



Special Collection on Racial Repair and Reparations— And What Philanthropy Can Do



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An Invitation from Aria Florant

Co-founder and CEO, Liberation Ventures



I've always believed that jazz is a metaphor for how the world should be. Birthed as an embodiment of Black humanity, jazz requires many voices, instruments, rhythms, and melodies to come together to create something beautiful. Social movements are similar. Many voices are required to win—each with different assets, experiences, networks, and roles. To reach critical mass, we sing together in harmony, with each pitch reaching a different audience. Like jazz, we come together to sing these melodies over and over, and, to some, the notes in this report are familiar. Indeed, the fight for reparations is older than emancipation.

Time, expertise, money, relationships, and followership are just a few of the instruments that must work in concert, creating beautiful songs, if our movements are going to succeed. People positioned across different sectors of society must build the power necessary to create a transformative shift in the way it operates. Importantly, we need everyone—because voices on the sidelines are a powerful endorsement of the inequitable status quo. As Desmond Tutu wrote, “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”

There currently is a door of opportunity, and stepping through it requires courage. In the five years since co-founding Liberation Ventures, I've spoken to hundreds of people in and outside of philanthropy about our work. Many have been hesitant to publicly support our cause, worried that merely saying the word reparations would put their credibility or status at risk. Such hesitation is the result of a centuries-long campaign to discredit Black people, in an attempt to rob us of our dignity and inherent sense of our own worth through anti-Black narratives about our deservedness, financial acumen, character, and more. I know it takes courage to stand tall against such a strong current, but the power that comes from standing in the truth is infinite—and the transformative impact that we say we want requires it.

For instance, many of the philanthropic dollars aimed to close the racial wealth gap often address symptoms rather than eliminate its causes—including its largest driver, which is intergenerational wealth transfer. We must invest in solutions that match the scale of the problems. Reparations and comprehensive racial repair are required to build the world we all deserve.

[Liberation Ventures](#) chose to partner with The Bridgespan Group for this research because we both are fellow travelers in pursuit of that world. Our organizations each reach different audiences, play different roles in the ecosystem, and bring different assets to the table—yet are driven by a shared goal: a just, thriving, multiracial democracy. In addition, both organizations know the value of bridging and collaboration across actors positioned differently throughout the field.

The song of the reparations movement is intensifying. Our inability to repair the harm of this country's origin deprives not just Black people, but all of us, of our humanity. Therefore, in essence, this issue is simple—we must do what we know is right. We must look ourselves in the mirror and ask: Do we really want to win, or do we want to look good losing? Liberation Ventures plays to win—as does this incredible movement, full of powerful leaders and organizations working toward reparations across the country. We are connected and strategic, and we are moving forward. Now is our time, and we need everyone to play their part. Join us.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Liberation Ventures" or similar, written in a cursive style.

SECTION 1



For philanthropists, foundations, and other funders who seek to advance racial equity and aspire to a thriving multiracial democracy, we invite you to see reparations for Black people—and building a culture of repair for all of us—as a necessity to reach that goal. Explore the history of race-based policy, root causes of the racial wealth gap, and the opportunity for transformation that repair can bring in our article, “Philanthropy’s Role in Reparations and Building a Culture of Racial Repair.”

Philanthropy's Role in Reparations and Building a Culture of Racial Repair

By: Aria Florant, Tonyel Edwards, Cora Daniels, Alexandra Williams, Maurice Asare, and Vikas Maturi

In 2021, almost 100 years after local government officials in southern California seized the beachfront land of a Black couple to placate white neighbors complaining about a “Negro invasion,” the tide shifted. Ownership of Bruce’s Beach, once home to the couple’s thriving resort for Black beachgoers, was transferred back to the Bruce family.

It meant that descendants of Willa and Charles Bruce were finally able to claim their inheritance.

“It is never too late to right a wrong,” Janice Hahn, chair of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors told the press at the time. “Bruce’s Beach was taken nearly a century ago, but it was an injustice inflicted upon not just Willa and Charles Bruce but generations of their descendants who would, almost certainly, be millionaires today if they had been allowed to keep their beachfront property.”¹

Today in the United States, if the wealth of white households remained stagnant, it would take Black families 228 years to catch up. That is more than 10 generations.²

Make no mistake: That gap is not the result of individual “bad” choices or biased myths that some groups are more hardworking than others. Instead, it is the result of what one historian dubs “[hard histories](#)”—a pattern of race-based policies, fueled and sustained by anti-Black narratives, that have repeatedly benefited white people while systemically demolishing the wealth and humanity of Black people like the Bruce family. On the policy front, that includes a hundred years of Jim Crow laws; the National Housing Act and redlining; Social Security’s exclusion of the majority of Black people for about two decades; and the GI Bill, which, in practice, also excluded nearly two million Black veterans³—all in addition to more than two centuries of enslavement. ([See the timeline](#) on page 10.) That American history of anti-Blackness and discrimination helps explain why [Where Is My Land](#), the organization created by Kavon Ward, a lead organizer in the return of Bruce’s Beach, currently has a waiting list of more than 700 Black families with compelling claims for stolen land and lost wealth.

