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## What Happened to Mine?: A History of Black Reparations in the United States

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# Bard

What happened to Mine?: A History Black Reparations in the United States

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
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## Introduction

The issue of Black reparations in The United States has become a very controversial subject and is often met with various emotions and opinions. Most Blacks support Black reparations while some, like President Obama, believe reparations will not fix the problems African Americans face on an everyday basis. Most Whites oppose Black reparations for different reasons. Many argue that slavery happened a long time ago and that it was not their personal doing that enslaved Blacks and that they should not be held responsible for the actions of their ancestors. Some argue Affirmative Action, as a form of reparations for Blacks, is good enough. Unfortunately for most African Americans, Affirmative Action does not do enough to fix their problems of inequality and institutional racism. Being poor and Black in America is difficult. Most Blacks live in poor urban ghettos, and receive the worst education, compare to their White counterparts. Compare to Whites, Blacks are the most unemployed. Compare to Whites, more Blacks are incarcerated. Compare to Whites, less Blacks make it to college and graduate. And last but not least, compare to Whites,.... well there is no comparison to be made about who are the most exploited; Blacks take that tittle too.

As an immigrant from the West Indies, I was never told my Blackness made me inferior, nor did I feel like it did. Where I am from there I had limited opportunities, but it's because St. Vincent is a developing country, not because I was Black. In St. Vincent, most people are Black; there are very few Whites. While growing up, my friends and I never paid close attention to the fact that we were Black; we knew that, we weren't blind.

Despite our Blackness, neither us, nor our parents faced racial discrimination and institutional racism.

In 2008, my immediate family and I immigrated to East Flatbush, Brooklyn New York, I was sixteen then. Soon I entered one of the worst high schools in Brooklyn, located in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Brooklyn, East New York. At the time I was not aware that I was going to one of the poorest schools in Brooklyn. Three years later I was preparing to be the first one in my family to go to college, an accomplishment I value to this day. It was when I first started at Bard that I became more aware of the enormous inequality gap between Blacks and Whites living in America. While in class I realized my classmates, most of them white, and recent high school graduates like I was, knew a lot more than I did. They had read books I had never heard of while attending school in Brooklyn. Looking back into the history I learned, both here in America and in St. Vincent, this was confusing to me. As far as I could remember, The United States was built on the backs of Blacks. It was their labor that cleared all the forest that stood before; it was their labor that made the United States what it was, so why were most Blacks still living in poverty? Why were most Blacks receiving mediocre education while their White counterparts had access to all the schooling that guaranteed success in college and in life? My confusion made me want to find out more in order to answer these questions. My Senior Project aims to answer these same questions I had three years ago. Specifically, my Project gives a detailed historical analysis of the movement for Black Reparations in the U.S. starting with Callie House's movement for ex-slave pensions after emancipation. Chapter two focuses on the period following the Civil Rights Movement and the radical movement for Black Reparations that emerge with James Forman and the Black

Manifesto that demanded reparations from predominantly White Christian churches and Jewish synagogues in the late sixties. Chapter three examines the conversation surrounding Black Reparations in contemporary America in relation to the HR.40 Bill brought to congress by Representative John Conyers to study Black Reparations. Enjoy!



**“Black Reparations: An Intro to the Movement for Black Reparations”**

African Americans who were enslaved before and during the American Civil War were finally emancipated at the end of the war. President Lincoln freed all the slaves in the South with the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, and at the end of the war the system of chattel slavery was finally abolished. Former slaves left a state of complete slavery and entered a politicized freedom that focused on their ability to be wage laborers. For over two hundred years, prior to the Civil War, the South enjoyed the benefits of slave labor and embraced the system of chattel slavery as normal. The North had been industrialized for more than fifty years, and by the time the Civil War began, most Northern States had at least partially abolished slavery. Meanwhile in the South, the system of chattel slavery grew and intensified. As the nation began to expand further west, Lincoln and his Republican Party planned to use the system of wage labor instead of slavery. This was not the only reason Lincoln ended slavery in America; he also shared some abolitionist views and was friends with many Northern abolitionists. The system of chattel Slavery had become something rejected by many globally and Lincoln was very aware of this. After the war ended, things changed dramatically. “Emancipation had destroyed the foundations of the southern economy and southern society.”<sup>1</sup> Former plantation owners no longer owned slaves and therefore lost their control over the labor source that fueled the South’s economy. The planters' loss in slaves also meant a loss in

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<sup>1</sup> Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation*, 2nd ed. (Canton, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 1.

property and profits. Black slaves were very expensive property and suddenly that property had disappeared.<sup>2</sup> The South's political and social climate also changed significantly at the end of the Civil War. With the Union's military coming out victorious, and Lincoln's Republican Party in power, new institutions were established to help the South move forward from one of the most destructive wars in which the United States had ever participated. Historians Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch argue "freedom meant that the new society that were to be constructed on the site of the old could not be patterned on the old design."<sup>3</sup> In other words, if the South was going to move forward, old customs had to be eliminated so that new ones could emerge. Unfortunately, this was difficult as many former slave owners were not happy with the fact that slavery was abolished and that the Union's military was still present in the South after the war ended.<sup>4</sup> Until 1876, the South was politically powerless. The former Confederate States were still being punished for their attempt to break up the Union, and as a result, the majority of the South was directly governed by the Union's military after the war.<sup>5</sup> The war left Lincoln

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<sup>2</sup> Du Bois, W. E. Burghardt. "Reconstruction and its Benefits". *The American Historical Review* 15, no. 4 (July 1910): p. 781.; Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation*, 2nd ed. (Canton, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 2-3

<sup>3</sup> Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation*, 2nd ed. (Canton, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 101-102, 106, accessed April 23, 2015, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.03945.0001.001>.; Sidney Andrews, *The South Since the War* (Cambridge, Boston: University Press: Welch, Bigelow, & Co., 1866), p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> Foner, Eric. *A Short History of Reconstruction*. (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1990), p. 23.

and his Republican Party with the task of getting the South to emerge from its “backward” way of life and join the North in its “progressive” way of living.<sup>6</sup>

In the North, many antislavery activists argued that slavery was “backward” and wage labor was the future.<sup>7</sup> They argued that “blacks would work more effectively and profitably as free laborers than as slaves.”<sup>8</sup> American Capitalism would allow the free laborer the opportunity to progress through their labor; it would motivate them to work harder and longer. Thus when the Civil War ended slavery in America and created a new society and market place in the American South, and with slavery abolished, controlling the labor of four million ex-slaves without the use of involuntary servitude/slavery was the primary goal of Reconstruction after the Civil War.<sup>9</sup> Given the destruction and expense of the Civil War, in order for the country to move forward, the Southern economy had to be restored. In order to do this, “new institutions emerged but they were fashioned in haste and in a climate of racial animosity, and as a result they emerged deeply flawed.”<sup>10</sup> These institutions included Johnson’s Presidential Reconstruction, contract labor, Black Codes, and Sharecropping, all of which hindered Black progress

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 21.; Sidney Andrews, *The South Since the War* (Cambridge, Boston: University Press: Welch, Bigelow, & Co., 1866), p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> Foner, Eric. *Nothing But Freedom*. (Baton Rouge, NO: Louisiana State University Press., 1983), p. 43.; Sidney Andrews, *The South Since the War* (Cambridge, Boston: University Press: Welch, Bigelow, & Co., 1866), p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation*, 2nd ed. (Canton, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 1.

after emancipation. Although ex-slaves gained political freedom, they were soon effectively disenfranchised due to feelings of white supremacy by Southern Democrats and Southern Whites who did not see Blacks as equal or fit for self-government.<sup>11</sup> Socially, freed people were outcasts in a white society and were discriminated against because of the color of their skin.<sup>12</sup> These new institutions such as contract labor, in which most Blacks were forced to enter in, and Black Codes that govern the lives of freed people in the years immediately following the war, brought about new policies that gave former slaves little to no options other than working on their former masters' plantations. The war had left the South "poor and stagnant" and Southern Blacks were the poorest. Although the step from enslaved to free was a significant gain for Southern Blacks, freedom was all they received after the war. Many had been optimistic about freedom but soon came to realize that their freedom came with limitations.<sup>13</sup>

During the years immediately after the Civil War, 1865-1866, Black Codes were designed by the Freedmen's Bureau/Union's military to govern newly freed people. These punitive laws restricted Black mobility and independence and they required all freed people to sign annual labor contracts with plantation owners.<sup>14</sup> Vagrancy laws were also adopted, which played a huge role in forcing former slaves back on plantations. As Amy

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<sup>11</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 46, accessed April 23, 2015, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.03945.0001.001>.

<sup>12</sup> Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation*, 2nd ed. (Canton, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Foner, Eric. *Nothing But Freedom*. (Baton Rouge, NO: Louisiana State University Press., 1983), p. 50.

Dru Stanley argued “In the South, at the end of the Civil War, Yankee officials imposed penal sanctions against idleness and vagrancy, obliging former slaves to enter wage contracts, forcibly inculcating the habits of free labor.”<sup>15</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, in his book, *Black Reconstruction in America*, had made a similar point seventy years earlier, that “The South.....sought to [re-establish] slavery by force, because it had no comprehension of the means by which modern industry could secure the advantages of slave labor without its responsibilities.” As a result of these beliefs, the South “opposed Negro education, opposed any land and capital for Negroes, and violently and bitterly opposed any political power.”<sup>16</sup> Vagrancy laws and the Black Codes did just that. Although the Thirteenth Amendment “ended” slavery at the end of the Civil War, almost all of the four million freed people ended up on the same plantation, doing the same work that they did before emancipation.<sup>17</sup> Former slaves “had been freed practically with no land nor money, and, save in exceptional cases, without legal status, and without protection.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, former slaves were given nothing except their right to freedom. They owned nothing but their bodies and their labor. No one could enslave them except as a punishment for crime. Most freed people only knew how to do plantation work and

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<sup>15</sup> Amy Dru Stanley, "Beggars Can't Be Choosers: Compulsion and Contract in Postbellum America," *The Journal of American History* 78, no. 4 (March 1992): p. 1267.

<sup>16</sup> Du Bois, W. E. B. *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880*. (New York, NY: The World Publishing Company, 1935), p. 185.

<sup>17</sup> Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation*, 2nd ed. (Canton, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Du Bois, W. E. B. *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880*. (New York, NY: The World Publishing Company, 1935) p. 188.

almost all refused to grow “slave crops” such as cotton, rice, tobacco and sugar.<sup>19</sup> Most freed people rejected the market place and preferred to be self-sufficient.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, most freed people in the South did not have that option in the years immediately succeeding the Civil War because they did not own any land to be self-sufficient, nor did they have any money, or any other form of capital to purchase land to do so.

The challenges former slaves faced were essentially these “three great obstacles.” Ex-slaves “inherited almost nothing from slavery”, did not have the capital, nor any way of crediting to live independent, and Southern white supremacy was determined to keep Blacks dependent on the white ruling class and within their control.<sup>21</sup> Black Codes and vagrancy laws made “almost every act, word or gesture of the Negro, not consonant with good taste and good manners as well as good morals” a crime. Punishment for such crimes came in the form of a fine, and if that fine could not be paid, which was the case most of the time, a “condition of almost slavery for an indefinite time” was handed out as punishment.<sup>22</sup> Former slaves were not allowed to be on the streets late at night and had to have passes to move around during the day. Freed people saw these laws that govern their

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<sup>19</sup> Foner, Eric. *A Short History of Reconstruction*. (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1990), p. 47.; Sidney Andrews, *The South Since the War* (Cambridge, Boston: University Press: Welch, Bigelow, & Co., 1866).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> Blight, David. History 119: The Civil War and Reconstruction Era. Yale University. New Heaven, CT. 15 April 2008. Lecture.; Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation*, 2nd ed. (Canton, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Du Bois, W. E. Burghardt. “Reconstruction and its Benefits”. *The American Historical Review* 15, no. 4 (July 1910): p. 784.

freedom as similar to the ones that had enslaved them for over two hundred years.<sup>23</sup>

Imbued with a sense of rights, derived from emancipation, Blacks fought to protect their right to control themselves and be independent. “In several cities, postwar black political organization began with protest against army policies. A group of Memphis free blacks condemned the rounding up of ‘vagrants’ for plantation labor: ‘It seems the great slave trade is revived again in our city.’”<sup>24</sup>

While many in Congress, though not all, saw former slaves’ freedom in the perspective of free labor and wage labor, former slaves saw freedom as the ability to obtain their own property. Land, along with the freedom to own their labor and body, their citizenship, and the right to vote, were former slaves' representation of freedom.<sup>25</sup> During slavery, about ninety percent of Southern whites did not own slaves. In order to “advance themselves economically” these southern whites acquired land to farm, some gained management positions on a farm, and others learned a profession, or ran their own business. Having observed this for years, ex-slaves hoped to have the same opportunities after emancipation via land redistribution.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, they soon found out they did not. Seeing that most of the Civil War was fought in the South, after the war the South

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<sup>23</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 109. accessed April 23, 2015, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.03945.0001.001>.; Sidney Andrews, *The South Since the War* (Cambridge, Boston: University Press: Welch, Bigelow, & Co., 1866).

<sup>24</sup> Foner, Eric. *A short History of Reconstruction*. (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1984), p. 69.; Sidney Andrews, *The South Since the War* (Cambridge, Boston: University Press: Welch, Bigelow, & Co., 1866).

<sup>25</sup> Foner, Eric. *Nothing But Freedom*. Baton Rouge, NO: Louisiana State University Press., 1983. p. 44.;

<sup>26</sup> Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation*, 2nd ed. (Canton, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 8.

was almost completely destroyed. Rebuilding the society and the physical environment was going to be expensive and the Union did not have the money to do so and land redistribution, besides the fact that Southern plantation owners opposed such policies, would mean political suicide for any politician in 1865. The South, for about three decades following the war, struggled return to a stable economy. A depression also occurred during those years and it made life even harder for ex-slaves, most of whom were extremely poor. The economic standing of the South in the late nineteenth century, ensured that "[in] the late nineteenth century ex-slaves were in no position to demand a larger share of the South's economic output, and southern whites were certainly unwilling to see their own positions deteriorate further to the benefit the blacks."<sup>27</sup> In other words, the South's poor economy had further infuriated former masters, who blamed it on the emancipation of the slaves. Life did get better for the former slaves, in comparison to the life of bondage that they lived previously. Ultimately this did not sit well with most Southern whites who, unlike ex-slaves, lived better lives before the depression. Most of them, still angry about losing their property in enslaved African Americans, claimed Blacks were lazy and their emancipation was only bad for the society's economy, ignoring that the ex-slaves' desire to have more down time, times where they could rest and enjoy their freedom, was a natural reaction from a people who worked restlessly for over two centuries.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation*, 2nd ed. (Canton, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 6.; Foner, Eric. *Nothing But Freedom*. (Baton Rouge, NO: Louisiana State University Press., 1983), p. 44.; Sidney Andrews, *The South Since the War* (Cambridge, Boston: University Press: Welch, Bigelow, & Co., 1866), p. 25, 27-28.



After Lincoln's assassination on April 14<sup>th</sup> 1865, the goals of Reconstruction underwent a revision when Andrew Johnson, Lincoln's successor as president, took up the task of reconstructing the South. Unfortunately, President Johnson gave little attention to the problem of integrating four million former slaves into their new status as free people. Instead, Johnson pardoned almost all ex-Confederates by the fall of 1865. As a result of Johnson's lack of interest in carefully reconstructing the South, and strong opposition coming from Democrats to Radical Republicans who hoped to get the southern economy back on track and integrate newly freed people into their new status as free citizens, Reconstruction came with little benefits for Southern Blacks. The big question that both Johnson and Congress faced was what was to happen to this new class of free people who had been enslaved for over two hundred years? They had never been free before and most ex-slaves were illiterate, which made them susceptible to white exploitation. Southern Democrats wanted immediate re-entrance into the Union and opposed all of the policies of reconstruction by Radical Republicans. While Radical Republicans called for Blacks to be given the right to suffrage, Southern Democrats called for a return to white Southern home rule, where White men and White men only ruled.<sup>29</sup> Radical Republicans understood the difficulty of reconstructing the South and wanted to lead the nation's new direction after a civil war to one where all were equal no matter their race. They believed granting freed people equal civil rights and political rights was one of the first requirements to effectively reconstructing the South after the Civil War. To help reconstruct the South, Congress created a "Bureau of Refugees,

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<sup>29</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 100, accessed April 23, 2015, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.03945.0001.001>.

Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands” at the end of the war.<sup>30</sup> The Freedmen's Bureau, as this organization was commonly known, was under the control of the Union's military and it was designed to help former slaves integrate into the “American” way of life. W. E. B. Du Bois reflected on this experience in *The Souls of Black Folks*, and discussed the Freedmen's Bureau noting, “[The Freedmen's Bureau] purpose was to 'establish regulations' for [former slaves], protect them, lease them lands, adjust their wages, and appear in civil and military courts as their 'next friend.'”<sup>31</sup> The Bureau was expected to help newly freed Blacks adapt to their “new status of voluntary industry.”<sup>32</sup> In order to do this the Freedmen's Bureau opened schools, and, to a certain extent, prevented former slaveholders from using Black Codes to re-enslave African Americans. The Bureau also attempted to answer the question of what was to be done with the abandoned lands in the south. These “abandoned properties” were “placed in the hands of the Bureau for eventual leases and sale to ex-slaves in forty-acre parcels,”<sup>33</sup> a derivative of William Tecumseh Sherman's “Field-order Number Fifteen.” This notion of giving former slaves forty-acres and a mule (or other draft animal) had been first introduced by General Sherman in 1864, and was later adopted by the Freedmen's Bureau as a way of integrating former slaves into their new status as free people. Unfortunately, during Presidential Reconstruction under Andrew Johnson, “Field-order Number Fifteen” was vetoed. Although there were some good that came out of the Freedmen's Bureau, like the

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<sup>30</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY: W. W. Northon & Company, 1999), p. 22.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 22.; Sidney Andrews, *The South Since the War* (Cambridge, Boston: University Press: Welch, Bigelow, & Co., 1866), p. 23, 24.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 21.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p. 22.

development of schools for Blacks and representation in court, the Bureau did fail in many ways, particularly in terms of land redistribution.

When it came to addressing the issue of integrating former slaves into the “American” way of life, both sides of Congress struggled to agree on how Black freedom would look. Radical Republicans believed that freed people should be granted citizenship and protection under the law along with their freedom. They also wanted newly freedmen to have the right to vote. In fact, some former slaves were granted the right to vote at the end of the Civil War. Suffrage, the Radical Republicans in Congress believed, would prevent the re-enslavement of Blacks by their former masters, and also increase the North’s political power in Southern states.<sup>34</sup> As citizens of the United States ex-slaves would use their vote to serve their interests. Most freed people believed, more than anything else, that land, was what they really deserved to get after working it for so long.<sup>35</sup> One of the founding philosophies of the United States is John Locke's philosophy on property, which was used to take land away from Native American Indians. According to Locke, when labor is applied to nature to change it from its original state, the laborer has the God given right to what his labor produces.<sup>36</sup> Former slaves believed, by Locke's

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<sup>34</sup> W. E. B Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (New York, NY: The World Publishing Company, 1935), p. 195-96; David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*(Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 109, accessed April 23, 2015, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.03945.0001.001>.

<sup>35</sup> Eric Foner, *Nothing But Freedom* (Baton Rouge, NO: Louisiana State University Press., 1983), Page 56; David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), accessed April 23, 2015, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.03945.0001.001>. *Liberator*, February 24, 1865; quoted in Mcpherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, p. 841.

<sup>36</sup> John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government* (New York, NY: The Liberal Arts Press, 1952), p. 20.

standard, they had a valid claim to the land they worked for over two hundred years.<sup>37</sup> In *The Second Treatise of Government*, Locke argues that God gave the world to men in common and also gave them “reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life and convenience.”<sup>38</sup> The land, Locke argued, did not belong to any human being in its natural and original state. He believed people owned their bodies and the labor that came from that person. When the laborer used his/her labor and create something new and convenient out of what was natural, the laborer automatically became the owner of what his/her labor created. “As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property.” He went even further to argue that the laborer had enclosed the land from the common by becoming the owner via the labor he/she applied to the land.<sup>39</sup> From this perspective, ex-slaves’ claim to the land, one could argue, was legitimate. Now that they were free, ex-slaves adopted such philosophies as their own.<sup>40</sup> When Locke wrote “God and his reason commanded him to subdue the earth, i. e., improve it for the benefit of life, and therein lay out something upon it that was his own, his labor,”<sup>41</sup> even an unlettered ex-slave could interpret this philosophy as pertaining to the two and one-half centuries they “tilled,” “planted,” “improved,” and “cultivated” the land without compensation. Labor, according to Locke, is the one thing that gave ownership and private property. It “gave a right of property wherever anyone

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<sup>37</sup> *Liberator*, February 24, 1865; quoted in Mcpherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, p. 841.

<sup>38</sup> John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government* (New York, NY: The Liberal Arts Press, 1952), p. 20.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17.

<sup>40</sup> Sidney Andrews, *The South Since the War* (Cambridge, Boston: University Press: Welch, Bigelow, & Co.,, 1866).

<sup>41</sup> John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government* (New York, NY: The Liberal Arts Press, 1952), p. 20.

was pleased to employ it upon what was common,....”<sup>42</sup> The land was common until enslaved Blacks worked it. It was common until enslaved Blacks cleared all the forest and cultivated the land. It was their “labor indeed that put the difference of value on everything...”<sup>43</sup> The newly freed people who hoped to obtain land after emancipation were not crazy to think they deserved a portion of the land they worked, their labor was what sustained the South's economy for over two centuries. According to Locke’s philosophy, the land was owed to ex-slaves, at least some of it, and yet “slaves received only 21.7 percent of the output produced on large plantations, and well over one-half of their potential income was expropriated from them without compensation.”<sup>44</sup> Although many freed people lacked education, they were aware of the profits that came from their labor, and for years they saw it go straight to their former masters. If anyone deserved land after the war, it was the people who worked it for centuries, ex-slaves. Here the notion of reparations takes a form of compensation for unpaid labor, or, a demand for stolen property, if Locke's philosophy is applied. If labor makes private property out of what is common to all of “mankind,” then ex-slaves had a right to the land they worked during slavery. Locke's analogy explaining the value of labor over fruitless land could be used to support ex-slaves' demand for part of the land they had been joining their labor with for over two hundred years. He wrote “let anyone consider what the difference is between an acre of land planted with tobacco or sugar, sown with wheat or barely, and an acre of the same land lying in common without any husbandry upon it....he will find that

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p. 20.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p. 20.

<sup>44</sup> Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation*, 2nd ed. (Canton, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 3-4.

the improvement of labor makes the far greater part of the value.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, even if the land belonged to plantation owners, their slaves were the ones joining labor to the land to make it valuable commodities. And since “every man” owns his/her “self,” and his/her labor, whatever is produced from that labor becomes his property. Ex-slaves could not have made any demands for compensation during bondage, but as freed people they could have, and many did demand compensation for unpaid labor.<sup>46</sup>

Even with limited political right and representation, Blacks made it known that they wanted land.<sup>47</sup> Despite Blacks views on freedom, the combination of former slaveholder resistance to redistribution and progressive Republicans’ commitments to wage a labor-driven economy ensured that Blacks received nothing but freedom. Former slaveholders and northern investors and speculators laid claim to much of the South's productive terrain: former slaves had no choice but to work for former slaveholders and northern speculators moving South. With nothing but freedom in their possession, former slaves had to depend on their white employers for everything.<sup>48</sup>

To add to the numerous challenges Southern Blacks faced after emancipation, and ultimately the failure of Reconstruction after the Civil War, lack of education also kept

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<sup>45</sup> John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government* (New York, NY: The Liberal Arts Press, 1952), p. 24-25.

<sup>46</sup> *Liberator*, February 24, 1865; quoted in Mcpherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, p. 841.

<sup>47</sup> Mary Frances Berry and John W. Blassingame, *Long Memory: The Black Experience in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 150.; Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA [etc.]: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 120.

<sup>48</sup> Eric Foner, *A short History of Reconstruction* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1984), p. 47.

Southern Blacks at the bottom of Southern Society. "Formal education for slaves was almost nonexistent. In most slave states it was actually illegal to educate a slave."<sup>49</sup> Most plantation owners believed that education would interfere with "the daily work routine..." of the slave.<sup>50</sup> Most slave-owners saw their slaves as only one entity, property. The slave's sole purpose was to work so that his/her master could reap the benefits that came from the slaves' labor. Slaves were the main reason Southern plantations were so successful. In most cases, the only time masters invested in educating their slaves was if additional profits were guaranteed. Most Slaves were uneducated, besides the rare few. After emancipation, the desire for education increased and it became just as important as land and money for the newly freed ex-slaves. Due to this lack of education, many ex-slaves, in the years following the Civil War, were often cheated out in dealings with their former masters and other white southerners who shared the same "anti-negro" views. In the eyes of ex-slaves, education was the sure way to better their living conditions.<sup>51</sup> As ex-slaves' hopes for land began to decrease, ex-slaves kept hopes of advancing through education. Although there were few African Americans who were able to achieve success in face of a racist Southern society that protected white supremacy, most ex-slaves died extremely poor.<sup>52</sup> The system of legal segregation that followed the war and lasted until 1954, almost an entire century after the Civil War ended, Southern Blacks continued to

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<sup>49</sup> Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation*, 2nd ed. (Canton, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 15.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>51</sup> Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation*, 2nd ed. (Canton, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 18.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

receive the worst education, if any, as many Black families had their children work to help meet the family's economic needs. Education, along with land and money, became a part of the language of Black Reparations at the turn of the twentieth century.

The Depression of 1873 caused a dramatic change in American politics. Wage labor suffered from the impacts of Depression as it caused many to be laid off and be without employment for a very long time.<sup>53</sup> Many factories in Northern States were forced to stop production and others began to cut wages significantly. The country entered into hard times, some argued "worst times the nation yet had seen."<sup>54</sup> There was an increase in the tension between the rich and the poor and the gap between the two also grew considerably. Urban centers, where most poor people lived, felt the effects of Depression the hardest, and the unemployment rates in these areas were highest. Many residents searched for work but could not find any. Both skilled and unskilled faced this problem.<sup>55</sup> These men and women soon took up a status of "tramps" and "beggars", which caused many to look down on them. With the economy at its worse, and hundreds of citizens losing their jobs and facing wage-cuts, America, in the 1870s, began to experience a societal revolution. Many Northern citizens cried for help but were told 'Things must regulate themselves.'<sup>56</sup> There were also widespread conservative views

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<sup>53</sup> Eric Foner, *A short History of Reconstruction* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1984), p. 217-218.

<sup>54</sup> Amy Dru Stanley, "Beggars Can't Be Choosers: Compulsion and Contract in Postbellum America," *The Journal of American History* 78, no. 4 (March 1992): p. 1269.

<sup>55</sup> Eric Foner, *A short History of Reconstruction* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1984), p. 218.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.



(mostly those who were least affected by the crisis, the rich) that related people's poverty to being lazy. Organizations like the American Social Science Association rejected government assistance, and believed it was the "over-generosity" shown to the poor that also contributed to their "laziness."<sup>57</sup> They encouraged people to work, even if it meant substantial cuts in wages. Many workers responded with attempts to resist wage cuts by striking but failed to create any major changes for the most part. As unemployment rose, so did the number of "tramps" and "beggars" that roamed the streets. To combat this problem, vagrancy laws were created by Northern legislators.<sup>58</sup> Unemployment, "beggary" and "pauperism" were all outlawed and punishable under the law. Punishment for crimes of vagrancy came in the form of a fine, and if that fine was not met, perpetrators were ordered to "compulsory labor." Vagrancy laws in the North resembled closely post-Civil War, Reconstruction-Era Black Codes that inflicted similar punishments to freed people of the South. These laws came to control the labor force and redefined the concept of free labor.

As the Depression of the 1870s deepened, and the lack of help coming from the Federal Government continued, the American political arena began to address the different issues brought about by the economic crisis. The Republican Party began to have in-party division, which led to Democrats seizing power in congress. Western and Southern Republicans wanted the government to get involved and help fix the economy,

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

<sup>58</sup> Amy Dru Stanley, "Beggars Can't Be Choosers: Compulsion and Contract in Postbellum America," *The Journal of American History* 78, no. 4 (March 1992): p. 1267.

while most Easterners opposed it, and labeled it “communist.”<sup>59</sup> By 1875 Democrats had attained majority in Congress, which marked the beginning of their quest for “redemption” of the political South and Southern Democrats. Democrats had, for many years before the Civil War, a strong political influence in Southern politics and as well as in Congress. The Civil War and the Radical Reconstruction period had put the Republican Party in charge and Democrats at their mercy. This was no longer the case in 1874. The Depression caused voting citizens to turn “against the party in power” and the Southern elections of 1874 proved that Democrats were steps closer to redeeming the former Confederate States. They won “over two-thirds of the region’s House seats, redeemed Arkansas, and gained control of Florida’s legislature.”<sup>60</sup> Democrats based their political campaign on the color line and often used violence to get the results they wanted. In Louisiana and Alabama, Democrats murdered and assassinated both Black and White supporters of the Republican Party, including “local Republican officeholders.”<sup>61</sup> The election of 1874 was a major turning point for both Democrats and Republicans in that it empowered Southern Democrats to regain dominance in Southern politics and ultimately crippled Radical Republicans efforts to effectively reconstruct the South. Republicans did not regain “electoral dominance” until 1896.<sup>62</sup> With former

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<sup>59</sup> Eric Foner, *A short History of Reconstruction* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1984), [Page 220]

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>61</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 101-102, accessed April 23, 2015, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.03945.0001.001>.

<sup>62</sup> Eric Foner, *A short History of Reconstruction* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1984), p. 221.

Confederate politicians back in control of the South, Southern Blacks faced harsh treatments from southern white supremacy backed by racist legislations. Education as a form of compensation for slavery was further abandoned.<sup>63</sup>

The Depression also placed Southern farmers in debt and unable to pay wages to freed people. A system of sharecropping became the primary means of employment for most freed people. Forced into contract with no other option but the penitentiary, freed people saw themselves trapped in a land where their rights went unacknowledged by the law. While freed people enjoyed the protection of the Freedmen's Bureau during the early years of Reconstruction (1865-70), the redemption of Southern Democrats in Southern politics saw less and less of Black civil rights being protected. In-party division among Republicans continued and when some Republicans called for Federal involvement to stop the violence on Southern Blacks, some felt it was better to abandon Reconstruction efforts. Most of the latter were supporters of State Rights and limited government involvement in individual state governments. Even when political violence left large number of Blacks dead, the Federal Government continued to do nothing arguing that "The whole public are tired out with these annual autumnal outbreaks in the South..... [and] are ready now to condemn any interference on the part of the Government."<sup>64</sup> Despite the division among Republicans and opposition from the Democrat Party, the Civil Rights Bill of 1875 was made law, along with the Jurisdiction

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<sup>63</sup> Mary Frances Berry, *My Face Is Black Is True* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knope, 2005), [Page 18, footnote 15]

<sup>64</sup> Eric Foner, *A short History of Reconstruction* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1984), [Page 236]

and Removal Act, which strengthened federal judiciary's power over state governments.<sup>65</sup> Although these laws were adopted and "accepted" by Southern States, there were huge efforts, many of them successful, to oppress Southern Blacks and deny them the right to vote. Democrats used the same violence as in the election of 1874 to gain political power in Mississippi in 1875, this time with little fear of Federal intervention. At the end of 1875, almost all could agree that Reconstruction had failed. "Seeking to gain title to the land and access to the education they needed for economic advancement, blacks encountered the unyielding and frequently violent hostility of whites who tried to deny them both."<sup>66</sup> Transitioning from slavery to freedom was not the problem of Southern society instead it was due to the flawed institutions that followed emancipation that failed to effectively reconstruct the south to where everyone was equal. The redemption of Southern Democrats also affected the post-Civil War Southern society because it supported and protected white supremacy.<sup>67</sup>

In 1891, Callie House, an African American woman, who was born into slavery in 1861, began her movement for Black Reparations in the form of pensions for ex-slaves.<sup>68</sup> House became active in the movement after reading about a bill that was in progress that would distribute pensions to ex-slaves. This "Freedmen's Pension Bill" was drafted by Southern Democrat Walter Vaughan of Alabama. Vaughn had "persuaded" Nebraska

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>66</sup> Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation*, 2nd ed. (Canton, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), [Page 13]

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>68</sup> Mary Frances Berry, *My Face Is Black Is True* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), p. 8, Chapter No. 1, footnote 4 (Census of 1880)

congressman, Republican William J. Connell, to introduce the bill in 1890 after writing to him about the bill and why he wanted Connell to support it. A year later Vaughn had already sold ten thousand copies of his “Freedmen's Pension Bill: A plea for American Freedmen,” a pamphlet he published in 1890 explaining his support for the bill and his reasons for its necessity. He even dedicates the piece of literature to his Republican friend W. J. Connell, and commends his “bravery” for daring to “say that the slave of a century is entitled to financial recognition because of former wrongs.”<sup>69</sup> In other words, Vaughan believed the government committed a wrong against ex-slaves and was obligated to compensate them for past wrongs suffered during slavery. Agents selling Vaughan’s pamphlet visited Rutherford County, Nashville, Tennessee in 1891, where House would have most likely acquired a copy, which was being sold for a dollar.<sup>70</sup> Poor Southern Blacks, many of who were former slaves, or had parents and other relatives who were enslaved before 1861, found interest in Vaughan's pamphlet; it concerned them as poor ex-slaves who struggled to survive daily and found appeal in being compensated for past wrongs done to them during slavery. Like the ex-slaves, Vaughan believed the Federal Government was responsible for the poor living conditions of most ex-slaves living in the South during the late nineteenth century. The Government had freed a large group of people with nothing but freedom alone in their possession; no money, no land; just their freedom to not be legally enslaved except through a commission of crime. This left most ex-slaves in debt and extremely poor and at the mercy of their former masters, most of

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<sup>69</sup> Walter R. Vaughan, *Vaughan's "Freedmen's Pension Bill.": A Plea for American Freedmen* (Omaha, NE: Walter R. Vaughan, 1890), p. 5.

