

## REPARATIONS

### **Chicago 2021 Update – Facilitator: Mr. Kamm Howard**

With the explosion of reparations conversations and actions nationally, reparations are an issue whose time has finally come. Nationally, the federal legislation, HR 40, the Commission to Study and Develop Reparations Proposals for African Americans Act”, is proceeding towards a 2020 House of Representatives floor vote. With over 150 cosponsors to the bill, and the control of Democrats in the House, it very likely to pass.

For the first time since its introduction, HR 40 has a Senate companion bill, S 1083 and has nearly half of Democratic Senators cosponsoring. Both Illinois Senators, Dick Durban and Tammy Duckworth are cosponsors. In a recent national poll, 90 percent of people who identified as democrats are in favor of some form of reparations. And now 50% of all Americans recognize the challenges Blacks face as result of 400 years of aggression and terrorist actions targeted toward our community

Local reparations efforts and actions have also taken off. In November of 2019, the City of Evanston, Illinois passed legislation to fund a Reparations Subcommittee. The Subcommittee is charged with directing funds towards reparative initiatives for the Black Residents of Evanston. On June 17, 2020, the Chicago City Council in a 47-2 vote passed legislations establishing the Chicago Subcommittee on Reparations., within the Health and Human Relations Committee. Ashville, NC was next in August of 2020 and the State of California followed with both their House and Senate passing the Reparations Task Force bill. (Now waiting for the Governor’s signature.)

In Laying the Foundation for Local Reparations: A Guide for Providing National Symmetry for Local Reparations, NCOBRA offers that

1. Local reparations must have 3 basic criteria
  - a. The remedies must be defined by and agreed to by those who suffered the injury
  - b. The resources must be received and/or directed by those who were injured
  - c. The remedy/policy cannot be ordinary public policy
2. There are three primary purposes for local reparations
  - a. Serve as triage, directing limited resources in few areas that are in great need.
  - b. Serve to push the passage of HR 40 and S 1083, the federal legislations
  - c. Establish structures, policies and initiatives that federal resources can flow once the federal legislation is passed or that is specifically targeted toward one of our initiatives.
3. That all reparations ideas should be organized and crafted to address the two categories of Full repair and direct and collective benefits.
  - a. Full repair has the five components of cessation and guarantees of non-repetition, restitution, compensation, satisfaction and restitution.
  - b. The reparation initiatives that are delivered will be in the form of either direct benefits to qualifying individuals or collective benefits to the entire community without qualifications.
4. That the demand for reparations centers around the three classes of crimes committed and still being committed

- a. Genocide – the data on life conditions of the Black community point to a devastating and horrific state of existence resulting from identifiable public policy.
- b. Economic plunder – in addition to theft of labor, there have been multiple periods of multi-billion-dollar theft post enslavement. Redlining, predatory lending, and devaluing and then gentrifying our communities all point to massive intentional theft.
- c. Apartheid – the ubiquitous and wide disparities that exist in every area of life between Blacks and whites in the areas of wealth, income, education, health, life expectancy, incarceration, homicides, police executions, etc., all point to a separate apartheid reality for Blacks in Chicago.

All of the above should guide our demand and actions for reparations in Chicago.

Actions.

As stated, the City Council created the Chicago Sub Committee on Reparations. This body will be charged to address some of the challenges specific to Black Chicagoans from the crimes of genocide, plunder and apartheid. Post enslavement actions consistent with crimes against humanity that have been inflicted on the Black community.

In preparation of the bill, a list of 16 initiatives were presented under the 5 components of full repair. Each of these initiatives serve to address some of the harms of those crimes

Component of Full Repair	Reparative Initiative	Direct Benefit	Community Benefit
Cessation and Guarantee of non-Repetition	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Enact a Civilian Police Accountability Council</li> <li>2. Mechanism that prevent racist policy</li> <li>3. Dismantle injurious laws and structures</li> </ol>		Yes Yes Yes
Restitution	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Preserve Black neighborhoods</li> <li>2. Develop and fund vocational training</li> <li>3. Proportionate representation in city contracts</li> <li>4. Free City and State College</li> </ol>	Yes Yes Yes Yes	Yes
Compensation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Enforce Chicago Slavery Disclosure Law</li> <li>2. Establish Neighborhood Trust Funds</li> <li>3. Establish Private Reparations Fund</li> </ol>		Yes Yes Yes
Satisfaction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Apology consistent with international norms</li> <li>2. Partnership w/Black Cultural Institutions</li> <li>3. Cultural Education throughout K-12</li> </ol>		Yes Yes Yes
Rehabilitation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Center for Transgenerational Epigenetic Injury Research</li> <li>2. Full range of free health services</li> <li>3. Reduced persistent health disparities and food deserts</li> </ol>	Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes

Policy must be crafted in each of these areas and enacted to begin the repair in Chicago. *The Chicago Sub-Committee on Reparations (CSR)* is a 17-20-member body of Aldermen within the City Council.

