

understanding the case for reparations.

mapping the historical context, from slavery, to Jim Crow, to present day state-sanctioned anti-Blackness — let's talk about what reparations are and why they are long overdue.



seeking to elevate + amplify Black calls for reparations.

what are reparations?

*"make amends, offering expiation (atonement), or giving satisfaction for a wrong or injury."
(Merriam-Webster)*

Reparations, within the context of anti-Black racism, refers to financially compensating and/or investing in Black folks and communities to account and make amends for the immense damages (monetary, physical, emotional) caused by state-sanctioned + legislated slavery, Jim Crow, and anti-Black racism.

Though it might take the form of a one-off payment, many scholars of and advocates for reparations have vocalized the need to also allocate funds to Black healthcare and education, in addition to individual people and families. Reparations are **not a new concept** and have been allocated in the past:

*"Historically, various groups have received reparations, including (but not limited to) payments made to Holocaust survivors and Japanese-Americans after their forced captivity in internment camps"
(Nasheed 2019).*

quantifying stolen labor.

Particularly in the United States, there is a storied and documented history of stolen labor from millions of Black folks.

Even since the abolition of slavery in 1865, millions more Black folks have been plundered and violently oppressed by both formal segregation and more informal, institutional, systemic racism, from the state, its institutions, and its citizens.

Just how much labor was stolen, and what is it worth?:

"Slavery lasted for nearly 250 years, about 60% of U.S. history, including Colonial times. Counting the nearly century-long Jim Crow segregation of African Americans, officially sanctioned racial oppression encompassed more than 80% of U.S. history to date.

The political scientist Thomas Craemer calculated the hours worked by enslaved black workers between 1776 and the official end of slavery. He estimates this uncompensated labor totaled between US\$5.9 and \$14.2 trillion in current dollars"
(Feagin 2019).

historical context.

Feagin (an American sociologist whose work and research is focused on state-sanctioned anti-Black racism), goes on to say that through his own calculations when looking at 4 centuries of racist oppression, that financial losses in the Black community is somewhere in the range of **\$10-\$20 TRILLION (USD)**.

Trillion. With a "t".

American wealth and economic empowerment was built on the backs of the free, stolen labor of Black folks. State-sanctioned racial oppression has directly resulted in the grossly disproportionate low quality of housing, healthcare, education, socio-economic status, rates of incarceration, and overall livelihoods for generations of Black folks and their communities that continues to this day.

Required reading in order to take this from the ideological into the deeply personal:

Ta-Nehisi Coates's "The Case for Reparations" makes the level of impact very clear. It is linked in our bio and is a necessary use of time for non-Black folks.

what is jim crow?

Immediately following the abolition of slavery in 1865, "Jim Crow" laws were imposed in the Southern U.S. in order to segregate Black folks, deny them the right to vote, and restrict their ability to find/keep employment or receive an education, among other things.

Named for a Black minstrel character (played by a white actor) named "Jim Crow", these laws existed for roughly **100 years**, ending in 1968.

"Black codes were strict local and state laws that detailed when, where and how formerly enslaved people could work, and for how much compensation. The codes appeared throughout the South as a legal way to put black citizens into indentured servitude, to take voting rights away, to control where they lived and how they traveled and to seize children for labor purposes." (history.com 2020).

While white Americans were accumulating wealth, building assets, and acquiring merits of traditional power, Black folks were barred from sharing any of it, and instead have been subjected to generations of systemic plunder + oppression.

diversity + inclusion is woefully insufficient.

"Liberals today mostly view racism not as an active, distinct evil but as a relative of white poverty and inequality. They ignore the long tradition of this country actively punishing black success" (Coates 2014).

Ta-Nehisi Coates's foundational essay, "The Case for Reparations", helps us understand why programs like "Affirmative Action" or "diversity quotas" do little to lift Black folks out of the holes systemically dug by institutional racism:

"America was built on the preferential treatment of white people - 395 years of it. Vaguely endorsing a cuddly, feel-good diversity does very little to redress this."

Diversity and inclusion or unconscious bias training is vastly insufficient to make up for the harms of anti-Black racism. Nothing can "make up" for these harms, but reparations are a necessary start.

In this present moment, we are called to think boldly; to revolutionize our institutions and rebuild our systems. To hold up a mirror to ourselves. Though we've been called to do this for a long time, we now seem ready to answer that call.

what would reparations look like?



William A. Darity, a leading scholar on reparations, estimates that roughly 30 million Americans would + should qualify. As the New York Times outlines (see sources), Darity estimates that each recipient should rightfully receive roughly \$80,000, making reparations a \$2.6 trillion project.

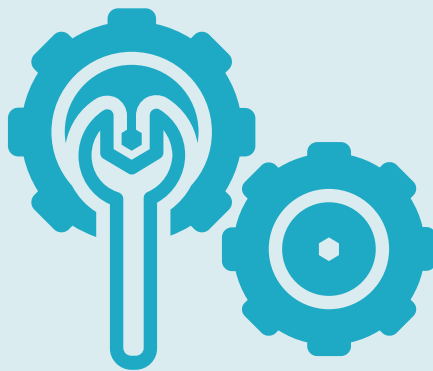
If this seems outrageously high to you, it is important to again put this in the historical context that it is borne out of. Not only can no amount of money make up for the harms of slavery and its legacies, but \$2.6 trillion does not cover the losses that many scholars have calculated Black folks to have been subjected to.

Whether payments are made in lump sums, in vouchers/on-going payment programs, or some other way altogether, one thing is clear:

we must not separate the call for reparations from our current calls to end police brutality, defund the police, end mass incarceration, and commit to anti-racism against Black folks.

Reparations are not radical; they are common sense and the very least that can be done in the wake of slavery, jim crow, and systemic anti-Black racism.

The amount of money, wealth, and labor taken from Black folx, historically through to our present day, is unfathomable. Reparations are among the only ways available to us to try and remedy some of this suffering.



don't cast these ideas away because you think you're supposed to. read on. talk to each other about it.

sources.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi: "The Case for Reparations"
(originally published in the Atlantic)

Cohen, Patricia: "What Reparations for Slavery Might Look Like in 2019" (New York Times)

Feagin, Joe R.: "The Case for African American Reparations Explained" (The Conversation)

History.com Editors: "Jim Crow Laws" (history.com)

Nasheed, Jameelah: "What are Reparations, How Could They Happen, and Why Do They Matter?" (Teen Vogue)

recommended further reading.

Alexander, Michelle: "The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness"