



REPARATIVE JUSTICE BIBLE STUDY

REPENTANCE, RECONCILIATION, AND
REFORM LEADING TO REPAIR

DEVELOPED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE TROTTER
COLLABORATIVE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AT THE
HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL, THE NATIONAL COUNCIL
OF CHURCHES, AND THE RELIGIOUS ACTION CENTER
OF REFORM JUDAISM



HARVARD
Kennedy
School



**Religious
Action
Center**
of Reform Judaism




INTRODUCTION

REPARATIONS ARE BIBLICAL

The case for restitution and restoration is laid out across the Old Testament and New Testament. The purpose of this 40-day Bible Study is to **educate** our communities on the topic of reparations using the scriptures and provide resources to **take action** on the consideration of reparations for Black Americans, including supporting the passage of H.R. 40 Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act at the federal level.

Each congregation, and each person within it, will have a different point of entry when approaching the issue of reparations. This tool can be used any time throughout the year - we recommend setting aside at least an hour for each of the six weekly sessions. When possible, creating a study group with trusted friends, family, and fellow congregants is encouraged.



COMMUNITY TOUCHSTONES

When we commit to our community touchstones, they help us develop a brave space for difficult conversations by fostering an environment of openness, inclusion, and - over time - trust.

We recommend you review these community touchstones prior to each meeting.

Feel free to add to the list as needed!



BE PRESENT AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE, TAKE CARE AS NEEDED

Be as engaged as your capacity allows. Be here with your doubts, fears and failings as well as your convictions, joys and successes, your listening as well as your speaking. If you need to take space for yourself or seek out support, please do so.

Adapted from the Harvard Divinity School [Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging Care Team](#)



WHAT IS OFFERED IN THE CIRCLE IS BY INVITATION, NOT DEMAND.

This one is incredibly important. We ask you to offer only what you want into this space. Although we may present guiding questions, please do not feel obligated to share unless you truly wish to.

PRACTICE DECOLONIZED TIME; MOVE AT THE SPEED OF TRUST.

While we may have an agenda for our time together, we approach our time organically, flexible to our individual and collective needs. We resist limited notions of time, productivity, and work, centering and prioritizing trust, relationships, and community.

OPEN WHAT YOU CAN CLOSE, EXTEND GRACE.


Be mindful of what you feel ready to share. Notice if something feels too raw or big to share right now. Honor your boundaries and hold yourself gently. Allow for grace for yourself and others as there may be times we unintentionally open something too difficult to close.

WE CANNOT KNOW FOR CERTAIN, UNTIL WE ARE TOLD.

We cannot know how someone self-identifies or what that identity means to them without them telling us. Resist assumptions, engage in inclusive language, and be open to possibilities.

SPEAK YOUR TRUTH IN WAYS THAT RESPECT OTHER PEOPLE'S TRUTH.

When speaking your truths, do your best to refrain from directive language and over generalizations. Be mindful of using "I" statements.





TAKE SPACE, MAKE SPACE.

If you tend to be more silent in group settings, we encourage you to “take space” and share your thoughts and experiences; Conversely, if you tend to be very talkative in group settings, we encourage you to contribute and to also be mindful of pausing to “make space” for other voices.

BE MINDFUL OF THE IMPULSE TO FIX, SAVE, ADVISE, OR CORRECT EACH OTHER.


This can be one of the hardest guidelines for those of us in the “helping professions” and/or committed to addressing issues of justice. If you feel this impulse while someone is speaking, try to listen deeply and make space for the person’s inner teacher. We are here to build together, learn and reflect.

IT’S NOT ABOUT CORRECTION, BUT TRANSFORMATION.

We can be unpolished and use the language we have in the process of learning and growth, but we will also work collectively to examine and transform our language when a word or language causes harm. Be open to hearing from others if your language causes harm. Be open to sharing when someone’s language causes you harm. We commit to addressing harm with intention, through grace, rooted in love and compassion, and how this looks will vary depending on the circumstances. We will do this with care as we are all here to learn.

LEARN TO RESPOND TO OTHERS WITH HONEST, OPEN QUESTIONS.

Intentionally engage in listening. instead of counsel, corrections, etc. With such questions, we help “hear each other into deeper speech.” Fully be present and try to ask thoughtful questions to move the conversation in a forward direction.





WHEN THE GOING GETS ROUGH, TURN TO WONDER.

When we take part in conversations like these, it is not always a natural or easy thing. If you feel judgmental, or defensive, ask yourself, “I wonder what brought her to this belief?” “I wonder what they’re feeling right now?” “I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?” Set aside judgment to listen to others—and to yourself—more deeply.

ATTEND TO YOUR OWN INNER TEACHER.

We learn from others, of course. But as we explore poems, stories, questions, and silence in a circle of trust, we have a special opportunity to learn from within. Pay close attention to your own reactions and responses, to your most important teacher.


TRUST AND LEARN FROM THE SILENCE.

Silence is a gift in our noisy world, and a way of knowing in itself. Treat silence as a member of the group. After someone has spoken, take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words.

STORIES STAY, LESSONS GO.

While the essence of what is said can go with us, people’s experiences and what they share in a circle of trust will never be repeated to other people.

Know that it’s possible to leave the circle with whatever it was that you needed when you arrived, and that the seeds planted here can keep growing in the days ahead.



WEEK 1



TOPIC OF STUDY

"And who is my neighbor?"

In the Gospel of Luke, the beloved physician, we come to understand the mercy and compassion of Jesus as he reaches out to welcome "marginal" members of society into the Kin-dom of God and performs miracles like healing the sick and raising the dead. The Jesus of Luke is an enormously powerful figure that was deeply concerned with themes of poverty, oppression, and the real conditions of people's lives. Jesus had a vision for social justice that reordered social structures, turning the world upside down, as he demanded the responsible use of wealth.

The commandment to "love our neighbors as ourselves" is clear in the law, without qualifications. Yet, the lawyer in the parable of the Good Samaritan questions Jesus about who deserves neighborly love in an attempt to justify being un-neighborly. In the passage, Jesus shifts the focus of the word "neighbor" from the recipient of loving care to the person who does the loving. What does this mean for us today in the work of reparations?

SUGGESTED PREWORK

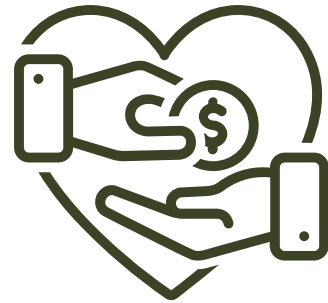
- [The Case of Reparations](#) by Ta-Nehisi Coates
- [Reparations Are a Peace Treaty](#) by Dave Ragland
- [The Midpoint Between Truth and Reconciliation Is Reparations](#) by Dave Ragland
- [**Reparatory Justice 101**](#) (1) webinar by NCC

GUIDING QUESTION

What does it mean to be neighborly? To carry on the mission of Jesus in this generation, and the next generation, and the next?

BIBLE PASSAGE

The Parable of the Good Samaritan
Luke 10:25-37 (NRSV)



25 Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 26 He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” 27 He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” 28 And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” 30 Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ 36 Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” 37 He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

During his ministry, Jesus saw every person and every person mattered to him, and they should matter to us as well.

The parable of the Good Samaritan challenges us to go beyond mere words or good intentions, and to actively demonstrate our love and concern for all of our neighbors - especially those who have been oppressed and unjustly harmed. On his way to Jericho, the man in the story was robbed of his wealth, his health, and left behind by religious leaders who - according to the Lord's commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" - should have taken responsibility to support the man in need. Instead, restoration comes from an unlikely source: a Samaritan, a member of an enemy ethnoreligious group. In the face of theft, the Samaritan saw the harm that had been done and spared no expense in taking steps to repair the damage and rehabilitate his wounded and plundered neighbor to his original good condition. Though not culpable for the man's plight, the Samaritan used his resources - without qualification, limit, or condition - to fulfill his missional calling to radical, restorative neighborly love.



ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

What are "reparations"?


The National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA) defines reparations as:

"Reparations is a process of repairing, healing and restoring a people injured because of their group identity and in violation of their fundamental human rights by governments, corporations, institutions and families.

Those groups that have been injured have the right to obtain from the government, corporation, institution or family responsible for the injuries that which they need to repair and heal themselves. In addition to being a demand for justice, it is a principle of international human rights law. As a remedy, it is similar to the remedy for damages in domestic law that holds a person responsible for injuries suffered by another when the infliction of the injury violates domestic law. Examples of groups that have obtained reparations include Jewish victims of the Nazi Holocaust, Japanese Americans interned in concentration camps in the United States during WWII, Alaska Natives for land, labor, and resources taken, victims of the massacre in Rosewood, Florida and their descendants, Native Americans as a remedy for violations of treaty rights, and political dissenters in Argentina and their descendants."

Reparations may take many possible forms to address the many forms of injury caused by chattel slavery and its continuing vestiges, which we will explore at greater depth next week, with options ranging from cash payments to economic development to policy changes that improve the lives of Black people of African descent in the years to come.






The human rights violations against Black people in the United States - including chattel slavery, lynchings, Jim Crow laws, and Black Codes - and the ongoing impacts of anti-Black racism require remedy and reparation under international human rights law. The United Nations outlines five conditions that must be met for full reparations:

- **Acknowledgement** of harm, including official apologies, public education, and memorials
- **Compensation** for injury and harm, which should be provided for any economically assessable damage, loss of earnings, loss of property, loss of economic opportunities, moral damages
- **Restitution**, which should restore the victim to their original situation before the violation occurred, e.g. restoration of liberty, reinstatement of employment, return of property, return to one's place of residence
- **Rehabilitation**, which should include medical and psychological care, legal, and social services
- **Cessation and Non-Repetition**, including reforming or eliminating laws and civil and political structures that led to or fueled the harm, including those that continue to do so

Read: [The U.N. Rights Chief Says Reparations Are Needed For People Facing Racism](#) article on NPR for more information.

The Bible is clear. The law is clear. Reparations are owed, and long overdue.

The form and manner must be determined by Black people in the United States. Reparation efforts can take place at the local level - in our communities and congregations. Federal reparations must also be considered. Since it was first introduced in 1989, H.R. 40 Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act has sought to create a federal commission to examine the history of slavery and discrimination from 1619 to the present in order to recommend appropriate remedies. We will explore many different forms of reparations, as well as ways to get involved in the movement, in the upcoming weeks.



LIFE APPLICATION

What are some ways we can think about the topic of reparations in light of the notion of being neighborly?

1. How do you think this parable of the good Samaritan illustrates the concept of reparations?
2. How do the actions (or, rather, the inactions) of the priest and the Levite who passed by the wounded man reflect our attitude of complicity and complacency in systemic racism?
3. What is the connection between call for reparations and the commandment to "love our neighbor as ourselves", as taught in the parable of the good Samaritan?
4. How can we use the parable of the good Samaritan to spark conversations about reparations with those who may not yet understand the need for them?