1 Joe Hernandez, “[A California Beach Was Seized from Black Owners in 1924. Their Family Just Got It Back](#),” National Public Radio, June 29, 2022.

2 Chuck Collins, Dedrick Asante-Muhammad, Josh Hoxie, and Emanuel Nieves, [The Ever-Growing Gap: Failing to Address the Status Quo Will Drive the Racial Wealth Divide for Centuries to Come](#), Institute for Policy Studies, August 8, 2016.

3 Linda J. Bilmes and Cornell William Brooks, “[The GI Bill Was One of the Worst Racial Injustices of the 20th Century. Congress Can Fix It](#),” *The Boston Globe*, February 23, 2022.



“When we work to repair as a nation—including ensuring Black folks achieve reparations—we are all going to benefit tremendously, and there are going to be generational impacts.”

EDGAR VILLANUEVA, FOUNDER AND CEO
THE DECOLONIZING WEALTH PROJECT

What could a different future for America look like?

Imagine if there were no more American stories framed by such gaps, disparities, and inequities.

Imagine an America that refuses to avert its gaze from the harms caused by systemic racism and instead collectively leans into the hard work of repair and transformation, even if all its benefits may not be seen in this lifetime.

Imagine an America where the fullness of Black creativity, ingenuity, and potential is finally revealed.

Currently, there is a broad ecosystem of grassroots organizations, nonprofits, artists, scholars, multiracial coalitions, leaders of color, and, yes, philanthropists, foundations, and other funders working across the United States who see reparations for Black people and creating a culture of racial repair as the missing piece to get to that better world, for everyone.

“When we ask for donors to support reparations, we are not begging for money for Black people. We’re extending a lifeline into your humanity, into your liberation and freedom, by being a part of this healing journey and process,” says Edgar Villanueva, founder and CEO of the [Decolonizing Wealth Project](#). “When we work to repair as a nation—including ensuring Black folks achieve reparations—we are all going to benefit tremendously, and there are going to be generational impacts.”

Reparations Are About the Future

For this article, we define reparations as a comprehensive federal program that addresses the legacy of slavery and the centuries of documented race-based policies thereafter. Inextricably linked to achieving this is building and sustaining a culture of racial repair. (More on this on [page 12.](#))

One of the big misconceptions about reparations is that it is a discussion stuck in the past—only about history long ago rather than an investment, perhaps *the* investment, in the future. Reparations and the repair that comes with it are an opening, an invitation, and an opportunity to transform ourselves, our communities, and our nation.

“When we think about reparations, it is not just paying for past harm. These harms are happening today and will continue to happen if we don’t do something about it,” says Ward. “This is not just a fight for the now, this is a fight for the future, too. I don’t want to pass this fight on to my child, and I don’t want my child to have to pass it on to her child.”

Because of that opportunity for transformation, [Liberation Ventures](#), a reparations field catalyst and intermediary working to accelerate the Black-led movement for racial repair, and The Bridgespan Group, a global nonprofit that advises mission-driven organizations and philanthropists, came together to explore the role philanthropy could play in the movement for reparations and racial repair as a pathway toward a more equitable future. (Although Bridgespan has engaged deeply for more than six years in the work of its racial equity journey, both internally as an organization and externally in our work, it is, admittedly, still in the beginning stages of employing an explicit reparative lens.) For this research, we interviewed more than 45 movement leaders, scholars, and funders, conducted a literature review, and surveyed senior philanthropic leaders, with respondents representing more than \$12 billion in assets.

For funders who believe in racial equity and aspire to a thriving multiracial democracy, we invite you to see reparations for Black people and building a culture of repair as a necessity to reach that goal. Join us in learning from those who are leading the way.

WHAT DO YOU SEE ON THE “OTHER SIDE” OF REPARATIONS?

