



Reparations Study Guide

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Study Committee:

Michelle Chalmers, LWV Wellesley
Debra Dagwan, LWV Cape Cod Area
Jeffrey Gold, LWV Amherst
Meghan Hanawalt, LWV Falmouth
Melinda Murphy, LWV Northampton Area
Shana Penna, LWV Brookline
Marcie Sclove, LWV Amherst
Patty Shepard, LWV Winchester
Christy Torres, LWV Northampton Area
Mary Hunter Utt, LWV Cape Cod Area

Co-Chairs:

Susan Millinger, LWV Amherst
Jeanne Morrison, LWVMA and LWV Cape Cod Area

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Section A: Why Should Reparations Be Provided? Consensus Question

Introduction

The Study Committee is reserving until the end of the Consensus Questions the basic question: should or should not the LWVMA adopt a position on reparations? Views on reparations vary widely, often depending on Who is to receive them; What the reparations will consist of; and How they are to be delivered. At the consensus meetings, local Leagues would determine who, what, and how before answering the question "Should we take a position or not?"

Yet whether or not we choose as a state league to take a position on reparations, the work of the study committee led to discovering how much there is to learn about the Black American experience since Emancipation. The committee also learned how little many white, Asian, and Latino Americans know about this subject. Question A-1 is the result.

Question A-1: Should the LWVMA support educational campaigns developed to raise awareness of the harms caused by systemic racism in the US?

- Yes
- No
- No consensus

Points of view

Yes:

As described in the *Why* and *What* sections of the Reparations study report, throughout our history, Black Americans have faced profound discriminatory challenges which prevented them from establishing themselves more securely in the American economy. An educational campaign represents the effort needed to understand 250 years of slavery followed by another 150 years (from Emancipation to the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts of 1964-65) of legal segregation, voting rights abuses, racial terror, convict leasing, incarceration, and federal policies which caused profound harm to Black Americans: for example, the Homestead Act, GI Bill, Social Security Act, and federal housing policies (all, and more, described in the study report).

Truth commissions, or truth-seeking, are part of the UN Basic Principles and Guidelines. In the description of reparations to the victims, one of the four components in the reparations process is satisfaction: "which should include the cessation of continuing violations, truth-seeking, search for the disappeared person or their remains, recovery, reburial of remains, public apologies, judicial and administrative sanctions, memorials, and commemorations." [OHCHR]

In African American writing about reparations, the equivalent of “truth-seeking” tends to be a study (like the proposed but still unpassed H.R.40), or an educational program. The National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N’COBRA)’s strategy for “achieving reparations” lists “public education” first among its methods. [NCOBRA] The National African American Reparations Commission [NAARC] insists that when an apology is given, it must be accompanied by the founding of an institute to educate on slavery and post-emancipation harms. [NAARC] The Amherst Heritage Reparation Assembly [AHRA] report recognizes the need for “educational opportunities for non-Black residents to better understand structural anti-Black racism and the meaning and history of reparations.” [AHRA, p 26]

Brophy points out “By preparing people to understand the nature of the harm and why reparations are needed, they [apology and truth commission] are a way of making the claim before the public.” [Brophy, p 1188]

No:

The University of Massachusetts poll of 2023 revealed that 47% of Americans do not accept the idea of the “privilege experienced by white Americans” and 48% believe “that racial problems are isolated and rare situations.” [UMass] In 2021, the Pew Survey discovered that 48% of white respondents said that “the legacy of slavery affects Black people in the U.S. not much or not at all.” [PEW]

Such views may lie behind the controversy surrounding teaching African American history in schools, controversies which exist in many areas of the country. They are not at present a cause of major debate in Massachusetts. Many Americans believe that teaching African American history has the potential not only to cause students emotional distress but to give them distorted ideas about their country. State legislatures have responded to those concerns. “FutureEd has [identified](#) 96 bills introduced or prefiled since January 2021 in 36 state legislatures that limit teaching on these topics. Fourteen of these bills were introduced in Mississippi. So far, Alabama, Arizona, Idaho, Iowa, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Utah have enacted 13 bills.” [FutureEd] Massachusetts is not included in this list. The Advanced Placement African American Studies course, itself a cause of considerable controversy in states like Florida [NPR], was taught in ten Boston schools and in about a dozen other Massachusetts cities in 2023-2024 in its second year as a pilot. [WBUR] It would seem that most residents of Massachusetts are comfortable with education of their children—the future citizens of Massachusetts-- in African American studies.