“The stated duties of the CSR are to

1. Analyze the historical harms of enslavement and segregation, as well as the ongoing harms of institutional discrimination and mass incarceration. (These ongoing harms include police terrorism, predatory lending, genocide, and apartheid)
2. Assessing the implementation of reparations measures consistent with international norms, standards, and laws for reparations as developed by the United Nations Human Rights Commission. (In particular the Basic Principles and Guidelines On the Right to Remedy and Reparation for Victims of gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violation of International Humanitarian Law. The measures collective adds up to full reparations and are subsumed in the following five components – cessation and guarantees of non-repetition, restitution and repatriation, compensation, satisfaction and rehabilitation)

In addition, the CSR may be tasked to

1. Ensure that progress is being made to secure equity, equality and parity for citizens of African descent in Chicago,
2. Consider what forms of redress may be taken, including, but not limited to rehabilitative reparations (i.e. closing racial gaps in homeownership), educational funding, healthcare access, contract equity, etc.,
3. Engage members of the impacted community and the public to discuss implementation of the above-mentioned matters.”

However, for local policy to be reparations, as stated earlier, those who were injured have to determine and direct the policy and resources.

As such, in Chicago, it required that there be a secondary body designed to fulfill that requirement. We have thus created the *Conrad Worrill Chicago Community Reparations Commission*. The CWCCRC will be composed of community members and organizations welcoming all political, social, economic and religious thought in Chicago.

To ensure that the CSR tasks above are in fact met, the Conrad Worrill Chicago Community Reparations Commission will work side-by-side with the CSR.

Specifically, the CCRC will

1. Act as a stakeholder (injured community) reparations authority.
2. Ensure that what is delivered by the CSR is in fact reparations.
3. In conjunction with the CSR, and/or separately, hold community forums, hearings, town hall gatherings, symposiums, and events to ensure maximum input from the injured community and awareness on the forms and priority of redress initiatives, beginning with the 16 initiatives listed above.
4. Receive all applications/plans for remedy – again beginning with the 16 initiatives via a model that is predictable, efficient, inclusive, and transparent.
5. Consider, deliberate and approve all reparations remedies for funding approved through the application process.

It is important that organizations pushing aspects of the Black Agenda also be represented on the CWCCRC.

## Public Policy Recommendations

Additionally, the National Black Agenda should have as the following goals:

1. Develop a resolution and push nationally and locally for all government parties to recognize, honor work fully to incorporate the International Decade of People of African Descent into public policy with the themes
  - a. Recognition
  - b. Justice
  - c. Development
2. Aid in enforcing the Durban Declaration and Program of Action which states
  - a. Slavery, the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonialism and apartheid (Jim Crow segregation) were crimes against humanity
  - b. That there was an economic basis to those crimes that enrich the racists and impoverished and injured the victims ( which is still evident in the descendants of both groups)
  - c. There is an obligation on behalf of the criminal to repair the wrongs

## What Community and Individuals Can Do

3. Sign on and support the Reparations Enforcement Movement, initiated by N'COBRA Chicago Chapter that utilizes the direct action model of activism to target corporations and institutions that criminally injured our ancestors and has led to the current self-destructive and alienated states within the African descendant community.
4. Sign on and support the call for a presidential executive order for the creation of the John Hope Franklin Initiative and Commission for Reparatory Justice for People of African Descent (African Americans) is being called by the National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC).
5. Sign on and support the (NAARC) revised HR40 Bill being submitted to Congressman Conyers that will call for reparations proposals and not simply a study.

## Reparations Appendices

*“Repairing the Past, Imagining the Future: Reparations and Beyond”*

**Senator Bill Owens, Founder and Chairman – 2004 Boston National Black Agenda**

Reparations: A Personal Journey

*“And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee, and when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty. Thou shall furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord Thy God redeemed thee: therefore, I command thee this thing to day.” Deuteronomy 15: 12-15*

Despite the numerous voices calling for Reparations, including the aforementioned biblical, and perhaps original, pronouncement demanding recompense for those who were held in bondage, descendants of

former slaves have not been compensated for their invaluable role in the building of America. Moreover, the psychological and sociological effects of slavery continue to exist.

Merriam Webster Dictionary defines Reparations as: “The act of making amends, offering expiation, or giving satisfaction for a wrong or injury; something done or given as amends or satisfaction; something that is done as a way of correcting a mistake that you have made or a bad situation you have caused.” While it is not my intention to belabor definitions of which you are aware, it is my hope to aid us in recalling and emphasizing the redress that we seek. Africans were captured, brought to America against their will, and forced to work for no pay. At the same time, individuals and corporations were made wealthy as a result of free labor. The injury and wrongdoing caused by this inhumane act is slavery.

In 2003, Dr. Ruth J. Simmons, President of Brown University appointed a Steering Committee to investigate and issue a public report on the University’s historical relationship to slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. While the “Slavery and Justice” Committee did not take a stand on reparations per se, in their concluding thoughts, members noted: “American slavery and the transatlantic trade that fed it were crimes against humanity.” Moreover, they stated that denial of the humanity of a certain category of people diminishes the humanity of all people.

This essay will focus on significant events and circumstances which led to calls for reparations. Personal experiences and lessons learned that influenced my desire to seek change will be shared - experiences which resulted in my filing legislation for reparations. And, we will discuss relevant current issues that are unresolved and continue to adversely impact Black people in America.

### Reflections

Most of us can recall significant experiences and events that have impacted our lives – encouraging words from a teacher, specific books we have read; lessons learned from parents – and the list goes on. We are also affected by discouraging words, and witnessing of mis-deeds perpetrated on others as well as on ourselves. Author B. J. Neblett notes: “We are a sum total of our experiences. Those experiences – be they positive or negative – make us the person we are, at any given point in our lives. And, like a flowing river, those same experiences, and those yet to come, continue to influence and re-shape the person we are, and the person we become.”

Among the countless experiences by which I have been influenced, one is uppermost in my mind; it was tragic, and happened when I was very young. This experience possibly was the driving force that led to my political career – my desire to make changes to benefit African American people – and ultimately to filing legislation for Reparations.

In the early years of my life, mid 1940s, a very traumatic event occurred in the small town of my birth, Demopolis, Alabama. A carnival came to town. Weeks before the carnival arrived, everyone in the town was excited, especially the children. As the time grew nearer, anticipation and excitement increased. When the carnival finally arrived, there was, as promised, lots of glitter and fun activities, including rides for children and adults. Two activities are more memorable than others – rides on the Merry-go-Round, and the Ferris Wheel. Small artificial horses were attached to the merry-go-round which we called “flying horses.” Small children rode the horses while parents stood along beside them to ensure their safety. Everyone attending the carnival appeared to enjoy themselves until a tragedy occurred. I do not

remember the exact year, or my age at the time of the incident; but I do recall that meat and other food items were rationed, and there were frequent blackouts. We were in the midst of World War II.

One of the patrons at the fairground was a Black soldier who stood in line to ride the Ferris Wheel. A group of white people also wanted to ride the Ferris Wheel; and a couple, wanting to advance in line ahead of the soldier, told him to wait. He refused to do so. The Chief of Police witnessed this interaction and asked the soldier if he had heard the couple tell him to wait. The soldier replied that he had heard, but he was next in line and would take his turn. At this point, without any further discussion, the Chief pulled his gun and shot the soldier. The soldier was killed on the spot.

The entire Black community was afraid to talk about the shooting. After my parents had a discussion with my siblings and me, they told us not to talk about the killing again – not among ourselves or with anyone else. However, I did try to engage in conversation with some of the neighbors, but the only response from older people was, “shut your mouth, these white folks will kill you.” I knew then that much was wrong, and decided that I would fix it. Although I was very young at the time, I decided that I could prevent such situations from happening again if I became President of the United States.

From that point, when asked what I wanted to be when I grew up, my reply was, “I want to be President of the United States.” Again, the older people would tell me to shut my mouth, because the white folks would kill me for talking like that – for having such high ambitions as to become President of the United States. These types of comments only heightened my resolve to make ‘them’ pay for the poor conditions of Black people compared to whites - killings, poor working conditions, old school books that were sent to our school from the white school, lack of toilet facilities, lack of running water, two different doors at the doctor’s office - and numerous other discriminatory practices designed to advance the feeling of superiority of one race of people over another. I wanted so much to see a Black man sit behind a desk at one of the stores or companies in Demopolis, Alabama. Rather, nearly every Black man or woman I knew worked for a white person. I continued to believe that only the President of the United States could make those changes.

When I was ten years old, my mother was asked if she had a son who could play with a three-year-old white boy while his mother was hospitalized having another baby. My mother asked me if I would like to perform the task, and I said yes. (After the young boy’s mother returned home from the hospital, I was asked to continue working for this family.) That experience provided me with greater insight into the thinking of white people. With that little boy, I was able to go into white owned restaurants, white sections of the theatre, play in the parks, and earn six dollars a week during the summer, and four dollars while in school. All the time, I wondered how I could make changes for my people.

Another event – a positive one – occurred when I was twelve years old. Reverend Ralph Abernathy became Pastor of my church and appointed me as the Superintendent of Sunday School and Chairman of the Courtesy Guild. Those experiences were invaluable to me. The fact that Reverend Abernathy had such confidence in my leadership capabilities reinforced my long-held commitment to change the conditions of Black people. I was on my way! Of course, at that time, I did not conceive of Reparations as we now know it to be. However, as early as my pre-teenage years, I knew that changes had to be made for African Americans, and I would be a part of effecting that change.

By the time I was fourteen years of age, Reverend Abernathy left my home church - Eastern Star Baptist Church in Demopolis – and became Pastor of a church in Montgomery, Alabama. Reverend Abernathy was one of my mentors, and when he left Demopolis, I missed him greatly.

With the assistance and encouragement of my family, at the end of my 9<sup>th</sup> grade, I left Demopolis to visit my older brothers in Boston, eventually returning to Boston to live with my brothers. Of course, the experience of traveling by bus and train revealed segregated waiting rooms, sandwich bars, restrooms and water fountains. Upon my return to Boston, I enrolled in English High School, and graduated from English High in 1955. My educational experience in Boston was much different from that in Demopolis. While the entire school population in Demopolis was Black – students, teachers, and administrators - schools in Boston were almost entirely opposite. At English High, all of my teachers were white, the Headmaster was white, and the vast majority of students were white, with many backgrounds and cultures.

In spite of the segregated school system and the sub-standard learning environment in Demopolis, our teachers, all of whom were Black, were excellent. They were caring, knowledgeable and, along with our parents, instilled in us a strong desire for learning. Consequently, I was eager to learn about as many different subjects as possible. The subject of slavery – its purpose and its impact on the lives of millions of African people – became particularly important to me.

Slavery was the cornerstone of the colonization of America. Many arguments have been made in an attempt to justify slavery, including a reference to the Bible and Ancient Greek practices. This defense, known as The Pro-Slavery Argument, stated that slavery was an institution ordained by God. Some argued that the lives of slaves in America was better than, or superior to, their lives in Africa. It has also been argued that slavery is the natural order of things, since Abraham owned slaves. However, behind all of the reasons given for the purpose of slavery, the most basic purpose was to rid oneself of work, and force labor upon someone else. Thus, the slave trade was created and designed out of greed. Europeans kidnapped and transported Africans to America and elsewhere in order to build personal wealth and wealth of the country.

#### The Middle Passage

Accounts of the Middle Passage – the forced voyage of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas – revealed the devastating and inhumane conditions that were forced upon Africans during this transport. We learned how African people were chained and kept in small quarters; how disease was rampant; how women were raped; how many Africans tried to take over the ships in order to free themselves; and how many starved themselves and even jumped overboard rather than live under such horrendous conditions. The numbers of Africans lost during the Middle Passage may never be known, as records were either not kept or not found. I have read that the speculation is between two million and eighty million Africans who perished during passage. While there is a wide disparity between two million and eighty million, even one million would have been too many; indeed, any number would have been too many. After reaching their destination, if the slave could not be sold, he or she was left to die.

