

# A Deliberative Forum on the Issue of Reparations

## Discussion Guide

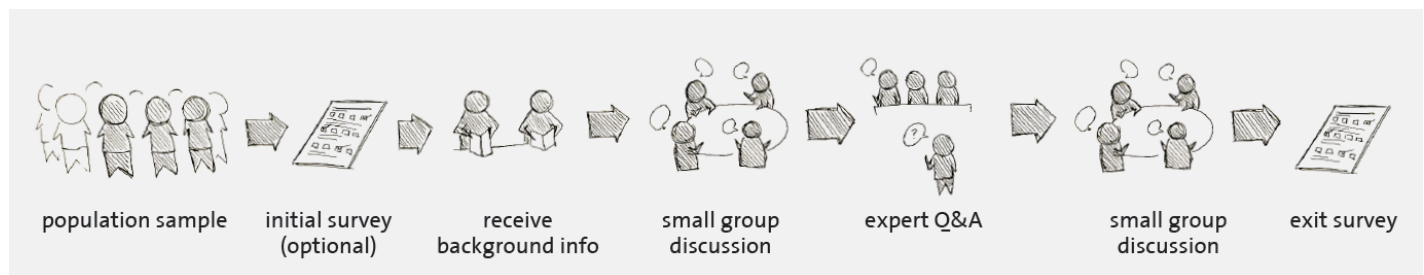


# What are Deliberative Forums?

Deliberative Forums seek to discover what people think about an issue after they have engaged deeply with multiple, alternative perspectives. These forums provide the resources citizens need to develop an opinion informed by relevant facts, expert information, and an understanding of how issues and policies affect others in their community.

## Elements of a Deliberative Forum

1. Organizers recruit a diverse group of participants.
2. Participants receive background materials offering basic information and a balanced overview of various perspectives on issues.
3. Participants engage in small-group discussions facilitated by trained moderators.
4. Participants' questions are addressed by a resource panel of people with expertise on the issues.
5. Participants return to small groups to reflect on the information provided by resource panelists.
6. Participants complete an exit survey.



# Preface

Discussions of Reparations today can be seen to revolve around three elements: Acknowledgement, redress and closure (ARC). Acknowledgement focuses on the recognition of the role that slavery and its consequences have played in our society. It entails a formal apology such as that made by many states and even the congress of the United States. It entails a commitment to move toward some redress, some material and policy changes that would positively address the racial disparities that are still present today. Ideally, such redress would result in a kind of closure and reconciliation.

It's also been said that Reparations is a big menu with many chefs in the kitchen. Some seek an incremental approach that looks at specific areas ripe for reparations. Examples include addressing the lives and properties lost in the 1921 Tulsa attack on Black Wall Street (in ways similar to the US Government's reparations to Japanese Americans interred during WW II). Some seek a local city-based reparations program like that of Evanston, Illinois where city council voted to put aside \$400,000 as a step to improve homes in once redlined districts (this has now become a nation-wide model called First Repair). Others seek a broad and comprehensive approach similar to the California's Reparations Task Force which includes direct payments to documented descendants of significant racialized injustices over time and some even offer a well-argued national Reparations project with a 14 trillion dollar price tag. And there are numerous approaches in between.

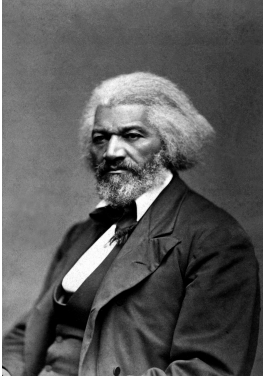
The Pittsburgh Crafting Democratic Futures Project is committed to forging a Reparations agenda for African Americans in the city of Pittsburgh (and other selected parts of Western Pennsylvania). What are the priorities and what are the areas (jobs, housing, education, etc) that can be addressed through Reparations?

