

Reparations

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Summary

Reparations are a form of redress for harms or wrongdoings committed against individuals and their descendants in the interest of justice and individual and collective healing and restoration. Reparations entail material and non-material restitution. A framework for effective and equitable reparations includes comprehensive, targeted, and backward- and forward-looking measures that are corrective, restorative, and evidence-based. Various arguments in opposition and support of reparations exist. Most of the arguments relate to liability, practicality, and public support. In the United States, those who oppose reparations argue that current citizens are not financially liable for past injustices, reparations are unattainable due to statute of limitations and enslaved people are no longer living, and reparations remain divisive. In contrast, reparatationists assert that taxpayers are responsible for the acts committed the by government, the U.S. government has a history of paying reparations and compensation which are indicative of practicality, and public division does not negate government accountability in interest of justice. Advancing reparations aligns with the mission of social work to enhance human well-being and achieve the goals of justice, human rights, and dismantling systemic and structural inequities.

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Defining Reparations

The term *reparations* derives from the ancient word *reparacioun* and, in Latin, the verb *reparare*, which means to repair or restore (Harper, n.d.; Latdict, n.d.). Various scholars, writers, and activists have proposed definitions for reparations. Brooks (2004) has explained it as “a moral obligation to apologize and to make that apology believable by doing something tangible called a ‘reparation’” (p. ix). In an article published in *The Atlantic*, Coates (2014) acknowledged reparations as “more than recompense for past injustices—more than a handout, a payoff, hush money, or a reluctant bribe” but as “a national reckoning that would lead to spiritual renewal” and “a revolution of the American consciousness” (para. IX). Taifa (2022) described reparations as “forms of compensation provided to those who have suffered human rights abuses or other forms of widespread systemic injustices, or to their descendants, usually in the aftermath of war, enslavement, or other forms of gross injustice” (p. 46). In consideration of the accumulated disadvantages from human rights abuses, Taiwo (2022) proposed reparations as an opportunity to “remake the world system” and redistribute global wealth to construct a justice-oriented world (p. 1). In a discussion on reparations for Indigenous peoples, the concept was defined as a process to amend past wrongs and mitigate suffering and pain (Lenzerini, 2008). Additionally, the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations (N’COBRA, n.d.-a) has offered reparations as “a

process of repairing, healing and restoring a people injured because of their group identity and in violation of their fundamental human rights by governments or corporations” (What is reparations section). N’COBRA advances reparations as redress for five slavery injury areas: peoplehood or culture, education, criminal punishment, health, and wealth (N’COBRA, Philadelphia, n.d.; Taifa, 2022).

From these multiple descriptions emerges a definition of reparations as the processes and means of redress from perpetrators or their representatives for harms or wrongdoings committed against people and their descendants in the interest of justice and individual and collective healing and restoration. Taiwo (2022) has theorized three general standpoints on reparations: harm repair, relationship repair, and constructivist. This definition fits the harm repair perspective because it focuses on “a conception of harm (or wrongdoing)” that lowered the “standard of welfare” for victims and inheritors, and thus, reparations aim to redistribute benefits or resources to close wealth, health, and other welfare gaps (Taiwo, 2022, p. 125). The other two viewpoints emphasize restoring relationships as a moral principle (relationship repair) and justly redistributing the advantages and disadvantages of racial capitalism (constructivist). However, Taiwo (2022) asserted that the three reparations views are not fundamentally opposite and that each has its strengths and limitations.

Reparations and reparation are often used interchangeably (Shepherd & Hemmings, 2022). Reparations are an internationally recognized process of restitution that involves non-material and material remedies. The non-material forms of reparations include symbolic gestures, such as acknowledgments, formal declarations, and apologies, whereas material forms of reparations are land, resources, the erection of monuments, mental health services, and direct monetary payment.

Principles of Reparations

Fundamental to definitions of reparations are principles that inform behaviors and decision-making on what it entails. The proposition “Nothing About Us Without Us,” which has anchored the activism of many peoples and movements, including the 1990s’ South African disability rights movement (Charlton, 1998; Pfeifer, 2022), is instrumental to ensuring effective and equitable redress. Reparations fail to meet its objectives and outcomes if those harmed, and their descendants do not decide the conditions of repair. Institutionalized self-determination is integral to reparations (Taiwo, 2022) and includes individual and collective self-determination, as Taifa (2022) explained:

the issue of self-determination for the descendants of Africans held as slaves in the U.S. to be key and central to a reparatory justice remedy. After the enslavement era Black people never had the opportunity to decide what our future would hold, with full appreciation of our options and reparations to put our choices into reality. (p. 35)

A basic principle for reparatory justice is that those who perpetuated the harm cannot dictate the remedy. This necessitates the creation of an independent structure to receive and allocate reparative remedies (National African-American Reparations Commission [NAARC], 2020). For example, African peoples, continental and diasporan, are the descendants of those who experienced forced migration, chattel enslavement, colonization, and apartheid and who, in the early 21st century, face ongoing anti-Black discrimination, aggression (state violence), and debts as consequences of European domination. Therefore, African peoples are central to the initiation, intervention, and evaluation of reparations for crimes against humanity, as described at the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance (United Nations Department of Public Information, 2002).

The concept of crimes against humanity is believed to have emerged in the late 18th or 19th century and, as defined by the Rome Statute of the International Court, denotes widespread or systemic acts committed against human populations (International Criminal Court, 2011; United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, n.d.). It is one of many crimes deemed serious by international law. The International Criminal Court (2011) has listed other serious crimes as genocide (e.g., intent to destroy fully or partially a group), war crimes (willful killing, torture, destruction), and crimes of aggression (armed forces against a sovereign state in violation of the Charter of the United Nations). Examples of crimes against humanity are murder, enslavement, extermination, deportation, imprisonment or deprivation of physical liberty, torture, sexual violence, persecution, forced disappearance, apartheid, and other inhumane acts (International Criminal Court, 2011).

The United Nations General Assembly has identified five principles of reparations for victims and their descendants because of gross violations of international human rights or humanitarian laws. The principles, including restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition, proclaim the following:

- Where possible, restitution should restore a victim to their original state before the gross violations.
- Compensation should offer appropriate material and moral damages proportional to the gravity of the harm or violation.
- Rehabilitation includes psychosocial and medical care, as well as legal and social services.
- Satisfaction is the cessation of harm, apologies, truth-telling, and commemorations and tributes to the victims or their ancestors and descendants.
- Examples of guarantees of non-repetition include transparency, effective civilian control of military and security forces, creation and observance of codes of conduct, reviewing and reforming laws contributing to or allowing gross violations, and abolition of oppressive structures. (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2005)

The United Nations further advises that remedies and reparations should be made available promptly, effectively, and adequately to promote justice. Reparations centralize the demand for reparatory justice, an international movement that calls on individuals who have caused, contributed to, and benefited from gross human justice violations and civil and criminal wrongdoing to redress and undo damages.

Framework for Reparations

Based on a synthesis of texts on reparatory justice, a framework for effective and equitable reparations contain comprehensive, targeted, and backward- and forward-looking measures that are corrective, restorative, and evidence-based. Remedies in proportion to the harms perpetuated are essential to effective and equitable reparations. In addition to full participation from those harmed, remedies should be at scale to redress harms and deliver individual and collective benefits, such as an individual receiving homeownership assistance or access to a community trust fund (Howard, 2020). Comprehensive redress, described as full repair by the National Black Cultural Information Trust (2023), is accessible, inclusive, and expansive (Taifa, 2022). Comprehensive redress is multiform to encompass cultural, educational, financial, health, and criminal/legal domains (N'COBRA, Philadelphia, n.d.). Full repair can help dismantle and restructure institutions and relationships (Henry, 2003), as well as reshape power dynamics (Taifa, 2022). The United Nations' five principles of reparations represent an international measure for comprehensive reparatory justice. Similarly, the NAARC (2023) has offered standards in a preliminary 10-point reparations plan. In NAARC's plan, reparations include a formal apology and Maafa (African Holocaust) museum, the right to repatriation and knowledge program, the right to land, funds for cooperative and socially responsible entrepreneurship, resources for healing and wellness, education, affordable housing and wealth generation, improvement of African American communities' information and communication infrastructure, the preservation of Black sacred sites and monuments, and repairing the criminal punishment system.

The unjust enrichment or benefits reaped at the expense of those harmed and their descendants requires targeted intervention that can effectively and justly address the causes and consequences of harms and wrongdoings. Brooks (2004) explained that historically reparations are asymmetrical measures designed to benefit those wronged and internationally have been regarded this way. Reparations are not ordinary public policy designed to equitably meet the needs of all people unless there is a case where all people are harmed (NAARC, 2020). For example, the German government, from 1945 to 2018, made reparations to Jewish victims, their descendants, and the state of Israel but not to all the citizens of Germany (Brooks, 2004; U.S. Department of State, n.d.).