Right now I get to choose a card, but there are only 12 cards. But what if I had all 52 cards, and the jokers, and I could choose whatever I wanted to do or be? I think that’s what the world after reparations looks like for Black people. And I think, for all of us, it means that everyone gets to live in that truth of everyone offered a full deck, and some haven’t been cheating the game the whole time.”

ROBERT SMITH III, SENIOR PROGRAM OFFICER OF THE THRIVING CULTURES PROGRAM, [SURDNA FOUNDATION](#)



The Racial Wealth Gap and the Opportunity for Transformation

Because of America’s history of race-based policy designed to build white wealth at the expense of Black wealth, many funders, as well as some movement leaders and scholars, come to the work of reparations through an interest in addressing the racial wealth gap. The Black-white wealth gap is \$11.2 trillion.⁴ Closing it would add between \$1 trillion and \$1.5 trillion in GDP to the US economy. By 2050, if we eliminated additional racial disparities in health, incarceration, and employment, the nation would gain \$8 trillion in GDP.⁵ There is a \$330 billion disparity in wealth flow between white and Black families every year, and intergenerational wealth transfer drives 60 percent of that disparity. That helps to explain how the disparity in inheritances between Black recipients and their white counterparts is \$200 billion—each year⁶—and how the nation’s inequities are further reinforced across generations.

Economist William “Sandy” Darity of Duke University, who has researched the racial wealth gap for decades, has long insisted that because of the size of the gap and the race-based national policies that created and sustained it, a federal reparations program is the only way to close it. “My response to philanthropists who resist this idea [of reparations] is, whatever else is proposed, by indirect or universal strategies, is not going to do it,” says Darity. “If you’re serious about closing the racial wealth gap, you have to think about direct mechanisms to get it done.”

WHAT DO YOU SEE ON THE “OTHER SIDE” OF REPARATIONS?

On the other side of reparations for the Black community, it looks like pure joy and liberation. For the rest of the world, it looks like the mountaintop that King preached about.

ROBIN RUE SIMMONS, FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, [FIRSTREPAIR](#)



Throughout this article, we share a sample of quotes of inspiration from movement leaders and allies on what they envision on the “other side” of reparations. Our [extended content on Bridgespan.org](#) features quotes from more leaders and profiles some of the work toward a more equitable future.

4 William Darity Jr., “[The True Cost of Closing the Racial Wealth Gap](#),” *The New York Times*, April 30, 2021.
5 Robert Lynch, “[The Economic Benefits of Equal Opportunity in the United States by Ending Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Disparities](#),” Washington Center for Equitable Growth, June 29, 2021.
6 Shelley Stewart III, et al., *The Economic State of Black America: What Is and What Could Be*, McKinsey & Company, June 17, 2021.

Government Policy Has Enabled White Wealth To Compound While Extracting Black Wealth

Timeline of select key events

1600s - 1800s Colonial Migration

White immigrant families arrive in colonial United States from Europe and settle in the south of modern-day United States.

Early 1800s: Land Lotteries

Land lottery policies (which offered land that had been taken from Indigenous peoples to white males) drive wealth and property accumulation for white families, and the second generation moves up in social strata.

Mid-1800s: Gains in White Wealth

Wealth of white families increases with the ongoing institution of slavery. By **1850**, the Mississippi River valley had more millionaires per capita than any other region in the United States. **1862**: Former slaveholders receive reparations through the compensation clause after President Lincoln signs a bill emancipating enslaved people.

Early-to-Mid-1900s: New and Fair Deal Policies

The two-century generational wealth gap expands even more as new federal policies like New Deal and Fair Deal policies (National Housing Acts, Social Security Act) and the GI Bill transfer more than \$120 billion to predominantly white families through low-interest mortgages, stipends for tuition programs, and federal guarantees on loans.

More than 98 percent of \$120 billion in federally backed mortgages goes to white homeowners from 1934 to 1962.



INTERGENERATIONAL WEALTH TRANSFER

Over time, the white family accumulates inheritances and other in-vivo transfer (e.g., down payments, tuition payments), which drive the racial wealth gap more than any other indicator

White Wealth

Black Wealth

1619 - 1865 Atlantic Slave Trade

In **1619**, the first ship carrying enslaved Africans lands at the English colony of Virginia. Over the course of 246 years, the Atlantic Slave Trade would bring approximately 400,000 enslaved people to the United States.



Mid-1800s Losses in Black Wealth

By **1860**, the US population of enslaved peoples grows to approximately 4 million (13 percent of the population).

By **1865**, formerly enslaved people are promised approximately 400,000 acres of land that General William Sherman reallocated to them following the Civil War. The promise is rescinded by President Andrew Jackson who returns land to former plantation owners.

