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Radically hopeful visions: Futuring for institutional anti-racism work

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes how a reparative futures approach alters the orientations and methods of institutional DEI work and generates a different set of affective, joyful outcomes. New paths forward emerge when past injustice is examined to imagine better futures. This activity resulted in novel perspectives on what a holistic, inclusive, anti-racist campus community could look like someday. We introduced the creative, optimistic, and long-term perspective of futuring into a year-long reparative anti-racism project to advance institutional diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts at an arts college. Reparative DEI processes, centered in tenets of anti-racism, rarely engage creative imagination to look forward. In addition, futures tools are seldom designed for the critical consciousness of reparative processes, which must be rooted in re-examining and challenging established narratives. The work shared here demonstrates an opportunity to explore both perspectives. Our experience reveals that reparative futures approaches alter both the feel of the process of approaching DEI work and establish a different set of outcomes. We propose that the radically hopeful visions created through critically conscious reparative futures practices offer an additional way to engage with reparative processes, bringing in creativity and consideration of relational connections.

1. Visioning for institutional DEI strategies

Long-term future visions of positive outcomes are a potential tool for expanding the ways that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts imagine and motivate change. Here, we offer a case study of how reparative futuring activities manifested in creative visions within a process that typically does not make time for playful imagination: institutional DEI and anti-racism work. In this experience, a creativity-based approach helped catalyze the work of becoming an anti-racism community of practice by connecting institutional and personal histories to radically hopeful visions. This case study demonstrates that future visioning is something that, as a creative act, can extend vital DEI work.

This paper describes what we learned by introducing a futures-based, creative visioning process into a typically medium-term, policy-focused approach. This experience demonstrated that a reparative approach to envisioning better futures adds new perspectives to the complex, challenging work of improving equity within an institution and shifts the types of future visions typical in futuring workshops.

With this opportunity for imagination and long-term visions in mind, Jessica, the first author, as a DEI leader and design scholar,

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proposed a creative modification to the process of an anti-racism team. This change to the team's process was inspired by the ongoing research of the second author, Hillary, who studies collective future visions. Jessica suggested that the team's analysis of institutional histories and strategic direction-setting could benefit from a moment of collective envisioning longer-term futures before determining their final recommendations.

Our process began with deeply examining the past through community organizing practices. Then, to generate long-term visions, we modified tools for collaborative visioning to include a more profound acknowledgment of the past and multiple experiences of the present. Finally, we facilitated narrative storytelling workshops to generate specific descriptions of scenes from those future visions. The result is a creative futuring process that makes visible plural histories and fosters visions that describe how anti-racist futures might unfold at the college.

2. Background: examining DEI and futures processes

Most higher education institutions in the United States have developed initiatives to create a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable learning and work environment for students, faculty, and staff. However, diversity workers struggle with the ongoing emotional labor (Ahmed, 2012). Rather than calling the effects of this as being *burned out*, educational studies scholar Kirk Anderson (2021) describes being *burned through*, "the exhausting institutional practice of performing emotional labor for multiple campus constituencies in the context of increasing job responsibilities, declining resources, and a limited ability to effect positive change on their working conditions" (p. 360). Diversity efforts face many obstacles to change, including aversions to altering inequitable systems and structures, taking risks, and entertaining nontraditional ideas and actions (Stanley et al., 2019). As a result, efforts often focus on incremental change in the near-term, and victories are hard-fought.

2.1. Reparative strategies in institutional DEI work

The DEI efforts of this task force pursue an anti-racism framing. Anti-racist work involves making sense of the world by re-examining history through a racialized lens to surface how past policies and actions shaping current racial inequities were predicated upon racist ideas and actions (Kendi, 2019). Historian Ibram X. Kendi (2019) states, "To be anti-racist is a radical choice in the face of this history, requiring a radical reorientation of consciousness" (p. 23). Then, using this new consciousness, we make decisions that intentionally repair past harms by creating more equitable outcomes. Besides acknowledging past harms, these reparative efforts surface and uplift historical moments of activism and agency that have been overlooked. Sociologists Max Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) connect these efforts to the creation of a *radical imagination* which is "about drawing on the past, telling different stories about how the world came to be the way it is, and remembering the power and importance of past struggles and the way their spirits live on in the present" (p. 3). This transdisciplinary radical reorientation to repair shaped our approach to collaborative futures.

The practice of acknowledging the past can also be used to create motivation for organizational change. *Historical consciousness* approaches examine how actors' understanding of the past informs their ideas about the present and expectations for the future (Wadhvani et al., 2018). Challenging the organization's single, hegemonic narrative of the past may create space to challenge narrow narratives of the present, opening new imaginaries for the future. When people within organizations re-examine and re-make the past, they generate new pathways for strategic change.

Reframing the past becomes necessary in order to imagine hopeful futures. Political scientist Manjana Milkoreit (2017) describes how shared imagination about the future provides motivation and guidance. Therefore, "transformations require the capacity to collectively envision and meaningfully debate realistic and desirable futures" (p. 1). Taking inspiration from these re-examinations of histories, we can create future visions to help draw people together toward positive change (Masini, 1982; Sriprakash et al., 2020).

2.2. Collectively imagining repair

Collectively imagining repair has always been a practice in anti-racism work, including organizing against enslavement, racialized violence, segregation, and other structural and race-based oppressions (Kelley, 2003). Organizer and author adrienne maree brown (2017) draws on afrofuturist worlds to propose principles for making societal change. Brown writes, "We say, Black lives matter! An afrofuturist assertion. Because we see something that is not here. ...And we bend the world to assert and embody that Black lives matter" (p. 110). Author and activist Walidah Imarisha (2020) proposes that visionary fiction is a form of activism and organizing that brings the future closer to being.

Futures tools support collective, creative visioning, and narrative futures help surface stories that are not initially included in futures contexts. A narrative paradigm helps to effectively "use stories and to frame and reframe experiences and ideas so that they can be heard, seen, and understood emotionally" (Jarratt & Mahaffie, 2009, p. 10). Beginning the narrative foresight process with the question, "What is the history of the issue?" should challenge a de facto understanding of a given problem (Milojević & Inayatullah, 2015). This challenge should lead to a further interrogation of power and who gets to determine a given worldview (or cognitive framework) of the organizational context. By challenging normalized categories and worldviews, we can create space for alternative futures and worldviews to develop. From there, new stories can be created that help redefine strategies for change.