A lack of strong interest, or a belief that eventually the citizens of the state will have experienced such an education, are reasons to avoid wasting the time and energy of the Massachusetts League on educational campaigns.

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Section B: Who Should Receive Reparations? Consensus Questions

Introduction

The original proposal passed at LWVMA Convention did not define who should receive reparations. In organizing the Study Committee, it was decided to focus first on the traditional view that reparations are owed to the descendants of Africans enslaved in the U.S., and to them only. Reparations, it has long been argued, are due the descendants of enslaved Africans to repair the damages and suffering caused by the institution of slavery, practiced in the US from its beginnings to 1865. Over time, however, some organizations have expanded the understanding of reparations to cover the harms up to and including those of the Jim Crow era and beyond.

In addition, as Nikole Hannah-Jones and many others have pointed out, the Civil Rights Act (1964), though it has improved aspects of Black American life, has not prevented many harms from continuing, and indeed there has been retreat from the gains of civil rights legislation. [1619, pp 455-456] (See also *Why Are Reparations Needed?* in the study report.) As a result, the concept of comprehensive reparations has been developed, which includes reckoning with the ills experienced since the late 19th century through today.

These later ills, the consequences of slavery, have been experienced by all Black Americans, not only the descendants of enslaved Africans. For this reason, some reparations organizations have changed their definition of whom should receive reparations to include all Black/African Americans.

The Reparations Study Committee presents both views.

Choose only one, Question B-1 OR Question B-2:

If reparations are provided, which group should be provided reparations:

Question B-1: Only descendants of Africans enslaved in the US from 1619 to 1865?

- Yes
- No
- No consensus

Points of view

Yes:

Reparations for Black Americans have been widely defined as due to descendants of the enslaved because of 250 years of chattel slavery. As N'COBRA writes, "The Trans-Atlantic Slave 'Trade' and chattel slavery, more appropriately called the Holocaust of Enslavement or Maafa, was a crime against humanity. Millions of Africans were brutalized, murdered, raped, and tortured. They were torn from their families in Africa, kidnapped, and lost family and community associations. African peoples in the United

States and the prior colonies were denied the right to maintain their language, spiritual practices and normal family relations, always under the threat of being torn from newly created families at the whim of the 'slave owner'." [NCOBRA]

The American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS) provides another basic reason for reparations for themselves, the descendants of the enslaved: "During Reconstruction, America reneged on the promise of forty acres and a mule, depriving us of the fruits of citizenship and relegating us to a permanent bottom caste within the country that our ancestors built. Reparations is our birthright, and must come through multigenerational direct payments and a redistribution of land that rights the wrongs of [robbery](#)." [ADOS]

"A debt must be paid, and our inheritance protected. We insist upon an historic, targeted allotment of policy and protections that fulfills the promise of economic inclusion and integrates the descendants of chattel slavery into the drivers of wealth." [ADOS]

Prominent scholars of reparations, such as William A. Darity, Jr., argue that reparations should go to the descendants of enslaved Black Americans. As Darity writes in *The Black Reparations Project*, "listing the four pillars of true reparations," the first pillar is "eligible recipients must be black Americans who have ancestors who were enslaved in the United States." [Darity, p 20] Darity clarifies that this eligibility can be determined by claimants being able to establish that "they had at least one ancestor enslaved in the United States" and "demonstrate that for at least twelve years before enactment of a reparations plan or a study commission for reparations, they self-identified as black, Negro, African American or Afro-American." [Darity, p 17]

No:

Reparations only for descendants of enslaved Africans would require Black Americans living today to prove their descent from an enslaved person, which would not always be possible, given the limitations of existing records. The idea of comprehensive reparations rejects the notion of a lineage group determining who receives reparations: "Lineage-based reparations are under-inclusive, create costly barriers, and are too restrictive for large-scale local governments, state and national reparative justice initiatives." [NBCT, p 3]

Harm did not cease with the end of enslavement. The *Why Are Reparations Needed?* section of the study report reveals a multitude of discriminations from the mid- and late-1800s up to the present day: the results of systemic racism. Systemic racism may have sprung from slavery, but it has survived and flourished since the freeing of enslaved people. All Black/African Americans have suffered these harms, and they deserve to participate in reparative actions. NAARC, N'COBRA, and NAACP all agree that others beside the descendants of the enslaved should receive reparations, although possibly with differences.

