

REPARATIONS

Toolkit

Created by:

The Commission on Social Action (CSA)

Reparations Task Force | Juneteenth 2024



rac

RELIGIOUS ACTION CENTER
OF REFORM JUDAISM

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The Reform Jewish Movement has a long history working to overcome racial discrimination and injustice throughout North America. Congregations, clergy, and congregants of the Reform Movement seek to create a world where all individuals, regardless of race, enjoy the full benefits of society. This work remains critical and we are committed to advancing racial and reparatory justice.

In 2019, the URJ adopted a Resolution to support the Study and Development of Reparations for Slavery and Systemic Racism in the U.S. Among its provisions, the Resolution committed to ongoing assessment and evaluation to strengthen our own institutions' efforts to combat implicit and explicit bias and promote racial equity. The purpose of this toolkit is to provide support for congregations and leaders undertaking this important work. It is intended to address these issues for those just beginning their journey and those who are already on the path and seeking different approaches to deepen their engagement.

INTRODUCTION

For centuries, Black people have played a key role in the fabric of the United States, helping to build the American economy and influence culture and all aspects of society. Yet, Black Americans in the United States continue to experience discrimination and challenges in every aspect of life that their white peers do not.

In this section of the toolkit, we provide a brief historical background of racial oppression. We recognize its limitations and urge readers to use to develop a deeper understanding of the history and current challenges.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

More than 400 years ago, 350 Africans were kidnapped from Angola by the Portuguese to be brought to North America. The 200 people who survived the journey arrived on the shores of Jamestown, VA on August 20, 1619. The ship disembarked at Point Comfort, known today as Fort Monroe, where the survivors were sold as enslaved laborers.

Over time, labor from the enslavement of Africans became the economic engine of the South, based on cash crops including tobacco, cotton, and sugar cane. Historians believe that throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, 6-7 million enslaved Africans were forcibly imported to the United States. Ratified in 1788, the U.S. Constitution counted enslaved people as three-fifths of a person. In 1808, the U.S. Congress outlawed the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The domestic slave trade continued, and the population of enslaved people tripled over the next 50 years.

One-third of the enslaved population lived and worked in the South, but the North benefited greatly from the wealth derived from the tobacco and cotton industries, particularly the financial sector. Northern businesses also made products that supported slavery (i.e., iron cages to transport slaves).

Civil War

Despite the fear and terror that had been instilled in those who were enslaved, slave rebellions and other uprisings occurred since the beginning of enslavement, one of the most famous being Nat Turner's Rebellion in 1831. Northern states outlawed enslavement at various times during the 19th century, and Northerners and Free Black people began helping enslaved people run away through a network later known as the Underground Railroad; it is estimated that 40,000-100,000 enslaved people found their freedom this way. Many others were captured, beaten, and sometimes murdered for attempting to run away.

As tensions grew, so did the North's desire to end the institution of slavery, contributing to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. Though President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, it would take another two years for all those who were enslaved to be freed. The Proclamation's announcement in Texas on June 19, 1865 is commemorated today as the federal holiday of Juneteenth.

Reconstruction and Black Codes

The Civil War, while won by the anti-slavery Northern forces, did not resolve all matters. Approximately four million formerly enslaved people struggled with shelter and lack of economic opportunity. After less than a dozen years of an attempted Southern Reconstruction (1865-1877), forces of opposition, such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), created a system of American serfdom that continued to oppress the formerly enslaved, their descendants, and those who looked like them – Black people.

JEWISH HISTORY OF ENSLAVEMENT OF AFRICANS AND THEIR DESCENDANTS

Jews began to [migrate to the American colonies](#) as early as 1654. The earliest Jewish settlers to the American colonies were about twenty individuals fleeing Portuguese conquest of Brazil, then controlled by the Dutch. Subsequent early waves of Jewish immigrants included Sephardic Jews who arrived in the mid-1650s and settled largely along the eastern seaboard; Ashkenazic Jews from Germany who arrived in the 1840s and established themselves in smaller cities in the midwest, west, and the south; and Ashkenazic Jews from Eastern Europe who arrived in large numbers in the late 1800s.

Some synagogues and individuals from that early period have been documented as supporting and participating in chattel slavery. For example, Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim was constructed in 1749 in Charleston, South Carolina by enslaved Black people, as ordered by David Lopez Jr., a prominent Jewish enslaver at the time. This included [at least two enslaved artisans](#) who were trained carpenters named Kit and George, along with the enslaved persons of another enslaver. The silver casting that held the synagogue's Torah scroll was also thought to be repaired by an enslaved person. In 2019, a year after the city of Charleston [issued a formal apology](#) for its role in enslavement, the congregation installed a plaque commemorating the history of the building, the contributions of the enslaved laborers, and committing to the "equality of all people."

Other [prominent Jews who enslaved people](#) include Aaron Lopez, a Sephardic merchant in Newport, Rhode Island who sent enslaved people to North Carolina; Moses and George Mordecai, who married plantation owners; Rachel Mordecai who married Aaron Lazarus, and whose children enslaved at least 30 people; and Beaufort Joel Henry, a rabbi's son who enslaved at least 10 people. The Lehman Brothers, German Jewish immigrants, owned enslaved people in Alabama to tend their cotton crops and benefited from enslaving people by investing in and trading in [cotton](#). [Rabbis also expressed their outright support](#) for enslavement, such as Rabbi M.J. Raphall in his then well-known [Bible View of Slavery Sermon](#), and Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise who was not in favor of slavery but was willing to accept it as the price to maintain the Union. (Read more [Wise and the Civil War](#)).

Importantly, some Jews were leaders in local and national campaigns for the abolition of slavery before the Civil War. Similarly, many Jewish leaders, congregations, and institutions actively fought for civil rights during the Reconstruction period and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Many Jews and Jewish organizations, including the RAC, have remained active in the continuing battles against racism for decades.