Although futures practices can be useful in processes that seek to propose more just futures, they must be constructed to acknowledge historic oppression (Bisht, 2017; Kapoor, 2001; Mazé, 2019). Future tools do not typically reflect the values of anti-racist work because they are likely to overlook the importance of structural and historical oppression. While future studies have shifted to acknowledge that worldviews beyond those rooted in western, technocentric, capitalist origins are essential to consider and engage

(Ahlqvist & Rhisiart, 2015; Kapoor, 2001; Masini, 1982; Sardar, 1993; Son, 2015), there may be a hesitation to directly engage anti-racist, feminist, disability justice and other theories that directly acknowledge structures of oppression. For example, Sriprakash et al. (2020) discuss the danger of confusing paternalistic ‘outreach’ with authentic engagement with historical knowledges beyond institutional engagement. Futures studies has been criticized for failing to interrogate and reveal underlying assumptions that lack critical and reflexive perspectives (Gunnarsson-Östling, 2011).

Recent work from futures scholars calls for a plurality of perspectives and recognizing the epistemologies and politics of futures methodologies. To name a few examples, social design researchers Mazé and Wangel (2017) propose three modes of bringing criticality into futures processes: 1) querying the worldviews and intentions of the researchers; 2) opening up a plurality of understandings of time and acknowledging that “the future is something that is always becoming”; and 3) focusing on creating “everyday practices in the present” (p. 274). In human-computer interaction, researchers explore new ways of thinking about time and speculation. To challenge assumptions about progress and technology, they seek to “reframe agency away from individualism” and “hold space for failure and letting go” (Howell et al., 2021, p. 7). Using a lens of queer futuring within education studies, Fleener and Coble (2022) write, “Queer futuring provides a framework with a specific focus on caring for and nurturing each other and the environment with underlying ethics of equity and fairness as desirable outcomes of our work” (p. 2). Adding these kinds of transdisciplinary considerations for care, acknowledgment of historic oppression, and opening space for many ways of knowing and understanding help expand the cultural responsiveness of futures practices.

3. Reparative methods for anti-racist visioning

This study sought to develop a reparative futuring process and understand how including creative futuring activities might transform an institutional DEI process. This process followed three stages: 1) examining the past for harms and resistance; 2) collaboratively envisioning radically hopeful futures; and 3) specifying moments in that future to bring stories alive. We hypothesized that reparative futuring could manifest in compelling visions that would support and extend the work of equity teams. We situate this as a participatory futures (Gidley et al., 2009) project that incorporates orientations and methods from reparative futures (Sriprakash et al., 2020) to foreground and center the past, which is an attitude and action missing from mainstream futures approaches.

In this case study, the institution’s DEI leadership declared the ambitious goal of transforming the college into an anti-racist institution (J.-H. Gray, 2017). In 2020, the college’s co-directors of Academic Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) requested and received funding from the college president to create an Anti-racism Transformation Team (ArTT). Reporting to the college president, the team’s mandate focuses on “equitable redistribution of institutional power, establishing clear accountability protocols, recommending financial priorities, and equitable support of various constituents across the college” (Columbia College Chicago, n.d.). As one of the co-directors said, “This gives us a structure from which to organize folks that are really interested in this work to do it together, collectively. I don’t think there are a lot of colleges that can say they’re taking the deep dive in the ways that we are” (Janik, 2020). The college hired Chicago Regional Organizing for Anti-racism (CROAR), which utilizes a community organizing approach to effect anti-racist change within institutions. Community organizing focuses on building relationships and constellating action on the ground to challenge power structures (Garza, 2020). Twenty-four college community members (students, faculty, adjunct faculty, staff, and alumni) were selected to learn principles of anti-racist organizational change and plan future actions.

The futuring activities consisted of three workshops. In the first workshop, 15 participants and four facilitators developed hopeful visions of the future campus based on themes of/from the past. In the second workshop, six participants created descriptions of future campus life. In the third workshop, six participants developed specific future stories.

3.1. Researcher positionality

From our positions of bridging the gap between institutional diversity practices and design-based futuring approaches, we see an opportunity for mutual learning and support. We believe that reparative design futures have a contribution to make in supporting efforts to devise new ways of building just worlds but recognize that design has long been agnostic to, or complicit in, upholding oppression. As white cisgender women, diversity practices are a process of learning and unlearning because we have only indirect experiences of interpersonal and structural racism. We are committed to lifelong study to understand and acknowledge historical and ongoing intersectional oppression. Therefore, we proceed with caution and deep collaboration when introducing new tools into racial equity and justice group work. We hope to help support the change and reflection that needs to happen in these historically colorblind practices.

For Jessica, this project was action research, and she was deeply involved in the team process as both a member and later as a leader. As an orientation to inquiry, action research seeks to create change with others. The process of testing, iteration, and evaluation was well-suited to this development process and allowed for the emergence of findings and knowledge in a more participatory way (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Jessica’s dual role as a designer/researcher and participant required continual reflexivity toward bringing together action and reflection, theory and practice, to create tangible and actionable knowledge for the team to seed change at the institution. This reflexivity necessitated a particular focus on power differentials as both researcher/designer and participant. As Sangiorgi (2010) states, “Activating collective optimism through shared and orienting visions needs to be supported by the creation of adequate infrastructures and effective power distribution strategies” (p. 36). Jessica’s praxis involved maintaining a reflective journal throughout this process, articulating observations and insights with Hillary, and triangulating concerns with others on the team, including the facilitators.

3.2. Stage 1: examining the past

In order to protect CROAR’s proprietary content, we will abstract some details of their process. However, we can say that their approach is aligned with anti-racist community-organizing trainings that “center a historical, cultural, and structural analysis of racism” (Racial Equity Institute, n.d.) and embrace “challenging entrenched power structures, both internal and external to an organization, and a willingness to examine and remake structures, cultures, and behaviors that reinforce power imbalances” (AORTA, n.d.). The CROAR training process initially focused on individual reflexivity and later moved to a systemic analysis of oppression. The facilitators asked team members to reflect on how their own racial identities have been shaped by a socialization process that teaches people of color to internalize their own racial oppression, while white people internalize their own racial superiority (Racial Equity Tools, n.d.). The consequences of this internalization lead people to believe, accept, and live out their lives in ways that define, normalize, support, and maintain the racial construct.

With this grounding in understanding how individuals absorb and perpetuate oppression, the organizers guided the team through community practices to reckon with the institution’s past. The task force co-created a historical analysis (a portion of which is shown in Table 1) and institutional power assessment to uncover historical and present moments of oppression and stories of resistance and activism. Historical analysis is necessary to imagine better futures, and the next envisioning stage built on the ongoing partnership with the organizers for this expertise. This community organizing tactic could benefit other researchers and activists using reparative futures.

