

Berkeley School of Theology - HSCE 5101  
Examining the Case for Reparations for African Americans  
“Reparations for African Americans, Next Steps”  
Katy Dickinson, 23 May 2023

This is a shifting time of change in the potential for reparations to African Americans, especially where I live in the San Francisco Bay Area. In the last few months, the governments of the State of California<sup>1</sup> and the City and County of San Francisco<sup>2</sup> have both been considering major financial reparations proposals on which legislation may be developed, with details being discussed almost daily in both the progressive<sup>3</sup> and conservative<sup>4</sup> news media. One group wrote on the California task force, “In addition to remedying the lingering effects of slavery, the report seeks to compensate black Californians for five categories of harms: housing discrimination, mass incarceration, unjust property seizures, and the devaluation of black businesses and health care.”<sup>5</sup> Other cities and states have made the national news discussing or acting on reparations,<sup>6</sup> and a national bill supporting reparations has just been submitted in the U.S. Congress. In introducing this new legislation calling for \$14 trillion in reparations, Representative Cori Bush said, “The United States has a moral and legal obligation to provide reparations for the enslavement of Africans and its lasting harm on the lives of millions of Black people.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Associated Press, “A California panel has called for billions in reparations for descendants of slaves,” *National Public Radio*, 7 May 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/05/07/1174627337/a-california-panel-has-called-for-billions-in-reparations-for-black-residents>.

<sup>2</sup> Associated Press, “San Francisco board open to reparations with \$5M payouts,” *NBC News*, 14 March 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/san-francisco-decide-black-reparations-plan-5m-person-rcna74873>.

<sup>3</sup> Ed Kilgore, “The Next Right-Wing Media Freak-out: Slavery Reparations in California,” *New York Magazine - Intelligencer*, 5 May 2023, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2023/05/california-slavery-reparations-are-next-right-wing-freak-out.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Elkind, “Left-wing lawmakers press for federal reparations for Black Americans: 'We're here to demand it,’” *Fox News*, 17 May 2023, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/democrats-reparations-black-americans>.

<sup>5</sup> Federalist Society, “Slavery Reparations in California,” *FedSoc Blog*, 27 January 2023, <https://fedsoc.org/commentary/fedsoc-blog/slavery-reparations-in-california>.

<sup>6</sup> Stephanie Whiteside, “What Cities are Considering Reparations?” *News Nation*, 8 May 2023, <https://www.newsnationnow.com/race-in-america/which-cities-considering-reparations/>.

<sup>7</sup> Alana Wise, “Rep. Cori Bush introduces bill on reparations for Black Americans,” *National Public Radio*, 17 May 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/05/17/1176753190/rep-cori-bush-introduces-bill-on-reparations-for-black-americans>.

Despite the inherent lack of perspective in responding to very current events, in this paper I present four well known reparations cases and then propose next steps to achieve practical and sustainable reparations for African Americans. The course of action I propose will be based on some of the work that is already being done, as well as addressing gaps where more efforts are needed. In the four race-based cases discussed below, reparations have already been paid or are under active legal consideration. These include, the Tulsa Race Massacre (lawsuits still in process), the Rosewood Massacre (reparations paid and ongoing), Japanese American Internment (reparations paid), and the Wyatt Massacre (reparations paid). This paper is not comprehensive, so I encourage the reader to investigate other well-known cases for which reparations have been paid to largely African American communities, including the 20th Century forced sterilization programs, Tuskegee experiments 1932-1972,<sup>8</sup> and Harvard's \$100 million endowment fund for slavery reparations.<sup>9</sup>

## **Definitions and Context**

To start, I present this definition from Darity and Mullen in *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*, "Reparations are a program for acknowledgement, redress, and closure for grievous injustice. Where African Americans are concerned, the grievous injustice that make the case for reparations include slavery, legal segregation (Jim Crow), and ongoing discrimination and stigmatization."<sup>10</sup> The 2009 apology offered by the U.S. Congress includes this statement on why action is needed,

Whereas an apology for centuries of brutal dehumanization and injustices cannot erase the past, but confession of the wrongs committed and a formal apology to African-

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<sup>8</sup> Dylan Matthews, "Six times victims have received reparations - including four in the US," *Vox*, 23 May 2014, <https://www.vox.com/2014/5/23/5741352/six-times-victims-have-received-reparations-including-four-in-the-us>.