Nonetheless, Jewish-owned businesses, like those owned by Americans of other faiths and no faith, benefited from the cotton trade and the trade of other commodities supported by chattel slavery, even if they were not themselves directly involved in the enslavement or trade of human beings.

A LOOK AT REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.'S VIEWS ON REPARATIONS

During Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s [historic 1963 speech](#) at the March on Washington for Jobs and Justice, he spoke of a "promissory note" the Founders bequeathed to the nation:

"Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation...One hundred years later the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land. And so, we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition. In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check.

When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This

note was a promise that all men — yes, Black men as well as white men — would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as its citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked insufficient funds.

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt.

We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so, we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.”

Dr. King's words were not simply a plea to end legal segregation or to gain the right to vote; they were a call to the nation to fulfill the obligations enshrined within the Declaration of Independence. The “promissory note,” as Dr. King described it, includes the building blocks of the case for reparations.

CALCULATING REPARATIONS



INTRODUCTION

Reparations can be broadly summarized by the following three things: Acknowledgment of the harms caused (education and apology), Repair (ensuring that policies and practices with racially discriminatory impacts are discontinued and the effects addressed), and Compensation (through financial, material, tax or other compensatory means). While we have yet to endorse a specific proposal for reparations, we present various approaches and look at the different ways organizations, elected officials, and legislatures have considered key questions concerning the type, amount, recipients, and process for reparations.

CALCULATING REPARATIONS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Income measures – Some scholars have sought to calculate the unpaid services (work) provided to white America by those who were enslaved, less the value of uncompensated services provided (food, housing, etc.). Proposed calculations include:

- [\\$1.5 trillion](#), based on a 1983 calculation that assumed 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 proposal by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. reflecting wages for 4 million enslaved people.
- [\\$5-15 trillion](#) based on the current value of 1983 calculations of wages earned by non-enslaved workers and deducting the cost of care of those enslaved.
- [\\$17 trillion](#) based on a 2019 calculation that assumed a 24-hour workday for enslaved people.
- [\\$59 trillion](#) based on an hourly wage of \$7.25 from 1790-1860, plus a 2% interest rate

Wealth measures – Some scholars have looked at the disparity in wealth as an indicator of discrimination’s ongoing impact. A study by the [Brookings Institution](#) found that wealth levels of both Black and white families were at \$0 for the lowest wealth quintile (20%) and that differences were greatest at the highest wealth levels and ages. White average wealth (heavily influenced by very wealthy families) was \$929,000, 6.7 times the average wealth of Black family’s average wealth of \$138,100. This indicates that wealth differences increase over time and generations. The Brookings study also found that wealth level differences were not impacted by educational differences and have increased over the past 20 years.

“40 acres and a mule” – In January 1865, Union General William T. Sherman issued [Special Field Order 15](#), which provided for the allocation of 40 acres to formerly enslaved people. The land was taken from 400,000 acres of land confiscated from Confederate landowners in South Carolina and Georgia (mules were not part of the order, but [some were given away by the Army](#)). Some of the land was [redistributed](#) by June 1865, but the order was short-lived. After President Lincoln’s assassination on April 4, 1865, President Andrew Jackson vetoed the accompanying legislation. The order was reversed, and the land that had been given was returned to white landowners. Today, General Sherman’s order is memorialized in the congressional designation of reparations legislation as “H.R. / S. 40.”

[Calculations](#) of the present value of “40 acres and a mule” differs widely. Assuming compensation only for the descendants of the four million people who were enslaved (and assuming one million families of four persons), calculations based on the current value of farmland range from \$486 billion (\$16,300 to each of 30 million who could trace lineage to an enslaved ancestor) to \$2.6 trillion (\$80,000+ per person).

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT OF ENSLAVEMENT

The enduring psychological, economic, spiritual, social, and other scars of enslavement continue to be present for the descendants of enslaved Africans and millions of Black Americans. The recent book by Linda Villarosa [Under the Skin: The Hidden Toll of Racism on American Lives and On the Health of the Nation](#) provides background on the devastating effects of the history of enslavement.

(Note that some of the preceding calculations may somewhat overstate present value as they apply an interest rate in excess of 2% or inflation factors that apply to prices of goods rather than labor, but they likely also understate the initial losses, as they generally do not try to value the losses for discrimination post-1863 Emancipation.)

NATIONAL REPARATIONS LEGISLATION

U.S. Senate: Senators Mazie Hirono (D-HI) and Cory Booker (D-NJ) introduced the first reparations for slavery bill in the U.S. Senate in 2019. The bill (S.1083) compiles and synthesizes documentation of the institution of slavery, the role of both federal and state governments in support of slavery, and it also addresses other forms of racial discrimination and the trauma that still exists today.

U.S. House: The late Representative John Conyers, Jr. (D-MI) first introduced a reparations bill (H.R. 3745) in the 101st Congress of 1989 and reintroduced the bill in each subsequent congress until he passed away in October 2019. The legislation sought to establish a commission to: 1) examine slavery and discrimination in the United States from 1619 to present, including the present negative impact of slavery on the descendants of enslaved Africans; and 2) recommend appropriate remedies that would include examining the need for a formal apology from the United States government, compensation in some form, and determining eligibility to receive reparations.

Under the sponsorship of Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX), the House Judiciary Committee voted H.R. 40 out of committee in April 2021 — a historic accomplishment that, unfortunately, did not lead to a vote on the House floor. In 2022, Rep. Jackson Lee and the H.R. 40 Strategy Group known as the “Why We Can’t Wait Coalition” called on President Joe Biden to issue an Executive Order to create a H.R. 40 Commission, which has not happened as of Spring 2024.

In January 2023, Rep. Jackson Lee and Senator Booker reintroduced S./H.R. 40 in the 118th Congress. The [Union for Reform Judaism](#) joined with other [faith leaders](#) and almost 30 Jewish organizations that support the creation of reparations commission through legislation or executive order

EXAMPLES OF REPARATIONS OUTSIDE THE U.S.