The strongest statement came from NAARC on March 25, 2022, against the position that ADOS is advocating. "Whether well-meaning or not, this position is well outside the

mainstream of the heroic multigenerational struggle for reparations in this country; the posture embraced by” N’COBRA, NAACP, and many other respected African-American organizations—as well as Rep Sheila Jackson Lee, who has followed Rep John Conyers as sponsor of H.R. 40. “NAARC also rejects this restrictive eligibility framework.” “The focus on who can prove a direct lineage to the enslavement era contains two major false assumptions: First, that lineage in all, or even most, cases can directly be proved. Second, that reparations are only due for the period of enslavement in US history.” [NAARC1]

It is also possible that the Supreme Court majority that ended affirmative action in college admissions would never uphold cash payments to Black Americans, including payments limited to Black Americans who are descendants of the enslaved.

Question B-2: All Black/African Americans living in the US, with preference given to descendants of Africans enslaved in the US from 1619 to 1865?

- Yes
- No
- No consensus

Points of view

Yes:

NAARC argues strongly that reparations should be for all Black/African Americans. In a recent press release on Comprehensive Reparations, which NAARC supports, NAARC comments on lineage-based reparations: “We advise against reparations programs that are too restrictive for large-scale reparatory justice initiatives. So-called ‘lineage-based’ reparations are a form of limited-access reparations that create additional barriers for Black communities to achieve comprehensive and full reparations. This leads to additional harms.” [NAARC2]

Comprehensive Reparations (sometimes referred to as harms-based reparations) “focus on repairing harms endured by Black communities (people of African descent) due to chattel slavery, Jim Crow, systemic racism and their continuing vestiges....” “Some reparations advocates focus only on the period of chattel slavery. However, this limitation does not sufficiently account for ongoing harms...” [NBCT, p 1]

However, N’COBRA reserves special reparations for the descendants of the enslaved. Like N’COBRA, other prominent Black reparations organizations such as NAACP and NAARC, and the reparation plans for the cities that have adopted such plans, have given special status to the descendants of enslaved Black Americans.

The municipal reparations movement began in Evanston, Illinois, and is open to all Black/African Americans living in the city. [FirstRepair](#) has prioritized initial funding of the Restorative Housing program for the descendants of enslaved Americans, but the program expects to go beyond descendants: “The program identifies eligible applicants as Black or African American persons having origins in any of the Black racial and ethnic

groups of Africa. The person must reside in Evanston at the time of disbursement of funds.” [Evanston]

The reparations program of Amherst, Mass., is modeled on Evanston’s FirstRepair. Its report remarks that “Due to present-day structural racism, the AHRA regards all Black residents of Amherst as eligible for reparations, while centering and prioritizing those whose ancestors were enslaved.” [AHRA, p 36] “The recommendations in this report regard all African Heritage residents of Amherst as eligible for reparations; that is, as currently written, our recommendations embrace the broadest notion of eligibility.” [AHRA, p 37]

No:

The search for reparations is an old one, dating at least to the 1890s and Callie House’s Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association, seeking pensions [1619, pp 462-463] and burial expenses for aged freedmen. [BlackPast] Enslavement is at the root of the wealth gap (see *Why Are Reparations Needed?* in the study report) which is a consequence of a century and a half of local and national policies. Reparations are due to the descendants of the enslaved for “centuries of stolen labor and robbed opportunities” [1619, p 463] and the harms resulting from the ultimate failure of Reconstruction. It is a debt owed specifically to the descendants of the enslaved.

It’s also the case that not all descendants of slaves, or all Black Americans need—or desire—reparations. In November 2022, the Pew Research Center published its findings from a 2021 survey. In this poll, 17% of Black/African Americans opposed the idea of compensating slaves’ descendants. [Pew] In four other polls taken by the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, from 2021 to 2023, opposition to the federal government providing reparations to the descendants of slaves increased among Black/African Americans from 14 to 26%. [UMass, p 2]

Coleman Hughes indicated his opposition to the grant of reparations in his “Opening Statement on Slavery Reparations to the U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary” delivered in Washington, D.C, June 19, 2019:

“What we should do is pay reparations to black Americans who actually grew up under Jim Crow and were directly harmed by second-class citizenship, people like my grandparents.

