

REP Education Sheet: D.C. Compensated Emancipation Act



- On April 16, 1862, President Lincoln signed the District of Columbia Compensated Emancipation Act into law, ending slavery in D.C., and paying reparations to the former slave owners loyal to the Union \$300 for each person freed
- Reparations was paid to the enslavers to compensate for “lost property,” rather than to the newly freed Blacks who forcibly and unjustly labored for centuries
- The Compensated Emancipation Act allocated \$1 million dollars from the U.S. Treasury to pay off enslavers. If calculated as a proportion of total federal expenditure, this would amount to a staggering \$12 billion today
- The U.S. government gave away acres of land it stole from indigenous groups to white immigrants and former land owners, building land grant colleges and providing federal subsidies to farm, while ignoring the promise it made to newly freed blacks for thirty acres and a mule
- In Washington, D.C., mainly over the course of more than three months in 1862 — in fact, claims continued to be paid well into 1863 — some 966 Washington enslavers filed their claims before the three-person Commission for the Emancipation of Slaves and received a huge reparations payment for the release of almost 3,100 captive Black people.