Finally, a discussion of Reparations allows us to frame the issue in terms of a wholistic approach to racial injustice and economic disparities. It leads us to see the interconnectedness of jobs, housing, education, health, entrepreneurship, and the justice system.

## Outline

- Historical Context for the Issue of Reparations
- Factual Background for the Issue of Reparations in Pittsburgh
- Models of Reparations (specific, local, state, national)
- Objections and Responses
- Areas to Consider and Connect for Reparative Justice (education, health, jobs, housing, entrepreneurship, and the justice system)

# Historical Background for the Issue of Reparations



“The world has never seen any people turned loose to such destitution as were the four million slaves of the South...They were free without roofs to cover them or bread to eat, or land to cultivate...” Frederick Douglass

While Douglass was not at first an advocate of Land as a form of restorative justice for Blacks in the South, the first offers of reparations made by the radical wing of the Republican Party as early as January 1865 were that lands abandoned by and confiscated from the former Confederates be provided to freedmen. This is the source of the phrase “40 acres and a mule.” It was never implemented during the Reconstruction Period and the practical idea of reparations receded during the repressive Southern policies and actions that arose in the 1870s and beyond.

Despite these difficult circumstances, in 1898 a grassroots organization called the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief Bounty and Pension Association was formed in Nashville TN. Its mission was to lobby Congress to provide pensions for the nation's estimated 1.9 million ex-slaves and essentially create a program similar to the civil war program for disabled veterans and families of deceased veterans.

In 1915, the association filed a lawsuit claiming that the Treasury Department owed the Freedmen \$68 million, the amount it had collected from the sale of slave grown and slave harvested cotton confiscated from the Confederates towards the end of and immediately after the civil war. The claim was denied.

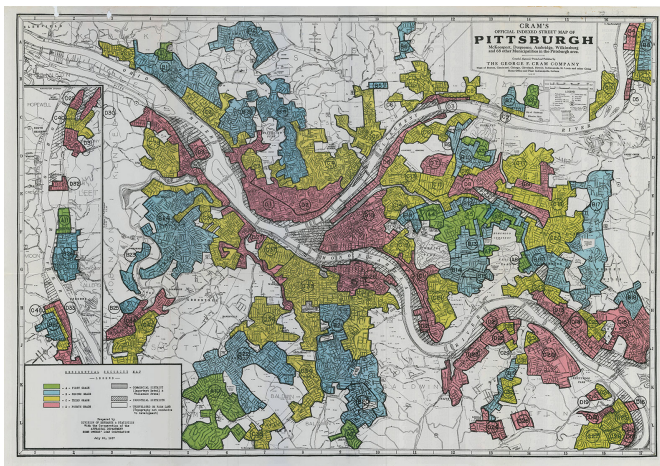
The first half of the 20th Century saw the revival of the KKK, the burning of the Black Wall Street in Tulsa (1921), lynchings and Jim Crow Laws repressing Black voting and creating segregated schools and communities where Whites Only and Blacks Only signs covered everything from hotels and diners to bathrooms and water fountains.



While the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v Board of Education* (1954) and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did away with many of the legal impediments that Blacks faced since the Civil War era, many of the social ills and limitations arising after a century of discrimination remained. These coalesced around a number of interconnected issues: job opportunities, education, housing, health and health care, and the criminal justice system.

In 1989 Representative John Conyers (D-Mich) introduced HR 40 (for the 40 acres) which sought to establish a Commission tasked with conducting research and determining “whether any form of compensation to the descendants of African slaves is warranted.” The bill has never reached the floor of Congress for a vote, but today it has two new sponsors — Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D Tex) and Senator Cory Booker (D NJ).

In 2014 Ta-Nehisi Coates published a groundbreaking article in *The Atlantic* titled “The Case for Reparations.” It followed the story of Clyde Ross, a Black man who left the racial conditions of the South for a better life and home in Chicago. He soon discovered that he lived in a web of racial discrimination. These included the practice of redlining certain areas in town as unstable and marked off from normal FHA-backed loans.



