

Black Live Matters

Reparations Policy Agenda

Reparations

The making of amends for a wrong that has been done – whether by individuals, corporations, government or other major institutions – by paying money, control of land, housing, jobs, health care, transportation and even finance and trade. — Agenda to Build Black Futures and UN Working Group of Experts: Mississippi Mission, US South Human Rights Abuses, Workers Rights and Economic Justice Testimony

Responsible Business/Accountable Business

Responsible Business/Accountable Business is a position by which a business will be held in check or account for their decisions and actions. An accountable business requires a commitment to the vision of Black and other oppressed peoples to assume self-determination over those areas deemed by Black and other oppressed people to directly affect their lives. “Responsible” or “Accountable” businesses must meet three basic criteria: provide living wage jobs for community residents; adhere to ethical labor and investment standards; treat workers and consumers/clients with dignity and respect; and make regular charitable contributions that support Black communities.

We demand reparations for past and continuing harms. The government, responsible corporations and other institutions that have profited off of the harm they have inflicted on Black people — from colonialism to slavery through food and housing redlining, mass incarceration, and surveillance — must repair the harm done. This includes:

- Reparations for the systemic denial of access to high quality educational opportunities in the form of full and free access for all Black people (including undocumented and currently and formerly incarcerated people) to lifetime education including: free access and open admissions to public community colleges and universities, technical education (technology, trade and agricultural), educational support programs, retroactive forgiveness of student loans, and support for lifetime learning programs.
- Reparations for the continued divestment from, discrimination toward and exploitation of our communities in the form of a guaranteed minimum livable income for all Black people, with clearly articulated corporate regulations.
- Reparations for the wealth extracted from our communities through environmental racism, slavery, food apartheid, housing discrimination and racialized capitalism in the form of corporate and government reparations focused on healing ongoing physical and mental trauma, and ensuring our access and control of food sources, housing and land.
- Reparations for the cultural and educational exploitation, erasure, and extraction of our communities in the form of mandated public school curriculums that critically examine the political, economic, and social impacts of colonialism and slavery, and funding to support, build, preserve, and restore cultural assets and sacred sites to ensure the recognition and honoring of our collective struggles and triumphs.
- Legislation at the federal and state level that requires the United States to acknowledge the lasting impacts of slavery, establish and execute a plan to address those impacts. This includes the immediate passage of H.R.40, the “Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act” or subsequent versions which call for reparations remedies.

Reparations for the systemic denial of access to high quality educational opportunities in the form of full and free access for all Black people (including undocumented, currently, and formerly incarcerated people) to lifetime education including: free access and open admissions to all public universities and colleges, technical education (technology, trade, and agricultural), educational support programs, retroactive forgiveness of student loans, and support for lifetime learning programs.

What is the Problem?

- Education in the U.S. has always been a subversive act for Black people. During enslavement we were legally barred from the most basic forms of education including literacy. Post-Civil War, and even after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, Black people have been locked into segregated institutions that are underfunded, under resourced and often face severe health risk because of the decrepit conditions of their school buildings.
- The current racial equity gap in education has roots that date back to enslavement. In fact, recent studies suggest that racial educational inequalities may be the most (measurable) enduring legacy of slavery. The same study also verified ongoing income inequality correlated to counties where slavery was prevalent.
- The cradle-to-college pipeline has been systematically cut off for Black communities. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 23 states spend more per pupil in affluent districts than in high-poverty districts that contain a high concentrations of Black students; and the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights shows persistent and glaring opportunity gaps and racial inequities for Black students. Black students are less likely to attend schools that offer advanced coursework, less likely to be placed in gifted and talented programs, more likely to attend schools with less qualified educators, and employ law enforcement officers but no counselors.
- Public universities, colleges, and technical education remain out of reach for most in the United States and policies to help students cover costs continue to shift towards benefiting more affluent families.
- Funding cuts across the country are forcing individual students' tuition and fees to cover more operating costs than ever at public colleges and universities. At City University of New York (CUNY), the largest city public university system in the U.S., tuition and fees cover over 50 percent of the operating budget. Since right before the recession, government funding for higher education has significantly fallen. 47 states spent less in 2014-2015 on per student funding than they did at the start of the recession.