Apartheid – When South Africa ended its racist policy of Apartheid in 1994, the country established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Its mandate was to investigate human rights abuses committed by the apartheid government, as well as recommend reparations and other policies to redress the abuse.

The Commission recommended that every victim of Apartheid-sanctioned violence receive from the government [approximately \\$3,500 per year for six years](#). Only a tiny number of recipients, 16,397 as of 2012, received reparations, just a fraction of the number of people who were impacted negatively by the regime. In addition to the number of victims impacted, there were many people who had been killed, abducted, or had simply “disappeared.” As of March 2022, the Reparations fund was worth about 1.9 billion dollars and many South Africans claim that they are still owed reparations. [Other forms of reparations](#) recommended by the Commission included educational support, housing, access to healthcare, and rehabilitation of communities.

The Holocaust – Following the Holocaust, West Germany agreed to pay reparations that largely went to survivors of Nazi atrocities.

As of 2023, Germany’s reparations payments totaled about [80 billion euros](#) (87 billion U.S. dollars), including payments to the State of Israel. Another [1.4 billion euros](#) (1.5 billion U.S. dollars) is slated to be paid in 2024, eclipsing the 1.2 billion euros (1.3 billion U.S. dollars) paid in 2023.

Germany also offered an official apology for the Holocaust and established new institutions, laws, and practices meant to educate the public on the horrors of its history, with the goal of preventing such tragedies in the future.

EXAMPLES OF U.S. REPARATIONS

Japanese Internment Survivors- 120,000 Japanese Americans were immorally and illegally forced by the U.S. government into internment camps during World War II. Recognizing the error of this racist policy, Congress made two attempts at reparations for Japanese Americans: The [Japanese American Claims Act of 1948](#) appropriated payments totaling \$38 million to settle 23,000 claims, which didn't adequately cover total damages to Japanese Americans that was estimated to be by the Japanese American Claims Act to have an actual cost of \$131 million. The [Civil Liberties Act of 1988](#) acknowledged the injustice of the internment camps and offered a formal apology. Survivors each received \$20,000. By 1998, survivors had collected a total payout of \$1.6 billion - an important gesture, even if it did not approach the actual costs in lost income, property, and livelihood.

Victims of Forced Sterilization – Thirty-three states practiced some form of [eugenics during the 20th century](#), with the sanction of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in 1921's *Buck v. Bell* that permitted forced sterilization. Also known as "racial improvement" or "planned breeding," many people with mental or physical disabilities, as well as poor Black women, were victimized to rid the population of their "undesirable" traits.

Out of thirty-three states, only North Carolina set up a reparations program to compensate its victims. The state sterilized close to 7,600 people, most of whom are not alive today. In 2014, the state passed a \$10 million reparations program that gave almost [200 living victims approximately \\$50,000 each](#).

Rosewood Massacre – In 1923, the mostly Black Gulf Coast town of Rosewood, FL, was [destroyed by a race riot](#). At least six Black residents and two white residents were killed, although many descendants said the loss of life was much greater. In 1994, Florida agreed to a reparations package for the descendants of Black residents totaling \$3.36 million dollars, including college scholarships for the descendants.

Reparations by Universities – Several colleges and universities are currently undertaking reparations efforts, [including schools](#) that have recognized the financial benefits they reaped from complicity in enslavement. For example, [Georgetown University](#) is determining how reparations may compensate the descendants of 272 enslaved people who were used two centuries ago as financial collateral to keep the university afloat. Similarly, [Princeton Theological Seminary](#) is working on reparations to address the ways in which it benefited from the slave economy over the course of its history. And in its report [Harvard and the Legacy of Slavery](#), the nation's oldest university makes several recommendations to redress its past ties to slavery and racist "race science."

JEWISH TEACHINGS



INTRODUCTION

Our commitment to reparations for Black Americans is rooted in our Jewish tradition and teachings. In this section, we highlight biblical, rabbinical, and modern-day texts that inform our views. These texts include references to enslavement, freedom, remuneration for damages and wrong doings, and other concepts that relate directly to reparations as a remedy for the injustice experienced by the Black community in the United States.

Note that this list is not exhaustive. For more, please visit the Resources Section where you will find video links to rabbinic sermons on reparations.

RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

BIBICAL TEXTS

Genesis 15:13-14

(After Abraham has been commanded to leave his land and go to Canaan)

“And [God] said to Abraham, “Know that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and afflicted four hundred years. But then I will bring judgment upon the nation they are serving, after that they shall go out with many possessions.”

Exodus 3:19-22

(God speaking to Moses at the burning bush)

“Yet I know that the king of Egypt will let you go only because of a greater might. So, I will stretch out My hand and smite Egypt with various wonders which I will work upon them; after that he shall let you go. And I will dispose the Egyptians favorably toward this people, so that when you go, you will not go away empty-handed. Each woman shall ask of her neighbor and the lodger in her house objects of silver and gold, and clothing, and you shall put these on your sons and daughters, thus stripping the Egyptians.”

Exodus 12:34-36

(Israelites preparing to leave Egypt after the 10th plague)

“So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders. The Israelites had done Moses’ bidding and asked of the Egyptians objects of silver and gold, and clothing. And Elohim (Ruach) had disposed the Egyptians favorably toward the people, and they let them have their request; thus they stripped the Egyptians.”

Deuteronomy 15:12-15

“If a fellow Hebrew, man, or woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall set him free. When you set him free, do not let him go empty-handed: Furnish him out of the flock, threshing floor, and vat, with which the Eternal your God has blessed you. Bear in mind that you were slaves in the land of Egypt and the Eternal your God redeemed you; therefore, I enjoin this commandment upon you today.”

Deuteronomy 15:18

“When you do set either one free, do not feel aggrieved; for in the six years you have been given double the service of a hired worker.”

