Enacting Truth and Reconciliation Through Community-University Partnerships

A Grassroots Approach

ANTHONY JAMES, SIMRAN KAUR-COLBERT, HANNAH STOHRY, NYTASIA HICKS, VALERIE ROBINSON

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a grassroots model for engaging truth and reconciliation (T&R) for racial terror lynching in the U.S., using as a case example two lynchings that occurred in Oxford, Ohio. Moreover, processes used to reconcile these events are the result of several community-university partnerships.

While many citizens are aware of national or macro level examples of T&R, such processes require state level entities to implement. Such requirements leave communities with little options for reconciling past atrocities. The grassroots approach presented in the current paper remedies this by also connecting local communities across the U.S. to engage in a national movement attempting to fully reconcile historical racial terror in absence of a federal mandate.

Guided by the Equal Justice Initiative's *Community Remembrance Project*, the current paper provides local coalitions a clear framework to engage in examining injustices that occurred in their local community during this brutal period of U.S. history. The aim of this paper is to provide communities with a grassroots approach that can be used to promote continued and sustainable T&R for racial terror lynchings that continue to haunt communities in contemporary times.

Keywords: *truth and reconciliation; grassroots approach; community-university partnership*

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INTRODUCTION

...As shadows extend across Oxford Memorial Park, two African American scholars from Miami University will place small shovels into soil and place it into one of two clear, glass jars with a black lid. A clear plastic label is affixed to the jars. They were sent from Montgomery, Alabama, where they will be returned for display in a museum that honors an estimated 4,400 known African Americans who were lynched during a reign of terror between the mid-19th – 20th centuries. In white lettering, the labels read: Henry Corbin, Oxford, Ohio, January 14, 1892, and Simon Garnett, Oxford, Ohio, September 3, 1877. Remembrance ceremonies like this have been held across the South and Midwest for several years. The resting place for the filled, uniform jars will be the Legacy Museum, twin institution to the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery (Curnutte, 2019).

Our paper begins with a description of a soil collecting ceremony modeling a truth and reconciliation process centered on a grassroots approach. Moreover, we introduce and apply this model through a community-university partnership that continues to enact truth and reconciliation for two brutal racial terror lynchings that occurred in Oxford, Ohio, in the late 19th century. Specifically, we center writing this paper as an act of "facing with courage" (Angelou, 1994, p. 272), the "wrenching pain" (Angelou, 1994, p. 272) of the lynchings of Henry Corbin (1892) and Simon Garnett (1877), so that the legacy of this historical wrongdoing "need not be lived again" (Angelou, 1994, p. 272).

Important in any conceptual framework guiding practical action process is communicatively establishing shared meaning with receivers (Jaccard & Jacoby, 2020), or in this case, those that will read about our model. Because formal

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truth and reconciliation has typically occurred via a national or macro-level approach, we share four cases (i.e., Germany, South Africa, South Korea, and Canada) that enacted truth and reconciliation for past atrocities that occurred in their history. This sets the stage for making distinctions between the typical macro or national approach and our micro or grassroots model, fueled by community-university partnerships. Next, we describe our community-engaged approach in Oxford, Ohio, as an ongoing process and practice; pedagogy and path; and project and proposition that we hope will engender truth and reconciliation from past injustices to contemporary problems.

LEGACY OF RISKS: GLOBAL TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION MOVEMENTS

The movement for truth and reconciliation in the United States (U.S.) is rooted in the tradition of the Black North American struggle. A struggle that influenced liberation movements in China, Ireland, Germany, India, South Africa, Korea, and the Philippines, and throughout Latin America and the Caribbean (Cone, 1999, p. xvii).

We note that each truth and reconciliation effort demonstrates a very different cultural approach, motivation, and outcomes. The U.S. system is built to have the policies de-centralized and enacted at the micro or state levels, with local representatives deciding how to enact change, as determined by political processes they deem appropriate (e.g., democratic). The U.S. has also historically maintained moral superiority and enforcing compliance in other countries while neglecting acknowledgment of its own wrongdoings, even within the U.S. This is true despite the efforts of the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA, n.d.), the long-standing works of Representative

John Conyers and colleagues introducing bill H.R. 40 *Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act* (Congress, n.d.). This bill recognizes the harm done by the slave trade, slave labor, and racial terror lynchings toward People of Color, in concert with other nations operating under the guise of a global oppressive hegemonic structure. Nonetheless, the work of this group is inspired by intentional macro-level efforts of truth and reconciliation in other countries, who attempted to reconcile aspects of their hegemonic oppressive pasts.

Many other countries have faced the responsibility and weight of historically significant atrocities, forcing them to address reconciliation via national movements or efforts. Each country demonstrates that the nature of such events has not only been unique to each country, but the approaches have also had distinct methods of addressing those atrocities. This paper utilizes the four international cases (Canada, South Africa, Germany, and South Korea) to broadly demonstrate the uniqueness of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, the global interconnections, and the diversity of macro-level approaches to addressing national events of terror. Each case is historically contextual and complex and cannot be fully fleshed out in this paper, so they are provided to demonstrate the potential for the U.S.'s ability to enact truth and reconciliation, albeit in other ways.

Canada Case

For over 150 years, residential schools operated in Canada, and over 150,000 Aboriginal children attended these schools, with many never returning to their homeland. The central goals of Canada's Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described

as "cultural genocide" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015). Canada engaged in cultural genocide by destroying the political and social institutions of Aboriginal people. In 2009, the TRC of Canada began a multi-year process to listen to Survivors, communities, and others affected by the Residential School system.

Appeals to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) haunts most post-1990s institutional attempts to address historical injustice (Grey & James, 2016, p. 303), including that of Canada's. Comparing Canada and South Africa, Nagy (2012) notes that loose comparisons have hampered the application of important lessons from the South African to the Canadian TRC—namely, the discovery that narrow approaches to truth collude with superficial views of reconciliation that deny continuities of violence.

The TRC of Canada (2015) discusses their approach to "reconciliation" in the context of Indian residential schools as comparable to a situation of family violence (p. 118). It is about coming to terms with events of the past in a manner that overcomes conflict and establishes a respectful and healthy relationship among people going forward. For the TRC of Canada, "reconciliation" is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada. And the Commission states that for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgment of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behavior.

South Africa Case

In 1948, when several countries were attempting to dismantle the effects of racism, the social system of apartheid (act of discrimination where persons are separated by class, race, economic status) was being implemented in South Africa. After a severe economic downturn caused by World War II and The Great Depression, the

South African government saw fit to integrate racial segregation into policy. The implementation of discriminatory practices and race-baiting policies cruelly targeted darker skin complexions, where Black people were viewed as less equal than white people. The hierarchical nature of South Africa's racial discriminatory social system, where the white minority ruled, had the most severe effect on persons of African descent. The policies prohibited activities such as interracial marriages while creating race-based designated employment and segregated neighborhoods. During apartheid, women of African descent were among the most restricted as race and gender were influential (Grey & James, 2016). For example, apartheid excluded Black women from paid labor and viewed them as free employment. Additionally, Black women were isolated from Black men and forced to work in houses as well as in the field (Grey & James, 2016).

In response to the struggle over apartheid in South Africa, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created. The goal of the Commission was to "promote national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding which transcends the conflicts and divisions of the past" (Preamble, 1995). The Commission largely focused its efforts on amnesty, where persons are forgiven for political offenses by the government, for criminals of apartheid. Criminals who came forward and admitted to violating human rights in the struggle for apartheid were granted amnesty. The effect of amnesty led to a traumatic transition through South Africa, but also a solution considered morally legitimate by citizens.

The South African Truth and Reconciliation process is often referred to as one of the most successful models of truth and reconciliation (Ibhawoh, 2016). Today, reconciliation scholars view South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation process as a universal paradigm or model. For example, the model was adopted by the Indian Residential School of Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada as well as The Vienna Declaration of Crime and Justice (Ibhawoh,

2016). The adoption of South Africa's TRC process supported domestic and international legitimacy of restorative processes. However, under the domestic and international adoption of South Africa's TRC process, truth regarding the experiences of Black women under apartheid remains overlooked (Grey & James, 2016).