FURTHER STUDY

- [Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair](#) by Duke L. Kwon and Gregory Thompson

O God, you have bound us together in a common life. Help us, in the midst of our struggles for justice and truth, to confront one another without hatred or bitterness, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)

WEEK 2



TOPIC OF STUDY

Owning the Ethic of Restitution

The principle of restitution is as old as the Book of Exodus, where the Laws of Restitution reads, "When someone steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, the thief shall pay five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep. The thief shall make **full restitution**..." In simple terms, restitution is the act of returning (or restoring) to a person some thing or right of which they have been unjustly deprived.

As Jesus approaches Jerusalem in the Gospel of Luke, we meet Zacchaeus, the tax collector – a thief in plain sight. His story illustrates how critical it is we take responsibility for the hurt we have caused, which includes knowing the hard truths of our history and what our liabilities might be. Zacchaeus' example calls us to own the ethic of restitution in our lives.

SUGGESTED PREWORK

- [The History of Reparations](#) by PBS Origins
- [In Truth and Reconciliation, First Things First—The Truth](#) by Dave Ragland
- [‘Slave Bible’ Removed Passages To Instill Obedience And Uphold Slavery](#) by NBC News
- [Intro to Reparatory Justice: Racial Wealth Gap Simulation](#) webinar by NCC

GUIDING QUESTION

What is the scriptural and theological heritage regarding the ethics of theft and restitution?

BIBLE PASSAGE

Jesus and Zacchaeus

Luke 19:1-10 (NRSV)

1 He entered Jericho and was passing through it. 2 A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3 He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. 5 When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."

6 So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him.

7 All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." 8 Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." 9 Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."



Source: [Sermons4Kids](http://Sermons4Kids.com)

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Zacchaeus' response: a moral foundation in the Hebrew Scriptures and his radical transformation through meeting Jesus

As the chief tax collector of Jericho, Zacchaeus was the best in the game. So trusted by the Roman state, he had advanced in prominence and stature to oversee other rank-and-file collectors in Judea. Zacchaeus plundered his neighbors, enriching himself, by exploiting the tax collection system through deceit - collecting a "surcharge" to turn a profit - at the expense of poor Jews in his district. While laws existed to prevent corruption, they were unevenly enforced. It was often only tax collectors themselves that knew the relevant statutes and carefully controlled the knowledge to avoid persecution. Zacchaeus was considered to be a sinner and a thief.

When Zacchaeus climbs the tree, the last thing he expects is for Jesus to stop and address him personally. The crowd is surprised, too, grumbling and discontent because Jesus - in his



extravagant love and kindness - invites himself over to Zacchaeus' house, turning the social order upside-down with such an intimate and generous request. In an instant, Zacchaeus is dramatically and fundamentally changed.

Zacchaeus' response is an act of obedience to the Hebrew Scriptures. He realizes his guilt (Lev. 6:4), confesses his sin (Num. 5:8), then he "returns" what was taken to "make full restitution" to the injured party, even at the painful cost to his own livelihood (Exod. 22:3). Zacchaeus' repentance leads him to correct the wrong as fully as possible - Jesus responds by celebrating his confession and proclaiming Zacchaeus' salvation.

Adapted from Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

A Historical Case for Restitution: The Racial Wealth Gap



Generations of African Americans have suffered greatly as a result of racial oppression in the United States, which began with the institution of chattel slavery. For over 400 years, since before the founding of the United States of America, African Americans have contributed significantly to the nation's history and economy. However, African Americans have been largely excluded from the typical American experience.

As an introduction to the discussion of the racial wealth gap, please watch [The Racial Wealth Gap Explained](#) video (16 minutes).

While we are only able to provide a brief historical background here for the purpose of grounding us in the conversation about reparations, please consider taking a look at some (or all) of the following resources to learn more about the enduring legacy of slavery and its ongoing harm.

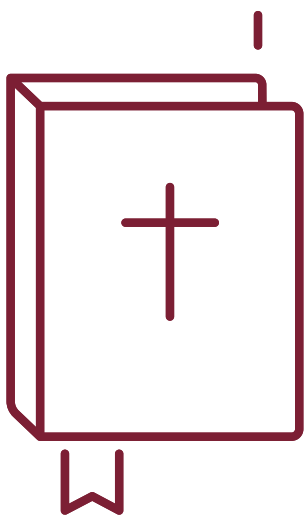
- [The 1619 Project](#) docuseries on Hulu
- [How Redlining Shaped Black America As We Know It](#) video
- [13th](#) documentary on Netflix
- [Health Disparities in the Black Community: Past & Present](#) by PBS Origins
- [Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents](#) by Isabel Wilkerson
- [The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness](#) by Michelle Alexander
- [The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America](#) by Richard Rothstein
- [Stamped From The Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America](#) by Ibram X. Kendi

"The Original Sin' of Slavery

On August 20, 1619, over 400 years ago, the first enslaved Africans (Angolans) were kidnapped by the Portuguese and arrived on the shore of Jamestown, VA. The ship disembarked at Point Comfort,

known today as Fort Monroe. The original ship, the San Juan Bautista, left Africa with 350 enslaved people on board. 150 died in route and the ship was attacked by two privateer ships, the White Lion, and the Treasurer. The White Lion made it to the United States and traded the enslaved for food. Even though the Transatlantic Slave Trade was happening in some form since the early 1500s-mid-1800s, 1619 is often the official documented start of enslaved Africans being brought over exclusively for the purpose of free labor.

In all, nearly 13 million African people were kidnapped and trafficked across the Atlantic Ocean, forming the engine of the Southern colonies' agricultural economy through their labor in cash crops like tobacco, cotton, and sugar cane. In 1808, when Congress outlawed the Transatlantic Slave Trade through the *Act Prohibiting the Importation of Slaves*, the domestic trade took off. The trade and transport of enslaved people from the Upper South to the Lower South helped the cotton industry boom - but it ripped families apart. It is estimated that a third of marriages were destroyed by force migration due to the economic benefit of the domestic slave trade and more than half of all enslaved people in the Upper South were separated from a parent or child. While many in the North were not slave owners, Northern industry relied on the raw materials produced in the South, particularly cotton and sugar, benefitting greatly from the wealth derived from enslaved labor.



The relationship between the institution of chattel slavery in the United States and Christianity is complex. We can see how proponents of slavery justified the practice using scripture by looking at the heavily-redacted "Slave Bible", which omits much of the Old Testament (including the Israelites' escape from Egypt in Exodus) and about half of the New Testament (including passages that emphasized equality between groups of people, like "There is no longer Jew or Greek;

there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus," in Galatians). At the same time, the religious roots of abolitionism can be seen from the very beginning, with John Hepburn penning the strongly-worded pamphlet, condemning slavery as "an abominable Anti-Christian practice... an affront upon the ever blessed Messiah, and his glorious Gospel," in *The American Defence of the Christian Golden Rule* in 1715. Levi Coffin, the "President of the Underground Railroad", writes in his text *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin*, "I had read in the Bible when I was a boy that it was right to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, and to minister to those who had fallen among thieves and were wounded, but that no distinction in regard to color was mentioned in the good Book, so in accordance with its teachings I had received these fugitives and cared for them." A Bible was found in the hands of Nat Turner, a fiery enslaved preacher seeking to deliver his people from his people from slavery, when he was captured after one most significant slave insurrections prior to the Civil War.

Growing tensions between the Northern and Southern states over slavery, states' rights, and westward expansion erupted into the Civil War, the deadliest war ever fought on American Soil. On January 1, 1863, as the nation approached the third year of the war, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing all enslaved people. It would take another two years, until June 19, 1865 (also known as Juneteenth, a federal holiday since 2021), for this to be fully accomplished when federal troops arrived in Galveston, Texas to take control of the state and ensure all enslaved people had been freed.

A Failed Reconstruction

Union General William T. Sherman's Special Field Order No. 15, the promise of '40 acres and a mule', emerged from a conversation with 20 Black pastors shortly before the end of the Civil War as a response to the question, "What do you want for your own people?"



Reverend Garrison Frazier, their chosen spokesman, stated "The way we can best take care of ourselves is to have land, and turn it and till it by our own labor... and we can soon maintain ourselves and have something to spare." However, that dream was never realized - the government did not keep its promise. After President Lincoln's assassination, President Andrew Johnson rescinded Field Order 15. Under his administration, the new southern states passed restrictive "Black Codes" designed to limit Black people's labor and activity, ultimately creating conditions very similar to that of enslavement.

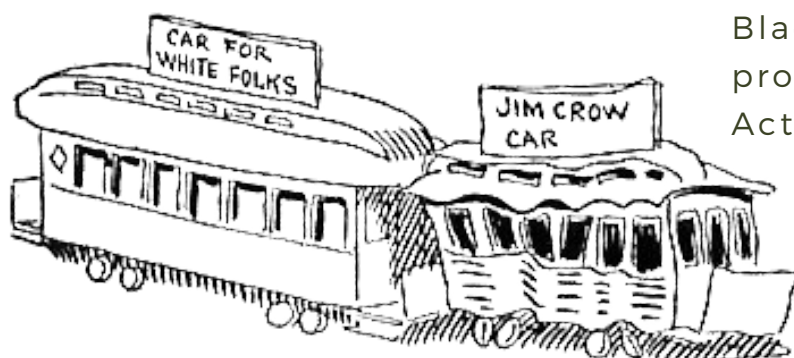
Black Codes, Jim Crow, and Ongoing Harms

For centuries, Black people were treated as property rather than human beings, subjected to inhumane living conditions, brutal physical punishments, and a complete denial of basic human rights. But even after the abolition of slavery, African Americans continued to face discrimination and oppression through the black codes shape-shifting into Jim Crow laws, mandating "separate but equal" segregation in nearly every aspect of daily life from schools to drinking fountains to bathrooms, and systemic racism. The movement of Reconstruction was short lived, with emerging white supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan paving the way for over 100 years of racial terror. It is estimated that between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and 1950, more than 4,300 Black people were lynched.