RABBINIC TEXTS

Bava Kamma 83b:1

MISHNAH: One who injures another is liable to pay compensation for that injury due to five types of indemnity: He must pay for damage, for pain, for medical costs, for loss of livelihood, and for humiliation.

Gittin 55a:12

The Mishnah teaches that Rabbi Yohanan ben Gudgeda further testified about a stolen beam that was already built into a building and said that the injured party receives the value of the beam but not the beam itself.

Regarding this, the Sages taught in a baraita – an oral tradition – (Tosefta, Bava Kamma 10:5): If one robbed another of a beam and built it into a building, Beit Shammai says: He must destroy the entire building and return the beam to its owners. And Beit Hillel says: The injured party receives only the value of the beam but not the beam itself, due to an ordinance instituted for the sake of the penitent. To encourage repentance, the Sages were lenient and required the robber to return only the value of the beam. The Mishnah was taught in accordance with the opinion of Beit Hillel.

Sanhedrin 37a

In the Talmud, we learn that all people are descended from a single being so that no person can say, “my ancestor is greater than yours.” (Sanhedrin 37a).

Pirkei De Rabbi Eliezer 11:5-6

“God created humanity from the four corners of the earth - yellow clay, and white sand, black loam, and red soil. Therefore, the earth can declare to no part of humanity that it does not belong here, that this soil is not their rightful home.” (Pirkei De Rabbi Eliezer 11:5-6)

Mishnah Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah 1.1

Our Jewish texts are also clear on the importance of restitution for wrongs committed. Maimonides linked the payment of damages to the concept of t’shuvah (return/repentance), noting that repentance must accompany the financial commitment. Racial healing can only begin to be achieved when this systemic oppression is recognized and accounted for, when t’shuvah is carried out.

MODERN TEXTS

Moses, Man of the Mountain by Zora Neale Hurston

(Pharaoh and Moses are negotiating after the 9th plague)

“Moses,” he said next morning, “as bad as I hate to see you in any form or fashion, I am a reasonable man. So I am prepared to let you go and take the children of Israel to go serve your God, but your flocks and your herds stay right here. You understand me, don’t you?”

“I heard you, Pharaoh, but when we go out to worship, not a hoof will be left in Egypt.”

“If you are only going out to worship your God as you say, what do you need livestock for?”

“We don’t know what we might need to serve God with until we get there. The flocks and the herds go with us, or we don’t go.”

“Well, you don’t go then. Egypt will not be robbed like that.”

REPARATIONS INITIATIVES:

How to take action



INTRODUCTION

In this section, we highlight different approaches that congregations, communities, and individuals have taken to learn about and become more involved in supporting or instituting reparations. This list is not exhaustive. Please let us know of congregations or communities doing interesting work in this area so that we can include them in this resource. (See the submission form at the end of this section).

All contact information is up to date as of April 2024 and we will do our best to ensure this information stays updated moving forward. Please contact **Yolanda Savage-Narva ysavage-narva@rac.org for any inquires.

Beth Emet The Free Synagogue, Evanston, Illinois:

Background: In 2019, the City of Evanston voted to use tax revenue from the sale of recreational cannabis to support reparations. Up to \$10 million was allocated over a 10-year period. An additional \$10 million over 10 years was added thanks to revenue from a real estate transfer tax. The city approved the distribution of the first \$400,000 in reparations payments to eligible households via support for home acquisition or improvements. This use of the funds connected to Evanston's past support of redlining and exploitive real estate practices that denied home ownership to many Black community members. The City Council has created a Reparations Committee which, with community input, will determine how to distribute the remaining funds.

The City initiative alone was never intended to provide reparations to all eligible residents of the community.

To complement the city's effort, leaders in the Black community organized a separate effort, called the Reparations Stakeholders Authority of Evanston (RSAE). RSAE's purpose is to raise and govern the distribution of funds to provide reparations to the community and allow for community input in the City program. RSAE has worked with the Evanston Community Foundation (ECF) to establish the Evanston Reparations Community Fund (ERCF), a 501(c)(3) organization. The ECF administers and acts as investment fiduciary of the ERCF, which is governed by a board of 18-25 Black community members.

In recognition of the ways in which Evanston has become an inspiration to local reparations efforts around the country, Robin Rue Simmons, the driver of the Evanston reparations effort, has founded First Repair, a non-profit focused on supporting local reparations efforts. First Repair has also partnered with the National African Reparations Coalition (NAARC) to create a Local Reparations Center in Evanston. For more information visit [First Repair](#).

Congregation Involvement: Beth Emet has a long history of engagement in matters of racial equity. Like countless organizations, activists, and individuals across the nation, the murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmad Arbery and George Floyd spurred them to action. After the City of Evanston adopted its reparations policy, members of the congregation's Racial Justice Committee sought to support this effort. They determined that the role of the congregation should be to support reparations efforts ethically, morally, and financially. With the strong support of its Rabbis, Beth Emet formed a Reparations Working Group, which issued a Position Paper [In Support of Reparations](#) that laid out the history of systemic racial discrimination in Evanston, as well as the Jewish case for reparations.

Beth Emet's Rabbi Andrea London is a leader of an interfaith clergy group of eighteen predominantly white Evanston-based faith organizations (including two synagogues, 14 church based groups, the Bahá'ís and a Buddhist Temple) that has already raised \$800,000 on behalf of ERCF, to fund additional reparations. The goal is to make this an annual commitment. One of the Beth Emet's Reparations Working Group members also serves as a Board member and treasurer of the ECF.

Additional steps taken by Beth Emet's Reparations Working Group:

- Communications: Making sure the topic of reparations is visible, current, and correct on the Temple's website, and that Reparations are mentioned regularly in the Temple newsletter.
- Education: The congregation's educational efforts include a course based on the Amherst "[Stolen Beam](#)" [curriculum](#) and a newly devised Evanston-centric course offered in-person and virtually to other religious institutions and synagogues. Beth Emet is also developing an educational program around the documentary film, "[The Big Payback](#)," about the fight for reparations in Evanston.
- T'shuvah Campaign: Beth Emet is raising additional funds to contribute to the Evanston Reparations Community Fund led by the Interfaith Clergy Group noted earlier. In past years, Beth Emet raised \$60,000 for the ERCF, all of which will be spent under the direction of Evanston's Black communities.