#### The Dred Scott Decision

A landmark case involving slavery which drew a clear line as to how the government stood on the issue was the Dred Scott Decision. Scott, an African, who had been brought by his former master to live in free territories, attempted to sue John Sandford, his current owner for his freedom. On March 6, 1857, Chief Justice Roger B. Taney ruled that persons of African descent could not be, nor were they ever intended to be, citizens under the U. S. Constitution, and that Scott was without legal standing to file a suit. Taney wrote that the framers of the Constitution believed that: “blacks had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the Negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit. He was bought and sold and treated as an ordinary article of merchandise and traffic, whenever profit could be made by it.” Imagine, if you will, the psychological effects alone that this ruling had on a race of people who were forced into slavery. Consider the implications of the wording of this ruling: “blacks have no rights which the white man is bound to respect.”

### Slave Codes and Black Codes

From the 1600s to the 1860s, sets of laws were enacted which defined the status of slaves as well as the rights and responsibilities of slave owners. Contrary to the beliefs of some, slaves did not accept their fate without protests. Many instances of rebellion were known to Americans, even in colonial times. These rebellions were not confined to the South. According to U. S. History. Org, one of the earliest examples of slave uprising was in 1712 in Manhattan. As Africans in America grew greater in numbers in the colonies, there was paranoia on the part of white settlers that a violent rebellion could occur. It was this fear that led each colony to pass a series of laws restricting slaves’ behaviors. These laws were known as slave codes. Examples of these codes included:

- Slaves were not allowed to own property.
- Slaves were not allowed to assemble without the presence of a white person.
- Any slave who evaded capture for 20 days or more would be publicly whipped for the first offense; branded with the letter ‘R’ on the right cheek for the second offense; lose one ear if absent for thirty days for the third offense; and castrated for the fourth offense.
- No slave was allowed to work for pay, or to plant corn, peas or rice; or to keep hogs, cattle or horses; or to own or operate a boat; buy, sell, or wear clothes finer than “Negro cloth.”
- Owners who refused to abide by the slave codes were fined and forfeited ownership of their slaves.

Modeled after Slave Codes, *Black Codes* were a body of laws, statutes, and rules enacted by southern states immediately after the Civil War to regain control over the freed slaves, maintain white supremacy, and ensure the continued supply of cheap labor. These laws included:

A broad vagrancy law which allowed local authorities to arrest freed people for minor infractions and commit them to involuntary labor. This period was the beginning of the Convict Lease System. Pulitzer prize-winning author Douglas Blackmon, in *Slavery by Another Name* described the convict lease system as free men and women who were forced into servitude, faced with subhuman living conditions and subject to physical torture. Astonishingly, this practice was *lawful* until 1951!

The Black Codes made it virtually impossible for Blacks to own land or make a living; at the same time, the landowners had no labor to work their land and no money to hire farm workers. Consequently, it became easy to impose the concept of sharecropping.

Sharecropping replaced the plantation system which existed before the war. If a former slave became a sharecropper, the landowner would, in many instances, tell the freed man to go to the county seat (or the owner would take him) to pick up his check. Although the landowner already had his share of the money, he would take half of the money belonging to the sharecropper as well. If the sharecropper refused to hand over his rightfully earned money, he ran the risk of being beaten or killed for disobeying the landowner. There were no consequences to the landowner for whatever punishment he imposed on a Black person.

### The Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights Movement was undoubtedly my greatest source of pride in Black people. I was encouraged and exceedingly grateful to witness a movement where Black people stood up to a racist system and to white people in general. It seemed as though the entire Nation was ready for change. While I was, indeed, happy to see the Movement take shape, I felt somewhat guilty, or ashamed, that I had not done something similar before that time. It is still difficult to adequately convey the satisfaction I felt while watching Dr. King and Rev. Abernathy lead millions of people in demonstrations that moved us somewhat closer to equity. And yet, not close enough.

Years later, after an altercation with several white men, and a four to six-year prison sentence for stabbing two of them, I decided to return to college and seek a career in Education Administration. At the same time, I became involved in community activism and attended the National Black Political Convention in Gary, Indiana.

Attending that convention was one of the most exhilarating experiences of my life. I felt so privileged to be among hundreds of African American people who spoke eloquently and passionately about forward movement and development of African people. On that day, I decided to seek political office - one step closer to Reparations!

