

What are Reparations and Should We Enact Them?

Compelling Question: What impact would reparations for slavery have on individuals and society?

Grade Level		Time	Standards/Competencies
K-2	3-5	90 Minutes	Common Core Anchor: Reading: R1, R2, R3 Writing: W2, W7, W8 Speaking & Listening: SL1, SL2, SL3, SL4 Language: L3, L4, L6 SEL: Social Awareness Responsible Decision-Making
MS	11-12		



Web Related Connections

Lessons

- [Black Lives Matter: From Hashtag to Movement](#)
- [Confederate Monuments and Their Removal](#)
- [Experiences with Race and Racism](#)
- [Noose Incidents and Their Historical Context](#)
- [The Alt Right and White Supremacy](#)
- [What is the School-to-Prison Pipeline?](#)

Other Resources

- [How Should I Talk about Race in My Mostly White Classroom?](#)
- [Race Talk: Engaging Young People in Conversations about Race and Racism](#)
- [Teaching about Elections](#)

Key Words

- apartheid
- capitalist
- commandeered
- compensation
- descendants
- endorsement
- grapple
- hierarchy
- institutional racism

LESSON OVERVIEW

In September 2020, California passed a bill to establish a task force to study and make recommendations on slavery reparations. The bill (AB 3121) is the first of its kind in any state. While California is the first state to pass such legislation, the issue of reparations has a long history in the United States. Since 1989, federal legislation has been introduced many times, including H.R. 40, the “Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act.” H.R. 40 proposes to study reparations and recommend appropriate remedies. It has been introduced in Congress several times but has never made it out of Committee. Reparations was addressed during the 2020 Presidential Democratic primary, with several candidates endorsing federal studies of reparations or acknowledging the importance of the issue.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn more about the history and rationale for reparations and reflect on their own point of view as well as consider the opinions of others.

[Note to Teacher: There are parts of this lesson plan in which prior knowledge about a range of topics would be helpful. Therefore, please read the lesson in advance and determine if prior knowledge is important for the class and adjust accordingly.]

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will define and describe reparations.
- Students will learn about the rationale for reparations for slavery and its historical context.
- Students will reflect on their own and others’ opinions about reparations and express their views verbally and in writing.

MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- “Ta-Nehisi Coates’ full opening statement on reparations at House hearing” YouTube video (2019, 5:15 min., PBS NewsHour, www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcCnQ3iRkys)
- (Optional) “Ta-Nehisi Coates describes continuing effects of slavery in reparations hearing” YouTube video (2019, 2:34 min., PBS NewsHour, www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIGvMLYP7RQ)

- Addressing America's Legacy of Slavery: The Question of Reparations (one copy for each student)

PROCEDURES

Defining and Describing Reparations

1. Begin the lesson by asking students: *Have you heard the term "reparations?" What does it mean? What do you think reparations has to do with the word "repair?"*
2. Have students work in pairs to come up with words, phrases and ideas connected with the concept of reparations. If you allow devices in your classroom, allow students to access online dictionaries and search engines.

Alternative: Have students conduct this search the night before for homework.
3. Have students write their words, phrases and ideas on post-it notes or use [Mentimeter](#) or another word cloud tool to share their responses. Read aloud all the responses.
4. Add some or all of the following words, phrases and ideas if not already shared; explain that these phrases and concepts are from dictionary definitions, journalists and scholars:
 - "An attempt to reconcile with the past between communities where one has suffered at the hands of the other." (Noah Millman, journalist)
 - "The making of amends for a wrong one has done, by paying money to or otherwise helping those who have been wronged." (*Oxford Dictionary*)
 - "A commitment to never repeat the injustice again." (L. Joy Williams, President NAACP, Brooklyn chapter)
 - "Spiritual repair, cultural repair, repair through the means of education, health, economics, society. ... helping to build institutions so that at least African Americans can catch up with white Americans." (Reverend Mark Thompson, member of the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America)
 - "A comprehensive reparations program must include three elements: acknowledgement, restitution, and closure." (Professor William A. Darity, Duke University professor of Public Policy and African and African American Studies)
 - "A full-hearted recognition that a wrong was committed, that something happened that should not have happened — and more than that, it's an apology that feels more sincere because you're attaching something tangible to it, because words are very cheap." (Coleman Hughes, freelance opinion journalist)
 - "The act of making amends, offering expiation, or giving satisfaction for a wrong or injury." (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*)
 - "A tool and an opportunity for us to recover a kind of history ... but to not relegate it only to history but make it part of our national memory." (Katherine Franke, Columbia University professor)
 - "The full acceptance of our collective biography and its consequence." (Reniqua Allen, journalist)
5. Ask students: *What patterns, common themes and differences do you see in these words, phrases and ideas? What do you think are the most important elements of reparations? How would you define reparations?*
6. Explain that most descriptions of reparations typically include three objectives: (1) an acknowledgement and recognition of the wrong that was committed, (2) the restoration of something lost or stolen, a remedy that directly and tangibly addresses the wrong done and (3) an element of closure which includes a full acceptance of the truth of the wrong and commitment to not repeat it.