For more information on Beth Emet's efforts, contact: Matt Feldman at matthewfeldman@gmail.com.

Amherst Jewish Community, a Reconstructionist Congregation, developed the Stolen Beam Course to educate on and encourage support for Reparations.

"The name 'Stolen Beam' is a reference to a Rabbinic deliberation in an ancient Jewish text about the right thing to do when we discover that the house in which we live was built on a stolen beam. One rabbi argues that the entire house must be torn down, and the beam returned. Another rabbi argues that it makes no sense to destroy the home, yet some form of acknowledgement and compensation is owed to the owners of the stolen beam – thus the metaphor for the realization that our country was built on stolen land, with stolen lives and stolen labor.

Although we believe the question of reparations for indigenous people in the U.S. is an equally important one, this course focuses specifically on issues related to reparations for African Americans. It views reparations within the context of recent writings about U.S. history, post-Holocaust history, Jewish moral philosophy, and systemic racism." – The Stolen Beam

Background: [The Stolen Beam Series](#) was born in 2020 when the Jewish Community of Amherst (JCA) formed the Tzedek Racial Justice Initiative, including a reparations subcommittee. The group, comprised of supporters and opponents of reparations, engaged in a study program that included learning and writing about enslavement and its contributions to the foundations of national wealth. The group ultimately supported reparations and is working to educate others. The congregation is involved with other statewide reparations committees, collaborating with Reparations4Amherst, and advocating for reparations at the federal level.

The Stolen Beam five-part series includes: The Case for Reparations; Historical Examples of Reparations; Models of/ Proposals for U.S. Reparations for Descendants of Enslaved Africans in the U.S: Federal, Municipal and Local Efforts; Some Jewish Perspectives on Reparations. Stolen Beam includes resources for each part of the series, such as, [Learning from the Germans](#).

Relatedly, in 2021, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association (RRA), with which the JCA is affiliated, adopted a resolution titled, [Reparations for Slavery, Indigenous Genocide and Systemic Racism in North America/Turtle Island](#).

For more information, please contact: Devorah Jacobson at devorahjacobson18@gmail.com and Jeffrey Gold at jeffreypgold51@gmail.com, or write to stolenbeam@gmail.com.

Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim a Reform congregation in Charleston, South Carolina:

Background: After the City of Charleston issued a formal apology for its involvement in the enslavement of Africans, the congregation [installed a plaque](#) commemorating the history of the building, the contributions of the enslaved laborers, and committing to the “equality of all people.”

Boston Workers Circle, a state affiliate of the national Workers’ Circle:

Background: The Boston Worker’s Circle Center for Jewish Culture and Social Justice (BWC) describes itself as “a multigenerational community. . . where Jewish identity is rooted in cultural heritage and the pursuit of a better world.” As its Reparations Working Group Chair, Nakhie Faynshteyn, said, “60 years ago, BWC was part of the white flight to Brookline – a largely white and Jewish city outside Boston – from Dorchester, which became a predominantly Black neighborhood due to blockbusting and redlining. BWC is working to reinvest and reconnect to this and other Communities of Color given that those in the white, Jewish community have gained a lot since.”

BWC’s work began with a connection to a multi-faith, Black-led campaign now called the Grassroots Reparations Campaign (GRC). The BWC Reparations Working Group is part of its Acting for Racial and Economic Justice Committee (AFREJ) and follows the five dimensions delineated by [The UN Framework on Reparations](#) to “discuss and act together to build a culture of reparations in our lives and in our community. These dimensions make it clear that reparations are more than just writing a check; it is a process of acknowledging and taking responsibility for the impacts of slavery and the racist institutions and systems implemented after its abolishment (i.e. Jim Crow laws, segregation, redlining, the prison-industrial complex, etc.) from which white people benefit”. For more information, see BWC’s [Reparations Group Document](#).

Nakhie Faynshteyn testified on behalf of BWC at a hearing of the Massachusetts’ legislature’s Joint Committee on Racial Equity, Civil Rights, and Inclusion. Nakhie has also advocated for Massachusetts’ congressional delegation to support H.R. 40. More directly, they’ve been involved with the [Ujima Fund](#) – a democratic, member-run organization building cooperative economic infrastructure in Boston, with a mission to return wealth to working class Communities of Color. They are also working to encourage people with institutional connections to support [Ujima’s Good Business Alliance](#).

GRC sponsors and promotes two annual Reparations Sabbaths/Sundays. [Download a Toolkit with instructions and suggestions for holding a Reparations Sabbath](#).

For more information contact Nickolas ‘Nakhie’ Faynshteyn at nickfayn@yahoo.com and Lynne Layton at Laytonlynn22@gmail.com.

The Philadelphia Quakers are helping Black Germantown residents gain financial literacy, create wills, and protect their assets and secure their homes:

Background: In 2018, members of Philadelphia, PA’s Green Street Monthly Meeting of Friends, a Quaker community in the diverse Germantown neighborhood, began a multi-year discernment process under the stewardship of a reparations committee. The group felt that by working in relationship with Black Germantown residents, their entire community would be enlivened.

The Meeting House congregation was founded in the 1880s and has financial reserves at their disposal to commit to reparations efforts. Green Street owns almost an entire city block, and members leave money and stock to the meeting when they die. That includes a gift more than half a century ago of shares in what later became GlaxoSmithKline, from a daughter of one of the founders. In May 2021, they agreed to commit \$50,000 per year to reparations work over the next decade to benefit Black residents of Germantown.