On the maps, green areas, rated “A,” indicated “in demand” neighborhoods that, as one appraiser put it, lacked “a single foreigner or Negro.” These neighborhoods were considered excellent prospects for insurance. Neighborhoods where black people lived were rated “D” and were usually considered ineligible for FHA backing. They were colored in red.

As a result, most Black homebuyers were led into predatory “contracts” where the seller kept the deed until the contract was paid in full. If a payment was missed, the buyer would immediately forfeit his investments and the property itself.

Redlining was just one of many ways that Blacks lost out on generational wealth. When the G.I. Bill was passed into law in 1944, it contained a wide range of benefits for returning veterans including college tuition, low-cost loans and unemployment insurance. While technically open to all vets, it benefited mostly white veterans. Lack of better education in segregated schools, FHA housing policies, poor resources for vocational training combined with the more overtly racist attitudes of the times, prevented many returning Black veterans from benefiting from the program.

The original GI Bill ended in July 1956. By that time, nearly 8 million World War II veterans had received education or training, and 4.3 million home loans worth \$33 billion had been handed out. But most Black veterans had been left behind. As employment, college attendance and wealth surged for whites, disparities with their Black counterparts not only continued, but widened. There was, writes Ira Katznelson, “no greater instrument for widening an already huge racial gap in postwar America than the GI Bill.” (“How the GI Bill’s Promise Was Denied to a Million Black WWII Veterans” by Erin Blakemore).

Post WWII educational and housing opportunities lost, redlining and the loss of generational wealth, undue burdens of the legal justice system, stress and chronic illnesses unalleviated by proper health care and made worse by food deserts, have affected Black Americans through the legal victories of the civil rights era and up to the present.

# Factual Background for the Issue of Reparations in Pittsburgh

In *From Here to Equality*, Darity and Mullen argue that wealth disparity is the best single indicator for the cumulative impact of the centuries old conditions that Blacks face in America. To quote at length:

Wealth — the difference between what we own and what we owe (or the difference between the value of our assets and our debts, or the net value of our property) — is the economic measure that best captures individual, family, and household well-being:

Wealth serves as a primary indicator of economic security. Wealthier families are better positioned to finance elite Independent school and college education, access capital to start a business, finance expensive medical procedures, reside in higher amenity neighborhoods, exert political influence through campaign financing, purchase better counsel if confronted with an expensive legal system, leave a bequest and/or withstand financial hardship resulting from any number of emergencies. Wealth provides financial agency over one's life. Simply put wealth gives individuals and families choice; it provides economic security to take risks and shield against financial loss. — Hamilton and Darity, Jr (“The Political economy of Education, Financial Literacy and the Racial Wealth Gap,” Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Review 99, no 1)

Data from the 2016 Survey of Consumer Finances indicates that medium black household net worth (\$17,600) is only one-tenth of white net worth (\$171,000). That means, on average, for every dollar the middle white household holds in wealth — measured by assets like homes, cash savings, and retirement funds — the middle black household possesses a mere cents.

Finding ways to close this national wealth gap is a central task for Reparations. There will also be local cases for Reparations.

In 2021 Ralph Bangs' *Pittsburgh's Deplorable Black Living Conditions* drew on five reports with employment data and the conditions of African Americans in Pittsburgh. *Economic Benchmarks* found that in 1994 Pittsburgh had the fourth highest Black poverty rate, and fifth highest black unemployment rate among America's 50 most-populated cities. Allegheny County had the fourth highest black poverty rate, and fifth highest black unemployment rate. *Black and White Economic Conditions in the City of Pittsburgh* found the city had the highest share of black households with children with female-heads; the highest rate of black men between 25-54 not in the labor force; the highest poverty rate for Blacks aged 18-64; and some of the highest rate of black women (age 25-54) not in the labor force. *Black-White Benchmarks Reports* showed that Pittsburgh in 2004 had: over half of elderly Black people living alone, an 'extremely' low median earnings for Black part-time workers as well as a low median value for Black-owned homes. *Pittsburgh's Inequality Across Gender and Race* showed in 2019 that over half of the city's Black children were impoverished, Black male unemployment rate (age 25-64) was nearly 10%, no Black children in Pittsburgh public high schools passed an AP test.