Reparations necessitate an accounting of the past, present, and future with aims of cessation and non-repetition of harms to sufficiently target those harmed and their descendants. Backward- and forward-looking measures are inherent in corrective, distributive, and restorative justice. As Brophy (2006) described:

Reparations are programs that seek both to repair past damage and to build something that will help bring about racial justice and equality. They are about both “corrective justice” (correcting past harm) and “distributive justice” (redistributing wealth in the present). (p. xiii)

Reparations are consistent with restorative justice. Linking reparations to restorative justice aligns with the relationship repair view of reparations, which centers the moral values and expectations for relationships (Taiwo, 2022). Like restorative justice, reparations seek to acknowledge and remedy wrongdoings and, following agreed-on resolutions, restore those harmed, and hold perpetrators accountable. Restorative justice is at the core of Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which seeks to address harms, pursue truth telling, and promote healing rather than engage in existing legal processes (Androff, 2022; Theissen, 1999).

This framework for effective and equitable reparations is consistent with international reparative principles, such as the South African TRC. On January 26, 1995, the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act was passed in Parliament and enabled the South African TRC to investigate gross human rights violations and undertake amnesty proceedings (Theissen, 1999). The South African TRC (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, n.d.) named six principles for reparation policy proposals to support healing and reconciliation: development-centered (communities have the information and resources to be self-determining); simple, efficient, and fair (available resources provide the largest benefit for people who receive them); culturally appropriate (sensitized and relevant to the cultural needs and practices of the community); community-based (community services and delivery should be expanded and have an enduring impact); capacity development (community services and resources developed should focus and build local capacity); and the promotion of healing and reconciliation (aim to bring people together).

Furthermore, Taiwo (2022) articulated an equally important constructivist view of reparations as a forward-looking measure to serve “a larger and broader worldmaking project” (p. 74). This constructivist view of reparations aims to justly redistribute intergenerational accumulations of advantage reaped from the global racial empire, particularly transatlantic slavery, colonization, and ensuing harms. This world-making project to redistribute global wealth is consistent with social, distributive, and structural justice.

It is vital to generate the definitions, principles, and framework for reparations to advance reparatory justice. Reparatory measures must be data-driven and evidence-based to ensure policies, practices, infrastructures, and interventions address the systemic causes of oppression (Blackman, 2023). Data should assess historical and ongoing harms, disproportionality, and disparity across various indicators (e.g., cultural, educational, financial, health, and criminal/legal) and provide evidence-based and equitable reparations. For example, the N’COBRA-Chicago provided racial data to the city council’s Health and Human Relations Committee to demonstrate the need for local reparations (Howard, 2020). The N’COBRA-Chicago Chapter used the Human Development Index to help elucidate the life conditions of African Americans in the city, including wealth, life expectancy, disease/COVID-19 deaths, and other factors. The Human

Development Index measures indicators of achievement and interrogates policy choices, such as the need for reparations as policy priority (United Nations Development Programme, 2023). As a result, in 2020, Chicago's city council formed a subcommittee for reparations.

With a general understanding of reparations established, a brief overview of how reparatory justice has formed and evolved internationally and, particularly, in the United States with peoples of African descent is provided next. This overview is followed by discussions of the divergent viewpoints on reparations and implications for social work. Reparations are a global issue impacting many countries, communities, and institutions. The specific contexts for reparations advocacy differ. In the United States, African American communities have sought reparations, particularly federal reparations, for enslavement and the legacies of slavery.

International Context for Reparatory Justice

Harms or wrongdoings are universal phenomena. Over the course of history, there are countless instances of human injury. As Delany (1852) explained:

That there have been in all ages and in all countries, in every quarter of the habitable globe, especially among those nations laying the greatest claim to civilization and enlightenment, classes of people who have been deprived of equal privileges, political, religious and social, cannot be denied, and that this deprivation on the part of the ruling class is cruel and unjust, is also equally true. (p. 11)

Since the mid-20th century, reparations have been recommended for gross abuses and cruel and unjust treatment. Reparations are an internationally accepted approach for making amends for injuries perpetrated by governments, non-governmental entities, and individuals. Throughout modern history, some form of restitution existed or was insisted on because of crimes against humanity. There are many cases in which people exacted reparatory justice in the form of liberation struggles, such as the Tempati Rebellion in 1757, the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), and the Bussa Rebellion in 1816 (Shepherd & Hemmings, 2022). The modern global context for reparations is strengthened by international principles and practices, such as the United Nation's *Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Remedy and Reparation* (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2005).

In addition to reparatory and restorative justice, transitional justice underlies international movements for reparations. Similar to reparatory justice, transitional justice seeks social change and to facilitate repair in various, concrete forms; however, transitional justice is less often utilized in domestic demands for reparations (King & Page, 2017). One explanation for this might be that transitional justice is based “on a legal standard for accountability . . . the principle of individual accountability for crimes against humanity” (Androff, 2022, p. 242). Transitional justice was purportedly first used in the 1990s, following governmental transitions in Latin America, South Africa, and the Soviet Union (Forrester, 2019; King & Page, 2017). Still, reparatory, restorative, and transitional justice has rooted global movements to redress wrongs, remove the

ongoing impact of wrongdoings on those harmed and their descendants, and devise remedies associated with wrongdoings such as official acknowledgment and land restitution (King & Page, 2017; Shepherd & Hemmings, 2022).

International Human Rights Practices

Several international principles, laws, and conferences are fundamental to advancing human rights and reparations domestically and globally. Prominent examples include the following:

- The International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, Germany in 1945–1946 set a global precedent for international criminal tribunals in which inhumane actions were explored, domestic leaders held criminally responsible, and punishment was recommended for crimes against humanity committed within national borders (Rosen, n.d.).
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the UN General Assembly in Paris, France on December 10, 1948 (United Nations, n.d.). The document consists of 30 universally protected and fundamental human rights (i.e., articles). The first article states that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights,” and Article 8 states that “everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law” (United Nations, n.d.).
- Three human rights conventions furthered the pursuit of human rights (Van Dyke, 2003). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed on November 4, 1950, at the European Convention on Human Rights, and was originally enforced on September 3, 1953, by the European Commission of Human Rights, the European Court of Human Rights, and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (European Court of Human Rights, n.d.). This declaration is a living document that defines and protects absolute rights and freedoms, such as the obligation to respect human rights. It contained Article 1 for the obligation to respect human rights and Article 13 for the right to an effective remedy for everyone whose rights and freedoms, as determined by the Convention, have been violated. The American Convention on Human Rights, or the Pact of San José, was adopted on November 22, 1969, and enforced on July 18, 1978 (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 1969). The American Convention intended to consolidate American states into the western hemisphere’s democratic framework and systems of personal liberty and outlined social justice in 82 articles. The two oversight bodies with respect to this Convention are the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, or the “Commission” and Inter-American Court of Human Rights or the “Court.” Article 63 of this document states that if the Court finds a violation of a right or freedom protected by the convention, then the Court will rule that the injured party has the right to restoration and, where appropriate, fair compensation and remedy. As of 2024, the United States is not a signatory country. The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights was adopted by the African States members of the Organization of African Unity on June 1, 1981, and enforced on October 21, 1986. The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights aimed to promote and protect human and peoples’ rights,

particularly African people, and eradicate all forms of colonization on the continent (African Union, n.d.). This document contains 68 articles, including Article 21 that states dispossessed people have a right to the lawful recovery of property and compensation.

- The anti-colonial demand for the establishment of a New International Economic Order, in 1974, is based on sovereign equality, equity, interdependence, cooperation, reparation, and common interests among all states regardless of their social and economic system (Forrester, 2019; United Nations, 1974). This demand is important because it recognized the legacies of colonization and discrimination and thus a need to modify the economic status quo and make restitution and full compensation for colonial and alien domination and exploitation of resources (Forrester, 2019).
- During April 27–29, 1993, a Pan-African Conference on Reparations was held in Abuja, Nigeria, and the Abuja Proclamation was issued to articulate grievances against Western countries, namely, the United States and European countries (Henry, 2003). According to the N’COBRA (n.d.-b), the proclamation stated to the international community that “there is a unique and unprecedented moral debt owed to the African peoples which has Yet [sic] to be paid—the debt of compensation to the Africans as the most humiliated and exploited people of the last four centuries of modern history” (para. 9). At the conference, it was declared by participants that the enslavement of peoples of African descent was a crime against humanity and reparations are not charity (Shepherd & Hemmings, 2022).
- On July 17, 1998, the UN Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court adopted the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and drafted a code of offenses such as genocide and crimes against humanity (International Criminal Court, 2011). This work initially began in 1949 and continued throughout the years (United Nations Office of Legal Affairs & Codification Division, 2023). In Article 75, the Rome Statute contains the International Criminal Court’s established principles and procedures for reparations to victims, such as restitution, rehabilitation, and compensation.
- The World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance occurred from August 31, 2001, to September 8, 2001, in Durban, South Africa. The outcome of this conference was the Declaration and Programme of Action that addressed actions related to historic and ongoing racism and other forms of injustice (United Nations Department of Public Information, 2002). The declaration reflects the conference’s agreement that enslavement and the trading of people for slavery were always a crime against humanity and colonialization led to persistent racism. The declaration urges states to take reparative measures to address and remedy racism, discrimination, and other forms of intolerance in the interest of justice.
- The UN General Assembly adopted the Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Remedy and Reparation on December 15, 2005, and it outlines 18 principles and 27 guidelines (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2005). The document identifies statutes of

limitations, victims' rights to remedies, how victims can access justice, and forms of full and effective reparation (i.e., restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition), among other principles.