<sup>70</sup> Mary Frances Berry, *My Face Is Black Is True* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), p. 33.

whom were focused on returning the South to its antebellum days.<sup>71</sup> It was the Government's "duty" to assist the "wards of the nation" (ex-slaves) as much as they do for the "saviors of a nation" (relates to the Veterans' Pension Bill that had passed in 1890, the same year Vaughan's pamphlet was published). Vaughan argued that it was the Government that made the former slaves free, so ex-slaves were now the Government's responsibility.<sup>72</sup> Vaughan based his argument for ex-slave pensions on the notion that the government had a moral obligation to correct its past wrongs in order to move forward as a nation. Vaughan also argued in his pamphlet that it was the English monarchy who corrupted the Union by introducing and enforcing the system of chattel slavery to the colonists, who, he argues, were originally against the system.<sup>73</sup> Vaughan does not deny the benefits that came from this "system of traditional wrong", but he also does not feel any guilt, and believes the "beneficiaries of the system of slavery were not responsible for a wrong entailed upon them."<sup>74</sup> Vaughan is not blaming those who benefitted from the system of slavery but he is calling for support for the bill's potential to improve Southern economy through financing ex-slaves to spend in White-owned businesses of the South. Vaughan's ex-slave pension bill served three main purposes, 1.) Compensation for the moral wrong done to ex-slaves via the system of slavery. 2.) To help and support former slaves who lived in extreme poverty, and thirdly, to help rebuild the South's economy by putting money in the hands of the large population of ex-slaves that lived in

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<sup>71</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 100, accessed April 23, 2015, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.03945.0001.001>

<sup>72</sup> Walter R. Vaughan, *Vaughan's "Freedmen's Pension Bill.": A Plea for American Freedmen* (Omaha, NE: Walter R. Vaughan, 1890), p. 8.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

the South.<sup>75</sup> As a Southern Democrat, Vaughan was doing his job as a political representative of the South. He was searching for ways to improve the South's economic standing. Callie House, and other African Americans who read Vaughan's pamphlet did not completely agree with his motives but kept a keen eye on the movement.

Callie House may have obtained a copy through borrowing or sharing the cost with others from her community but the idea spread regardless. Many of House's neighbors worked as laundresses and seamstresses, while the men worked for different white employers doing various service work or farming through the system of sharecropping. The nation was still struggling economically due to the economic depression of the previous decade. Ultimately, Blacks felt the effects of depression the hardest and, according to economic historians, were not in any "position to demand a larger share of the South's economic output."<sup>76</sup> Inevitably, they received the lowest wages and were the poorest class. Along with low paying employment, African Americans in the South faced a violent and racial oppression that kept them at the bottom of society with no help from the federal government. The Redemption-era of Southern Democrats caused many Southern African Americans to lose faith in the government to protect their civil rights, much less to compensate ex-slaves. Blacks faced brutal opposition from Southern Democrats aimed at reviving Southern white supremacy. Most Blacks were restricted from voting due to racist legislation and intimidation. Since their redemption to political power in 1876, Southern Democrats began to gradually, and eventually, undo all

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<sup>75</sup> Walter R. Vaughan, *Vaughan's "Freedmen's Pension Bill.": A Plea for American Freedmen* (Omaha, NE: Walter R. Vaughan, 1890), p. 8.

<sup>76</sup> Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation*, 2nd ed. (Canton, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 9.

the progress achieved during Reconstruction. As things began to get worse for Southern Blacks, many resorted to migration. Some moved to the industrialized North, some moved west to California, the new frontier, and some moved to other Southern States where large communities of African Americans resided and lived with less fear of white control and violence. With a lack of faith in the government to cater to their needs and no talks of compensation for slavery, Vaughn's Pension Bill rekindled poor Blacks' optimism for restitution in 1891.

The Freedmen's Pension Bill was drafted in a similar way to the Union veterans' pensions bill introduced in Congress for veterans who fought with the Union's military during the Civil War.<sup>77</sup> The Freedmen's Pension Bill required ex-slaves who were still living to apply for pensions from the Federal Pension Bureau. Those who qualified would receive “\$15 per month and a bounty of \$500” if they were seventy years and older. Those who were under the age of seventy would receive \$12 per month and a bounty of \$300 until they became seventy. Ex-Slaves under the age of sixty, if qualified, would receive \$8 per month and a bounty of \$100. Those under the age of fifty would receive \$4 per month and then \$8 per month when they turned sixty.<sup>78</sup> In his pamphlet, Walter Vaughn explained how he was able to lobby for the Freedmen's Pension Bill and how he came to introduce and support it. He claimed after visiting some parts of Mississippi and observing the horrible living condition former slaves lived in caused him to promote the idea of pensions for ex-slaves who struggled to survive daily. Vaughan believed that the

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<sup>77</sup> Mary Frances Berry, *My Face Is Black Is True* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), p. 34.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34-37, footnote 45 (See H.R. 11119, *Congressional Records*); Walter R. Vaughan, *Vaughan's "Freedmen's Pension Bill.": A Plea for American Freedmen* (Omaha, NE: Walter R. Vaughan, 1890), p. 39.



emancipation of slaves in the South left former slaves “poverty stricken,” and, most Southern Democrats believed they were a burden to Southern society. Vaughan, much like his fellow party members, believed Southern slave societies functioned better before the Civil War. He believed, more specifically, slaves lived better lives before they were emancipated. They believed the Civil War was primarily fought to save the Union with no focus on freeing the enslaved. To them, the war had damaged the white “Brotherhood” of the nation and had caused a division between the North and the South. The war was over, ex-slaves had been freed, now it was time to reconcile the relationship between the North and the South. As the reunification of the two regions rose to the top of the nation's political agenda, the problems former slaves continued to face after their emancipation were pushed aside.<sup>79</sup> This left a legacy of issues that seriously hindered the progress of Black Americans after emancipation.

Although many poor African Americans supported the Freedmen's Pension Bill for obvious reasons, there were some who watched Vaughan with suspicion, and Callie House was one of those people. According to Berry, Vaughan's commitment to improving the lives of white Southerners was disguised through the Freedmen's Pension Bill. House argued that Walter Vaughan real intention with introducing and lobbying for the Freedmen's Pension Bill was to “revive the southern economy” by using the pension bill which would give ex-slaves money to spend on white businesses. In the end, all the capital from the pensions would remain with the white ruling class who owned almost everything, leaving poor blacks in the same position they had always held since they

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<sup>79</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. #, accessed April 23, 2015, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.03945.0001.001>.

stepped foot onto the New World, the bottom.<sup>80</sup> As a poor African American, and an ex-slave, Callie House believed the government had a debt to pay to former slaves and the Freedmen's Pension Bill was a way to do so. House kept her eyes and ears open and paid close attention to Walter Vaughan's efforts to get Congress to pass legislation that would guarantee pensions for ex-slaves. She was a direct victim of slavery and had witness her own family suffer the evils of enslavement. House also lived among other ex-slaves who also suffered from extreme poverty after being emancipated without land or money to help them survive. If anyone deserved help, Callie House believed it was these ex-slaves who labored restlessly and relentlessly for many years without pay. Although House opposed Vaughan's intentions with the Freedmen's Pension Bill, she used the information in his pamphlet to help start her own movement to gain compensation for ex-slaves, especially those living in extreme poverty. House learned how Vaughan went about lobbying for ex-slave pension and applied similar tactics to her movement.

After attempts to get land failed, House's ex-slave pension movement emerged as the next attempt by Blacks to gain reparations for slavery. House, an ex-slave herself, understood the difficult lives ex-slaves lived after emancipation. Most ex-slaves lived in extreme poverty and many died in poverty. House's ex-slave pension movement was a grass-roots level one that attracted mostly poor ex-slaves who were old and disabled from so many years of manual labor. Most of these ex-slaves suffered from poor health and had no means to access proper health care.<sup>81</sup> They supported House's movement because

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<sup>80</sup> Mary Frances Berry, *My Face Is Black Is True* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), p. 37.

<sup>81</sup> Mary Frances Berry, *My Face Is Black Is True* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), p. 51-52.

they too believed the government owed them for years of unpaid labor. Local preachers and their congregation, many of whom were ex-slaves themselves, also supported the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association. The Association received most of its support from via the Black church, a place where Blacks have always found empowerment to fight for equality.

The Association's mutual help/assistance programs were very helpful to its members. The Association offered medical and burial assistance to its members and was essential in helping ex-slaves and their families have more control over their lives and interests were heard. This was very important for the members of the Association since at the time Southern Blacks were practically disfranchised.<sup>82</sup> Ex-slaves across the South all related to House's movement for ex-slave pensions and soon the Association grew in its membership.<sup>83</sup> Neither land nor education as reparations for poor ex-slaves had been achieved, so House's ex-slaves pension movement seemed a worthy cause to the Association's members.<sup>84</sup> The Association was well organized and the funds collected from members were used for mutual assistance programs, but more importantly, to lobby for the pension bill in Congress, and also to spread information on the ex-slave pension bill movement.

As the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association grew in membership, so did the opposition coming from the Federal government.<sup>85</sup> Callie House

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<sup>82</sup> Mary Frances Berry, *My Face Is Black Is True* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), [Page 51-52]

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

and the Association's movement for ex-slaves pensions threatened the government's systematic control over poor Blacks. There were strong opposition coming from most whites, many of whom "denounced the members of the association, House, and other leaders as misguided."<sup>86</sup> White press "derided the movement as ridiculous and fraudulent."<sup>87</sup> Even when Vaughan first introduced his Freedmen's Pension Bill, many whites criticized him for supporting ex-slave pensions. "The papers blamed Vaughan because as a white man he should have known that his idea would excite the "negroes" unnecessarily and make them less tractable."<sup>88</sup> The growing membership of the Association lead to an investigation by the Federal Pension Bureau, who then placed a Fraud order against the Ex-Slave Pension Association. Federal Pension Bureau attacked House and the Association and its efforts to gain pensions for slavery and years of unpaid labor, because they, along with government, were determined to keep Blacks under control and were certain that ex-slaves were not going to get pensions for slavery. "Federal officials feared the association's successful membership campaign" and they feared a rebellion would occur after ex-slaves "discovered that there would be no pension or other compensation for slavery."<sup>89</sup> This fear ultimately motivated the opposition coming from the Federal government. As a result of the Pension Bureau's attack on House and the Ex-slave Pension Association, Congress "upheld the postmasters action while recognizing that they had the right to instruct him to declare certain matters unmailable." The Association was then band by the postmaster and could not send nor

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>87</sup> Mary Frances Berry, *My Face Is Black Is True* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), p. 79.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

receive mails of any kind. The pension Bureau accused the Association of participating in fraudulent activities, despite no evidence to support such accusations.<sup>90</sup>

The government attacked an impoverished group due to the fear of ex-slaves' dedication to gaining reparations for slavery. The power of ex-slave reparations demands scared government officials, even though they had the Association under surveillance and knew that its members were nothing more than ex-slave and their families who met to "work peaceably to achieve economic justice."<sup>91</sup> The opposition the Association faced was mostly based on the fear of Black progression over white Americans. Blacks position in America had always been the bottom and White America wanted to keep it that way, especially in the South where Black disfranchisement and oppression reigned with terror. The government wanted ex-slaves to "remain bereft of even the hope of ever receiving any form of reparations from the federal government." And to do this the government had to "demonize all pension advocates as venal agitators."<sup>92</sup> Despite the constant opposition coming from white America, and the Federal government, Callie House continued with her movement to fund lobbying efforts for ex-slave pensions. House's persistence, along with member's discontent over the inequality and oppression they faced, kept the movement alive. "Equal protection under the law remained unenforced and the plight of [B]lacks ignored" and "the largely unresponsive states and federal government did little or nothing to remedy the abuse."<sup>93</sup> Despite full cooperation by the Association, the

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 86-90, 128, 162.; "Ex-slaves the defrauded." New York Times January 23, 1900.

<sup>91</sup> Mary Frances Berry, *My Face Is Black Is True* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), p. 94.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 143.; Black Resistance/white law.

Pension Bureau continued to enforce the fraud order, which was unfortunate since the funds collected were sometimes used to fund the needed mutual assistance programs of the Association. “No one involved with the Association realized that no matter what they said or did, the government was bent on suppressing the pension movement.”<sup>94</sup> Eventually House was arrested in 1916 and the movement did not continue much longer after her conviction.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

**Black Nationalism and the Fight for Black Reparations in the Late Sixties**

At the turn of the twentieth century, little had changed for Blacks living in the United States. Slavery had left a legacy of Black oppression that motivated years of institutionalized racism and discrimination against blacks. Blacks were lynched in the South; segregation had been ruled legal in 1896, and the system of Jim Crow had left Southern Blacks disenfranchised. Blacks in the North faced race riots where white mobs violently attacked Blacks. “Between 1882 and 1946, at least 5,000 people, the vast majority of whom were black, were lynched in the United States.”<sup>95</sup> Black communities not only had to worry about lynchings, but they were in constant fear of invasions by armed murderous white mobs.

In the decade from 1898 to 1908, 'race riots' broke out in Wilmington, North Carolina; Atlanta; New Orleans; New York City; Phoenix; South Carolina; Akron, Ohio; Washington Parish, Louisiana; Birmingham, Alabama; Brownsville, Texas; and Springfield, Illinois; to name but a few.<sup>96</sup>

Southern Democrats and big business-oriented Northern Democrats had successfully pressured Congress to abandon efforts to effectively reconstruct the South and integrate Southern Blacks. Although the Fourteenth Amendment had lawfully made African Americans citizens of the United States, White America struggled to fully accept Blacks as equal and as American citizens. Southern Blacks were kept from participating politically by poll taxes, Grandfather clauses, and literacy tests enforced by Southern state governments to keep Blacks from exercising their constitutional rights. Most

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<sup>95</sup> Robin D. G. Kelly, *Freedom Dreams* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), p. 19.

<sup>96</sup> *Idib.*, p. 19.

Southern whites still held the notion that Blacks were not fit to participate in America's politics and that they were biologically unfit for self-government. After 1876 and the redemption of Southern Democrats, ever fewer people of African descent, most of whom lived in the South, achieved political success. Groups like the Klu Klux Klan (KKK) used violence to intimidate and keep Blacks from voting booths. Despite the danger, many Blacks still attempted to exercise their right to vote but faced violent opposition from racist whites who saw Blacks as inferior and a threat to white supremacy, particularly in the realms of white political and economic dominance over Blacks. With “Jim Crow” laws mandating and supporting inequality between Blacks and Whites, African Americans continued to suffer from subordination and second-class citizenship for an additional century after the conclusion of the Civil War. The previous century saw the emergence of legal segregation in the South with the Supreme Court case that ruled “separate but equal” treatment of Blacks and Whites was legal in 1896 with the Plessy v. Ferguson case.<sup>97</sup> This legal segregation continued up until the 1954 court case of Brown v. Board of Education that overturned the Plessy v. Ferguson case. During this time Blacks constantly faced harsh and violent discrimination from whites, both in the South and the North. In 1921, the prominent and successful Black business districts were bombed and destroyed by White mobs in Tulsa, Oklahoma and a Black neighborhood in East St. Louis, Missouri. Like much of the white mob violence on Blacks that occurred before the civil rights movement, many Blacks lost their lives, including young children.

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<sup>97</sup>Boris I. Bittker, *The Case for Black Reparations* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 13.



And, like past mob violence on Blacks, the wrong-doers were not convicted by white-dominated courts and juries.<sup>98</sup>

As things began to worsen in the South many Southern Blacks began to migrate to Northern cities, starting at the turn of the century and accelerating after World War I and the onset of the Great Depression. Between 1910 and 1920 there was an enormous migration of Southern Blacks moving to Northern industrial cities like New York, Boston, and Chicago. This migration grew tremendously by the end of the Second World War. There are various factors that contributed to this large migration of Southern Blacks. The industrial North and its higher wages attracted many Southern Blacks who suffered from harsh discrimination, disenfranchisement, very low wages, and extreme poverty living in the South. The North was not much better; Blacks still faced discrimination and were often victims of hate crimes and race riots. Increases in Northern industrialization during the early twentieth century also caused an increase in European immigration to the United States. These immigrants, especially the ones coming from Southern and Eastern Europe, became immediate competition to Blacks living in these urban cities and many of these immigrants participated in race riots that targeted blacks, attempting to accelerate their assimilation into Anglo-American society by trading on their “whiteness” in comparison to African-Americans’ exclusion by color.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>Robin D. G. Kelly, *Freedom Dreams* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), p. 79-80.

<sup>99</sup>Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 94-96, 109, 118.

The First Great Migration of Southern Blacks made Northern race relations more complicated.<sup>100</sup> Competition between poor Blacks migrating from the South and Europeans who began to immigrate to the United States, along with the political rhetoric used to unify all Whites by Democrats in Congress, ultimately promoted and led to residential segregation in Northern industrial cities. As the number of Blacks moving north increased, most of them could only find housing in predominantly Black neighborhoods; several Black “ghettos” consequently emerged in different Northern cities. “As the number of blacks in Chicago more than doubled, crowding forced them over invisible boundaries into adjoining white neighborhoods, where they were met with threats and violence.” Blacks, although out of the South, still grappled with racial discrimination and violence in the North. “Between July 1917 and March 1921, there were fifty-eight recorded bombings of properties rented or purchased by blacks in white Chicago neighborhoods.”<sup>101</sup> Many white residents in Northern urban cities like Chicago formed “neighborhood improvement associations” where they pressured white owners and realtors to discriminate against Blacks who were trying to move in to these predominantly white neighborhoods. “Whites also adopted restrictive covenants to confine black Chicagoans to small sections of the city. . . . Most restrictive covenants prevented the sale of property to blacks, although some targeted Jews and Asians as well.”<sup>102</sup> These restrictive covenants were introduced in the 1920s, and by 1940, Chicago became the most segregated Northern city. “Together, the bombings, ‘neighborhood

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<sup>100</sup> Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York, NY: Random House, 2010). p. 219, 249-250.

<sup>101</sup> Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 21, 211-12.

<sup>102</sup> Clement E. Vose, *Caucasians Only: The Supreme Court, the NAACP, and the Restrictive Covenant Cases* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. vii.

improvement associations,' realtors' sales policies, and restrictive covenants helped create Chicago's first all-black ghetto on the city's South Side."<sup>103</sup> The creation of the Federal Housing Administration in 1934 explicitly discriminated against Blacks and marked Black neighborhoods as "locations in which no loans should be made for either purchasing or upgrading."<sup>104</sup> Since banks and other lending institutions relied on the FHA's mapping of different neighborhoods to determine which ones would receive mortgage loans, Blacks were automatically denied access to the benefits of the Federal Housing Administration. "The FHA's *Underwriting Manual* also praised restrictive covenants as the surest protection against undesirable encroachment of inharmonious racial groups."<sup>105</sup> There were attempts by some leading African Americans who hoped to counteract the lack of access Blacks had to mortgage loans by making their own mortgage lending companies. Even this turned out to be extremely difficult. "The Mortgage Bankers Association was an all-white organization; African Americans were barred from both the national organization and its local subsidiaries."<sup>106</sup> And since mortgage banker training courses were only open to MBA members, Blacks were automatically excluded. In 1953 Dempsey J. Travis, a native of Chicago's Black Belt, tried to apply to the FHA to be a loan correspondent so that his mortgage corporation, Sivart, could hand out FHA insured loans to Blacks living in Chicago. Travis's application was turned down that year and every year after that for the remainder of the

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<sup>103</sup> Beryl Satter, *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2009), p. 41.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>105</sup> Charles, Abrams. *Forbidden Neighbors* (New York: Harper, 1955), p. 231-32, 234.

<sup>106</sup> Beryl Satter, *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2009), p. 43.

1950s. It was inevitable Travis's mortgage corporation failed before even getting a start.<sup>107</sup>

As the situation worsened for Blacks living in both Northern and Southern States, many black activist groups began to more prominently show their discontent with their position in America. Groups like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), the Nation of Islam and others protested the unfair and brutal treatment and discrimination Blacks continued to face. As violent response to Black protestors made the news and other media outlets, more and more people living within the U.S's borders and those living outside of it began to pay closer attention to what was to happen with America and its race problems. With the rise of the Soviet Union after 1917, the United States and its embrace of capitalism faced challenges from communist ideology and practice and America's proletarian critics were quick to point out the contradictions that came from America's oppression of Blacks in contrast to the democratic language of liberty and inclusion.<sup>108</sup> The United States, as it emerged out of the Second World War in 1945, became a world super power and was rivaled only by the Soviet Union; the U.S. claimed to be the protector of democracy, fighting communism and dictatorships threatening developing countries' desire for self-government. While defending the principles of democracy, the United States was still struggling to extend this protection to include its own Black citizens. In response to this exclusion, many Black nationalists groups emerged, conveying a contradiction that many of America's communist enemies used to

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 43-44.

<sup>108</sup> Robin D. G Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990). p. 100, 226-227.

criticize and discredit the United States' claim to promoting democracy. Groups like the Black Panther Party, a communist black nationalists group, the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), NAACP, Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam came in different forms and had different goals but all were in resistance to Black oppression and demanded the protection and respect of Black civil rights. The increase in resistance to Black oppression through many legal and social victories, and the sense of a global audience overseeing U.S. domestic policy and evaluating American influence on foreign affairs based on this, helped to inspire and drive the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and early 1960s, which successfully influenced the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The 1964 Civil Rights Act was supposed to represent the end of African Americans being denied their civil rights. For three centuries, African Americans endured harsh oppression backed by law. Carter G. Woodson analyzed this historically as well as living in this era and expressed the problem poignantly in his 1921 essay "Fifty Years of Negro Citizenship as Qualified by the United States Supreme Court"; "The citizenship of the Negro in this country is a fiction."<sup>109</sup> The legacy of a racialized slavery that lasted for more than two hundred years, and then a century of systematic oppression created a tremendous inequality between Black Americans and White Americans. When the Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed, African Americans still made up most of the poor living in America. They received the worst education and lived in the worst neighborhoods. Few African Americans owned property; many were paid less for the same work done by their White counterparts; and most African Americans were unemployed for long periods.

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<sup>109</sup> Robin D. G. Kelly, *Freedom Dreams* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), p. 19.

The system of Jim Crow, which lasted well into the twentieth century, also negatively affected Black Americans access to the housing market. The few Black Americans who did own their own homes “suffered from discriminatory policies and practices from lending institutions, real estate firms, and the Federal Housing Administration.”<sup>110</sup> The demand for Black reparations in the late 1960s and early 1970s stems significantly from these problems and struggles Blacks continued to face. Black radicals of the 1960s used these institutional discriminative practices as reasons, along with slavery, for Black reparations. To them, it was clear things had not changed and instead, things had gotten worse. They were representing the Black working-class who faced extreme urban poverty, racism, and police brutality. Influenced by race leaders such as Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, and other black separationists groups, Black radicals of the 1960s used very aggressive and militant rhetoric when talking about Black struggle and White supremacy. As a result, many of these groups and people were “silenced” via lack of media coverage of their movement and also inaccurate coverage of their movement, the little they did receive. These groups also faced federal opposition and also opposition from “both the White left and the mainstream Civil Rights Movement.”<sup>111</sup>

America required more than laws to solve the problems that resulted from three centuries of racial discrimination against Blacks.<sup>112</sup> Participation from different power institutions needed to be more involved in order to correct the racial oppression of Blacks that had lasted for so many years after the Civil War which ended slavery. The federal

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 125.; Beryl Satter, *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2009), p. 43.

<sup>111</sup> Robin D. G. Kelly, *Freedom Dreams* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), p. 62.

<sup>112</sup> Robert S. Lecky and H. Elliot Wright, eds., *Black Manifesto: Religion, Racism, and Reparations* (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1969), p. 6.

government had already shown through their actions with Callie House's ex-slave pensions movement in the past that they were not interested in reparations for Blacks. Religious foundations, such as Christian churches and Jewish synagogues were considered to be institutions that citizens looked to for moral guidance. In the late 1960s many local, regional, and national religious institutions began to take their place in setting a moral example to the American people. These institutions, mostly Christian and Jewish, "vowed" to fight racism and poverty. They also took some responsibility for continuing discrimination. Some of them were even "mobilized to voice corrective intentions" and Interreligious coalitions for social efforts multiplied.<sup>113</sup> Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in 1968 was evident to the still lingering racial tensions between Blacks and White Americans. King's assassination also created an atmosphere in the country that sparked reactions from different denominations of religious institutions and community-based organizations dedicated to solving the "crisis in the nation," the crisis of racism, poverty and violence that spread across the nation. One community-based organization that pioneered such a movement towards activism was the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO). In 1967, IFCO came together to fund locally-based Organizations aimed at fighting poverty, racism and supported self-determination of groups shut out of power. "IFCO was not a black organization in terms of direction, nor was it completely slanted toward black poverty. However, the plight of blacks could hardly fail to be a major focus in light of socio-economic realities."<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>114</sup> Robert S. Lecky and H. Elliot Wright, eds., *Black Manifesto: Religion, Racism, and Reparations* (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1969), p. 7.

More religious institutions began joining the cause to fight racism and poverty, in attempt to solve America's racial problems. "By Fall 1968 nearly \$50 million had been pledged and some millions expended."<sup>115</sup> Such events may have been a supporting cause for the Black Economic Development Conference (BEDC) to demand reparations from religious groups like they did with the Black Manifesto in 1969. IFCO was already leaning towards monetary contributions to Black progression by funding anti-racism and anti-poverty programs. Despite their vow to help promote social equality and fight urban poverty, most Blacks who suffered from both poverty and racial discrimination did not receive anything from IFCO. Blacks were used as targets in theory for such programs but almost never in practice. "It is doubtful that the Black Manifesto could have come forth had the religious groups not adopted such strong anti-poverty rhetoric."<sup>116</sup> The BEDC may have targeted the churches and religion because of the notion that religious groups might be more susceptible to charges that they live up to their rhetoric of moral duty to uphold and promote social equality. Churches and synagogues that pledged to fight racism and poverty "were not insincere, but they probably did ignore signs saying well-motivated intentions were not adequate to handle the enormity of the problems."<sup>117</sup> In other words, the problems Blacks faced needed more than just church charities but a social revolution in America backed by religious institutions that supported Black financial status and social equality in a white privileged society.

As early as 1966, the former National Committee of Negro Churchmen expressed dissatisfaction with the white religious sphere's tendency to reflect the broader white culture by taking paternalistic approaches, white directed, to the obliteration

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p 6.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p 6.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p 6.



of poverty and discrimination. Despite the financial commitments of the mid-1968, greater displeasure was evident when the by then National Committee of Black Churchmen met in late October. Reactions to paternalism were loud. The applause was rousing when a speaker declared: ‘Let the church see that the Black Power Movement is assuming power and consolidating power, then the white church seeks to coopt it by funding its community organization programs and then coopting its leaders. The whites are always in control. They dictate what must be done.’<sup>118</sup>

It is evident from this quote that Black Churches also criticized the approach taken by predominantly white churches and synagogues in fighting racism and poverty. The issue was not that Black churches, and Black community-based organizations rejected white assistance to improving Black lives, but that Black churches and community organizations rejected white control over Blacks, even in organizing anti-poverty and anti-racism programs aimed towards Blacks.

Blacks living in America grew weary of waiting for race relations to improve and this led to more militant, direct demands that many Blacks believed was long overdue. Progress was slow and the government was not doing much to help poor Blacks. As a result of this perceived negligence held by poor Blacks about both the federal government and state governments, Blacks did not believe they were being taken seriously. Some Blacks were tired of “begging” for change and many decided it was time for a more militant approach to securing protection of civil rights and equality in America. Although “Black college graduates were finding better jobs” and “Black public officials were increasing” and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had been passed, most Blacks remained unemployed. “Ghettos” were still mostly slums and home to most blacks living

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<sup>118</sup> Robert S. Lecky and H. Elliot Wright, eds., *Black Manifesto: Religion, Racism, and Reparations* (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1969), p. 6.

in America. Many Blacks felt as though the government was not allowing them the freedom to shape their own future.

In his introduction to *Reparations: The Black Manifesto and Its Challenge to White America*, Arnold Schuchter wrote, “The separation of America into two societies, one black and one white, has made distance between the races a structural part of the American way of life and has thereby facilitated direct and indirect violence against blacks.”<sup>119</sup> President Lyndon Johnson and the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (the Kerner Commission) were aware of this division among America’s Black and White citizens. The Commission’s report stated that ‘white racism’ was the major cause of black disorders and urban problems.<sup>120</sup> It was quite obvious the nation had a major problem with the potential to worsen if no action was taken to engage with or change domestic race relations. Frustrated individuals looked beyond official government action to be able to find solutions for problems that were not being adequately addressed. “From an atmosphere cluttered with paper promises the participants came to the Detroit conference (April, 1969) called by the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO).”<sup>121</sup> The meeting was held for Blacks only. White controlled pledges and plans for Blacks were left outside. This meeting was a space for Blacks to exert their control over their own lives and future and make decisions that would benefit them. Ultimately, due to this exclusion of “whiteness” the conference received “bad press,” except in Black papers. It was in this meeting that James Forman first introduced

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<sup>119</sup> Arnold Schuchter, *Reparations: The Black Manifesto and Its Challenge to White America* (New York, NY: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1970), p. xvii.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

the Black Manifesto. The Black Manifesto was hardly reported when it was released after the meeting (except in Black papers), and it was practically ignored by the large eastern dailies who control much of the nation's information and how the public received such information.<sup>122</sup>

Black reparations by the 1960s took on a different tenor than the approach that had been taken by Callie House in the 1890s. House's reparation movement for ex-slaves, which stemmed from Congressman Walter Vaughan's Freedmen's Pension Bill, a bill supporting pensions for ex-slaves, gained little success due to widespread opposition from the Federal Government and most White Americans. House, Vaughan, and many former slaves believed the government was responsible for the poor living conditions ex-slaves lived in and, if the federal government claimed a guardian role for new Black citizens, it was thereby responsible for taking care of ex-slaves. For these early advocates of reparations, the Freedmen's Pension Bill would fulfill this responsibility the Government had towards ex-slaves. Unfortunately, the federal government's position ended House's movement in 1916.