1870s: Sharecropping era of indentured servitude.

1872-1874: Freedmen's Bureau and Savings Bank is dismantled. Black families lose most of the greater than \$1 million deposited into the bank.

1881: Insurance companies practice explicit discrimination by declaring that policies held by Black customers are worth one-third of the value of equivalent policies held by white customers.

Late 1800s - Mid 1900s Jim Crow Era

Descendants of formerly enslaved families are subject to destruction and appropriation of property as white rioters kill residents and loot Black towns and neighborhoods throughout the 1900s (i.e., Tulsa Massacre, Wilmington Massacre, Rosewood Massacre, etc.).

This is worsened by de jure racial segregation (e.g., discriminatory lending and redlining practices that withhold opportunities for Black wealth accumulation).

1935: The Social Security Act excludes occupations predominantly filled by Black workers and other minorities. The National Labor Relations Act permits unions to exclude people of color from collective bargaining.

1944: The GI Bill excludes 1.2 million Black World War II veterans from receiving benefits.

Post Civil Rights Mid-1900s - present: Ongoing Atrocities

Mass incarceration; the War on Drugs; police executions of unarmed Black people; ongoing credit, housing, and employment discrimination; and more.

1970s: The War on Drugs begins, imprisoning millions of Black Americans over the course of 50 years, creating a crisis of mass incarceration, and extending America's legacy of slavery.

2020: The COVID-19 pandemic exposes the longstanding structural drivers of health inequities, affecting Black communities in particular. At the height of the pandemic, [Black people died from COVID](#) at twice the rate of white people.

The United States is in the midst of the largest wealth transfer in its history. As the baby boomer generation passes away, an estimated \$84 trillion will be passed down to heirs, with some \$16 trillion transferred in the next decade alone.⁷ To put that in perspective, that wealth transfer over the next 10 years is 43 percent more than what it would take to eliminate the entire Black-white wealth gap. Because of the history of race-based policy and segregation in the United States, the boomers who benefited most from decades of wealth building were primarily white.⁸ Rather than reinforcing the nation's inequity, this immense wealth transfer is a tremendous opportunity to do things differently. Philanthropy could leverage it to create a new path, diverging from the one America has inherited, by seizing the potential that building a culture of racial repair can bring.

Reparations Are an Overdue Paycheck *and* Build a Culture of Repair

What's in a word? A lot, actually. One of the challenges of the reparations movement today is a lack of understanding of what reparations truly means—its required combination of restitution *and* repair.

Reparations are an internationally recognized legal framework for people who have suffered violations of human rights or humanitarian law.⁹ When applied to the history of Black people in the United States, we define reparations as a comprehensive federal program that addresses the legacy of slavery and the centuries of documented race-based policies thereafter.

WHAT DO YOU SEE ON THE “OTHER SIDE” OF REPARATIONS?

It's a world I don't think I will personally recognize because it would be a different world. It would be a world-making event to invoke the language of Olúfémi O. Táíwò and Adom Getachew. At a small individual level, interactions would be based on mutuality and respect.

JEAN-PIERRE BRUTUS, SENIOR COUNSEL, ECONOMIC JUSTICE PROGRAM,
[NEW JERSEY INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE](#)



7 Talmon Joseph Smith, “[The Greatest Wealth Transfer in History Is Here, With Familiar \(Rich\) Winners.](#)” *The New York Times*, May 23, 2023.

8 Ibid.

9 The United Nations defines reparations as having five components: restitution (e.g., restoring freedom, citizenship, wealth); compensation (e.g., institution or individual is obligated to compensate for the damage); rehabilitation (e.g., legal, medical, psychological, and other care services); satisfaction (e.g., public apologies, truth-seeking, memorials and commemorations); and guarantees of non-repetition. “[Reparations.](#)” The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, n.d.

Building a Culture of Racial Repair

REDRESS

Acts of restitution, financial compensation, and rehabilitation; proactive steps taken to embed racial justice into systems and “heal the wound”

Success looks like: financial compensation deployed, ownership redistributed, rehabilitation

Moving between components takes energy and momentum and happens at the individual, institutional, and societal levels.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Ownership and willingness to take responsibility for harm; commitment to non-repetition

Success looks like: financial resources committed, professional development and institutional capacity building, inclusive and democratic governance processes, systems and policy change

RECKONING

Learning and deeply understanding the what, how, and why of actions and systems that have contributed to harm

Success looks like: curriculum change, public conversation, narrative campaigns, research to unearth injustice, experiences at museums and historical sites

All people, across race, must move through this cycle in relationship with each other. We all have a shared stake in repair.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Admission that harm was caused; naming and voicing understanding of harm

Success looks like: institutional acknowledgment of harm, public apologies, monuments and memorials



ACHIEVING REPARATIONS

A federal program designed to narrow the Black-white wealth gap and engage in the pillars of building and sustaining a culture of repair

A BETTER FUTURE

A country where institutions tell the truth about our history, there is no racial wealth gap, the federal government apologizes and sets the country on a new path forward, and our society learns to live into a culture of racial repair

Essential to achieving reparations is building a culture of repair—the work required to cultivate norms, practices, rituals, and values for productively responding to harm (see image previous page). Liberation Ventures offers [one way of thinking about racial repair with a framework](#) that consists of an ongoing, iterative cycle of reckoning, acknowledgment, accountability, and redress.

The process of moving toward reparations and creating a culture of repair gives us the opportunity to become a nation where the racial wealth gap narrows; institutions tell the truth about our history; federal, state, and local governments and institutions apologize for harms; and we all enjoy the power of a multiracial democracy, by and for all the people. Critically, raising the issue of repair does not imply that the Black community is broken, damaged, or defined by victimhood. Instead, what is damaged and in need of repair are the policies, systems, and culture that created and sustained the harm and inequity reparations address. Therefore, all people, regardless of race, stand to benefit and have a role to play.

Despite this holistic definition, much of the public discourse around reparations often focuses on specific dollar amounts and who exactly would be paid. In regard to the recent work of the statewide [reparations task force in California](#), one philanthropic leader confided, “What do you think [that price tag] does politically? It hands a weapon to others who want to increase divisions.”

Putting the focus only on the price tag, out of context, is a shock-and-awe approach that paralyzes the broader discussion into a state of impossibility. Daniel Anello, CEO of [Kids First Chicago](#), points out: “The only way we don’t get sticker shock is if people really understand their history, and how we got to where we are, which is one of the pillars of comprehensive reconciliation.”

WHAT DO YOU SEE ON THE “OTHER SIDE” OF REPARATIONS?

We wouldn’t have the mass incarceration that we have, the type of health care system that we have, we wouldn’t have the type of education system ... I’m talking about a whole new society. That’s my vision for the future with reparations, with what I call reparatory justice.”

NKECHI TAIFA, FOUNDER, [REPARATION EDUCATION PROJECT](#)



Movement leaders we spoke with are much more concerned with the racial repair, healing, and opportunity that reparations can bring to the entire nation. Ward is quick to point out that the Bruce's Beach success is not full reparations because it was not accompanied by additional forms of repair. Indeed, after the land transfer, it took the city of Manhattan Beach two years to formally apologize, an initial step toward repair.¹⁰

This article focuses specifically on Black people because of the history and significance of Black-white dynamics in shaping the United States. That does not mean that historical and ongoing injustices to Indigenous, Latinx, or Asian American communities are in any way being overlooked. Given the depth of inequity that has been systemically imposed on Black people, an America where all Black people can thrive is one where all Americans must be thriving too.

“It is so important to understand history within the context of the Black-white paradigm because the protocols of anti-Blackness have become the protocols of oppression for the nation. So, understanding that history is important if we want to create a nation that can have a thriving democracy,” explained Angela Glover Blackwell, founder in residence at [PolicyLink](#), when asked about reparations at a *Stanford Social Innovation Review* “Frontiers of Social Innovation” conference in 2023.

“ It is so important to understand history within the context of the Black-white paradigm because the protocols of anti-Blackness have become the protocols of oppression for the nation.”

ANGELA GLOVER BLACKWELL,
FOUNDER IN RESIDENCE, POLICYLINK

Furthermore, movements for equity and justice are often working in solidarity with one another. (For more on the Land Back movement, which includes Native reparations in addition to Indigenous self-determination, see the work of the [NDN Collective](#) and [Sogorea Te' land trust](#), as well as [Indigenous-led funding opportunities curated by Neighborhood Funders Group](#).)

It is also critical that we apply an intersectional lens to reparations. For instance, redress for a cis Black man might look different than it would for a queer disabled Black woman or for a trans Black woman, because these individuals are likely to have experienced different harms based on their particular identities. Likewise, the most common narratives of enslavement depict labor “on the backs” of Black men, which erases the significance of Black women’s labor, along with the labor of their forced reproduction, in the nation’s history.

Scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, founder of the [Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies](#) at Columbia Law School and co-founder the African American Policy Forum, warns that disconnecting the experience of Black women from the history of enslavement and its legacies ensures the dynamics of harm will continue to be repeated. “Until we are able to acknowledge that the wealth disparity came through Black women’s wombs, our effort to advance a reparations frame is going to be incomplete,” says Crenshaw.

10 Tyler Shaun Evains, “[Manhattan Beach Apologizes for Taking Bruce's Beach, Other Black-Owned Land](#),” *The Daily Breeze*, April 5, 2023.



Reparations Are Not a Radical Solution, Though the Impact of Repair Will Be

“It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked ‘insufficient funds.’”

—Martin Luther King Jr., “I Have a Dream,” August 28, 1963

Reparations for Black people in the United States is not a new idea, although the movement has gained more media attention in recent years, thanks in part to the writing of Ta-Nehisi Coates and Nikole Hannah-Jones, as well as attention raised by Black Lives Matter in the aftermath of the police killing of George Floyd. The unfulfilled promises of “40 acres and a mule” issued in 1865 after the Civil War anchored the earliest discussions on reparations.¹¹ But the call actually dates back even further, thanks to Black women. Belinda Sutton, an Africa-born woman who was enslaved by landowner Isaac Royall Jr., is considered one of the first people to demand reparations for slavery and win—petitioning the Massachusetts General Court in 1783.¹²

In fact, the United States has even paid reparations for slavery before—not to Black people, but rather to slaveholders. In 1862, almost a year before he signed the Emancipation Proclamation, President Abraham Lincoln signed a lesser-known bill, the District of Columbia Emancipation Act, that paid up to \$300 (approximately \$9,010 today) to slaveholders loyal to the Union for every enslaved person freed.¹³

11 Henry Louis Gates Jr., [“The Truth Behind ‘40 Acres and a Mule,’”](#) Public Broadcasting Service, September 2013.

12 Aria Florant, [“A Dream in Our Name,”](#) Liberation Ventures, February 2023.

13 Tera W. Hunter, [“When Slaveowners Got Reparations,”](#) *The New York Times*, April 16, 2019.

And, a century and a quarter later, President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act, which gave a formal apology for the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II and paid \$1.6 billion to survivors.¹⁴

Reparations are also a global concept. In 2022, New Zealand became the most recent country to implement reparations when it made reparations to the Ngāti Maru, one of its indigenous peoples.¹⁵ Recently, King Charles of Britain has even given the crown's first support for research into the monarchy's slavery ties.¹⁶ After World War II the United States, via the Marshall Plan, also helped to ensure that European Jews received reparations for the Holocaust.¹⁷ Since 1952, to foster societal healing, Germany has paid more than \$80 billion euros¹⁸ to Holocaust survivors and started the journey of ongoing truth-telling and work to preserve the legacy and memory of victims and survivors.

Truth and reconciliation commissions have been used in various forms around the world to help nations heal from human rights atrocities.¹⁹ In South Africa, such a commission was spearheaded by Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela and is praised for the public airing of the physical and psychological harms of apartheid inflicted on Black South Africans. To be sure, the approach is also criticized because accountability and redress fell short, in that reparations payments were minimal and no perpetrators were prosecuted, while some received amnesty.²⁰

Today, the reparations ecosystem in the United States includes a robust mosaic of Black-led organizations and multiracial coalitions. Grounding the movement are long-time advocates and veteran organizations like [N'COBRA](#) (National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America) that have been doing this work for decades. Building on their

WHAT DO YOU SEE ON THE “OTHER SIDE” OF REPARATIONS?

We create new pyramids, and the world has a total new order, and thousands of years from now, hundreds of years from now, this moment will go down in history as a pivotal moment for humanity.”

KAMM HOWARD, DIRECTOR, [REPARATIONS UNITED](#)



14 Helen Yoshida, "[Redress and Reparations for Japanese American Incarceration](#)," National WWII Museum, August 13, 2021.

15 Fabiola Cineas, "[New Zealand's Māori Fought for Reparations—and Won](#)," Vox, January 17, 2023.

16 David Conn, Aamna Mohdin, and Maya Wolfe-Robinson, "[King Charles Signals First Explicit Support For Research Into Monarchy's Slavery Ties](#)," *The Guardian*, April 6, 2023.

17 Rashawn Ray and Andre M. Perry, "[Why We Need Reparations for Black Americans](#)," Brookings Institution, April 15, 2020.