- Resolution 68/237 was adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 23, 2013, to declare January 1, 2015, to December 31, 2024, as the International Decade for People of African Descent with the theme of “People of African descent: recognition, justice and development” (United Nations General Assembly, 2014, p. 2). The resolution contained three objectives, one of which was to strengthen the full and equal economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights of peoples of African descent domestically and internationally. The resolution follows up and agrees with the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (United Nations General Assembly, 2014). Reparations for peoples of African descent were not specifically mentioned in the resolution. However, reparatory justice is critical to engendering full and equal rights for African peoples and cessation of ongoing harms, such as racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance, against these communities.
- Resolution 75/314 was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (2021, August 2) to establish a Permanent Forum of People of African Descent, which serves as “a consultative mechanism for People of African descent and other relevant stakeholders as a platform for improving the safety and quality of life and livelihoods of People of African descent, as well as an advisory body to the Human Rights Council” (p. 3). Furthermore, the resolution states that the forum supports the socioeconomic expansion of communities and peoples of African descent. Like Resolution 68/237, this resolution did not mention reparatory justice, but reparations must be a requisite standard to aid the socioeconomic development of communities and peoples of African descent. The forum must tackle global reparatory justice given the large financial debts and wage and wealth disparities that exist in Africa and throughout the African diaspora (Darity & Mullen, 2020; Mangani, 2022; Mooney et al., 2021; United Nations, 2023).

Global History of Reparations

The first decision for reparations by the International Criminal Court occurred on August 7, 2012, for victims of war crimes committed by Thomas Lubanga (International Criminal Court, 2012, 2021). Lubanga was held liable to make reparations due to using youths younger than 15 to fight in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Lubanga's victims are to receive collective, service-based reparations as recommended by the Trust Fund for Victims, which is a fund created in 2004 in accordance with Article 79 of the Rome Statute (International Criminal Court, 2012, 2021). Although this was the first reparations case for the International Criminal Court, there are many examples of reparations in the global context such as Germany to Jewish victims and descendants of the Holocaust, the United States to Japanese Americans for internment during World War II, Colombia to victims of the 5-decade war, and South Africa to victims of apartheid. In an unusual case of reparations, Haiti was forced to pay an indemnity to France after a freedom revolt by people who were enslaved and free (Ayesh, 2019). In 1825, Charles X demanded \$30 million, in

United States Dollars (USD), as reimbursement for European planters who lost property (i.e., people and land) due to Haitian sovereignty or Haiti would face additional aggression (Du Bois, 1915/2007). These loan payments and interest rates crippled the island but made Haiti the first nation to permanently ban slavery (Rosalsky, 2021). Also notable are the reparations paid to former enslavers, such as the United Kingdom's Slave Compensation Act of 1837 and the United States' District of Columbia Compensated Emancipation Act in 1862.

Reparations received by those harmed and their descendants are the result of a constant struggle rather than the goodwill of wrongdoers. Goschler (2022) explained that the reparations agreement signed in 1952 for West Germany to compensate Jewish people for persecution occurred as a result of emotionally charged and difficult negotiations and protests. Translating the ideals of justice and recommendations from international laws and principles into reparations for historical and ongoing harms remains challenging. For example, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has advocated a global agenda for reparatory justice since 1958, with the official CARICOM body forming in 1973 (Caribbean Community Secretariat, 2023). CARICOM consists of 20 countries whose objectives are economic integration, foreign policy coordination, human and social development, and security. Additionally, Shepherd and Hemmings (2022) have described CARICOM's 10-point plan to support remedying African peoples for the harms of the transatlantic trade, enslavement, genocide, and colonization. CARICOM's action plan, which was the model for NAARC's 10-point plan (Taifa, 2022), includes a full and formal apology, development programs for Indigenous peoples, funding for repatriation to Africa, establishment of cultural institutions and the return of cultural heritage, remedying the public health crisis, education programs, enhancement of historical and cultural knowledge exchanges, psychological rehabilitation as a result of trauma, the right to development through the use of technology, and debt cancellation and monetary compensation (Institute of the Black World 21st Century, 2014; Shepherd & Hemmings, 2022). CARICOM's plan provides common objectives for African peoples, continental and diasporan, and ideas for others who seek reparatory justice.

The international movement for reparatory justice persists as many countries have yet to make reparations to harmed communities. For example, the United Kingdom, Portugal, France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Germany, and Switzerland have not paid reparations to the CARICOM for human rights violations (Shepherd & Hemmings, 2022). France has not remedied Haiti for human rights violations, including enslavement, or provided a full reimbursement for the indemnity (Rosalsky, 2021). The United States has not remedied peoples of African descent for human and civil rights violations. Although the U.S. government has a history of providing restitution to harmed communities, H.R.40 and S.40, which are federal reparations bills to study the institution of chattel enslavement and subsequent anti-Black racial discrimination and propose remedies for African Americans, have yet to pass the Congress. For this reason, the United States provides an important case on reparatory justice.

Reparatory Justice in the United States

Advancing reparations at federal, state, or local levels of government emerges from the stalwart leadership of “catalytic agents” or individuals working in community formations and leading movements (Henry, 2003, p. 135). Prominent examples include the Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association of the United States of America (MRB&PA), the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika, the Black United Front, the Japanese American Citizens League, the National Council for Japanese Americans Redress, the Black Reparations Commission, the Nation of Islam, and the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America.

Federal Government

Special Field Order No. 15 is perhaps the most well-known federal reparative initiative post chattel slavery. Following the Civil War, freedmen, or freed people who were formerly enslaved, were left without basic necessities. Freedom for African Americans came with a profound accumulative disadvantage (Taiwo, 2022). Despite the reality that the labor and talent of freed people created the economic base of what would become one of the most affluent nations in the world, that wealth and prosperity were never transferred to African Americans.

On January 12, 1865, General William T. Sherman met with 20 Black leaders to discuss freed people’s needs to transition to citizenship. These leaders saw land ownership as the way forward. Franke (2019) recounted the story of Garrison Frazier, a 67-year-old freed person from Granville County, North Carolina, who expressed his desire for the community to have land to best take care of themselves by their own labor and apart from White people due to race prejudice in the South. Land for farming was viewed as the path to economic self-sufficiency for the freedmen (Darity & Mullen, 2020; Du Bois, 1935/1998). Special Field Order No. 15 supported the division and redistribution of confiscated plantations. Under this initiative, 40,000 freedmen would receive an army mule and not more than 40 acres on the coastal plains of South Carolina and Georgia (Martin & Yaquinto, 2007). These newly freed people would only have “possessory titles,” ownership contingent on grounds that others do not lay claim (Du Bois, 1935/1998; Franke, 2019, p. 59). On May 29, 1865, President Andrew Johnson, Abraham Lincoln’s successor, issued an Amnesty Proclamation, which reversed Special Field Order No. 15, and allowed Confederate landowners to retrieve confiscated land (Franke, 2019; Kwon & Thompson, 2021). Thus, emancipated African Americans were dispossessed of their newly acquired land. This denial of landownership became foundational to the U.S. racial wealth gap (Hassan, 2023; van Wormer, 2014). According to Hassan (2023), issues with land distribution continued through the Industrial Revolution and World War II, with an estimated 1.5 million White families benefiting from land provided by the federal government between 1862 and 1934. In the 21st century, this translates to approximately \$46 million USD to White American descendants who benefited from the homestead legislation (Hassan, 2023).

The Southern Homestead Act of 1866 was another post–Civil War effort to redistribute landownership. The purported goal of the act was to provide preferential access to public land in the southern states (e.g., Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, and Mississippi), whereas the Homestead Act of 1862 was premised on the idea that the primary beneficiaries of 160-acre plots would be landless Whites and emancipated freedmen who had never taken up arms against the United States (Kwon & Thompson, 2021). Although most of the high-quality farmland was disbursed before the Civil War, freed people wanted land for homestead purposes (Hannah-Jones, 2021; Shanks, 2005). Like most Reconstruction-era policies, the Southern Homestead Act was repealed in 1876, with only a small percentage of freed people benefiting from the legislation (Shanks, 2005). The designated 400,000 acres earmarked for 40,000 freedmen was disbursed to southern Whites who were loyal to the Confederacy (Brooks, 2004).

Both the Southern Homestead Act of 1866 and the Freedman’s Bureau constituted unsuccessful attempts by the federal government to create an economic base for persons it had formerly enslaved. Plagued by underfunding and persistent racism, the Freedman’s Bureau dissolved in 1872 (National Archives, 2022). A third attempt by the federal government involved the introduction of the Ex-Slave Pension and Bounty Bill in the U.S. Congress to provide financial compensation for each formerly enslaved person. Congressman William James Connell (R-NE) introduced H.R.11119 in the House of Representatives to seek a federal pension for freedmen (Hill, 1996; Kelley, 2007). However, Congress did not pass the bill in 1890 on the basis that “ex-slave pensions would be too large a burden on taxpayers” (Brooks, 2004, p. 9).

