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THE REPARATIONS DEBATE IN THE UNITED STATES

African Americans in search for justice

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Abstract

African Americans are in a continuous struggle for equality in America. The reparations debate, in which African Americans are searching for reparations for slavery and segregation that followed, may help create an equal society.

In June 2019 the H.R.40 Bill was presented to Congress. This Bill advocates for a commission which will study the repercussions of slavery for African Americans and propose a suitable solution, in short the Bill is a blueprint for how to execute reparations. This thesis researched the historic reparations and the recent reparation debate. More specifically, this thesis aimed to answer the following question: *“In what ways is the historical reparations debate incorporated in the current debate on reparations for African Americans searching for justice, and what does that mean for the significance of the current debate?”*

Based on the already existing historiography, this thesis took a qualitative research approach and draws upon primary and secondary sources to see how the historic debate has influenced the recent debate. Analysis of the primary sources showed that the historic debate is very much incorporated in the recent reparations debate. Furthermore, the reparations movement has never been stronger in its goal to create an equal society. However, the current reparations movement still left some questions unanswered such as who exactly would receive reparations, and who will pay for them.

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Introduction

Slavery was abolished more than 150 years ago, but there is no equality between white and black people in the U.S. African Americans feel this lack of equality in everyday life: they experience problems in the fields of education, housing, employment, unequal wages, and on a larger scale, police brutality and mass incarceration. This ongoing inequality can be traced back to the Atlantic slave trade.

African Americans are in a continuous struggle for equality in American society. Over the years, there has been a debate about whether or not to grant African Americans reparations for this struggle. Reparations can take many forms. The term does not necessarily mean monetary reparations; reparations can also be an apology or more social programs to help African Americans in need.

The U.S. is not the only country that has a dark period in its history. However, the U.S. seems to deal with the situation differently than other countries. The U.S. chooses to ignore its dark periods instead of addressing them. In this regard, they could learn from Germany after the Second World War. In 1952, Germany had already reached a plan for reparations for the victims of the Holocaust. This plan consisted of payments to the victims, payments to multiple organizations, and the erection of memorials and statues.

The idea of reparations is not foreign to the U.S. The U.S. paid reparations to Japanese Americans after World War Two in accordance with the Civil Liberties Act of 1988,¹ and more importantly, this act acknowledged and apologized for the injustice done to these people. If the U.S. is already familiar with the concept of reparations, why is the case so different for African Americans?

In 2014, Dr. Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote an article in *The Atlantic* called “The Case for Reparations.” This article initiated a widespread debate about reparations. On June 19, 2019,

¹ Civil Liberties Act, 1988. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/100th-congress/house-bill/442>.

Congress held a hearing on the reparations debate, which was about passing the H.R. 40 Bill. “This Bill establishes the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans. The commission shall examine slavery and discrimination in the colonies and the United States from 1619 to the present and recommend appropriate remedies.”² In short, the commission will study the repercussions of slavery for African Americans and will then propose a suitable solution. The aim is to close the gap between white and black Americans in areas such as education, income, incarceration, and employment.

Many scholars have written about the reparations debate. In the late 1980s, this scholarship reached new levels because of the Civil Liberties Act (1988), which stated that reparations were to be paid to Japanese Americans. This also generated questions about reparations for African Americans. In recent years, these questions have come up again. There has been discussion about what reparations should be, whether in the form of money or more symbolic measures such as a formal apology from the American government. The question of a formal apology is what Roy L. Brooks describes in his book *Atonement and Forgiveness*, while other scholars such as William A. Darity argue for a more concrete solution such as money or better social programs to help African Americans get out of poverty. What is interesting about this scholarly debate is the position of white Americans. According to the Pew Research Centre, the majority of white Americans do not think slavery has had an impact on black Americans’ positions today, and they feel that enough has been done in restoring black Americans’ equal rights.³

Few studies have discussed the relationship between the historical debate and the recent debate. This recent debate on reparations is important since it reached Congress, and it is a

² HR. 40 Bill, 2019. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/40>.

³ Menasce Horowitz, “Most Americans say the legacy of slavery still affects black people in the U.S. today.”

major topic in the presidential campaigns for the presidential election of 2020. Thus, this thesis explores the recent debate about reparations for African Americans. It argues that the historic and recent reparations debate cannot be viewed separately, and that the recent movement has a comprehensive understanding of what a reparations program should entail to be fully successful. The research question is the following: *“In what ways is the historical reparations debate incorporated in the current debate on reparations for African Americans searching for justice, and what does that mean for the significance of the current debate?”*

Researching the reparations debate is relevant because of the recent debate in Congress. Additionally, it is interesting and relevant to research why the American government has not yet made any reparations to African Americans, while the U.S. is not unfamiliar with paying. This thesis contributes a good overview of the reparations movement and demonstrates that African Americans have sought reparations from the moment slavery was abolished, not just since the civil rights movement. This thesis also emphasizes how important the recent debate is, because the pursuit of reparations has been underway for a long time. Furthermore, this thesis underscores that the debate reaching Congress is a truly historical moment, because this is the first time Congress is considering the H.R. 40 Bill.

To answer the research question, this thesis takes a qualitative research approach and draws upon primary and secondary sources. This thesis closely examines the primary sources to see how the historic debate has influenced the recent debate. The primary sources include the testimonies made at the House hearing and at Congress on the new H.R. 40 Bill, examples of early calls for reparations such as the Black Manifesto by James Forman, and the influential article of Ta-Nehisi Coates: *The Case For Reparations*

Furthermore, this thesis draws from the archives of *The New York Times*, the Leiden University Library Catalogue, journal articles on Jstor of important scholars such as William Darity and Randall Robinson. Lastly this thesis uses American government websites and

websites of non-profit organizations such as the Pew Research website. On the basis of these sources, a comparison is made between the historical reparations debate and the recent reparations debate

This thesis is limited in its scope because there are limited primary sources on the historical reparations debate. Furthermore, after this thesis is finished there will be further developments in the reparations debate in the U.S. Congress that cannot be incorporated because the decision on the H.R.40 Bill will not yet have been finalized.

The thesis is structured as follows: the first chapter provides historical background on reparations and argues that the effects of slavery are so tangible for black Americans today that there is still a need for reparations. The second chapter provides a literary review of the reparations debate; what scholars have already written about the reparations debate and presents an overview of their different opinions. It argues that the reasons for demanding reparations changed over time, it moved from immediate monetary reparations for slavery to solutions for the long lasting effects of slavery on African Americans today.

The third and final chapter focuses on the recent debate in Congress as a case study and draws the conclusions that the recent debate has certainly learned from the historical movement, and has taken into account its successes and failures. It concludes that the recent reparations movement has to be a collective one and has to make a change on the life of every black Americans' life in order to succeed.

Chapter 1: The Historical Debate

To understand the current reparations debate, it is important to research the history of reparations. The H.R. 40 Bill is a culmination of everything that happened in terms of reparations, the Bill was presented to Congress in June 2019. This chapter aims to answer the following question: “How has the reparations debate changed over the years, and what were the reasons for these changes?”

First, I argue that the first demands for reparations were short-term solutions, because the formerly enslaved needed a concrete, immediate solution. Second, I contend that as more time passed since slavery, the more the reparations debate became about racial issues and inequality. This shift in solutions, which started roughly after the Jim Crow era, reflects the historical context of that time. Finally, I argue that because of white Americans’ opposition concerning the reparations movement, a solution has still not been found and the movement has a long way to go.

Early reparations

Discussion about reparations began immediately when the Civil War, and thus slavery, ended in 1865. The question of what to do with all the formerly enslaved arose. General William Tecumseh Sherman and prominent black ministers discussed this matter and came up with a solution: 40 acres and a mule.⁴ This meant that formerly enslaved could claim their 40 acres of land to start a new, free life. On the one hand, this was just a solution to the problems arising from the abolishment of slavery, but on the other hand, this was in a sense the first instance of reparations. Freedmen Bureaus were created where formerly enslaved could go to claim their land.⁵ This appeared to be a significant first step in compensating African Americans for their suffering. However, the U.S. government was concerned it would look like they were giving

⁴ Sarah McCammon, “The Story Behind 40 Acres and a Mule”.

⁵ Charles Henry, *Long Overdue*, 22.

black Americans preferential treatment. Therefore, the bureau was given no budget, was only meant to last one year, and also had to include Southern White refugees.⁶ This attitude set the tone for the further reparations debate: the government would help African Americans with the bare minimum so it looked like they took action without actually giving African Americans the help they really needed.

The situation for formerly enslaved Americans worsened when President Lincoln was assassinated and Vice-President Johnson came to power. Johnson was responsible for reversing the 40 acres and a mule bill. The plots of land were given back to former Confederates, and freedmen and women had nothing once again.⁷ They were forced to sharecrop on the land that had briefly been theirs, and to make matters worse, the land was owned by their former slaveholders. In a sense, they were back to where they had started.

However, this setback was not accepted without resistance. Historian Mary Frances Berry has extensively researched the story of ex-slave Callie House. Berry's work is important because it shows that in the 19th century, discussions about reparations were already occurring, and ex-slaves were organizing themselves to demand reparations for slavery. Furthermore, Berry's work illustrates how difficult it was for black Americans to demand something from white Americans.

House was an impoverished washerwoman from Nashville who desired a better life.⁸ She set up the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association in 1898 to demand pension for former slaves.⁹ This was a collective effort to demand reparations. The movement was quite successful in terms of followers. Berry estimates that there were 600,000

⁶ Henry, *Long Overdue*, 42.

⁷ Henry, *Long Overdue*, 42.

⁸ Berry, *My Face is Black is True*, 6.

⁹ Berry, *My Face Is Black Is true*, 7.

members.¹⁰ Unfortunately, the movement was not successful in actually obtaining pensions for former slaves. House experienced constant repression from the U.S government, which wanted to get rid of House and did so by accusing her of fraud. The movement asked for money from its members to print pamphlets and travel to spread the word. However, the Post Office Department accused House of keeping that money for herself.¹¹ In the end, House was jailed and lost her credibility, and the movement disappeared. House's story perfectly illustrates that the call for reparations was already popular in the 19th century and that one would not get way with challenging white supremacist powers.