The Green Street Friends reparations project is led by its Black members, and the committee has both authority and responsibility to set priorities around programming and reparations funding. In 2022, in partnership with the non-profit legal services agency VIP Philadelphia, The Green Street Friends offered four pro bono legal clinics to help Black Germantown homeowners create wills, understand their deeds, and address tangled titles to their homes. These efforts help protect and secure Black wealth, as well help stabilize Black homeownership.

Members of the Green Street committee see reparations as “economic and spiritual repairs for the intergenerational harms of slavery, Jim Crow, and their afterlives.” In the future, they are considering ways to help with an array of issues that include mental health, food insecurity, and lack of resources in schools.

For more information Christie Duncan-Tessmer, General Secretary, (215) 241-7210, cduncan-tessmer@pym.org

The Fund for Reparations Affinity Group, Denver, Colorado:

Background: The Fund for Reparations Affinity Group in Denver, CO is the first foundation-based reparations giving circle in the United States. It is “a philanthropic home for Americans of European descent who recognize that their wealth has roots in the enslavement of Africans in the United States, and/or that they have enjoyed financial advantages due to systemic inequities and policies that have benefited white Americans at the expense of Black Americans for generations.”

The Fund was co-founded by white donors and is managed by the Denver Black Reparations Council under the auspices of The Denver Foundation, a large and experienced community foundation that stewards over 1,000 donor funds. As stated on the Denver Foundation’s website: “Giving circles and affinity groups help democratize philanthropy, welcoming people of all giving levels to the power of giving. Giving circles and affinity groups connect individuals who donate their money to pooled funds shared with other donors. The donors decide together which nonprofit organizations or community projects to support. Through the process, donors build strong connections and increase their engagement in the community.”

For information about the Fund for Reparations Affinity Group, please email Genevieve Laca at glaca@denverfoundation.org or call 303.300.1790.

Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey:

Background: In 2016 Princeton Theological Seminary embarked on a two-year, comprehensive, internal audit of its historic connections to enslavement, to “repent and repair” as needed. The [results were made public](#) in 2018. Subsequently, the seminary undertook a year of processing, teaching, and creating a plan for meaningful reparations. While the seminary itself was not built with slave-labor and leaders at the time denounced slavery, several faculty members enslaved people. The Seminary also profited through investments made with those who were enriched by slave-labor. Additionally, members of the seminary were leaders in the American Colonization Movement (sending former slaves to Africa).

In 2019, the Seminary announced it was committing \$27.6 million to its [Act of Repair Action Plan](#). The Plan includes steps to:

- Honor the legacy of the African American experience at Princeton Seminary through the naming of prominent campus spaces;
- Offer 20 new scholarships each year for students from historically disenfranchised communities to ensure that a Seminary education is affordable and does not further contribute to the disproportionate debt burden of students from these communities;

- Evaluate the curriculum and pedagogy in light of our history;
- Enhance community partnerships and support historically disenfranchised communities in and around Princeton; and
- Ensure that every member of the Princeton Seminary community understands our history.

To date, the names of several buildings have been changed at public gatherings of rededication. The promised scholarships are in place, as is an annual Doctorate Fellow position that will be awarded to descendants of enslaved people. In addition, the newly created Betsy Stockton Center for Black Church Studies supports the social justice efforts of current and future leaders of Black churches, sponsors forums around the country, and partners with seminaries in Africa, particularly in Liberia to build strong faith communities that have grown from the progeny of those who were sent to Liberia from the US. The Seminary is also building relationships with local Black churches to enhance and support their ministries and communities of faith.

More information can be found at slavery.ptsem.edu or by contacting the [Director of the Betsy Stockton Center, Reverend Dr. David Lattimore](#)

Reparations 4 Slavery

Background: Upon discovering her family’s slave-owning past, Lotte Lieb Dula developed a web portal for white Americans who want to come to terms with their own family’s history by “walking the path of racial healing through making reparations.” In addition to offering research techniques, the webpage includes information on how to make partial personal reparations, as well as other reparations resources.

For more information, contact info@reparations4slavery.com or visit reparations4slavery.com. Linked in the Reparations 4 Slavery website is also Reparationsproject.org, which offers redress through the

Quarterman & Keller Fund, a 501c3 organization that makes grants aimed at narrowing the wealth gap for descendants of enslaved people. Randy Quarterman, the descendent of enslaved people in coastal Georgia, came together with Sarah Eisner, the descendent of the Quartermans’ enslavers, to launch this initiative. “We created the Reparations Project because we believe that we cannot wait for the government alone to provide programs for redress and healing, though we believe our government must also do the work of truth telling and begin the work of paying reparations in a multitude of ways. We want to create new models for individuals, descendant-families, and the nation to repair racialized, caste-based injustice against Black/African American communities that began in 1619 and continues today.”

For more information, contact the Quarterman Keller Foundation at info@reparationsproject.org or visit its website: [About - Reparations Project](#)

Groups Undertaking Educational Initiatives

Background: In May of 2021, the Religious Action Center (RAC) and the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), in partnership with Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills and Temple Sinai of Washington, D.C., completed a three-part series on reparations. The program featured panelists with policy and academic expertise as well as perspectives on the Jewish case for reparations. Temple Sinai’s website includes links to the series and other reparations resources templesinaidc.org/multiracial-sinai/#reparations. Temple Sinai is also a member of WIN, the Washington Interfaith Network, through which it works with leaders to develop financing and ownership opportunities that build Black wealth and create new units of affordable and sustainable housing.

For more information, contact Steven Metalitz at sjmetalitz@aol.com.

The RAC also sits at the Interfaith Reparatory Justice Table, representing the only Jewish, non-Christian

denomination in this coalition. The coalitions discussed reparations within the U.S. and internationally as it relates to issues including the racial wealth gap, voting rights, housing and land debt, and Black maternal health. The coalition brings the faith community's voice to bear in the reparations space.