As of 2023 the highest levels of neighborhood poverty (apart from higher education student populations) are concentrated in the predominantly Black areas of Homewood, Brushton, East End, Point Breeze, and the Southside neighborhoods of Knoxville and Beltzhoover. These are the neighborhood populations that rely heavily on supplemental supports from the public sector for strongly needed opportunity bridges out of prevailing situations of social scarcity and isolation.

## Questions

- Given our country's historical circumstances and the facts about racial disparity that we face today, what are we to do?
- What kinds of actions and policies merit discussion and deliberation?
- And how can the idea of Reparations focus our attention on these matters?

# Models of Reparations

**Tuskegee Medical Experiment settlement:** In 1973 a class-action lawsuit was filed on behalf of the study participants and their families, resulting in a \$10 million, out-of-court settlement in 1974. On May 16, 1997, President Bill Clinton issued a formal Presidential Apology for the study.

**Japanese Internment settlement:** The Civil Liberties Act of 1988 granted each surviving internee \$20,000 in compensation, equivalent to \$40,000 in 2021, with payments beginning in 1990. The legislation stated that government actions had been based on "race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership" as opposed to legitimate security reasons. A total of 82,219 received redress checks. The act was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan.



There are various Models of Reparations (specific, local, state, national) and numerous ways to approach each model (some in a piecemeal manner, some focused on documented loss of land or life, some large scale and national in nature). Reparations can focus on particular instances of racial injustice, like the erasure of Bush's Beach in California, that can result in material compensation. Others seek reparations for those documented decedents of slaves and seek direct payments as compensation. Reparations can also focus on policy and legislative action aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of communities that have been marginalized by racial injustice (like redlining).

The Pittsburgh Crafting Democratic Futures Project is committed to forging a reparations agenda for African Americans in the city of Pittsburgh (and other selected parts of Western Pennsylvania). Please offer your ideas for Reparations in the context of the following models.

## ***Specific claims for material reparation.***

In the late 1950s the City of Pittsburgh under the Urban Redevelopment Authority evoked eminent domain and razed 1,300 buildings that had once been part of a thriving Black Hill District community. The area eventually became part of the Penguins Civic Area. One of the buildings destroyed during the urban renewal was the historic Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church formed in 1808. After a series of negotiations with new owners of the Pittsburgh Penguins, Bishop Errenous McLoud Jr. announced an agreement with the team to provide compensation and a 1.5-acre parcel land for development of housing and other revenue-generating development. During a news conference announcing the agreement, Bishop McLoud said that this accord "could and should become a model for reparations all over the world."

## ***Local claims for reparations can refer to cities, municipalities and neighborhoods within them.***

When Robin Rue Simmons was a Ward Alderman for the City of Evanston, IL, she led the passage of the nation's first municipally-funded reparations legislation for Black residents, which began disbursements in January 2022. As a real estate agent, she came to see the disparities created by the segregation of Black areas and saw the need to address that through some kind of city-sponsored home ownership and home improvement program. Today the City uses the first 10 million



dollars of tax revenues from the legal sale of cannabis to offer grants of 25K to residents in the distressed sections of the Evanston. While it is an ongoing and developing program, it is also being used, under the project title of FirstRepair, as an example for other cities across the nation.

### **State-wide claims for Reparations**

In the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd in 2020, California commissioned a “Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans.” For two years it worked on a document that details the kinds of racial injustices endured by California’s Black population in spite of the fact that California was not a slave state. California practiced many of the prejudices and policies that put this minority in a disadvantage with regard to housing, education, health, income. The Report stands out for its detailed economic analysis and the fact that there exists a wealth gap between Blacks and Whites. For example, the median net worth of White households is 10 times that of Black households in the bottom 20% of the income distribution.