3.3. Stage 2: critically conscious reparative futures

While the team was working on their historical analysis, the co-authors began to look ahead to the strategic planning portion of the team’s work. We adapted established futures practices for new approaches that would respond to the perspectives and values of the anti-racism team members. We built on the frame of a Futures Workshop (Dator, 1993; Jungk and Müllert, 1987; Vidal, 2006) and assessed what might be missing from those prescribed steps. The Futures Workshop style is informed by peacebuilding practices in futures studies, where Polak (1973) initially sought to help people devastated by war imagine a peaceful future. The format of a Future Workshop is defined by Jungk and Müllert (1987), referred to by Dator (1993) who ran countless versions of this format, and then further developed by Vidal (2006).

The foundation of a Future Workshop has three parts: critiquing the present state, envisioning a better world, and then translating those visions into a set of projects or a more practical action plan. The objective is to “critically and thoroughly” discuss the present situation, imagine “social fantasies,” and then determine the next steps by assessing the “practicability” of the final concepts (Vidal, 2006, p. 5). We add to this an attention to justice-based participatory futuring methods and justice-based scholarship to ensure that many perspectives can define preferable futures (Milojevic & Inayatullah, 2003; Gidley et al., 2009; Ramos et al., 2019; Nikolakis, 2020; Paniagua & Cornejo, 2020).

To ensure that many perspectives can define preferable futures, we added to the Future Workshop approach attention to justice-based participatory futuring methods such as social learning that centers transversal epistemologies to empower participants to collaborate and co-develop future scenarios about their own communities (Gidley et al., 2009; Nikolakis, 2020); working as co-participants rather than owners of the process (Paniagua & Cornejo, 2020); attending to cultural knowledge as a point of inspiration (Cruz & Kahn-Parreño, 2022), and an “action modality” that “emerges from embodied participation” to use in futuring activities that include people with “systemically different backgrounds” (Ramos, 2017). Scholars who critique current futures practices seek to break patterns of narrow assumptions about what the world is like today, how people experienced injustice in the past, and who and what can be centered in the future.

The Future Workshop structure lacks a space to recognize the influence of the past and how it continues to shape the present, so we

Table 1
A section of the team’s historical analysis of institutional racism.

How has your institution created and supported the white-dominant cultural center through its decisions, programs, and actions?		
Theme	Examples	Team member quote
Foundational racism and paternalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Our name is tied to history of genocide against indigenous peoples - Our campus sits upon stolen land - White savior mindset in the ways students were targeted and enrolled 	<p>“For much of this institution’s history, it’s operated from an assumption that we hold power and resources that prospective BIPOC students wouldn’t have access to without our generosity. This white saviorship is rooted in the liberalism of the time, that tries to resolve white guilt, but fundamentally ignores privilege and the complex circumstances affecting this student base, and our complicity in it.”</p> <p>“Structurally, our institution maintains opaque barriers and other limitations in a few key areas: vertical communication between different levels of personnel as well horizontally between departments; the timely distribution of information and decisions that directly impact the community dynamic; budgets, resource allocation, are difficult to access and decided top-down; accountability processes are obscure, and have their own limitations based on the position and identity of the person in question.”</p>
Maintaining power and status quo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inequitable power relations between trustees, administration, faculty, staff, and students - Ultimate power residing with non-educators controlling funds through capitalist stock market - Hierarchical decision-making process not based on democratic input or consensus - Working in silos maintains divisiveness, preventing conversation and collaboration - ‘Us against them’ mentality - Fixing broken systems are not the priority 	

modified this format to include deeper acknowledgment of the past and space for multiple experiences of the present (see Table 2). Additionally, rather than ending with a set of incremental next steps (as future workshops typically do), we focused on clarifying what radical success would look like for this group's anti-racist efforts. From this vision, we used backcasting to reveal a few new steps to introduce into their planning. In these ways, we added activities to:

- a) acknowledge the institution's history,
- b) scaffold their thinking about visions and
- c) integrate backcasting to inform their strategic planning phase.

We framed the backcasting activity as developing a "transition pathway" to evoke non-linear, inclusive transformation. We compare the original structure of the Future Workshop to our modification in Table 2. The result is a creative futuring process that makes visible plural histories and fosters visions that describe how antiracist futures can unfold.

We modified the popular Three-Horizons activity (Curry & Hodgson, n.d.; Sharpe et al., 2016) to support different types of creativity and offer more support for imagining a radically hopeful future. We called this "More of/Less of" and used it to help participants transition from describing the present state of the college community and begin to imagine what a radically better future might look like. Finally, to integrate their future visions more easily into their ongoing strategic planning, we made the final stage of the workshop a backcasting activity. Drawing from the instructions from Future Backwards by Cynefin (Snowden, 2007), we prompted them with, "From your description of a ridiculously hopeful future, what are the steps, working backward, that would result in that type of future?" (We used the term 'ridiculously' in the workshop, but we have chosen to use 'radically' in this paper in order to better align with existing

The first three-hour envisioning workshop occurred on Zoom eight months into the team's year of training. They were supporting instructions and frameworks laid out on virtual collaboration boards in Miro. In addition to the two CROAR facilitators who did not participate, fifteen people participated, and Hillary provided instructions and helped answer questions but did not generate ideas in the breakout rooms. The demographics of the participants are outlined in Table 3.

3.3.1. Learning from anti-racism trainers

We collaborated closely with expert facilitators from CROAR to respect the organizers' facilitation methods and learning structure while adding our creative futuring activities to the process. CROAR facilitators led these developmental discussions, combining their past experience with facilitating anti-racist organizational teams, continually foregrounding their lens of challenging the "ways in which racism is embedded in the structures of institutions" (Davis, 2016, p. 18), leading to "embedded oppression and misuse of power" (CROAR, n.d.). We discussed extensively the goals of the futures workshop, when it could occur, how to prepare and support people in this new activity, and how it could connect to the team's outputs overall. Our process was interjected into CROAR's typical flow, with some modifications made to their typical visioning approach to acknowledge the futures perspectives.

This collaboration resulted in some excellent questions as the organizers listened to our proposal to add this new method to their existing process. They expressed concerns about accommodating people who would respond to the futuring exercises while holding space for those who do not. They advised us to take the time to acknowledge that this is a new and different way of thinking about challenges. They suggested that we build in moments to slow down and allow people to participate in their own ways, at their own pace. One organizer also reminded us, "Dismantling racism is a generational process. But people show up with present pain—I want to fix this NOW. Recognize that people need change today" (Carey, personal communication, October 20, 2021). This mindset could make participants reluctant to think very far into the future. Therefore, as we designed our activities, we would need to recognize that people need change *today*. As facilitators and instructors, we could invite them to hold both the urgency and pain of today and the possibilities of forty years from now.