<sup>9</sup> Michela Moscufo, "Harvard sets up \$100 million endowment fund for slavery reparations," *Reuters*, 26 April 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/harvard-sets-up-100-million-endowment-fund-slavery-reparations-2022-04-26/>.

<sup>10</sup> William A. Darity, Jr., A. Kirsten Mullen, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 2.

Americans will help bind the wounds of the Nation that are rooted in slavery and can speed racial healing and reconciliation and help the people of the United States understand the past and honor the history of all people of the United States.<sup>11</sup>

In summary, our country needs healing and reconciliation that can be provided by acknowledgement, redress, and closure for grievous social and economic racially-based injustice over many centuries. Reparations to African Americans are part of getting to that closure.

As a Christian, I agree with Duke Kwan and Gregory Thompson in *Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair*<sup>12</sup> that reparations are possible and can be inspired by the example of the Zacchaeus, the rich tax collector of Jericho, who in the Gospel of Luke 19:1-10 said to Jesus, “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.” In offering reparations, Zacchaeus was seeking to make his community whole after he damaged it with theft and greed.

Kwan and Thompson characterize America’s history of systemic racism as *theft*. They write, “this theft is best understood not merely in terms of wealth but in the more comprehensive terms of truth and power...To frame the harm done by American White supremacy in exclusively economic terms is actually to obscure the nature and magnitude of that harm”<sup>13</sup> Like Kwan and Thompson, I recognize that the broad harms caused by systemic racism can only be partially addressed by even the most generous monetary reparations.

As a white, middle class, educated American woman, I am grateful to our professor Dr. Aidsand Wright-Riggins for the essay, “The Tulsa Race Massacre is personal to me, and

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<sup>11</sup> U.S. Congress, “Concurrent Resolution Apologizing for the slavery and racial segregation of African-Americans,” S. Con. Res. 26, *congress.gov*, 18 June 2009. <https://www.congress.gov/111/bills/sconres26/BILLS-111sconres26es.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Duke L. Kwan, Gregory Thompson, *Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2021), 17.

<sup>13</sup> Kwan, Thompson, 20-21.

remembering is a holy act.”<sup>14</sup> He presents the lasting negative potential for violent racist acts against African Americans to cause generations of pain as well as a legacy of social and economic disadvantage. Dr. Wright-Riggins writes that the massacre led his family to see America in a new way, “Like Abraham Joshua Heschel, they understood that America is a country where ‘few are guilty, but all are responsible.’ They understood that all are responsible for evil because only a nation indifferent to suffering will tolerate injustice and systemic inequality. History is personal.”<sup>15</sup> Reading the essay was less powerful for me than hearing our professor talk about the destructive and lasting influence of the Tulsa Race Massacre on him and his family.

### **Tulsa Race Massacre, 1921**

The first case study in systemic racism our class considered was Tim Madigan’s *The Burning: The Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921*.<sup>16</sup> Madigan wrote that before it was attacked by a white mob, “Black people said that the Greenwood community in Tulsa, Oklahoma, was the top of the mountain for people of their race, a remarkable little city within a city, remembered over the decades as the ‘Negro Wall Street of America.’”<sup>17</sup> Reparations were offered to victims from the beginning but were never paid. Madigan quotes former Tulsa Mayor Loyal J. Martin in 1921, “Tulsa can only redeem herself from the country-wide shame and humiliation into which she is today plunged by complete restitution and rehabilitation of the destroyed black belt.”<sup>18</sup> Eighty years later, the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 sounds similar in its

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<sup>14</sup> Aidsand Wright-Riggins, “The Tulsa Race Massacre is personal to me, and remembering is a holy act,” *Baptist News Global*, 4 June 2021, <https://baptistnews.com/article/the-tulsa-race-massacre-is-personal-to-me-and-remembering-is-a-holy-act/>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Tim Madigan, *The Burning: The Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2021).