By the sixties, there were multiple organizations that demanded various forms of reparations on behalf of Blacks, and none of these resembled House's initial attempts to achieve this. Each group differed in the specifics of their demands, ranging from land redistribution to monetary compensation, but all had one thing in common. They all maintained that Blacks were owed some form of restitution or reparations for past wrongs done to Blacks and for the unpaid labor of African and African American slaves that had

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<sup>122</sup> Robert S. Lecky and H. Elliot Wright, eds., *Black Manifesto: Religion, Racism, and Reparations* (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1969), p. 10.

financed the development of the nation as a whole from the eighteenth through the twentieth century. On May 4, 1969, James Forman, former director of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), went into New York City's Riverside Church with a "Black Manifesto" demanding reparations for Blacks. Most Americans were unaware of the Black Manifesto and its demands before May 4. "By the end of the next day, Forman and the Manifesto were front-page news from coast to coast."<sup>123</sup> The Black Manifesto is considered by historians to be the first official document representing the movement for Black reparations after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>124</sup> The document, unlike House's petition in the 1890s, contained a list of demands that amounted to five hundred million dollars in reparations to fund different community organizations and programs that would be used to benefit the Black community; both in the United States and Africa, the "Motherland." The Black Manifesto came into existence at the National Black Economic Development Conference (NBEDC) organized by the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO) in 1968. "IFCO had been created in 1967 as an ecumenical venture of major religious organizations to fund local community organizations committed to self-determination and self-help programs."<sup>125</sup> IFCO was directed by a Black American Baptist clergyman, Reverend Lucius Walker. Each IFCO member was required to pay \$1,000 before becoming a member as their contribution to the organization's anti-poverty fund. Within two years of its founding, IFCO had twenty-five members. IFCO's plans to hold the National Black Economic

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<sup>123</sup> Arnold Schuchter, *Reparations: The Black Manifesto and Its Challenge to White America* (New York, NY: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1970), p. 5.

<sup>124</sup> Robin D. G. Kelly, *Freedom Dreams* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), p. 120.

<sup>125</sup> Arnold Schuchter, *Reparations: The Black Manifesto and Its Challenge to White America* (New York, NY: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1970), p. 2.

Development Conference were still unknown to virtually all of America, both Black and White. “The NBEDC, Mr. Walker’s brainchild, was intended to bring together diverse black leadership to discuss economic and community development programs and strategies.” Despite its financial problems, however, IFCO had not originally planned for the NBEDC to endorse a Black Manifesto.<sup>126</sup> “On April 26, 1969, in Detroit Michigan, the night before the end of the NBEDC, James Forman first presented the Black Manifesto.”<sup>127</sup> The Manifesto was approved by a vote of 187 to 63, despite the fact that many of the participants in the conference were absent on that night.<sup>128</sup> Forman’s involvement with the BEDC after the conference in April 1969 marked his emergence “from relative obscurity to national prominence as a black spokesman.”<sup>129</sup> A steering committee was organized at the NBEDC (later renamed the BEDC) and Forman was appointed head of the United Black Appeal, a program that originally stemmed from IFCO in 1968, and was design to build economic relations in Africa in order to support and improve life in Africa for BEDC’s “African brothers”.<sup>130</sup>

A year later, in 1969, Forman interrupted church services (The Riverside Church among them) to read the Black Manifesto which demanded reparations from all white churches and synagogues for their contribution to Black oppression. The manifesto accused predominantly white American churches and synagogues of using religion to

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<sup>126</sup> Arnold Schuchter, *Reparations: The Black Manifesto and Its Challenge to White America* (New York, NY: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1970), p. 3.

<sup>127</sup> Idib., p. 4.

<sup>128</sup> Idib., p. 4.

<sup>129</sup> Idib., p. 4.

<sup>130</sup> Idib., p. 4.; *The Black Manifesto to the White Christian churches and Jewish synagogues in The United States of America and All other Racist Institutions* (1968), p. 5-10.

oppress Black people and it aggressively demanded these churches to meet the demands in the Black Manifesto. The document demanded money for land, a form of reparation African Americans had pushed for since emancipation; it also demanded money for Black publishing companies and other communication programs that would represent Black Americans to provide “an alternative to the white-dominated and controlled printing field.”<sup>131</sup> The manifesto also demanded money for researching problems affecting Black people along with demands for money for other programs that the BEDC hoped to use to help poor Blacks.

The introduction began by articulating “Total control as the only solution to the economic problems of Black People.” The BEDC believed the economic problems Blacks continued to face were results of “the racism on which the Western World was built.” The Manifesto also argued that there could be no separation between the problems of racism and the problems of financial instability and cultural degradation because these were all the caused by and the result of white supremacy and the oppression of Blacks. The Manifesto demanded money for land in the sum of two million dollars; ten million each for four major publishing and printing industries in the U.S. in Detroit, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and New York; ten million dollars each for four of the "most advance scientific and futuristic audio-visual networks to be located in Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland and Washington, D.C.; thirty million dollars for a research center that will "provide research on the problems of black people"; ten million dollars for training centers "for the teaching of skills in community organization, photography, movie making, television making and

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<sup>131</sup> *The Black Manifesto to the White Christian churches and Jewish synagogues in The United States of America and All other Racist Institutions* (1968), p. 5-10.

repair, radio building and all other skills needed in communication; ten million dollars to assist the National Welfare Rights Organization; twenty million dollars for a National Black Labor Strike and Defense Fund; twenty million dollars for the establishment of the International Black Appeal; one hundred and thirty million dollars to establish a Black University in the South. The Manifesto also demanded unused funds from the planning budget of the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO) to implement the demands of the BEDC.<sup>132</sup> It is unclear who all the people were that contributed to the drafting of the Black Manifesto but Forman and supporters of the Black Manifesto believed these programs were important to the Black community and if properly funded, would finally correct the damage done by white supremacy.

The BEDC targeted federal programs such as the National Welfare Rights Organization deserving more money from the government and better administration of the welfare system. They identify similar issues with the National Black Labor Strike and Defense Fund, both Programs that drew administrative and financial support from the federal government. The BEDC wanted to protect Black workers and their families who, in their minds, continued to and constantly faced racist working conditions in both the North and the South. Reparations were also asked for to finance different programs to assist Africa in order to generate and raise funds throughout the United States to help The BEDC's "African brothers." The International Black Appeal (IBA), headed by James Forman, was charged with "producing more capital for the establishment of cooperative

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<sup>132</sup> *The Black Manifesto to the White Christian churches and Jewish synagogues in The United States of America and All other Racist Institutions* (1968), p. 5-10.

businesses in the United States and in Africa, [the] Motherland.”<sup>133</sup> The IBA had three functions and that was to raise money for programs of the BEDC, develop cooperatives in Africa and support African liberation movements, and establish a Black Anti-Defamation League which would protect Africa’s and its people’s image from Western imperialists racist rhetoric. The Manifesto makes appeals for Africa and for reparations to combat the “defamation” of Africa and to also rid the continent of “capitalism and imperialism.”<sup>134</sup> The BEDC, influenced by the Pan-Africanism movement that begun in the 1930s with Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association, drew a connection between Africa and African Americans living in the United States to show Blacks heritage that go back to Africa, but, was violently interrupted by slavery. Forman and the BEDC not only see reparations being due to African Americans but also Africa.

The BEDC considered all People of African descent members of the BEDC and invited all Blacks to help promote the demands in the Black Manifesto. Individuals who supported the Black Manifesto were asked to participate in sit-ins and distribute copies of the Black Manifesto to congregations. And, if physically attacked, or physically forced to leave, were encouraged to use self-defense. “We call upon all black people throughout the United States to consider themselves as members of the National Black Economic Development Conference and to act in unity to help force the racist white Christian churches and Jewish synagogues to implement these demands.”<sup>135</sup> The NBEDC called for all People of African descent in the United States to reach out to all the Black people in the country, men and women, students, the unemployed and the successful, community

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<sup>133</sup> Idib.

<sup>134</sup> Idib.

<sup>135</sup> *The Black Manifesto to the White Christian churches and Jewish synagogues in The United States of America and All other Racist Institutions* (1968), p. 6.



groups, welfare organizations, teacher organizations, church leaders and organizations "explaining how these demands are vital to the black community...." The Manifesto also asked the black community to "boldly" confront "our white oppressors" and demand "this modest reparation of 15 dollars per black man."<sup>136</sup> Delegates of the NBEDC were asked to call press conferences to get as many Black organizations as possible to support the demands of the conference. The Black Manifesto also asked for white support in achieving these demands. The Manifesto makes the claim that white support for the Black Manifesto and its demands would show Whites' willingness to fight the system of white supremacy that has oppressed Blacks for centuries and the reason for the demands in the Black Manifesto. They believed these actions would strengthen the movement, just as it did when applied by Martin Luther King Jr. during the Civil Rights Movement. With white support churches and synagogues would feel pressured to meet the demands of the Black Manifesto. People were also asked by the BEDC to "seize the offices, telephones, and printing apparatus of all church sponsored agencies and to hold these trusteeship until our demands are met."<sup>137</sup> The BEDC also vowed to declare war on the white religious institutions if they failed to meet the demands in the Manifesto. The BEDC believed the demands were "modest" and "reasonable" and also asked these religious institutions to come up with larger sums than what is in the Manifesto. White Christian churches and Jewish synagogues were not the only institutions the BEDC demanded reparations from, but also other "racist institutions" like private businesses and the federal government.

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<sup>136</sup> *Idib.*, p. 7.

<sup>137</sup> *The Black Manifesto to the White Christian churches and Jewish synagogues in The United States of America and All other Racist Institutions* (1968), p. 7

They also wanted these demands to be met quickly and were willing to fight for a long time until the demands in the Manifesto were met.

There was no doubt that the Manifesto was influenced by socialist ideals, portrayed a revolutionary perspective, and was comfortable registering black anger about contemporary African-American conditions.<sup>138</sup> “The strategy for achieving the demands was straightforward; it disrupted the day-to-day operations of white religious establishments. While the Manifesto did not drastically differ from social legislation or proposals earlier made in the U.S., it still put forward enough radical ideas in the Manifesto itself and in the suggestions of how to disseminate these ideas (disrupting service, mobilizing the black population) that the Manifesto and the organization putting it forward staunchly antisocialist/anticommunist Americans profoundly uneasy. At its core, this version of reparations challenged U.S.-style capitalism and accused it of being oppressive to Blacks.<sup>139</sup> The document explicitly went further in this critique, stating sympathy with the Vietnamese people and portraying them in solidarity as an oppressed group suffering from the hands of American capitalism/capitalists. In the context of the ongoing (and escalating) Vietnam War, such a position made the Manifesto very controversial with the public.

Given these positions, the mainstream response to Forman and the BEDC’s demand for reparations and there was much opposition to the Black Manifesto. Many of the critics came from the churches and synagogues who were being asked to pay for past wrongs; in these circles, the BEDC’s demand for Black reparations met general

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<sup>138</sup> Robert S. Lecky and H. Elliot Wright, eds., *Black Manifesto: Religion, Racism, and Reparations* (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1969), p. 14.

<sup>139</sup> *Idib.*, p. 14.

disapproval. Synagogues were specifically opposed to Black reparations as a way of improving Blacks economic status for two reasons: first, the Manifesto's claims could be portrayed as anti-Semitic and, given the context of World War II and the Holocaust, this was highly controversial. Second, some community leaders feared that supporting Black reparations would diminish the power and continuation of reparations for Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. "Jewish agencies were specifically inhospitable to reparations as an approach to black economic development, a factor noted as ironic by observers of several persuasions since Jews in modern history have received 'financial amends'"<sup>140</sup> In response to both these positions, many supporters of the BEDC and the Black Manifesto found these perspectives to be ironic. Their own appeals reflected their awareness that Jews, a couple decades before 1969, had received reparations for suffering, displacement, and property loss during the Holocaust.

Many of these churches and synagogues responded back to the BEDC via news articles where they assured the BEDC that they were not going to pay any reparations.<sup>141</sup> Some even asked for government intervention to stop Forman and the BEDC from interrupting church services. On June 26 1969, "the largest Orthodox rabbinic body" in the U.S. went on record "unanimously" and rejected demands for reparations by "some Negroes."<sup>142</sup> A month before that, Rabbi Joseph Karasick, head of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, called for government to make interruption of

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> "Lutherans Reject Demand For Reparations to Blacks," *The New York Times*, October 26, 1969, p. 73.

<sup>142</sup> "RABBIS TURN DOWN REPARATIONS IDEA: Council Says Gulf Between Races Would Be Widened," *The New York Times*, June 27, 1969, p. 43.

religious services a “severely punishable crime.”<sup>143</sup> Such appeals for government intervention and assistance helped to taint the image of the BEDC as an ineffective spokesperson for Black rights.

Christian institutions, like their Jewish counterparts, also tried to mediate, alter, and deflect the criticism put forward by the BEDC and the Manifesto. Most institutions responded by rejecting the appeals for financial reparations and instead tried to focus dialogue on social engagement and debate. “White leaders of [the United Church of Christ], however, stressed displeasure with the Manifesto’s philosophy, and the synod gave no funds to BEDC, though it did deal with demands from the Black caucus in the denomination.”<sup>144</sup> Some churches, like those of the Protestant denomination, agreed with the concept of religions’ moral responsibility to promote equality and agreed to give the BEDC some of the money that was asked for but not all of it.<sup>145</sup> “In Boston, an ad hoc white clergy group and the unofficial Association of Boston Urban Priest lent support to the Metropolitan Boston Committee of Black Churchmen in seeking \$100 million from area religious groups, particularly the Christian Scientists.” In explaining the donation, the priest’ association said the churches and synagogues were the “logical starting point” in making reparations “to the black race for centuries of systematic genocide that [religious institutions] have helped to force upon black people.”<sup>146</sup> A lot of the churches responded to the Black Manifesto by rejecting its strategies but, importantly, they began

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<sup>143</sup> IRVING SPIEGEL, "RABBI URGES U. S. TO GUARD WORSHIP: Karasick Asks for Laws to Prevent Interruptions," *New York Times*, May 19, 1969, p. 33.

<sup>144</sup> Robert S. Lecky and H. Elliot Wright, eds., *Black Manifesto: Religion, Racism, and Reparations* (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1969), p. 21.

<sup>145</sup> GEORGE DUGAN, "PROTESTANT FUND FOR BLACKS ASKED: Council of Churches Seeks \$500,000," *New York Times*, September 12, 1969, p. 1.

<sup>146</sup> Robert S. Lecky and H. Elliot Wright, eds., *Black Manifesto: Religion, Racism, and Reparations* (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1969), p. 20.

new programs for Black development. “Taking this tack were Riverside Church, the United Methodist Board of Missions, the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church, the General Synod of the Unitarian Association, Union Theological Seminary, New York, and the United Church of Christ.”<sup>147</sup> In this sense, the Manifesto achieved some modest success in raising public awareness and enacting action.

In the summer of 1969, the Manifesto had been disseminated to most major religious denominations and these, in turn, had formulated some response to the demands.<sup>148</sup> Some whites saw Forman as an illegitimate spokesperson for People of African descent and disregarded the Manifesto.<sup>149</sup> What the Black Manifesto gives insight to was the radicalization of the movement for civil rights and Black reparations. The Manifesto introduced new demands that contrasted with the agendas of other militant Black groups demanding social/racial justice from white institutions. It also demanded large sums of money from religious groups, which was unprecedented and caused many white religious leaders to be shocked to find out “their goodwill” was neither good nor enough.<sup>150</sup> At the same time, Forman’s tactics and approach might have alienated religious members from supporting Black reparations or even considering the arguments in the Manifesto.

The Black Manifesto was, in its theory, widely accepted by most Blacks. Almost all Africans Americans at that time would agree that Blacks had the worst economic status in America and it was due to centuries of Black oppression that created white

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<sup>147</sup> Idib., p. 21.

<sup>148</sup> Idib., p. 2.

<sup>149</sup> Idib., p. 3-4.

<sup>150</sup> Arnold Schuchter, *Reparations: The Black Manifesto and Its Challenge to White America* (New York, NY: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1970), p. 5.

privilege. As a result of white privilege, Blacks continued to constitute the lower class of American society. Although all Blacks could agree that America had done great wrongs to People of African descent, not every African American agreed with Forman's and the BEDC's approach to the issue of reparations. The Manifesto received opposition from the mainstream civil rights group NAACP, who had already been established as the official representative organization for African Americans since the early 1900s. The NAACP could not associate themselves with the radicalism of the BEDC, they were more supportive legislative changes as a way to improve Black lives and achieve equality. Forman and the BEDC's radical approach affected the level of seriousness both White America, specifically White religious institutions, and other African Americans had towards Forman and the Black Manifesto. The BEDC were militant and, as history has shown, White America does not favor Black militancy and often goes very far to eliminate such militancy (i.e Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr.). The NAACP was not a radical group, unlike the BEDC and Forman. Bishop Stephen G. Spottswood, Chairman of the NAACP publicly disassociated the NAACP from Forman and the BEDC in a news article in 1969.<sup>151</sup> The BEDC was ultimately illegitimized after this public disassociation coming from the NAACP. White America, and also most African Americans saw the NAACP as the official representative of People of African descent living in America, so when the NAACP publicly opposed Forman, this confirmed Whites feelings of the BEDC's illegitimacy. Even IFCO, who had held the National Black Economic Development Conference a few months before Forman interrupted the Riverside Church in May 1969, did not endorse the Black Manifesto. Reparations to improve Black lives

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<sup>151</sup> THOMAS A. JOHNSON, "N .A .A .C .P.'s Chairman Assails Black Demand for Reparations," *New York Times*, July 1, 1969, p. 26.

and economic status would mean giving up white privilege, and White America was not ready to give up their white privilege in the late sixties.

The fight for Black reparations in the late sixties was ultimately affected by radicalism, White America's continued opposition to Black reparations, and division among the Black community on how reparations should be achieved. The political atmosphere during the late sixties was placed on a world stage because of the Cold War which influenced much of the radicalism that occurred during the late sixties. Communist groups like the Black Panther Party (BPP) had been explicit with their anti-capitalist feelings and many Blacks in Harlem and Chicago had converted to the Nation of Islam, who also criticized American capitalism. Many of the Black radicalism that emerged in the late sixties stemmed from Blacks feeling weary of waiting for equality and Black exploitation to end. No one can doubt the loyalty of Blacks to the United States. Blacks had fought for America in every war the United States had entered into and many more were in Vietnam at the time fighting. Yet still, Black veterans came back home to still be discriminated against and treated with disrespect. The demands for Black reparations represented the Black community's need for White America to correct its past and current wrongs committed against People of African descent. But the BEDC's approach with the Black Manifesto was too radical and caused division among Blacks and attracted a lot of White criticism and opposition.

### **Reparations in Contemporary America (Chap 3)**

The 1970s brought much uncertainty for Americans and the future of the great United States. The Cold War was heating up and the United States began to be more involved in Cold War conflicts. The U.S. had been fighting in Vietnam since 1955 and at the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, the United States' military received its first ever defeat. President Richard Nixon's Watergate scandal was also among the other things that made the 1970s a dark period in American history. The nation's economy was in jeopardy and America had entered an economic recession. Most of America's money was being poured into to military advancement and the arms race between the Soviet Union and The United States, the two Superpowers after WWII. Additionally, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) placed an embargo on The United States' access to Arab oil, on which the nation heavily depended. This was a result of the United States support for Israel in the Yom Kippur War against Arabs living in the Middle East.<sup>152</sup> With limited access to oil, gas prices sky rocketed, which was evidence to America's damaged economy.

First, the war in Vietnam ended in the first-ever military defeat for the United States. Second, the Watergate cover-up unraveled, and the presidency of Richard Nixon became engulfed in scandal and, by year's end, calls for impeachment. Last but not least, Americans were hit hard by a collapsing economy: 1973 was also the year of the Arab oil embargo and the beginning of the long slide into stagflation that lasted until the 1980s. Any of these events alone would have

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<sup>152</sup> Andreas Killen, *1973 Nervous Breakdown: Watergate, Warhol, and the Birth of Post-Sixties America* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2006), p. 24.



challenged America's image of itself; together they shook the national psyche to its very core.<sup>153</sup>

Americans across the country began to lose their jobs and, like every other economic depression the U.S. has experienced, Blacks suffered the most. As a result of the recession, and the cut in funding for public policies that benefitted poor Americans, which were extremely helpful to poor Blacks, Johnson's War on Poverty campaign was abandoned (much like the political climate that caused Radical Republicans to abandon the first reconstruction in 1875).<sup>154</sup> Nixon had also begun his War on Drugs campaign and had re-instated the death penalty. The nation began to focus more on personal responsibilities and morality, and with that, a new way to racially exclude Blacks as a group. As urban cities began to deteriorate and fail, the media along with the government began to create stereotypes that were racist without being explicitly racist (welfare queens were stereotyped as representing poor Black single mothers; drug lords and gangsters were also Black stereotypes, as well having characteristics that made them immoral, lazy, and criminals).<sup>155</sup> This shift to group-based discrimination, from "liberal individualism"

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<sup>153</sup> Idib., p. 2.

<sup>154</sup> Andreas Killen, *1973 Nervous Breakdown: Watergate, Warhol, and the Birth of Post-Sixties America* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2006), p. 3.

<sup>155</sup> Charles P. Henry, *Long Overdue: The Politics of Racial Reparations* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2007), p. 16. "Nonetheless, the Edsalls manage to reframe the issue by positing the conflict as a larger debate over values rather than over White privilege. They state that the "rights revolution has focused on individual rights to the exclusion of traditional values like law and order, family, sexual conduct, joblessness, welfare fraud and patriotism." Thus, in one fell swoop the Black demand for equality framed in the language of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, as well as the Bible, is removed from the pantheon of traditional values, replaced by racial code words invoking historical White stereotypes of violent Blacks, lazy Blacks, and immoral Blacks."

is now considered by contemporary sociologists as “new racism” or “White nationalism.”<sup>156</sup>

Yet in many ways, the “new” racism is much like the “old” racism. The same person who relies on group stereotypes to exclude Blacks from the home or workplace also appeals to individual rights to deny any accountability for reparations claim. In short, the historical framing of rights and responsibilities is always used to protect White privilege.<sup>157</sup>

The War on Drugs targeted urban Black “ghettos” and ultimately lead to the mass incarceration of Blacks, which still continues to this day. With the media creating negative stereotypes of Blacks via movies and news reports, and the mass incarceration of Blacks, many White Americans began to believe these stereotypes, which was easy for them to do so since most Blacks lived in segregated communities from Whites. Studies have also shown that most Whites refuse to support programs aimed at fixing past discrimination or current ones.<sup>158</sup>

With much of a Cultural Revolution taking place in the 1970s, Americans, both Black and White, were too caught up with personal issues ranging from unemployment to fears of Soviet invasion. As a result of this, the radical movements for Black reparations that emerged in the late sixties were pushed aside. Many Americans, during the 1970s began to suffer from paranoia due to the Cold War. The fear of communists in the nation’s government was brought about by Senator Joseph McCarthy immediately after the Second World War and caused many Americans and government officials, even the President, Richard Nixon, to become paranoid. Due to this paranoia and fear of

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<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17

<sup>157</sup> Charles P. Henry, *Long Overdue: The Politics of Racial Reparations* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2007), p. 17.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

communism, radical groups like the Black Panther Party faced significant opposition from the federal government. The entire nation was caught up in the drama of the Cold War with the increased advancement in media technology and the pain of the Vietnam War, which became the first televised war in the United States. The fear of Soviet spies in the United States' most vulnerable and secret institutions caused many to act out of the ordinary. Arnold Hutshnecker, a psychiatrist who was believed to have treated President Nixon on several occasions in the 1960s argued that much of the Cold War could have been avoided if it was not for the fear of "imaginary attacks" that lead to "holy wars in the name of self-defense."<sup>159</sup> The Cold War paranoia also affected the United States domestic policies and politics.

The Nixon administration was extremely paranoid about the anti-war movements that emerged during the 1970s and as a result, conducted illegal surveillances of many government official and radical leaders who Nixon suspected were traitors to the United States. The Democrats became Nixon's chief enemy in which his paranoia lead to spy on. "After learning that phone conversations of an intimate nature had been monitored, the Democrats filed suit against the Watergate burglars for invasion of privacy."<sup>160</sup> Nixon was forced to resign and while some of the actors/participants in the Watergate scandal were imprisoned, Nixon was pardoned by Gerald Ford, who replaced him as the next President of the United States. Nixon's immediate pardon was interpreted by many Americans as proof that the government was involved in bigger conspiracies.<sup>161</sup>

Americans all over were paranoid as these events occurred, (Kennedy's assigation, the

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<sup>159</sup> Andreas Killen, *1973 Nervous Breakdown: Watergate, Warhol, and the Birth of Post-Sixties America* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2006), p. 237.

<sup>160</sup> *Idib.*, p. 138.

<sup>161</sup> *Idib.*, p. 240.

loss of the Vietnam War, Watergate Scandal, and the oil crisis, an economic recession/depression). The media also brainwashed many Americans as politicians used it to sway citizens' opinions.<sup>162</sup> As a result, all these things overshadowed any Black reparations movement that remained from the late 1960s. The media was no longer interested in the Black power movement but was rather used in the late 1970s and 1980s to create negative stereotypes of Blacks living in America. Urban cities, where most Blacks lived, were failing and the government began to blame the residents for failing cities. Blacks were blamed for their misfortunes with no consideration for the systematic oppression and racism that govern their everyday lives. It was not until the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 that awarded Japanese Americans reparations for the internment camps that the issue of Black reparations resurfaced.

### **Civil Liberties Act of 1988**

On August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 into law. The Civil Liberties Act paid monetary compensation to Japanese-Americans as a group who suffered injustice based on membership of a racial minority group. The Act was passed to fully compensate surviving Japanese-Americans and their direct families economically, and it also authorized federal institutions to memorialize the events. It had taken Japanese-Americans many years to begin to come to terms with their wartime experience and to publicize this on a national level. In 1941, Japan had launched a surprise attack on U.S.'s naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. In 1942, in response to the bombing, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an order to evacuate 120,000 West Coast Japanese and Japanese-Americans from their homes and relocated them in U.S.

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<sup>162</sup> Idib., p. 253.

military-supervised internment camps. “Approximately two-thirds of those interned were native-born American citizens.” Unlike Italian-Americans and German-Americans (who had been targeted for similar ostracism in World War I), the focus on Japanese-American loyalty seemed to be heavily motivated by racism rather than just wartime policy and domestic security.

The internment experience had left deep scars, and the healing process was slow. After the war, anti-Japanese sentiments were still strong on the West Coast and it was not until years later that these sentiments decreased.<sup>163</sup> Although Japan had surrendered unconditionally to the Allied Powers, and the fact that Japanese-American citizens had disproportionately served in the U.S. Army and received numerous awards for loyalty, courage, and bravery in combat, would show the contrary. Japanese-Americans still continued to face discrimination due to lingering animosity arising out of the Second World War by most White Americans. Some people were more welcoming than others as Japanese Americans began to be released from the internment camps to return to their neighborhoods and homes. Others continued to discriminate against Japanese Americans, refusing to serve them at restaurants, gas stations, grocery stores and other businesses.<sup>164</sup> Outside the West Coast, there were many who, for a long time, remain ignorant about the internment camps and how much it affected those forced to live in them. The government was also not eager to release much information about the internment camps and “most Americans were too preoccupied with rebuilding their own lives to care.”<sup>165</sup> With war rhetoric still present and a large number of veterans of the Pacific War resettling around

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<sup>163</sup> Leslie T. Hatamiya, *Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and the Passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 130.

<sup>164</sup> *Idib.*, p. 130-31.

<sup>165</sup> *Idib.*, p. 131.

America in the 1950s and with continued segregation and Jim Crow dominating large parts of the U.S., it would have been very challenging for Japanese Americans to demand redress immediately after the internment camps were shut down. Also, the same legislators who had successfully lobbied for the evacuation had a stake in both covering up the events and suppressing any redress for Japanese Americans immediately after the war.<sup>166</sup>

Moreover, many Japanese Americans were also not ready to demand redress. Many had to “literally and figuratively” rebuild their own lives.<sup>167</sup> Many of the internees lost their businesses, some their homes, and others their property in land that they held to squatters. After the internment camps were shut down by the government, many Japanese Americans suffered from poverty. “According to the 1970 U.S. census, about 20 percent of the surviving Issei were below the poverty level. Many of their children, the second generation Nisei, could not afford to complete their college educations because they had to support their families.”<sup>168</sup>

Government injustice and a profound stripping of property rights, combined with widespread social and marginalization meant that the experience of internment gave many Japanese Americans insight into the Black experience, or at least a common ground in terms of thinking about reparations having suffered similar damaged from the injustice brought upon them by their government. The internment camps caused Japanese Americans to struggle with issues of self-worth and had also economically disadvantaged

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<sup>166</sup> Idib., p. 131.

<sup>167</sup> Leslie T. Hatamiya, *Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and the Passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 132.

<sup>168</sup> Idib., p. 132.

an entire generation.<sup>169</sup> Most internees did not talk about what happened to them during the war to their children because they were ashamed of it. “Many Sansei and Yonsei (third and fourth-generation Japanese Americans) have grown up without knowing what happened to the Issei and Nisei during the war, because their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents never talked about it and because their textbooks and libraries were virtually silent on the subject.”<sup>170</sup> The same happened to ex-slaves after emancipation as the Reconstruction era arrived. The difference between ex-slaves and Japanese Americans was the century of Jim Crow laws and legal segregation that followed emancipation that ultimately affected African Americans’ political, social, and economic power in demanding redress.

Gathering a strong supportive Japanese American community to demand redress from the government did not come easily, nor did it come quickly. It was not until forty years after the last internee was released from incarceration in 1946 that grassroots support reached its highest. By 1980s, Japanese Americans as a group were economically, socially, and politically in a position to put up a strong fight for reparations.<sup>171</sup> New generation shifts, and the changes wrought by the 1960s and 1970s civil rights and women’s right movement brought a new interest in this past history. By the 1970s, Japanese Americans as a whole were doing well economically. “In 1979 the median income for a Japanese American family was nearly \$7,500 above the national average; the poverty rate for Japanese American families was less than half the national rate; and Japanese Americans on average had completed more schooling than Americans

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<sup>169</sup> Idib., p. 132-33.

<sup>170</sup> Idib., p. 133.

<sup>171</sup> Leslie T. Hatamiya, *Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and the Passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 130.

had overall.” Now that the Japanese American community was beginning to regain financial security, they could turn and dedicate time and money to the movement for Japanese American reparations. Community now had “(1) the monetary resources necessary for a lobbying campaign, and (2) the time, mental energy and assurance to devote to redress.”<sup>172</sup> In 1978, the first “Day of Remembrance,” which was covered by local media and ABC’s “20/20” in the State of Washington, Japanese Americans came together as a group for the first time to demonstrate for redress and reflect on the evacuation and internment. “In a sense [the] event represented the broad realization that the United States government had committed a great injustice to its own citizens.”<sup>173</sup>

In an April 1978 meeting at the Japanese American Citizens League’s (JACL) headquarters in San Francisco, representatives from all JACL’s regional districts came together to draft guidelines to what would become the league’s position on war-time internment redress. After discussing different amounts to be asked for, the convention ended with the JACL accepting

...the relatively arbitrary sum of \$25,000 in monetary compensation for each of the 120,000 former internees or their survivors, for a total of \$3 billion. The guidelines also called for an equal amount of money to be set aside by a commission of Japanese Americans nominated by Japanese Americans. Other demands included reimbursement for losses, reinstatement in jobs, and an acknowledgement of wrongdoing and apology from the U.S. government.<sup>174</sup>

After much debate, the JACL and the National Redress Committee accepted the proposal as a guideline. The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) was the organization that

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<sup>172</sup> Leslie T. Hatamiya, *Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and the Passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 132.

<sup>173</sup> *Idib.*, p. 134.

<sup>174</sup> *Idib.*, p. 139-40.



started the redress movement, “it was the only community organization that had the reputation of being a long-established, legitimate group representing Japanese Americans” and “the only organization with enough membership, resources, and connections on Capitol Hill to give the Japanese American reparation movement a worthy chance.”<sup>175</sup> Despite this prominent organization, the very appearance of public demonstrations and a movement in general to compensate and acknowledge this past suggested a change in Japanese American attitudes towards the internment era.

The man who took control of the redress movement for Japanese Americans, John Tateishi, (director of JACL and former chair of JACL’s National Redress Committee) consciously used the media to help publicize the JACL’s proposal and its movement and to again widespread, national support for reparations for Japanese Americans who suffered from the wartime internment camps. Tateishi was able to get CBS to do a segment on the “Tule Lake internment camp for the national network; both ABC and NBC soon followed with comparable pieces.”<sup>176</sup> Tateishi also made numerous appearances on a number of radio and TV talk shows to talk about the JACL and its movement for Japanese-American reparations.

In its success conveying the message to national media outlets and in the rapid publicizing of internment to the American public, the Japanese-American movement for reparations demonstrated two things that James Forman and other African American groups that asked for reparations in the late 1960s had lacked: unity in leadership and unity in what reparations should look like. The Japanese-American community did have

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<sup>175</sup> Leslie T. Hatamiya, *Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and the Passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 138.