3.3.2. Incorporating decolonial perspectives

In addition to the expert advice from the community organizers, we incorporated strategies from decolonizing futures scholars into the visioning workshop. These scholars critique current futures practices and seek to break patterns of narrow assumptions about what the world is like today, how injustice was experienced in the past, and who and what can be centered in the future. In our current world, situated in modernity, capitalism, patriarchy, and whiteness, it is easy to assume that existence is a neutral, shared experience (Vieira de Oliveira & Prado de O. Martins, 2019). Interdisciplinary scholars Mitchell and Chaudhury (2020) describe how "present apocalyptic narratives embed a series of problematic assumptions which reveal that they are motivated not by a general concern with futures but rather with the task of securing white futures" (p. 1). In earlier research, Hillary identified how future visions in racial justice often imagine futures that are not speculative but where access and safety available to some people today will someday be

Table 2

Comparing the collaborative phases of a traditional Future Workshop (based on Vidal, 2006) with our modifications.

Established phases of Future Workshops (Vidal, 2006)	Our modified phases to reflect liberatory practices
1. "The problem is critically and thoroughly discussed"	1. Acknowledge current pain in the present (Devich-Cyrl, 2021)
2. "social fantasies of the participants are developed"	2. What got us here? (Historical analysis) (Sriprakash et al., 2020)
3. "ideas found are checked and evaluated in what concerns their practicability"	3. What do we want more of? What do we want less of?
	4. Describe a better, ridiculously hopeful world. Summarize in three statements.
	5. Backcasting to reveal new perspectives

Table 3
Demographic details of 15 workshop participants.

<u>Gender identity</u>	<u>Racial identity</u>	<u>Roles at the college</u>
Female: 8	AAP: 2	Students: 4
Male: 5	Black: 6	Staff: 6
Non-binary: 2	Latina: 2	Faculty: 4
	White: 5	Administrators: 1

available to all (Carey et al., 2022). We recognize that there has been debate in the literature between decolonial theory and discussions on reparations for U.S. enslavement. While we situate this project more squarely within the discussions on reparations, we also echo Sriprakash's (2022) and Bhambra's (2021) thinking that a reparative lens can accompany and enable decolonial efforts. This positioning would also help re-fortify decolonial efforts against the watering down that has taken place (Shain et al., 2021). Also, while our work is informed by decolonizing futures scholars for their critiques of futures practices, we do not claim that this case study fully utilizes a "decolonizing futures" approach.

3.4. Stage 3: specifying stories

We designed two additional workshops to translate the initial visions from the workshop into what we hoped would be vivid stories of possible futures. These two workshops built on the technique of experiential futures (Candy, 2010; Candy & Dunagan, 2017) and Hillary's developing research on evoking future visions in the present (Carey, 2021). This approach focused on imagining everyday moments from an imagined future. Experiential futures offer prompts to imagine rituals, roles, moments that could be true in a potential future. Hillary's framework prompts people to think about how to evoke those everyday possibilities through language and enactment.

Experiential futures seek to make ideas about the future more accessible, but we acknowledge that this method does not explicitly engage with oppression or reparative processes. Researchers such as Mazé (2019) have highlighted the lack of engagement with political dimensions within design and futures scholarship, calling for other approaches, such as a historical or genealogical approach. In addition, the tripartite concept of time—that there is a past, present, and future—is a Western and modern concept (Inayatullah, 1990). While Candy's methods were not developed in a decolonial or reparative context, other researchers have demonstrated how to ensure the methods will not replicate existing systems of oppression. Kuzmanovic and Gaffney (2017) incorporate complementary approaches (such as pre-rehearsals and pre-enactments) from other fields to increase inclusivity and empowerment in experiential futures engagements. Garduño-García and Gaziulusoy (2021) explore how experiential futures can better connect to plural publics through immersive storytelling that positively correlates with empathic capacity. Candy himself highlights how experiential futures has evolved to be more pluralistic, opening "promising new avenues for attempting complex collective acts of empathy, conversation, and deliberation in the public sphere" (Candy & Kornet, 2019).

To further engage the original visions, we held two two-hour workshops virtually through Zoom and supported voluntary participants with instructions and brainstorming tools on virtual boards in Miro. The first 'specifying' workshop had participants reflect on themes that the two authors pulled from the first workshop, and they imagined what those themes would look like in an everyday campus experience. A list of everyday moments at the institution was offered, and participants self-selected into two groups, one choosing to look at classroom experiences and the other choosing decision-making meetings. Therefore, the primary activity was to imagine what a classroom or a meeting in a hopeful future would look like if it involved the themes of inclusion, belonging, and freedom.

The final workshop aimed to turn the future classroom and meeting descriptions into stories that could be translated into artistic pieces to share the visions with a larger community. Our plan was to finish the second workshop with artist briefs or scripts that could be given to art students from the college to create visual or video expressions of the visions. Participants worked in two groups to brainstorm and then decide on a final description of their future classroom or meeting.

3.5. Working with illustrators: concretize the visions

At the end of the last workshop, the two co-authors refined two scenarios that describe a moment in time for both visions in a way that an illustrator or video artist could bring to life. This required a series of iterative conversations between us and the illustrators to translate broad ideas about what the future could hold—even when constrained to a classroom or meeting—into a specific moment that could describe the values and goals of that future. We wrote the descriptions as scripts or scenes to capture roles, interactions, and dialogue. With the artist briefs ready, Jessica's position as a DEI leader helped us secure funding to hire art students to illustrate the visions.