The absence of federal actions did not temper African Americans’ desire for reparations and self-sufficiency. As the late Imari Abubakari Obadele explained, “at no substantial period during the era since slavery have our people neglected wholly the campaign for reparations” (Taifa, 2022, p. 153). African Americans created mutual aid and self-help groups to further their own cause. The proliferation of these efforts was known as the ex-slave pensions and bounty movement. It is estimated that between 1890 and 1917, more than 600,000 formerly enslaved people sought compensation from the U.S. government for unpaid labor (Brooks, 2004). These efforts were often undertaken through the guidance of organizations known as Ex-Slave Clubs (Kelley, 2007). The guiding premise of these organizations was based on the rationale that freed people were entitled to financial compensation for their unpaid labor. With the support of their growing membership leaders of the organizations lobbied Congress for a pension to address the socioeconomic needs of freedmen. The Ex-Slave MRB&PA of the United States of America was one of the most well established and best known of these collective efforts (Brooks, 2004). A key figure in the ex-slave pension movement, Walter R. Vaughan, published a pamphlet titled *Freedmen’s Pension Bill: A Plea for American Freedmen*. It was Vaughan, a Democrat and son of an ex-slaveholder, who influenced Congressman William J. Connell to present the 1890 bill, which modeled the pension plan for Union soldiers. As a White southerner born in Selma, Alabama, Vaughan was motivated by a belief that pensions to former Confederate soldiers and ex-slaves would increase the financial viability and economic stability of the New South (Perry, 2010). Between 1890 and 1903, a total of nine identical pension bills would be rejected by Congress (Kelley, 2007; Lewis, 2014).

Vaughan employed Isaiah Dickerson, an African American, to distribute the Freedmen Pension Bill pamphlet (Berry, 2005). Dickerson would later join with Callie House, a single mother and formerly enslaved person from Nashville, Tennessee, to launch their own organization. Assisted by Vaughan, Dickerson and House established the MRB&PA in 1897 (Perry, 2010). The MRB&PA became one of the first organizations to campaign for reparations. The organization's mission was to lobby Congress for legislation that would grant financial compensation to freedmen in the form of a pension payment program (Perry, 2010). Callie House became the national spokesperson for the MRB&PA. For nearly 30 years she struggled to secure a pension program for the uncompensated labor of freed persons and their descendants. However, the MRB&PA's efforts were never fully realized. Structural barriers to passing pension bills included opposition from the Bureau of Pensions, the U.S. Postal Service, and the Department of Justice (Lewis, 2014). Callie House and other leaders were convicted on fraud charges, essentially bringing the movement to a halt (Berry, 1972; Perry, 2010).

Similar to the challenges faced by African Americans, Indigenous Peoples of the Americas have struggled for acknowledgment and redress of historical injustices. Recompense for Native Americans has been largely based on litigation that involved treaty violations. Atrocities such as the Trail of Tears, the massacre at Wounded Knee, and other genocidal acts are well documented in the annals of U.S. history (Rasley, 2020). The aftermath of these atrocities left devastation among the Indigenous communities that transcends to contemporary issues. For example, Native Americans have the highest poverty rate among racial groups in the United States (Rasley, 2020). In addition, this population experiences some of the worst health outcomes, including high rates of infant mortality, low life expectancy, poor educational attainment, and high rates of suicide and substance abuse (Rasley, 2020). Efforts to amend for the historical injustices inflicted on the Indigenous Peoples of North America include the following:

- In 1980, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Sioux Nation in the amount of \$105 million USD for treaty violations. The case of *United States v. The Giant Sioux Nation* involved violations of an 1868 treaty regarding claims to the Black Hills areas of South Dakota (Rasley, 2020). The money continues to draw interest as the elders have refused financial compensation in favor of land restoration.
- In 1946, Congress created the Indian Claims Commission. Prior to its demise in 1978, approximately \$1.3 billion USD was paid to federally recognized tribes for confiscated land (Hatzipanagos, 2023).
- The American Rescue Plan Act passed by Congress in 2021 made \$1.75 billion USD available for Native Americans and Alaskan Natives (Bureau of Indian Affairs, n.d.; Rasley, 2020). This amount constitutes an unprecedented level of funding to assist tribal groups.

The U.S. government has also extended reparations to Japanese Americans (Yamamoto, 2007). The Civil Liberties Act of 1988 granted reparations to Japanese Americans, and their descendants, who were confined in internment camps during World War II. The federal act (P.L. 100–383) granted \$20,000 USD to survivors, or their descendants, for wrongful incarceration during World War II. The bill, H.R.442, was introduced in Congress in 1987 and signed into law by U.S. president Ronald Reagan on August 10, 1987, to redress the evacuation, forced relocation, and internment

of Japanese Americans (Civil Liberties Act, 1987–1988). The bill was amended in 1992 to extend benefits to several categories of individuals who were excluded in the original redress. Furthermore, an additional \$400 million USD was allocated for financial restitution to eligible citizens for their losses. In total 82,219 individuals received financial redress. Additionally, a formal apology signed by U.S. president George H. W. Bush was issued on behalf of the American government in 1990 (Yamamoto, 2020).

While the U.S. government has used reparations to redress injuries to some groups, peoples of African descent have not received reparatory justice for the harms of institutionalized enslavement and subsequent racialized discrimination. The persistent disparities that exist between African Americans and European Americans in the areas of wealth, health, education, and other measures of well-being have origins in racial injustices. To rectify this situation will require that society make a major paradigm shift. As Kwon and Thompson (2021) stated:

Indeed, throughout its history the government has paid reparation to Native peoples, to Japanese Americans interned during World War II, and most relevantly, to *slave owners* following the emancipation. The United States has already demonstrated its capacity to enact reparations when it finds the moral and political will to do so. (p. 21)

Federal legislation has been recommended to study and propose reparations for African Americans but has yet to pass.

H.R.40—Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans

In 1989, using precedents set by other victims of injustices such as Japanese Americans, Congressman John Conyers (D-MI) introduced H.R.3745, a bill to create a Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act (Henry, 2003). The legislation is considered the mark of the modern phase of the reparations movement to redress slavery and ongoing racial discrimination (Brooks, 2004). The bill was later renamed H.R.40 to reflect the undelivered promise of the federal government for 40 acres and a mule to people emancipated from enslavement. Subsequently, the legislation was retitled the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act. Thus, H.R.40 transformed from a study bill to a remedy bill (McElderry & Jones, 2021; Taifa, 2022). According to the 118th Congress (Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act, 2023–2024), H.R.40 seeks to establish a Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans to

(1) compile documentary evidence of slavery in the United States; (2) study the role of the federal and state governments in supporting the institution of slavery; (3) analyze discriminatory laws and policies against freed African slaves and their descendants; and (4) recommend ways the United States may recognize and remedy the effects of slavery and discrimination on African Americans, including through a formal apology and compensation (i.e., reparations).

The commission consists of individuals from civil society and reparations organizations and individuals appointed by the President and congressional leadership; Members of Congress and governmental employees may not serve on the commission. The commission may hold hearings, subpoena witnesses and records, and contract with other entities to conduct its work.

The commission must submit its final report within 18 months of its first meeting. (paras. 1–4)

Passage of this legislation would mean the establishment of a commission to conduct research to determine if the descendants of people formerly enslaved warrant reparations (Darity & Mullens, 2020). The repeated failure to pass H.R.40 each year since its introduction in 1989 attests to the hurdles related to addressing race injustices. The modern U.S. Democratic Party has been more tolerant to discussions on reparations and in the summer of 2000 adopted a party plank to endorse a federal commission to study the residual impacts of slavery as a component of their overall platform (Henry, 2003).

In September 2016, the United Nations' Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent encouraged Congress to pass H.R.40 to study reparations proposals (United Nations, 2016). Following Conyers departure from Congress in December 2017, Representative Shelia Jackson Lee (D-TX) and Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) became the major sponsors of the bill (Darity & Mullens, 2020). In 2019, Senator Booker introduced bill S.1083, which is a companion bill to the H.R.40-Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act. The Senate bill was later renamed to S.40 to correspond with the House bill H.R.40. National attention on the issue of reparations is further reflected in the 2019 Democratic Party's presidential primary. Candidates Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Marianne Williamson (D-CA), and Beto O'Rourke (D-TX) indicated support for reparations (Politico, 2019). The publicity propelled reparations for African Americans onto an unprecedented national scale.

While each of the candidates indicated a level of support for reparations, Marianne Williamson articulated a plan (King, 2019a). In addition to drawing attention to the issue, Williamson's campaign brought attention to the various movements and organizations that advocate for reparations, such as American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS) Advocacy Foundation. It should also be noted that Williamson was the first candidate to launch an ad on the issue of reparations and the only candidate to attend the ADOS national conference. According to Williamson, "America will not have the future we want if we're not willing to clean up the past" (King, 2019b,

para. 4). Possibly due to unprecedented publicity, on April 14, 2021, the House Judiciary Committee held the first-ever markup of H.R.40, and it was passed out of committee (Darity & Mullens, 2020; Taifa, 2022).

Other Notable Federal Actions

In 2009, passage of U.S. House Resolution 194 and Senate Concurrent Resolution 26 issued a formal apology to the African American community for “centuries of brutal dehumanization and injustices” (Apologizing for the Enslavement and Racial Segregation of African-Americans, 2007–2008, para. 15). Moreover, there was an admission that

African-Americans continue to suffer from the complex interplay between slavery and Jim Crow—long after both systems were formally abolished—through enormous damage and loss, both tangible and intangible, including the loss of human dignity, the frustration of careers and professional lives, and the long-term loss of income and opportunity.