“But paying reparations to all descendants of slaves is a mistake. Take me, for example. I was born three decades after the end of Jim Crow into a privileged household in the suburbs. I attend an Ivy League school. Yet I’m also descended from slaves who worked on Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello plantation. So reparations for slavery would allocate federal resources to me but not to an American with the wrong ancestry -- even if that person is living paycheck to paycheck and working multiple jobs to support a family.” [Hughes]

In his TED talk, Hughes explored that final comment further: he believes that class “is almost always a better proxy for disadvantage than race” and that class-based policies “tend to be more popular and less controversial because they don’t penalize anyone for immutable biological traits.” [TED]

For Solomon Green, “Reparations for slavery aren’t just a bad idea; they are an abysmal idea.” In arguing his case, he indicates that reparations for Black Americans are just as bad as reparations for the descendants of slaves. [Green]

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Section C: What Reparations Could Be Given? Consensus Questions

Question C-1: Should the LWVMA support the provision of the broad range of possible reparations to Black/African Americans?

- Yes
- No
- No consensus

Points of view

Yes:

The study report provides an overview of seven areas of harm that Black Americans, descendants of slavery, and more recent immigrants face [HarmReport], areas that deserve reparations:

1. Culture and symbols
2. Housing
3. Transportation
4. Education
5. Criminal legal systems
6. Health care
7. Income and wealth

Other areas of harm may well arise but these seven arise again and again and are ongoing since Emancipation. However, these and other areas of harm also will vary from city to city, town to town, and compete with other local priorities for urgency, cost, development, and other local issues. As a result, it is important that local Leagues and the State League have a variety of reparations from which those most appropriate can be selected.

What Reparations Could Be Provided? in the study report provides many examples of reparations which could help to heal these seven harms. These are drawn from Embrace Boston's *Harm Report* and the writings of N'COBRA, NAARC, and NAACP, as well as the from the two communities, Evanston, Illinois, and Amherst, Massachusetts, who were first in the nation to establish reparations programs. The California Reparations Report, with over 90 policy recommendations, was not studied for this report, given the focus on Massachusetts. [CRR]

No:

Scholars like William A. Darity, Jr., argue that the reparations should be monetary, and as we have seen above, should be given only to those who can prove descent from the enslaved. [Darity1, p 19] His second pillar of "true reparations:" "The reparations plan must be designed to eliminate the black-white chasm in wealth;" the third pillar: "The vast majority of the reparations fund should take the form of direct payments to eligible recipients." [Darity1, p 20] Any program that distracts from the goal of closing the wealth gap is misguided. Moreover, "piecemeal or local reparations are not capitalized

sufficiently to eliminate the racial wealth gap.” [Darity2, p xvi] While income or wealth is one of many possible reparations for those arguing for a broad range of reparations, for Darity, as for ADOS, income or wealth is the only possible reparation. (Though Darity does add grants to historically Black colleges as an exception at one point. [Darity2, p 265])

“Both injustices, slavery and post-slavery racial discrimination, have profound wealth implications for African Americans living today. There is a substantial difference in the amount of wealth that whites and blacks have today. If properly structured, reparations should suffice to close the black-white wealth gap.” [Craemer, pp 22-23]

Question C-2: Should the LWVMA support reparations in the form of cash payments to descendants of Africans enslaved in the US between 1619 and 1865?

- Yes
- No
- No consensus

Points of View

Yes:

Section B: Who Should Receive Reparations has in the *Points of view for Consensus Question B-1* explained the arguments **why** the descendants of the enslaved should receive reparations. The question to be supported here is why such reparations should be cash payments.