<sup>17</sup> Madigan, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Madigan, 258.

sentiments and empty support for reparations. The Commission's Preface begins, "This report describes the worst event in Tulsa's history and the worst case of racially motivated violence in Oklahoma's history." It continues,

By midday, June 1st the riot was over. Nearly all of Tulsa's 10,000 innocent black citizens were homeless and incarcerated... simply because of the unpopular color of their skin. Tulsa blacks and whites suffered needless loss of life and property, all because of racial hatred. Based on this historical record the majority of the Commission supports the concept of reparations.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the Commission's conceptual support for reparations, while the 118 massacre survivors were given medals in 2001 and the Oklahoma state 1921 Tulsa Race Riot Reconciliation Act of June 1, 2001 acknowledged moral responsibility, the Act did not include funding reparations, expecting that private sources would pay.<sup>20</sup> Private sources did not pay until over twenty years later, when in 2022 a private funder donated one million dollars to the three remaining survivors of the Tulsa massacre.<sup>21</sup> The Business for Good website reports, "The funds go directly to the survivors—Viola Fletcher, 108, Lessie Benningfield Randle, 107, and Hughes Van Ellis, 101, who were children at the time, and watched their homes turn to ash. This was the first time they received any sense of amends for the massacre."<sup>22</sup> I am encouraged even at this late date that substantial financial support is going to the few remaining Tulsa victims.

The Tulsa Race Massacre has been prominent in recent news, not only because of the Hundredth Anniversary of the event, but also because excavations of unmarked graves started in

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<sup>19</sup> T.D. Churchwell, "Preface: Skeleton Out of the Closet," in *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report by the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*, State of Oklahoma, 21 February 2001, v, <https://digitalcollections.tulsalibrary.org/digital/collection/p15020coll6/id/447>.

<sup>20</sup> Mihir A. Desai, Suzanne Antoniou, Leanne Fan, "The Tulsa Massacre and the Call for Reparations," *Harvard Business School*, 2021, <https://courseware.hbs.edu/public/tulsa/>.

<sup>21</sup> Associated Press, "New York Donors Give \$1M to 3 Tulsa Race Massacre Survivors," *U.S. News & World Report*, 17 May 2022, <https://www.usnews.com/news/us/articles/2022-05-17/new-york-donors-give-1m-to-3-tulsa-race-massacre-survivors>.

<sup>22</sup> Business for Good, "1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Survivors," *Business for Good*, accessed 18 May 2023, <https://bfg.org/what-we-do/1921-tulsa-race-massacre-survivors/>.

2020. Sixty-six additional sets of remains have been discovered in the last two years.<sup>23</sup> Also in the news are lawsuits filed in 2020 by the three surviving victims and descendants of victims who have died. An organization called Justice for Greenwood is managing the lawsuits, seeking justice and reparations from the City of Tulsa and others.<sup>24</sup> The most recent media story I found reported in 2022 that an Oklahoma judge rejected the reparations suit by descendants but has allowed the case of three living victims to go forward.<sup>25</sup> Considering restorative compensation for victims but not their descendants seems to be a pattern but is not always the case.

### **Rosewood Massacre, 1923**

As part of its 2020 “Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma,” Human Rights Watch compiled a list of reparations to past victims of human rights violations, starting in 1994 with victims of the 1923 massacre of African Americans in Rosewood, Florida. Unlike the famously thriving Greenwood in Tulsa, Rosewood is described by Robert Samuels in the *Washington Post* as an “an old mill town, deep in the backwoods of north Florida — a place where black people did well for themselves.”<sup>26</sup> As in Greenwood, a white mob burned the town and killed African Americans who lived there. Human Rights Watch summarized, “Survivors of the 1923 Rosewood Race Massacre, and their heirs (who received a scholarship fund), became the first group of victims of a racial massacre in the US to be compensated for their material losses.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ken Miller, “Latest search for Tulsa Race Massacre victims comes to end,” *Associated Press*, 19 November 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/forensics-massacres-7939fdd726723e2477b0233e7bb4dc45>.

<sup>24</sup> About, *Justice for Greenwood*, accessed 17 May 2023, <https://www.justiceforgreenwood.org/about-us/>.