In addition to widespread violence, law and public policy created violent structures that enabled the plunder of Black wealth. In the 1930's, President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal excluded

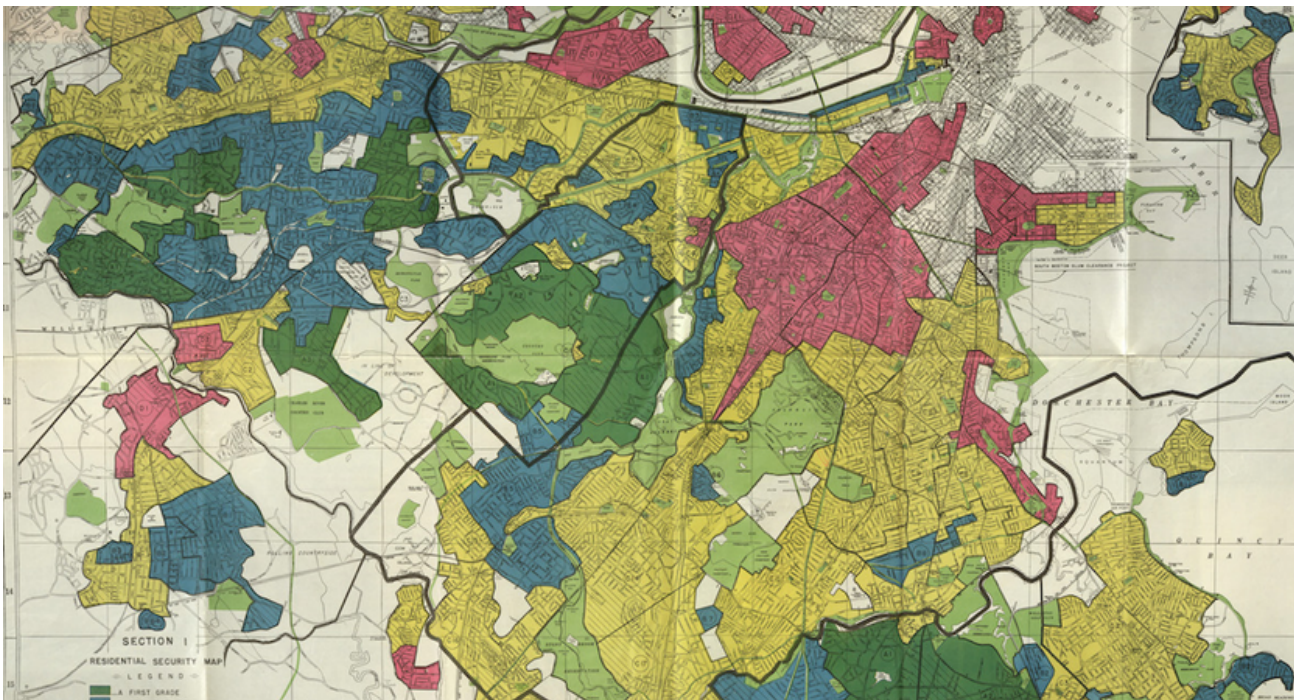
Black Americans across key programs. The Social Security Act and National Labor

Relations Act in 1935 excluded farm workers and domestic workers, professions where Black people were



"White" and "Jim Crow" railcars; racial segregation in the United States as cartooned by John McCutcheon, 1904

disproportionately represented (65% of Black workers were engaged in one of these two professions according to the 1930 Census). The Federal Housing Administration (FHA), established in 1934, was meant to increase the housing stock. However, it excluded Black neighborhoods from government-insured loans. Deeming these neighborhoods as "hazardous", the FHA colored these areas on the map red in a practice now called "redlining" - all while subsidizing builders creating primarily white suburban neighborhoods. The Veterans Administration, which gave veterans access to mortgages with no down payments, adopted the same maps and thus excluded Black veterans from the housing benefits of the G.I. Bill. With colleges still segregated - especially across the South - or unprepared to handle the large influx of veterans after WWII, many Black men and women were unable to take advantage of the educational benefits afforded in the G.I. Bill. In the words of Historian Ira Katznelson, "There was "no greater instrument for widening an already huge racial gap in postwar America than the GI Bill."



The HOLC map of Boston (Robert K. Nelson, LaDale Winling, Richard Marciano, Nathan Connolly, et al., "Mapping Inequality," American Panorama, ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers)

Today, the typical white family has about 10 times as much wealth

as the typical Black family - a statistic virtually unchanged since 1950. The racial wealth gap created through chattel slavery was reinforced by federal policy throughout this nation's history, and exacerbated by local and institutional policies. According to the Brookings Blueprints for American Renewal & Prosperity project, "If Black households held a share of the national wealth in proportion to their share of the U.S. population, it would amount to \$12.68 trillion in household wealth, rather than the actual sum of \$2.54 trillion. The total racial wealth gap, therefore, is \$10.14 trillion."

"The problems of racial injustice and economic injustice cannot be solved without a **radical redistribution** of political and economic power."

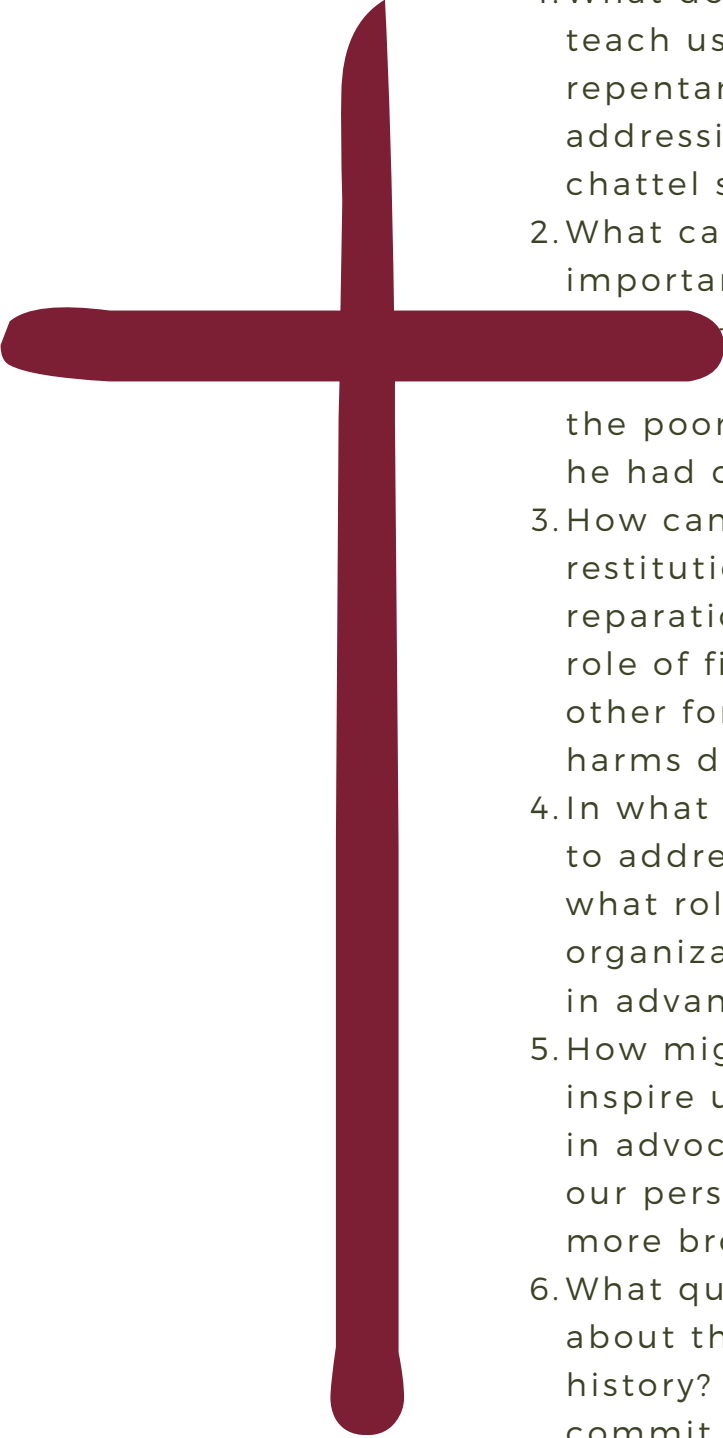
— Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"The Three Evils of Society," 1967

The vestiges of chattel slavery remain, visible in measures of the racial wealth gap, disproportionately high rates of denied mortgages and fair lending rates regardless of income, increased mortality rates during the COVID-19 pandemic, inadequate investment in school districts serving higher numbers of Black and brown students... the list goes on, which is "Why We Can't Wait". Martin Luther King Jr. wrote in this 1964 text, "**While no amount of gold could provide adequate compensation for the exploitation of the Negro American down through the centuries, a price could be placed on unpaid wages.**" Reparations cannot be less than their financial components, but - as Christians - they are undoubtedly more. Repentance calls us to change our ways, meaning changing the policies that created and sustained these inequities in the first place. However, like Zacchaeus, we are also called to own the ethic of restitution. Our debt is long overdue. We must acknowledge the harms caused by the enormous breach of slavery, then seek to provide compensation and restitution for all those impacted.

LIFE APPLICATION

What are some ways we can think about the topic of reparations in light of the call to see the harm and own the ethic of restitution?

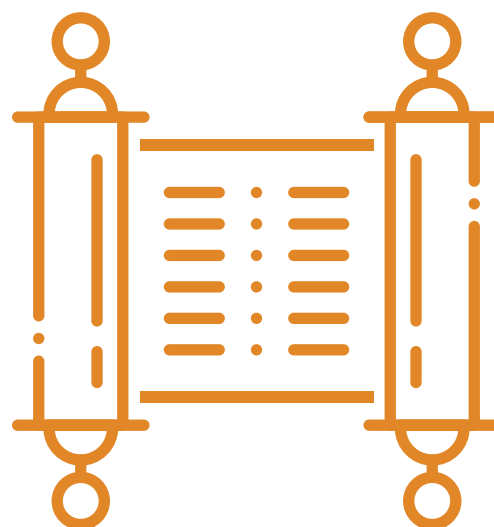
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1. What does the story of Zacchaeus teach us about the importance of repentance in the context of addressing historical injustices like chattel slavery and its vestiges?
 2. What can we learn about the importance of restitution from Zacchaeus' decision to give half of his possessions to the poor? His decision to repay those he had cheated four times over?
 3. How can we apply the concept of restitution to the issue of reparations? What do you see as the role of financial compensation and other forms of redress in light of the harms discussed?
 4. In what ways might reparations help to address the racial wealth gap, and what role can faith-based organizations and communities play in advancing the case for restitution?
 5. How might the story of Zacchaeus inspire us to take a more active role in advocating for reparations, both in our personal lives and in society more broadly?
 6. What questions do we still have about the full truth of America's history? How can our community commit to learning more?

FURTHER STUDY

- Hearing on Slavery Reparations before a House Judiciary subcommittee (C-SPAN, 2019)
- An American Lament devotional journey through America's history of slavery, segregation, and racism
- Why we need reparations for Black Americans report by Brookings Institute
- The Next Reconstruction: Examining the Call for a National Reparations Program brief by Urban Institute

Gracious God, we thank you for the human family filled with all peoples of the earth. We are thankful that you have created such an amazing and wonderful diversity of people and cultures. We humbly ask that you send the Holy Spirit as you did the disciples to instill the faith and the courage to do the work to enrich our lives with ever-widening circles of fellowship so that we may discover your presence in those who differ from us. Deliver us and deliver our communities from the bondage of racism that denies the humanity of people, and deprives all people of the blessings, of the diversity you have created. Open us to your word, your wisdom, your power, and your will. Amen. (A Prayer for Racial Justice by Peter Jones, PhD and Kathie Smith at Loyola University Chicago's Institute of Pastoral Studies)

WEEK 3



TOPIC OF STUDY

What is owed?