Cash payments became the traditional reparations for the freed and their descendants, early supplementing or replacing land. When General Sherman listened to the expressed desire of the Black leaders of Savannah and provided forty acres (and later a mule) in Special Field Order No.15), the model for reparations was set as land. [Foner, pp 70-71] Land represented a livelihood in 1865 to a community of agrarian workers, but in other economic circumstances its equivalent was and is cash. For Callie House’s Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association in the 1890s, aged freedmen deserved cash pensions. [Darity2, pp 11-12]

In the twentieth century, cash has been the reparations for Holocaust victims and the Americans of Japanese descent interned during the Second World War. [Winbush, pp 14-21] These recent payments have reinforced the belief that cash should be the repair for the many harms done to the enslaved and their descendants. [Winbush, pp 14-21] For the American Descendants of Slaves (ADOS) Advocacy Foundation, “Reparations is our birthright, and must come through multigenerational direct payments and a redistribution of land that rights the wrongs of the great land robbery.” [ADOS1] The focus of ADOS, however, is on cash. “At minimum, the Reparations package should prioritize cash payments totaling \$20 trillion to American Descendants of Slavery.” [ADOS2]

N’COBRA defines reparations quite broadly, although its detailed discussion begins “the material forms of reparations include cash payments, land, economic development and

repatriation resources particularly to those who are the descendants of enslaved Africans.” [NCOBRA]

A number of distinguished scholars, such as William A. Darity and A. Kirsten Mullen in *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*, argue that monetary payments by the U.S government are the only proper reparations to those who can demonstrate that they are the descendants of the enslaved. [Darity2, pp 256-257] Darity suggests that the reparations could be provided as direct cash payments (possibly paid out over time), a trust fund, or endowments to historically Black colleges. Total sums, calculated by different scholars using different bases range from around \$2 trillion to around \$17 trillion. [Darity2, pp. 256-264]

Thomas Craemer, calculating “for expropriated labor due to slavery” and “for lost freedom,” estimates between \$54.9 trillion and \$6.6 quadrillion, in 2019 dollars. Craemer ends by suggesting “minimum reparations as a political compromise” enough “to close the average per capita black-white wealth gap” of \$14.7 trillion in 2019 dollars. [Craemer, p 58]

No:

The U.S. Supreme Court’s decision that Harvard's and UNC's admissions programs violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment ended race-conscious decisions in college admissions, as discussed in *Why Are Reparations Needed? Education*, in the study report. That decision suggests that the same Supreme Court majority would not uphold cash payments to Black Americans, including payments limited to Black Americans who are the descendants of the enslaved.

The amounts of money involved in monetary payments to even one group of Black Americans are staggering and seem in themselves to be enough to rule out reparations in cash payments to the descendants of the enslaved. Surveys and polls repeatedly reveal that Americans in large numbers do not support government provision of cash reparations, which are assumed to be paid by taxes. *Against Reparations* in the study report provides evidence, from the Pew Survey and four University of Massachusetts polls, of hostility to cash payments on the part of white, Asian, and Latino Americans—and even a minority of Black Americans. Recent negative public responses to cash payments in the California Reparations Report are another indication of that hostility. [NPR]

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Section D: How Should Reparations Be Provided? Consensus Questions

Introduction

Reparations for the descendants of Africans enslaved in this country from 1619 through the end of slavery is a widely discussed topic, recently broadened by some to include all Black/African Americans (see *Who Should Receive Reparations? Consensus Questions*). Yet few arguments thoughtfully critique reparations in relation to the specific type(s) of organizations that could provide them: for example, government, private, religious, or educational organizations at the national, state, or local level. In the points of view that follow, we give the best arguments, pro and con, we have found.

Question D-1: Should the federal government provide the bulk of the funding for reparations to whichever group is identified in Section B as the rightful recipients?

- Yes
- No
- No consensus

Points of view

Yes:

The federal government is the entity that supported the institution of slavery, which was fundamental in the creation of a national economy based on the cotton economy of the South. This national government legally defined the enslaved as not fully human in the Constitution, supported legal segregation after the end of the Civil War, and endorsed a myriad of federal policies which explicitly and implicitly harmed Black Americans. The federal government is therefore the entity most responsible for establishing and maintaining this harm, and therefore is most responsible for providing a comprehensive reparative plan.

No:

The majority of the American public is not in favor of reparations, so it is not surprising that there is opposition to the federal government providing them. In the 2021 Pew Survey, 68% of the respondents were opposed to reparation: majorities of each racial/ethnic group surveyed except Black Americans. [Pew]

It is possible that the federal government is also not seen as a likely provider of reparations because of the long history of programs that were supposed to benefit all Americans, but ultimately failed to provide much help to Black Americans: Social Security is one example; another is the GI Bill. (See the study report section on *Why Reparations?* for additional examples, such as USDA and FHA programs.)