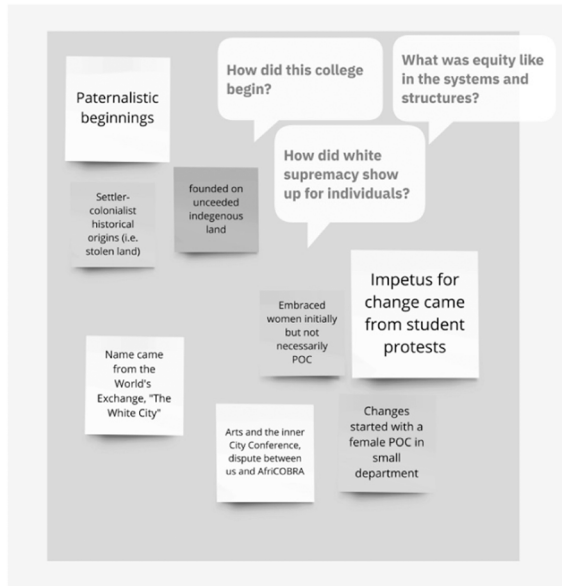
4. Results: new perspectives

4.1. Visions of a ridiculously hopeful future

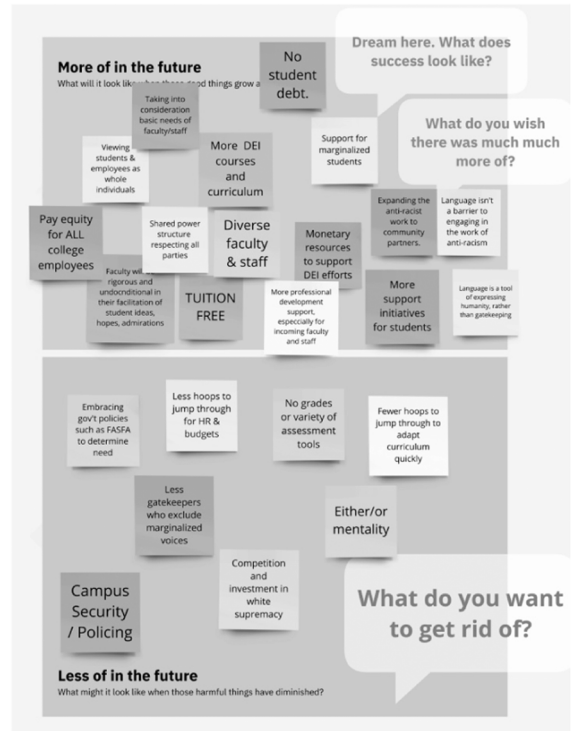
The first workshop resulted in a successful introduction to radically hopeful visions and long-term futures. Working in virtual

breakout rooms, participants were able to move through five key stages of the three-hour workshop: 1) acknowledging present pain; 2) reflecting on the past; 3) identifying what they want to see more of and less of; 4) imagining what that ‘ridiculously hopeful’ future could contain and then summarizing that future into three statements, and 5) backcasting from that future description. At the end of the workshop, the final step was for each group to present their descriptions and backcasting process to the entire group and the

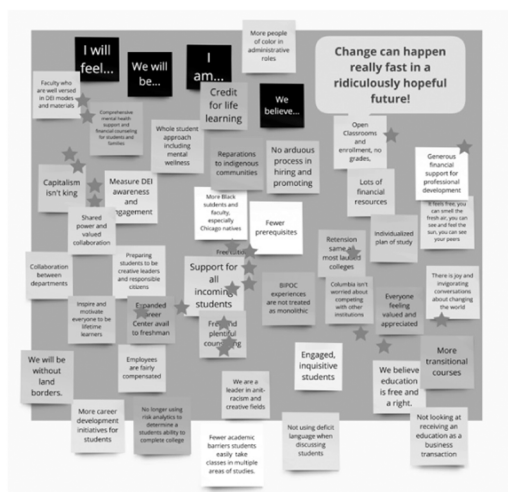
Board 1. “Acknowledge the past” portion of the virtual board from one group’s activity. Prompts included: How did this college begin? How did white supremacy show up for individuals? What was equity like in the systems and structures?



Board 2. “More of/Less of” portion from one group’s activity. Prompts included: What is there too much of today? What is harmful that needs to be removed? What are the mindsets and challenges that are common today but we hope would decrease or go away in the future?



Board 3. “Ridiculously hopeful” future portion from one group’s activity. Prompts included: Think of all the different ways to describe what this organization has transformed into in the hopeful future. What roles, rituals, events, and institutions exist in your ideal future for us?



Board 4. “Your vision of the future” portion from one group’s activity. Instructions were to copy & paste the three most voted-on statements and then rephrase to be more specific and clear.

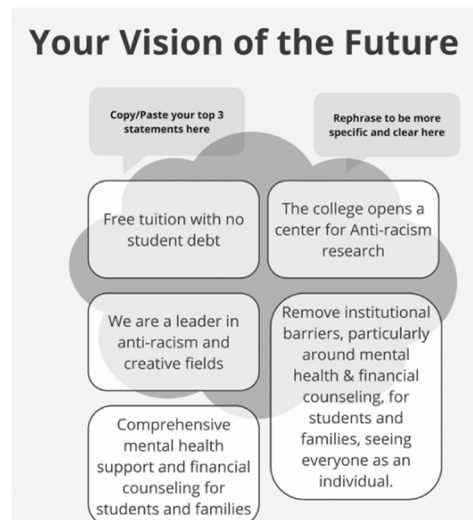


Fig. 1. Elements of a critically conscious reparative futures workshop.

community organizer facilitators. Participants felt that because the artifact (digital whiteboards shown in Fig. 1) was visible, a more interesting conversation developed in which they were talked *with* rather than talked *at*. The visual structure helped bring focus and shared documents. Each group successfully developed distinct, shared descriptions of what a hopeful transformation toward inclusion and equity could look like for the college community, as seen in Table 4.

4.1.1. *Consensus and dissensus*

People working with reparative processes will always surface and grapple with tensions and disagreements. This case study highlights the value of a reparative process that took place over several months before the futuring workshops. Through the historical and institutional analysis, group members shared their own perspectives on the history of the institution and its current practices. The group’s power dynamics could be seen and felt as students and staff found their voice to share their experiences which were quite different from those of faculty and administrators. By the time we held the futuring workshops, the group was prepared to challenge the dominant paradigm of the institution, so there was little disagreement about what an anti-racist future might look and feel like. This was also an open, generative process that allowed different future visions to emerge. However, there were creative frictions in the imagining process. Some participants were inclined to be more granular and specific about a future moment, while others tended toward envisioning a more metaphysical, embodied sensation of the future.

4.1.2. *Activities*

Participants expressed joy about participating in the futuring activities. For example, at the end of the session, one participant typed into the chat, “Imagination and future visioning is so important and a crucial part of decolonization. How do we work towards what we cannot even imagine?” Moreover, others typed support for this: “❤️, 💖.” The same person followed up: “I have to imagine that at some point, my ancestors dreamed me into existence. I appreciate the opportunity to dream, too.”

Backcasting proved difficult in the time allotted with light facilitation. For example, in group three, they focused on the enormous societal shifts that would be necessary to make college a free, federally-funded option, so they did not appear to arrive at any new actions or steps that they, as a team, could take to bring about this hopeful future. As a result, our hypothesis that backcasting would move the visions from the workshop into their current work did not. This may be due to the initial framing of the problem rather than a problem of the backcasting task. (We will reflect on this in the

Despite the enthusiasm for futuring overall, we became concerned that our goal of inspiring new perspectives was unmet. There seemed to be nothing remaining to keep the visions from the workshop memorable as the participants returned to everyday work. Despite enthusiasm about the long-term futures, the first workshop did not have material support that would keep those ideas alive for the participants. We decided to create additional workshops to develop the visions from the first workshop into stories that could be shared with the larger campus community. The futures project began as a plan for a single workshop but grew into a more extensive process of three workshops and a final stage of engaging student artists to visualize the visions.