In the pathbreaking 2014 article, *The Case for Reparations*, author Ta-Nehisi Coates begins by quoting Old Testament scripture from Deuteronomy, Moses' farewell address to the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land of Canaan. In Deuteronomy, Moses recounts God's law and its applications in people's everyday life. In the text, when the enslaved are freed, we are commanded to not send them out "empty-handed" and, instead, "supply them liberally" from the wealth they have helped produce. General



Sherman's Field Order 15, Reconstruction, and other initiatives calling for the restitution of what is owed failed to supply Black Americans with the resources needed to thrive in the transition to freedom. What does this mean for us in the contemporary conversation on reparations?

SUGGESTED PREWORK

- What is Owed? by Nikole Hannah-Jones
- Ta-Nehisi Coates: Reparations Are Not Just About Slavery Interview

GUIDING QUESTION

In scripture, how are reparations used to establish equity and enable new futures?

BIBLE PASSAGE

Deuteronomy 15:12-15 (NRSV)

12 "If a member of your community, whether a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold[a] to you and works for you six years, in the seventh year you shall set that person free. 13 And when you send a male slave[b] out from you a free person, you shall not send him out empty-handed. 14 Provide for him liberally out of your flock, your threshing floor, and your winepress, thus giving to him some of the bounty with which the Lord your God has blessed you. 15 Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; for this reason I lay this command upon you today.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

We have a choice before us each and every day - do we choose allegiance to ourselves and the idols of our own creation, or do we choose life and wisdom by **following God's commands?**

In an 1810 sermon delivered at First Church in New Haven, entitled "The Charitable Blessed", Reverend Timothy Dwight IV (grandson of the slaveholding theologian, Jonathan Edwards) preached the need to take responsibility for their ancestors' role in the enslavement of Africans. A



particularly salient excerpt from the sermon reads:

*"We inherit our ample patrimony with all its incumbrances; and are bound to pay the debts of our ancestors. This debt, particularly, we are bound to discharge: and, when the righteous Judge of the Universe comes to reckon with his servants, he will rigidly exact the payment at our hands. **To give them liberty, and stop here, is to entail upon them a curse.***

We are bound to give them, also, knowledge, industry, economy, good habits, moral and religious instruction, and all the means of eternal life."

Reverend Dwight makes clear that, in order for emancipated slaves to start anew - to be fully restored to equal status in the nation's life and economy - there is a moral and practical necessity for restitution.

In our passage of scripture from Deuteronomy, a long speech Moses makes a speech to Israel before his death, we see a reiteration of God's laws and guidance on how they apply to their contemporary moment. In the selected passage, we see echoes of other occasions in which reparations were paid. When the Hebrews were liberated from from slavery under Pharaoh in the book of Exodus, they received "jewelry of silver and gold" and clothing (Ex. 12:35-36) from their oppressors, just as God promised when speaking to Moses at the Burning Bush on Mount Sinai, the liberated Israelites "will not go empty-handed" (Ex. 3:21-22). The silver and gold were restitution for their unpaid labor and suffering. Reparative justice would also help jumpstart their new lives and build economic independence in their freedom.

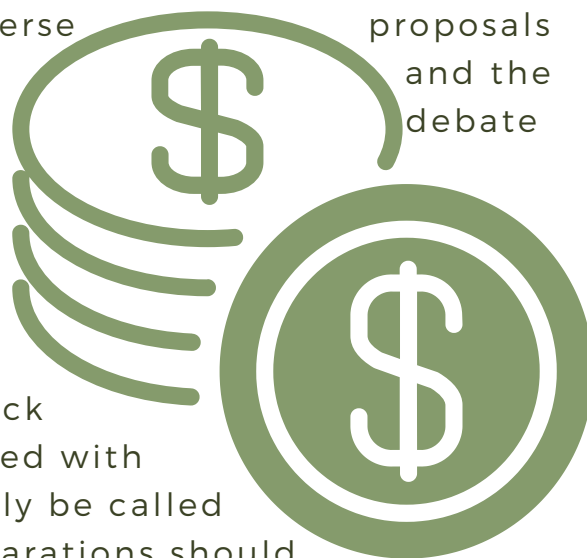


The passage in Deuteronomy makes clear that we must respond to the failure to provide reparations for Black Americans upon their liberation and ongoing, systematic plunder. This "moral debt", and "the practical damage it has done", is a liability fracturing our communities, our churches, and our country - we can't afford to wait any longer. As Reverend Peter Jarrett-Schell articulates in Reparations: A Plan for Churches, "We can't truly come together as one community while some of us still reap benefits from the sabotage of others... There is an order to these things, and it can't be circumvented: justice precedes reconciliation. Reconciliation precedes community." So, in order to come together, how can we begin to understand what is owed?

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

"Our unpaid labor has been a stepping-stone to its financial success. Some of its dividends must surely be ours." - Sojourner Truth

The appeal for reparations can best be understood, in the words of lawyer and activist Randall Robinson, as a call for "just compensation" as an entitlement for the many years of heinous U.S. government-embraced wrongs and the stolen labor of our forebears." There are many ways people have worked to calculate a number for "just compensation", with a numerous different methodologies for measurement, diverse proposals for the form reparations should take, and the necessary scope of intervention. The debate on reparations surfaces a wide range of questions: What amount of money should be given? Where should this money go to? Who exactly is this money being given to? What is the process to provide reparations to Black Americans? What else should be paired with monetary compensation to adequately be called reparations? What other forms of reparations should



be included? Acknowledging the complexity of the conversation, our aim is to provide an overview of the scholarship for the purpose of discussion and point you to trusted resources to further your learning.

Income Measures

Some scholars seek to calculate the value of unpaid labor and services provided to white Americans (the work) minus the value of uncompensated services provided (food, housing, etc.). Some examples of calculations include:

- \$1.5 trillion currently based on a 1983 calculation of \$500 billion by assuming 40-60% of the difference between Black and white income resulted from discrimination
- \$3.2-6.4 trillion, based on the current value of a 1968 suggestion by Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. of \$800 billion, based on \$20 per week since the late 1700s for 4 million slaves
- \$5-15 trillion based on 1983 calculations of \$1.4 trillion and \$3-5 trillion, based on wages earned by non-enslaved workers and deducting the cost of care of those enslaved
- \$17 trillion in a 2019 calculation (but as it assumed a 24-hour workday, the value may be closer to the \$5 trillion using an 8-hour day)
- \$59 trillion, based on \$3.7 trillion as \$7.25 per hour during 1790-1860, plus a 2% interest rate (though the hourly rate of \$7.25 would seem to include a present valuing, so this might actually be closer to the \$3.7 trillion original number)



Wealth Measures

Some scholars consider the racial wealth gap to be the most robust indicator of the cumulative effects of white supremacy in the US. According to the 2016 Survey of Consumer Finances, the mean racial wealth gap is \$795,000 per household. In an average Black household (3.31 persons),

this equates to payments of approximately \$240,000 per person, equating to \$8 trillion total. Another calculation to eliminate racial inequities in household wealth, providing Black families with their proportional share of total wealth, would require an outlay of \$10.7 trillion.

Value of 40 Acres and a Mule

H.R. 40, which would establish the Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act, is named as an allusion to the broken promise of General Sherman's Field Order 15, which would provide 40 acres of tillable land and a mule to support the agrarian effort. Some scholars calculate reparations by estimating the present value of 40 acres and a mule. In 1865, when the order was issued, the value was \$400 million - this translates to \$168 billion today.



Forms of Reparations

Just as there are diverse perspectives on how reparations should be calculated, there are just as many views and proposals for the forms they should take on. While some scholars favor direct payments, others promote educational programs like a free college education, while others call for down payment and housing grants. The National African American Reparations Commission has a 10-point Reparations Plan, with proposals that include a national apology for slavery and subsequent discrimination, funds for the establishment of health and wellness centers, and the preservation of Black monuments and sacred sites.

H.R. 40 would provide the opportunity to study and develop reparation proposals into tangible forms of financial redress and repair for the enormous debt owed to the Black community.

The diverse calculations and form offered by scholars provide a way to begin to quantify the harms and understand the path to repair. Yet, we must approach these calculations and solutions with the understanding that the numbers provided **underestimate** the true cost of 400 years of injustice, as they forgo the physical and emotional harms of slavery and the denial of the property, autonomy, and family life.

In future weeks, we will consider the precedent for reparations, examples of groups undertaking reparation activities at the local level, and opportunities for engagement in the movement. As a community, and as individuals, we must consider what the faithful response is now that we are more fully aware of what is owed.

LIFE APPLICATION

What are some ways we can think about the topic of reparations in light of what is morally and practically owed to Black Americans?

1. In what ways might the concept of reparations challenge our assumptions about what is just when it comes to issues of wealth distribution and economic opportunity?
2. How can the Christian church be a moral voice in the call for reparations? What are some steps our community could take to help grow our collective knowledge of reparations?
3. What questions do we still have about how reparations are calculated, or the forms they can take?
4. How can the church play a role in promoting reconciliation and healing through reparations?



FURTHER STUDY

- Reparations: A Plan for Churches by Peter Jarrett-Schell
- From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century by William A. Darity Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen
- Why We Can't Wait by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Thou Eternal God, out of whose absolute power and infinite intelligence the whole universe has come into being, we humbly confess that we have not loved thee with our hearts, souls and minds, and we have not loved our neighbors as Christ loved us. We have all too often lived by our own selfish impulses rather than by the life of sacrificial love as revealed by Christ. We often give in order to receive. We love our friends and hate our enemies. We go the first mile but dare not travel the second. We forgive but dare not forget. And so as we look within ourselves, we are confronted with the appalling fact that the history of our lives is the history of an eternal revolt against you. But thou, O God, have mercy upon us. Forgive us for what we could have been but failed to be. Give us the intelligence to know your will. Give us the courage to do your will. Give us the devotion to love your will. In the name and spirit of Jesus, we pray. Amen. (Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)

WEEK 4



TOPIC OF STUDY

A Godly Spirit

Church, we often talk about the Spirit and praise its holy power. While we continue to praise and worship in the Spirit, let us remember that the Spirit is not an abstract idea relegated to the realm of emotions. The Spirit is a living force that informs our religious practice and shapes how we bring our faith to bear on the challenges we face.

In this week's passage, we will explore what Jesus says about the Spirit and how the Spirit compels him to act. Jesus reads this scroll from Isaiah that opens with the familiar call, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me", to remind us that our faith and faithful works are grounded in the Spirit. If we are to live like Jesus, we must understand the centrality of the Spirit. Specifically, we will discuss how the Spirit moved Jesus to walk with the poor and advocate for freedom. His ministry embodies a liberatory posture that repositions our work of reparations within a spiritual framework.

SUGGESTED PREWORK

- Callie House: Reparations Advocate and Trailblazer podcast
- Reparations: Story, History, and Democracy video forum
- "Breath & Fire: The Spirit moves us toward racial justice" article by M. Shawn Copeland

GUIDING QUESTION

What does Jesus, informed by the Spirit, say about oppression, freedom, and sight?