<sup>25</sup> Ken Miller, “Judge: Tulsa Race Massacre victims’ descendants can’t sue,” *Associated Press*, 4 August 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/lawsuits-race-and-ethnicity-tulsa-oklahoma-massacres-61e4a271a584c40483e1ba0709699159>.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Samuels, “After Reparations: How a scholarship helped — and didn't help - descendants of victims of the 1923 Rosewood racial massacre,” *Washington Post*, 3 April 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/national/rosewood-reparations/>.

<sup>27</sup> Human Rights Watch, “The Case for Reparations in Tulsa, Oklahoma: A Human Rights Argument,” *Human Rights Watch*, May 2020, 56, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/29/case-reparations-tulsa-oklahoma>.

Reparations for Rosewood consisted of both a small financial payout (“Only half received more than \$2,000”),<sup>28</sup> plus a scholarship. Samuels reported, “since 1994, 297 students have received Rosewood scholarships.”<sup>29</sup> Rosewood is an unusually successful case where reparations went not just to victims but also to their descendants. Payments by the Florida state legislature are limited to \$6,100 per year to eligible students. The “Rosewood Family Scholarship Program for the direct descendants of the Rosewood families, not to exceed 50 scholarships per year”<sup>30</sup> continues today.

### **Japanese American Internment, 1942-1946**

In determining the amount to be paid for the Rosewood Massacre, 1994 Special Master Richard Hixson in his “Rosewood Victims vs State of Florida” specifically cites as a guiding precedent the payments made by the federal government to Japanese Americans who were interned during World War II.<sup>31</sup> This successful reparations example is also listed by Human Rights Watch<sup>32</sup> and is the largest and most famous case of racially-based reparations. Japanese American reparations were paid after an education and redress advocacy campaign not just for the American people but also for the internees themselves. Japanese American internee and author John Tateishi is quoted as saying that it took many years for community elders to accept the need to raise their voices in protest,

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<sup>28</sup> Samuels.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Online Sunshine, “1009.55 - Rosewood Family Scholarship Program,” *Official Internet Site of the Florida Legislature*, accessed 17 May 2023, [http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&Search\\_String=&URL=1000-1099/1009/Sections/1009.55.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=1000-1099/1009/Sections/1009.55.html).

<sup>31</sup> Richard Hixson, “Rosewood Victims vs State of Florida,” HB 591 - State of Florida, in the *Internet Archive Wayback Machine*, 24 March 1994, <https://web.archive.org/web/20141218161140/http://www.thewhitehouseboysonline.com/ARTICLE-ROSEWOOD-VS-STATE.html>.

<sup>32</sup> Human Rights Watch.

The one thing that resonated for the Nisei generation was the message that this is not about us. This is an issue that is about the Constitution and the future [of this country]. We were determined to pass [the Civil Liberties Act] as a way of having Americans recognize the injustice of what happened to us—not for our sake, but in order to make sure this never happened again...The redress campaign wasn't just about trying to gain monetary compensation...But the money was part of the message. The American public didn't give a damn until the minute we started demanding compensation.<sup>33</sup>

H.R.442 - Civil Liberties Act of 1987 was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan on 10 August 1988.<sup>34</sup> It directed a payment of \$20,000 to each surviving internee and declared,

(1) a grave injustice was done to citizens and permanent resident aliens of Japanese ancestry by the evacuation, relocation, and internment of civilians during World War II; (2) these actions were without security reasons and without any acts of espionage or sabotage...and were motivated by racial prejudice, wartime hysteria, and a failure of political leadership; (3) the excluded individuals suffered enormous damages for which appropriate compensation has not been made; and (4) the Congress apologizes on behalf of the Nation.<sup>35</sup>

In all, 82,219 received redress because of the Civil Liberties Act of 1987.<sup>36</sup> In this case, restorative compensation went only to victims, but not to their descendants.

There are many examples of the U.S. government paying compensation for harms<sup>37</sup> but few that have to do with restorative justice for racism or racially-based violence, and no others are on the scale of the reparations paid to Japanese American internees. In response to an interview question on reparations to African Americans for slavery, internee Tateishi said, “I can't think of any group that has suffered racism to the degree that black Americans have. I know

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<sup>33</sup> Isabela Rosario, “The Unlikely Story Behind Japanese Americans' Campaign For Reparations,” *National Public Radio*, 24 March 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2020/03/24/820181127/the-unlikely-story-behind-japanese-americans-campaign-for-reparations>.