B'nai Israel, Sacramento, CA:

Background: Prior to a Civil Rights trip to the South, B'nai Israel, an approximately 600-family congregation in Sacramento, CA, created a series of book discussions, including a discussion of Ta-Nehisi Coates' June 2014 article in *The Atlantic*, "[The Case for Reparations](#)". The group also read articles on the Jewish case for reparations, including [Atonement, the Jewish Case for Black Reparations](#) from the Jewish News of Northern California. They read material with an anti-reparations perspective. The group considered Nahma Nadich's "[An American Teshuvah](#)" and the Brookings Institution's, "[Why We need reparations for Black Americans](#)" as well as other articles about the Black-white wealth gap. For more information, contact Judy Heiman at Hamentashen@msn.com.

California has a Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans, which issued an interim report on June 1, 2022. The interim report includes a set of preliminary recommendations for policies that the California Legislature could adopt to remedy the ongoing and compounding harms experienced by African Americans because of enslavement and its lingering effects. On June 29, 2023, the Taskforce to Study and Develop Reparations Proposals for African Americans issued its final report to legislature.

[Full Report - The California Reparations Report - Final Report - AB 3121 - California Department of Justice](#)

See calmatters.org/california-divide/2023/01/california-reparations and oag.ca.gov/ab3121/reports for more information.

M'kor Hayim, Tucson, Arizona

Background: M'kor Hayim is a small, 65-household congregation in Tucson, AZ that started a Racial Justice Task Force the week after George Floyd was murdered. They have held a series of virtual monthly meetings, including one in November 2020 focused on reparations. Participants received in advance a list of suggested readings and videos and the meeting began with a Zoom poll: "Do you favor reparations for Black Americans? Do you oppose reparations for Black Americans? Are you unsure?" The group was very divided. After watching an [NBC YouTube clip on Reparations](#), two Racial Justice Committee members engaged in a debate followed by discussion breakouts considering, "If there were reparations, what form should they take and who should get them?" A poll at the end of the program found 65% in favor of reparations, 35% against, and no one unsure. The program ended with discussion about actions to support H.R./S. 40, and several people committed to contact their elected representatives. Several congregants, as well as the congregation itself, officially joined the Tucson Branch of the NAACP.

Coming To The Table (CTTT), whose motto is "Taking America Beyond the Legacy of Enslavement (TABLE)," brings together descendants of enslavers and descendants of the enslaved to promote racial healing. Pages 28-37 of their Reparations Guide contains a list of reparative acts that might challenge and expand what many think of when they hear the word "reparations."

Below is CTTT's recommendations for steps that individuals can take.

INDIVIDUAL OPPORTUNITIES



INDIVIDUAL OPPORTUNITIES

1. Create, lead, or join national efforts to organize the national discussion on race.
2. Seek further inspiration for reparations work through organizations such as the Movement for Black Lives, NAACP, the National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC), the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA), Urban League, and Reparations4Slavery.com, a portal for white Americans walking the path of racial healing through making reparations.
3. Speak out and support initiatives, programs, and laws that correct racial injustices (i.e., affirmative action).
4. Support non-profits and other organizations led by African Americans that promote racial justice in your local area.
5. Join and donate to organizations that are working to correct inequalities via legal and educational efforts.
6. In your personal and professional life, work for the civil rights of African Americans.
7. Advocate for the hiring of African Americans in your workplace.
8. When you hear or see racism, speak up using whatever tactics work best for you, from direct confrontations to humor. Make clear that you do not share racist views. Turn the event into a teachable moment for others who may be present. Seek training on how best to do this by checking out resources provided by The Dialogue Company.
9. Find ways to support the African American community through public service (i.e., volunteering for after-school programs, one-on-one homework support, African American events, and festivals, etc.). Be aware of and careful to avoid white saviorism.
10. Patronize African American owned businesses; make a concerted effort to seek out African American doctors and medical professionals, attorneys, accountants, and sales and service professionals.
11. Join with a Black-led organization to organize a Juneteenth Festival in your local area.
12. Increase understanding for all on the impact of the legacy of slavery and systemic racism on Black and African Americans.

Reparations advocates agree that there is no substitute for a federal program of repair. That said, reparations also need to be made at the state, local, and personal levels. Reparations may be carried out by heads of state, by legislatures, by local councils and commissions, by nonprofits and business groups, and by local community groups, for example. Individuals may provide support through direct funding and through advocacy. We encourage you to take the strongest action you can based on these suggestions.

*** It is through our collective power that we can make a strong impact on the Reparations movement. And for our communities to be in partnership with one another, we would like to include more examples and specific opportunities others can engage in. If you have participated in or know of actions happening in your community or congregation, please fill out this form to propose a contribution to this toolkit and tell us more about all the great work that is possible!*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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A SPECIAL THANKS TO THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION ON SOCIAL ACTION’S REPARATIONS TASK FORCE FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS:

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FAQs



FAQS

Q: What are reparations?

A: According to the United Nations: “Adequate, effective, and prompt reparation is intended to promote justice by redressing gross violations of international human rights law or serious violations of international humanitarian law. Reparations should be proportional to the gravity of the violations and the harm suffered. In accordance with its domestic laws and international legal obligations, a State shall provide reparation to victims for acts or omissions which can be attributed to the State and constitute gross violations of international human rights law or serious violations of international humanitarian law. In cases where a person, a legal person, or other entity is found liable for reparation to a victim, such party should provide reparation to the victim or compensate the State if the State has already provided reparation to the victim.”¹

Q: What do reparations look like?

A: According to the UN, reparations include five key components: cessation/assurance of non-repetition, restitution/repatriation, compensation, satisfaction, and rehabilitation. Reparations are a concept rooted in international law that involves specific forms of repair to specific individuals, groups of people, or nations for specific harms they have experienced in violation of their human rights.² [Reparations are] recompense for past injustices—more than a handout, a payoff, hush money or a reluctant bribe. What I’m talking about is a national reckoning that would lead to a spiritual renewal.” ~Ta-Nehisi Coates³

Q: What is H.R. 40?