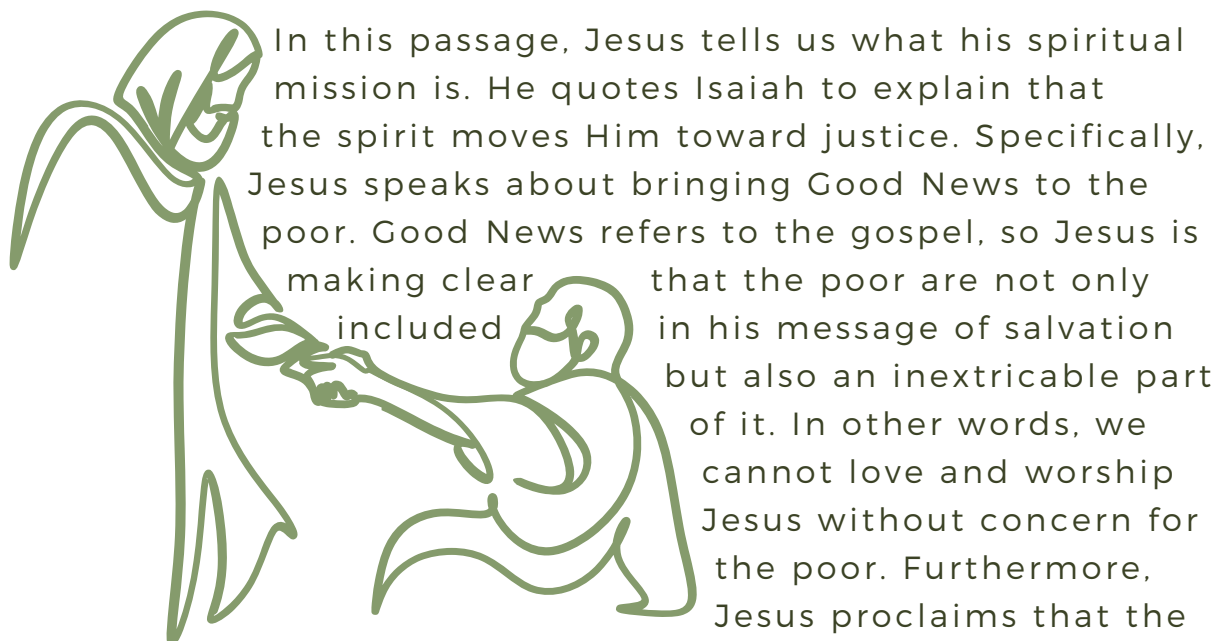
BIBLE PASSAGE

The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth
Luke 4:18-19 (NRSV)

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set free those who are oppressed,
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

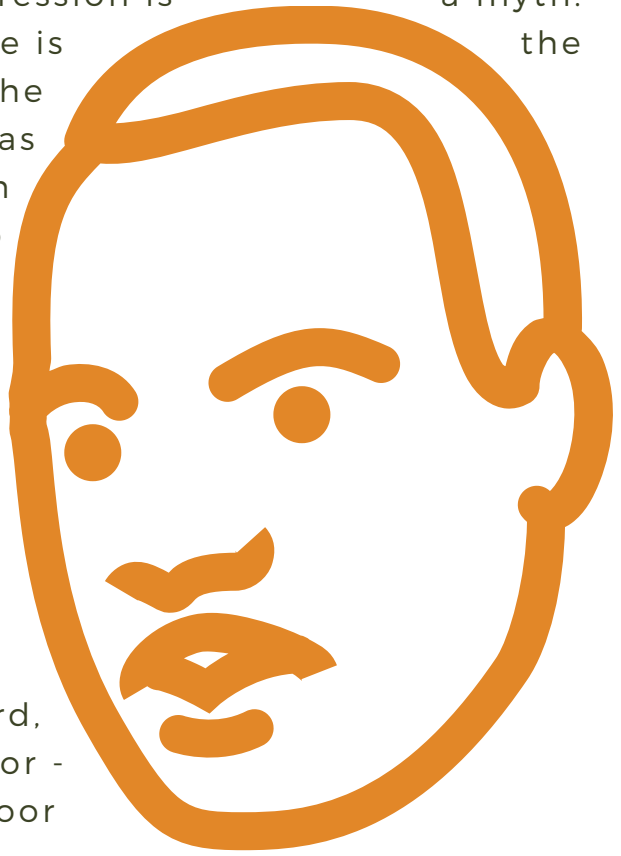
Liberation and just relationships, especially with those marginalized, are Jesus' mission on Earth



captives are to be released. He does not linger on their guilt or innocence. Rather, he talks about His mission to help bring about their freedom because captivity goes against God's desires. Lastly, Jesus promises to bring sight to the blind. Blindness and sight describe physical abilities as well as the spiritual. He hopes to bestow sight to see the material world and sight to see the spiritual. Blindness is a popular Biblical metaphor for those who are lost in the ways of faith. On Mount Sinai God instructs Moses and the Israelites "You shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds officials and subverts the cause of those who are in the right" (Exodus 23:8). In the bible Blindness is synonymous with corruption and being unable to see the moral way of God.

Today, spiritual blindness can help us explain the concept of wokeness. Woke means being awake to racial justice. In 1968, Rev Dr. King preached "Remaining Awake in a Great Revolution" at the National Cathedral. King argued that to sustain this movement for justice, Americans ought to remain aware of the injustice. They must be able to see and perceive racial oppression and the lies of Christians who suggested this oppression is a myth. In other words, seeing this injustice is the opposite of spiritual blindness in the Bible, so this verse could be read as Jesus promoting a mass education campaign to awaken people up to their current circumstances through the lens of a faith that does justice.

To fully awaken, Jesus begins with the presence of the spirit of the Lord, a powerful and essential resource in any social movement. Jesus makes these proclamations, anointed with the Spirit of the Lord, to fulfill a year that is in God's favor - a year where people go free, the poor



are cared for, and everyone has the ability to see the ways of Christ.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

Where can we see the spirit of reparations across this country's history?

Being spiritually awake means understanding the origin of these words spoken by Jesus. These words come from the Prophet Isaiah, who taught us to learn to do good and seek justice (Isaiah 1:17). Jesus picked out this verse from the entire scroll of Isaiah to read in front of his home community in Nazareth. Jesus evoking the prophet Isaiah to speak about justice reminds us to think about whose shoulders we stand on. Immediately following Emancipation, a number of African American activists advocated for reparations. In her book *My Face is Black Is True: Callie House and the Struggle for Ex-Slave Reparations*, Dr. Mary Frances Berry explores how former slave Callie House made one of the first public cases for reparations and sued the federal government. On a local level, House assembled systems of mutual aid to provide healthcare and burial services. Additionally, her team of mutual aid organizers in Nashville petitioned Congress for pensions for Black veterans who fought for the Union without

pay (one of the early types of reparations).

These two campaigns turned into the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief and Pension Association, led by House and Isaiah Dickson, a schoolteacher and minister. "The ex-slave movement had a dual mission from the beginning: the attainment of

federal pension legislation and mutual aid to poor members." House traveled across the country, collecting petitions from ex-slaves and developed litigation against the Federal government to give these claims Constitutional backing and national attention. In the association's 1915 class



Image of Callie Guy House, the *'foremother of the reparations movement'*

action suit, House argued that the over sixty-eight million dollars the Federal government made off its cotton tax between 1862 and 1868 belonged to the formerly enslaved workers because the Treasury Department had profited off taxing the piles of cotton federal troops had seized from the Confederacy.

Here, Jesus shows us the power of drawing on a prophet who came before Him. In the fight for reparations, we can draw on those who came before us like Callie House to give moral authority to the movement. As we'll learn in later weeks, Callie House's organizing was just the beginning of reparations movements in the United States. Since her work, many other groups have made the case for and received reparations.

LIFE APPLICATION

Jesus's spirit of bringing freedom to the captives, good news to the poor, and sight to the blind embodies a type of reparatory justice. By that, we mean Jesus seeks to repair the harms of oppression, spiritual blindness, and economic injustice. So let us now consider how we as a community can pursue reparations.

1. What does spiritual blindness look like to you?
2. What does it mean to be blind to the history of slavery and racism in the United States?
3. How can we better care for the poor?
4. How could reparations bring about economic freedom and care for the poor?



FURTHER STUDY

- [The Big Payback](#)
documentary and
[discussion guide](#)



If we are to serve, if we are to care, if we are to minister, we have to get right inside. And so, let us pray: Spirit, touch me. Touch me with your grace, Touch me with your wisdom.

Touch me with your love so that I can help somebody, so that I can serve somebody, so that I can bless somebody. Be the bridge over troubled waters, so that I can be the balm in Gilead, be the hands of Jesus stretched out to heal. If I can help somebody as I pass along, then my living will not be in vain. Let us meditate on those words and carry them in our hearts into our homes, into our neighborhoods, and teach them to our children! Let us be practical, reaching out across the boundaries of race and class and status to help somebody, to encourage and affirm somebody, offering to the young an incentive to learn and grow, offering to the downtrodden resources to help themselves. May our fasting be the kind that saves and shares with the poor, that actually contacts the needy, that gives heart to heart, that touches and nourishes and heals. Amen. (Sister Thes Bowman)

WEEK 5



TOPIC OF STUDY

Putting the Gospel in Action: Reparations Initiatives

This week's readings shed light on what the Bible says about how we should treat our neighbors and who our neighbors are. We draw from Mark, Luke, and Philippians in the New Testament to explore what Jesus and the Christian Church teach about our divine responsibilities to others in our communities. These verses will hopefully inform and give meaning to our movement for reparations, a movement that hinges on the central question of how we ought to treat one another, even those we do not know.



Reparations is a question of faith that we can begin to explore in these chapters. This week, we will also be looking at the precedent for reparations in this country. While many will suggest paying reparations would be too difficult, we can look at our own history and to initiatives across the country doing this work.

SUGGESTED PREWORK

- [A Christian Call for Reparations](#) article by Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas
- [Grassroots Reparations Campaign](#) resources

GUIDING QUESTION

What do Jesus and Paul teach about how our obligation to others?

BIBLE PASSAGE

Mark 12:30-31 (NRSV)

30 "...you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

1 John 4:20 (NRSV)

20 Those who say, "I love God," and hate a brother or sister are liars, for those who do not love a brother or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.

Philippians 2:4 (NRSV)

4 Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

The Bible teaches that to love God we must love our fellow and treat them as we would want to be treated,

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus teaches that in addition to loving God with all our heart, Christians should also love our neighbors as ourselves. I am wondering here if we can use a



Biblical interpretation tool called the "talking book." Developed by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and his reading of Olaudah Equiano's biography, the "talking book" describes how the Bible can talk back to the readers and their present circumstances. For example, during enslavement in the United States, African Americans read Exodus as God speaking to their captivity and promising to free them as God did for the Israelites. In short, the talking tool asks us to read the Bible and its lessons in light of our present circumstances.

