

# REPARATIONS ARE A NECESSARY STEP TO JUSTICE

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## A Perspective

America is coming up on 160 years since the United States abolished slavery and 60 years since the passing of the Civil Rights Act.

By now America ought to be a much better for African Americans, but the echoes of slavery linger like stains on our nation's soul. Black citizens still do not enjoy the same successes as their White counterparts. Equality is the letter of the law, but not the spirit of our nation. Black Americans are still second-class citizens.

African Americans were granted freedom in 1965, but enormous barriers appeared -- Jim Crow laws, Ku Klux Klan brutality and institutionalized segregation to name just a few. Abuse and subjugation kept a vast majority of Black Americans out of commerce, education and politics.

In the mid-1950s African Americans began to concertedly campaign for equal rights. The Civil Rights Movement brought hope, but also new levels of suffering. Black leaders were terrorized and assassinated. The U.S. intelligence community ran Cointelpro, which equated Black activists to terrorists. The "War on Drugs" proved to be thinly veiled war on Black people.

Following every step towards equality, African Americans were kicked down a flight of cold concrete stairs back into a dark basement.

Even today African Americans cannot catch a break. A nation that enshrines "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" has failed to bring along African Americans. Despite a handful of visible exceptions, most Black people do not thrive in America. African

Americans of the 21st century -- still struggling to overcome 400 years of abuse and exclusion from the education and economic systems -- suffer from police brutality, discrimination, economic inequality and other systemic forms of racism.

African Americans need remedies to help them to catch up. We need a hand to step to that elusive level playing field. Affirmative action has helped but is now under attack. Small business support has helped a few, but even that is abused by the White majority. Our lives remain shorter, sicker, poorer, less free and less secure than other Americans.

America needs to make amends. Reparations for the descendants of slavery and segregation is an idea whose time has come.

Compensating the African American descendants of enslaved Black people is a concept tossed around since Reconstruction. Would reparations help make the Black experience any better in America? The California legislature seems to believe they would.

Assembly Bill 3121, signed into law in September 2020, established a task force to study and develop reparation proposals for African Americans based on the lingering effects of slavery and segregation.

It issued a 1,100-page report in June 2023 that "surveys the ongoing and compounding harms experienced by African Americans as a result of slavery and its lingering effects on American society today and proposes a comprehensive reparations plan."

The California Legislative Black Caucus developed 14 bills based on the report's findings. Gov. Newsom signed six last month. One calls for the state to issue a formal apology to be displayed on a plaque on the state capital acknowledging

**An apology without proper follow up action is an empty promise at best and a manipulation of Black voters at worst. African Americans are not fooled by vacant gestures. We hear the echoes of past attempts at appeasement that, as Shakespeare might say, were "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."**

that California had a hand in perpetuating slavery and benefiting from the slave trade.

This is a step in the right direction and starts a meaningful conversation on reparations.

And it is only a start.

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I am hopeful the bills signed by Gov. Newsom signify that a better future is just beyond the horizon. Baby steps are at least steps.

I may not be directly affected by the passage of California reparations because my traceable ancestry begins in Texas. That is okay for now. Watching the California Black Caucus and grassroots organizations working to hold the state accountable and advocating for African Americans has me excited for the future of the descendants of slaves in America.



WHITE SUPREMACY  
OVERPOLICING GENTRIFICATION SLAVERY  
WAR ON DRUGS JIM CROW  
RACIAL PROFILING MASS INCARCERATION  
VOTER SUPPRESSION REDLINING  
SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE POLICE BRUTALITY  
EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION

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Reparations are meant to acknowledge and repair the causes and consequences of human rights violations and inequality in countries emerging from dictatorship, armed conflict, and political violence, as well as in societies dealing with racial injustice and legacies of colonization.

Source: International Center for Transitional Justice