Germany Case

German history is most well-known for World War II (world conquest efforts and imperialism) and the Holocaust (genocide of Jews, People of Color, people with disabilities, non-Aryan peoples, and many innocent victims). The Nuremberg Trials, formed by the Allied Powers, indicted Nazi officials and the United Nations "passed a resolution in 1946 making the crime of genocide punishable under international law" (History.com, 2018). The Study Commission for Working Through the History and the Consequences of the SED Dictatorship in Germany was tasked with investigating and documenting "human rights abuses, and to assess the politico-historic, economic, ideological, and society factors of the dictatorship as well as the misuse of environmental resources" (United States Institute of Peace, 1992).

Germany established another Commission in 1995 "because all of the topics could not be dealt with in one period of legislature" (USIP, 1992). The 1992 Commission recommended "national holidays, memorials, documentation centers, and mapping of government buildings used by SED institutions...[and] the establishment of a permanent independent foundation for follow-up on the recommendations" while the 1995 Commission succeeded in establishing "a permanent foundation...to take symbolic and restorative measures" (USIP, 1992), modeling and inspiring other countries to participate in accountability measures to addressing national atrocities.

South Korea Case

In the case of South Korea, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established in 2000 (modeled after the South African TRC) (Kim, 2013) and then expanded by law in 2005 in order to address "Japanese colonialism, the partition of the Peninsula, and decades-long anticommunist dictatorships" (United States Institute of Peace, 2012), also addressing civilians killed in the Korean War. The Commission found a total of 1,733 cases; however, they only issued 1,679 recommendations, including 1,461 cases of massacres, 162 cases opposing Korean independence, and 56 human rights violations cases (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Republic of Korea, 2005). They provided recommendations including "a policy of memorialization, by organizing events, establishing historical records and monuments, and furthering peace education" (USIP, 2012) and recommended the creation of laws for victims to receive reparations.

Other Commissions even influenced the S. Korean government to implement recommendations from those efforts, including presidential apologies (for state violence) toward victims and families. On a more specific note, the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (일본군성노예제 문제해결을 정의기억연대) makes demands of the S. Korean government and demands toward the Japanese government, a movement to educate and restore justice for the sexually enslaved women, many of whom are no longer living (Korean Council, 2020). This movement elicits national and international support; on a contemporary note, U.S. politicians even find themselves involved in asking Japan for reparations toward the sexual victims of Japanese imperialism and colonization of S. Korea.

S. Korea and Germany have also collaborated as nations, not only to learn from each other's truth and reconciliation efforts that were mentioned above, but to even address reconciliation for their

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own geopolitical relations (e.g., Korean guest workers in Germany) and inner-Korean countries' reunification (Federal Foreign Office, 2020). Truth and reconciliation is possible in every context and can be inspired by our interconnection with other nations that are doing this work.

A GRASSROOTS APPROACH TO TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

The previous international cases show various, but reasonably well defined, models for national action to atone for past atrocities. The elements in each (e.g., acknowledgment of past atrocity, validation of the pain to victims, engagement of community events to symbolize remorse, etc.) are key pieces of the puzzle to reconciling the past acts. Thus, it is imperative that grassroots efforts also incorporate into their models such practices for them to be sanctioned as legitimate acts of reconciliation by citizens, especially those who are victimized by the heinous acts. As the Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation (GTRC) project shows, in absence of a government-sponsored mandate to reconcile past atrocities, a grassroots approach is ideal for engaging in "research and community outreach by taking private statements, holding public hearings, and conducting documentary research" to reach similar reconciliatory ends (Williams, 2009, p. 145). To be sure, the examples listed above would land on the spectrum of fully government-sponsored, whereas the GTRC model would be entirely on the community-based approach. Our model is between the two, as we are starting as fully grassroots but working with government entities to manifest truth and reconciliation.

