

For Education and Pushback on Reparations – Questions, Answers and Resources

Slavery was such a long time ago that there's now no need for reparations.

Yes, slavery was not yesterday (1619-1865) but subsequent harms to Americans of African descent continue. The period after the Civil War known as Reconstruction, which included many types of reparations for Black Americans, only lasted about twelve years. It was followed by [Jim Crow](#), lynchings, the debt peonage of sharecropping along with other land and housing disparities, racially biased mass incarceration, and other laws and policies that to this day sustain white supremacy and hamper upward mobility.

During slavery, people of African descent were of course deprived of vast amounts of wages by working for free. Due to white supremacy their work afterwards was also poorly compensated, and just as wealth is handed down through generations, so too is poverty. On average, Black families currently hold about 1/10 the wealth that white families do. As the [National African Americans Reparations Commission](#) explains, “The living legacy of enslavement is manifested in today’s society in persistent poverty and widening disparities in every socio-economic index (health, education, housing, unemployment etc.) and in the growing economic inequalities in both income and wealth.”

“When institutional racism has been eradicated and black people reach economic parity with white people – maybe then black people can “just get over it.” [Reparations4Slavery](#)

You were never a slave and I was never a slave-holder.

Generally, people who are not descendants of enslaved people have had wealth and other advantages passed down to them for generations; people who are descendants of enslaved people have been handed the opposite. In this sense, America owes a historical debt to Black and Brown people, and reparations means repaying that debt—a debt so large as to defy accurate accounting.

Consider for a moment the essential nature of chattel slavery as it was practiced throughout the Americas for centuries—that is, human beings as property, bought, sold, auctioned, used as collateral. This centuries-long atrocity was the wholesale theft of vast amounts of wealth produced by coerced and oppressed Black labor and re-enforced by an entire society rooted in anti-Black violence and White Supremacy. There is no rug nor form of whitewashing wide enough to cover up the magnitude of these crimes.

Surely, we cannot pretend that the past is over—indeed, it isn’t even past yet. As explained by [Reparations4Slavery](#), another among many organizations currently working on this effort, “The debt to the descendants of enslaved Africans is incalculable. Nothing we can do as individuals can absolve us from this debt. However, if we have inherited any of our ancestors’ best qualities, we can employ them to heal the racial divide, to make this world a better place, for African Americans and for ourselves.”

I can see that this country has been unfair to Black people, but my immigrant ancestors who were not Black never had it easy either. What is the difference?

“Nearly every ethnicity, Black or white, has endured historic trauma of some sort; many have arrived on our shores precisely because of this trauma. However, today, most immigrants of European descent have overcome the obstacles that brought them here, entered the middle class and have attained at least the median net worth. This is effectively because policies and laws affecting our economies have always favored white-skinned people. African Americans to this day are still held back by historic policies and their current-day corollaries that have resulted in the 10:1 racial wealth gap.”

Reparations4Slavery

What about other groups who find themselves deserving of reparations?

Other such groups have indeed had organizations working on their behalf for reparations. For instance, after 120,000 Japanese Americans were unjustly imprisoned during the Second World War, Congress approved reparations in the form of mass payments to them in 1948. Forty years later, President Reagan approved another \$20,000 payment to each of the surviving imprisoned individuals.

As that example shows, harms inflicted on different groups by racial discrimination vary, so they need addressing on a case by case basis. Given our local situation, the Champaign-Urbana Reparations Coalition is working for reparations to Americans of African descent. Our doing so is not to deny the need for redress for other harmed groups in our country.

Who even does this?

Reparations is not a new concept. The Federal Republic of Germany [has paid reparations](#) to the State of Israel and continues to pay reparations to Holocaust survivors. The U.S. government has paid reparations to Americans of Japanese descent interned during World War II, to victims of nuclear weapons testing, and to victims of the syphilis experiment at Tuskegee University. [As this timeline demonstrates](#), many groups in the U.S., black and otherwise, have received a wide array of different forms of reparations.