<sup>176</sup> *Idib.*, p. 141.

some division but Tateishi was able keep any division out of the public's view. So when Japanese-American Republican Senator S. I. Hayakawa expressed his opposition to the Japanese-American reparations movement, Tateishi did not wait too long to use the press to respond to Hayakawa. In the initial statement, Hayakawa was quoted by *The Salt Lake City Tribune* saying that "The Japanese-American Citizens League [had] no right to ask the U.S. government for reparations for Japanese-American citizens placed in relocation camps during World War II." According to Sen S. I. Hayakawa "Everybody lost out during the war, not just Japanese-Americans," and that it was "ridiculous" of the JACL to demand \$25,000 in redress for victims of Japanese-American internment camps.<sup>177</sup> After this incident Tateishi made a greater effort to use the media to maintain an image of a united Japanese-American community in which he was successful.

Tateishi and the JACL were able to show that there was large support coming from the Japanese-American community for redress. According to a survey conducted by Tateishi and Clifford Uyeda "85 percent of the 4,000 responses collected throughout the Northern California-Western Nevada-Pacific District via numerous church, cultural, and community organizations agreed with the proposition that the government should apologize for its wartime actions and financially compensate those who had been affected."<sup>178</sup> Although the survey did not consider Japanese-Americans outside the West Coast, Tateishi used the results to present the picture of a unified Japanese-American community that wanted the same thing to the media."<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Leslie T. Hatamiya, *Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and the Passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 140-1.

<sup>178</sup> *Idib.*, p. 141.

<sup>179</sup> *Idib.*, p. 141.

By 1980, Japanese-Americans had already begun to rally together to demonstrate and lobby for reparations for the injustice done to them during the Second World War. A lot had changed in America's society by 1980 which made it easier for the Japanese-American redress to gain outside support. The political scene had changed despite the conservative Republican victory of Ronald Reagan as president. "By the 1980s, however, the political climate had changed dramatically. The stereotype of 'sneaky Asian' had dissipated." More importantly, the nation had come to a new sensitivity over civil rights issues during the 1950s and 1960s. Minority groups had begun to fight for their civil rights and equal protection of those rights as well. Political activism became the way to social changes via legislative measures.<sup>180</sup> Moreover, the general public had been sensitized to certain injustices and inequalities by the civil rights movement, and several decades of landmark court cases had adjusted and changed the way the federal government dealt with race-relations in America. The Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education* marked a milestone for race relations in America and had made segregation illegal, which was legal up until 1954. In 1964 the Civil Rights Act was passed and a year later the Voting Rights Act followed. The fight coming from minority groups living in America, specifically the Black Nationalism/Black Power movement, led to these milestone court cases that changed American politics and society. Such changes were supposed to mean equal opportunity for everyone, no longer applicable to White Americans only, but all Americans, no matter their "race, creed, or ethnicity."<sup>181</sup> Unfortunately, African Americans continued to experience institutional racism and

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<sup>180</sup> *Idib.*, p. 141.

<sup>181</sup> Leslie T. Hatamiya, *Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and the Passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 131.

discrimination that continued to exclude Blacks from equal opportunities. Despite Affirmative Action, the civil rights legislation and the rise of a new Black intellectual elite, Blacks continued to struggle with issues of being treated unequally in America. Japanese-Americans on the other hand, benefitted from this environment of rising social consciousness which lead to their success for reparations.<sup>182</sup> The government's willingness to look back at the internment camps and hear the Japanese-American community's story and reconsider its action during the Second World War proved this increase in social consciousness. The combination of a strong and organized movement and the government's dedication to the Japanese-American redress significantly helped Japanese-Americans win reparations.

On January 1979, Ron Ikejiri, JACL's Washington, D.C. representative, schedule a meeting with the four Japanese American Congressmen. At this meeting Senator Inouye proposed a blue-ribbon study commission, and after a "sensitive meeting the committee decided to follow Inouye's advice and lobby for a commission."<sup>183</sup> In 1980, Congress appointed a nine member committee to study Japanese American internment camps. The Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC), as the committee was called, opened the first door to this success. A year later, in February 1981, the Commission concluded that the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II was a "grave injustice."<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Idib., p. 131.

<sup>183</sup> Leslie T. Hatamiya, *Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and the Passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 142.

<sup>184</sup> Peter Irons, ed., *Justice Delayed* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), p. 103-120.

The CWRIC's report in 1982 on the Japanese internment camps was significant in the movement for Japanese American reparations. The Commission educated both congress and the Japanese American community on the issue of redress, which helped to give the bill credibility. The Commission was also able to help bring the Japanese American community together to fight for redress. The commission hearings gave Japanese Americans their first real opportunity to speak out about their wartime experiences. About 80,000 former internees came to talk about their emotional past. The different emotional stories were able play on the human compassion citizens had towards the wronged group. Soon the movement for Japanese American redress was at the forefront as a national issue. With the backing of the commission's report and the redress recommendations in it, Japanese Americans regained a sense of hope and faith in their government.<sup>185</sup>

On August 2, 1979, senators Inouye and Matsunaga introduced the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians Act to Congress. A month later, on September 28, 1979, nine Democrats introduced the companion bill, H.R. 5499, to the House. Over 110 representatives co-sponsored the bill.<sup>186</sup> By the time the Commission released its findings in 1983, the political scene had turned to a more conservative side. The presidential and congressional elections of 1980 marked the start of the Reagan era. With Reagan as president, and his conservative Republican party in control of the Senate, "minority-rights issues had little chance of finding strong support on Capitol Hill." As a result, redress movements for Japanese Americans went on hold until 1987, in the 100<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Leslie T. Hatamiya, *Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and the Passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 84.

<sup>186</sup> Leslie T. Hatamiya, *Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and the Passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 86.

Congress.<sup>187</sup> While legislative pursuits for Japanese American redress went on a break due to Reagan's election and early presidency, there were efforts to win redress via the courts. The first attempt was the reopening of the Korematsu, Hirabayashi, and Yasui cases in which the Supreme Court upheld the military's decision to incarcerate People of Japanese ancestry during the Second World War. The other was an unsuccessful attempt by the National Council for Japanese American Redress to sue the U.S. government for violating the constitutional rights of Japanese Americans interned during the war. The court ruled on the government's Sovereign immunity doctrine that prevented the government from being sued without its permission.<sup>188</sup>

The media "intently" and "compassionately" covered all aspects of the Japanese American redress battle. "When the decisions were handed down, the courtrooms were packed with reporters, with television news cameras and photojournalists crowding the hallways. "Both legal battles.....made the arguments in support of the redress legislation more compelling." The cases educated Congress and the public on the movement for Japanese-American reparations and their wartime experience.<sup>189</sup> In 1965, third-generation Japanese American, Steven Okazaki, released a film entitled, *Unfinished Business*, which documented the history of the Korematsu, Hirabayashi, and Yasui cases, which became a part of the video collections of schools, libraries, and public television. The film's nomination for an Academy Award further helped to spread information on Japanese American internment camps and redress movement. The cases became a type of way citizens learned about the movement for Japanese American redress. Wide coverage of

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<sup>187</sup> Idib., p. 99.

<sup>188</sup> Idib., p. 165.

<sup>189</sup> Leslie T. Hatamiya, *Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and the Passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 165.

the cases brought the issues of Japanese American redress and wartime experience to the average American who grew sympathetic to the movement to the point of support.<sup>190</sup> The more Americans found out about the redress movement by Japanese Americans, “the more sympathetic they were and the more favorable the political climate became for passage of the historic legislation.”<sup>191</sup> By 1988, both Republicans and Democrats were bidding for the Asian American vote.<sup>192</sup> Inevitably, increased support for Japanese American reparations in and out of Congress lead to the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. The 1988 Civil Liberties Act was groundbreaking in its ability to reopen a dialogue of reparations that, up until this point, had been limited to restoring and returning the property of Holocaust victims in Europe and, in an American context, to indigenous peoples in the 1971 Alaska Native Claims settlement which Native disputes with the U.S. over land claims and economic development.

### **Conyers and the HR.40 Bill**

In November 1989, Representative John Conyers of Detroit introduced his HR 3745 Reparations Bill, which called for a systematic study to consider Black Reparations. Moreover, the bill addresses how such reparations should be disbursed, if this investigation would conclude that reparations were also, in fact, due to African Americans. Given Conyers’ timing with his bill coming to Congress a year after Japanese Americans received reparations via the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, the link between the achieved reparations and the requested new perspective is clear. HR 3745 asked for funding to create a committee to study Black reparations and to investigate the effects of

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<sup>190</sup> Idib., p. 172.

<sup>191</sup> Idib., p. 166.

<sup>192</sup> Idib., p. 147.

slavery and years of Black oppression on present-day African Americans. The HR 3745 intended to

acknowledge the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality and inhumanity of slavery in the United States and the 13 American colonies between 1619 and 1865 and to establish a Commission to examine the institution of slavery, subsequent de jure and de facto and economic discrimination against African-Americans, and the impact of these forces on living African-Americans, to make recommendations to the Congress on appropriate remedies, and for other purposes.<sup>193</sup>

Without directly spelling out the terms of reparations, the bill mirrored the lobbying efforts of Japanese Americans in asking for both financial restitution and historical awareness of these past wrongs still affecting contemporary minority populations. Later renamed HR.40 in honor of William Tecumseh Sherman's Field Order Number 15 of 1864, popularly remembered as "forty acres and a mule," this bill attempted to give a historical roots to contemporary complaints. As Conyers himself explained "I chose the number of the bill, 40, as a symbol of the forty acres initially promised freed slaves. This unfulfilled promise and serious devastation that slavery had on African American lives has never been officially recognized by the United States government."<sup>194</sup>

The Commission was designed to study the extent to which the Federal government and State governments supported the institution of slavery in the United States. Additionally, the Commission would have also examined the effects of an additional century of Black oppression and exploitation, and its effects on present day

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<sup>193</sup> Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act, H.R. 40, 114th Cong. (2015). Accessed April 28, 2015. <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/thomas>.

<sup>194</sup> <http://conyers.house.gov/index.cfm/reparations>



African Americans.<sup>195</sup> Conyers believed the “lingering negative effects of the institution of slavery” and whether America owes African Americans reparations had not been broadly discussed. The Commission would help determine the most effective way to administer Black reparations.<sup>196</sup>

Included in the Commission’s study was an examination of (A) the capture and procurement of Africans; (B) the transport of Africans to the United States and the colonies that became the United States for the purpose of enslavement, including their treatment during transport; (C) the sale and acquisition of Africans as chattel property in interstate and intrastate commerce; and (D) the treatment of African slaves in the colonies and the United States, including the deprivation of their freedom, exploitation of their labor, and destruction of their culture, language, religion, and families. The commission was also responsible for examining Federal and State laws that discriminated against freed people and their descendants during the period between the end of the Civil War and present.

This HR.40 Bill simply called for the United States government to acknowledge its past injustices against enslaved Africans and their descendants. The bill called for a study of Black reparations for these injustices and how the lingering effects of a century of separate but unequal segregation affect present day African Americans. The Commission required eight million dollars (\$8,000,000) to carry out the provisions in the Act. Conyers, aware of the Civil Rights movement, of which he was a part of, understood the polarizing quality of slavery would ruffle feathers and cause some Whites to feel

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<sup>195</sup> <http://conyers.house.gov/index.cfm/reparations>

<sup>196</sup> Idib.

guilty for something they did not do. For almost decades now Conyers has continuously advocated for the federal government “to undertake an official study of the impact of slavery on the social, political and economic life” of the nation.<sup>197</sup> Conyers goes further to state, “Over 4 million Africans and their descendants were enslaved in the United States and its colonies from 1619-1865, and as a result, the United States was able to begin its grand place as the most prosperous country in the free world.”<sup>198</sup> African Americans who support Black reparations argue that America’s economic prosperity is due to African slavery and the exploitation of Blacks and their labor. Reparations represent years of unpaid labor that the American government owes to Blacks and is yet to be paid. What is more confusing is that, as Conyers mentions, there has not been an official apology from the federal government for its support of, and involvement in the enslavement, exploitation, abuse and murdering of Africans and their descendants. This leads me to assume that the U.S. government does not feel guilty for slavery and the continued Black oppression that followed it.

Similar to the experiences of Japanese American advocates leading the Civil Liberties Act, Conyers’ bills raised controversy. Representative James Sensenbrenner opposed the bill and responded by saying “[t]here’s no more detestable institution than slavery....but I don’t think trying to monetarize that history lesson is going to provide a useful purpose.”<sup>199</sup> Conyers himself addressed criticism by saying most critics of Black reparations argue that slavery happened a long time ago and is hurtful and divisive to

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<sup>197</sup> <http://conyers.house.gov/index.cfm/reparations>

<sup>198</sup> *Idib.*

<sup>199</sup> Susan Hansen, Slavery Reparations Bill Moves Forward, *BALT. SUN*, Oct. 25, 1990, at 3A.

bring back up, and is best left in the past.<sup>200</sup> Conyers faced significant resistance due to arguments that civil rights-era legislation from the 1960s had, in fact, fulfilled the deferred promises of Reconstruction era. According to Conyers “some opponents of reparations argue that blacks have already been compensated through affirmative-action program, anti-poverty programs and race-based scholarships.”<sup>201</sup> Yet it was precisely because these “Reparation-like” programs failure to fix the problems brought about by slavery and Black oppression that Conyers and supporters of Black reparations continue to press the issue.

Conyers African American Reparations bill only managed to gain twenty-four co-sponsors the first time it was introduced to the House in 1989.<sup>202</sup> The bill states: The HR.40 Bill aims to

examine de jure and de facto discrimination against freed slaves and their descendants from the end of the Civil War to the present, including economic, political, and social discrimination;” examine the lingering negative effects of the institution of slavery and the institutional discrimination Blacks continued to face a whole century after the Civil War ended and how it affects Blacks in present day America; recommend appropriate ways to educate the American public of the Commission's findings; recommend appropriate remedies in consideration of the Commission's findings on the issue; and submit to the Congress the results of such examination, together with such recommendations.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> <http://conyers.house.gov/index.cfm/reparations>

<sup>201</sup> Lena Williams, "Blacks Press the Case for Reparations for Slavery," *New York Times*, July 21, 1994, p. B10.

<sup>202</sup> Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act, H.R. 40, 114th Cong. (2015). Accessed April 28, 2015. <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/thomas>.

<sup>203</sup> *Idib*.

Even though Conyers has injected his bill into congressional agenda every year since 1989, the legislative proposal dies in the committee each year.<sup>204</sup> He relates the HR40. Bill to another bill he was able to pass, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday bill, which took 15 years to be finally passed. He goes on to state “we have seen the support for this bill increase each year. Today we have over 40 co-sponsors, more than at any time in the past.”<sup>205</sup> Most of the forty co-sponsors were from the Congressional Black Caucus who represent the interests of Black Americans in Congress. There was also an increase in the number of supporters who were not of the Congressional Black Caucus.<sup>206</sup> He goes further to say “Just this past month my Colleague Tony Hall, from Ohio introduced a bill calling for an apology as well as the creation of a reparations commission. So now, for the first time we now have two bills in Congress that call for the creation of a commission.”<sup>207</sup>

On January 7, 1997, in the 105th Congress (1997-1998), Conyers introduced his bill HR.40 Bill again. Again the bill was sent to the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, and again no action was taken. In the 106th Congress (1999-2000), Conyers again introduced his bill, and again it was referred to the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, never to be seen again.<sup>208</sup> Although Conyers had as many as forty cosponsors for his bill, conservative Republicans, who controlled Congress (up until the

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<sup>204</sup> Robert Wesley, "Many Billion Gone: It is Time to Reconsider The Case for Black Reparations?" *Boston College Third World Law Journal* 19, no. 1 (December 1998): p. 452.

<sup>205</sup> <http://conyers.house.gov/index.cfm/reparations>

<sup>206</sup> Idib.

<sup>207</sup> Idib.

<sup>208</sup> Melissa R. Michelson, "The Black Reparations Movement: Public Opinion and Congressional Policy Making," *Journal of Black Studies* 32, no. 5 (May 2002), p. 584.

