

Crafting Our Democratic Futures: The Issue of Reparations

A Deliberative Forum

Report Summary by Robert Cavalier, Director

Carnegie Mellon's Program for Deliberative Democracy



Crafting Our Democratic Futures is a National Effort aimed at addressing the issue of Reparations. It is funded by the Mellon Foundation and led locally by Carnegie Mellon's Professor Joe William Trotter, Jr. Giant Eagle University Professor of History and Social Justice.

On September 23rd, 2023 Carnegie Mellon University's Program in Deliberative Democracy ran a "Deliberative Forum on the Issue of Reparations" for the Pittsburgh Crafting Democratic Futures Project. The forum, hosted by the Kingsley Association, brought together a cross-section of the Pittsburgh Black community for a civil and informed discussion of redress for past and continuing forms of racial inequality in the city and county. The event included 46 people (six participants at six different tables, a moderator at each table, a panel of three experts and a panel moderator). The questions for discussion were based partly on questions previously developed during two CDF weekend retreats in May and June, 2023.

In order to help frame the discussion and enhance the value of the results, participants received background information on the reparations issue. This included a 16-page Discussion Guide that was developed ahead of the forum. The booklet contains a section on the deliberative process, a preface and outline, sections on the historical and factual background for the issue, models of reparations (specific, local, state, and national), a set of objections and replies, and finally specific areas to consider for restorative justice (education, housing, healthcare, entrepreneurship, jobs, and the justice system). We developed quantitative and qualitative questions that sought to ascertain participants' opinions on the goals and objectives outlined in the background document. These questions came directly from the questions and issues posed during two separate CDF project Retreats in May and June.

The first set of questions revolved around the General Issue of Reparations, namely, "What are the most important examples of inequality that warrant Reparations in the Pittsburgh region?" There were three check box questions that were used to gauge the level of support for each category within the question. The results [N=32] of the quantitative questions are below and are

interspersed with salient comments from the results of the qualitative questions.

The first check box question read: How do you view the various models for Reparations? (Specific Claims, Local Claims, State-wide Claims, National Claims)

	Specific Claims	Local Claims	State-wide Claims	National Claims
Very Important	59%	53%	47%	47%
Important	13%	22%	25%	28%
Moderately Important	6%	6%	9%	13%
Slightly Important	16%	3%	6%	0%
Not Important	0%	3%	3%	0%
Not Sure	6%	13%	9%	13%

It is typical of all responses that a strong majority of all participants rated the general field of Reparations as Important or Very Important. Here specific documented claims like that of the Bethel AME Church in Pittsburgh (72%) and local claims relating to cities like Pittsburgh or counties like Allegheny (75%) received the highest percentages. State-wide and national claims also had large majorities, but less so in the Very Important category.

The second check box question concerns remuneration: What are the primary forms that you believe reparations should take?

Cash or grants to ‘make right’ past harms (slavery, Jim Crow)	56%	16%	13%	6%	3%	6%
Cash or grants to ‘make right’ present conditions (economic inequalities)	56%	19%	6%	0%	6%	13%

Reimbursement for individual, documented loss of land or livelihood	44%	28%	13%	3%	6%	6%
General, wholistic policies that recognize the interconnectedness of jobs, housing, healthcare, prison reform, etc.	59%	16%	16%	0%	3%	6%

Using the same criteria for assessment (Very Important, Important, etc.) we again see strong majorities across the board. However, the questions in the first two columns conflated two approaches (cash or grants). We will need to unpack that in the future.

Direct Cash Payments

There is considerable disagreement over the use of direct cash payments including disagreement over who would be eligible, how that would be determined, how much money would be involved and where the money would come from. A new problem for those who have thought through the details of authentication (State and National) is the rise of AI enabled deep-fake technology.

The first two options refer to *the distribution of cash reparations* along the lines of *past harms* and *present conditions*. Note that a larger poll with a random sample base of 1,012 found that “cash payments in the form of reparations” was supported by 59% of Black Americans but opposed by 79% of White Americans. Even in our sample, almost 10% questioned the need for reparations (“As an African American I'm 20 years old and I have watched my people struggle and rise up. I don't think we need handouts for events that are in the past”).

Be that as it may, the struggle for Reparations on moral grounds will continue. The issue has become an important feature of today’s civil rights struggle. As one participant put it: “It will take a long time but that is no reason to give up or not put on the work - we have waited this long.”

Direct Grants

The first two options also speak of *grants* (supposedly direct grants). This model has been adopted by the City of Evanston, Illinois for the purpose of providing *support for home purchase or home improvement* (hence increasing the equity value of the home). According to that city’s Reparations Committee, grants of \$25,000 from their Restorative Housing Program “will be prioritized for Ancestors – defined as an African American or Black individual, at least 18 years old at the time, who was an Evanston resident between 1919 and 1969.”

The third check box question reads “Who should receive compensation?”

Families	53%	16%	6%	6%	3%	16%
Neighborhoods	50%	31%	9%	0%	3%	6%
Communities	53%	25%	13%	0%	3%	6%
Specific Groups (occupational, other)	22%	28%	13%	3%	0%	34%

One participant felt that community was commonly used by Blacks and neighborhood by Whites. But it could be argued, as it was in a NYT Op Ed, that “To really change things, you have to lift up and integrate whole communities. That’s because it takes a whole community to raise a child, to support an adult, to have a bustling local economy and a vibrant civic life. The neighborhood is the unit of change.” Here both terms are interchangeable.

Another main segment of the Forum dealt with areas of focus as targets of reparations. The two main Retreats identified these areas and discussed them in detail. We used the same categories in the format for the final quantitative question, *vis., Jobs, Housing, Entrepreneurship, Education, Health Care, Law and Justice.*

The question for the participants focused on prioritizing the areas to be targeted for reparations.

Health Care	14 Overall
Education	13 (10 ranked it as top choice)
Housing	13 Overall
Jobs	5
Law and Justice	5
Entrepreneurship	3

A comment field allowed for other options and clarifications. For example, one participant wrote: “They are all important and interconnected in the Black Community”

These priorities can be brought to the table when seeking city and county engagement with this issue.

A final check box question asked participants *to assess the process*. Responses were weighed as Very Successful, Successful, Moderately Successful, Slightly Successful, Not Successful, and Not Sure.

Give you a better understanding of the issue?	25%	22%	34%	3%	13%	3%
Cause you to consider points of view that you had not previously ?	38%	22%	19%	9%	6%	6%
Make you feel comfortable expressing your opinion?	34%	28%	19%	6%	6%	6%
Allow you to share stories and experiences with residents from other parts of the city?	38%	34%	13%	9%	0%	6%

Make you more likely to become engaged with this issue?	38%	22%	28%	6%	3%	3%
--	-----	-----	-----	----	----	----

Reading from left to right, the majority of participants felt that the event was either successful or very successful. A separate document reviewed the process in more detail and made recommendations for future events.

Concluding Comments

We established that the public can carry on an informed conversation about this divisive topic in a civil manner and can identify issues of relevance to addressing the problems caused by the institutional and generational challenges faced by a significant number of Afro-Americans and their community. Moreover, specific issues have been identified for future deliberative forums in the Pittsburgh area.

Finally, a new report from the National League of Cities entitled “Municipal Strategies to Narrow the Racial Wealth Divide” presents a detailed roadmap for achieving many of the goals of a Reparations project. The Report has two main sections: 1. *Principles of An Effective Municipal Racial Wealth Divide Strategy* and 2. *City Strategies to Narrow the Racial Wealth Divide*.

There are six principles and five strategies discussed. They are clear and well grounded in practice or proposed practice. For example, a section of Principle 2 emphasizes the importance of citizen engagement in identifying problems and proposing solutions. It is similar to the Deliberative Forum model:

"Again, and again, history has shown that decisions made without representation from communities of color have led to inequitable policies and practices that have fueled the racial wealth divide. City leaders and administrators can change that – and must change that – by actively and intentionally engaging BIPOC community members and leaders. Specifically, BIPOC residents must be engaged in each step along the way in creating a municipal policy or practice. This means before identifying a problem, drafting a potential policy to address it, and then seeking

input from the residents impacted by the problem, city staff must understand that people of color living in the impacted community have the best understanding about the community's strengths and challenges. And those same residents have the most relevant ideas about how best to address the community's priorities."

Along with the report from National League of Cities, it is important to review the "Prosperity Initiative Report" developed for the Tucson AZ area. Just as the NLC booklet provides critical Principles and Strategies for approaching the many aspects of the wealth gap and related challenges, the Tucson area's municipal memorandum provides a precise template for filling in the details. From the Introduction:

"The result is a robust set of 13 policies in the areas of housing, health, education, transportation, workforce development, job quality, small business, financial capability, neighborhood reinvestment, and digital connectivity. While it is up to each local governing body to determine which policies are most applicable to their communities, I am recommending that the Board of Supervisors adopt all 13 policies by way of a new Board policy titled *Reducing Generational Poverty and Improving Individual and Community Wealth.*"

It is recommended that these documents be consulted in any thoroughgoing effort at addressing the issue of Reparations.