

The Reality of Reparations

The Civil War ended 155 years ago, yet the United States has done little to acknowledge the harms committed to African Americans during slavery in any sort of meaningful way. A promise was made after the war that African Americans recently freed from bondage would be given 40 acres and a mule. However, President Andrew Johnson rescinded the order within months of the war's end and President Lincoln's assassination.

Moreover, the abolishment of slavery did not put a halt to injustices against Black folks in this country. The United States has transitioned into two other eras of injustice since slavery: Jim Crow; state and local laws which enforced segregation and modern-day discrimination; the prison industrial complex, micro and macroaggressions, etc, both of which have contributed to the need for reparations.

The costs of continuous injustice are both literal and figurative. Economically, the disparities between Black and whites particularly are stark. For example, for every dollar a white household holds, a Black one has 10 cents. Additionally, racial segregation plays a role in Black-white differences in health. It is argued that reparations have the potential to not only help the economic circumstances of African Americans, but also their health and wellbeing.

The argument for reparations for African Americans is nothing new. It came into play during the Great Depression, contributing to the country's failed stabilization efforts, which led to economic volatility. In fact, reparations have been issued to other groups by the United States government. First issued under the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, over 80,000 people were offered monetary redress for the internment of over 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II. Both letters of apology and checks for \$20,000 were sent out.

Organizations like N'COBRA, the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America, have been putting in the work to make this dream a reality for decades. Their mission is intergenerational and is currently focused on getting Congress to pass HR 40, the reparations bill.

While the issue remains socially contentious, it is important that we prioritize Black folks' voices in the discussion. In 2016 a majority of Black Americans supported reparations, according to a Marist poll. It is time we start to listen and learn how to bring this idea into fruition.

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Information gathered from "Home," N'COBRA (<https://www.ncobraonline.org/>); David R William and Chiquita Collins' "Reparations: A Viable Strategy to Address the Enigma of African American Health" in *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 47, no. 7, March, 2014; William A. Darity and A. Kirsten Mullen's *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Patricia Cohen's "What Reparations for Slavery Might Look Like in 2019" in *The New York Times*, May. 23, 2019; and Erik Gellman and Margaret Rung's "The Great Depression" in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History* (Oxford University Press, 2018).