Questions D-2 through D-6: Should the following levels of government and other organizations participate in efforts to redress the harms caused to whichever group is identified in Section B as the rightful recipients?

Question D-2: Federal government

- Yes
- No
- No consensus

Points of view

Yes:

The federal government is the entity that supported the institution of slavery, which was fundamental in the creation of a national economy based on the cotton economy of the South. This national government legally defined the enslaved as not fully human in the Constitution, supported legal segregation after the end of the Civil War, and endorsed a myriad of federal policies which explicitly and implicitly harmed Black Americans. The federal government is therefore the entity most responsible for establishing and maintaining this harm, and therefore is most responsible for providing a comprehensive reparative plan.

No:

The slowness of response to Rep. John Conyers' H.R. 40, which would set up a commission to study the provision of reparations is significant. Conyers first introduced H.R. 40 in 1989 and every subsequent year until his death, when Sheila Jackson-Lee assumed main sponsorship. H.R. 40 finally got out of committee in 2021, and despite some 190 co-sponsors, never made it to the House floor for a vote. The most likely reason for this is a lack of political will, coupled with the ongoing polarization of legislative politics at the federal level. As Darity and Mullen have noted, reparations will never become a reality for Black Americans without significant white support, and ongoing educational initiatives about reparations at all societal levels continues to be profoundly critical. [Darity, p 31]

Question D-3: State governments

In relation to Questions D-3 to D-6, a word of caution is in order because of the long standing LWV position on "Meeting Basic Human Needs," which suggests that it is unwise to have state or local governments or private enterprises dominating the provision of any basic human needs. "The federal government should set minimum, uniform standards and guidelines for social welfare programs and should bear primary responsibility for financing programs designed to help meet the basic needs of individuals and families. State and local governments, as well as the private sector, should have a secondary role in financing food, housing and health care programs." [Impact, p 146]

- Yes
- No
- No consensus

Points of view

Yes:

State governments have a role to play in the reparative effort, based on the unique racialized harms each state enacted. In some cases, this may focus on legal segregation; in others, the harms might be more directed in the areas of housing, education, incarceration, or health care. A state's in-depth analysis of its role in discriminatory practices also contributes to further educational awareness of the dynamic relationship between federal and state policies which supported racialized harm and anti-Black racism.

No:

Only the federal government has the capacity to create an adequate reparations plan, and any other focus (state, local, or private) would diminish the federal government's responsibility. [Darity, pp 256-270] There is little evidence yet of the success or failure of state reparations programs, since California's, the most advanced, is still in its infancy.

Question D-4: Local governments

- Yes
- No
- No consensus

Points of view

Yes:

Municipal governments have the opportunity to understand the impact of racialized harms as they occurred locally, offering the community the opportunity to organize and build democratic and equity awareness at the local level. While local governments cannot possibly raise the monies needed to address the racial wealth gap, they nevertheless play an invaluable role in promoting awareness, memorializing local harms and examples of resilience, identifying local redress, and demonstrating the potential to fund needed local initiatives which are reparative.

No:

Darity's view, expressed above, is that only the federal government has the capacity to create an adequate reparations plan, and any other focus (state, local, or private) would diminish the federal government's responsibility. [Darity, pp 256-270] National polls have not so far asked about local governments as providers. As with the states, local government programs are still young, though Evanston and Amherst reparations programs (described in the study report section *How Should Reparations Be Provided?*)

are older than California's. It is still too soon to know how successful they will be and how their local public, activist, and academic audiences will view them. Their actions are limited by their funding.

Question D-5: Business enterprises

- Yes
- No
- No consensus

Points of view

Yes:

The multi-systemic analysis of racialized harms that has been presented throughout the study report suggests a multi-systemic response. Within that context, businesses that have contributed, directly and indirectly, to the persistent racialized harms that continue to be a deleterious outgrowth of the institution of slavery, the Jim Crow era, and the implicit and explicit biases of contemporary America, have a responsibility to both acknowledge such harms and actively implement efforts and policies oriented toward repair. These include not only businesses that had a history of involvement in the slave trade (e.g., insurance companies, banks), but also business policies, so well identified in *The Black Tax* by Shawn Rochester. Based on the economic framework of the cost of slavery, Rochester identifies the jobs that were lost; the impacts of explicit and implicit bias in hiring based on actual research; and hypothesizes about the economic impact of Jim Crow based on economic data. [Rochester] It is the multi-systemic approach that offers the most comprehensive strategy to address the racialized harms that persist to this day.