- Financial aid is not sufficiently covering the basic needs of students attending public universities and colleges, leaving many of them struggling to eat and pay for housing, transportation, daycare and healthcare. A Wisconsin Hope Lab survey showed half of all students surveyed were struggling with food and housing insecurity, 20 percent didn't have money to eat and 13 percent were homeless.
- Access to education — from university, to college, to community schools, to continuing adult education, to agricultural training — is essential to ensure that our communities can thrive. In addition to college age students, the ability to access lifelong education is essential to the political, economic and cultural health of our nation.
- The rising costs of higher education and exploitative and predatory lending practices of private and for-profit institutions make Black students more likely to drop-out, and leave them and their families stuck with debilitating and crippling debt. U.S. student loan debt nearly totals \$1.3 trillion, with close to \$900 billion in federal student loans, and more than 7 million borrowers in default.
- Historically Black Colleges and Universities continue to play a critical role in offering Black students, especially from low-income communities, access to higher education in an environment where they are supported and able to thrive. However, federal and state funding systematically underfunds Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) compared to Predominantly White Institutions (PWI). Since the recession, deep state funding cuts have disproportionately affected HBCU's, putting the future of many in jeopardy, and impairing their ability to offer high-quality educational opportunities to their students.

What Does This Solution Do?

- We seek complete open access for all to free public university, college and technical education programs (including technology, trade and agricultural) as well as full-funding for lifelong learning programs that support communities and families. We also seek the forgiveness of all federal student loans. Policies shall apply to all and should focus on outreach to communities historically denied access to education including undocumented, incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people.

- Cover all living costs, including but not limited to housing, transportation, childcare, healthcare, and food for students attending public universities, colleges, and technical educational programs (including technology, trade, and agricultural).
- Fully fund and provide open access to K-12, higher education, technical educational programs (including technology, trade, and agricultural), educational support programs and lifelong learning programs to every individual incarcerated in local, state, and federal correctional facilities (juvenile and adult).
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- Provide full access to all undocumented people to state and federal programs that provide aid to cover the full costs, including living costs, to attend public universities, and colleges, technical educational programs, and lifelong learning programs.
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- Increased federal and state investments in all Historically Black Colleges (HBCUs).

Federal Action:

- Target: Legislative
- Process: This would require passage of a bill through both houses of Congress and be signed by the President. The Bill would provide \$165 billion (in 2014 the DOE provided \$30 billion in grant aid, \$36 billion in tax cuts and \$99 billion in federal student loans) per year to states to eliminate undergraduate tuition and fees at all public universities and colleges, and assist states to cover all related living costs for students. Additionally, the bill would allocate funding to lifelong learning and technical education programs and fund and provide complete open access to K-12, higher education, technical educational programs (including technology, trade, and agriculture), educational support programs and lifelong learning programs to every individual incarcerated in local, state, and federal correctional facilities (juvenile and adult). The bill would also increase work study programs and employment opportunities for students and expand eligibility to undocumented students and incarcerated students.
- Target: Legislative
- Process: This would require the passage of a bill through both houses of Congress and be signed by the President. The bill would allow undocumented people access to full state and federal aid to cover all tuition, fees, and living costs to attend public universities and colleges, technical educational programs (including technology, trade, and agriculture), and lifelong learning programs.

- Target: Legislative
- Process: This would require passage of a bill through the state legislature that ensures all HBCU's receive equitable funding for operational, staffing, infrastructure, and research needs, in order to adequately provide high-quality educational opportunities. In addition, the bill should offer incentives for HBCU's to attract and secure staff, increase graduate school course offerings, and support graduate schools that train teachers, doctors, lawyers, and social scientist.

- Target: Executive
- Process: The President could issue an executive order abolishing all current student debt, Article I, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution. The President should expand the Second Chance Pell Grant to include all individuals currently incarcerated in local, state, and federal correctional facilities (juvenile and adult).

State Action:

- Target: Legislative
- Process: This would require passage of a bill through the State legislature which provides funds to eliminate undergraduate tuition and fees at all public universities and colleges and cover living costs. Additionally, the bill would allocate funding to lifelong learning and technical education programs and fund K-12, higher education, technical educational programs (including technology, trade, and agriculture), educational support programs and lifelong learning programs in all state correctional facilities. The bill would also increase work study programs and employment opportunities for students and expand eligibility to undocumented students and incarcerated students. The cost of the bill would vary based on jurisdiction.

- Target: Legislative
- Process: This would require the passage of a bill through both houses of Congress and be signed by the President. The bill would allow undocumented people access to full state and federal aid to cover all tuition, fees, and living costs to attend public universities and colleges, technical educational programs (including technology, trade, and agriculture), and lifelong learning programs.

- Target: Legislative
- Process: This would require passage of a bill through the state legislature that ensures all HBCU's receive equitable funding for operational, staffing, infrastructure, and research needs, in order to adequately provide high-quality educational opportunities. In addition, the bill should offer incentives for HBCU's to attract and secure staff, increase graduate school course offerings, and support graduate schools that train teachers, doctors, lawyers, and social scientist.