Some of the Task Force’s proposals are familiar: greater investments in schools, health care, housing, job training and businesses in Black communities; improving access to higher education; advancing voting rights; and reforms in policing and public safety. More controversial are proposed direct payments to residents who can document a family history that goes back to an enslaved person.

To those who ask why they should be liable for racial injustices that they did not take part in, California Secretary of State Shirley Weber says you “may not have planted the tree, but you surely enjoy the shade.”

In Pennsylvania, State Representative Chris Rabb will propose a bill that would establish a state-level reparations plan for Pennsylvania residents of African descent. The bill would contain an opt-in entitlement program that reaches beyond the damage inflicted during the formal era of slavery — it would also include retribution for those who have suffered from past and current state laws, court decisions and government practices that have systematically disadvantaged African Americans.

### **National claims for Reparations**

In *From Here to Equality*, William Darity, Jr and A Kirsten Mullen lay out the most comprehensive argument for Black Reparations in the 21st Century. They focus on the documented wealth gap between Black and White America and the sources for such a gap. Wealth as an economic indicator gathers in one place all the challenges that Black individuals and families face.

In order for a real Reparations project take place, that gap must be identified and healed. Only the national government has the means to take this on (as it does in times of war or during pandemics). It will require direct payments to documented decedents of enslaved Africans and the price tag will be daunting i.e. around 14 trillion dollars.

An Administrative Agency under the supervision of an Advisory Board will be required and benchmarks established to ensure that the program is achieving its goals. The Reparations program could be delivered over several phases: some with direct compensation and some with the delivery of programs to address specific harms.

# Objections and Responses

Not surprisingly, discussions of reparations involve objections and responses. Below are some typical objections and sample responses. The list of objections is not exhaustive nor are the responses necessarily conclusive.

## **Slavery was a blight upon our society, but it was a long time ago.**

For many Afro-Americans, slavery is a living part of their family tree. Many know or know of families whose great-grandparents could tell stories related to them of relatives who lived through the slave era. And this is certainly true of the post-reconstruction era. Beyond that, many Blacks have vivid memories of the Jim Crow era, of “Green books” mapping safe areas to travel during the 40s, 50s and early 1960s and more.

## **Didn't America already pay its debt for slavery in blood by waging the Civil War, which resulted in emancipation?**

Reparation for a serious injustice does not simply happen when the unjust practice is ended. It requires some sort of payment or compensation for the damage done. To follow an analogy from Malcolm X, if you stick a knife into someone, simply pulling the knife out is not sufficient. You have to heal the wound as well.

## **Black reparations will unfairly ignore the parallel blight of whites who live in poverty.**

Poverty in the United States unequivocally merits renewed and concentrated attention through the many programs aimed at alleviating the conditions of poverty for all its citizens. But there are critical differences in the historical specificity of the circumstances that have produced each community and key differences in the substance of the status of each community. Only Black American descendants of persons enslaved in the United states have a claim to the debt that was never paid to their ancestors upon emancipation.

## **Regardless there is no way to pay enough to compensate for the evil of slavery.**

Frederick Douglass would have agreed that it is unlikely that there is anything that could be done that would mitigate the harms inflicted on Blacks by enslavement. Nevertheless he argued that America should do as much as possible. The fact that full amends cannot be made for a grievous injustice does not mean that significant recompense should not be made.

“...even if there were never a payout in hard cash, putting a price tag on injustice was a worthy exercise that forced an examination of history ...If provocative dollar amounts caused Americans to consider the scope of the country's moral obligation to Black people... that might lead to a more productive conversation about other ways to meet that debt.” The Rev. Al Sharpton, NYT

## Questions

- What are the most important examples of inequality that might warrant Reparations in the Pittsburgh region?
- What are the principal forms (models) that you believe Reparations should take?
- Who should receive compensation—individuals, families, neighborhoods, communities, specific groups (occupational, other)?
- Who should be the target of Reparations requests—government, private industry, financial institutions, philanthropic organizations, nonprofits, families, others?
- In your view, how would you frame the issue of Reparations?