4.2. *Specifying stories of everyday future moments*

With our attention to revisiting the visions from the initial workshop, the second and third visioning workshops focused on developing two vivid visions of anti-racist futures for the college community. Six participants from the first workshops voluntarily attended these two additional sessions, which resulted in two key illustrated scenarios: a description of a student’s experience in an anti-racist classroom and the rituals within a transparent decision-making meeting. The process of moving from themes to initial descriptions to more vivid stories is described in Table 5.

Through the workshops and some additional effort on our part as facilitators, we developed two vivid visions of antiracist futures for the college community. Capturing the complexities of the future visions in a momentary scene was harder than expected. The final stories focused on two crucial settings that can be liberating or oppressive on a college campus: a classroom and a decision-making meeting. Two students produced a set of illustrations to accompany the future narrative. The results are two engaging and specific

Table 4

The summary statements from each group describing their ‘ridiculously hopeful’ future visions for the college.

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Free tuition with no student debt Our college as a leader in anti-racism and creative fields Remove institutional barriers, particularly around mental health & financial counseling, for students and families, seeing everyone as an individual.	We move away from an individualistic mindset, seeing our actions as necessarily collectively linked together, oriented around a non-capitalist, justice-oriented paradigm that supports all of our talents and creativity. Students are passionate and proud to be part of this collective, with far more agency and power in their own educational experience. People feel free to be themselves because all identities are celebrated. At the more national and global level, our college actions are supported by fundamental reorientations of funding, power, policy, economies, etc.	Students are paid a stipend to go to school and tuition is free Much less distance between the college president and lowest paid worker, and all college employees make a generous salary that they can reasonably live off of Shared governance, equitable decision-making, and all meetings are totally open for anyone to walk in and participate. sabbaticals (for all) for rest, community growth, innovation, collaboration & most of our time at the college is spent on innovating

stories of events in an antiracist future of this unique college campus, with vibrant accompanying illustrations. Fig. 2 depicts both stories. On the left is a joyful classroom experience where students’ needs and identities are centered, and learning happens through collaboration and reflection. The second story describes new rules and rituals to ensure a more equitable and inclusive decision-making meeting.

The final illustrations reflect the perspectives of the illustrators. The students illustrated the most relevant aspects of each story for themselves, which was an interpretation we invited. It was enlightening to share our artist statements that described many more things than could be captured in an illustration, so the illustrators needed to choose which moments they felt were most important. Jada Russell focused on the feel of the classroom and the ease the students would feel in such a setting (Fig. 2, left). Ab Rieve focused primarily on the inclusion and belonging of these meetings rather than the particular rules and rituals that would be facilitated (Fig. 2, right). We intend the final illustrated visions to serve several purposes:

1. Reflect the ideas the team members generated about what the future might look like.
2. Demonstrate the goals of anti-racism work in a more simple and engaging way that helps the campus community understand what anti-racism work looks and *feels* like. The visions offer an affective and embodied connection that a more traditional outcome of an anti-racist task force—such as a text-based explanation of a complex institutional policy change—does not offer.
3. For our theoretical research, we were interested in comparing what hopeful visioning activities would generate and the community organizing process, which focuses on strategic, policy-level change.

We recognize that policy must change to bring about a more equitable campus, yet that type of change is not the only way to intervene or describe anti-racism work’s ultimate goals.

4.3. Comparing DEI and futuring processes

Finally, to assess the usefulness of the future visions, we compared those visions to CROAR’s standard process outputs. The culmination of CROAR’s year-long training ends in the team creating strategic directions, which are then used to generate action items across the upcoming year. The team collectively drafted and adopted the strategic directions. Unfortunately, they show little influence from the first visioning workshop.

The three final visions do, however, represent a more holistic perspective on what anti-racism can achieve. It is useful to compare the three visions from the workshop (Table 4) to the five strategic directions, which are:

- establish new decision-making practices

Table 5

An example of how the concepts evolved and the visions of future experiences became more specific as the group moved from the initial workshop toward the final illustration.

Themes from workshop 1	Concepts developed in workshop 2	Stories generated in the workshop 3
1. Belonging and trust 2. Flexible, supportive structures 3. Deep respect and balanced decision-making 4. Learning from and with each other 5. Shared understanding of justice permeates everything 6. We become a beacon and justice + creativity	A. Anti-racist Classroom - Transformed curriculum - Collective learning - Culture-scape of trust - Demonstrate anti-racist values - Redistribute assets and opportunities B. Transparent Decision-Making - Knowledge building for DEI mindsets in everyone - Multiple ways to participate: talking, writing, action - No one person has the final say, loudest voice - More collaboration and curiosity - More listening, more emergence	A. Anti-racist Classroom Student A puts on whatever they want to wear, hair, doesn’t worry how people will judge them walking into a classroom. They don’t know what major (or are there majors?) They are looking forward to class because it’s Art Activism. The instructor greets me by name and my correct pronoun. As the instructor, Curtis is there but working more as a facilitator. The student leader for the day, Pax, is leading. Curtis had plenty of time to connect with students prior to class. We have freedom to do what we want in class as long as we meet the end goal. TC knows that as long as they participate, complete their daily writing, and complete the overall project (not so much solution-focused, but produced something). B. Transparent Decision-Making In an anti-racist future, don’t need to worry about the politics and motives, can trust them Power check: - Do we have the people here who can make these decisions? - - What freedoms do we have to influence this decision? If none, this doesn’t need to be a meeting. Evidence that administrators have learned to implement anti-oppression practices in their behaviors in the meeting Anyone can attend. anyone can be heard. Skilled facilitator helps this happen. Highest ranking person in the room appreciates and seeks out challenging perspectives. Students act with confidence and feel certain that they will be valued and listened to.