Local Action:

- Increase local investments in public universities, colleges, technical educational programs (technology, trade, and agricultural), educational support programs and lifelong learning programs. Increase local investments and ensure access to education for all adults and youth incarcerated in local correctional facilities.

How does this solution address the specific needs of some of the most marginalized Black people?

- This policy would directly impact undocumented and incarcerated people by making higher education, technical education (including technology, trade, and agriculture) and lifelong learning programs eligible to them. The policy would also cover necessary living costs so they can pursue educational opportunities.
- Only 32 states offer some type of college or post-secondary courses to adults who are incarcerated, but 80 percent of the incarcerated population never graduated from high school.
- In the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, 83 percent of Black trans respondents report not having a college degree.
- A Center for American Progress report showed that among Black same-sex couples that reported graduating from high school, only 40 percent report completing some college, compared to 67 percent for white same-sex couples

Model Legislation:

- While, no current legislation provides funding to cover all costs related to higher-education, we can build off of models that cover the costs of tuition and fees and eliminate our current debt-based model.
- While not ideal, and not inclusive of all components of the above demands, Senator Sander's College for All Act includes federal funds to ensure free college and university for all eligible students.
- Washington College Bound Scholarship
- Oregon State Legislature
- Kentucky House Bill 626
- DEMOS Debt Free College

Resources:

- How Bad Are Conditions in Detroit Public Schools? This Appalling Strauss, Valerie, Washington Post, 20 January 2016.
- Racial Disparities in K-12 Education 2013-2014, Civil Rights Data Collection.
- Policies to help students pay for college continue to shift toward favoring the rich Marcus, Jon, Hechinger Report, 24 May 2016.
- Student and Faculty Higher Education Platform
- Students now pay more of their public university tuition than state governments Douglas-Gabriel, Danielle, Washington Post, 5 January 2015.
- Hungry to Learn: Addressing Food & Housing Insecurity Among Undergraduates Goldrick-Rab, Sara, Broton, Katherine, Eisenberg, Daniel. December 2015.
- Food Pantries Address a Growing Hunger Problem at Colleges Saul, Stephanie, New York Times, 22 June 2016.
- The Case for Debt-Free Public College, Huelsman, Mark. DEMOS.
- Funding at HBCUs Continues to be Separate and Unequal Arnett, Autumn, 31 May 2015. Diverse Issues in Higher Education
- Funding U.S. Historically Black Colleges and Universities: A Policy Recommendation Jr. Mitchell, Donald Fall 2013, JEP EJOURNAL of Education Policy

Organizations Currently Working on Policy:

- The Debt Collective
- Ohio Students Association
- DEMOS
- Wisconsin Hope Lab

Authors & Contributors of this Policy Overview

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Reparations for the continued divestment from, discrimination toward, and exploitation of our communities in the form of a guaranteed minimum livable income for all Black people, with clearly articulated corporate regulations.

What is the problem?

- Structural racism — particularly against Black Americans — has shaped the rules of our economy since the founding of the U.S. The combination of slavery, America’s deep-rooted system of racial capitalism, and long-lasting discriminatory institutions have for centuries denied Black people equal access to the wealth created through their labor.
- Second, such racism continues to drive unequal economic outcomes and opportunities that are passed on intergenerationally. Today, an entire system of laws, regulations, policies, and normative practices explicitly exclude Black Americans from the economy and from leading safe, healthy, and economically secure lives. In the past, this took the form of Jim Crow and problematic racial and gender exclusions in New Deal social policies; now, the most glaring example is our racialized system of mass incarceration.
- In 2011, the median Black household had just \$7,113 in wealth, more than 15 times less than the \$111,146 in wealth held by the median white household. Today, a mere 42 percent of Black families compared to 72 percent of whites own their homes, driving the historically durable racial wealth gap. At the end of 2015, the unemployment rate for the general population was 5 percent, yet 9.2 percent for Black workers and just 4.4 percent for white workers. The unemployment rate for Black Americans has been roughly double that for whites since at least the early 1970s. There are also stark racial disparities in education, health access and outcomes, the criminal justice system, and social mobility, among many other arenas of economic security and well-being.

What does this solution do?

- A Universal Basic Income (UBI) provides an unconditional and guaranteed livable income that would meet basic human needs while providing a floor of economic security. UBI would eliminate absolute poverty, ensuring economic security for all by mandating an income floor covering basic needs. Unlike most social welfare and social insurance programs, it is *not* means tested nor does it have any work requirements. All individual adults are eligible.
- No other social or economic policy solution today would be of sufficient scale to eradicate the profound and systemic economic inequities afflicting Black communities.
- As patterns and norms of “work” change rapidly and significantly in the decades to come — no matter how profound those changes are — it is likely that Black America and other populations that are already disadvantaged will bear the brunt of whatever economic insecurity and volatility results.
- A pro-rated additional amount included in a UBI for Black Americans over a specified period of time.