In our time, the Champaign-Urbana Reparations Coalition is by no means alone—dozens of [similar organizations exist around the country](#), and many of them have fought successfully for various kinds of reparations. [add a “for example” or two?]

Isn't this issue too big to tackle? Where would it even start?

Like many similar organizations around the country, CURC has a local emphasis, focused on creating a culture of repair in our own community. We seek redress from our government entities—local, state, and federal—but there is also a need for institutions and individuals to reckon with their participation in or profit from slavery and its legacy.

These efforts have already achieved results—in August (?) of 2025, for example, the Urbana City Council listened to our explanations of local historically based disparities and established a commission to study local forms of redress.

We have identified ample local forms of repair and have the courage to work on them. Reparations are a form of justice, not charity.

There are already programs out there to help people. Where is even more money going to come from?

While reparations can take the form of [individual payments](#), they also take a collective approach. The latter emphasizes the building of powerful community-based economic institutions that benefit the entire African American community in a fair and equitable manner. It is not “all about the money,” and reparations differ from social programs.

People are just going to waste the money anyway.

A serious, ethical conception of reparations assumes that control over what happens with them rests with the receiver, not the giver. People may be hesitant to support reparations because of a prevailing racist belief that African Americans are inherently irresponsible people who would not know how to handle new resources. It is important to examine and call out this belittling belief.

In addition, the idea of reparations is not “all about the money.” The United Nations has defined adequate reparations as taking five distinct forms: cessation and guarantees of non-repetition, restitution, compensation, satisfaction, and rehabilitation.

It's not my job - someone else can take this on.

For many, working for reparations is emancipating work that restores humanity and dignity, both for the recipients and for themselves. Many have a heart for justice and fairness, compelled by religious belief or moral codes. In social terms, healing one part of the body benefits the whole.

The fact is that laws and policies in Champaign County have systematically contributed to and exacerbated today's racial inequalities. Absent an honest look at our history and its repercussions in our present, we cannot reach our potential for the future. Roles that promote reparative justice exist for individuals, local and state governments, and the U.S. government.

“A basic principle of the Reparations Movement is that the very demand for Reparations constitutes—in itself—an indispensable validation by African and African-descended people of our own precious humanity. If Africans or Afro-descendants fail to demand that the present-day representatives and

beneficiaries of those persons, institutions and nations that committed the most horrible crimes imaginable against our ancestors be held accountable and made to pay restitution, we would be implicitly sending a message to ourselves and to the world at large that we do not consider our ancestors (or ourselves) to be sacred beings imbued with inalienable rights and deserving of respect and justice! “ NAARC

Quoted Sources:

NAARC - National African American Reparations Commission <https://reparationscomm.org>

Established in April, 2015, the National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC) is a group of distinguished professionals from across the country with outstanding accomplishments in the fields of law, medicine, journalism, academia, history, civil rights and social justice advocacy. They are united in a common commitment to fight for reparatory justice, compensation and restoration of African American communities that were plundered by the historical crimes of slavery, segregation and colonialism and that continue to be victimized by the legacies of slavery and American apartheid.

Reparations4Slavery <https://reparations4slavery.com>

"We are charting a path to the reparative future. The message for white families is simple: we must learn about erased history; we must determine how our ancestors are connected to this history; and we must work with our Black brothers and sisters to reverse the harm our families have caused. This is the path of co-liberation."

The First Repair Toolkit:

<https://firstrepair.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Reparations-Now-Toolkit-FINAL.pdf>

Brookings report:

https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/BigIdeas_Ray_Perry_Reparations-1.pdf

LA Reparations Advisory Commission FAQ:

<https://civilandhumanrights.lacity.gov/commissions/reparations/faq>

A library's site of previous examples of reparations:

<https://guides.library.umass.edu/reparations>

Reparations 4 Slavery FAQ:

<https://reparations4slavery.com/faq/>