(Apologizing for the Enslavement and Racial Segregation of African-Americans, 2007–2008, para. 10)

While the resolution was symbolic, it made no mention of reparations.

Several resolutions have been proposed. S.Con.Res.26 was introduced in the 111th Congress by Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) (S.Con.Res.26–111th Cong., 2009–2010). It makes clear that slavery and the Jim Crow laws that followed were inhumane injustices inflicted on African Americans by the U.S. government. However, beyond a symbolic apology, the resolution neither offers nor endorses any claims of settlement or redress for these atrocities. Furthermore, it should be noted that a congressional resolution, which expresses a collective opinion, differs from a legislative bill.

H.Con.Res.44 was introduced on May 5, 2023, by Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA) (Urging the Establishment of a United States Commission, 2023–2024). The intent of the resolution is to establish the first United States Commission on Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT). The purpose of the TRHT is to examine the legacy of slavery and systemic racism. The proposed commission would serve as a conduit to promote reparative justice and racial healing. The work of the commission is viewed as complementary to H.R.40/S.40. Representative Cori Bush (D-MO) introduced a resolution on May 17, 2023, that specifically calls for reparations, including compensation for the descendants of formerly enslaved peoples of African descent (Recognizing That the United States Has a Moral and Legal Obligation, 2023). The resolution advocates for a holistic approach to reparations by the federal government that would include material and non-material forms of repair. Included in the resolution is a call for passage of HR. 40 and H.Con.Res.44.

In addition to legislation and resolutions to advance reparations, there are actions to block funding to secure financial compensation from the U.S. government. Representative Brian Babin (R-TX) introduced H.R.4321, No Bailouts for Reparations Act, to the House on June 23, 2023 (No Bailouts for Reparations Act, 2023–2024; Noel, 2023). If passed, the bill would prohibit federal

funding to any local governments or states that approve reparations. Although no action has been taken on the H.R.4321, the bill has 13 sponsors and has been forwarded to the Oversight and Accountability Committee.

State and Local Actions

The U.S. Congress has yet to pass federal reparations legislation; however, a few states and local governments have taken action. For the most part, the fight for reparatory justice at the state level has yielded few victories. Although, in 1994, Florida approved \$2.1 million USD for the living survivors of the Rosewood Terrorist Attack of 1923, which resulted in multiple deaths and destruction of the Black community in the town of Rosewood (Darity & Mullens, 2020; Kelley, 2007). Californians are the harbingers of reparations advocacy at the state level. In 2021, the California Taskforce to Study and Develop Reparations Proposals for African Americans was established to examine past and present effects of discrimination and racism on African Americans (Chavez et al., 2023; Jones et al., 2023). The Task Force presented a preliminary report to the California legislature on July 1, 2022, and a final report on June 29, 2023. The more than 1,000-page document submitted to the legislature offers 115 recommendations to redress the harms of slavery and its legacy. The report called for reform in the areas of health, education, housing, the legal system, and several other areas that have created racial disparities for descendants of enslaved Californians. Following California, Illinois and New York are the second and third states, respectively, to pursue reparations commissions (Alfonseca, 2023).

Illinois established the African Descent-Citizens Reparations Commission (ADCRC) in 2022 (State of Illinois, 2023). The major focus of the ADCRC is to ensure public education about reparations. The ADCRC seeks “to ensure equity, equality, and parity” around issues of proportional economics in state contracts and preservation of African American neighborhoods and communities (State of Illinois, 2023, para. 2). On Tuesday, December 19, 2023, New York Governor Kathy Hochul signed legislation to study reparations and racial justice and to examine the legacy of slavery and its prevailing impact on African Americans (Alfonseca, 2023). State actions led by grassroots efforts have propelled local resolutions on the issue of reparations (Martin & Yaquinto, 2007).

States and municipalities enacting slavery disclosure ordinances include Chicago, San Francisco, Oakland, and Detroit. According to Taifa (2022), 16 jurisdictions require corporate entities to certify that steps have been taken to disclose whether the company or its predecessors participated or profited from the institution of slavery. For example, Wells Fargo Bank acknowledged its ties to slavery as a result of its merger with Wachovia Bank in 2008 (Corporate Accountability Collective, 2022). Three years prior to the acquisition, Wachovia reported that its predecessors profited from slavery (Corporate Accountability Black Collective, 2022). Wachovia apologized in 2005 for its predecessors. However, Wells Fargo continued to receive sharp criticism related to accusations of discriminatory lending practices.

Between 2019 and 2022, several cities established reparations commissions or recommended redress. For example, in 2020, the town of Asheville, North Carolina, voted to give reparations to Black residents in the form of a public apology and invest in Black communities (Taifa, 2022). Similarly, in 2020 the City Council of Chicago overwhelmingly voted to establish the Chicago Subcommittee for Reparations (Howard, 2020). However, in 2022, the U.S. City Council of Evanston, Illinois, became the first city to make local reparations payments after passage of Resolution 58-R-19, *Commitment to End Structural Racism and Achieve Racial Equity* (City of Evanston, n.d.). The Evanston City Council voted to allocate the first \$10 million USD in tax revenue from the sale of cannabis to fund reparations initiatives that address the gaps in wealth and opportunity of Black residents (Treisman, 2021). A preliminary survey has indicated that among 3,500 Evanston residents, a large proportion expressed favorable perceptions of the initiative (Kulke, 2023). Among respondents, 70% of White residents viewed the initiative as “good public policy.” Also, Black (64%), Latinos (61%), and Asian (62%) residents expressed support of the program. The survey was groundbreaking because it represented the first time feedback was made available on an operational reparations program for African Americans.

The official return of the Bruce family’s ancestral property to the living heirs by Los Angeles provides another local case (City of Los Angeles, n.d.). Ownership of the land was seized from the Bruce family in 1924 as part of eminent domain. The land was used by the original owners to operate a beach resort for African Americans. On June 28, 2022, Los Angeles County reached an agreement to lease the property from the family for \$413,000 USD per year, and the county has the option to buy the land for \$20 million USD in the future (Caplan, 2022; City of Los Angeles, n.d.). Kahrl (2023) has disputed that the Bruce’s Beach case represents true repair. The NAARC established a minimum set of criteria for what constitutes reparations (Howard, 2020). The criteria are (a) the party inflicting the harm cannot determine the remedy, (b) an independent structure is established to receive and allocate resources, and (c) allocation of resources must not take the form of ordinary public policy that is not exclusively for the injured people. Kahrl argued that the restoration of land to the Bruce’s Beach descendants is not a model for reparations because it does not address the ongoing systemic inequality African Americans experience in real estate markets such as dispossession and displacement through over-taxation, gentrification, and foreclosures. However, others assert that the Bruce’s Beach case amounts to a form of family-based redress due to an acknowledgment by government officials of wrongdoing and the return of land to the descendants of Willa and Charles Bruce (Taifa, 2022).

While state and local steps are clearly important in the movement toward reparatory justice, Howard (2020) explained that local efforts do not comprehensively address the multiple and complex injury areas of reparations. In consideration of NAARC’s basic criteria, some have also questioned whether the Evanston program rises to the level of reparations. To ensure that local efforts are indeed reparations, Howard (2020) suggested making a distinction between two categories: full reparations/full repair and direct benefits/collective community benefits. With an understanding that full repair is unlikely to occur through local actions, Howard advocates for a mixture of both direct and community benefits for local initiatives.

Universities

A few institutions of higher learning have acknowledged participation in the institution of slavery and pursued redress. In 2019, students at Georgetown University voted to increase their tuition to benefit descendants of the 272 enslaved people who were sold to aid the college 200 years ago (Taifa, 2022). Historical records indicate that the Jesuits who oversaw the school during the 19th century actively participated in the institution of slavery and sold human bodies to secure the financial future of the university. In an attempt to redress the human rights violations, the university will use funds from increased tuition to support community projects and initiatives aimed at restitution and atonement (Georgetown University, n.d.). Other universities have followed suit. For example, Virginia Theological Seminary (2024) earmarked \$1.7 million USD to pay reparations to descendants of enslaved Africans who worked on their campus. Princeton Theological Seminary pledged \$27.6 million USD for various initiatives to recognize how it benefited from slavery (Kaur, 2019). In 2022, Harvard committed \$100 million USD for its involvement in slavery and racial discrimination and announced intentions to locate the descendants of enslaved persons (Hartscollis, 2022). Furthermore, a consortium of more than 100 institutions of higher learning in the United States, Canada, Columbia, Scotland, Ireland, and England have committed to acknowledgment, research, education, and atonement related to enslavement and racism, as well as envision examining their institutions' histories of slavery, promoting reconciliation practices, and creating and sustaining reconciliation and reparative practices (Taifa, 2022; University of Virginia, 2013). The consortium of colleges and universities originated with the efforts of the University of Virginia and is collectively referred to as Universities Studying Slavery.