<sup>34</sup> Jessie Kratz, “Japanese American Internment: Righting a Wrong,” *National Archives - Pieces of History*, 17 February 2017, <https://prologue.blogs.archives.gov/2017/02/17/apologizing-for-japanese-internment-righting-a-wrong/>.

<sup>35</sup> U.S Congress, “H.R.442 - Civil Liberties Act of 1987,” *congress.gov*, 10 August 1988, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/100th-congress/house-bill/442>.

<sup>36</sup> Densho Encyclopedia, “Civil Liberties Act of 1988,” *Densho*, accessed 18 May 2023, [http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Civil\\_Liberties\\_Act\\_of\\_1988/](http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Civil_Liberties_Act_of_1988/).

<sup>37</sup> Linda Bilmes, Cornell William Brooks, “The United States pays reparations every day—just not to Black America,” *Harvard Kennedy School*, 3 February 2022, <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/faculty-research/policycast/us-pays-reparations-every-day-just-not-black-america#transcript>.



that this kind of thing is never just about money...Until there are efforts made to try to resolve the root causes and to get at the racism, it's going to be a tough battle to move forward.”<sup>38</sup>

### **Wiyot Massacre, 1860**

Racial reparations can take many forms. The African American survivors of the Rosewood massacre were paid cash and their descendants were given a scholarship fund. So far, African American survivors of the Tulsa massacre have received a medal and some cash but are in the process of seeking more. Japanese American internment survivors were paid cash. The Wiyot Tribe of Northern California was given part of its ancestral land back. In 2020, the tribe in its newsletter, *The Da'luk*, described its circumstances as being positively influenced by reparations discussions of the African American community,

Now with the advent of Black Lives Matter (BLM) and a greater acknowledgment to the systematic racism, land theft, and genocide that Native Americans and other groups have been experiencing for generations across the world, we find ourselves in a position where land return or repatriation, has emerged as simply the right thing to do to begin the healing and reparations process.<sup>39</sup>

Emily Nonko writes about how ancestral lands were lost, “On Feb. 25, 1860, a group of local white men brutally slaughtered over 100 sleeping Wiyot women, children and elders while men gathered provisions for the Wiyot’s annual renewal ceremony.”<sup>40</sup> After decades of negotiations, and grants to remove tons of hazardous waste and invasive species, in 2019 the city of Eureka returned 270 acres of island land to the tribe. Tribal administrator Michelle Vassel is quoted, “Eureka is the first municipality in U.S. history to voluntarily return land to a tribe without restrictions on how they can use it.”<sup>41</sup> After the return of Tuluwat Island, the tribe and city have

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<sup>38</sup> Rosario.

<sup>39</sup> Adam Canter, “Shawir Darrudaluduk ‘We Belong to the Wilderness,’” *Wiyot Tribe - The Da'luk* 20 no.9, 1 September 2020, <https://www.wiyot.us/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/246>.

<sup>40</sup> Emily Nonko, “An Indigenous Community Land Trust Is Creating Housing Through #LandBack,” *NextCity*, 23 March 2023, <https://nextcity.org/features/an-indigenous-community-land-trust-is-creating-housing-through-landback>.

<sup>41</sup> Nonko.

continued to work together to create a tribally-led community land trust that is developing housing and community resources to benefit both the Wiyot Tribe and Eureka.<sup>42</sup> I am inspired by both the broader benefits of African American political advocacy, and this collaboration between a tribe and city to build a stronger community based on reparations.

### **What Kind of Reparations?**

Darity and Mullen’s “acknowledgement, redress, and closure” are complex and time consuming to accomplish. Considering what kind of reparations are appropriate (including determining whether reparations only go to victims or to both victims and their descendants) can be as difficult as getting support and funding to provide them. As Samuels writes, “supporters of reparations acknowledge the stumbling blocks of figuring out the appropriate way to pay back black Americans for centuries of enslavement and systemic discrimination. They also face the challenge of persuading skeptical lawmakers who consider reparations a pipe dream with no lasting effect.”<sup>43</sup> The Pew Research Center has quantified just how divided current views are about reparations, “Americans view the prospect of reparations mostly negatively...Views of reparations for slavery vary widely by race and ethnicity...Around three-quarters of Black adults (77%) say the descendants of people enslaved in the U.S. should be repaid in some way, while 18% of White Americans say the same.”<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps indulging in counting their chickens before they hatch, several of the contributors to Raymond A. Winbush’s *Should America Pay?*<sup>45</sup> offer extensive suggestions for

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<sup>42</sup> Nonko.