If we read the Bible's lessons about loving our neighbors as ourselves today then we would hear God calling us to fight for reparations. The first epistle of John explains how unholy slavery was. It asks if we are not able to love the people we share the earth with, then how can we love God who cannot see?

Lastly, in Philippians, Paul instructs the early church to care about the interests of others. Talking to us today, this passage can speak to the need to build a broad coalition interested in reparations, the interest, and well-being of those whose labor and land were stolen. Paul writes this letter as a transformed man. He was formerly called Saul and persecuted Christians. While much has been said about Paul's individual transformation, it is important to note that Paul changed so we could serve Christ, which raises the question of how this Bible Study could foster personal growth that spurs us to act in accordance with the Bible's teaching about neighborly love.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

Reparations as a way to fulfill the Bible's call to care for others is not a new or radical concept.

Since Callie House's organizing in the mid-nineteenth century, many other groups in the United States



and abroad have successfully campaigned for reparations. In the US, Japanese Americans. In 1998 the US paid descendants of Japanese Americans who were held captive at internment camps during World War II \$20,000. Senator Daniel K. Inouye, the Democrat of Hawaii and a Japanese-American who lobbied for reparations in Congress, pointed to how the United States paid each American held hostage in the American Embassy in Teheran in 1979 \$22,000. There is a legal precedent to addressing past harms with reparative payments to victims. In 1945 the German Government began paying Holocaust survivors, their families, and their descendants from a total sum of \$86.8 billion. These cases prove how there is a historical and moral precedent for reparations as a tool to address past harms and create what Dr. King refers to as the beloved community on earth.

In the United States, many organizers have advocated for reparations from local governments and institutions as well as a national program of reparations from the Federal Government. Community organizer Mariame Kaba successfully petitioned the Chicago City government to pay reparations to the survivors and families of police brutality. In the case of the over one-hundred Black Chicagoans who were tortured by police commander Jon Burge, Kaba forced the city to set to teach about the Burge torture case in tenth-grade history courses. Additionally, Kaba's team secured free college for survivors and their families, making Chicago the first US city to pay reparations. Nearby in Evanston Illinois, FirstRepair, an organization founded and led by Robin Rue Simmons, passed a plan for reparations for Black residents who were harmed by the city's housing policies. The initial payments, made in 2022, represent the first tax funded reparations targeted for Black Americans in the US.

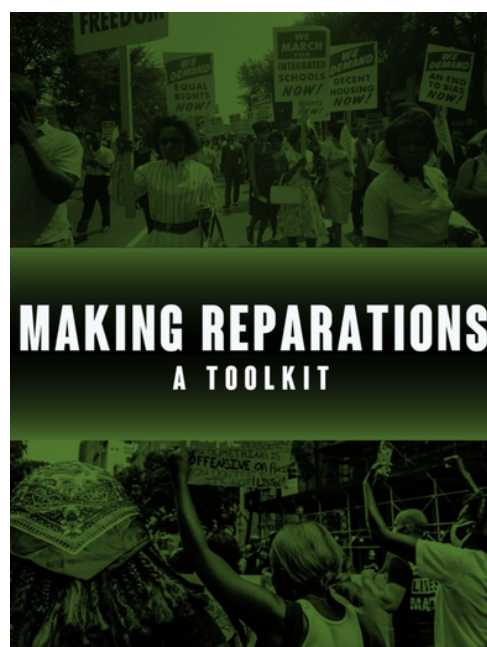


Image of the Making Reparations Toolkit, created by FirstRepair



Image of the Jubilee March poster for Juneteenth 2023, hosted by NCC

On the national level, groups like the National Council of Churches (NCC) and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism are urging president President Biden to sign H.R. 40. First proposed by the late Representative John Conyers in 1989, H.R. 40 would create a national expert commission to study the vestiges of slavery and racial injustice, and explore reparations as a solution. As Paul was a Christian evangelist, these groups

and historical figures are reparations evangelists that demonstrate how to embody the Bible's lessons about caring for our neighbors through their advocacy for reparations.

LIFE APPLICATION

How can our actions reflect our faith?

1. How do you draw on the spiritual teachings of Jesus, as seen in the passages we contemplated this week, to work towards justice in your community?
2. How do we preach the Gospel with actions? What does our faith call us to do in this movement?
3. How would we become reparations evangelists and get other people engaged in learning about, and advocating for, reparations?

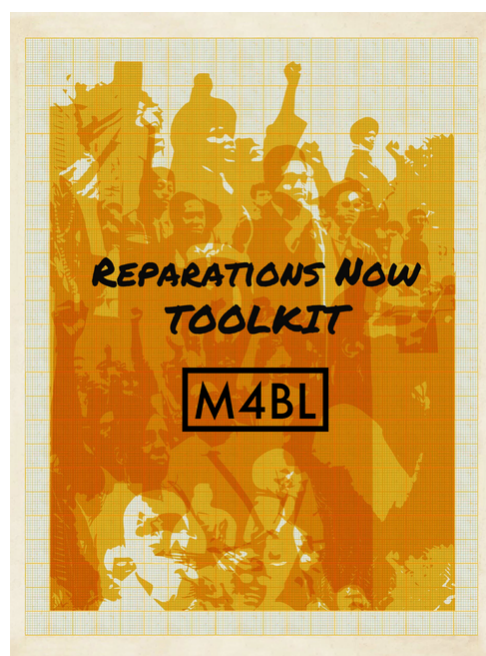


Image of the Reparations Now Toolkit, created by The Movement for Black Lives

FURTHER STUDY

- [400 Years of Inequality Timeline](#) and free [Open Online Course](#) with six modules
- [Memory, History, and the Ethics of Reparations](#) webinar by Terrence L. Johnson
- An [Historical Timeline](#) of Reparations Payments Made From 1783 through 2023 by the United States Government, States, Cities, Religious Institutions, Universities, Corporations, and Communities, developed by the University of Massachusetts Amherst
- [A blueprint for reparations in the US](#) TED Talk by William "Sandy" Darity



May the God of peace and power, who brings back the prophets of old to accompany us on our journeys today, make us all complete in everything good so that we may do God's will. May we live out the rest of our days to see farther, love deeper, and celebrate more beautifully. May we never, never, never turn away from terrible injustice but fight until our very last breath for equality, freedom and justice for all. Amen (Liz Theoharris)

WEEK 6



TOPIC OF STUDY

Moral imagination and bending the arc toward reparative justice

This week we will revisit Jesus's Beatitudes and explore how these famous lines apply to the movement for reparations. Jesus is at the beginning of his travels with his disciples when he sees a large crowd gathered. He teaches these lessons of Christianity to explain the fundamental core tenets of the His Gospel of

on the
bear



Salvation, the Good New. The Sermon Mount brings spiritual guidance to on social issues like hunger and peace. Jesus takes the side of those who have been cheated and persecuted to proclaim that His Father in Heaven does not abide by or favor the current status quo. The Beatitudes are a powerful spiritual resource to help us imagine a fair social order. In our final week, we will explore ways we

can personally work toward bending the arc of the moral universe

SUGGESTED PREWORK

- Letter from Birmingham Jail, 1963 by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

How does Jesus challenge the social order in the Beatitudes and who does He bless?

What values does Jesus uplift across the Sermon on the Mount?



BIBLE PASSAGE

The Beatitudes
Matthew 5:1-10 (NRSV)

1 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 And he began to speak and taught them, saying:

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Jesus blessing those who are at the bottom of the status quo shows that the social order needs to be repaired.

The Sermon on the Mount is a church favorite that reminds us of our Christian duty to feed the hungry and clothe the poor. However, what if this well-known chapter is saying something more about the social order that does not give mercy, comfort those who are mourning, or praise those who pursue righteousness? In other words, each verse speaks to an injustice in the social order that Jesus seeks to challenge through the Gospel. To challenge the social order, Jesus preaches that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to the poor and the peacemakers, the very people being persecuted. This proclamation then makes the persecution of peacemakers and those who fight for righteousness a transgression against God. By blessing those at the bottom of the social order Jesus questions the order itself. If



the Kingdom belongs to those with a pure heart and those who are poor, what does it say about a status quo that oppresses those folks? In other words, Jesus's blessings say just as much about the Kingdom of Heaven as they do about our responsibility as Christians to amend and repair the social order. He is preaching that the status quo, that those who show mercy or seek righteousness, needs to be transformed so that righteousness and mercy become the norms.

Jesus gives theological backing to direct services and broad-based organizing that seeks to bring about righteousness and justice in the world. A pure heart is closely interlinked with and interdependent on the blessing of the poor and righteousness. Jesus blesses those who mourn, so when we mourn the racial injustice in the United States and the stolen labor that necessitates reparations, we must remember that Jesus blesses our mourning and those who, deep in their mourning, hunger for righteousness - a repair from this harm.

In the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Plain, which we can find in the Gospel according to Luke (Lk. 6:20-26), Jesus offers blessings **and** woes. The woes further demonstrate Jesus's concern for those marginalized by society and His call that, those with privilege, address societal harms.

24 "But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

25 "Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

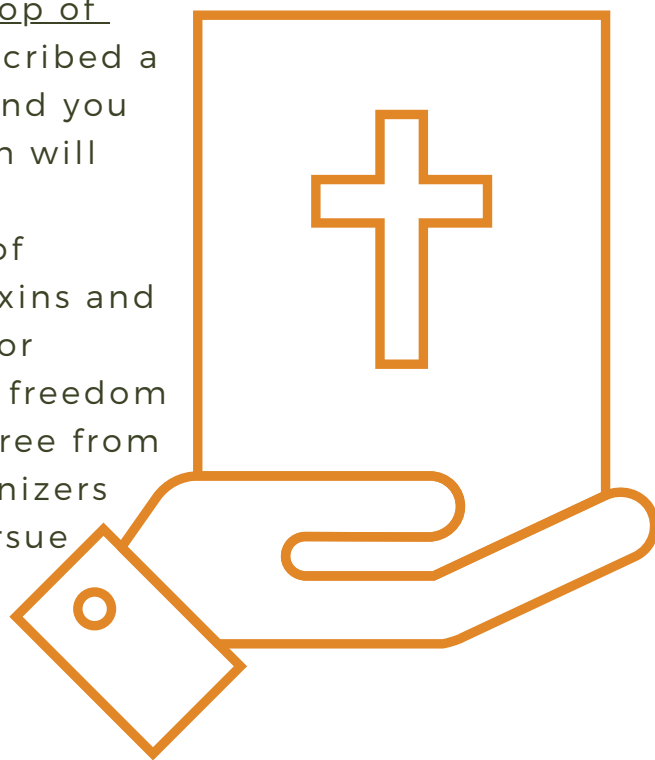
"Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

Now that we have studied what the Bible teaches about Reparations, let us learn about and get connected to groups pursuing reparations today.

Many groups around the country are applying Jesus's spirit of reparative justice to pursue reparations in their local communities. For example, a group in South Memphis led by Marquita Bradshaw and Frank Johnson is advocating for reparations for the environmental harm caused by a toxic landfill that caused deadly illnesses and other sicknesses in their community. Residents in South Memphis have been organizing for accountability and reparations from the government since the landfill is an Army Defense Depot.