The model advanced in the current paper incorporates these elements, but through grassroots coalition building. Moreover, the current model uses a community-university partnership to advance efforts and galvanize resources to help communities address evils of the past. As more communities learn of racial terror lynching in their own past, this model serves as a guide for approaching truth and reconciliation in absence of national action.

Our model aligns with the work of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI; Montgomery, AL), which has taken the lead on documenting the many cases of racial terror lynchings that occurred in the U.S. from the end of the Civil War to the mid-20th century. EJI encourages local communities to engage in systematic community remembrance activities that allow for bringing awareness to the cases and allowing communities to reconcile that past (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017; n.d.). We juxtapose our micro-level or grassroots model of truth and reconciliation against international approaches. We conceptualize our praxis for truth and reconciliation as one that joins a legacy of risks taken by those who came before us and those who will come after us toward collective re-existence (Walsh & Mignolo, 2018). Lastly, we offer our interpretations of the social and political implications of organizing for truth and reconciliation.

OVERVIEW OF THE COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

Community-university partnerships can take many forms or structures because both sides encompass many components. The partnership for the local Oxford Truth & Reconciliation project includes a university faculty member representing one academic unit, a staff member from the university's graduate school, and thirteen students representing three academic units (College of Arts and Sciences, College of Creative Arts, and College of Education, Health and Society). Those community members are a subset of a broader university coalition that includes: faculty

members from other academic units, the Office of Institutional Diversity & Inclusion, and the Office of Global Initiatives. On the geographically-bound community side, coalition partners included members of the Oxford City Council, the local Unitarian Universalist church, the Smith Library of Regional History, the Oxford Community Relations and Review Commission, the local NAACP, the former and current Oxford Mayor, and residents whose families resided in the area over several generations. Finally, this partnership includes the formation of a relationship with a direct descendant Chris Corbin of one of the lynching victims profiled in this project (i.e., Henry Corbin).

Partnerships can have many meanings, and need specificity of the components included in the partnership. The structure of the partnership profiled in this paper included a one-credit hour study away course offered at the university, funding from three academic units to provide expenses for faculty and students to travel to Montgomery, AL during the spring break, and approval from the city to conduct a soil remembrance ceremony (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017). It also included a preliminary approval from the city to erect a historical marker profiling the lynchings, research help from the Smith Library of Regional History, and participation in ceremonies from local religious leaders.

The partnership connected key university and community stakeholders to advance the efforts of the project. In this case, this included obtaining buy-in from multiple university stakeholders. One example of this included securing funding from multiple deans and multiple units on campus, which allowed the course to be offered and for the students and faculty to travel to Montgomery, AL to connect with EJI and visit their museum and monument. Another critical connection was determining which institutional employees had key leadership positions in the city government (i.e., the city mayor was a faculty member at the institution and the previous mayor was the dean for a major unit on campus). Each of these

individuals were able to advise the project on how to move the work forward through bureaucratic steps in the city council. Lastly, the current vice president of institutional diversity & inclusion invited the new city mayor to serve on a major university task force examining issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. This non-exhaustive step assured that the efforts of the truth and reconciliation coalition were part of the conversation between key community-university state holders. This process facilitated opportunities to continually move the work forward in absence of a government-sponsored mandate for reconciling these past atrocities.

CONCEPTUALIZING CONCEPTS

Essential in any theoretical or practical model is to clearly define the concepts embedded in the model (Jaccard & Jacoby, 2020; Klein & White, 2015). The major concepts in our model include truth, reconciliation, and grassroots approach. In this model, truth is defined as bringing awareness to a historical event. Specifically, events that distorted or muted the voices, or truths, of marginalized members of a given context. This particular conceptualization helps validate the narratives of those historically marginalized by more powerful members of society. By validation, this can also mean that additional narratives are or have components that are just as accurate as prevailing narratives. To be sure, our conceptualization is not necessarily designed to determine 100% accuracy of a given narrative. Across the many instances of racial terror lynchings, there is a wide spectrum of narratives for many of the cases, and actual or objective truth is somewhere on that spectrum. However, in a process of truth and reconciliation, there must be a mechanism for acknowledging narratives that have historically been silenced or ignored. Through the acknowledgment of those narratives, there may be an increased chance of getting closer to an accurate account of the actual events that took place.