In addition to organized movements such as the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association, ex-slaves sometimes sought reparations for themselves individually. One such example is the infamous case of Henrietta Wood, who was a free woman who was kidnapped in Cincinnati and wrongfully enslaved, she ended up in Mississippi.¹² When she returned home in 1878 she sued the man who enslaved her in. This was already unusual, but the fact that her case led to a small victory was even more unusual. An all-white jury ruled in her favor, and her slave owner had to pay her \$2,500 in compensation.¹³ The only reason her case led to a victory was that Wood could demonstrate that she was wrongfully enslaved.¹⁴ All the other black men and women who were legally enslaved received nothing and could not gain reparations through the court, and Wood's victory did not result in a surge of other suits.

Wood's case was even reported by *The New York Times* in 1878, and the article acknowledged the heart of the problem: "Who will recompense the millions of men and women

¹⁰ Berry, *My Face is Black is True*, 254.

¹¹ Berry, *My Face is Black is True*, 134.

¹² McDaniel, "The Former Slave Who Sued For Reparations and Won".

¹³ McDaniel, "The Former Slave Who Sued For Reparations and Won".

¹⁴ McDaniel, "The Former Slave Who Sued For Reparations and Won".

for the years of liberty of which they have been defrauded?”¹⁵ On the one hand, this illustrates that America was aware of the problem, but on the other hand, black Americans could only pursue reparations if they were wrongfully enslaved. Reparations for legal enslavement were not yet considered necessary.

The call for reparations did not die out after Callie House and Henrietta Wood; Black people still tried to fight the legal system. One such example is the case of the cotton tax. During the Civil War, the U.S. government ordered higher taxes on cotton to finance the Civil War.¹⁶ However, in 1915 multiple black newspapers reported that part of the fund lay untouched in the U.S. Treasury.¹⁷ The ex-slaves felt this money belonged to them since they were the ones who had picked the cotton. Attorney Cornelius Jones decided to sue Secretary William G. McAdoo, demanding that the cotton tax be distributed among the former slaves. First, McAdoo denied that the funds existed, and second, the case was rejected on the grounds of government immunity, which means that the U.S. government can only be sued when it consents to be sued. According to Berry, “Jones’s plea failed because the courts decided that governmental immunity superseded a determination as to whether African Americans might receive the funds.”¹⁸

Historian Ana Lucia Araujo has also investigated lawsuits made by African Americans. Like Berry’s research, Araujo’s work shows that it was impossible for African Americans to demand reparations through lawsuits in the early 1900s. A collective group identified as Cato sued the U.S. in pursuit of reparations for “damages due to the enslavement of African Americans and subsequent discrimination against them, for an acknowledgment of discrimination, and for an apology.”¹⁹ Even though the judge ruled that discrimination is

¹⁵ McDaniel, “The Former Slave Who Sued for Reparations, and Won”.

¹⁶ Berry, “Taking the United States to Court”, 95.

¹⁷ Berry, “Taking the United States to Court”, 95.

¹⁸ Berry, “Taking the United States to Court”, 96.

¹⁹ Araujo, *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade*, 161.

intolerable and slavery inexcusable, he also ruled that the plaintiffs could not sue the U.S. because like in McAdoo's case, "the government of the US must agree to be prosecuted."²⁰ Thus, Araujo has concluded that a successful outcome of these kinds of lawsuits is nearly impossible. Again, these are harsh examples of how the U.S. has handled the legacy of slavery and the reparations debate.

The 1950s: the Black Manifesto and the civil rights movement

Despite African Americans' efforts to better their lives through seeking reparations, they barely succeeded. The circumstances for black people did not improve. They had to live with sharecropping, harsh Jim Crow laws, lynching, ghettos, and racism imbedded in every institution. The situation became heated again in the 1950s when the civil rights movement accelerated.

Two of the most important achievements of the civil rights movement are the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, which were passed in 1964 and 1965, respectively.²¹ The movement secured the attention of the government due to its many supporters and large, peaceful demonstrations, sit-ins, and boycotts.²² In theory, this meant that segregation in public places and voting discrimination were forbidden. These two acts were huge accomplishments for African Americans and were great steps toward racial equality. To take more concrete action, affirmative action was also introduced and mainly targeted universities and workplaces. Affirmative action improved minorities' chances of receiving higher education and better jobs.²³ In terms of reparations, this was positive, especially regarding long-term solutions to solve the racial inequality gap in education and employment. However, affirmative action was a very controversial concept. Many white Americans claim it is "reverse discrimination,"

²⁰ Araujo, *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade*, 162.

²¹ Chong, *Collective Action and the Civil Rights Movement*, 18.

²² Chong, *Collective Action and the Civil Rights Movement*, 18.

²³ Reyes, "Affirmative Action Shouldn't Be About Diversity".

meaning that minorities with lesser applications are accepted over white Americans with better applications because the university is forced to accept a certain percentage of minorities. In short, white Americans claim they are being denied on the basis of the color of their skin, conveniently forgetting that African Americans are denied in many instances specifically for that reason.

However, it is not only white Americans who are opposed to affirmative action; some African Americans do not agree with it either. They want to earn their place at university because of their own hard work. Additionally, African Americans do not want their white peers to think they were only accepted because of affirmative action.²⁴

Affirmative action was either way not the solution for African Americans, according to James Forman. He claimed that more radical action was needed to achieve equality goals. James Forman was a prominent figure in the civil rights movement, and a proponent of black nationalism. In 1969, he presented his influential Black Manifesto by disturbing a Sunday service in New York City's Riverside Church.²⁵ In his manifesto, Forman demanded \$500 million from white Christian churches. He targets churches because white Christian churches and Jewish synagogues are "part and parcel of the system of capitalism, [so] ... they [should] begin to pay reparations to black people in this country."²⁶ Forman criticizes the churches' reliance on wealthy white Americans enriched by slavery and its conduction of business with white Americans who were exploiting black people.²⁷

The Black Manifesto includes guidelines for how the demanded money should be spent. It was to be used to establish programs and combat poverty and injustice. Forman demands the establishment of black university, a research skill center, and major publishing and printing

²⁴ Reyes, "Affirmative Action Shouldn't Be About Diversity".

²⁵ Forman, *The Black Manifesto*, 1969.

²⁶ Forman, *The Black Manifesto*, 1969.

²⁷ Lechtrek, "We are demanding \$500 million for reparations," 47.

industries.²⁸ Moreover, in the manifesto he explains how black people can help see that these demands are met. He motivates them to go to their own white Christian churches to read their demands.

In the end, some churches listened and donated money. This was the second time an organized reparations movement confronted a specific group to pay reparations. In this case, the success of the Black Manifesto lay in the targeting of churches. Churches advocate the idea of helping people in need; therefore, in a sense they had to meet the demands because of their Christian beliefs.²⁹ The Black Manifesto was the first real victory for the reparations movement. Their cause was acknowledged, and they received money. Unfortunately, this did not mean the government was on board. There were still no reparations on the national level, nor was there structural change for African Americans.

Despite the influence of the Black Manifesto, affirmative action seemed to achieve the goal of structural change for African Americans, which Forman's Manifesto could not do. Affirmative action should be about reparations and leveling a playing field that was legally imbalanced for hundreds of years.³⁰ In this light, affirmative action was a hugely important step for the reparations movement. It was finally federal legislation designed to improve the lives of African Americans. Moreover, it was the beginning of a long-term solution to the inequality African Americans have faced since they came to the U.S.

However, affirmative action did and could not solve everything for African Americans. After the Acts of 1964 and 1965, de jure segregation (legal separation of groups of people based on law) was over. African Americans were now equal citizens in terms of the law, and the law forbade segregation. Unfortunately, de facto segregation (societal segregation, not based on

²⁸ Forman, *The Black Manifesto*, 1969.

²⁹ Lechtrek, "We are demanding \$500 million for reparations", 64.

³⁰ Reyes, "Affirmative Action Shouldn't Be About Diversity".

law) emerged, this meant that neighborhoods and schools were still segregated, with black neighborhoods being poorer and the quality of education lower than in predominantly white schools. Even today, segregation of neighborhoods and schools is a problem in the U.S., leaving many African Americans with lesser opportunities than those available to white Americans. Sadly, neither affirmative action nor the Black Manifesto could solve de facto segregation.

The 1980s to the present

In the 1980s, the reparations debate intensified again, this time because two other groups demanded reparations and actually secured payments from the U.S. government. Some First Nations peoples of North America were compensated for the illegal seizure of tribal lands in 1877, as were Japanese Americans who had been interned in prison camps during World War II.³¹ The compensation for Japanese American was the Civil Liberty Act of 1988. The legislation offered a formal apology and \$20,000 for each surviving victim.³² According to scholar Rhoda Howard-Hassman, a reason for the successful reparations for Japanese Americans is that the case was more clear in that the number of victims was relatively small, they could be easily identified through official records, and many of them were still alive. Furthermore, the injustice took place during a relatively short time period, and it began and ended on known dates. Finally, the amount of reparations demanded was not so large that the public would find it unreasonable.³³ In the case of African American reparations, this is all much more complicated. For example, it is already difficult to identify which people of African descent in the U.S. today are the descendants of enslaved people,³⁴ let alone to discuss how

³¹ Healy, "America Has Tried Reparations Before. Here Is How It Went".

³² Qureshi, "From Wrong to Right: A U.S. Apology for Japanese Internment".

³³ Howard-Hassmann, "Why Japanese-Americans received reparations and African-Americans are still waiting".

³⁴ Howard-Hassmann, "Why Japanese-Americans received reparations and African-Americans are still waiting".

much the reparations should be and who should pay for them. However, these difficulties do not mean that African Americans should not earn reparations.

Logically, African Americans were outraged when the U.S. government paid reparations to Japanese and Native Americans. In 1989, Representative John Conyers drafted the H.R. 3745 bill – the forerunner of the H.R. 40 bill – calling for the establishment of a congressional commission to study the impact of slavery on African Americans.³⁵ This bill was meant to make the reparations debate easier because the commission would identify whom reparations should be for and what form they should take.

John Conyers repeatedly introduced the bill to Congress. In the beginning, the reparations movement was about obtaining money, but it has developed into the pursuit of recognition and a formal apology. As historian Charles Henry states, “A sincere apology by the duly elected representative of a people can mark an important first step in the process of reparation leading to national reconciliation, forgiveness, and healing.”³⁶ Money became less of an immediate problem, and the social inequality between African Americans and white Americans became more visible. The inequality has become a societal problem that some feel can only be solved by recognition and an apology.

According to Henry, several presidents have apologized for slavery. However, those apologies were somehow never apologies to African Americans. Both Bush and Clinton traveled to Africa to express regret for the role the U.S. played in the African slave trade. Stating regret would make more sense, and would be more meaningful, if they traveled to former slave marketplaces to apologize there to African Americans.³⁷ Expressing regrets is not the only thing presidents have done. Clinton actually created an advisory board on race in his second term.