There is a certain amount of public support for reparative activity from business enterprises. The Pew Survey of 2022 asked those who favored reparations (about 30% of the respondents) whether they thought "all or most of the responsibility for repayment" should be the role of the federal government, businesses, or banks that profited from slavery, colleges/universities that benefited from slavery, or descendants of families who engaged in the slave trade. Of these respondents, 75% chose "all or most" for the federal government while 65% chose "all or most" for businesses and banks. In comparison, 53% gave this much responsibility to colleges and universities, while 44% gave it to descendants of families who participated in the slave trade). [Pew]

All the questions in the Pew survey focus on cash reparations to the descendants of slavery, not to comprehensive reparations to Black/African Americans, reflecting the traditional understanding of reparations. It will be interesting to see surveys asking about attitudes a broad range of reparations to a broader community, such as proposed in the State of California Reparations Report. [CRR, pp 48-52]

No:

As the examples noted in the study report suggest, business enterprises have

historically been part of a complex system causing racial harm, which they are only recently beginning to acknowledge.

Reparations activists have sought to compel businesses and banks by lawsuits to apologize for their roles in slavery and to provide reparations, with mixed results. [Montero, pp 241-289] That the track record so far has not been impressive raises the question of whether time, energy, and financial resources should be devoted to this end. [Afrik, p 368]

The very real possibility exists that the reparation activities of business enterprises will be misused as a marketing approach for the benefit of the institution involved. Moreover, as David Montero explains, "Small corporate actions or token gestures made without involving Black communities themselves... cannot possibly address the scope of enslavement and repair the damages." [Montero, p 289]

Question D-6: Other organizations (private institutions, universities, faith-based groups, etc.)

- Yes
- No
- No consensus

Points of view

Yes:

Universities and some faith-based institutions are (re-)discovering their racialized histories in which the exploitation of Africans who were enslaved or their descendants were harmed. In some cases, these institutions participated directly in owning and/or selling the enslaved and thereby benefiting from that economy. In other cases, faith leaders are discovering the racialized history of their institutions and seeking to make amends to Black/African Americans for those wrongs committed. In all cases, the efforts of these institutions seek to redress their institutional wrongdoing, in some cases directly to descendants. In other cases, the institution, through its discovery of its history, seeks to educate its community in the effort of truth-seeking, apology, and reconciliation.

Over half of the respondents to the Pew survey who supported reparations approved of colleges and universities taking responsibility for "all or most" provision of reparations. [Pew]

No:

These concerns about reparation activities by private organizations of any size range from the very real possibility that they will be misused as a marketing approach for the benefit of the institution involved to the strong likelihood that, without addressing the underlying systemic issues, they will fail to achieve any meaningful change in the long run. In addition, there is concern that not enough of the descendant population has been engaged with the proposed reparative plans. [Merelli]

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Section E: Concluding Consensus Question

Introduction

This study guide, using its accompanying study report for background and contextual details, has laid out consensus questions addressing why reparations are needed, who exactly could receive reparations, what reparations could be made, and how reparations could be provided.

Finally, the overarching question must be asked whether the LWVMA should take a position on reparations, so that local leagues can either advocate and educate citizens about local and state reparations programs, plans, policies, and legislation; or not.

Further, if the LWVMA should not take a position on reparations, should the league oppose reparations?

In his Letter from Birmingham Jail, The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., reminds us, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” [MLK]

Question E-1: Should the LWVMA take a position in support of reparations?

- Yes
- No
- No consensus

Points of view

Yes:

As set out in the *Why Are Reparations Needed* sections of the study report, ongoing disparities in housing, education, health care, voting rights, and more plus conscious and unconscious bias and limited access to employment have harmed Black Americans. These harms consequently have affected social mobility and equality, and have roiled this nation for more than 400 years of enslavement and its aftermath through to today.