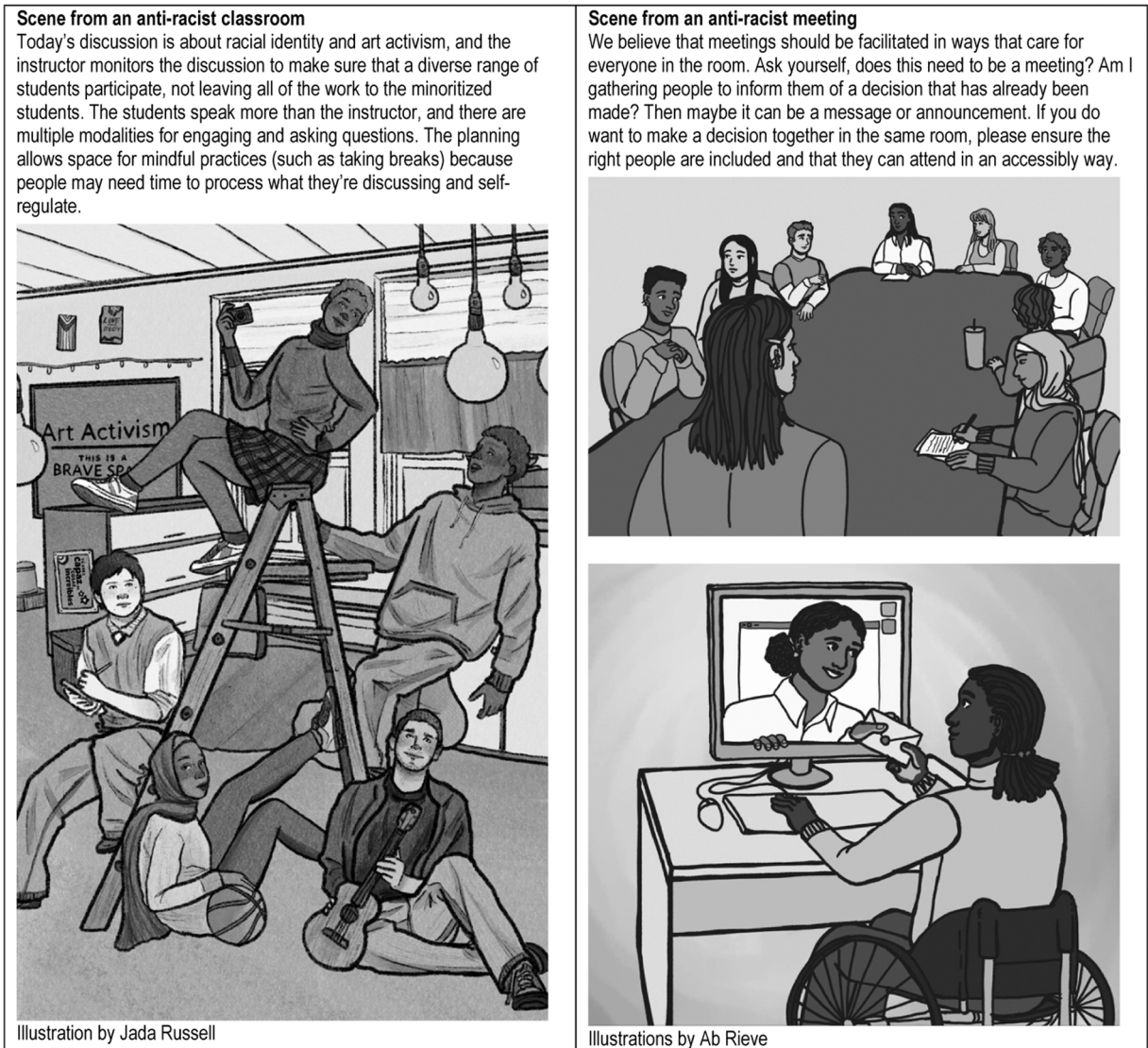


Fig. 2. Two illustrated stories that capture a sense of the future stories that the workshops developed. On the left, an illustration by Jada Russell, depicting an anti-racist classroom experience in the future. On the right, an illustration by Ab Rieve depicting the future vision of how equitable decision-making meetings might feel. Accompanying text would include, “Power Check 1: Do we have the people here who can make the decisions? Ensure the right people are in the room or do not move forward.” (Note: The “right people” refer to decision-makers, not a diversity of identities.).

- acknowledge and make reparations
- distribute resources equitably
- support intersectional identities
- expand institutional anti-racism capacity.

These workshop descriptions seem to take a larger perspective on change beyond DEI. In the collective visioning workshop, they imagined what it would mean for the college to be known for this work, what it would feel like for students to feel differently in the classroom, and what it would mean for salaries and stipends to have more financial equity overall. They took a larger view of resolving the inequities of the tuition-based college system and wrestled with what freedoms faculty would need to bring new pedagogies into the classroom. While these stories were not solid enough to last beyond the workshop as strategic visions, the conversations were provocative and holistic.

5. Discussion: bridging DEI and futures processes

From our perspective, institutional DEI work can benefit from collective reparative future visioning. However, tools need to be

crafted thoughtfully to respect the values of anti-racism and deliver useful, actionable outputs.

5.1. Historical analysis

Through this historical analysis work that challenged a ‘fixed past,’ we looked backward to “challenge deterministic or teleological perceptions of the past as a single, linear, inevitable set of events” and “pluralize reality” (Bendor et al., 2021, p. 2). This allows for multiple perspectives and experiences—challenging the idea of a singular shared past. By reconstructing the institution’s histories, we grew our collective sense of agency to foster change (Wadhvani et al., 2018). Acknowledging the past made room for futures. To continue to think of our institution as a bold, progressive institution with a stellar track record would restrict our capacity to imagine change. This can be understood as a *rhetorical strategy* to alter the narration of history, which we (the authors) used to inform the futuring activities. However, others may hesitate to receive the visions because they did not participate in the rhetorical challenges and reconstruction of the past.

5.2. Reparatory orientations and affective visions

Riedy & Waddock (2022) advocate for using social imaginaries to inspire publics toward healthier, more sustainable transformation. They recommend three attributes for stories that can support transformation: 1) continued dialogue focused on shared storylines to help support anti-hegemonic narratives; 2) replicable and plausible stories that are easily understood and engage emotions; and 3) dialogue and stories that feature characters people can identify with, leading to an increased sense of agency to participate in transformative change. If we compare our outputs to these attributes, the continued work of the anti-racism team provides a space for the first attribute—the ongoing dialogue that critiques and develops shared perspectives on the harms of white supremacy in the institutional setting. Our creative activities primarily focused on the second and third attributes by seeking to create visual stories that would be sharable by our team and beyond.

The social imaginaries developed through the visioning workshops differed in tone and content compared to the actions resulting from the organizer’s anti-racism process. The resulting visions are emotive and experiential. Longer-range visions anchored further into the future embrace a more holistic world (such as equality of salaries and learning as an embodied experience) vs. the themes from strategic plans that do not exist as a narrative or demonstrate new ways of being. The future stories explore new rituals and habits that could be fostered rather than the strategic plans focused on fixing a broken process at the college. At the same time, these visions are rooted in the everyday, with seeds of that future already existing in the present. They are not speculative in their descriptions of worlds that do not currently exist but instead, seek to bring practices from anti-racist spaces into wider use in the institution.