Courts

Several sources have identified legal cases for reparations fought by and on behalf of peoples of African descent. One of the first cases of record involved Belinda Sutton Royall in 1783 (Davis, 2023). Belinda Sutton petitioned the Massachusetts General Court to grant her an income from the estate of Isaac Royall, Jr., a wealthy slaveholder who had purchased Belinda when she was only a child. The court agreed to award Belinda Sutton Royall a pension of 15 pounds and 12 shillings per year. However, she would petition the court repeatedly to collect the awarded monetary compensation (Davis, 2023). In 1853, a case involved Henrietta Wood, a free Black woman, who was employed as a domestic worker in Cincinnati, Ohio (Davis, 2023). Wood was enslaved by Zebulon Ward, a White man who manipulated her to relocate from free territory to Kentucky, a state permitting slavery. Wood remained enslaved until federal emancipation. In 1870, Wood sued Ward for \$20,000 USD in damages and lost wages. She was able to recover those damages after a jury decided in her favor in 1878.

After Reconstruction, one prominent example of harms or wrongdoing is the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, which highlights the discriminatory practices experienced in biomedical research and health care, and its subsequent legal case. Beginning in 1932, White physician-researchers of the U.S. Public Health Services recruited 399 study participants and 201 control subjects to examine the effects of untreated syphilis (Heller, 2022; Washington, 2006). The study participants were to

receive free treatment, appropriate health care, and other incentives such as free transportation and meals (Heller, 2022). However, medical treatment was withheld to permit the physician-researchers to document the disease manifestation in Black men, which was believed to differ from the disease's progression in White men (Washington, 2006). The atrocity and gross miscarriage of justice resides in the reality that after treatment was available the men continued to be denied care. Heller (2022) reported that, while the study began 10 years before penicillin was discovered to treat syphilis and 15 years before the medication became widely available, even after penicillin was commonly used as treatment, it was denied to the Tuskegee participants-patients. By 1972, when the offenses were leaked to the public through the Associated Press, 28 of the 399 patients had died of syphilis. Another 100 of these men died of complications related to syphilis. Furthermore, the spouses of 40 patients and 19 children were infected with syphilis (Washington, 2006). The unethical study spanned a 40-year period.

As a result of this study, a lawsuit was filed to redress the violations inherent in the Tuskegee study. In 1974, the case resulted in a \$10 million USD out of court settlement with the U.S. government. The attorney representing the survivors originally asked for \$1.8 billion USD for the Tuskegee study. A formal apology was issued to the small number of surviving study participants and families on May 16, 1997, by President William Clinton (Ross, 2017; Washington, 2006). In addition to the financial compensation and apology for the harm inflicted on the Black men involved in the study, redress led to significant changes in medical ethics, protection of human subjects, and informed consent in biomedical research. However, none of the physician-researchers or public health officials who knew about the unethical study were held accountable for the human rights violations in the case.

Other important reparations litigation has involved class action lawsuits from descendants who pursued damages for the enslavement of their ancestors and the complicity of corporate entities. In *Cato v. United States* (1995) two sets of plaintiffs, collectively referred to as *Cato*, filed a class action suit seeking damages for enslavement and subsequent discrimination. The case went to the appellate court following dismissal at the district court level. The appellate court ruled that redress for slavery is a matter for the legislature rather than a judiciary forum (Brooks, 2004). In 2002, a case was filed in federal courts in Louisiana, Illinois, Texas, New Jersey, and California for the use of enslaved labor and complicity in the slave trade. Companies such as New York Life Insurance, J.P. Morgan, Union Specific, Aetna, R.J. Reynolds, and Lloyd's of London were defendants in reparations class-action lawsuits (Biondi, 2007; Taifa, 2022). This case was dismissed for a lack of standing, failure to state a claim relevant to relief, debarment of the suit under the political question doctrine, and debarment of suit under statutes of limitations (Inniss, 2010).

Historically, scholars have found legal efforts or strategies to be ineffective in securing reparations due to ineligibility, sovereign immunity, and statute of limitation issues (Brophy, 2006). Furthermore, legal efforts fall short of comprehensive reparations. According to Brooks (2004), the tort model to litigate slave redress is an inadequate approach. The approach lacks the requirement of atonement. Brooks explained that

without the demand for a genuine apology as a condition precedent to receiving money or any other form of redress, and without the desire for racial reconciliation, the tort model undercuts the moral basis for redress, and, hence, dishonors the history of the slaves. (p. 139)

The failure of the courts has revealed the importance and necessity of reparations legislation or reparations being addressed by the legislature.

Views and Debates on Reparations

Reparations or reparatory justice is considered a contentious issue. In October 1951, a German public opinion survey was conducted among the masses of German people to assess their support of restitution for Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, including matters of compensation, indemnification, and reparations (American Jewish Committee, 1952). The survey reported that

two thirds of the West German population pay lip service to the principle of restitution, but that for practical purposes this avowal is meaningless. Follow-up analysis and attitude-test queries show that more than half the population is, in effect, strongly opposed to restitution; only 2% would accord restitution to Jews priority over other claims upon the Federal treasury.

(American Jewish Committee, 1952, p. 1)

This same survey made comparison of groups who should receive help, such as war widows and orphans, air raid victims, refugees and expellees, dependents of people executed for alleged involvement in the anti-Hitler putsch, and Jews. Results indicated that Jewish people (68%) should receive help behind all other groups, whereas widows and orphans (96%) received the most support.

In the United States, opposition or support for reparations are subject to racialized disagreement. The Pew Research Center in October 2021 surveyed U.S. adult respondents on reparations for slavery (Blazina & Cox, 2022). Results indicated that over three-quarters of African Americans supported reparations in money or land compared to 18% of European Americans, 33% of Asian Americans, and 39% of Hispanic Americans. Additionally, respondents varied regarding their views on how slavery affects Black Americans. African Americans overwhelmingly agreed (88%) that slavery presently affected Black Americans a great deal with similar agreement among Asian Americans (80%), whereas Hispanic Americans (64%) and European Americans (50%) indicated less agreement. Other national and international surveys on Black reparations have presented similar results. For example, Theissen (1999) reported public opinion polls on apartheid and the South African TRC. A 1992 opinion poll revealed that 59% of African respondents endorsed punishment for perpetrators of apartheid while 49% of White respondents were opposed. Additionally, a 1999 survey indicated that 65% of African respondents favored the TRC compared to 39% of White respondents (Theissen, 1999). Consistent with the sample of German respondents who did not support Jewish reparations and White residents opposed to the South

African TRC, a vast majority of non-Black U.S. citizens do not support Black reparations. The reasons for a lack of support for reparations vary. However, Germany and South Africa still enacted measures of reparatory justice. West Germany provided restitution to Jewish people and Israel, and continues to compensate living Holocaust survivors (Grieshaber, 2022). The South African TRC was established by the new government to investigate wrongdoings and make recommendations for reparations.

There are varying positions on reparations; however, a few general arguments are shared, which also may apply to global contexts for reparatory justice. A discussion of the reparations' debates presented here are based on the U.S. movement for Black reparations. Even as H.R.40 and S.40—the Commission to Study and Develop Reparations Proposals for African Americans Act—remain stalled, the U.S. federal government daily compensates people or communities who are harmed such as fishermen, coal miners, those whose trade agreements were violated, veterans of the military and their descendants, and others who are entitled to restorative justice (Ranalli, 2022; Shaw, 2022). Therefore, identifying key arguments in opposition and support of U.S. Black reparations is warranted.

Arguments Against Reparations for African Americans

There are several arguments that refute the need for reparatory justice. For example, in 2001, David Horowitz, in an advertisement for his book *The Death of the Civil Rights Movement*, cited 10 oppositions for reparations for slavery, including that no single group benefited from and is responsible for slavery, reparations have already been paid to African Americans, and Blacks owe debt to America. Like Horowitz (2001), Ward Connerly and Dinesh D'Souza have claimed that slavery was beneficial to African Americans as they enjoy a higher standard of living than most Black people in other parts of the globe (Brooks, 2004). The arguments against reparations are discussed using Brophy's (2006) four categories of oppositions: those requested to pay have no liability because compensation is immoral and was never due, compensation has already been made, compensation is impractical, and reparations are divisive and focus on the past.

The first opposition relates to statute of limitations and culpability. *Statute of limitations* is a legal term for any law that prevents a claim, civil or criminal, after a certain period has passed following an injury (Cornell Law School, n.d.). American slavery occurred long ago, and perpetrators and victims are no longer living. Therefore, the question arises about culpability or who should pay reparations. Critic and feminist Camille Paglia (1999) concluded that “an apology can be extended only by persons who committed the original offense. Slavery was a commercial operation tolerated but not invented by government. Therefore, the government cannot logically apologize for it” (p. 353). Opponents invoke that it is immoral to require current citizens such as immigrants to pay reparations when they are innocent of crimes alleged and have retained no benefit from the alleged crimes (Brophy, 2006). Living Americans have no direct participation in slavery, and at the time, slavery was legal. Opponents argue that slavery has existed in some form throughout ancient times. Although slavery is considered a crime against humanity in the early 21st century, it was not during the period reparations are being sought. Additionally, opponents

argue that Africa is complicit (Grennes, 2023). The basis of the argument is that peoples of African descent in the diaspora were captured and sold into slavery by other Africans, thus Africa bears responsibility.