Reconciliation in this model is conceptualized as public atonement of a past event by an official element of the offending party. Important in this model is that in a given event, there may be multiple offending parties. As it relates to racial terror lynchings, multiple entities were culpable for, or complicit in, the lynchings that took place in the U.S. between the period of Reconstruction and the end of World War II (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017). Specifically, law enforcement officers that did not always protect Black citizens from mob attacks, ordinary White citizens seeking vigilante justice, community members attending public lynching, people posed in pictures next to brutalized Black bodies, lawmakers who did little to construct laws that protected Black citizens from racial terror attacks, individuals who accused Black residents of crimes that resulted in racial terror lynchings, etc. This minor list pales compared to the many levels of culpable parties responsible for the 4,000+ documented racial terror lynchings that took place during this period of U.S. history. We offer several caveats to this conceptualization of reconciliation.

First, we suggest a process approach that allows for multiple layers of atonement to occur so that the process of reconciliation can promote healing over time and take a non-linear form. To be sure, having state officials (e.g., city, county, state) engage in formal recognitions (e.g., resolutions, public ceremonies, historical markers) can serve as a standard that sparks the process of reconciliation. Secondly, such processes may take place long after the lives or presence of the individuals, families, and communities directly impacted by the racial terror lynchings. However, the amount of elapsed time should not be an excuse for ignoring and/or neglecting to reconcile this past. Rather, we propose that engaging in this process helps prevent such events from occurring in the future (Stevenson, 2014; Taylor, 2015). Third, it would be naïve to suggest that atonement at all of these levels of context is required for reconciliation to occur. However, having officials in positions of power engage in a process of atonement sets a moral and ethical standard for

behaviors that are not accepted; in this case, terrorizing vulnerable communities. Fourth, though it would be hopeful that all members of a given community would offer buy-in for the reconciliatory act, this may not be a reality. The seemingly annual vandalizing of race-based historical markers in the United States (U.S.) American South -e.g., Emmitt Till marker was replaced due to being repeatedly vandalized (Associated Press, 2019)- serves as reconciliation processes that can take place without the full support of a given community. Similarly, we are not arguing that engaging in this process will be a panacea for racial tensions. Rather, we argue that this process puts into place a public standard for what is and is not appropriate, a standard that clearly was not in place during the period of these racial terror lynchings. It is also a movement to ensure that we recognize and acknowledge this aspect of U.S. history and we never forget racial terror lynchings, its lingering impact, and serves as a deterrent in that society never allows such instances to happen again.

Atoning for past atrocities is not new. In fact, since humans have walked the earth, there have been bloody conflicts due to the limited resources available to meet the needs and desires of all human beings (Sowell, 2007). For many of these atrocities, state entities have engaged in macro-level truth and reconciliation to atone for such past events as a mechanism for healing and bringing peace to a given geographic area (we discuss these later in this paper). However, our approach differs from those macro-level approaches to truth and reconciliation in that we are using a *grassroots* approach. By grassroots, we mean a coalition of local citizens engaged in the process of bringing public awareness and atonement to past events. We apply the model here by examining racial terror lynchings in Oxford.

DESIRED OUTCOMES OF RECONCILING RACIAL TERROR LYNCHINGS

Our approach to grassroots truth and

reconciliation is not fully original. In fact, our desired outcomes are derived from a model based on the suggested practices outlined by the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI; 2017). Their founder and director, Bryan Stevenson, started down this path through engaging in social justice work in Montgomery, AL. He notes in his TED Talk (Stevenson, 2012) that on a trip to Germany, he was amazed at the number of historical markers he passed that profiled the atrocities of the Jewish Holocaust. However, in his own country, he was appalled at the number of Confederate markers in Montgomery, which represent a powerful message about the pride in pre-Civil war values, and the lack of markers profiling the many racial terror lynching tied to that period in U.S. history. This sparked his work to build a memorial and museum in Montgomery to provide a more balanced (or accurate) narrative for this period of U.S. history. This led to the research which found that many more racial terror lynching occurred from years 1870 – 1950 than had previously been reported. Because he was ambivalent that the U.S. would engage in a macro approach to reconciling this past, he offered a pathway for communities to engage in this process through local coalitions (EJI, n.d.).