5.3. Making visions tangible through specificity

In the first workshop, the team members were able to imagine ridiculously hopeful visions, but they struggled with translating those visions into actions through backcasting in a transition pathway. We speculate that the visions were too broad in scope, and participants felt they needed more agency to make pathways toward societal change. Visions created in the short span of an introductory workshop are unrefined or as Blythe et al. (2016) offer, “naïve fragile fictions.” They are the start of brilliant images of just futures, but they are incomplete. We explored one way to give robustness and specificity by creating scenarios of key moments in the future. So we added guided activities to explore specificity: ‘what does a classroom look like?’ and ‘what does a better meeting look like?’ As the visions become rooted in tangible contexts, they look less like upending the whole system and are more about delivering meaningful moments. However, there are many other ways to develop strong visions (including necessary visions of upending whole systems), and we hope to explore those in subsequent work.

5.4. Facilitating critically conscious reparative futures

Anti-racist futures must be paired with historical analysis, reparatory orientation, and reflexive facilitation. This case study demonstrates that it is possible to collaborate and partner with experts more versed in reparative techniques. However, researchers must enter this work with an understanding of oppression and historical influence. Connecting to a community organizing process already in progress ensured that participants were comfortable understanding the depth of the challenge and ready to talk about complex topics. It was a mutual learning space where we gained new insights, perspectives, and tools from each other. To be trusted in social justice contexts of social justice, facilitators need to be fluent and open in discussions of historic and ongoing injustice. Tools intended for other contexts cannot just be ported over to this one; the integration must be done carefully.

People actively working to bring about systems change have many ideas about what “better futures” look like, but they often lack the tools to capture those visions and rarely have the time and space to dream of long-term horizons. Can futures practices help support this type of social dreaming that collects and materializes the systemic solution advocates imagine? We found that creative facilitation was needed to guide thinking toward what is possible, but the content of the visions was quickly generated. Facilitation should be continuously reflexive while focusing on the new practices of orientation to the future. Facilitators helped to translate ideas about the present pains into opportunities for change in the future.

5.5. Creative anti-racist praxis

Futures were added to the DEI process because Jessica wanted a *creative* process and engaging visions that could enlist others in the objectives of this team. In reflecting on this process, Jessica's thinking was driven by her concern (especially once she became team leader) about how the team would take action once the training was over. She was not looking for an alternative to CROAR's strategic directions approach; instead, she wondered about 'both/and.' What if we engaged a deep, challenging analysis of our own institution's history (and our complicity) and imagined a more joyful future that sought to repair past harms? Jessica also realizes how much her teammates influenced her thinking about how the team would act moving forward. The anti-racism team was filled with artists and performers who constantly urged us to process our learning through somatic practice. They urged us to do more than intellectually grapple with institutional and intellectual histories of racism and reflect on what systemic racism *feels* like in our individual and collective bodies and what it might feel like *otherwise*.

5.6. Moving forward

We recognize that this process does not specify the continuing work of taking reparative actions. As we write this, in the fall of 2023, the CROAR portion of the training has ended, and the anti-racist team continues to work on transforming the college's practices and policies. Current projects include the cross-college development of a campus climate survey and a thorough revision of bias reporting processes. Neither of these projects would be happening without the work of the team. The college also plans to hire a cabinet-level diversity officer to work alongside the president. Despite these initial actions, it remains to be seen if and how the collective work of acknowledging and repairing the harms of the past and present will happen campus-wide.

In this context of a college where more than 50% of students identify as non-White, where they arrive hoping to explore and express themselves across multiple art forms, where they seek spaces in which their nonconforming and marginalized identities and bodies can feel safe and welcome so that they can thrive and flourish, Jessica believed that Hillary's provocation to describe the possibilities of a ridiculously hopeful future could galvanize the team around hope. From there, others in the campus community might also see themselves in this future. When Jessica shared the final illustrations with the team, they were highly energized and eager to show them to others in the larger campus community. However, questions remain: Can our co-created visions generate a creative, collective action frame shared across the campus community? Will the visions offer support to the reparative work yet to come? The next research step is to examine how external audiences receive the visions.

6. Conclusion: reparative future visions offer new, equitable perspectives

Long-term visions have great potential to engage people in DEI work in new ways. First, challenging the past must be part of a new praxis toward imagining futures. Futuring activities would have been less effective without the past-facing historical work facilitated by the organizers. Second, we propose that the radically hopeful visions created through collaborative futures practices offer an alternative way to introduce bold initiatives and gain community support. The infusion of creative, long-term thinking generated visions of an anti-racist future without oppression—breaking the mental model of the present and offering radical alternatives. Visions may be a better rhetorical device for gaining support rather than the more principle-driven formats of institutional planning documents.

This creativity-based approach helped catalyze the work of becoming an anti-racist learning community by connecting institutional and personal histories to radical imaginations of future world-building activities. The resulting process was joyful, resonant, and productive. As bell hooks states, "Hopefulness empowers us to continue our work for justice even as the forces of injustice may gain greater power for a time" (2003, p. xiv). "Ridiculously hopeful" was an exciting provocation that feels very antithetical to the deep historical analysis that was currently happening in the team. It felt life-giving, rooted in the hopes of the individuals on the team, and connected to interpersonal change rather than at the institutional level.

The importance of reparative future visions may not be about predicting or advocating for the future but instead is about shining a perspective on the present (Le Guin, 1969). As designers Gray and Lin (2021) state, "Reparative practices are just as much about the process as the outcome and radical design futuring becomes a means to directly support place-based movements agitating for intersectional justice" (p.43). At times, the authors of this paper wonder, is this work truly about pulling people toward a new way of being? Or rather, helping them see that the present state of things is not good enough for all? This case study demonstrates that future visioning in DEI/anti-racism team building can effectively develop orientations beyond the present challenges. This may help build solidarity and sustain motivation to implement radical change. New paths forward emerge when past injustice is examined to imagine better futures. This activity resulted in novel perspectives on what a holistic, inclusive, anti-racist campus community could look like someday.

We are enthusiastic about the benefits of thinking about equity outcomes in quotidian scenes from the future. By giving specificity to what successful transitions could look like, far-future visions can be inspiring tools for planning and persuasion. While moving from vague visions to specific stories that compel people toward progressive action still needs more work, it is essential to find ways to make the collective visions of racial justice projects more compelling and shareable so that they can motivate larger publics to get more involved. The radically hopeful visions created through critically conscious reparative futures practices offer an additional way to engage with reparative processes, bringing in creativity and consideration of relational connections. Stories of everyday moments from the long-term future may be a way for anti-racism efforts to clarify and communicate their hopes for a better future.

Declaration of Competing Interest

Each of the authors confirms that this manuscript has not been previously published and is not currently under consideration by any other journal. Additionally, all authors have approved this paper's contents and agreed to the Futures Journal's submission policies. To the best of our knowledge, none of the above-suggested persons have any conflict of interest, financial or otherwise. Each named author has substantially contributed to conducting the underlying research and drafting this manuscript. Additionally, to the best of our knowledge, the named authors have no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise.

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