A second argument is that African Americans have already received compensation. Opponents cite enactment of civil rights legislation, anti-discrimination laws, affirmative action, and welfare programs as examples of redress for slavery and discrimination (Brooks, 2004; Brophy, 2006). McWhorter (2003) argued that Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty; the 60 bills steered through Congress by Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. in his 5 years as chairman of the Education and Labor committee; and the expansion of welfare are all examples of reparations for African Americans. Opponents claim that the U.S. government has sufficiently exercised an interest in race consciousness such as in college admissions, but this cannot exist in perpetuity. As U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor wrote in *Gutter v. Bollinger* (2003), "25 years from now, the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary to further the interest approved today" (p. 31). In 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed Justice O'Connor in *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College* and held that the admissions programs at Harvard College and the University of North Carolina violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. The decision in effect ended affirmative action in college admissions.

In addition to these arguments against reparations, Political Scientist Adolph Reed Jr. has proposed a case against reparations. Reed (2016) has asserted that aside from the technical issues associated with reparations such as determining eligibility, the underpinnings of reparations are deficit-based and controlled by petite bourgeoisie African Americans. Reed (2016) wrote:

argument for pursuit of reparations hinges on this view of the black American population . . . as defective and in need of moral and psychological repair. The idea resonates with middle class *noblesse oblige* . . . the people who can conduct the finely calibrated analyses that determine what forms and magnitude just compensation should take . . . who would stand to administer whatever compromise palliatives are likely to ensue from this activity. (para 17)

Similarly, McWhorter (2003) expressed that not only does the paradigm of reparations root Black existence in shame, but it renders Black success, pride, and resilience as meaningless. Where Reed posited advocacy for reparations as advancing a psychological project grounded in Black defectiveness that is encouraged by the *noblesse oblige*, others have expressed concerns that reparations proposals do not amount to adequate restitution. Evanston, Illinois, was the first U.S. city to issue reparations. However, Cicely Fleming, an Evanston council member, voted against the housing proposal and asserted that the grants were "a housing plan dressed up as reparations" (Wendling, 2022, Reparations for all section, para. 1). Fleming did not regard the city's reparations plan as sufficiently ambitious and responsive to the needs of Black communities.

A third argument is that reparations are impractical (Brooks, 2004; Henry, 2003; Reed, 2016; van Wormer, 2014). As an example of the infeasibility of reparations, some opponents have cited the issue of eligibility, such as who should receive reparations. Are reparations only for African descendants of American chattel slavery who can prove ancestry? Do Black immigrants from Africa or Caribbean countries, for example, meet eligibility as they do face anti-Black discrimination? What percentage of Black lineage is necessary for multiracial persons? What about people who self-describe or are ostensibly White but have Black ancestors due to slavery? Who will control and disburse reparations funds? The California Task Force to Study, & Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans (2023) recommended reparations to

only those individuals who are able to demonstrate that they are the descendant of either an enslaved African American in the United States, or a free African American living in the United States prior to 1900, be eligible for monetary reparations. (p. 41)

Other procedural factors complicating legal practicality of reparations include the doctrine of standing and sovereign immunity (Brooks, 2004). Opponents state that the alleged harms are irretraceable to living African Americans and the government must grant consent to be sued, which are reasons for the U.S. Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit's ruling in *Cato v. United States* in 1995. *Cato* is an example of an unsuccessful reparations claim. Aside from eligibility, opponents dispute the utility of reparations to create racial equality (Brophy, 2006).

Final arguments are that reparations are divisive and focus on the past. The U.S. public opinion polls on reparations illustrate a racial divide. A majority of European Americans do not support reparations. In contrast the vast majority of African Americans support reparations. Opponents of reparations argue that uniting a broad section of U.S. citizens for large-scale redistribution of economic resources and reshaping the financial sector has a greater benefit than the monetization of Black pain (Liu, 2021; Reed, 2016). This approach has the potential to benefit all U.S. citizens and receive comparatively more support. Other opponents such as Paglia (1999) and McWhorter (2003) have argued that reparations render African Americans as victims shackled to the past (Brooks, 2004; Brophy, 2006; McWhorter, 2003). Opponents of reparations claim that instead of focusing on persistent Black achievement and resiliency, reparations overfocuses on the past of slavery and discrimination, which the U.S. government has addressed.

Arguments for Reparations for African Americans

Randall Robinson's *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks* is considered a pivotal text for opponents and proponents of reparations. In this work, Robinson (2000) outlined the ways in which slavery and racial discrimination impact African Americans on major statistical measures from health to wealth. He acknowledged the contributions of affirmative action practices but explained the inadequacy of the policy to respond to the masses of African Americans. Enactments such as affirmative action in college admissions helped certain individuals like Robinson who were poised to succeed, but not broad communities of African Americans. For reparations, Robinson (2000) stated:

Solutions must be tailored to the scope of the crime in a way that would make the victim whole. In this case, the psychic and economic injury is enormous, multidimensional and long-running. Thus must be America's restitution to blacks for the damage done. (p. 9)

Some of the most common reasons cited as support for reparations are explained here. These arguments are discussed in the context of the four categories recognized by Brophy (2006): There is no statute of limitations and culpability remains, compensation has not been made, compensation is practical, and reparations are entitled and forward-looking measures.

According to the General Assembly of the United Nations, in Article I, there are no statutory limitations on crimes against humanity, irrespective of date of commission, whether committed in time of war or peace (United Nations, 1968). The World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa, on September 8, 2001, declared that "slavery and the slave trade are a crime against humanity and should always have been so, especially the transatlantic slave trade, and are among the major sources and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance" (United Nations Department of Public Information, 2002, p. 1). Thus, proponents of reparations assert that peoples of African descent and their ancestors are due restitution. Also, legally tolerated human rights violations do not absolve perpetrators from retribution. An example is Germany's anti-Jewish legislation from 1933 to 1939 and, subsequently its reparation program for Jewish survivors and descendants. Furthermore, proponents argue that while servitude has existed in some form or another since ancient times, plantation slavery was uniquely barbaric in terms of magnitude, organized nature, and dehumanization (United Nations Department of Public Information, 2002). It is also a misconception that Africans simply sold other Africans into slavery. Proponents state that the demand for labor in the western hemisphere was started, perpetuated, and controlled by Europeans and enriched Europeans. As Osabu-Kle (2000) explained:

the Atlantic slave trade was not born out of the desire of Africans to sell their fellows, but out the desire of Europeans [sic] nation, Portugal, to obtain gold from African soil. Secondly, the character of the process was European raid of African villages to obtain captives for sale to fellow Europeans in Africa, Europe or the Americas. Europeans in Europe, Africa and the Americas created the demand, and Europeans in Africa created the supply through a combination of their superior military might and trickery. Before the demand was created, there was no epoch of slavery in Africa. (p. 6)

Proponents assert that living Americans have not directly participated in slavery but are beneficiaries of the institution, whereas African Americans have predominately experienced the deleterious impact of system. Slavery shaped the conditions in the early 21st century, including capitalism, the prevailing U.S. economic system (Baptist, 2016; Darity & Mullen, 2020). Thus, culpability applies to all citizens. In the United States, the general principle is that taxpayers are liable for the acts of government (Brophy, 2006; Taiwo, 2022). The U.S. government affords reparations in various contexts in which living Americans have not directly participated in harms.

A second argument by proponents of reparations is that African Americans are entitled to but have not received compensation. The enactment of civil rights legislation, affirmative action, and anti-poverty programs are, as explained by Brooks (2004), symmetrical measures accessible to everyone, but chattel slavery and resultant racial discrimination mainly targeted peoples of African descent. While affirmative action helped achieve diversity through race-sensitive admission policies at universities and government employment to benefit women and non-White racial/ethnic groups, the policy was not exclusive to African Americans (Aka, 2009; Crosby et al., 2006). Representation at universities and in government employment increased for some African Americans, but affirmative action was not exclusive to African Americans or diverse communities of African-descended people. Furthermore, White Americans have historically been the greatest beneficiaries of the New Deal, GI bills, and affirmative action, where, in many cases, Black Americans were excluded or faced discriminatory treatment (California Task Force to Study, & Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans, 2023). This exclusion has greatly impacted homeownership, employment, and wealth for multiple generations of African Americans. Proponents argue that reparative measures are designed to redress harm to targeted populations (Brooks, 2004). Therefore, African Americans have not receive reparatory justice from the U.S. government.

In addition to these assertions, proponents argue that reparations are warranted to redress the deficit-based circumstances created because of systematic harms caused to African Americans. Darity and Mullen (2020) have argued that racialized wealth disparities are “real, extensive, and quantifiable” and attributable to slavery and persistent racism and discrimination (p. 46). Reparations are forms of restitution provided to individuals and communities who have suffered human rights abuses associated with armed conflict, enslavement, or other forms of injustice. Additionally, proponents assert that Evanston’s housing program is an example of reparations because it (a) responded to the harms of redlining and over-policing against a specific group and (b) resources were specifically aimed at this harm (Howard, 2020). Although the Evanston program is not large-scale or multifaceted redress, it is still a reparative measure.