2006 election), would not allow the bill leave committee and onto the floor for a vote.<sup>209</sup>

Very much like the early efforts by Japanese-Americans to gain redress when Reagan first stepped into to office in the early 1980s. Republicans' control of the chamber ultimately put the chances of the Reparations bill for passage on the slim side; the legislation was unlikely to become law. Despite this, evidence has shown as the public becomes more aware of the reparations issue via increased media coverage, very much like the steps taken by the JACL during their redress movement for Japanese American reparations in the 1980s. Increase in support would increase the chances of the HR.40 bill to get passed as law. Conyers's Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Bill took fifteen years to pass, some believe the Commission to study Black reparations may take just as long.<sup>210</sup>

Reparations in the 1980s and 1990s took a different direction in which it became more focused on property and loss of property. The Civil Liberties Act of 1988 that awarded Japanese-Americans reparations was primarily handed out to correct past injustices by the government during wartime that lead to property loss and loss of potential opportunities due to Japanese American internment camps. The same can be said about the Rosewood Reparations that was handed out to Blacks and their descendants who suffered from the 1923 White mob race riot that left many Black Rosewood residents homeless or dead. In both of these cases, reparations were handed out to correct property damage. One of the first stages in reparations for past injustices is an apology. Apologies acknowledge the injustice that was done; it does not fix the problems that result from such injustices. Most reparations come with an apology first

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<sup>209</sup> Charles P. Henry, *Long Overdue: The Politics of Racial Reparations* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2007), p. 99.

<sup>210</sup> Melissa R. Michelson, "The Black Reparations Movement: Public Opinion and Congressional Policy Making," *Journal of Black Studies* 32, no. 5 (May 2002), p. 586.

then monetary reparations follow (Jewish Reparations for the Holocaust, Japanese-American Reparations, Rosewood Reparations).

On May 16, 1997 President Bill Clinton issued a formal apology for the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male, the "longest nontherapeutic experiment on human beings" in the history of medicine and public health. The study, which was conducted by the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) at Tuskegee Institute, in Tuskegee Alabama, was expected to last six months but went on for forty years (1932-1972). The study looked at the effects of untreated syphilis in Black men. None of the men were told they had syphilis but 399 men were given the syphilis disease. These men were sons and grandsons of slaves and most of them had never seen a doctor and were more than happy to get free healthcare. Unfortunately, these men were deceived. In the mid-1940s, when penicillin became the standard cure for syphilis, none of men in the study were given the drug. Some of the men suffered from insanity and blindness from an advanced stage of syphilis, yet they were withheld treatment due to the study requiring observation until death. The research project was finally stopped in 1972 after news reporters received information on the unethical methods used in the Tuskegee Syphilis experiment. As a result, there was an outcry by the public which brought an end to the study.<sup>211</sup> In his apology, Clinton placed the blame on the medical researchers for neglecting their responsibility to "heal and repair." In an effort to show regret, the Clinton administration provided a \$200,000 grant to build a "center for bioethics in research and health care at

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<sup>211</sup> accessed April 28, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1369625/Presidential-Apology-for-the-Study-at-Tuskegee>.

Tuskegee University as part of a lasting memorial to the study's victims."<sup>212</sup>

Unfortunately Blacks still have yet to receive an apology for slavery and the century of Black oppression that followed.

In 1995, nine former residents of Rosewood Florida, once an all-Black town, were awarded \$150,000 each as restitution for property destroyed by White mobs during the 1923 race riot that left many dead and homeless.<sup>213</sup> Taking into consideration the destruction of the community, and the loss of lives Former Rosewood families had to deal with, the sum of money was inadequate but the settlement marked a precedent, and was the first time Black reparations were awarded. Governor Lawton Chiles of Florida signed the House Bill 591 in to law in 1995, in which the descendants of the Black victims of Rosewood massacre received reparations for property damage.<sup>214</sup> Like Japanese American reparations, the Rosewood reparations were awarded to correct damage done to victims' property. Also, like Japanese American reparations, the Rosewood reparations "fit tightly within the individual rights paradigm of the law."<sup>215</sup> Normally reparations for victims of past injustices must be identifiable and alive, and so too the perpetrator. Unfortunately in the case of Black reparations for slavery, the descendants of ex-slaves are so removed from the initial injustice of slavery that it becomes difficult to meet criterion of reparations for damaged or illegal seizure of property.

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<sup>212</sup> Idib.

<sup>213</sup> Robin D. G. Kelly, *Freedom Dreams* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), p. 114.

<sup>214</sup> Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks* (New York, NY: The Penguin Group, 2000), p. 225.

<sup>215</sup> Robert Wesley, "Many Billion Gone: It is Time to Reconsider The Case for Black Reparations?" *Boston College Third World Law Journal* 19, no. 1 (December 1998): p. 452.

Additionally, the survivors of the Rosewood massacre received reparations as a result of the action of the Florida legislature. In the context of legislative action, the demand for a tight fit may be a practical or political, rather than a legal, prerequisite to success.<sup>216</sup>

In other words, the fact African Americans of today do not have a direct connection to slavery and did not suffer from the institution of slavery themselves, does not eliminate the fact that Blacks continued to suffer racial injustice for a whole century after emancipation. As a result of the lingering negative effects of slavery, most Blacks living in America continue to suffer from these negative effects today. The century of racialized discrimination and institutional racism that followed emancipation affected Blacks' economic and political opportunities which kept most Blacks as a group, at the bottom of American society. Black reparations have faced a significant amount political opposition, which, unfortunately for Blacks, is the only way Black reparations will be handed out. The government cannot be sued without its permission and the government has no interest in giving permission to be sued for slavery. The government has not been willing to hand out Black reparations since emancipation. And, personally, I believe they will never be willing until the government acknowledges a wrong was done to Blacks via the system on chattel slavery and a century of continued institutional racism and Black oppression.

It seems as though whenever there is an economic crisis in the United States African Americans suffer the most from such economic misfortunes that affect the nation. For example the depression of the 1870s that ultimately cut short the efforts to effectively reconstruct the South and integrate newly freed people. Another time was the

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<sup>216</sup> Robert Wesley, "Many Billion Gone: It is Time to Reconsider The Case for Black Reparations?" *Boston College Third World Law Journal* 19, no. 1 (December 1998): p. 452.



depression of the 1930s and then the depression of the 1970s and 1980s. The fight for Black reparations has suffered from division among the Black community and some of the tactics used by Forman and other radical groups like the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in the late sixties and early seventies were too radical for the time. The issue of Black reparations, after its failure in the late sixties, did not come up again until the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 that awarded Japanese Americans reparations for the injustice that was done to them that led to property loss and damage. A year after the Civil Liberties Act passed, Congressman John Conyers of Detroit brought his HR.40 Bill to congress to study Black reparations and design remedies to help fix the problems affecting present day African Americans that resulted from past and current injustices. Unfortunately the bill is yet to be taken up as a serious issue by the United States' Congress.

The war on drugs that which began in the 1970s mostly targeted urban Blacks, which ultimately led to a system of mass incarceration of Blacks and police brutality against Blacks. The media also contributed to popular stereotypes of Blacks as criminals via the way they broadcast news concerning Blacks. Government funding for public housing, which was helpful to Blacks living in urban ghettos, was first cut by the Nixon administration and continued in by Reagan's presidency. Although certain aspects improved for Blacks living in America by the 1980s, most Blacks continued to live in terrible conditions, received the worst education, and were the most unemployed. For

years, Blacks have joked about exacting reparations. In the urban riots of the 1960s, many looters proclaimed “This is my 40 acres . . . . I’ll be back for the mule.”<sup>217</sup>

For some reason, studying Black reparations for past wrongs done to the race that still affects Blacks living in America today was not important enough for the federal government to take up; it lacked real support in Congress. Only twenty-eight members of Congress endorsed the HR.40 Bill in 1991, others either did not vote on the issue or simply rejected it. Blacks, unlike Japanese-Americans, have never been in a strong economic standing as a group and also have lacked the political influence in Congress to make something happen. Blacks receive the worst education compare to other Americans, and it is one of the main reason Black support, from young Blacks have been minimal. Most Blacks are unaware of the debate over reparations. In sixties, the radicalism of the Black Manifesto and other radical groups, for the most part, scared most Blacks away from supporting such demands as in the Black Manifesto during the late sixties and early seventies. These movements were too radical but they brought awareness to the American public.

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<sup>217</sup> Lena Williams, "Blacks Press the Case for Reparations for Slavery," *New York Times*, July 21, 1994, p. B10.

### **Conclusion (Chap 4: If You Were...)**

The movement for Black reparations in the late sixties and early seventies suffered from lack of white support, division among Black leaders and organizations, and opposition from the federal government. Most Whites living in America were not ready to give up the privileges that they have enjoyed for centuries. Reparations for Blacks would mean this privilege would be threatened. Not only would it threaten White privilege, but Whites would have to pay for something they personally did not do; for something their ancestors did, or did not do (in reference to European Immigration in the early 20th century). The division among the Black community on the issue of reparations in the late sixties resulted from the radical approach of from Black Nationalists groups like the Black Economic Development Conference (BEDC) and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP). Their opposition to American Capitalism and their anti-American rhetoric caused both Whites, and some Blacks, to reject Black reparations during the late sixties. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and its achievements are considered by historians as the second Reconstruction; in which some of the laws, such as the illegalization of segregation and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, were passed with active federal protection compare to the situation in 1865. Unfortunately, the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement were not enough to correct the problems Blacks continued to face as a result of centuries of racial oppression. By the 1970s, the political atmosphere surrounding the Cold War and America's domestic economic crisis had forced the issue of Black reparations aside and out of mainstream American thought. The 1980s reopened the debate over reparations with the Japanese-American redress

movement that led to the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which awarded Japanese Americans reparations. Unfortunately, during this time, Blacks began to face new forms of racism and exclusion. “Both symbolically and substantively, the 1980s were reminiscent of the rollback of Black progress that followed the first Reconstruction [in 1865].”<sup>218</sup> President Ronald Reagan had declared war on the welfare system and had begun to implement conservative policies that “resurrected” the codified reference to race, such as “states’ rights,” of which he won much white support.<sup>219</sup> As a result, reparations for Blacks faced further opposition backed by conservative politics.

Reparations were not handed out to Blacks in the late sixties and early seventies because of America’s history of not fully accepting Blacks as true Americans. From slavery, to Jim Crow laws in the South, to residential segregation and race riots in the North, America has continued to oppress and exclude the Black population in America. This racism against Blacks has continued to affect Black progression and leads me to conclude that Blacks will never receive reparations for slavery. By not issuing an official apology for slavery, The United States government, or White America, has further shown its opposition to Black reparations. Until this first step of apologizing for slavery is taken, any chance of monetary compensation for African Americans is unlikely. Representative John Conyers has re-introduced the HR.40 Bill to congress every year since 1989; it is now 2015 and the bill is yet to leave committee to be voted on.

An official apology for slavery will show that the United States government accepts and regrets the faults of their ancestors, due to their flawed judgments; and to prove that they are truly sorry, and determined to make sure these injustices do not re-

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<sup>218</sup> Charles P. Henry, *Long Overdue: The Politics of Racial Reparations* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2007), [Page 101].

<sup>219</sup> Idib.

occur, they must award the victims, or their descendants who still suffer from these past injustices, reparations. Germany did this with Israel when they awarded reparations to Jews and the State of Israel for the Holocaust in the 1950s. Japanese Americans, in 1988, were awarded by the U.S. government reparations for World War II internment camps. In both of these cases an official apology was given by the descendants of the perpetrators and succeeding governments and then reparations followed. I believe the United States government is afraid to apologize for slavery because it would be apologizing for American Capitalism. What do you get from four hundred years of racialized slavery? The answer is American Capitalism. American Capitalism is based on the oppression of Blacks. Being Black in 1790 meant that you could never become an American citizen. You were most likely a slave, working hard and bringing your “master” and his great America wealth. This was your life for about two and a half centuries of unpaid labor. Being Black in the South in the 1890s meant you were free, but you could not vote; you could not eat at the same restaurants as Whites; you could not serve on a jury; you were lynched and murdered without justice; you were extremely poor; and you faced oppression all because you were Black. In the 1930s and 1940s very little had changed for you. You and your family moved to Chicago because the South was just too much to deal with. Everywhere you went in the South you were treated like an outcast. They burned your churches and schools, and on top of that, you were extremely poor. In Chicago you made more money, still earned terribly low wages, but compared to the South it was better and you didn’t have to worry as much about getting lynched in Chicago. Although, there were race riots during this time, of which many of them targeted your community.

If you were White in the 1930s and 1940s, you always benefitted from white privilege. If you were from Southern Europe or Eastern Europe, then you too enjoyed the benefits of White supremacy. You were always hired over Blacks; you had access to better education and lived in better neighborhoods, where you joined restrictive covenants to residentially segregate Blacks. Your government agreed with you and made sure the benefits offered by the Federal Housing Administration excluded Blacks. You also participated in race riots that targeted Blacks. You entered their communities and bombed and destroyed it. You murdered them; you contributed to Black oppression while you benefitted from White privilege. If you were Black, by 1950s, your patience for change to occur was running out. You started to fight harder for your civil rights and protection of them. You started to resist your oppression even more through various means. You went to court, won some battles; you protested even when it meant you might get murdered, beaten and arrested for exercising your constitutional rights. You watched your leaders get assassinated when they stood up for you, and still you continued to fight your oppression. What else did America want from you for you to be accepted as equal? You fought in both World Wars for America. You had been fighting for the Union since America's independence from Britain. As a proud veteran you returned back to the United States, your home, to be treated with the same discrimination and oppression you were just fighting to protect overseas. Did America forget it was your labor that turned the United States into the world economic power it was in the 1960s? Based on the status of your people, it would seem as though America did forget. By the 1960s you were ready to force America to address the issues that affected your everyday life as a result of the institutional racism that oppressed you and your people, citizens of the United States.

The United States still uses this system of capitalism and it is still oppressive to Blacks and benefits Whites. American Capitalism, because of its roots in an oppressive system of racialized slavery, has created a culture of White privilege that still exist today. The majority of Blacks living in America continue to receive the worst education and live in the worst, most under-resourced neighborhoods in America. There are more Blacks imprisoned than there are whites due to the industrial prison complex, a money making business that targets Blacks. Mass incarceration of Blacks is not something new; in fact it is very similar to the mass incarceration of ex-slaves after emancipation. The residential segregation that resulted from decades of redlining and discrimination in the housing market still affects most Blacks today. Most Blacks living in the United States live in urban “ghettos”. American Capitalism has oppressed Blacks for centuries. Knowing this, it is understandable why James Forman and the BEDC attacked the system of capitalism in the Black Manifesto.

Calculating the exact amount of money owed to Blacks for the unpaid labor extracted during the two hundred years of slavery, and also for the additional century of Black oppression backed by law, is difficult, and that is understandable too. The question is not how much America owes Blacks? We all could agree that two hundred years of unpaid labor is worth a lot. The real question is; what is America doing to pay that debt? And is it effective in reversing the negative effects that stemmed from slavery and segregation that still affect African Americans today? The answers to these questions are nothing and no. Affirmative Action, which was implemented during Lyndon Johnson’s Presidency, was designed to help fix the inequality that existed between Blacks and Whites. Even today many Whites oppose Affirmative Action and argue that it is reverse

racism. Unfortunately, Affirmative Action did not change America's culture of White privilege. Affirmative Action only picks the best achieving Blacks who were fortunate enough to get passed all the institutional racism and discrimination that are so detrimental to the majority of Blacks who cannot get passed such obstacles and are ultimately left behind. Furthermore, white women benefit from Affirmative Action the most.

The fact is Black reparations are needed in order to fix the inequality and race problems that still exist in America. Blacks continue to hold a second class citizenship in the United States and will continue to hold a second class citizenship if they are not given the opportunity to progress. The effects of institutionalized racism that protect and support White privilege will forever keep Blacks at the bottom of America's social order, no matter how hard they try to progress. Reparations for Blacks should not only take the form of money, but instead include the creation and implementation of policies that would counteract institutional racism. Reparations could be used to improve the education Blacks who live in low-income communities receive so that they can be prepared for college. Reparations could also be used to fund Black businesses, which in return will circulate capital within the Black community. Such efforts to create equality will allow Blacks to control their own lives instead of being exploited, controlled, and oppressed by American Capitalism. It will create equal grounding and provide Blacks with the opportunity to reach their full potential. The issue of Black reparations does not apply to Blacks only, but it requires the entire country to come together in order to solve the social and racial problems all Americans and people living in the United States face each day.



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