<sup>43</sup> Samuels.

<sup>44</sup> Carrie Blazina, Kiana Cox, “Black and White Americans are far apart in their views of reparations for slavery,” *Pew Research Center*, 28 November 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/11/28/black-and-white-americans-are-far-apart-in-their-views-of-reparations-for-slavery/>.

<sup>45</sup> Raymond A. Winbush, *Should America Pay? Slavery and the Raging Debate on Reparations* (New York: Amistad - Harper Collins, 2003).

how to spend reparations funding in addition to, or instead of, cash payments to victims. Two of the essays, “Debt of Honor” by Christopher Hitchens,<sup>46</sup> and “Against Reparations” by John McWhorter,<sup>47</sup> quote Randall Robinson’s 2001 suggestion in *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks* that reparations should consist of a trust fund for African American education, housing, and job training, with companies that benefited from slave labor providing the money. In addition to what sounds like a paternalistic solution, “a program supporting poor black people for a few years while stewarding them into jobs,” McWhorter also proposes an inner-city home buying and small business loan program, scholarships and educational improvement, and affirmative-action policies to provide equity in promotions and combat racism in business.<sup>48</sup> A notable addition to this list comes from Crawford, Nobles, and Leary in “Reparations and Health Care for African Americans: Repairing the Damage from the Legacy of Slavery” in which the authors offer fourteen points of social, economic, and health-based recommendations to empower the African American community.<sup>49</sup>

Many of these plans and proposals seem to have more than one goal. In “Riding the Reparations Bandwagon,” Milly Secour likens reparations to admitting wrongs and making amends as a part of a twelve-step program, “a process of recovery for those in denial about our addiction and dependency on white privilege.”<sup>50</sup> Ta-Nehisi Cates expanded on this addiction recovery image in his famous 2014 *Atlantic* article “The Case for Reparations,” republished in *We Were Eight Years in Power*. Coates writes,

We must imagine a new country. Reparations—by which I mean the full acceptance of our collective biography and its consequences—is the price we must pay to see ourselves squarely. The recovering alcoholic may well have to live with his illness for the rest of

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<sup>46</sup> Winbush, 172-179.

<sup>47</sup> Winbush, 180-196.

<sup>48</sup> Winbush, 193.

<sup>49</sup> Winbush, 251-281.

<sup>50</sup> Winbush, 293.

his life. But at least he is not living a drunken lie. Reparations beckon us to reject the intoxication of hubris and see America as it is—the work of fallible humans.<sup>51</sup>

Jon M. Van Dyke in “Reparations for the Descendants of American Slaves Under International Law,”<sup>52</sup> summarizes four approaches that may be combined, “(1) an apology for the wrong, which can be general or specific; (2) an investigation and accounting; (3) compensation for the victims, either through a general class approach or through on individual determinations, or both; and (4) prosecution of the wrongdoers.”<sup>53</sup> These approaches may each take many decades to accomplish. In the concluding section that follows, I consider areas where work is already being done toward reparations, and notable gap areas.

### **Conclusion: Next Steps for Reparations**

After reading so many books, articles, and new stories, I have developed a basic understanding of the complex and emotionally powerful topic of reparations for African Americans. Rather than adding to the abundant analyses on how to spend money that has yet to be made available (some samples of which are above), I have considered where work is being done and where there seem to be gaps.

The area where the most work seems to be going forward is in legal cases and legislative bills seeking remedies for group harm caused by America’s racist system, including slavery, Jim Crow laws, segregation, racist violence, etc. Each court case has the potential to establish legal precedents for future cases. Court-ordered penalties could discourage racist violence by making it very expensive. As seen in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*,<sup>54</sup> and *Loving v. Virginia*,<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ta-Nehisi Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* (New York: One World Publishing, 2017), 209.

<sup>52</sup> Winbush, 57-78.

<sup>53</sup> Winbush, 65.