A: In 1989, the late Rep. John Conyers (D-MI), the longest-serving Black congressman, introduced H.R. 40, a bill calling for the creation of a special federal commission to study and develop reparation proposals for African Americans. The bill has been re-introduced in every subsequent congress. Today, its lead sponsor is Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee with 130 cosponsors as of July 2024.

Q: Why should Reform congregations support passage of H.R. 40?

A: As Jews, we are committed to Tikkun Olam, repairing the world. Reparations are a way of repairing the damage done by the injustice of chattel slavery and its legacy. How can we not, at the very least, support a bill that would study the issue and propose remedies?

Q: Enslavement of Africans and their descendants ended over a hundred years ago; why this interest in reparations now?

A: Throughout the decades, the forces of reaction and white supremacy suppressed legitimate claims to reparations, beginning with the collapse of Reconstruction. The legacy of enslavement faced by Black Americans continues to this day through inequities in education, employment, housing, and nearly every other aspect of life. These inequities will only continue and worsen if nothing is done. Moreover, the increased awareness of the murder of Black individuals at the hands of police, the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, and numerous books and articles have drawn the attention of many Americans to the inequities faced by Black Americans. As Hillel said, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?”

Q: Why should I pay for reparations? My family didn't enslave people. What does this have to do with me?

A: Whether or not our ancestors were enslavers or even discriminated against Black people, the United States government and many of our state and local governments have discriminated against Black people in ways that have directly limited opportunities for Black Americans, including the acquisition of wealth. The results are systemic, structural, and institutional in nature. This has included discrimination in government programs related to housing, education, employment, and more. Even if our own families didn't enslave people, even if we are recent immigrants, even if we didn't refuse to sell a home, even if we didn't withhold a loan or job, we have benefited from being part of a society whose history includes 250+ years of enslavement of Black people without pay and another 150+ years of governmental discrimination against Black citizens. The American economy was partially built on the backs of enslaved people, and neither they nor their ancestors were ever compensated for it. Even after emancipation, Black Americans faced unimaginable violence, discrimination, and inequity that has been passed from one generation to the next.

Q: Didn't we already pay reparations to enslaved people after the Civil War?

A: No. President Lincoln's assassination prevented reparations from happening. In January 1865, as the Civil War was nearing its end, Union General William T. Sherman issued Field Order No. 15, which redistributed 400,000 acres of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida coastline to formerly enslaved people in 40-acre parcels (hence the phrase "40 acres and a mule" as well as the "40" in H.R./S. 40). It was a revolutionary idea and might have gone a long way to changing the history of race relations in the United States if President Lincoln hadn't been assassinated. Unfortunately, Andrew Johnson, who became president upon Lincoln's death, revoked the order. Many of the freed people who had secured acres for themselves and their families wound up working (very much like slaves) for the same landowners who'd previously enslaved them.

Q: Are reparations just another form of social welfare? I already donate to several charities.

A: The goal of reparations is to have governments (local, state, and national) and other institutions recognize and correct the discrimination that they perpetrated or allowed throughout our nation's history, including during our lifetimes.

Q: Are reparations about giving money to individuals?

A: Reparations can take many forms, including expressions of remorse, education, congressional hearings, a national apology, the institution of relevant government programs, creation of tax incentives for Black-owned businesses, educational stipends to Black Americans, individual or community compensation, monetary compensation, or other approaches. Reparations can, but need not be, exclusively financial.

There are situations when giving money to individuals or families is appropriate as one form of reparations – community/direct reparations. But this is only one form. Reparations must occur at the federal, state, and local level. Wherever it occurs, it must involve the community it aims to serve.

Q: Who decides what reparations look like?

A: It is important for members of the African American community to be involved through neighborhood meetings, communal institutions, a national conversation, [truth and reconciliation commissions](#), or other avenues. Those who continue to be deeply impacted by the systemic effects of chattel slavery as well as other unjust policies must be at the forefront of these conversations.

Q: Our congregation is busy with so many other critical issues now. Why should we take on reparations for our social justice work?

A: Our religious identity as Jews is predicated on the concept of justice. “Justice, justice you shall pursue.” A fundamental aspect of our Jewish traditions – from *Kiddush*, to the later part of the V’ahavta, to the Pesach Seder – is acknowledging the “*hotzeiti et-chem mei-eretz Mitzrayim*,” being brought out of Egypt. The Torah portion *Mishpatim* states: “You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.” This verse reminds us of the importance of empathy for others.

Additionally, people in our own Jewish community are of African descent. While this may appear to be only for people outside of the Jewish community, reparations would also have a positive impact on people inside the Jewish community. We also learn that the work of repairing the world – bringing wholeness and compassion to our world, is not an exercise in charity. Rather, we need to admit that our own liberation is bound up in the liberation of others. The repair we seek to bring about is deeply rooted in our Jewish traditions and beliefs. It is the work of justice.

Q: Where can I learn more about my geographical location and its history of racial injustice and discrimination?

A: Whitewashing, or ignoring the history of enslavement and racial discrimination that is part of the American story, is damaging to Black and white people alike. To fully participate in the movement for reparations, it is important that white families revisit and relearn our country’s history through a lens of racial justice. Institutional racism impacts us all. We encourage you to [find out about your state’s history with slavery](#).

Q: What precedents are there for reparations?

A: While there is no direct historical corollary for reparations for slavery and ongoing systemic racism, the United States and the Jewish community has prior experience with reparations for wrongs committed.

Precedents for reparations include—but are not limited to—[Holocaust Restitution provided to victims of the Holocaust and to the state of Israel](#), the [Civil Liberties Act of 1988 that formally apologized and provided compensation for the internment of people of Japanese descent in the U.S. during World War II](#), and [The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act that applied to aboriginal land claims](#).