³⁵ H.R. 3745 Bill, 1989, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/house-bill/3745/text>.

³⁶ Henry, *Long Overdue*, 2.

³⁷ Henry, *Long Overdue*, 5.

This was not the first advisory board that was created; President Lyndon Johnson also had an advisory board on race. However, reforms were never made because Johnson experienced a backlash from his white voters because one of the problems the board identified was racism among white Americans. The fear of losing voters was more important than acting on the suggestions of the board. Moreover, the reforms were at the time of the Vietnam War, which was very expensive. These expenses stood in the way of Johnson's Great Society: his main goal was to eliminate poverty and racial injustice with a set of domestic programs such as food stamp programs, housing for the poor, better education, and more healthcare.³⁸ Together, these programs were called the War on Poverty. However, due to the Vietnam War, Johnson would and could not invest as much as he would have liked in the War on Poverty. Instead of realizing his great reforms, he created another commission. Not long after Nixon was elected president, the reparations debate was once again shut down.

Thirty years later, Clinton, initiated a discussion about race again, this time it was more focused on American citizens, and he launched the following campaign: "Ten things every American should do to promote racial reconciliation." Instead of discussions about huge expenditures or raising taxes to pay for reparations. Clinton's approach did not work because the campaign was not specifically focused on reparations and therefore did not attract black Americans.³⁹

Although African Americans have still not received nationwide reparations from the U.S. government, states have sometimes been unable to avoid issuing reparations. In this last example of reparations, the State of Florida has paid reparations comparable to the federal programs for the Japanese Americans.

³⁸ Burch, *The Great Society and the War on Poverty*, 110.

³⁹ Henry, *Long Overdue*, 14.

In 1923, a white woman was beaten, and she claimed that her assailant was black. This accusation sparked race riots in the prosperous black town of Rosewood, Florida. White Americans wanted revenge for the woman, and a week of rioting and mob lynching followed without any evidence. The town was destroyed, houses burned, and black people beaten to death.⁴⁰ No one was punished for the horrible deaths and destruction. Afterward, the black survivors did not dare discuss what had happened to them and their town. Only after Jim Crow was abolished and lynch mobs were a thing of the past did this incident come to light. The stories were so horrible that in 1993, Florida had no other choice than to investigate the claims.⁴¹ The investigations eventually led to a law that compensated victims with \$150,000 each, and a scholarship fund was created for descendants of the victims.⁴² The law cost \$2.1 million, which is why it can be compared with federal reparations programs such as payments to Holocaust survivors and Japanese Americans.⁴³

There are two important points about this case for the historical reparations debate. First, lawyer Martha Barnett has said that in the case the discussion of racism was avoided, and the term “reparations” is not included in the law.⁴⁴ Instead the focus was primarily on private property rights and compensation of the victims for the loss of their private property. This tactic proved to be the right one because it focused on something concrete with which every American can sympathize – losing one’s private property – instead of addressing racism. Second, Barnett noticed that the apology the State of Florida gave along with the passing of the bill mattered most to the survivors of Rosewood. The apology states, “We had an obligation to you as our citizens, we failed to live up to it then, we are going to live up to it today, and we are sorry.”⁴⁵ This is not even a concrete apology about racism, but this was still the part that meant the most

⁴⁰ Glenza, “Rosewood massacre”.

⁴¹ Glenza, “Rosewood massacre”.

⁴² Glenza, “Rosewood massacre”.

⁴³ Glenza, “Rosewood massacre”.

⁴⁴ Glenza, “Rosewood massacre”.

⁴⁵ Glenza, “Rosewood massacre”.

to the victims. This ties in with Henry's point about presidents making apologies, is the first step in the process of reparations .

News of Florida's reparations program received a great deal of publicity. It was on front pages of prominent newspapers, Hollywood made a film about it, and several books were written about the case. However, this national attention was not enough for the U.S. government to take action like it did after the civil rights movement. Florida dealt with the situation, and that was the end of it. Only when Coates wrote his influential article in 2014 was the reparations debate ignited once more, and this time the article finally seemed to attract enough attention, because the H.R. 40 Bill reached Congress. The slow process of the reparations debate and Congress has to do with white Americans' opinions on the matter.

Reactions of white Americans

One of the reasons the reparations movement faced so many difficulties is the opinions of white Americans. In general, white Americans' opinion is that African Americans do not need reparations. The Pew Research Centre researched race relations in the U.S in 2019. From their findings, it was clear that white Americans did not see race as a problem. They did not believe that being black is a disadvantage in America. The following figure shows that white and black Americans do not see eye to eye:

Whites and blacks don't see eye to eye on whether blacks are treated less fairly in a variety of settings

% of whites and blacks saying, in general in our country these days, blacks are treated less fairly than whites in each of the following situations

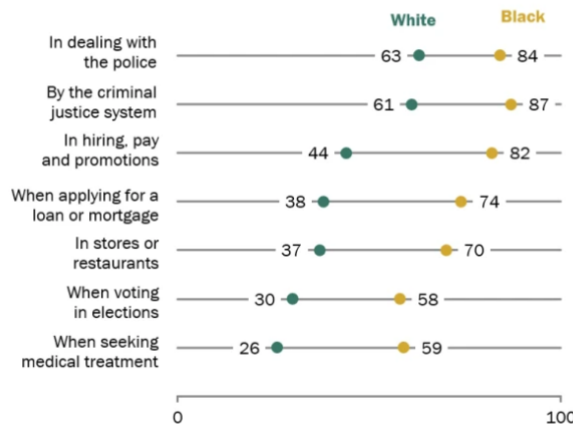


Figure 1: Menasce Horowitz, “Views of Racial Inequality.”

However, in a more recent poll done by CBS news, after the demonstrations of May 2020, it shows a shift in white American’s opinion. Now, eight in 10 Americans say discrimination against African-Americans exists today.⁴⁶ Additionally, a majority (57%) think police are more likely to use deadly force against a black person than a white person, in 2016 this was 43%.⁴⁷ Most of these changes come from a shift in white Americans opinion. While this shift is positive, at the same time there is a negative shift in how Americans perceive the handling of race relations by Trump’s administration. Around 60% of whites say it has become more common and more accepted to express racists views, since Trump was elected.⁴⁸

Even though there is a positive shift happening of more white Americans acknowledging the problem of racism and discrimination there is still not massive support from white Americans for reparations. A reason for this has to do with the general philosophy in the U.S. that if one works hard, one will achieve things – the typical American Dream idea. Social

⁴⁶ De Pinto, “Americans’ views shift on racial discrimination.”

⁴⁷ De Pinto, “American’s views shift on racial discrimination.”

⁴⁸ Menasce Horowitz, “How Americans see the state of race relations.”

programs for African Americans interfere with the American Dream idea because the government is involved and because they conflict with the concept of equal chances for everyone. This is why the creation of social programs is met with such backlash from white Americans. Another reaction to the reparations debate is white Americans defending themselves against accusations about slavery, they feel personally attacked when they did not have anything to do with slavery directly. White Americans feel it is unfair that they should pay for what happened before they were born. Without the support of white Americans, it will be difficult for the reparations movement to succeed.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the question “How has the reparations debate changed over the years, and what were the reasons for these changes?” Discussions about reparations began after the end of the Civil War and never went away. Since the Civil War, there have been several victories in the reparations movement, with the greatest victories being the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Act. On paper, racial equality has already been achieved. However, in practice, the U.S. still has a long way to go, and large government-scale reparations have not yet been achieved.

The first demands were made immediately after the abolishment of slavery and were very concrete: compensation for all unpaid labor, the cruelties of slavery, the cotton tax, and pension for elderly ex-slaves. These were short-term solutions: something had to be done about the formerly enslaved situation immediately so they could start a new life. Money was the right solution for this. Over time, the demands of the reparations debate changed. The longer ago slavery happened, the more the debate becomes about racial issues. The effects of slavery are so tangible for black Americans that the need for reparations continues. They demand racial equality in every aspect of society. The reparations movement has moved from getting money for formerly enslaved to educating people about racism, creating welfare programs to close the

racial inequality gap, and what has become increasingly important and is typically seen as the first step in reparations: a formal apology where the U.S government actually acknowledges the wrongs of slavery and that the effects of slavery are still felt today.

Chapter 2: Historiography

As seen in Chapter 1, the reparations movement has been around for a long time and has changed over time. This chapter argues that the demands of the reparations movement changed accordingly. Over time immediate monetary reparations were less needed, since the lives of black Americans became more stable. Thus, the demands changed into more emotional demands such as recognition and apologies. Furthermore, I contend that the further slavery was in the past, the more the reparations movement became about social injustice and less about slavery in itself. Finally, this chapter discusses the differences and similarities between scholars' positions and the reasons for any disagreements. Anti-reparations sources are also included in the discussion. The historiography will start in the 1970s, then it moves on to the most influential reparations writer of the 2000s: Randall Robinson, and it finishes with a recent work, published in 2017: Ana Lucia Araujo's *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: A Transnational and Comparative History*.

The historiography of the reparations debate began in the 1970s with Boris Bittker. The civil rights movement had existed for quite some time, and President Johnson's affirmative action was being criticized. This was an interesting time for reparations, because some people felt that affirmative action was already a solution to reparations. To include Bittker's work, and also start the historiography with Bittker is quite interesting, because he was a white lawyer advocating for reparations, which is unusual on its own, even more so that he already wrote about it in the 1970s. Bittker was motivated to research reparations when he heard James Forman's Black Manifesto in 1969. In addition, Bittker was a professor at Yale, and at the time there were many student demonstrations against white power, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King were both assassinated in the 1960s, and affirmative action was in decline.

Bittker argued that reparations should not be made because of the wrongdoings of slavery; later, other scholars also embraced this idea. Bittker argues that the slavery era is too long ago and that the connection with the people who initiated the slave system in America and the people who should pay compensation is too remote. Furthermore, according to Bittker the case for reparations is strongest if the focus is on the Jim Crow system: “This immoral and unconstitutional caste system by public officials during the present century that provides the strongest case for black reparations.”⁴⁹ It is clear Bittker finds reparations for the Jim Crow era justified, he states that he does not provide the solution but that his main objective is to open up the debate, especially for white Americans. Bittker recognizes that black Americans are already familiar with the reparations debate and that it is now time for white Americans to be familiar with the debate as well.

Even though he states that he does not provide a solution, he still argues for group reparations, which later became the norm for reparations. Bittker foresees the following problems with individual reparations: it would require racial classifications akin to Hitler’s labeling of the Jews. Additionally, individuals are not equally entitled to reparations: a single black mother from the lower class and a black professor from the middle class are both products of slavery and segregated society, but they cannot make the same claim to a share of the national budget.⁵⁰ Bittker is very practical and tries to find legitimacy for reparations in the law.

Bittker is a good starting point for research into the scholarship of the reparations debate. His scholarship was influential for the field because he stepped away from the idea to demand reparations for slavery, but instead to pursue reparations for the Jim Crow era. The scholars succeeding him embraced this new reason of demanding for reparations. Furthermore, Bittker shaped the scholarship around solutions as well, he made compelling arguments for group

⁴⁹ Bittker, *The Case for Black Reparations*, 17.

⁵⁰ Bittker, *The Case for Black Reparations*, 95.

reparations instead of individual reparations. Where Bittker is very focused on the law, Robert Westley moves away from the law and is more focused on social programs as a means for reparations, those programs are also part of group reparations. Westley's article, published in 1998, was very influential and is seen as turning point in the reparations movement, because he established the case for reparations as more than a claim on the legislature.⁵¹

In the 1990s, the reparations debate was ignited again because Japanese Americans received reparations from the U.S. government in 1988. Robert Westley's "Many Billions Gone" was one of the most influential articles of the 1990s, and he based his title on James Baldwin's essay "Many Millions Gone." James Baldwin was one of the most important Black writers in the first half of the 20th century.

Westley's main argument is that reparations should be endorsed as a program of social justice that avoids some of the pitfalls of affirmative action.⁵² Westley describes the following pitfalls: many white Americans see affirmative action as a handout and not as compensation. This belief that black Americans will receive a handout and white Americans will not receive anything encourages further discrimination against black Americans. Second, only a small group benefits from affirmative action, while all black Americans should be compensated. Third, affirmative action will not survive long enough to compensate all black Americans, because it is so out of line with mainstream white American values. Finally, affirmative action is not uniform and systematic. It is clear that affirmative action is not the road to reparations.⁵³ Rather, Westley is a prominent advocate of monetary compensation: "Compensation to Blacks for the injustices suffered by them must first and foremost be monetary." In Westley's opinion, black people need economic independence to be free from discrimination and to have freedom.

⁵¹ Westley, "Many Billions Gone," 430.

⁵² Westley, "Many Billions Gone," 433.

⁵³ Westley, "Many Billions Gone," 436.

Westley also outlines a plan for how to achieve this economic independence. A fund should be established that will be financed by the U.S. The fund should focus on educational and economic empowerment, and distribution should be determined on the basis of need. Westley also advocates for group reparations rather than individual compensation because black Americans have been and are being harmed as a group. In the later reparations movement debate, the question of who should receive reparations has been broadly discussed. Scholars debate who are slave descendants and how one can determine if someone is a slave descendant. Westley does not even mention this; he bases everything on economic need.

Westley was significant for the state of the field in the late 1990s-early 2000s because he mentioned the problems of affirmative action, and that affirmative action was not the same as reparations. Furthermore, he showed that the scholarship was nowhere close to solve to question of: “who will receive reparations?”⁵⁴ Finally, Westley argues that reparations will bring closure and equality. Once reparations are paid, no more will be owed to black Americans than is owed to any citizen under the law.⁵⁵ Black Americans will finally be able to function within American society with absolute equality. Furthermore, Westley feels that once reparations are paid, black Americans’ opportunities for public happiness will be the same as those of any white citizen, because they will no longer face racism because they will be equal to white citizens.⁵⁶ However, it is not proven that this is a realistic concept. Economic reparations will certainly help black people to participate in society better, and perhaps they will also decrease the racism black Americans faced, when they made use of affirmative action. However, this still does not mean that the minds of white people will be changed. Even though black Americans might achieve economic freedom through a reparations fund, this does not necessarily mean that black Americans will no longer face racism. This conclusion is too

⁵⁴ Westley, “Many Billions Gone,” 472.

⁵⁵ Westley, “Many Billions Gone,” 473.

⁵⁶ Westley, “Many Billions Gone,” 475.

simplistic and suggests an utopia that certainly cannot be achieved by simply introducing a reparation fund.

In the 2000s, reparations moves away from practical and pragmatic solutions to researching the emotional damage done and the importance of an official apology. Randall Robinson's book was influential for this shift. Robinson's argument for emotional reparations, such as funding for museums and history books in order for blacks to regain their legacy. Additionally, emotional reparations have become equally important as monetary reparations due to Robinson's work. Furthermore, he links slavery and the social injustice together, instead of focusing on one of the other for reparations arguments.⁵⁷

Robinson's arguments are somewhat similar to Westley's. They are both in favor of setting up a fund as part of reparations to minimize the wealth gap between white and black Americans. However, neither work specifies how large the fund should be or who should pay for it. This makes the call for a national fund less convincing as an actual solution for reparations. Robinson also mentions affirmative action, though he is not as negative about it as Westley is. Robinson argues that affirmative action is valuable and should continue to exist. However, affirmative action is not a solution to the inequality and reparations problems. It only targets a certain portion of African Americans. It does not help the poorest black people who need the most help.⁵⁸

A substantial part of Robinson's book is about the wrongdoings of slavery and after slavery, especially the persistent racism and the resulting wealth gap. Whereas Westley's argument is quite simple in saying that economic reparations will solve the inequality issues, Robinson goes a step further to also include the emotional damage of slavery and the

⁵⁷ Robinson, *The Debt*, 73.

⁵⁸ Robinson, *The Debt*, 95.

repercussions of slavery for black people. An equally important issue for Robinson is that the U.S. robbed many African Americans of their identity, leaving in its place feelings of self-hatred and self-doubt.⁵⁹ For Robinson, this emotional damage is reason enough to demand reparations. Robinson argues that reparations will not only create equality but that even campaigning for reparations – not only for slavery but also for the way white Americans have treated African Americans since the end of legal enslavement – is therapeutic. Robinson states that this will help African Americans “rediscover their sense of history and self in a way that will bring about a reawakening, whatever the outcome.”⁶⁰ Here Robinson really differs from Westley; for Robinson, economic redress is the top priority. Ultimately, the “debt” Robinson discusses is societal acknowledgment of slavery and its aftermath. White Americans must confront and recognize the ugly past of slavery for black and white Americans to make peace.⁶¹

Robinson’s inclusion of the emotional damage caused by slavery is a convincing argument for the reparations debate. It is more nuanced and makes the story more complete than only discussing economic redress. However, both Robinson and Westley could have delved more into the national fund to establish a specific plan for how reparations would all work. Finally, neither Robinson nor Westley mention the white backlash their plans would certainly receive.

Brooks’ book *Atonement and Forgiveness: A New Model for Black Reparations*, which was published in 2004, has a completely different view than those of the previous two scholars. Brooks does not agree that reparations should mainly be about economic redress. He criticizes the Rosewood Compensation Act (see Chapter 1) because the State of Florida settled racial issues with financial compensation without an official apology. Brooks argues that redress

⁵⁹ Robinson, *The Debt*, 201.

⁶⁰ Robinson, *The Debt*, 203.

⁶¹ Robinson, *The Debt*, 201.

should first and foremost be about apology. His complete formula is as follows: atonement (apology and reparation) plus forgiveness leads to racial reconciliation.⁶²

Financial compensation alone fails to generate the healing between oppressor and oppressed, which according to Brooks is the essential aim of reparations. This leaves reparations as a means instead of an end. In this case, reparations can be considered a physical affirmation of the oppressor's promise of apology. Brooks has created a more specific solution called the dual reparation plan: the creation of a national museum of slavery and an atonement trust fund for descendants of slaves.⁶³ The museum will function as a voice for all the nameless slaves, and it will emphasize black pride and dignity. Brooks hopes such a museum will change how Americans think about slavery. Furthermore, the museum will emphasize black pride and dignity.

Brooks also has a specific plan for the trust fund: every newborn black American baby would receive funds to enroll in higher education, for example. The federal government would finance the fund. This idea is very interesting, and it has potential to help close the racial wealth gap by helping a whole new generation from the beginning of their lives. Brooks makes a compelling case for why black Americans deserve this trust fund when no other minorities do. He argues that black Americans were the main target of slavery and Jim Crow; no other group suffered for so long. Second, black Americans have a collective memory and need only the government can satisfy. Finally, black people were kidnapped from their homeland, whereas other minorities voluntarily migrated to the U.S. Brooks also acknowledges the struggles of other minorities and says that they should also receive welfare, but they would not be eligible for the trust fund.⁶⁴

⁶² Brooks, *Atonement and Forgiveness*, 169.

⁶³ Brooks, *Atonement and Forgiveness*, 159.

⁶⁴ Brooks, *Atonement and Forgiveness*, 160.

Brooks goes further than advocating for formal apologies and a trust fund; he includes all parties and makes a case that reparations is better for everyone: white Americans, black Americans, and society as a whole. He states that when an official apology is made, the oppressed party should forgive the oppressor, and only when this happens can full racial reconciliation occur.⁶⁵ However, the oppressed party should not feel obligated to forgive until they feel enough has been done to deal with the past. It is interesting that Brooks also creates a role for black Americans. Until Brooks, the scholarly was all about how white Americans should make amends, and when they did, the case would be closed. Brooks now recognizes that this is too simplistic. Only when black Americans specifically accept the apology and reparations made by the federal government can reparations fully succeed and racial equality be achieved. This is already completely different than Westley's article, where financial compensation is considered sufficient. Brooks' research is more similar to Robinson's work. They both pay a great deal of attention to the harms of slavery and Jim Crow, and both focus more on the emotional side of reparations rather than the financial side.

Charles P. Henry links the discussion of reparations to historical context and case studies and concludes that reparations should be race based. He notes that after the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 when Japanese Americans received reparations, the African American reparations debate flared up again, and scholars published a great deal on the topic. Henry calls the Rosewood reparation case a victory, because at least the victims received monetary reparations. Henry compares Rosewood to the Tulsa Riots, which happened 1.5 years after the Rosewood riots, and Tulsa victims did not receive anything.

Henry argues that when reparations are successful they are not race based and that that is exactly America's problem: America's racism has hindered solutions. Solutions were found

⁶⁵ Brooks, *Atonement and Forgiveness*, 42.

where reparations were not race based but, for example, property based. The same goes for the apologies made by presidents. The apologies never specifically mention slavery in the U.S., and they are never held at slavery memorial locations in the U.S. Henry is a fervent advocate for apologies, which is quite typical of early 21st-century works on reparations. One reason for this is that slavery had occurred a long time ago, Jim Crow laws had been abolished, and African Americans were beginning to build their own somewhat equal lives. The situation was more stable, so there was room to think about apologies and the psychological effects of slavery.⁶⁶

Furthermore, Henry discusses current situations and links them to reparations. For example, Hurricane Katrina was also a race-based problem. The lack of help given to the victims was because they were black, but white Americans do not acknowledge that Katrina was about race.⁶⁷ This is something Henry also stresses: reparations always suffers a backlash from white Americans, because they do not believe the debate is about race. In addition, white Americans do not feel the urge to act immediately, and they are tired of discussing African American equality.

Henry does not provide his own vision of how reparations should be made; he only highlights possible solutions such as that apologies should be very important and reparationists should not aim for solutions through litigation and legislature since it is very difficult to navigate those institutions. One way to change legislature is to attract broad political support and voters. To achieve this, the movement should start with initiating discussions and educating people on the moral case for reparations.⁶⁸

A recent work on reparations is Araujo's book *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: A Transnational and Comparative History*, which was published in 2017. As the title

⁶⁶ Henry, *Long Overdue*, 67.

⁶⁷ Doherty, "Remembering Katrina."

⁶⁸ Henry, *Long Overdue*, 25.

suggests, Araujo takes a transnational approach to reparations. She also includes Africa and Caribbean countries in the search for reparations not only from the U.S. but also from Europe. While this may seem irrelevant to this thesis, it is relevant to how Araujo currently approaches the reparations movement since this book is so recent.

Araujo focuses on slavery and the Atlantic slave trade and barely includes the aftermath of slavery and the inequality African Americans still feel today because of slavery. This is unusual, because since the early 21st century scholars have moved away from slavery and have mainly focused on reparations for the repercussions of slavery. Araujo tries to show that reparations go far beyond granting freedom and civil rights. She recognizes the various forms of reparations outlined in this chapter, such as offering an apology, offering payment for damages, and symbolic reparations like acknowledgement and memorials. Araujo also keeps the historical circumstances in mind when it comes to the reparations movement. She highlights how and why requests for reparations have been emphasized or dismissed in public debates.⁶⁹ For example, in the Second World War, the struggle against Nazism and fascism dominated the world's concerns and news. The issue of reparations for slavery was not on the front pages of newspapers. However, black activists were still encouraged because other victimized groups were receiving restitution.

Araujo also highlights the paradox of the Second World War: while black soldiers were abroad fighting for democracy, back in the U.S. they were segregated and had no right to vote.⁷⁰ At the end of the Second World War, the voices calling for reparations grew in strength, partly due to the anti-colonial struggle in Africa and, as previously mentioned, the first calls for reparations by the Jews and Japanese. The civil rights movement emerged, with the main goal being to achieve equal civil rights. Reparations were also mentioned; however, African

⁶⁹ Araujo, *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade*, 5.

⁷⁰ Araujo, *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade*, 12.

Americans showed little support for this cause. Araujo argues that this is because of the full focus on civil rights and the suppressive atmosphere of the Cold War; people had other things to think about. However, Araujo states that no other movements supporting reparations emerged in different countries in South America or Africa.

Another interesting point Araujo raises is that reparations were only made to the former slave owners to compensate them for the damages of the Civil War and the lost labor: “When governments comprised in indemnifying former masters and planters, they took the clear decision to engage existing resources to subsidize those who over more than three centuries already benefited from slavery, rather than supporting decent work and living conditions to freed people.”⁷¹ This quote summarizes the white Americans attitude toward reparations, and the movement still has a long way to go. Araujo still has no answers to the following questions: what kinds of reparations are due – financial, symbolic, material, or all of the above? Who should give reparations, and who should obtain them? Between all the organizations and activists, there is still no consensus about these important questions.

Over time, the historiography of reparations has changed in ideas for suitable solutions for reparations, from a one-time payout to creating a trust fund and a formal apology from the government. However, scholars have embraced both types of reparations: monetary and emotional. There is an agreement that reparations only work, when both solutions are included. Furthermore, the argument for what black Americans should receive reparations changed. At first, in the 1990s, scholars advocated that reparations should be made for Jim Crow, not for slavery. It was not until Robinson’s book in *The Debt* (2000) that recent social injustice was linked to slavery, which has stayed that way since.

⁷¹ Araujo, *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade*, 6.

Anti-reparation scholarship

It is important to also consider some of the most important anti-reparations sources. This section is significantly shorter, because there are simply less anti-reparations scholars. Also, it is not necessary to trace the complete historiography of anti-reparations, to only highlight the most important contributors and arguments is sufficient to make the reparations debate nuanced.

Scholars John McWhorter and Walt Williams, both of whom are black, are against reparations John McWhorter is a professor at the Columbia University. McWhorter's argument, in his books: *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (2000) and *Winning the Race: Beyond the Crisis in Black America* (2005) is about victim-hood of African Americans. A central theme for McWhorter is that the problems black Americans struggle with such as: mass incarceration, poverty, bad education, crime and unemployment, does not come from external factors, such as white racism. The scholars in this chapter have all pointed to the legacy of slavery and the Jim Crow as a cause for the problems and struggles black Americans are facing today. McWhorter, however, argues that these problems come from within the black community.⁷² He states that black Americans have adopted an identity of being a victim, the term McWhorter uses for this is Cult of Victimology.⁷³: "the belief that all black people suffer and are injured by racism, explains why African Americans have not been as successful as other racial and ethnic groups. The root of this problem cannot be traced to structural inequalities in the United States, especially unequal power relations, between black and white people, but to specific African American ideological and behavioral patterns that undermine black American well-being."⁷⁴

⁷² McWhorter, *Losing the Race*, 44.

⁷³ McWhorter, *Losing the Race*, 82.

⁷⁴ McWhorter, *Losing the Race*, 118.

He emphasized in both of his books that the situation for black Americans have changed for the better in the 1960s, and black Americans should acknowledge this instead of lingering in the past. McWhorter advocates that African-Americans should move forward, that is one of the reasons he is not a proponent of reparations. He explains that searching for reparations is looking in the past, and laying the blame by some else: “reparations cannot logically rely on a depiction of black Americans as a race still reeling from the brutal experience of slavery and its after-effects.”⁷⁵ While this is, for most reparationists, the core of the reparations movement, the situation nowadays is a direct result of slavery.

McWhorter also argues that reparations already have been done in the form of affirmative action, food stamps, black history month and this very debate on reparations. If reparations should happen, McWhorter would prefer to see it as more social and welfare programs to, for example, help single mothers and clean up the inner cities. A lot of proponents of reparations would also vote for these kinds of reparations. The big difference is that McWhorter would not see it as reparations for slavery, but as an effort to repair problems in black America in helping people to help themselves.⁷⁶

Walter Williams is an economics professor at George Mason University, and together with McWhorter they are the leading foes of reparations. Similar to scholars in favor of reparations, Williams discusses the question of who should receive reparations. For Williams this question is already reason enough to be against reparations, since the slaves, slave traders and slave owners are deceased Williams does not see the point in paying reparations to the descendant of slaves. Furthermore, he argues if the U.S. starts paying reparations to African Americans, should the U.S. not also pay reparations to Native Americans, or Mexicans, both groups lost their land to the U.S. government? Williams continues that slavery in itself is widely

⁷⁵ McWhorter, *Losing the Race*, 165.

⁷⁶ McWhorter, *Winning the Race*, 53.

misunderstood, namely slavery had little to do with racism since slavery was all over the world. Not only African Americans were enslaved, Romans enslaved Europeans, Africans enslaved Africans. Williams wants to illustrate with this example that slavery was not only done by racist white Americans to black Africans, but done all over the world to all sorts of people. While Williams is right that slavery was not an unique act done by the U.S. he misses the point that slavery played a significant role in creating negative perceptions of black people, which have lasted ever since.

Additionally, Williams argues that reparations is nothing more than a cheap political trick of Democrats, to ensure the black vote with promises of reparations. If some of the Democrat candidates would do this, it still does not say anything about reparations being justified or not. The reparation movement is a real movement which has been around for a long time, and it is certainly more than just a cheap political trick.

Finally, Williams contends that reparations are unnecessary because African Americans actually benefited from slavery. The reason he gives is purely economic: “Almost every black American’s income is higher as a result of being born in the United States than any country in Africa.”⁷⁷ This statement is overly simplistic, it overlooks the racial wealth gap in the U.S., black Americans have far less wealth than white Americans, and the unemployment level is way higher. Moreover, Williams, coming from an economic background, completely ignores the psychological effects slavery and racism have had on African Americans. Williams argues reparations with a rational and economic point of view, while reparations is much more complex than that.

⁷⁷ Harris, “If the advertisement's aim was to inflame, it succeeded.”

Conclusion

In this chapter the historiography of the reparations debate has been discussed. Since the 1970s a lot has been written about the subject. Arguments in favor of reparations has changed drastically over time, starting from purely economic individual reparations, to group reparations, to more psychological reparations such as apologies and acknowledgements. Even though the scholars did not agree on who has to receive reparations, or if it is about reparations for slavery or rather for Jim Crow and persisting racism, they agreed on one fundamental point: reparations have to happen in order for black Americans to move forward.

It is interesting to see how the fundament of the historiography stays the same, and the scholars are building on each other's work searching for new solutions, conforming to their time. The scholarship has changed over time, from solely monetary solutions to also include symbolism and apology in a reparation program. This change was possible because after the Jim Crow laws were abolished, African Americans were beginning to build their own somewhat equal lives. The situation was more stable, so there was room to think about the emotional side of reparations.

The trend which was most important and influential for the current debate is change from short-term solutions to long-term solutions, and the research into the long lasting effects of slavery. This is exactly what the current reparation movement is about; to see the bigger picture, how slavery has influenced African Americans lives to this day. The recent debate focuses on the current circumstances and how this is connected to slavery, and especially what America can do to solve it. The only thing the current debate still has to agree on is who should receive reparations and who will pay for it. That reparations are long overdue, scholars all agree on. The next chapter will analyze the current debate about reparations, and it will incorporate chapter 1 and 2 into the analysis.