Key Words (cont.)

legacy
lynching
Jim Crow
mass incarceration
oppression
precedent
redistribute
revitalize
segregation
sharecropping
trauma
underpinning
vestiges
wealth
white supremacy

7. Explain that reparations can be made in the form of individual monetary payments to victims or descendants of the atrocity, settlements, scholarships, waiving of fees, and systemic initiatives to offset injustices, land-based compensation related to independence. Whatever specific financial form reparations take, they can also be paired with apologies and acknowledgments of the injustices committed.



Information Sharing

1. Ask students: *Have you heard anything about reparations in the news lately?*
2. Share the following information:
 - In September 2020, California passed a bill to establish a task force to study and make recommendations on reparations for slavery. Bill AB 3121 is the first of its kind in any state. California Governor Gavin Newsom stated,

"As a nation, we can only truly thrive when every one of us has the opportunity to thrive. Our painful history of slavery has evolved into structural racism and bias built into and permeating throughout our democratic and economic institutions."
 - In July 2020, the city of Asheville, North Carolina, voted unanimously to approve a reparations resolution for Black residents. In the same month, the mayor of Providence, Rhode Island, signed an executive order to pursue "truth, reconciliation and municipal reparations" for Black Americans, Indigenous people and people of color in the city.
 - Federal legislation has been introduced many times since 1989, including H.R. 40, the "Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act." H.R. 40 proposes to study reparations and recommend appropriate remedies; it has been introduced in Congress several times but has never made it out of Committee.



Video Viewing

1. Explain that in 2014, Ta-Nehisi Coates, author and journalist, wrote an important article in *The Atlantic*, "The Case for Reparations," which re-invigorated the topic of reparations for slavery. In 2019, he testified before a House committee about H.R. 40 and reparations.
2. Show this 5-minute clip of his testimony, "[Ta-Nehisi Coates' full opening statement on reparations at House hearing.](#)" Have students take notes on important facts, quotes, thoughts and ideas.

Note: The material in this video is complex and intellectually dense. Preview the video so you can choose where to stop it periodically and ask students basic comprehension questions as a check for understanding.]
3. After watching, engage students in a brief discussion by asking the following questions:
 - What is Coates saying?
 - What quotes stand out for you?
 - What does he mean when he says the dilemma of reparations is "a dilemma of inheritance?"
 - What important facts, evidence, or information does he provide to make his case for reparations?
 - How does Coates connect the atrocities of slavery with current day violence, disparities and inequities faced by Black people in the U.S.?
 - How does Coates define reparations?



Reading Activity

1. Distribute a copy of "[Addressing America's Legacy of Slavery: The Question of Reparations](#)" to each student and give them 20–30 minutes to read silently or read aloud as a class.

Note: If the reading is too long for a class period, here are some alternative reading strategies:

 - a. Assign it as homework reading the evening before.

- b. Have students read a portion of the content and engage them in cooperative learning with the [jigsaw method](#). Create three groups using these sections of the material: (1) America’s Legacy and The Evolution of Slavery, (2) Calls for Slavery Reparations and (3) Today’s Conversation on Slavery Reparations. Have each group read their part, then create new groups of students, with at least three students who have each read a different section of the material in each group.
 - c. Have students read a shorter reading from the Additional Reading and Resources section and engage students in a discussion about it.
2. After reading, engage students in a discussion by asking some or all of the following questions:
 - As you read the piece, what thoughts and feelings came to mind?
 - From what you read, what did you already know? What did you learn that you didn’t know before?
 - Was there anything you learned that challenged your prior thinking about reparations? Please explain.
 - Why are reparations important? What’s challenging about reparations?
 - How would you define reparations now that you know more?
 - Do you think that studies of reparations should be legislated? Please explain your thinking. Does it matter whether the legislation is at the state or federal level?
 - What more do you want to know?
3. Ask students: *The system of enslaving Black people that was abolished through the 13th amendment has lasting consequences today. What do you think some of them are?*

As you brainstorm and capture their ideas, explain how the legacy of enslavement of Black people in the U.S. connects to current day manifestations of racism and white supremacy. This includes attitudes and beliefs about Black people and disparities and inequities in violence, income, wealth, education, housing, criminal justice, etc.
4. If time permits, watch this short video where [Ta-Nehisi Coates describes continuing effects of slavery in the reparations hearing](#).

Philosophical Chairs Activity

1. Engage students in a discussion about their opinions on whether the U.S. should consider reparations using a Philosophical Chairs process which supports respectful dialogue and critical thinking around controversial topics.

Note: Before starting, remind students about class guidelines for respectful dialogue and get agreement on abiding by them. If you haven’t already established guidelines, you can use ADL’s [Establishing a Safe Learning Environment](#).

If this is your first time using Philosophical Chairs or a similar process, practice with a topic that is somewhat controversial but less challenging (e.g., dress codes). Given the sensitivity of this topic, decide whether your students can follow guidelines for respectful dialogue and engage with an appropriate level of seriousness.

To learn more about Philosophical Chairs, see [A Framework for Whole-Class Discussions](#).
2. Set up Philosophical Chairs as follows:
 - a. Present this statement to the class to consider: “The United States should implement a slavery reparations program.”
 - b. Explain to students that they should consider everything they know or have learned about reparations from the learning materials in this lesson (background reading, videos, definitions/descriptions of reparations). Then, give them three minutes to write their thoughts, ideas and facts about the statement.
 - c. Have students take a position on the statement: Agree, Disagree or Undecided. Then, designate a part of the room for each position and have students move to the part of the room that aligns with their position.

- d. Call on students (alternating among students who agree, disagree and are undecided) and have them share their ideas and positions on the topic. Continue this process for 10–15 minutes to ensure many positions are heard and interest remains high.
 - e. Provide additional time for students to ask questions of each other about their positions, provided that questions remain respectful and dialogue for understanding is prioritized over debate.
3. After the Philosophical Chairs activity, have students write a reflection essay that includes: (1) the comment they heard that most challenged their thinking, (2) the extent to which the dialogue changed their mind or not, and (3) an honest assessment of how open-minded they were to considering other points of view at the start of the conversation. If time permits, have students share their essays with the class.
 4. Reconvene students and engage them in a discussion by asking some or all of the following questions:
 - What was that discussion process like for you?
 - Was it easy or difficult to decide which position to take? Please explain.
 - Was it easy or difficult to hear the positions that differed from your own? Please explain.
 - How open-minded were you at the start of the conversation? Did that change throughout the discussion?
 - To what extent did you shift your thinking or change your position?

Closing

Have students share how they would now define or describe reparations based on everything they have learned.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Below are optional additional classroom activities to build upon and extend the lesson plan.

Reading

- Have students read Ta-Nehesi Coates' essay, "[The Case for Reparations](#)," published in *The Atlantic*. Engage in classroom discussions about the essay and have students write reflection essays about it.
- Have students read opinion pieces about reparations with different points of view; have them compare and contrast those viewpoints.

Research

- Have students study the history and content of proposed legislation (city, state and federal) about reparations for slavery. Then have them create their own bills that include what they think should be the focus and specific elements of a reparations program.
- Have students conduct additional research about different aspects of slavery reparations (e.g., definition, history, slavery legacy and its impact) discussed in the lesson. Have them present their research in the form of a video, essay or digital slide presentation.
- Have students learn more about the legacy of enslavement and its impact on Black Americans, including digging deeper into some of the statistics cited in the reading about education, criminal justice, wealth and housing discrimination.

Writing

Have students write and deliver a speech that expresses their views about reparations for slavery. The speech can be positioned as if students are testifying at a local, state, or federal hearing about whether reparations for slavery should be implemented.

Activism

Have students organize a teach-in at school or create content for social media to educate their community about reparations for slavery.

ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- [“1 in 5 supports reparations in new poll”](#) (*The Hill*, June 25, 2020)
- [“A Roadmap for Reparations in Education”](#) (Education Week, October 15, 2020)
- [“America Has Tried Reparations Before. Here Is How It Went.”](#) (*The New York Times*, June 19, 2019)
- [California was a free state, but there was still slavery; reparations are on the table](#) (Newsela, October 6, 2020—note requires Newsela free account)
- [“How Reparations for Slavery Became a 2020 Campaign Issue”](#) (*The New York Times*, June 28, 2020)
- [H.R.40 - Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act](#) (Congress.Gov)
- [“North Carolina City Approves Reparations for Black Residents”](#) (*The New York Times*, July 16, 2020)
- [“Reparations bill wins new momentum in Congress”](#) (*The Hill*, April 4, 2019)
- [“Reparations for slavery to get a hearing in Congress”](#) (*The Guardian*, June 13, 2019)
- [“Six times victims have received reparations — including four in the US”](#) (Vox, May 23, 2014)
- [“Teaching Hard History: American Slavery--Classroom Videos”](#) (Teaching Tolerance)
- [“The Case for Reparations”](#) (*The Atlantic*, June 2014)
- [“The Thorny History of Reparations in the United States”](#) (History, August 29, 2019)
- [“What Do 2020 Candidates Mean When They Say ‘Reparations?’”](#) (*The Atlantic*, June 5, 2019)
- [“What is Owed”](#) (*The New York Times*, June 30, 2020)
- [“What Reparations for Slavery Might Look Like in 2019”](#) (*The New York Times*, May 23, 2019)

Common Core Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
R2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
R3: Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
Writing
W2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
W7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
W8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
Speaking and Listening
SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
SL2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
SL3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
SL4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
Language
L3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.
L6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

CASEL's SEL Competencies

COMPETENCIES

Self-Awareness: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.

Responsible Decision-Making: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.

Addressing America’s Legacy of Slavery: The Question of Reparations

Adapted from ADL’s Civil Rights Policy Backgrounder on Reparations

AMERICA’S LEGACY AND THE EVOLUTION OF SLAVERY

Slavery existed in British North America and, subsequently, the United States from 1619 through 1865. Enslaved Africans and many generations of their descendants were held in bondage in the U.S. under violent, inhumane, and brutal conditions. Racism—and eventually a full-fledged ideology of white supremacy—were used to perpetuate and defend slavery and the hierarchy in wealth and opportunity that was created as a result. White supremacy is a product and legacy of slavery.

Impact and Legacy of Enslavement

With the passage of the 13th Amendment in 1865, involuntary servitude and forced labor were prohibited in the U.S. However, the legacy of slavery and the ideology of white supremacy continues to persist after slavery’s end, causing great harm to generations more of Black people. Jim Crow, which were state and local laws enacted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that legalized and enforced racial segregation, established segregation and treated Black people as second-class citizens. Lynching and various forms of racial oppression and terrorism plagued communities and fueled the mass migration of millions of African American people from the South to the North and West. Outside the South, from the 1930s through the 1960s, Black people were largely cut off from the housing market through redlining (housing discrimination), restrictive covenants (restrictions on land use), bombings, and other means, both legal and illegal. Housing discrimination, coupled with discrimination in education and employment, created disproportionate obstacles to advancement in U.S. society.

In addition, often law enforcement not only failed to protect Black communities from violence and oppression but sanctioned and took part in such violence. The trauma suffered by African American people was compounded by institutional inequality and continued marginalization in the North and West, creating continued and long-term generational poverty.

Over 150 years after slavery ended, the remnants of U.S. enslavement remain. Arguably, there is a significant lack of understanding in our society of enslavement and its lasting destructive impacts, including the racial hierarchy that it perpetuated. Nor has much been done to address the continued legacy of slavery. According to a recent report by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), only eight percent of U.S. high school seniors know that the Civil War occurred because of slavery and some textbooks have even softened language surrounding the issue.

Criminal Justice and Mass Incarceration

Mass incarceration in the U.S. continues to have a disproportionate and devastating impact on Black people and other communities of color. While approximately 30% of people in the U.S. are Black or Latinx, almost sixty percent of inmates are. About one in every 15 Black males age 18 or older is incarcerated, compared with one in 106 white males. Exacerbated by the “War on Drugs” begun in the 1980s, the U.S. incarcerates a higher percentage of Black men than South Africa did during the height of apartheid. If current trends continue, one in three African American male babies born today will spend some of their lives behind bars.