Faith had played a major role in this local campaign for reparations. Marquita's mother, Doris Bradshaw, formed the Defense Depot Memphis, Tennessee Concerned Citizens' Committee (DDMT-CCC). At the top of their printed newsletter, they inscribed a verse from the Gospel of John: "and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." This Bible verse represents DDMT-CCC's mission of informing residents about the toxins and holding the Depot accountable for hazardous pollution. They linked freedom with a healthy, safe community free from environmental racism. Here organizers are drawing on the Gospel to pursue truth and reparations. The current plan for reparations targets the \$35 million that the Defense Depot is selling for and



proposes a detailed investment plan of the \$35 million returning to the community that was harmed by it.

Inspired by the Scripture and the examples of folks organizing for reparations, we can now turn to these tools to take action collectively. It is important to highlight how both religious and non-religious groups are currently enacting reparations. In 2019, Princeton Theological Seminary committed \$26.7 million to reparations to atone for the ways Princeton University profited from slavery. Jewish groups have also organized for reparations. The Beth Emet Free Synagogue in Evanston Illinois is a proud donor to and support of the Evanston Reparations Community Fund (ERCF) and the Jewish Community of Amherst (JCA) organized the "Stolen Beam" series to explore reparations and assist with local efforts for reparative justice.

In addition to looking into groups in your local community engaging in reparations work, it is helpful to get connected with coalitions as well. Named in honor of Dr. King, Why We Can't Wait is a coalition of hundreds of social justice organizations, schools, and congregations working towards reparations. For more resources, see the final pages with resources from the NCC. Motivated by Biblical teachings and supported by many existing groups working on reparations, we can join this broad movement for repair and justice.



As a congregation, we can sign this Reparationist Pledge of Accountability to "approach reparations as a spiritual and healing journey" among other commitments such as drawing on love as an advocacy tool for education and organizing.

LIFE APPLICATION

Jesus challenges us to rethink the status quo and how our collective liberation is deeply interconnected with those who are historically kept at the peripheries of society, politics, and often religion.

1. What is Jesus saying about the status quo? How is reparations a tool for bringing us closer to the society Jesus envisioned?
2. How do you think Jesus's lessons challenge prevalent social norms today? What does that mean for our personal lives, and for our community?
3. What sort of spiritual resources can we draw on as a congregation to pursue this world that Jesus envisioned?

FURTHER STUDY

- The Sin of Racism: Blessed Are They Who Are Persecuted for the Sake of Righteousness
article by the Sisters of Mercy

Open unto me-light for my darkness.

Open unto me-courage for my fear.

Open unto me-hope for my despair.

Open unto me-peace for my turmoil.

Open unto me-joy for my sorrow.

Open unto me-strength for my weakness.

Open unto me-wisdom for my confusion.

Open unto me-forgiveness for my sins.

Open unto me-love for my hates.

Open unto me-thy Self for my self.

Lord, Lord, open unto me. Amen. (Howard Thurman)

JUBILEE JOURNEY



RESOURCES TO GET INVOLVED

To get started, keeping in mind the local organizations we highlighted and the resources they have created for local organizing, we recommend that congregations search for already existent and or potential reparations campaigns in their community. It could be joining a coalition working towards national reparations or it could be a group looking to address the harm from a specific institution or local or state government. To help with the search, please [see this map](#) of historical injustices and reparation campaigns.

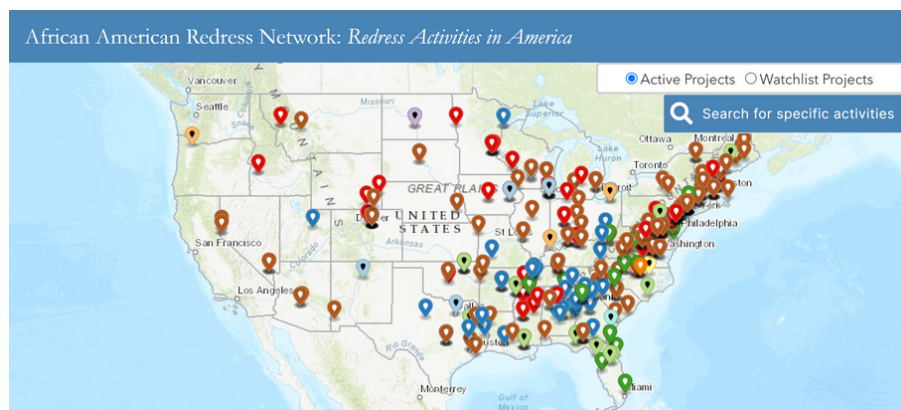


Image from the African American Redress Network (AARN). Overall, there are 463 instances of reparations and redress efforts according to AARN's mapping.

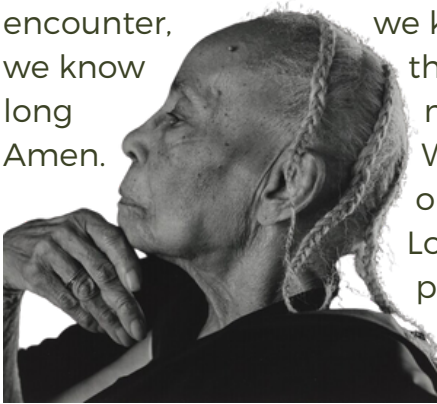
We also encourage you to engage with other religious communities and congregations for interfaith organizing efforts. Our national leaders provide a powerful example of how direct action can make a big impact. Together, the National Council of Churches (NCC) and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism envision a public interfaith demonstration to celebrate Juneteenth Day of Action with a march of at least 400 faith leaders, representing the recent anniversary of 400 years of slavery and a slave-based economy in the United States. The march will go from Malcolm X Park to Lafayette Square and advocate for the establishment of a Presidential Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act. The march in Washington is open to all communities - or you can organize a march in your own city at the Town Hall, State Capitol, and more.

**Attending a march, or hosting an event?
Consider using these social media hashtags to
broaden your reach: #ReparationsNow, #HR40,
#PassHR40, #FaithInReparations, and #WeCantWait**

A CALL TO ACTION FOR FAITH COMMUNITIES

Once you have identified a reparations cause in your local community, or people who you could build out a coalition with, you can take action in a myriad of historically and religiously informed action principles. We can employ Dr. King's principles of non-violence and moral integrity to organize large actions and protests for reparations and write to local and national lawmakers. We can draw on Septima Poinsette Clark's principles of mass education campaigns to spread awareness and knowledge about local issues and history.

It is okay to be angry when learning about these injustices. In fact, it is a natural and human emotion. We can channel this anger into motivation for direct action. We can also evoke the long-time faith-based organizing principle of listening to launch listening campaigns to learn about the issue and collectively envision what reparative justice would look like. Collective imagination is a powerful yet often overlooked tool and spiritual practice that draws on Biblical lessons to think about, as a community, how reparations can come about and who we need to organize with and reach with our message. We invite you to join us on this spiritual journey to Jubilee. Though we know not yet the destination or the trials we will inevitably encounter, we know that our Scripture calls us to begin the journey and we know that - by our faith - we have the tools to continue on the long march and use the movement to give glory to God, Amen. We rejoice because we have a rich history of faith-based organizing, of congregations reading the words of the Lord unto their current circumstance to preach and practice the Good News. We preach the Gospel by looking into local movements, organizing, marching, and keeping the faith so that at the end of our journey we can say that "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith"(2 Timothy 4:7) .



*Image of Septima Poinsette
Clark, the 'Mother of the
Movement'*

A FEW KEY STEPS WHEN ORGANIZING A DIRECT ACTION

Developed in consultation with Let My People Go: End Poverty, Militarism, Racism, National Resource Guide by The People's Consortium for Human and Civil Rights

1. **Prayer** is an essential part of any spiritual endeavor or any endeavor we take as spiritual people. As we practiced above, pray for justice and reparations.
2. Identify and **learn about the problem** and how it has been and is affecting your community. For example, if we are seeking reparations from unjust housing laws in the twentieth century, we should look not only at redlining, but we should also look at how the vestiges of slavery and Jim Crow racialize the housing and financial markets today. We contextualize current issues in a long line of historical injustices to give moral weight and historical urgency to matters.
3. Read, listen to, and speak to God and the Bible. **Bring the Scripture to bear on this issue** like a talking book. Ask the age-old Christian question, what would Jesus do? It is important to remember as Rev. Cornell William Brooks teaches, that not every religious voice is moral, and not every moral voice is religious. Since we are coming from a faith tradition, we need to explore how we can draw on our religious foundations to make moral arguments in the public sphere.
4. **Listen** to people in your community who are closest to the problem and involve them as stakeholders. Those who bear the brunt of the problem deserve a seat at the planning and decision-making table.

5. Build it a **diverse, multiracial, multigenerational movement**. We can learn from those who have gained knowledge over their many years of experience and draw on the energy and moral courage of young people.
6. Think about **different direct action plans** based on their sacrifice and potential for change. For example, writing a letter is low sacrifice and is usually not the sole driver of change. Occupying a government building requires sacrifice and planning, and typically forces lawmakers to address the issue. Once you decide, organize stakeholders, involve the media, and take action.
7. As the Golden Rule of faith-based organizing teaches, never do for others what they can do for themselves. We **organize with and on behalf of others**, not for others. We learn from Scripture we are all part of the Kingdom of God so we work together in solidarity and avoid repeating the same hierarchies Jesus preached against.
8. **Keep yourself spiritually, mentally, and physically sound** during the movement, and listen to signs of burnout. May we remember what Paul wrote to the Romans, "Do not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer" (Romans 12:11-12).

Whether it is a prayer vigil, a march, a town hall, or a meeting with one of your representatives, remember the words of Queen Mother Audley Moore, the "Mother" of the modern reparations movement: **"Keep on. Keep on. We've got to win."**

Let it be so.

RESOURCES

FOR DEEPER ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY LEARNING

- [2023 Edward L. Mark Lecture](#) featuring Cornell William Brooks titled Exonerating History: Mrs. Callie G House and the Biblical Empirical Case for Reparations
- [The Black Manifesto](#) timeline and study guide
- [K-12 Curriculum](#) from the 400 Years of Inequality Initiative

WORSHIP RESOURCES

- Additional worship resources from [Arrabon](#), including chord charts and lead sheets
- Sample sermons, both recorded and written, on [Reparations4Slavery](#)
- [Prayers for Racial Justice and Reconciliation](#) by the Jesuit Resource from Xavier University
- [Interfaith Spiritual and Faith Reparations Resources](#) by the Grassroots Reparations Campaign, a program of the Truth Telling Project

H.R. 40 aligns with the National Council of Churches anti-racism campaign to [A.C.T. Now to End Racism](#).