Chapter 3: Analysis

This final chapter analyzes the recent reparations debate, specifically the Congressional hearing on the H.R. 40 Bill - Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act. It will consider the effects of the historic reparations debate on the recent debate and Bill. First, I argue that the current reparations debate has learned from and taken into account the history of reparations. Thus, the current and historic debates cannot be viewed separately, the recent debate includes historic arguments and lessons from failures. Moreover, the current debate has based the new H.R. 40 Bill on the history of the reparations movement and added current circumstances to it, such as mass incarceration and police violence against black Americans.

Secondly, I contend that the proposed H.R. 40 Bill is a collective one because this bill represents every black American, which is in contrast to the individual claims for reparations in the past. Scholars Bittker and Westley already advocated for collective reparations, as a more efficient solution than making individual reparations claims. Thirdly, I argue that the current reparations movement is in the most united state since black people started advocating for reparations. This means that the activists all have the same goal: the passing of the H.R.40 Bill and finally getting reparations for black people. This ties in with my second argument, that reparationists are acknowledging they have to be a collective in order to make progress and see changes in U.S. policy. Finally, I contend that the mostly white reactions against the reparations have stayed the same since the historic debate.

H.R. 40 has been around for quite some time. U.S. Representative John Conyers(D-MI) introduced the Bill in January 1989 and every year thereafter.⁷⁸ Congress member Sheila Jackson, representative of Texas and main sponsor of the bill, took over upon Conyers'

⁷⁸ H.R. 40 Bill, 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/40>.

retirement in 2017. Jackson convened a House hearing on the H.R. 40 Bill specifically on Juneteenth, a holiday commemorating the abolishment of slavery in Texas on June 19, 1865.⁷⁹

Different witnesses provide their statements on the Bill, in order to convince the opponents to sign the Bill. Some of the important witnesses were Ta-Nehisi Coates, who wrote the influential article titled “The case for reparations,” which once again sparked the current reparations debate, and economist Julianne Malveaux, who explained in-depth the current financial status of black Americans and how monetary reparations would work. The most prominent opponent in the hearing was Representative Mike Johnson (R-LA), who claimed that reparations would be unconstitutional.⁸⁰ The hearing on June 19, 2019, lasted about three hours; the decision on whether the House passes the Bill has yet to be made.

⁷⁹ Tayler, “So You Want To Learn About Juneteenth?”

⁸⁰ ABC News, “House Judiciary Committee hearing on slavery reparations,” minute 11:20.

H.R. 40 Bill

At the center of the reparations debate, the bill is a blueprint for how to execute reparations. This blueprint mentions some interesting points, which will be explained. See the text of the Bill below:

This bill establishes the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans. The commission shall examine slavery and discrimination in the colonies and the United States from 1619 to the present and recommend appropriate remedies. Among other requirements, the commission shall identify (1) the role of federal and state governments in supporting the institution of slavery, (2) forms of discrimination in the public and private sectors against freed slaves and their descendants, and (3) lingering negative effects of slavery on living African-Americans and society.⁸¹

An interesting point in the Bill is the part about the examination of the “lingering negative effects of slavery on living African-Americans and society.” The Bill’s supporters’ unanimous argument that slavery has lingering negative effects on both living African Americans and society itself becomes apparent. This argument represents one of their major contentions for reparations. It is very important that the research commission makes this an official fact, this way opponents cannot dismiss it anymore. Additionally, it is evident that slavery has negative effects on society today. However, it should be made more clear what precisely are those effects and how this has affected African Americans, hopefully the research commission can establish this.

A second important part of the H.R. 40 Bill is that the commission’s identification of the role of federal and state governments in supporting the institution of slavery. A critical step is to establish the ways in which the government was involved in slavery and in racist policies after slavery. When that aspect is officially established, proponents of reparations can make a good case to directly demand reparations from the government. Given the lack of an official

⁸¹ H.R. 40 Bill, 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/40>.

collective reparations program, individuals themselves sometimes seek reparations, or as previously mentioned, institutions that discovered their ties with slavery might create their own reparations program. However, such efforts are insufficient. Therefore the proponents of the Bill believe that it is essential for the H.R.40 commission to show that the federal government did play an active role in treating African American as second-rate citizens. This fact will further legitimize their reasons for reparations and will add to the significance of the current reparations debate.

During the hearing, Coates also brought up the issue of government involvement with an effective example, in order to convince opponents why the government should pay for reparations. Coates mentioned that the government had known about redlining; or the systematic denial of various services, by federal government instead of stopping this policy, the government encouraged and endorsed it.⁸² The commission's establishment of government endorsement of racial policies long after the abolishment of slavery as a fact is crucial for once again strengthening the case for reparations. In the hearing of the H.R. 40 Bill, opponent Mike Johnson (R-LA) asked the panel⁸³, "Why should the federal government address and also pay for reparations?" The panel subsequently replied that the federal government should do so because it was "deeply complicit in the racial institution; furthermore, people victimized by redlining, housing segregation, racial profiling are very much alive today."⁸⁴

Moreover, this part of the H.R. 40 Bill dismisses the argument that only "a few white Americans" are racist; since the US was built on racist institutions that continue to exist. Therefore, the matter of African Americans asking for reparations and that only the federal government can provide such reparations makes sense. The succeeding section outlines some of the new arguments of the recent reparations debate. A number of those arguments were

⁸² Coates, "The Case For Reparations."

⁸³ ABC News, "House Judiciary Committee hearing on slavery reparations," minute 10:55.

⁸⁴ ABC News, "House Judiciary Committee hearing on slavery reparations," minute 26:25.

presented in the hearing on Juneteenth, the holiday for commemorating the ending of slavery in the United States.

Recent reparations debate

As described in the previous chapters, over the years the reparations debate has moved away from solely monetary solutions, such as a check for every slave descendant, towards an approach for creating an equal society between white and black Americans. To build such an equal society, reparations would still need a monetary solution; at the same time, proponents of the reparations debate argue that Americans ought to engage in the conversation about race. This argument is the result of the history of reparations, it has become clear to proponents that a conversation about race has not been easy, but it is certainly necessary. For white Americans such a conversation would mean that they can reconcile with their past, and for black Americans it would mean that they can finally move on. Proponents of the reparation debate have also reached the conclusion that reparations will have a higher chance of succeeding if the federal government acknowledges the past and actively pursues reparations, since individual reparations initiatives do not bring the change proponents would like to see.

The federal government had ample opportunities to create an equal society. The Civil War and the Reconstruction era each offered openings to include black Americans in society; if the New Deal policy and the GI Bill had been inclusive for blacks as well, the current society would look considerably different.⁸⁵ The notion that blacks are inferior to whites started with slavery, and this idea could have been reversed after the abolishment of slavery. The Jim Crow laws were enforced instead; additionally, the notion that black people are inferior persists. The government played a significant role in this regard, and its responsibility includes the development of an equal society.

⁸⁵ Darity, *From Here to Equality*, 51.

One of the key hindrances to the development of an equal society in the US is the racial wealth gap. The racial wealth gap is the disparity in median household wealth between different races.⁸⁶ The discrepancy in wealth between white and black households is significant. Even when a black household is wealthy, the wealth is not the same as the one that a white family possesses. Wealth inequality in the US can be described as follows: “blacks represent approximately 13 percent of the United States’ population, but possess 2.6 percent of the Nation’s wealth. That translates into roughly an \$800,000 gap in net worth on average per household.”⁸⁷

The racial wealth gap can be traced back to slavery. After slavery ended, in the Reconstruction era, newly freed black people attempted to close the gap between themselves and white Americans in terms of education, property, business, and wealth. However, the introduction of the Jim Crow laws not only segregated the society but also dictated the specific jobs that black people could do and how much they were paid.⁸⁸ Additionally, many black people were working in indentured servitude. All of these factors signified that black people could not acquire the same wealth as white people did.

Even when black Americans managed to be successful, white people disallowed any black Americans to prosper and therefore destroyed black businesses. One of the most horrific examples of this case is the Tulsa race massacre in 1921, when mobs of white residents murdered multiple blacks and the Greenwood District in Tulsa, Oklahoma, was destroyed.⁸⁹

The racial wealth gap widened when the New Deal and the post-World War II measures such as the GI Bill excluded African Americans from using the benefits. This incident caused the widespread prosperity of the white working-class Americans and the increased poverty of

⁸⁶ Amadeo, “Racial Wealth Gap in the United States”.

⁸⁷ Darity, *From Here to Equality*, 53.

⁸⁸ Amadeo, “Racial Wealth Gap in the United States”.

⁸⁹ Place, “Tulsa Race Massacre.”

black Americans. This pattern persists, as white Americans are systematically favored by public policies, whereas African Americans are accumulating the disadvantages.⁹⁰ This example illustrates that the pattern is embedded in politics; thus, to change or even eliminate this destructive pattern, fighting the politics is necessary.

After the abolition of the Jim Crow laws in 1964, another opportunity for the US to create an equal society emerged. However, that situation did not transpire; instead the US became a de facto segregated society, with government-endorsed racist policies such as redlining.

In the historic reparations debate, the racial wealth gap is neither mentioned nor identified as the focus of the debate. Nevertheless, the racial wealth gap has become quite prominent in the recent debate because it constitutes a tangible problem and simultaneously embodies all the difficulties that African Americans experience today as a consequence of slavery. Furthermore, the racial wealth gap is both an effective example and a solid argument to advance for reparations.

In the recent reparations debate, the wealth inequality issue has become very prominent. It has been addressed extensively by panel witness Julianne Malveux. She argued that America's wealth was made possible due to slavery. However, black Americans were denied the ability to participate in their nation's economic growth and wealth. Instead of helping black Americans, the federal government was helping immigrants from Europe. They received land and were able to get grants from the government to develop their land. Meanwhile, African American people were denied the right to these wealth transfers.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Darity, *From Here to Equality*, 64.

⁹¹ ABC News, "House Judiciary Committee hearing on slavery reparations," minute 1h:28.

Malveux continued that economic envy from white Americans has suppressed black Americans, and has denied them the ability to accumulate wealth. Economic envy could result in lynching, or destroying businesses. Lastly, Malveux contended that it is very difficult to escape poverty when zip codes determine which school you go to. These are the vestiges of enslavement. Almost all of the current problems for black Americans can be traced back to economic underpinnings, which subsequently can be traced back to slavery.⁹²

She advocated that in order to make reparations, there should be new legislation that has positive economic implications for black Americans.⁹³ This way the wealth gap, a long lasting effect of slavery, can be closed and this will be a big step towards an equal society.