- The revenue saved from divesting in criminal justice institutions could be pooled into a fund for UBI; this revenue could be earmarked for the “PLUS” aspect of the policy that would be targeted toward Black Americans. If combined with other funds, it would effectively function as reparations, in a grand bargain with white America: All would benefit, but those who suffered through slavery and continuing racism would benefit slightly more.

Federal Action:

- Target: Legislative
- Process: UBI would have to pass both houses of Congress and then be signed by the president. The revenue could be generated by multiple sources which would require structural reforms to the tax code including higher taxes on the wealthy, taxes on public goods like air (carbon tax) or on certain industries (financial transactions tax), or a dividend based on distributing resources from a common-owned asset (like oil).

State Action:

- Target: Legislative
- Process: Similar to national policy, UBI would have to pass through state legislatures and be signed by governors. Other instances might require amendments to State Constitutions. The precedent here is the Alaska Permanent Fund, set up in the late 1970s/early 1980s. All residents of Alaska receive an annual dividend based on the invested revenue from the publicly-owned oil reserves.

How does this solution address the specific needs of some of the most marginalized Black people?

- UBI would then provide an individual-sustaining basic floor for people who are formerly incarcerated upon re-entry that does not currently exist.
- UBI would be an improvement on portions of today’s current safety net and would benefit cash poor Black people the most. Some benefits, such as food stamps, are replete with paternalistic restrictions that rest on racist tropes about recipients and their consumption habits. Others, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), are significantly tied to work, which is problematic when structural racism continues to create so many barriers to Black employment. UBI lacks these flaws.

Model Legislation

- Model policy exists in the form of the Alaska Permanent Oil Fund in which state residents receive a yearly dividend based on the publicly owned wealth of the state's oil reserves. Other countries around the world are currently proposing a UBI including Switzerland and Finland.

Resources:

- Universal Basic Income & African Americans
- Basic Income Earth Network
- U.S. Basic Income Network

Organizations Currently Working on Policy:

- Basic Income Project

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Reparations for the wealth extracted from our communities through environmental racism, slavery, food apartheid, housing discrimination and racialized capitalism in the form of corporate and government reparations focused on healing ongoing physical and mental trauma, and ensuring our access and control of food sources, housing and land.

POLICY BRIEF COMING SOON

Reparations for the cultural and educational exploitation, erasure, and extraction of our communities in the form of mandated public school curriculums that critically examine the political, economic, and social impacts of colonialism and slavery and funding to support, build, preserve and restore cultural assets and sacred sites to ensure the recognition and honoring of our collective struggles and triumphs.

What is the problem?

- The United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent reported after their country visit to the U.S. that they were “concerned by an insufficient recognition in the present day of the influence of the baggage of the past, which necessitates specific institutions and programmes tailored to the situation of people of African descent.” Stories of African American history are often left untold or are under-told, and many individuals have no understanding of the extraordinary sacrifices that were made and hardships that were overcome. We need cultural reparations to publically acknowledge the history of mass violence in the U.S. in order to begin to heal from the trauma.
- School curriculums often whitewash the history of slavery and the state’s role in oppressing Black people, such as through textbooks that refer to slaves as immigrant workers, claim thousands of Blacks fought for the South during the Civil War, or otherwise downplay the horrors of slavery.
- Even in states and cities that require Black history education, the subject is often taught sporadically or only during Black History Month or Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday. Teachers at D.C.’s Howard Middle School were even fired for teaching Black history beyond the curriculum.
- There are too few acknowledged and preserved historical sites commemorating Black history. Of the 412 National Park Service sites in the U.S., only 25 (or 6 percent) are specifically devoted to Black history. According to the Institute of Museums and Library Services, there are 35,000 museums in the U.S., but only about 300 (or less than 1 percent) of these are specifically devoted to Black individuals or history. Despite their valuable programming and exhibitions, these organizations do not receive adequate funding from state legislatures or philanthropic organizations. The Smithsonian will open the National Museum of African American History & Culture in September 2016, making it the first and only national Black history museum to date.
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What does this solution do?

