

What is Reparations?

Reparations is a well-established principle of international law. It is payment for an injury; redress for a wrong done. In the context of Black people in North America, reparations is repair for the enslavement era and its living legacies. In the U.S., the concept of reparations essentially constitutes four elements:

- 1) The formal acknowledgment of historical wrong and an official, unfettered apology
- 2) The recognition that there is a continuing injury
- 3) The commitment to redress by culpable entities which enjoyed unjust enrichment from the enslavement era and its vestiges
- 4) The actual compensation in whatever form or forms are agreed upon

What is HR 40?

In 1989 Congressman John Conyers introduced “The Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act, which later became known as HR 40, in remembrance of the 19th century failed legislation to provide freed Africans with forty plot acres of land. In 2019, HR 40 was updated and reintroduced by Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee as the “Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act,” noting that in the 30 years since the bill’s original introduction, sufficient evidence has been assembled to not just study but also develop proposals for remedy

What Does HR 40 Do?

HR 40 acknowledges the fundamental injustice and inhumanity of slavery in the U.S., and establishes a commission to study and consider a national apology and proposal for reparations for the institution of slavery, its subsequent racial and economic discrimination against African Americans, and the impact of these forces on living African Americans. The Commission is charged to make recommendations to Congress on appropriate remedies

Legislative Inspiration for HR 40

HR 40 follows the successful model of the reparations campaign for Japanese Americans incarcerated during WWII. The campaign began with a 1980 congressional bill establishing a commission to investigate the unjust incarceration, evaluate and consider the amount and form reparations would take, and make recommendations to the Congress for remedy. Based on the Commission's findings, President Reagan signed into law the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. The bill formally apologized to Japanese-Americans, authorized the payment of \$20,000 to each Japanese-American detention camp survivor; instituted a trust fund to educate Americans about the suffering of the Japanese-Americans; and issued pardons to all those who resisted detention camp internment.

Why is the Federal Government Important?

Black people in America are the descendants of Africans kidnapped and transported to the United States with the explicit complicity of the U.S. government and every arm of the U.S. lawmaking and law enforcing machinery. The dehumanization and atrocities of slavery were not isolated occurrences but mandated by formal laws that were codified and enshrined in the Constitution. The role of the federal government in supporting the institution of slavery and subsequent discrimination directed against Blacks is an injustice that must be formally acknowledged and redressed

Who Supports HR 40?

HR 40 has been supported by a multitude of city councils across the country from the time of its inception to the present. The state of California has established a reparations commission patterned off HR 40. The U.S. Conference of Mayors, along with Amalgamated Bank, the Players Coalition of Professional Athletes, Coaches and Owners Across Leagues, and Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream, has endorsed HR 40, to name a few. Numerous national, state, and local organizations as well as religious institutions, legal organizations, labor unions, and professional and fraternal organizations have officially endorsed HR 40 and the concept of reparations for the descendants of Africans enslaved in the United States

What Forms Can Reparations Take?

A reparations settlement can be created in as many forms as necessary to equitably address the many forms of injury sustained from chattel slavery and its continuing vestiges. Such forms can include cash payments, land, educational scholarships, tax relief, community development, historical monuments and museums, pardon of political prisoners, repatriation resources, and the elimination of laws and practices that maintain dual systems in major areas of life including the criminal punishment system, health, education, and the financial economic system that go beyond the implementation of basic public policy.

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