An additional argument in the recent reparations debate is about directly addressing the opponents of reparations. According to the House hearing panel, the non-execution of a reparations program is in fact contrary to U.S. values and norms. The United States is acknowledged as the “land of the free,” the notion that everyone who comes to the US has an equal chance to make something for themselves.⁹⁴ Although the general perception in the US is that Americans have to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, the ensuing concern focuses on the lack of so-called bootstraps at the outset. The House hearing panel attempted to demonstrate the hypocrisy in the conception of the US and the reality, raising a key question: How can the US be the “land of the free” when so many black Americans never experience equal treatment or opportunity? To overcome this issue, the panel argued that Americans have to engage in the conversation about race. As panel member Katrina Browne underscored, (white) Americans feel personally attacked when the conversation is about race and perceive that they are being accused of racism.⁹⁵ Another problem, which makes the fight for reparations

⁹² ABC News, “House Judiciary Committee hearing on slavery reparations,” minute 1h.13.

⁹³ ABC News, “House Judiciary Committee hearing on slavery reparations,” minute 1h.28.

⁹⁴ Darity, *From Here to Equality*, 78.

⁹⁵ ABC News, “House Judiciary Committee hearing on slavery reparations,” minute 59.57.

difficult, is that history classes in schools are of poor quality. This results in several Americans not knowing their own history, and therefore do not understand why black Americans call for reparations in the first place. These two problems cause a difficulty in engaging in the conversation about race. Scholars such as Westley and Robinson believe that reparations cannot be successful without addressing the sensitive topic of race and agree that the H.R. 40 Bill can hopefully facilitate this matter.

Finally, the panel tried to appeal to the public by raising an important question to ponder: How can the US be a nation of freedom while mass incarceration and widespread injustice occur? Involving the present situation might help people to increase their understanding of the necessity of reparations, instead of asking them to relate to slavery. As Danny Glover, a black rights activist on the panel, stated, “white America has to recognize that racial injustice cannot be changed without radical changes in our society.”⁹⁶ Ultimately, the slavery that is instituted in the American mind portrays black people as inferior. This depiction indicates that slavery is not a matter of the past but one that is linked with the present: slavery is codified in the laws of the US and its criminal justice system. The only means of escaping and resolving this matter is confrontation with the past, coupled with the acquisition of knowledge about why the present is shaped the way it is.⁹⁷

The monetary solution is still important in the recent reparations debate, but solely focusing on finance is now emphasized as an empty gesture. This argument follows the change of the historiography on reparations. It further moves away from monetary solutions and toward the direction of changing the society as a whole, with social programs. Simply writing out a check would lack the understanding or the depth of the unaddressed moral issues that continue to haunt this nation.⁹⁸ This aspect reverts to a previous point that the conversation about race

⁹⁶ ABC News, “House Judiciary Committee hearing on slavery reparations,” minute 54.02.

⁹⁷ Darity, *From Here to Equality*, 80.

⁹⁸ Darity, *From Here to Equality*, 81.

has to occur to allow the US to move forward. The emotional side of the reparations debate is not necessarily new, as scholars Brooks and Henry already advocated for formal apologies, further education on slavery, and additional museums to commemorate. However, dismissing a solely monetary solution as meaningless on its own is a novel element.

Advocates of the reparations debate realize that the problems currently confronting black Americans are not due to discrimination but are the cumulative result of earlier evils, policies, and preferences. The lack of recognition that the legacies of slavery and segregation have deprived African Americans of opportunity and that their problems are cumulative is hindering the realization of a reparations program.⁹⁹

Disremembering slavery

The disremembering of slavery and ignorance in education constitute another argument for reparations and simultaneously an explanation of why reparations have neither been made nor welcomed with great enthusiasm. In the most recent book about reparations, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century* (April, 2020), co-authors William Darity and Kirsten Mullen describe the term dismemory as a condition involving “organized and systematic efforts to manipulate and distort the nation’s history.”¹⁰⁰ The dismemory of slavery started immediately after the Civil War when the “lost cause” ideology emerged. This ideology holds the idea that the cause of the Confederacy during the Civil War was to protect the Southern way of life, and that this cause was a just one. Southerners had to stand up for their own rights against the aggressive North. The lost cause turned out to be a propaganda campaign to misinterpret the causes of the Civil War and to rarely mention slavery. When slavery was mentioned, it was portrayed as a completely different matter: the slaves experienced pleasant working conditions, displayed loyalty to their owners, and often

⁹⁹ Darity, *From Here to Equality*, 218.

¹⁰⁰ Darity, *From Here to Equality*, 219.

fought for the Confederacy themselves. The propaganda succeeded because many Americans nowadays still believe that the cause of the Civil War was about the states' rights and not about slavery.¹⁰¹

The construction of numerous Confederate monuments between 1900 and 1920, the naming of schools and streets after rebel officers, to make the defeat by the rebels an official remembrance holiday was lobbied illustrate additional examples of dismemory. In 2016, the South had more than 1,500 Confederate monuments.¹⁰² In addition to celebrating the Confederacy, the voices of slaves and black abolitionists are silenced. In the Confederate Museum in Charleston, for example, the term "slave" is only mentioned once.¹⁰³ White Southerners also made sure that the "right" version of history was taught at schools; they convinced school districts to replace the history textbooks with pro-Confederacy textbooks, in which slaves were depicted as happy servants.¹⁰⁴ There were no school textbooks which spoke ill of the Confederacy.¹⁰⁵

Americans have to overcome this structural system of history being told incorrectly, in order to overcome ignorance and racism, and to be able to support the reparations debate. For both black Americans and proponents of the reparations debate, the inclusion of the proper recollection of slavery and education on America's history as part of a reparations programs are both crucial. William Darity and Kirsten Mullen highlight in their new book how important it is for a reparations program to overcome the structural problems in education. Apart from the monetary payments, reparations should focus on "de-confederatization." That is, the goal to provide Americans with an accurate story of the Civil War and the reconstruction and reverse

¹⁰¹ Neiman, "Reparations for Black Americans."

¹⁰² Darity, *From Here to Equality*, 221.

¹⁰³ Neiman, "Reparations for Black Americans."

¹⁰⁴ Darity, *From Here to Equality*, 221.

¹⁰⁵ Neiman, "Reparations for Black Americans."

the lies that are embedded in the lost cause myth. Once America makes an actual change in the structural problems in education, it will result in a positive change in terms of racism and equality.

In 2016, the need for a proper recollection of slavery became apparent with the demonstrations to remove statues that celebrate controversial Civil War era figures such as general Robert E. Lee, a general of the Confederacy. These statues are symbols of white supremacy and are viewed as figures that glorify slavery and the Confederacy and intimidate African Americans.¹⁰⁶ The call for the removal of troublesome statues and monuments was met with a violent rally of far-right white Americans in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017, resulting in one fatality and many injured.¹⁰⁷ This incident is proof of the deep entrenchment of racism in American society. It also highlights a harsh truth: the US has statues that tell a very one-sided and concerning part of history, instead of paying reparations for the cruelties of the individuals immortalized in the statues.

New debate, new questions

The recent reparations debate not only brings new arguments but also raises new questions such as “Should reparations be a race-based policy?” While more specific plans are made regarding the execution of such a reparations program, this question arises. Building on scholar Roy Brook’s concept of a trust fund for black babies, Senator Corey Booker (D-NJ) has presented the idea of setting up a “baby bonds” plan; this plan would put money into a savings account for *all* American children. The idea is that far more money would go to children in poverty, which in practice indicates that the money would go mostly to black children because they live disproportionality in poverty compared to white children.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Stiem, “Statue wars.”

¹⁰⁷ Stiem, “Statue wars.”

¹⁰⁸ Kurtzleben, Danielle. “2020 Democrats Wrestle With A Big Question”.

With his plan, Booker attempts to close the racial wealth gap and explains that his baby bonds can be viewed as a form of reparations.¹⁰⁹ Although his plan would help more black families than white, his policy is not race-based. Proponents of reparations would not call this plan a reparations program because it does not address the atrocities of slavery and after slavery. A reparations policy would include a formal apology and acknowledgement of the slave past, next to compensation. Such a policy, without specifically mentioning race, would essentially signify a step back for reparations.

Other plans similar to baby bonds have been suggested, such as a job-based plan, which would help young adults from poor neighborhoods to find jobs. This plan would be available to all races, but in practice it would largely help African Americans, similar to the baby bonds. Finally, one plan proposes to guarantee admission to any public university in the state, for students in the top 10% of their high school class.¹¹⁰ These plans are targeted to close the racial wealth gap, without explicitly being a race-based policy. As previously mentioned, such plans are not what reparations are all about. Scholar Henry also argued that reparations should be race-based because the problems are race-based. However, he underlined that reparations ideas always suffer from a backlash because white Americans do not believe that the problems are about race. As Henry's argument remains relevant, the US could benefit from these types of plans, while waiting for a genuine reparations program.

Another reason why the adoption of non-race-based policies would be easier is that opponents are arguing that reparations would be unconstitutional.¹¹¹ In previous reparations cases, the Supreme Court already decided that "racial entitlements are only permissible to remedy the present effects of the government's own widespread discrimination in the relatively

¹⁰⁹ Kurtzleben, Danielle. "2020 Democrats Wrestle With A Big Question"

¹¹⁰ Kurtzleben, Danielle. "2020 Democrats Wrestle With A Big Question."

¹¹¹ Brophy, "Some conceptual and legal problems in reparations for slavery," 502.

recent past.”¹¹² Thus, race-based policies such as reparations would be unconstitutional. Nonetheless, the government’s discriminatory stance in the recent past would need to be demonstrated to declare the H.R. 40 Bill to be constitutional

The formulation of a legal claim for reparations is difficult because the same questions since the beginning of seeking reparations from the government still exist: Who should receive reparations? Who exactly are the descendants of slaves? Who will pay? The H.R. 40 Bill can hopefully overcome the legal difficulties and answer the questions. The research commission of the bill should clarify who the victims are and that the government is responsible and thus should pay for reparations; this approach represents the only means of executing the reparations.¹¹³

These questions demonstrate what the status of the reparations movement is now. The movement still are indecisive about who will receive reparations, and how much or in what form. When looked solely at these questions, the recent reparations movement has not come much further than the historical reparations movement on these particular points. The recent movement has booked a lot of progress and things have changed positively. However, it is poignant to see the movement is still not in agreement about the most important questions. As long as they are not in agreement, they do not stand strong against white opponents. Hopefully, the H.R. 40 research commission can answer these questions once and for all.