- Demand a thorough and accurate public education curriculum on Black History, including not only slavery and civil rights, but also contributions of African and African American heritage at the local, national and global level. This must be integrated throughout the school year and taught in a way that presents the history as part of an ongoing narrative of oppression and resilience, not as historical artifacts.
- Funding for cultural assets and sacred sites such as Black burial grounds; Black towns (e.g. Mound Bayou, Mississippi); houses of worship; meeting halls; one-room schools; and other significant institutions that speak to the triumphant quest of a determined people to create a new African community in this hostile land.

- These Black sacred sites, monuments, and museums must be preserved as permanent memorials to continuously inform and inspire future generations of people of African descent about this legacy of trials, tribulations and triumph, and to remind America of the white supremacist terror employed to obstruct the path to freedom of African Americans.

Federal Action:

- Target: Executive, U.S. Congress (especially Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs), U.S. Department of the Interior
- Process: The President of the United States has the power to designate important natural, cultural, and historical sites for permanent protection under the 1906 Antiquities Act. While the President can designate national parks or monuments, congressional approval is needed to create a national park. The federal government (via the National Parks Service) should erect markers on every site where a Black person was lynched, where a massacre of Black people was committed, and sites where Black towns or neighborhood were destroyed.
- Target: U.S. Congress
- Process: Pass a bill authorizing funding for the preservation of Black burial grounds and other significant cultural and historical sites. Additional funds should be appropriated to conduct research on the impacts and legacy of slavery and to identify previously unknown Black sacred sites and monuments.

State Action:

- Target: State Legislature
- Process: Pass a bill requiring instruction in Black History from elementary through high school. State legislatures should form a commission to research how Black history is taught in their schools, identify inconsistencies, and make recommendations for improved instruction.
- Target: State Departments of Education and State Boards of Education
- Process: Develop statewide curriculum standards for a robust Black History curriculum.
- Target: State Legislature
- Process: Pass a bill authorizing increased funding to existing Black museums and appropriate funds to erect markers on sites where a Black person was lynched, where a massacre of Black people was committed, and sites where Black towns or neighborhood were destroyed.

Local Action:

- Target: Local School Boards (and possibly individual school Principals)
- Process: Develop and implement a robust Black History curriculum.

How does this solution address the specific needs of some of the most marginalized Black people?

- By expanding Black history education, monuments, museums, and recognized heritage sites, the stories of those who were marginalized and forgotten will be elevated. As we expand the knowledge and understanding of this history with depth and breadth, we can honor the diverse experiences of Blacks in America, including the history of, for example, our trans, queer, and gender nonconforming brothers and sisters.

Model Legislation

- Illinois House Resolution 1011 “Requests President Obama to commission a study to detail the economic impact of the slave trade and the use of slave labor; and how Emancipation, while freeing them of their literal bonds, and ending an immoral practice, did not guarantee equality in education, employment, housing, and access to quality affordable health care; that this study also include an analysis for how reparations for past harms have benefited ethnic groups that have received them during the course of U.S. history; and a proposal for reparations to the descendants of slaves in the U.S., and how those reparations can help overcome obstacles that still exist today in education, employment, housing, health care, and justice.” This does not specifically call for development of heritage sites or monuments.
- H.R. 40 requests a federal commission to study slavery and its impact on descendants of slaves today, including the role of the Federal and State governments. It further requests that the commission make recommendations based on its finding, including an apology to descendants of slaves and reparations. It requests \$8 million for the commission, but does not specifically call for development of heritage sites or monuments.
- 105 ILCS 5/27-20.4 requires every public elementary and high school curriculum to include a Black history unit, but does not require an all-year integration of Black history into the curriculum.
- The City of Chicago created a reparations package for victims of police torture under Jon Burge, including a \$5.5 million fund (the torture victims originally requested \$20 million); a formal apology from the Chicago City Council; creation of a permanent memorial recognizing the victims; an agreement to teach public school students about the case in their 8th and 10th grade history classes; free city college tuition and job training to victims, their immediate family members and their grandchildren; and funded psychological, family, substance abuse, and other counseling services to victims and their immediate family members.

- Philadelphia was the first city to impose a Black history graduation requirement in 2005.

Resources:

- Do's and Don'ts of Teaching Black History
- Beyond Black History Month
- Lawyer for Chicago Torture Victims: A Model for Responding To Police Brutality
- Relevant Federal Laws for National Historic Places and Landmarks

Organizations Currently Working on Policy:

- Equal Justice Initiative Community Remembrance Project
- National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC)
- National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA)
- Alliance of African American Museums
- African American Experience Fund

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The immediate passage of H.R.40, the “commission to study reparation proposals for African-Americans act” or subsequent versions which may call for reparations remedies, and similar legislation in all 50 states in order to force the us to acknowledge the lasting impacts of slavery and establish a plan to address those impacts.

Source: <https://policy.m4bl.org/reparations/>