# Areas to Consider and Connect for Reparative Justice

In an important way, a discussion of Reparations allows us to frame the issue in terms of a wholistic approach to racial injustice and economic disparities. It leads us to see the interconnectedness of education, health, jobs, housing, entrepreneurship, and the justice system.

As you deliberate on two or three of these areas, consider your own experiences as well as those in your community that you know. Imagine how some form of reparations, policy or local funding might address concerns that you and your group may have.

It is important to remember that The Pittsburgh Crafting Democratic Futures Project is committed to forging a reparations agenda for African Americans in the city of Pittsburgh (and other selected parts of Western Pennsylvania). Please offer your ideas for Reparations in the context of the following areas.

## Education

Income, home ownership, car ownership, health outcomes- including maternal mortality and COVID deaths, the impact of the criminal justice system as well as average educational attainment all provide evidence of inequality in Pittsburgh and throughout the nation. *All of these areas impact or are impacted by the quality of public education and/or systemic racism. They are entwined.*

In K-12 education, money is essential but not *sufficient* to ensure that Black students get the education that can change the trajectory of a family. The more important consideration is not equality in schools and between schools, it is equity.

The solution is to provide children more time to learn and ensure that each child receives effective teaching and other support which is holistic in its approach. The City of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh Public Schools, non-profits, and community members and groups can work together to weave a safety net for students.

Evidence supports the need for Black students to see and learn from Black teachers. Even the presence of one Black teacher in the school makes a difference. Finally, there is a long-standing tradition of homeschooling within the Black community that has gained widespread attention, in part because of the recent attempts to ban certain Afro-American histories from being taught. When Black parents teach their children at home, they should be offered support in any forthcoming reparations package.

## Health

There are political and social detriments to health and well-being in the Black community that are broad and historical in nature. Health gaps are tied to wealth gaps, but even well off Blacks face toxic stress from racism and Black women suffer higher birth mortality rates.

The lack of good paying jobs leads to lack of healthcare which in turn conceals 'silent killers' like high blood pressure and diabetes. Suspicion of the health care system and lack of Black doctors and healthcare professionals add to the problem.

We need to take a holistic, community based approach to health care in Black communities. There is also a tradition of self-help health initiatives within the Black community e.g. Barber shops played a key role in getting people vaccinated during COVID.

## **Jobs**

The labor market remained strong overall in the first quarter of 2023, with relatively low unemployment rates for all groups and the lowest Black unemployment rate on record in March 2023 at 5%. However, we cannot conflate "better than normal" with "acceptable." Steep inequities persist in the labor market: Black workers continue to experience unemployment at twice the rate of white workers. The majority of Blacks generally have lower pay with fewer benefits like health care and retirement funds. Furthermore, when the numbers of Blacks include those who are incarcerated, the unemployment rate is still high.

## **Housing**

The legacy of housing discrimination has left many in the Black community without the generational wealth that home ownership can provide. Moreover, many black homeowners can lose their homes because they are unable to pay their property taxes and can fall into arrears with their utility bills. Many elderly Black homeowner don't have wills that can ensure that the property will be passed on – and many fall prey to "home buying" schemes.

African Americans on average also have lower credit scores. The reason many borrowers start out behind on their credit scores has less to do with individual behavior and more to do with the limited financial resources of their family households.

Public housing has had both positive and negative effects and the issue has been made more challenging by the homeless crisis. We must invest in programs that create positive outcomes for both individuals and communities.

Efforts on the part of local government and area banks must focus on housing and the prevention of both blighted communities that lower the value of housing and gentrification that increases the cost of housing.