In 1972, I was elected to the office of State Representative, and in 1974 to the Massachusetts State Senate. I was fortunate to have attracted a core group of people who shared vision of liberation. Significantly, among those were Jemadari Kamara, Mtangulizi Sanyika, and Shirley Owens-Hicks. They ran both campaigns and without question, were instrumental to my elections. After being elected to the State Senate, it was my wish to file legislation for reparations; but some of my supporters advised against filing such legislation at that time.

In 1982, I lost an election, went to live in Detroit, Michigan for a while, and thought I had lost the opportunity to seek Reparations through legislation. While in Detroit, however, I met Chokwe Lumumba, who had written a couple of books on Reparations. I also worked with a group of people to form what we called a Reparations Group. Our group became the largest known reparations group in the United States. As it was a continuing desire to assist people in my community, I decided to return to Boston and seek re-election to the Massachusetts State Senate. Being a member of the State Senate would place me in a position to file the legislation calling for Reparations. In order to finance my campaign, I sold my business so as to eliminate the need to rely solely on others for campaigning. I called Chokwe Lumumba and asked him to write the legislation for Reparations.

Everything seemed to be coming together. I won the election, Chokwe wrote the legislation, and I filed it. My sister, State Representative Shirley Owens-Hicks, and State Representative Byron Rushing co-sponsored the legislation. This legislation, the first to be filed in any legislative body since Reconstruction, was filed in 1989 – Senate Bill 1621. (See Michigan Chronicle article – attached.)

“The Commonwealth of Massachusetts shall pay reparations to people of African descent born in the United States for malfeasance and culpable nonfeasance of the Commonwealth, its agents, employees and citizens with regard to the institution of African slavery, the African slave trade, and, and invidious discrimination against descendants of Africans born in, or residing in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Commonwealth shall establish an African Reparations Commission which shall negotiate with legitimate representation of African descendants born in the United States for the payment of the above indicated reparations.”

In the early 1990s, the legislation became national and international news. I was invited to, and appeared on many national television programs, including Phil Donahue, Charlie Rose, and Bryant Gumbel.

Although there was opposition to the Reparations Legislation, there was also a great deal of interest and support. For example: In 1990, Chief M.K.O. Abiola invited me to come to Nigeria to speak at a forum. We led a delegation from the United States and England to meet with Chief Abiola and President Ibrahim Babangida. Among the delegates were Martin Luther King III; a State Representative from Arkansas; a delegate from the British Government; and the Jamaican High Commissioner Dudley Thompson. After the forum, Chief Abiola escorted the delegation to meet with President Babangida, and the discussion centered on how to advance the movement for Reparations.

During the meeting, each of us was given a task. Chief Abiola was to travel throughout Africa to inform people in every country that we were planning to organize, and take our case to the World Court. President Babangida, as Chairman, was to call together the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and get Heads of State to come to a meeting and commit to the call for Reparations. High Commissioner Dudley Thompson was to raise the level of consciousness in Jamaica and other parts of the Caribbean. (Evidence shows that he did his job.) My responsibility was to return to the United States and elicit support from as many elected officials as possible – City, State, and Federal - to file legislation calling for reparations.

Upon my return to the United States, I spoke with Representative David Richardson of Pennsylvania, who was President of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators. He also took the issue to the House of Representatives in Pennsylvania, wrote a resolution, and it was passed in that House. During the same time-frame, Representative Richardson took the issue to the National Black Caucus of State Legislators and asked for their support. Some tried, in their respective states, to either file legislation or a resolution. We also began to work with many groups across the country, including the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations (N’Cobra).

Congressman John Conyers of Detroit, Michigan contacted me, and I contacted him to gain further momentum with reparations. I gave the Congressman a copy of my legislation; he was able to do more research and gathered a team of lawyers that added to our legislation. The common theme to which we both spoke was the creation of a commission to study and negotiate with legitimate representation of African descendants born in the United States for payment of the indicated reparations.

Although United States Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania Congressman Thaddeus Stephens introduced reparations legislation which passed both the Senate and

House of Representatives, we have not received reparations to date. My voice is added to those of many who loudly ask the question: “Why?”

Similarly, while State Senator Bill Owens of Massachusetts introduced Senate Bill 1621; co-sponsored by Representatives Owens-Hicks and Rushing, why would the Massachusetts legislature fail to pass legislation to create a commission to negotiate with legitimate representation of African descendants born in the United States for payment of the indicated reparations?