PRIMARY ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES

- [The National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America \(N'COBRA\)](#)
- [The National African American Reparations Commission](#)

WHAT IS HR 40, REPARATIONS, AND “WHY WE CAN’T WAIT”

- **Reparations is a Justice matter**, and this legislation is in response to racial equity issues **400-plus years in the making**.
- **This country has been built upon intentional structural inequities against people of African descent** including chattel slavery, Black Codes, convict leasing, Jim Crow, redlining, access to fair housing, education, employment opportunities, etc.
- Since the federal government has never commissioned its own comprehensive study, H.R. 40 would **establish an expert federal commission to study** the legacy of slavery and ongoing harms **and develop proposals for how to provide redress and repair**, including fiduciary reparations. The work of an H.R. 40 commission is a **necessary part of public acknowledgment of the U.S. government’s complicity and wrongdoings, and how it seeks to rectify them**.
 - [HR 40 Bill Text](#): *The commission shall examine slavery and discrimination in the colonies and the United States from 1619 to the present and recommend appropriate remedies. The commission shall identify (1) the role of the federal and state governments in supporting the institution of slavery, (2) forms of discrimination in the public and private sectors against freed slaves and their descendants, and (3) lingering negative effects of slavery on living African Americans and society.*
- **32 years in the making**, since its first introduction by late Rep. John Conyers in 1989, there is **precedent for H.R. 40**, and establishing an expert commission to examine harmful impacts of policy choice and provide redress is a **typical government practice**.
 - See below “*Historical & Supporting Information, Scholarly Articles*”
- If passed, H.R. 40 would provide the information and resources for **America to move towards atoning for its original sin**. The trans-Atlantic slave trade and the brutal treatment of African Americans has impacted every generation since the first enslaved Africans were sold in 1619.
- **Guarantees of non-repetition** include institutional and legal reform as well as reforms to government practices to end the abuse.
- The right to remedy and **reparation is well-defined in international human rights law**, and governments have an obligation to fulfill those rights. Victims of serious human rights violations, including acts of racial discrimination, have a right to an effective remedy, which includes reparations for past and ongoing harms. These victims include Black communities that still endure systemic discrimination rooted in the history of enslavement of Africans. Reparations include the following:
 - **Restitution**: measures to restore the situation that existed before the wrongful act(s) were committed, such as restoration of liberty, employment and return to the place of residence and return of property.
 - **Compensation**: monetary payment for “economically assessable damage” arising from the violation, including physical or mental harm, material losses, and lost opportunities.
 - **Rehabilitation**: provision of “medical and psychological care as well as legal and social services.”
 - **Satisfaction**: includes a range of measures involving truth-telling, statements aimed at ending ongoing abuses, commemorations, memorials or tributes to the victims, and expressions of regret or formal apology for wrongdoing.
- Passing H.R. 40 will be **in alignment with the United Nations International Decade for People of African descent: recognition, justice and development**,” recognizing internationally that people of African descent represent a distinct group whose human rights must be promoted and protected.
- There can be **no racial healing without repairing the harm** caused by the deprivation and destruction of Black wealth, racism in health care, discrimination in the criminal legal system, and more. H.R. 40 is the **only bill that will lead to concrete proposals** for repairing the damage that the US government has inflicted on Black people. **Anything short of this will fail to deliver the remedy required**.

FAITH FACTS—BIBLICAL JUSTIFICATIONS & SCHOLARLY ARTICLES

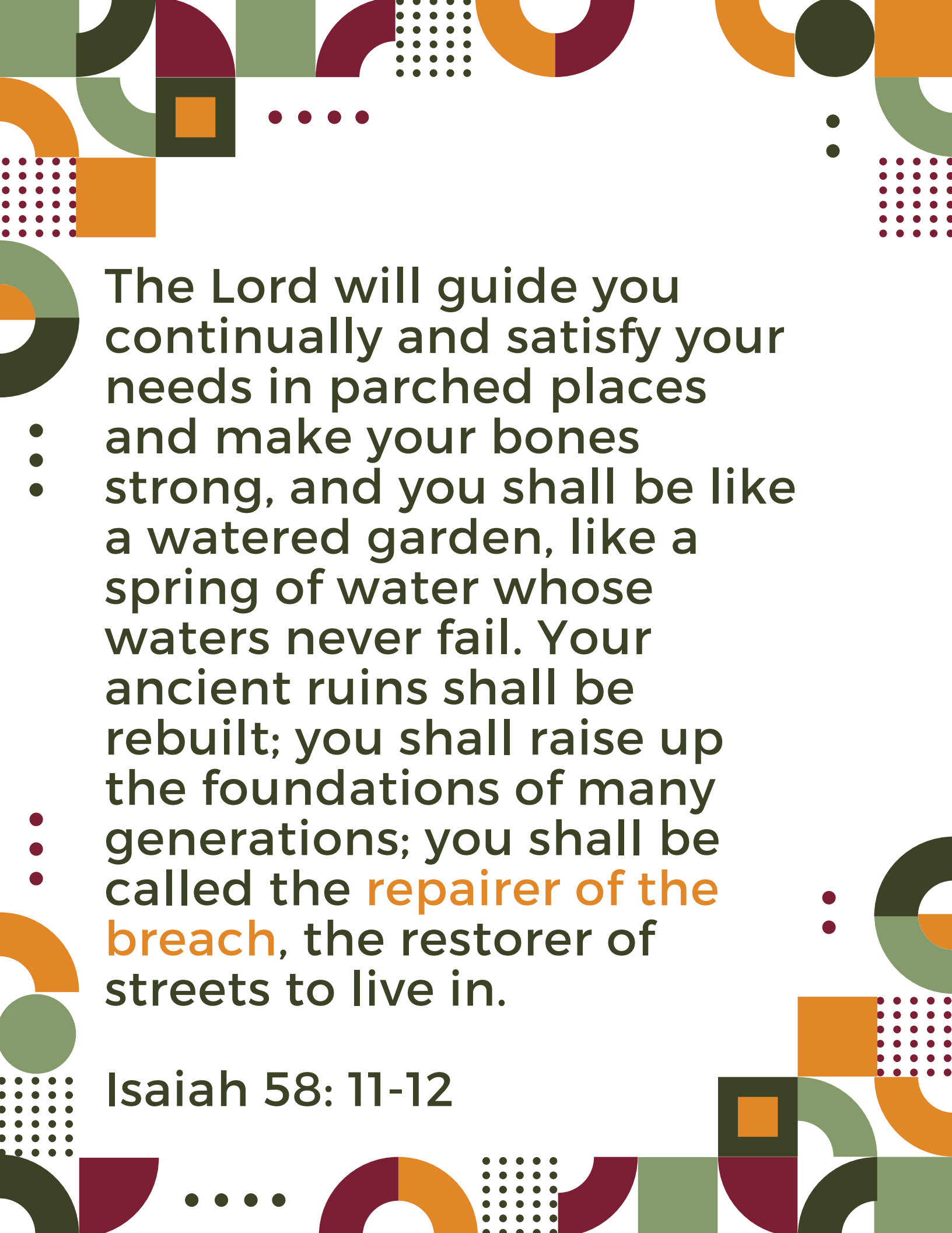
- God demands our acknowledgement and redress of injustice – Genesis 4:10
- Jesus' mission statement is the basis for our faithful response – Luke 4:18-19
- Zacchaeus learns from Jesus the principal of reparatory restitution – Luke 19:8-10
- [The Biblical Case for Reparations](#), by Rev. Dr. John Thomas
- [A Christian Call for Reparations](#) by Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas
- [Reparations Are Biblical](#), by Rev. Thabiti Anyabwile
- [Reparations is not only a political response, but a Christian response...](#), by Rev. Dr. Kerry Day

HISTORICAL & SUPPORTING INFORMATION, SCHOLARLY ARTICLES

- [An Historical Timeline of Reparations Payments Made From 1783 through 2021 by the United States Government, States, Cities, Religious Institutions, Colleges and Universities, Corporations, and Communities](#)
- Today's debate about [reparations for slavery](#) dates back to Alexander Hamilton's era. Except in the past, reparations were [actually paid out](#) – to the [owners of enslaved people](#).
- The Rhode Island General Assembly [passed an act in 1778](#) that said since enslaved people were “deemed the Property of their Owners ... Compensation ought to be made to the Owners for the Loss of their Service.”
- **Northern elite slaveholders sought and sometimes received reparations** for [losses they experienced during the Revolutionary War](#). Reparations ranged from restitution for the loss of enslaved people who escaped and gained freedom behind British lines to compensation for the expense of maintaining property (which included enslaved people) that were [commandeered by Revolutionary forces](#).
- The **Compensated Emancipation Act of 1862 ended enslavement in Washington, DC**, establishing a commission to hear petitions of former slave owners and provided direct compensation for the “loss of their human property.”
- The **American Civil War's Field Order No. 15 in 1865** issued by Union Gen. William Sherman promised [“40 acres and a mule”](#) to formerly enslaved people freed along the coast of Georgia – though it was [quickly overturned and did not originally include a mule](#).
- President Carter issued Executive Order 12093, the “President's Commission on the Holocaust” in 1978, which was responsible for submitting a report “with respect to the establishment and maintenance of an appropriate memorial to those who perished in the Holocaust.”
- The **Congressional Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC) of 1980**, which studied the facts and circumstances surrounding the internment of US citizens and permanent residents during World War II, led to the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. The US government then issued a formal apology for the internment and granted redress in the form of financial compensation and education benefits to survivors and their families.
- The **Indian Claims Commission Act of 1946** established a formal commission to hear, investigate, and determine the validity of claims of “any Indian tribe, band, or identifiable group of American Indians” against the US.

COUNTERARGUMENTS TO THE OBJECTIONS

- In response to claims that H.R. 40 is divisive, following the Capitol Attack and the 4 years of regression under Trump: We should not allow those who spread disinformation, traffic in hatred, and foment violence to define what unity and healing look like.
- **Slavery was national policy**, with ramifications that reverberate across the country today. We need a national reckoning and solutions at the federal level.
- White people continue to enjoy the spoils of a government that gave the white majority a leg up while **robbing Black people of intergenerational wealth**. The proposed H.R. 40 commission will design proposals to address and eliminate the racial wealth gap, in addition to reparative proposals that will specifically address disparities in healthcare, employment, education, food access, land and home ownership, police violence, etc.
- **Not everyone will agree on every aspect of any bill**. But those who support reparations for the legacy of slavery all agree on one thing: that reparations in some form or forms, are owed. H.R. 40 is an essential step toward making reparations a reality. We cannot further delay the establishment of the federal commission, whose job it will be to study the legacy of US enslavement and develop various reparatory proposals of redress. **The journey to repair is long**. But establishing the H.R. 40 commission is **absolutely essential**, and won't preclude further debates.



The Lord will guide you
continually and satisfy your
needs in parched places
and make your bones
strong, and you shall be like
a watered garden, like a
spring of water whose
waters never fail. Your
ancient ruins shall be
rebuilt; you shall raise up
the foundations of many
generations; you shall be
called the **repairer of the
breach**, the restorer of
streets to live in.

Isaiah 58: 11-12