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**ANNOUNCEMENT**  
**The Peoples Truth & Reckoning Commission**  
**Starting April 15, 2021**

In response to the murders of Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, George Floyd, and so many others, people from across our community, led by youth activists and the Iowa Freedom Riders (IFR), took to the streets in the Summer of 2020. We demanded that our civic leaders **wake the fuck up** and recognize that the murders in other cities were interconnected to deep structural legacies of police violence, racial bias, white privilege, and institutionalized white supremacy that exist in our own community and have continuously caused grievous harm up to and including this day.

We demanded that our civic leaders recognize that systemic racial injustice exists in Iowa City despite (or even because of) the city's beloved self-image as a "liberal college town," and that it has persisted despite all past efforts to address it. We demanded that our existing political leaders, including BIPOC leaders, recognize that **they are part of the problem** when they continue a politics-as-usual that we know is failing.

We demanded the establishment of an independent Truth & Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that would stimulate difficult, necessary conversations, provide a healing space for victims, generate a robust factual record, and push for major reforms aimed at deep systemic change.

The City Council agreed to our demand. But as we now know, the beginning was end. While complimenting itself on its "historic" and "courageous" move, in fact, the Council never seriously considered anything other than a commission that it could tightly control and coordinate—a hand-puppet for performative BLM gestures that would conveniently avoid anything uncomfortable to the Council's power base.

The task of designing the "puppet TRC" was given to two white council members who embarked on a "listening tour" but then refused to make any real changes to their own initial plan. Critically, they expressly refused to use the word "independent" anywhere in the Establishing Resolution. The Council's only woman of color member voted *against* the creation of the puppet TRC. But the Council pressed ahead. A chairperson and a paid "facilitator," both close allies and personal friends of the Mayor, were quickly installed. In an early vote, the puppet TRC expressly refused to include the term "white privilege" in its mission statement, fearing it would anger or alienate the white community.

And as described in [a recent IFR Statement](#), as soon as the puppet TRC took a single step disfavored by the City Council, it was suspended and ordered to appear "hat in hand" on April 15, 2021, presumably so it can assure the Council it will be more obedient going forward.

But in fact, something *else* will happen on April 15. A truly independent, truth-seeking, victim-centered, justice-oriented, and people-driven Truth & Reckoning Commission **will begin....**

## A Peoples TRC

The Peoples TRC starts with the recognition that the present political system has failed the most marginalized citizens and it is time for people to claim our own power back. We will not be given justice from those in power. We will create it with our own voices and efforts.

The Peoples TRC is a dynamic and evolving idea. The structure and content will be co-created by participants in gatherings and sessions starting on April 15. The Commission itself will be democratically selected and will likely consist of some participants linked to IFR and some drawn from the broader community of individuals and organizations focused on racial justice. It will include some individuals with professional expertise but also emphasize the importance of direct personal experience. To be clear, **victims of systemic racism will create and lead this process.**

The Peoples TRC draws inspiration from a legacy of historic and ongoing TRCs and peoples-driven processes, including the [South Africa TRC](#), the [Greensboro TRC](#), the [Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#), the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#), the [People’s Commission to Decriminalize Maryland](#), and many others—including new efforts being announced around the country, such as New York City’s newly formed [Racial Justice Commission](#), which is expressly tasked with reviewing city government operations and the city’s constitutional charter.

The Wabanaki TRC was able to work closely and successfully with Maine state agencies and other officials, despite the difficult subject matter and legacies of tribal-State distrust, in part because the TRC’s status as an “independent body” was always respected. Among other features, the 5 commissioners were selected by a broader Commission Selection Panel that acted pursuant to a careful design and composition process.

These same processes also offer cautionary tales. For example, research shows that many people felt used and ignored by the South Africa TRC because it failed to adequately confront racist ideology, failed to provide mental health resources, and ignored victims’ calls for concrete reparations and compensation for past harms. The Peoples TRC will aim to learn from past experiences and ensure that our process is centered on victims’ experiences and needs.

## Truth & Reckonings

The Peoples TRC will pursue the real truth of victims of racial injustice, no matter how uncomfortable it makes the Council or other power structures in Iowa City. The People TRC will seek to understand, express, and validate the truth of victims in a series of reckonings that will be created by victims themselves. These could include:

- ***Truth-telling.*** The Peoples TRC will host emotionally supportive and knowledge-backed spaces where people, especially Black and Brown people, can come forward to safely tell their stories of the abuse, violence, discrimination, and dehumanization that they have suffered linked to systemic racism, classism, ableism, and anti-LGBTQ attitudes.