It is important to note that, after the meeting in Nigeria, all of us did our job; however, unfortunate events occurred which derailed all that we had done. There was an internal political struggle in Nigeria, including the election of Chief Abiola for President, which was annulled by President Babangida, who also resigned from the Presidency. I ran for re-election and lost. High Commissioner Dudley Thompson, the only political figure left, was in an appointed position. I can only hope that he was instrumental in the development of CariCom (Caribbean Community and Common Market). These were regrettable events, and can be attributed to greed, corruption, and a missed opportunity. Twenty-five years later, one might ask, what’s next? Thankfully, the voices calling for Reparations have not been silenced.

#### Racial Disparity in the Twenty-First Century

Included among those demanding reparations are high profile individuals such as Congressman John Conyers; Attorney and Harvard Law School Professor Charles Ogletree; Randall Robinson of Trans-Africa, Actor Danny Glover; National Correspondent and Author Ta Nehisi Coates, and countless others. Many have written and spoken extensively on the subject.

George Lamming, prize-winning Author and Visiting Professor, Brown University declared: “There is a perennial debt to be paid to Black people for continuing of enslavement and degradation. There are those who believe that the matter is over. They are completely wrong.”

However, despite the continual demands for restitution for the horrendous acts perpetrated on Blacks by whites in this country and elsewhere; despite the current racial animus exhibited toward African-Americans; and despite the fact that numerous existing corporations and institutions in America have admitted to profiting from slavery – the debt has not been paid.

In State of the Race, Dr. Jemadari Kamara, Director, Center for African, Caribbean and Community Development at University of Massachusetts Boston remarked that the concept of repairing someone damaged by an act of another is at the core of reparations – to attempt to make whole again. Also reminding us for whom reparations are intended, he writes: “The consequences of the residual socio-economic degradation faced by the descendants of those enslaved are omnipresent in America’s cities. They fill the soup kitchens and homeless shelters. They creatively sustain the irregular economy, because the regular economy offers them little hope. It is for these victims of this continuing process of exploitation and mal-distribution that reparations are called.”

The consequences of slavery are many; however, the most fundamental is racism. After slavery, racial discrimination was most blatant in the South, but certainly not limited to that region. Discrimination was national in scope. Public and private institutions as well as federal agencies such as the Social

Security Administration and Homeowners Lending Corporations denied Black Americans access to programs that were available to Caucasian Americans.

Although by law racial discrimination ended with passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and Fair Housing Act of 1968, this nation is still marked by racial disparities. Today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, 150 years since slavery ended, residuals of slavery continue. Mass incarceration; assault on voting rights; police brutality; offensive, dehumanizing political and social discourse remain high priorities for groups such as Black Lives Matter; the Innocence Project; NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People); the United States Justice Department, as well as other groups and individual citizens.

A significant degree of controversy surrounding reparations remains. Questions asked include: Who will receive the money? How will it be disbursed? Why should there be any compensation for something that occurred hundreds of years ago? And the questions continue. Comments such as: "It's time to move on" and "I don't want any handouts" are often espoused by African-Americans and others in opposition to Reparations.

There are those who dismiss the efficacy for reparations by suggesting that Africans were as much to blame for slavery as Europeans and that both profited from selling and buying of people. In an Op-Ed in the New York Times titled *Ending the Slavery Blame-Game*, Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Director of Hutchins Center for African and African American Research, Harvard University, asserted: "Advocates of reparations for the descendants of those slaves generally ignore this untidy problem of the significant role that Africans played in the trade, choosing to believe the romanticized version that our ancestors were all kidnapped unawares by evil white men, like Kunta Kinte was in 'Roots.' The truth, however, is much more complex: slavery was a business, highly organized and lucrative for European buyers and African sellers alike."

Such arguments are refuted by others in the African-American community, including Dr. Lolita Buckner Inniss, Professor at Cleveland Marshall College of Law. In a letter to the New York Times, she argued that regardless of who did the capturing, it was white people who created the market for African slaves and perpetuated the practice, even after the import trade was banned.