The disparities do more than inhibit economic growth, which they do: they also deprive Black Americans from establishing generational wealth, thus contributing to the increasingly wide wealth gap between Black and white Americans. For example, “the average net worth of white households in 2019 was US\$983,400, and for Black households it was US\$142,500. The average racial wealth gap amounted to US\$840,900 per household in 2019.” [Craemer, p 24]

Overall, William Darity, Jr., asserts: “we view wealth, or net worth, as a more powerful measure of economic well-being than income. Indeed, we view the racial wealth gap as the most robust indicator of the cumulative economic effects of white supremacy in the United States.” [Darity, p 405]

The LWV already supports a long list of social issues in its *Impact on Issues*, including criminal justice, education, housing, health care, and others to “Secure equal rights and equal opportunity for all. Promote social *and* economic justice and the health and safety of all Americans.” [LWV, p 17]

No:

There are many reasons why the LWVMA should oppose reparations, including cost, complexity, and racial divisiveness. These reasons and others are explored in *Against Reparations*. Surveys repeatedly show opposition to reparations among all social groups except Black Americans (and a sizeable minority of Black Americans opposes reparations). [PEW] [UMass1] [UMass2]

The cost of reparations to the descendants of enslaved African-Americans is extremely high, in the billions or trillions; this cost is an important ingredient in opposition. Even preferring comprehensive reparations would be expensive. For example, the cost to Evanston, Illinois, of the first stage of its FirstRepair program, for assistance with housing, is \$25,000 per qualified applicant. 123 have qualified; 16 to be given grants in the first year of the program: [Evanston] \$400,000 just for the first year; overall \$3,075,000.

Complexity, specifically of grants to the descendants of the enslaved, has been addressed, for example, in comparison with payments to Holocaust Survivors: “I write this having spent decades of my life negotiating more than \$17 billion in reparations for Holocaust survivors...I learned...that Reparations are complicated, contentious and messy, and work best when the crime was recent and the direct victims are still alive. Based on my experience, I believe that trying to repay descendants of slaves could end up causing more problems than reparations would seek to solve and that there are better ways to end racial disparities.” [Eizenstat]

It is important to listen to the Black voices which oppose reparations. There are Black voices that lament changing values: The importance of personal responsibility is emphasized by Shelby Steele: “the demand for reparations is yet another demand for white responsibility when today’s problem is a failure of black responsibility.” [Steele, p 197] Robert L. Woodson, Sr., asserted that “The entire issue of reparations debases the determination and achievement of blacks throughout history who managed to prosper in the midst of virulent racial hostility. Reparations assumes that the fate of black America can be determined by what white Americans do or fail to do.... Those patronizing voices of whites who seek to save us from ourselves, and black “spokespersons” who embrace an agenda of racial grievance and an identity of victimization, should stand aside.” [Woodson]

Armitage Williams emphasized the significance of victimization by entitling his anti-reparations essay “*Presumed Victims*.” “The reparations movement, at bottom, encourages minorities to believe that they are really lost souls....Again, as an American black, I find this stereotype of failure not only personally insulting, but also to be radically destabilizing...After all, what need is there for individual striving when it is plainly understood that all the difficulties blacks suffer are the direct indisputable result of incidents that occurred centuries ago.” [Williams, pp 166-167] Coleman Hughes, then

a student at Columbia, spoke at the hearing on H.R. 40: “Reparations, by definition, are only given to victims. So the moment you give me reparations, you’ve made me into a victim without my consent” Hughes also argued during the 2019 hearing that reparations “would insult many black Americans by putting a price on the suffering of their ancestors.” [Hughes]

Both Black and white voices point out that increased racial divisiveness would be a likely result of either payments to the descendants of the enslaved or comprehensive reparations. Solomon Green commented “there is the risk of driving further racial resentment in the United States, given that opinions on reparations are sharply divided along racial and political lines.” [Green] “Reparations could seriously inflame racial tensions, stoking the resentment of nonblack citizens who would feel their needs for government assistance were being ignored in a rapidly changing, dislocating economy.... A government program white citizens perceive to be helping African Americans at their expense, for a crime they did not commit, would only push them further from understanding racism in America.” [Eizenstat].

To prevent increasing divisiveness, and to build a stronger political base, Coleman Hughes has suggested addressing class rather than race. “Class is almost always a better proxy for disadvantage than race;” “class-based policies are more popular.” Focusing on class will make possible the creation of “the political coalitions required to solve the problems facing black people today.” “If you care about fighting racism... support class-based policy.” [TED]

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