Reaction of whites

The most controversial anti-reparations scholar is David Horowitz. In 2001 he published an advertisement in several university newspapers including at Brown, Duke, UC Berkeley,

¹¹² Bader, “Reparations Would Cost Trillions and Are Unconstitutional.”

¹¹³ Brophy, “Some conceptual and legal problems in reparations for slavery,” 502.

and the University of Chicago.¹¹⁴ He sent his advertisement to 71 college papers, and 39 rejected it. Of the 22 college papers that did print it, 15 later apologized to their readers for doing so.¹¹⁵ His advertisement was titled “Ten Reasons Why Reparations for Slavery Are a Bad Idea and Racist, Too.” The advertisement came out during an interesting time in the U.S. It was published one year after Robinson’s book *The Debt*, in which Robinson argues in favor of reparations for African Americans. In addition, the race riots in Cincinnati (April 2001) only happened a month previous to the publishing of the advertisement. Finally, the effects of the war on drugs in the 1970s became clear in the 1990s and early 2000s in the form of mass incarceration of African Americans. In short, the early 2000s were a turbulent time for race relations in the U.S.

In his advertisement, Horowitz lists 10 reasons why the U.S. should not pay reparations to African Americans. His views were very extreme and not based on facts. For example, Horowitz claimed that white Christians created the anti-slavery movement and that because of the sacrifice of white soldiers in the Civil War slaves were freed and now live a comfortable life in the U.S. “Where is the gratitude of black America and its leaders for those gifts?” he asks.¹¹⁶ While one cannot take this view seriously, it is an important piece of anti-reparation rhetoric that gained a great deal of attention.

There were many protests happening at the time, and the editors of the university papers that published the advertisements were forced to resign.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, multiple scholars wrote a reply to Horowitz defending reparations. On the other hand, the protests also brought forth scholars who agreed with Horowitz, which made the reparations debate even more complex.

¹¹⁴ Horowitz, “Ten Reasons Why Reparations for Slavery is a Bad Idea for Blacks,” 48.

¹¹⁵ Campbell, “Right Turn.”

¹¹⁶ Horowitz, “Ten Reasons Why Reparations for Slavery is a Bad Idea for Blacks,” 48.

¹¹⁷ Harris, “If the advertisement's aim was to inflame, it succeeded.”

Since Horowitz the reactions to a reparations program have roughly stayed the same, even though the plans for executing the reparations are changed. From monetary short term solutions, to social welfare programs for the long term, and advocating for an equality in every facet of society for every black American.

One of the most common reactions against reparations highlights the idea of why Americans today have to pay for something that occurred 150 years ago, even though the victims are deceased. The H.R. 40 Bill is an effective tool not only for overcoming this argument but also for establishing the existence of living victims who deserve reparations. Non-slave victims may still feel the effects of slavery in their everyday life. Furthermore, Coates argued in the Juneteenth House hearing that Americans do not adopt this attitude toward George Washington. Adding that Americans are proud of this part of history, which they regard as relevant and thus continue to celebrate, instead of saying it was 150 years ago and George Washington is not relevant anymore.¹¹⁸ Coates further noted that although the history of slavery remains significant, it is only being dismissed; however, such outlook should not mean that reparations should not transpire. Finally, this quote from a recent study on reparations effectively summarizes this matter: “a failure to pay a debt in timely fashion does not extinguish the obligation, particularly since the consequences of past injustices continue to be visited upon the descendants of the direct victims. A national act of procrastination does not eliminate the debt.”¹¹⁹

In addition, the opposition has mentioned that immigrants who arrived in the US after the abolishment of slavery cannot be held responsible for something that happened before their arrival; that is, they cannot be blamed and should not pay for reparations. However, immigrants had access to their American Dream because of slavery. Slavery made the US a wealthy country

¹¹⁸ ABC News, “House Judiciary Committee hearing on slavery reparations,” minute 43.13.

¹¹⁹ Darity, *From Here to Equality*, 225.

teeming with opportunities. Immigrants are not personally blamed for slavery, but they should support reparations because they owe their success to slavery.

White American's negative reaction against reparations can also be viewed as structural racism. This means the reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity, in social, economic and political systems.¹²⁰ Furthermore, it normalizes and legitimizes advantaging white people (white privilege), while simultaneously disadvantaging black people.¹²¹ Every time black Americans make progress, they are met with structural racism. Or how Carol Anderson's calls it: white rage. In her book, she gives the following examples of white rage: creating black codes, mass incarceration of black people and after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, schools were shut down and public money went into private schools instead of public schools.¹²² These examples show how white rage has disadvantages black people. Structural racism is the core of what stands in the way for black Americans on their way to an equal society since slavery.

Relating to the preceding points, the H.R. 40 Bill would be needed to state as a fact that the effects of slavery, such as structural racism, continue to resonate. This fact would make the claim for reparations more legitimate and would refute the opponents' argument.

Current situation for African Americans

African Americans have come a long way since slavery, but their situation is still far from ideal. Many white Americans continue to believe McWorther's argument that race is not an issue in the US anymore, contend that affirmative action helped to create an equal society, and recognize that the US is a post-racial society since the election of President Barack Obama.¹²³ Such beliefs underscore the critical importance of the current reparations debate. The

¹²⁰ Lawrence, Keleher, "Structural Racism."

¹²¹ Lawrence, Keleher, "Structural Racism."

¹²² Anderson, *White Rage*, 25.

¹²³ Anderson, *White Rage*, 78.

goal of the reparations debate is twofold: keep the memory of slavery and segregation alive and raise awareness of the present problems of African Americans.

The incarceration numbers of young African Americans has increased since the War on Drugs in the 1970s.¹²⁴ Today black Americans are incarcerated at more than five times the rate of whites.¹²⁵ The mass incarceration of (young) black Americans is a growing racial problem, and it does not stop there. The incidence of police violence and shootings against African Americans has significantly intensified since the 2010s.¹²⁶ The police shootings and the fact that police officers rarely get prosecuted have created a highly tense situation, in which African Americans feel unsafe and demand justice. A tragic event exemplifies this point. In 2013, Florida neighborhood watch coordinator George Zimmerman was acquitted of the murder of an unarmed black teenager, Trayvon Martin, which outraged the African American community and subsequently resulted in the founding of the Black Lives Matter movement. The movement has gained an ample amount of public awareness, primarily on the issue of police brutality,¹²⁷ with large protests and marches. The movement gives a voice to individuals and unifies black people all over the world in their search for equality and justice. Black Lives Matter can be compared to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Both movements organized themselves in mass protests to change the circumstances for black Americans.¹²⁸ The rather painful reality is that another mass movement, decades later, is needed because an equal society is not yet achieved.

For African Americans, the current circumstances in the US indicate the critical necessity of the H.R. 40 Bill and increase the urgency and legitimacy of the recent reparations debate. A poignant aspect is that 150 years after slavery, African Americans are still fighting

¹²⁴ Sentencing Project, "Trends in US Corrections."

¹²⁵ NAACP, "Criminal Justice Fact Sheet."

¹²⁶ Peffley, Jon, *Justice in America*, 113.

¹²⁷ Iorio, "The True Impact of Black Lives Matter."

¹²⁸ Iorio, "The True Impact of Black Lives Matter."

for their freedom. With the current reparations debate, this struggle is not forgotten; furthermore, the current circumstances demonstrates that the US is not post-racial and underscores the need for society to change.

Conclusion

In late May of 2020, demonstrations broke out in Minneapolis, Minnesota after the death of George Floyd. He died while under arrest. Officer Derek Chauvin held Floyd in a knee lock for 8 minutes, suffocating him. This is not the first case of extensive police violence against black Americans. Floyd's death sparked widespread demonstrations all over the world, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets to demand justice for black people and to raise awareness of racism. The officers involved in Floyd's death have been fired and are facing charges.

The demonstrations of May highlight the importance of the reparations debate discussed in this thesis, because black Americans still do not receive equal treatment. This thesis has outlined the reparations movement, from the very beginning until the Juneteenth 2019 House Hearing on the H.R.40 Bill, and answered the following research question: *“In what ways is the historical reparations debate incorporated in the current debate on reparations for African Americans searching for justice, and what does that mean for the significance of the current debate?”*

First of all, the historical debate is very much incorporated in the current debate. The new reparations bill, the H.R. 40 is named after the first ever promise of reparations: the 40 acres and a mule. This promise was never granted, and African Americans have been searching for reparations ever since. Furthermore, the recent movement has learned from the failures and successes of the historical movement, and is building on its experiences and scholarship. The current movement has certainly realized that the problems currently confronting black Americans are not due to discrimination but are the cumulative result of earlier evils, policies, and preferences. This way the debate has a strong argument for reparations, because it can clearly expose the bigger picture of the reparations debate, being persistent structural racism

after slavery, which has resulted in a racial wealth gap and mass incarceration. In addition, thanks to the historical movement the lesson has been learned that reparations should be collective, and have to make a change on the life of every black Americans' life.

The current debate has come far, thanks to the many solutions and concepts for different kinds of reparations. The understanding is now that simply writing out a check would lack the understanding or the depth of the unaddressed moral issues that continue to haunt the U.S. A reparations program has to combine emotional reparations with monetary reparations.

The current debate still did not succeed in answering all the questions of the historical debate, such as who exactly would receive reparations, and who will pay for them. The movement right now is advocating that the federal government should pay out reparations, since they have been complicit in structural racism. The recent movement also brought about new questions, for instance: should reparations be race-based, and are reparations even legal? The research commission of the H.R.40 Bill will hopefully be able to answer these existing and new questions.

Another point the current movement has still to overcome is ignorance and racism. As long as there is a structural system of history being told incorrectly, this is difficult to achieve, and it will be difficult to convince opponents of the reparations debate to support the Bill.

However, the reparations movement has never been stronger, due to a combination of two things: the long history and persistence of reparations activists, and the current situation in the U.S. If anything, the death of George Floyd has emphasized once more how utterly important reparations are, and its goal to create an equal society.

This thesis has given an overview of the reparations movement in the United States. It showed the history of the reparations debate, the current state of the historiography and an analysis of the House hearing on the H.R.40 Bill and the recent reparations debate. It

demonstrated how much the historical and recent movement are intertwined and inseparable. However, this thesis could not cover everything to do with this subject, especially since there has been no decision on the H.R. 40 Bill yet. For further research I would recommend keeping track of the bill, and to see how reparations will make an impact on the African-American community in the United States.

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