- **Investigation.** Where needed, especially to lay factual groundwork for victims' truths, the Peoples TRC will stimulate and support investigation and research projects to uncover historical and institutional truths about discrimination and injustice in Iowa City.
- **Reparations.** The Peoples TRC centers the need for a reallocation of resources based on past harms perpetuated by the state. The formation of reparations circles will allow for independent distribution of funds to people who have been harmed by policing, incarceration, and other forms of state violence.
- **Healing.** Spaces that center mental health and trauma recovery, using professional resources in areas ranging from traditional counseling to body and spirit-based healing such as yoga, meditation, acupuncture, tarot, and more.

*From the Mandate of the Canada TRC:*

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission will build upon the "Statement of Reconciliation" dated January 7, 1998 and the principles developed by the Working Group on Truth and Reconciliation and of the Exploratory Dialogues (1998-1999). These principles are as follows: accessible; victim-centered; confidentiality (if required by the former student); do no harm; health and safety of participants; representative; public/transparent; accountable; open and honourable process; comprehensive; inclusive, educational, holistic, just and fair; respectful; voluntary; flexible; and forward looking in terms of rebuilding and renewing Aboriginal relationships and the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

- **Artistic Exploration.** Unbounded creativity projects using the tools of visual and performing arts, where communities and individuals connect and reach into the deepest impacts and experiences of lives lived under invisible systems of oppression, discrimination, privilege, alienation, distrust, fear—and hope for something better. Certainly, this will include traditional community art projects such as large-scale murals but also much more.
- **Education.** Our Iowa City community is fortunate to be particularly flush with historical and disciplinary expertise, both personal and academic, on the myriad of social and political dimensions of systemic privilege and harm. Teach-ins, talks, debates, and consciousness-raising exercises can challenge each of us on a journey of continuous learning and build deep solidarity for a more equitable future.

## Public Archive and Recommendations

Proceedings of the Peoples TRC will be public except when victims decide that certain more limited forums may be necessary. Proceedings will be live-streamed and available for online participation whenever possible. Victims' valuable stories and experiences will, whenever victims choose, be promoted on social media and to traditional media in ways that celebrate their dignity, nuance, and importance.

The Peoples TRC will strive to preserve a detailed digital and physical archive of the proceedings that is easily accessible to all members of the public.

The Peoples TRC will be attended by one or more Rapporteurs who will compile a final summary of the proceedings. The Commission itself will use its experience and this summary to prepare a series of concrete recommendations to existing political leadership on necessary reform.

These recommendations can also be used to guide social movement political efforts, including electing new leadership willing to engage with the recommendations and implement the needed reforms.

**Funding**

At the appropriate time, both people-driven crowdfunding and donor funding may be sought to infuse the process with needed resources and generate funds for reparations. Given that the City Council has committed itself to fund racial justice efforts, public funding may be sought under terms that absolutely do not compromise the Peoples TRC independence and vision.

“The most important element of a TRC is that it is allowed to be independent, both in its operations and to set its scope.”

“[It is legitimate for politicians] to put their political capital behind an initiative with an ultimate political agenda . . . as long as once the initiative takes off that you retreat and let the process be as independent and legitimate and participatory and inclusive as possible.”

-Anna Myriam Roccatello,  
International Center for Transitional Justice

**April 15 Establishing Convocation**

The Peoples TRC will “begin” with an energetic, in-person, outdoor convocation in Iowa City (with online participation available) on April 15, 2021. Details about the event will be released soon. The Commission itself has *not yet been formed*. A Working Group will be formed on April 15 to formulate a selection process and a proposed mandate for democratic consideration at a later meeting. The Peoples TRC will at all times strive to be democratic, inclusive, and non-hierarchal.

**Inspiration and Participation**



We will not realize our vision of justice alone, but in solidarity with our community. As such, IFR is seeking support and collaboration with other community organizations who advocate for justice for BIPOC peoples in Iowa City ahead of the April 15 convocation. We welcome any questions, ideas, or feedback through [our email address](#). From IFR and the forthcoming Peoples Truth and Reckoning Commission, we see you, we love you, and remember, we have nothing to lose but our chains.

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*We've got to face the fact that some people say you fight fire best with fire,  
but we say you put fire out best with water.  
We say you don't fight racism with racism.  
We're gonna fight racism with solidarity*

-Fred Hampton