Proponents dispute that reparations center Black existence in shame or defectiveness. Contrary to Reed (2016), the historical record does not substantiate reparations as solely or largely controlled by middle class and elite African Americans. Researchers have detailed the consequences of historical trauma on peoples of African descent, First Peoples of the Americas, and other marginalized groups (Brave Heart et al., 2011; DeGruy-Leary, 2005; Mohatt et al., 2014). Following any traumatic event, intergenerational emotional, mental, and physical suffering are common occurrences. Taifa (2016) has argued that the effects of the criminal punishment system on African American communities might be understood as a form of mass atrocity. In this context, the criminal punishment system can have a damaging and accumulative impact on the mental and physical functioning of individuals directly or indirectly involved and their progeny (Taifa, 2016; Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018). The United Nations has identified reparations as a right for victims and their descendants whose physical and psychological well-being and dignity have been violated (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2005). Advancing reparations for harms or wrongdoing does not invalidate the achievements or pride of African Americans.

Proponents argue that the U.S. Black reparations movement was and remains diverse. African American movements for reparations have historically received broad-based but insufficient support to advance federal legislation. For example, the MRB&P is regarded as one of the first organizations to seek Black reparations from the federal government. One of the organization's leaders was Callie House, a laundress from Rutherford County, Tennessee, who sought pensions for ex-slaves and their families who were at the lowest economic level (Berry, 2005). At the time, economically mobile African Americans provided some philanthropy to the poor, but most of their emphasis was on civil rights and opportunities rather than pensions for ex-slaves (Berry, 2005). From its inception, the reparations movement was led by the Black laboring classes, rather than the Black bourgeoisie, and Black nationalist activists, such as Queen Mother Audley Moore, Conrad Worrill, and Imari A. Obadele (Henry, 2003). There is representation for Black reparations among other groups, such as the N'COBRA (n.d.-a), a mass-based coalition that includes diverse communities of African Americans; the ADOS (ADOS Advocacy Foundation, 2024a), a grassroots lineage-based reparations organization; and the Movement for Black Lives (2023), a coalition for Black political organizations. These organizations share a common aim that African Americans are due reparations, even though they may differ in membership, reasoning, and approaches to reparations.

A third argument is that reparations are not only practical but also rooted in international law against government-sanctioned human rights violations. Proponents of reparations have achieved small victories because of state and local legislative actions. Some examples include Asheville, North Carolina; Evanston, Illinois; and Rosewood, Florida. Also, private institutions have offered reparations such as the Virginia Theological Seminary's designation of \$1.7 million USD in a reparations' endowment fund. These local efforts are important, but proponents assert a need for federal legislation and full reparations that provide direct and community benefits (Howard, 2020; Taifa, 2022). Consequently, passage of H.R.40 and S.40 would establish the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans. The commission would examine the U.S. history of slavery and discrimination from 1619 to the early 21st century and help determine appropriate compensation.

Proponents diverge on the practicalities of reparations. For example, as it relates to eligibility, some prefer non-lineal, inclusive standards that make reparations available to all Black people in the United States (N'COBRA, n.d.-a; Taifa, 2022), whereas others promote lineal-based standards, which excludes Peoples of African descent who cannot trace their ancestors to an enslaved or free person prior to the end of the 19th century (ADOS Advocacy Foundation, 2024b; California Task Force to Study, & Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans, 2023). Similarly, while some proponents insist reparations are warranted for chattel enslavement and persistent racial discrimination (Brooks, 2004; Taifa, 2022), other advocates argue that reparations should redress modern-day harms such as Jim Crow instead of slavery (Brophy, 2006; van Wormer, 2014).

A fourth argument by reparations advocates is that reparations are entitled and forward-looking measures. Proponents claim that the abolition of slavery and desegregation were issues resolved without broad public support. Furthermore, most polls narrowly define reparations as direct monetary compensation rather than include the multiple forms of remedy that exist. As an

example, Reichelmann and Hunt (2021) found that most White Americans favor memorials (51.98%) and apology (39.13%) over financial payments (19.47%). Although reparations must be targeted to those harmed, in a racially diverse republic such as the United States, all citizens will glean some benefit. Blackwell (2017) has described these added benefits as the curb-cut effect. According to this perspective, programs, policies, or practices targeted to vulnerable groups generate some benefit for others. For example, curb cuts designed for people in wheelchairs offered an added benefit for people pushing carts or strollers and people riding skateboards (Blackwell, 2017). Reparations have the utility to recognize the harms suffered by peoples of African descent and their descendants, as well as the potential to realize the contributions they have made (Brophy, 2006). One of the five forms of full reparations includes memorials and tributes to the continuing legacy of African Americans in the past and present. Proponents argue that reparations are not only backward-looking remedies to repair the harms of injustices but also forward-looking to create a racially and socially just society particularly for those harmed (Brophy, 2006; Taiwo, 2022).

Implications for Social Work

Reparatory justice is critical to the principles of restorative and social justice. As described by Finn et al. (2022), “restorative justice seeks societal transformation and empowerment through advocating for a justice system which attends to the rights and needs of those harmed, while holding those who caused harm meaningfully accountable” (p. 10). van Wormer (2009) further described community reparations as a form of restorative justice aimed at remedying human rights violations, such as the institution of slavery, committed by a population or state. Restorative practices are solution-focused rather than individualistic and problem-centered. In this context, community reparations are analogous to social work’s strength-empowerment model (van Wormer, 2009).

For the profession to realize its goal of social justice, social workers must engage and participate in contemporary social movements that advance Black reparations (BlackDeer & Ocampo, 2022; Jones et al., 2023). Androff (2022) asserted that social workers have a role in racial healing, social recovery, and national truth telling. The author identified the TRC as a project to mobilize racial and restorative justice. As a tool of transitional and restorative justice and the facilitation of social change, the TRC is related to reparations and social work practice. Androff (2022) stated that TRC aligns with the profession’s emphasis on human rights, trauma-informed care, and community practice.

Jones et al. (2023) have identified how advocacy for reparations is congruent with the mission of social work to enhance well-being of vulnerable and oppressed populations and the 13th Grand Challenge to eliminate racism (Grand Challenges for Social Work, 2020). The authors listed several ways the profession can advance reparations:

- Social workers can partner with reparations’ organizations to lobby for and support domestic and global reparations for African peoples, continental and diasporan.

- Social workers can incorporate recommendations from the Association of Black Social Workers in Nova Scotia and the Canadian Association of Social Workers to develop strategies and curricula that promote reparations and reparatory justice.
- The Council on Social Work Education and social work programs can equip students with knowledge on the historical oppression of peoples of African descent and how policies such as H.R.40 and S.40 attempt to redress systemic inequalities and atone for injustices.
- Professional social work organizations such as the National Association of Social Workers, the International Federation of Social Workers, and the Society for Social Work and Research can prioritize reparations and reparatory justice in their conference themes, publications, and/or ethical codes.
- Individual social workers and professional social work organizations should work in solidarity to support and build coalitions with reparations-centered organizations, such as the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations, the Caribbean Reparations Commission, or the European Reparations Commission.

A few social work scholars have proposed that the profession enhance its efforts to dismantle structural and systemic inequities created by white supremacy (Apgar, 2021; BlackDeer & Ocampo, 2022; Goode et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2022). Disrupting structural barriers and systemic oppression can begin with changes to the implicit and explicit curricula of social work programs. The revisions should include decolonizing curricula in favor of multiple ways of knowing, macro and micro skill development that targets structural changes instead of overvaluing direct clinical work, and consciousness-raising that leads to student engagement in political and social action (BlackDeer & Ocampo, 2022). For example, multiple ways of knowing and consciousness-raising may include applying the principles of an Afrocentric paradigm that embraces the ideology of collective identity, spiritual nature of humans, and affective knowledge (Schiele, 1996). Ubuntu pedagogy and Indigenous principles offer alternative approaches to inclusive learning (Davidson & Katopodis, 2022). Advancing reparatory justice in social work requires that professional education and training decenter direct practice to focus on knowledge and skills for social action, community organizing, and policy/legislative advocacy, which are necessary to actualize social change and transformation of oppressive structures.

Conclusion

There are various definitions, guidelines, principles, practices, and policies to advance reparations. However, this article presented reparations as an internationally accepted approach to redress human rights violations and systemic acts committed against people. An effective and equitable framework for reparations encompasses comprehensive, targeted, and backward- and forward-looking measures that are corrective, restorative, and evidence-based. Although reparations, particularly reparations for African Americans, remains a polarized issue, countries such as Germany, the United States, and South Africa have paid reparations to survivors and their descendants.

Reparations as a social justice and policy issue is relevant to social workers. However, few scholars have addressed reparatory justice and Black reparations in the social work literature. Reparations for American slavery, apartheid, and the rich legacies of these systems are germane to curtail or eradicate health, criminal punishment, housing, and education inequities faced by African Americans. The social work profession's commitment to social justice on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed populations is a major reason to formally advance reparations. The ethical codes of professional social work organizations, such as the International Federation of Social Workers (2018) and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2021), mandate that social workers promote social justice. The profession must become more intentional in its efforts to actualize social justice to move the goal of social justice from aspirational to transformative. Furthermore, in 2021, the NASW updated its ethical standard 1.05 on Cultural Competence to "social workers must take action against oppression, racism, discrimination, and inequities, and acknowledge personal privilege" (NASW, 2021, para. b). Social work education and training must include accurate information on the history of white supremacy and actionable approaches to atonement to meet this requirement. Reparatory justice presents an opportunity to reckon with the historical costs and benefits of white supremacy and systemic oppression. Comprehensive reparations may serve as a basis for racial atonement, healing, and justice.

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