## **Entrepreneurship**

During the era of segregation in the 40s and 50s a large number of Black businesses flourished by providing safe-havens for African Americans traveling around the country, A special Green Book listed many of these hotels, restaurants, gas stations and even resorts. With the end of segregation in the 60s, many no longer served their original purpose, but this period highlights a long-standing tradition of entrepreneurial spirit in the Black Community. Ongoing support of this tradition is important to continue.

## The Justice System

Public Safety—The presence of crime and quality of life issues are paramount in all communities, especially in communities of color. Everyone wants a safe space to live, to work, to raise families, to thrive. Partnerships between police and residents are also paramount in creating safe and stable neighborhoods and in preventing crime. These partnerships in turn depend on mutual trust and respect, something that is often strained in Black and brown communities. To succeed in this, we need more minority representation among the rank and file.

Officers who know and respect communities, who stop at neighborhood gatherings, who drop in at community meetings, provide opportunities for residents to know them and they to know residents. There is an opportunity for communication about problems in the neighborhood, a chance to share in the resolution of those problems, including coordination with local violence interrupter groups and a new recognition of the role that mental health issues play in lives of some of our neighbors. There is a tradition of self-help in Black communities and self-policing that can be brought into alignment with new models of public safety.

Squatters in abandoned houses, irresponsible landlords, the presence of apparent drug activity, the disruption of after-hours clubs and gun violence are just a few of the concerns that need be addressed when residents and police work in trust and cooperation. This is a main concern of Pittsburgh's new Police Chief, Larry Sciroto ("Every Officer is a Community Policing Officer.")

Criminal justice system – Here solutions include connecting local and national reparations approaches through the school-prison pipeline, including the inability to earn an income for Social Security while in jail. We need better job preparation integrated into release programs, removing the stigma of incarceration by removing the 'check box' for minor infractions during job interviews and providing mentoring during the transition back into the community.

## Appendix: A National Apology

In 2009 under the Obama Administration, the US House of Representatives and the Senate unanimously passed an apology for slavery. Preceding the formal statement, a number of conditions were listed, including

Whereas after emancipation from 246 years of slavery, African-Americans soon saw the fleeting political, social, and economic gains they made during Reconstruction eviscerated by virulent racism, lynchings, disenfranchisement, Black Codes, and racial segregation laws that imposed a rigid system of officially sanctioned racial segregation in virtually all areas of life;

Whereas African-Americans continue to suffer from the complex interplay between slavery and Jim Crow—long after both systems were formally abolished—through enormous damage and loss, both tangible and intangible, including the loss of human dignity, the frustration of careers and professional lives, and the long-term loss of income and opportunity;

Whereas a genuine apology is an important and necessary first step in the process of racial reconciliation;

With this as a background, the text of the apology reads: “That the House of Representatives— (1) acknowledges that slavery is incompatible with the basic founding principles recognized in the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal; (2) acknowledges the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity of slavery and Jim Crow; (3) apologizes to African Americans on behalf of the people of the United States, for the wrongs committed against them and their ancestors who suffered under slavery and Jim Crow; and (4) expresses its commitment to rectify the lingering consequences of the misdeeds committed against African Americans under slavery and Jim Crow and to stop the occurrence of human rights violations in the future.”

# Acknowledgements

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Drew Smith, Professor of Urban Ministry, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and Urban Institute

Ralph Bangs, Public Policy Researcher, Analyst and former Associate Director of the Center on Race and Social Problems, School of Social Work, University of Pittsburgh

Linda Lane, Former Superintendent of Pittsburgh Public Schools

And a special recognition for the presenters and authors of the groundbreaking book on Reparations: *From Here to Equality* —

William A. Darity, Jr., Samuel DuBois Cook Professor of Public Policy, African and African American Studies, and Economics; and Director of the S. D. Cook Center on Social Equity at Duke University.

Kirsten Mullen, Folklorist and founder of Artefactual, an arts-consulting firm; and faculty member of the Community Folklife Documentation Institute

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