Studies show that crime rates do not account for the racial disparities in the criminal justice system. Rather, laws that punish particular behaviors more than others, as well as systemic racism that undergirds policies and practices, all contribute. For example, research confirms that white people are just as likely to use drugs as Black people—and are as likely or even more likely to deal drugs—but police are twice as likely to arrest Black people for drug crimes compared to white people. In some states, African American men are serving time for drug-related charges at a rate that is twenty to fifty times higher than rates for white men.

Income and Wealth Disparities

Wealth in the U.S. continues to be unequally distributed by race, which is another effect of slavery. Black families generally have a fraction of the wealth of white families, leaving them with fewer opportunities for upward mobility. Black children are far more likely to live in households that are low-income, poor, food-insecure, or receiving public benefits than white children.

It is also noteworthy that white households, on average, are worth nearly 20 times more than Black households and that it would take 228 years for the average Black household to catch up. A recent report by two economists found a “robust and persistent relationship” between slavery and economic inequality between Black and White communities today. Their study found that U.S. counties that in the past exhibited a higher share of enslaved people in their population are still more unequal in the present day due in large part to a continuing gap in educational attainment between Black and White people.

Segregation and School Inequities

More than 60 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, schools in the U.S. remain separate and unequal. In an analysis of the 97,000 public schools in the United States several years ago, the Department of Education found a pattern of inequality on several fronts, with race as the key distinction. High schools with the highest percentage of Black and Latinx students have fewer course offerings associated with college preparation and access. Black and Latinx students are more likely than white students to attend schools with first year teachers and teachers who do not meet all the state teaching requirements. In addition, Black and Latinx students are underrepresented in Gifted and Talented Education Programs. Black students are three times more likely to be suspended or expelled than their white peers, pushed into the juvenile and criminal justice systems which has become known as the “school-to-prison pipeline.”

CALLS FOR SLAVERY REPARATIONS

Historically, compensation for those injured by the actions of government has happened, but rarely. Germany paid Holocaust survivors compensation as part of the 1952 Luxembourg Agreement and later. More recently, after years of lawsuits, the Canadian government announced a settlement with survivors of the “Sixties Scoop,” a 1960s program where thousands of Indigenous children were forcibly taken from their parents and given to white families. The Canadian government agreed to pay the children taken away approximately \$800 million in reparations. And in the U.S., “redress” was offered to 82,000 Japanese American people who were incarcerated during World War II. The Civil Liberties Act of 1988 included a presidential apology and \$20,000 to each living person who had been incarcerated. The law explicitly provided that compensation would only be provided to victims still alive and precluded reparations claims by the descendants of Black enslaved people and others.

Reparations for Enslavement

While the concept and meaning of reparations has evolved over time, the idea of providing acknowledgment, redress, and closure for the injustices of slavery is not a new concept. Union General William Sherman set precedent in January 1865 by carving 400,000 acres into 40-acre plots for freed Black men and offering to rent mules to them to work the land. However, less than three months after Sherman’s order, President Lincoln was assassinated, and President Johnson effectively rescinded the order and ordered that most of the confiscated land be returned to its former owners. The slogan “40 acres and a mule,” therefore, became synonymous with the federal government’s failure to redistribute land after the Civil War, denying freed enslaved people the opportunity to own their own small farms and forcing them to live under the system of sharecropping and resulting poverty. In 1969, James Forman, then head of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, commandeered the pulpit of Riverside Church in New York and proclaimed a “Black Manifesto.” The Manifesto demanded \$500 million in reparations from churches and synagogues for Black enslavement as “... part and parcel of the capitalist system.”

Decades later in 1989, the late Congressman John Conyers [D-MI13] introduced the first bill on the issue. The bill proposed a commission to “study and consider a national apology and proposal for reparations for the institution of slavery, its subsequent de jure and de facto racial and economic discrimination against African Americans, and the impact of these forces on living African Americans, [and] to make recommendations to the Congress on

appropriate remedies.” House Resolution 40, a reference to 40 acres and a mule, has been introduced every year since. HR40 never made it out of committee, but legislators have continued to try each year, using the Resolution as an opportunity for education and conversations about the relationship between historical discrimination and current day racial inequities.