We have learned through our work here in Oxford (OH) that as people become more aware of their county's history of racial terror lynching, many desire to engage in the truth and reconciliation process. However, they are unsure of the steps in this process. This project includes specific components that allow local communities to actively engage in truth and reconciliation, specific to their local context. First, we discuss the desired outcomes of our local project using components from the model suggested by the EJI model. Then, we discuss the subsequent progress of our efforts in realizing truth and reconciliation.

Building a Diverse Coalition

The first desired outcome in the process calls for building a diverse coalition that allows community

members (not geographically bound) to have a role in the process. This desired diverse coalition of community members would include Faculty, University Administrators, Historians/Librarians, officials elected to local office, descendants of victims of racial terror lynching, and faith leaders. Our local project began with two faculty members interested in providing an opportunity to teach a graduate-level study away course on truth and reconciliation for Spring break. Their desire to include campus leaders involved administrators accepting invitations to engage with and support both faculty and graduate students. Of note, several graduate students of the coalition were and are also residents of the local community. Faculty and graduate students then reached out to local historians/librarians about events in Oxford to learn more about the circumstances surrounding the lynchings of Henry Corbett (1892) and Simeon Garnett (1877). Librarians helped compile primary documents (e.g., local news articles) related to the two lynchings that occurred, providing us with necessary materials to review the historical context surrounding those involved with the racial terror lynching events.

The authors of this paper identify as diverse community members who are invested in the historic and restorative nature of this reconciliation project for Oxford (OH), inspired by Chinese-American activist, Grace Lee Boggs, who in her reflection on sustainable activism writes, "We need to embrace the idea that we are the leaders we've been looking for," (2012, p.159). We also connected with geographically local community members. Two faculty members of our university, but also members of the community, joined us on our trip to visit the Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice (Montgomery, AL). Forging relationships with other faculty members with whom you share a traveling/learning experience opened up opportunities to connect with the community. Engaging outside the classroom and in the community allowed for more opportunities

> *For both approaches –national and grassroots– to truth and reconciliation, the process must start with honest conversations and engagement with impacted communities.*

to build trusting community-university partnerships and having meaningful conversations about racial justice. Additionally, community members also allowed us to connect to the local Historic and Architectural Preservation Commission. This partnership led two team members (students) to attend a public city meeting and share information about the course content, travel to the National Memorial for Truth and Reconciliation in Alabama, and support the local efforts to recognize the impact of the racial terror lynching that occurred in the local community.

Engaging Library Historians as Community Gatekeepers

The second desired outcome in the process involved engaging library historians as community gatekeepers who might support faculty and graduate students with advancing the truth and reconciliation process. Librarians served as historians who joined the student-faculty coalition by supporting research of primary source evidence and archival documents about the local racial terror lynchings. This expanding coalition would compile documentation of the racial terror lynching. The librarians collaborated with other library systems across the country to retrieve the historical documents from archives. This level of engagement from librarians built a sense of coalition work amongst the now three parties of faculty, students, and librarians. Students were able to ask for the librarians' assistance with locating files, understanding archived newspaper articles, and navigating library systems for detailed personal searches about the lynchings. Indeed, reading through the stories also gave historical context of the culture at the time, and the ways in which narratives were (un)told, and

from whose perspective. All of this must be considered in the process of uncovering truth in order to understand the need for reconciliation. In addition to helping provide these documents, the librarians also served as gatekeepers into the community as they linked the two faculty members and students with residents of the local town whose families date back to the time of the lynchings. These members met with the coalition to give more history about the nature of the relationship between the town and its Black residents.