It is worth re-stating that racial discrimination is ever present in our society today. Some areas of blatant racial animus include, but are not limited to:

*Voting Rights:* The right to vote is a fundamental tenet of an advanced society and was guaranteed by the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitution. Additionally, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was designed to protect and enforce those Amendments. Yet, in many states – both South and North – a significant number of citizens, especially People of Color and those with limited financial means are finding it extremely difficult to vote due to laws passed by state legislators with the sole purpose of disenfranchising a group of people from voting. President Obama has noted: "Voting is a time when we all have an equal say – black or white, rich or poor, man or woman. It doesn't matter. In the eyes of the law and in the eyes of democracy, we're all supposed to have that equal right to cast our ballot to help determine the direction of our society." He further stated that the right to vote is threatened today in a way that it has not been since the Voting Rights Act became law nearly five decades ago.

*Mass Incarceration* leads to a lifetime of “imprisonment.” Entire families are adversely affected when a man or woman is incarcerated. Often, the incarceration is for non-violent acts; however, after the individual has served his time (paid his debt) and re-enters society, he is treated as a second-class citizen. Many privileges of citizenship are withdrawn, including, in some states, the right to vote, as well as the opportunity for employment and housing.

*Police Brutality* – in the past few years alone, we have witnessed time and again the numbers of Black men and women who have been beaten and often killed by police officers. In many instances, there appeared to be no cause for the officer to confront the civilian at all. In the vast majority of instances, the officer has not been held accountable for his actions, even when a life was taken.

*Offensive Behavior and Discourse* – Beginning with President Obama’s election, we have watched and listened in horror, disbelief, and anger to members of Congress and others with a platform call him a liar, question his birthplace, and question his legitimacy as President. We have observed those with permission to openly carry a weapon, brazenly and defiantly attend rallies where the President is speaking wearing loaded weapons on their hips. When the President of the United States is shown the repeated level of disrespect that our current President has been shown, from elected officials and others, tacit permission is given to engage in hateful and racist language and behaviors as well. Words matter, and when they are offensive, dehumanizing, and degrading, can lead to violence by those who are sworn to protect and serve all people within their jurisdiction. One might reasonably conclude that the apparent hatred and obvious disrespect exhibited by some toward Africans in America emanate from slavery.

In the Brown University Steering Committee Report, previously mentioned, Committee members wrote: “Material inequalities are only part of the legacy that slavery and Jim Crow bequeathed to the Nation. In the worst circumstances, they leave legacies of rage and contempt that, left unattended, virtually ensure the eruption of new atrocities in the future.”

It is also noted that U. S. Courts and Legislatures have become primary venues for reparation claims of various sorts, and political leaders have been outspoken in demanding leaders of other nations (i.e. Japan) acknowledge and make amends for the misdeeds of their predecessors. On the other hand, Americans remain uneasy, at best, about broaching aspects of their own history, particularly in regard to slavery.

Dr. James Woodard, Attorney/Africanist Scholar, while addressing a Primary Source Symposium asked and answered the question: “What does it mean in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century to be accountable for slavery? It means working toward a new world order – it not only means recompense for past injustices, but indemnification for present discrimination. ...To be accountable for slavery in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century means teachers should engage in honest dialogue with their students, exposing them to true history – not history that’s been revised to hide the misdeeds of those who control the world.” He further stated that, “Inasmuch as we are a nation of laws, perhaps we should discontinue the moral arguments regarding reparations and begin arguing the rule of law.”

We have seen, in recent weeks, the symbolic removal of the Confederate flag from the State House in Columbia, South Carolina. This occurred in the aftermath of the murder of nine worshippers at the

Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church during Bible Class by a white man who stated that he attended this service for the sole purpose of killing Black people. While I applaud the symbolic gesture of removing the flag, much more needs to be done. Legislation, enforcement of laws, and accountability are required in order to make the changes that are needed in our society.

In the previously mentioned speech by Dr. Woodard, he also posed a provocative question to his audience: "...if Blacks had enslaved whites for 246 years and perpetrated Jim Crow for 58 more years, would you oppose reparations for white Americans?" I am convinced that the answer would be no.

The African Slave Trade was the greatest crime in history! All European nations that participated must pay; existing companies that participated must pay. The slave trade, itself, was created and designed out of greed. We cannot rest, nor should we rest, until we receive reparations – for the wrongdoing of slavery. Our forefathers should have received it, our children need it, and we deserve it for future generations.

**"To step into the future, the injustices of the past must be redressed. We must eradicate economic, political, and social injustices against African people throughout the world."**