TODAY’S CONVERSATIONS ON SLAVERY REPARATIONS

In recent years, the conversation about reparations for slavery has garnered new and revitalized attention. In 2014, Ta-Nehisi Coates famously made the cover of *The Atlantic* with his article, “[The Case for Reparations](#).” In this essay, Coates argues that the Black community has been prevented from building wealth or accumulating generational wealth because of the economic underpinnings of slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and federally backed housing policy. Coates focused the conversation over reparations on the need for our country to come to terms with the fact that the legacy of slavery has extended in our policies and institutions long after slavery was abolished. Coates called for passage of HR40 as a first step toward our society having more informed conversations about racism and the legacy of slavery. Coates’ piece generated wide attention, both praise and criticism.

In 2016, the Movement for Black Lives included a demand for reparations in its policy platform. Also in 2016, a [report](#) from the United Nations’ Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent concluded that slavery reparations are necessary for the U.S. to confront its legacy of “racial terrorism” and to combat racial injustices caused by hundreds of years of legalized racial discrimination. The report indicated that reparations could come in the form of direct compensation, educational opportunities, criminal justice reform legislation, psychological rehabilitation, debt cancellation, and formal apologies. The group also encouraged passage of HR40.

Colleges and Universities

In recent years, students at U.S. colleges and universities have urged that such institutions grapple not only with their historical ties to slavery but more specifically, the profits from slavery on which such institutions grew. The larger academic movement for reparations that existed for decades has recently grown transformed into a new wave of activism around racial inequality. At Georgetown University, for example, 272 enslaved people were sold in 1838 to pay university debts. Enslaved people continued to wash the clothes of white, wealthy students from landowning families until Emancipation. After the end of the Civil War, Black people continued to work on campus as servants, while the first Black undergraduate wasn’t admitted until 1950. In April 2019, Georgetown University’s student body voted overwhelmingly to authorize the creation of a fund to directly benefit the families of the 272 enslaved people that were owned and sold by Jesuit priests who operated Georgetown. The fund would be governed by a board of five descendants and five students that would allocate the funds collected from a fee (\$27.20) assessed each semester.

2020 Democratic Primary Candidates and Reparations

A July 2018 survey from Data for Progress found that only 26 percent of Americans supported compensation or cash benefits for descendants of enslaved people. Despite this lack of support, there is reenergized grassroots activism on the issue and the issue of reparations emerged back on the campaign agenda for the Democratic 2020 Presidential Primary election. Several of the candidates running in the Democratic primary, including Senators Kamala Harris and Elizabeth Warren, former HUD Secretary Julian Castro, and Beto O’Rourke offered measured endorsements for federal studies of reparations or called the issue important or acknowledged how history supports calls for restitution. Senator Cory Booker’s campaign platform focused on a policy that would help close the racial wealth gap, and another candidate, activist Marianne Williamson, proposed to set aside \$100 billion- \$500 billion for a reparations program. Although not a candidate, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi recently announced her support for HR40 legislation, which would form a commission and study the possibility of paying slavery reparations.

Goal of Reparations Programs

As noted earlier, there isn’t a single or uniform model for what reparations would look like. There are a few major objectives of a reparations program: acknowledgment (acceptance of the truth), redress (remedy or compensation), and closure. Through the years, many have argued for direct payments to descendants of

enslaved people or proposed government financing of a national fund to develop educational and economic opportunities for Black communities. The direct goal of such programs would be to close the racial wealth gap that has persisted as a result of institutional racism. Others, such as the American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS) movement, call for set asides for U.S. descendants of slavery. And even among supporters for reparations, there isn't consistency as to whether reparations should be exclusively for African American people who can trace their ancestors to U.S. slaves.

Not all experts focus exclusively on a direct cash payments framework for reparations despite the precedent. So far, candidates, elected officials, and mainstream conversation on reparations have focused more heavily on the "acknowledgment" goal. When reparations are discussed, major questions arise as to what a reparations program would look like, who would benefit, who would pay, and how it would be funded. Many, therefore, argue that the government needs to formally study reparations first to develop a possible road map for reparations, address outstanding questions, and begin to start reconciling with the country's history and the legacy of slavery. Some also argue for the need for more education in the U.S. on the history of slavery. And others have proposed that slavery reparations take the form of monuments, memorials, and museums with a separate creation of trust funds for victims of Jim Crow era discrimination.