Connecting with Descendants of Racial Terror Lynching Victims

The third desired outcome is connecting with the descendants of victims of racial terror lynching. This outcome was a result of the efforts of faculty, student, and librarian research. Connecting with a descendant of one of the individuals who was lynched allowed us to fulfill the component in our model of allowing individuals and families directly impacted by the event to possibly start the process of closure. Additionally, in the current situation, this also allowed the family to finally have their accounts of events to be heard and considered. The descendant also visited our class to give a guest lecture on how this event impacted their family over time.

Engaging with Local City-Elected Officials and Faith Leaders

The fourth desired outcome was to engage off-campus community leaders, including elected public officials and faith leaders. This diverse coalition invited the mayor of the city that houses the university as a guest speaker to the graduate course. The class was able to share information with the mayor about the project, but also the local lynchings. In turn, the mayor shared information about how to engage the city in efforts to approve elements of the soil remembrance ceremony and eventually erect a historical marker on city property. Collaborations with the city are ongoing as they are the key stakeholder in erecting a historical marker in the

city that memorializes these events. Representatives of the city have met with the local librarians and recommended locations in the city where the marker can be erected that provides visibility and recognition of this history. Through this, a few of the Commission members attended our local soil remembrance ceremony. As a result of exposure to the local Police Community Relations and Review Commission (PCRRC), one of the two students who shared the local efforts at a public meeting applied and was accepted as a Commission member, where PCRRC responsibilities include building relationships, taking community complaints and improving local policing. During the soil remembrance ceremony, a pastor of the local African Methodist Episcopal Church conducted the opening and closing prayers. Through rapport-building with other members, the student found out that one of the Commission members (and their life partner) made their own trip to Montgomery, AL, after hearing about the local truth and reconciliation efforts at that public meeting. We share this to demonstrate that this is what we mean by grassroots movement-building.

Furthermore, the leaders of the local Unitarian Universalist church read about the activities of the coalition in the local newspaper and reached out to the faculty members to gain more knowledge about the project. This resulted in two members of the team visiting a gathering by the church and speaking with them about ways to collaborate in the future to support truth and reconciliation. One specific suggestion by members was to donate funds to help future members make the trip to Montgomery to visit the EJI museum and monument.

Communicating Efforts to the Public via Local News Media

Our fifth desired outcome involved successfully engaging with a journalist who profiled the stories in a national newspaper outlet, the Cincinnati Enquirer. The news media has the power to share stories in larger platforms, and to provide

visibility and outreach. This provided an opportunity to expand the network of coalition partners, but also spread the story to a wider audience. Getting buy-in was, and will continue to be, a crucial part of being able to engage in the process at multiple levels of society (e.g., local, state). Furthermore, the University also dedicated a webpage highlighting the efforts towards local truth and reconciliation (Miami University, n.d.).

SUBSEQUENT OUTCOMES OF TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION ACTIVITIES

Beyond building a coalition, several steps are outlined in the EJI model regarding engaging the community in truth and reconciliation. In the previous section, we outlined the desired outcomes of building a diverse coalition, engaging librarians as community gatekeepers, connecting with descendants of racial terror lynching victims, communicating efforts to the public via news media, and engaging local elected officials. In this section, we will share the progress we made since we first set out to remember the lives of those who were lynched in the local community.

Determining location of events

First, we were able to unearth these narratives and provide families and communities with the first step of healing the harm that had been done. To assist communities with this step, the Equal Justice Initiative encouraged local coalitions to contact them and engage in ceremonies that helped initiate the process of truth and reconciliation. In their landmark report "Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror," the EJI (2017) identified more than 4,000 documented lynchings that were carried out from 1877-1950. Using public documents, newspaper reports, personal histories, family oral traditions, etc., the Equal Justice Initiative was able to approximate nearly exact locations of where most of these lynchings took place. Importantly, the results of this study included 800 more lynchings than had been counted in previous reports.