<sup>54</sup> Justia, “Brown V. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954),” *Justia - U.S. Supreme Court*, accessed 22 May 2023, <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/347/483/>.

<sup>55</sup> Justia, “Loving v. Virginia, 388 U.S. 1 (1967),” *Justia - U.S. Supreme Court*, accessed 22 May 2023, <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/388/1/>.

America's social and economic system has proven it can change in response to the slow process of legal judgement and legislation.

In considering their goals, I recommend that groups seeking redress through the courts and legislative change should remember the words of Japanese American internee John Tateishi, "The money was part of the message. The American public didn't give a damn until the minute we started demanding compensation."<sup>56</sup> That is, large monetary payouts can cause the public to pay attention. In addition to pursuing payouts that can benefit African American victims and their descendants, I would hope to see reparation outcomes that include community education. As suggested by the U.S. Congress when they offered their apology in 2009,<sup>57</sup> this would help the people of America understand the past and honor the history of all our people. Community building projects inspired by the success of reparations to California's Wiyot tribe can also help bind the wounds of our nation.

The area which seems to show less work than is needed is in public relations. In the example of the largest and most famous case of U.S. racial reparations, the Japanese American community started with a public relations campaign of radio programs to educate and make the case for redress.<sup>58</sup> Another option was suggested by one of my BST classmates. When our class was discussing how to get support for reparations, he suggested "put up a billboard!"

Billboards and posters have been used effectively before. During World War I, a time when America was openly racist, large format military recruiting posters encouraged African American men to enlist, portraying them as patriotic, brave, and self-sacrificing. My mother's Eleanor Creekmore Dickinson Charitable Art Trust<sup>59</sup> collection includes one such poster that

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<sup>56</sup> Rosario.

<sup>57</sup> U.S. Congress, 2009.

<sup>58</sup> Rosario.

<sup>59</sup> Eleanor Dickinson Art, *eleanordickinsonart.com*, accessed 23 May 2023, <http://eleanordickinsonart.com>.

proclaims, “Colored Man is No Slacker.”<sup>60</sup> A long-term marketing communication campaign could shift the now-polarized public opinion toward a more positive view of reparations and how they can help redress some harms caused to African Americans by our country’s horrific history of racism.

In parallel, educational materials on reparations could be developed and distributed to primary, secondary, and university audiences. For example, in developing this paper, I could not find a complete list of the history of reparations sought or paid. A partial list is available from the University of Massachusetts – Amherst, but more is needed.<sup>61</sup> The U.S. Congress act initially introduced by Representative John Conyers in 1989, “H.R. 40 – Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act,”<sup>62</sup> may result in some of this, if it ever passes.

One of the goals of a long-term, nationwide, public relations campaign would be to change today’s racially polarized differences of opinion so that reparations for African Americans will get greater legislative support and substantial funding approval. In choosing what to communicate in such a campaign, I would be guided by Kwan and Thompson’s wisdom, “reparations are not primarily given in light of a hoped-for future; they are given in light of an actual past.”<sup>63</sup> That is, focusing on reducing or ameliorating harms already done seems most effective. In continuing to follow the current course of court cases and legislative change, with the addition of a new public opinion changing campaign, I hope our country will be able to

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<sup>60</sup> E.G. Renesch, Charles Gustrine, “Recruiting posters for African American soldiers, 1918,” *Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History – History Resources*, accessed 23 May 2023, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/recruiting-posters-african-american-soldiers-1918>.

<sup>61</sup> Allen J. Davis, “An Historical Timeline of Reparations Payments Made From 1783 through 2023 by the United States Government, States, Cities, Religious Institutions, Universities, Corporations, and Communities,” *University of Massachusetts – Amherst*, 21 March 2023, <https://guides.library.umass.edu/reparations>.

<sup>62</sup> U.S. Congress, “H.R. 40 – Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act,” *congress.gov*, accessed 23 May 2023, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/40>.

<sup>63</sup> Kwan, Thompson, 25.

follow the example of Zacchaeus. Paying reparations to African Americans has the potential to make our nation more whole after we have damaged it with theft and greed.



World War I recruiting poster, 1918, Eleanor Creekmore Dickinson Charitable Art Trust collection

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