Soil collection ceremony

Second, gathering soil and engaging community members in contributing soil to the same jar to send to EJI unites communities in the shared pain and reverence for the lives that have been lost due to racial terror lynching. This ritual allows communities to bear witness to their legacies and demonstrate connection. Additionally, considering the locations of many of the lynchings (e.g., rural areas), it could be that the same soil still holds the DNA remnants of individuals terrorized in those locations some 70 - 170 years earlier. Equal Justice Initiative's community remembrance project of gathering soil from the site of lynchings establishes "relationships to the universe, to the landscape and to stones, rocks, insects and other things, seen and unseen," and that this notion of reconciliation is a difficult one for Western systems of knowledge to deal with or accept (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012, p. 78).

Erecting historical markers

Third, as of fall 2020 the coalition is completing the necessary paperwork for local city elected officials to review and approve the erection of historical markers for truth and reconciliation. This phase is the apex of the model in that it institutionalizes a memorial of lynching victims, through grassroots approaches. Because the efforts are centralized through EJI, markers have shared design and text to help create a movement of truth and reconciliation that can occur over time in multiple locations. A major point of the process is to create dialogue about this period of U.S. history while also allowing communities to atone for the racial terror inflicted on communities of color throughout the land for nearly 100 years. The markers serve as a springboard for facing this past and creating opportunities to prevent such acts from occurring again in the future.

SUSTAINING GRASSROOTS APPROACHES TO TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

In conclusion, this particular method of truth and reconciliation fuels a national movement. It is a "bottom-up" approach that allows separate communities, via coalition teams, to independently progress through truth and reconciliation at a pace that is appropriate to their local area. For our project, our coalition utilized a community-university partnership. Because it is connected to the broader EJI approach, though we have some independence and unique aspects to our approach, we are also connected with a broader truth and reconciliation movement. We also are creating a model that can be repeated in other places that need additional resources to help with coalition building. We have conceptualized truth and reconciliation by blending what we have learned, others' conceptualizations, and our experiences working on truth and reconciliation efforts through our graduate course. Examining four international cases (Canada, South Africa, Germany, and S. Korea) has shown that it is absolutely possible for countries to demonstrate national efforts to address macro-level terrors.

We note that truth and reconciliation is an ongoing process and not an outcome. Additionally, it is a process that includes both macro (e.g., national) and micro (e.g., grassroots) approaches. So, what would be some indicators that we are ensuring progression in the process and not stagnation across these approaches?

For both approaches –national and grassroots– to truth and reconciliation, the process must start with honest conversations and engagement with impacted communities. Example cases from national approaches above were able to ignite this process with the resources of state entities. However, in grassroots approaches, multiple sparks are needed to ignite a broader discussion across a given community. For our community-university partnership, this included creating a

study away course that impelled students to reach out to community stakeholders to engage coalition building around the topic (e.g., conversations with local librarians).

More formal steps are also needed to create sustainability in the movement. The EJI has included a mechanism for engaging students in the process via an essay contest (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017). This is a step that is included in the process of erecting historical markers, for which our local efforts are just beginning. Students are encouraged to learn about the events, reflect on their thoughts and feelings, and submit an essay to the local coalition. Winners are rewarded with a monetary award that goes towards their college expenses. This aspect of the process includes local schools in, and adjacent to, the local communities where the lynching(s) took place. Including schools in the process adds another coalition member and creates an opportunity to broaden the discussion to future generations. Finally, awardees read their essay at the unveiling ceremonies of the markers.

Key to this process is the ability to obtain buy-in from key community stakeholders, with the intent of engaging and contributing. Our process used a community–university approach because the resources of the university have a wide reach that creates a certain level of respectability and validation to the project. Engaging communities whose current members were not directly responsible for the past events creates a significant barrier to starting the conversation and continuing it. However, partnerships with key community stakeholders (i.e., university) help ease buy-in and promote coalition building.

We hope that the model we have chosen to implement can guide other communities wanting and needing to start this process. The model can be used to promote continued and sustainable truth and reconciliation for racial terror lynchings that created modes of interaction that continue to haunt communities in contemporary times.

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