18 Kirsten Grieshaber, "[Germany Marks 70 Years Of Compensating Holocaust Survivors](#)," *AP News*, September 15, 2022.

19 Sarah Souli, "[Does America Need a Truth and Reconciliation Commission?](#)," Politico, August 16, 2020.

20 David Marchese, "[What Can America Learn From South Africa About National Healing?](#)," *The New York Times*, December 11, 2020.

legacy are a swath of newer organizations tackling a wide range of work: narrative change (e.g., [Media 2070](#)), policy advocacy (e.g., [Why We Can't Wait](#) coalition), racial healing (e.g., [The Truth Telling Project](#)), and state and local advocacy (e.g., [FirstRepair](#)). Intermediaries, such as [Liberation Ventures](#) (collaborator on this article) and the [Decolonizing Wealth Project](#), are organizing donors and redistributing funding across the movement. The field is also beginning to build out its research infrastructure (e.g., with organizations like the [African American Redress Network](#)) such that the movement is better equipped to educate, advocate, and connect with other movements.

Momentum is building. Currently, reparations and racial repair activities are happening across all 50 states. In 2021, Evanston, Illinois, became the first city in the United States to create a reparations plan for its Black residents in the form of housing grants.²¹ [FirstRepair](#), founded by Robin Rue Simmons, the former Evanston alderman who led the effort for the bill's passage, is currently in conversations with more than 100 initiatives on the local and state level that have taken some step toward reparations. A consortium of more than 90 universities across the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada are investigating their own institutions' ties to slavery and the legacies of racism in their histories.²² In 2022, the United Nations called on the US government for the first time to begin the process of providing reparations for descendants of enslaved Black people.²³

WHAT DO YOU SEE ON THE “OTHER SIDE” OF REPARATIONS?

I'd like to borrow something I heard recently and turn this question around to say, 'What would you be doing if you didn't have to fight for justice?' So, on the other side of this, I am a librarian. I am surrounded by books, and I get to read all day because I am not fighting for my people, for recognition of both our contributions and what has been and continues to be taken from us. On the other side is true liberation, it's the ability to exist in our fullness.”

RICSHAWN ADKINS ROANE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, [WEISSBERG FOUNDATION](#)



21 Char Adams, "[Evanston Is the First U.S. City to Issue Slavery Reparations. Experts Say It's a Noble Start](#)," NBC News, March 26, 2021.

22 "[Universities Studying Slavery](#)," President's Commission on Slavery and the University, University of Virginia, March 2016.

23 Josh Marcus, "[UN Committee Calls on US to Offer 'Reparations' to Descendants of Enslaved People](#)," *The Independent*, August 30, 2022.

And, in 2023, Representative Cori Bush introduced the Reparations Now Resolution, following a decades-long tradition of introducing a federal bill on reparations in every legislative session.²⁴

Philanthropic involvement in the movement is growing, too, with national organizations entering the space. At least 80 national funders, including the Ford Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, Hewlett Foundation, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, among others, are supporting multiple actors in the reparations ecosystem.

“When it comes to reparations, it is not a matter of ‘if’ it will happen—it is happening right now,” says attorney and activist Nkechi Taifa, founder of the [Reparation Education Project](#). Taifa, who has been working on this issue for 40 years, sees the momentum now as at an all-time high. Her message to funders: “The opportunity is here, the opportunity is now. You can either be on the cutting edge to make transformational change happen or regret not doing so later.”

Still, despite the long history and precedent to employ reparations, well-funded opposition forces to equity have made the mere word “reparation” toxic, despite its linguistic roots in repair. “We have a hugely asymmetrical situation where hundreds of millions of dollars are basically being spent trying to shift understanding away from the idea that there’s still race work that needs to be done,” says Crenshaw, “and that there’s still racial repair that needs to happen.”

The fruit of those anti-equity efforts includes the introduction of more than 563 anti-critical race theory measures in 2021 and 2022 aiming to regulate how race is discussed in the United States; almost half (241) are now in effect.²⁵ The topic of reparations was also cut from the required topics in the new AP African American studies curriculum. In addition, in a sign of the symbolism of the word itself, the shooter of the racist massacre in Buffalo, New York, wrote “Here’s your reparations!” on the assault rifle used to steal 10 Black lives.²⁶

“We have a hugely asymmetrical situation where hundreds of millions of dollars are basically being spent trying to shift understanding away from the idea that there’s still race work that needs to be done and that there’s still racial repair that needs to happen.”

KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW, FOUNDER, THE CENTER FOR INTERSECTIONALITY AND SOCIAL POLICY STUDIES, COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL AND CO-FOUNDER, THE AFRICAN AMERICAN POLICY FORUM

24 Alana Wise, “[Rep. Cori Bush Introduces Bill on Reparations for Black Americans](#),” National Public Radio, May 17, 2023.

25 Olivia B. Waxman, “[Exclusive: New Data Shows the Anti-Critical Race Theory Movement is ‘Far From Over.’](#)” *Time*, April 6, 2023.

26 “[Accused Tops Shooter Charged with Federal Hate Crimes and Using a Firearm to Commit Murder](#),” United States Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, June 15, 2022. To learn more about the lasting harm this act of racist violence inflicted on the community, listen to Na’kya McCann, Lori Lizarraga, Marianne McCune, Courtney Stein, and Dalia Mortada, “[How a Black Cheer Squad in Buffalo Deal with the Racist Massacre Blocks Away](#),” National Public Radio, July 5, 2022.

At a recent reparations conference, tight security and regular warnings to attendees not to post the location of the conference hotel served as a reminder that some movement leaders in the room receive routine death threats as a result of doing this work. In our own conversations, there were some funders supporting reparations work who purposely don't use the word publicly. Movement leaders stressed the need for funders to use their influence, voice, and convening power to foster education and collaboration.

Dr. Luke Charles Harris, co-founder of the [African American Policy Forum](#), reminds us to stay focused on what matters: "What we should be afraid of is white supremacy, not reparations."

Repair Is Possible, and Now Is the Time

"Reparations would look like Black people making their own businesses and collectively owning land and building houses on our own land. It looks like beloved community, where we could determine our future for ourselves, our children, and our families."

—Mike Milton, founder and executive director of the [Freedom Community Center](#)

Our interviews illustrated that the work of reparations and repair is wide ranging. While philanthropic organizations cannot themselves pay reparations, the abundance of imagination and variety of entry points is a reminder that there is no lack of opportunity for philanthropy. See the table on the next page for examples of what this work can look like. We dig deeper into this topic with funder examples in our companion article for *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, "[A Reparations Roadmap for Philanthropy](#)" In addition, Liberation Ventures is co-creating with movement leaders the Reparations Grantmaking Blueprint, available in early 2024, that will include a full picture of the strategic investments necessary to build momentum over the next 10 years.

We also invite you to take a look at some of the exciting work across the movement in the [Reparations Movement Profiles](#) on our website, which showcase organizations working toward reparations and repair in critical lanes:

- [Land ownership](#). Land theft contributes to the racial wealth gap.
- [Criminal legal system](#). The War on Drugs disproportionately harms Black communities today.
- [Media](#). Anti-Black narratives spread by the media since colonial times help ingrain inequities.
- [Education](#). The erasure of the nation's "hard history" prevents understanding of root causes of inequity.

These efforts to address specific harms can create tangible psychological and material benefits for affected Black communities and serve as valuable pilots of learning and innovation. Such efforts are also critical to building momentum toward the ultimate goal of achieving reparations and building a culture of racial repair.

"For me, there's no way to get to equity without reparations," says Richard Wallace, founder and executive director of [Equity and Transformation](#). "Fixing inequity is very simple—put the resources stolen from our communities back into those communities. Fixing the racism that caused inequity is the hard part."

Supporting the Reparations Movement and Building a Culture of Racial Repair

ACHIEVING REPARATIONS

	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE INVESTMENTS
 <p>REPARATIONS</p>	<p>A federal program designed to narrow the Black-white wealth gap and engage in the pillars of building a culture of repair</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convening and planning support to design a coordinated movement strategy • Narrative change to build public understanding on reparations • Research to inform reparations program design • Lobbying efforts • Grassroots organizing to mobilize constituencies

BUILDING A CULTURE OF RACIAL REPAIR

	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE INVESTMENTS
 <p>RECKONING</p>	<p>Understanding and grappling with the what, how, and why of actions that have contributed to harm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storytellers, artists, journalists, and scholars creating new ways to unearth and understand racial injustice • Commissions for wealth-origin research and stories for institutions, corporations, and families • Educators and organizations designing curricula that teach truthful US history • Initiatives for open dialogue and advancing racial healing • Movement leaders and efforts pushing back on the anti-critical race theory movement • Creation of and increased access to programming in public memorials, museums, and other institutions that serve to acknowledge harm
 <p>ACKNOWLEDGMENT</p>	<p>Admission that harm has been done</p>	
 <p>ACCOUNTABILITY</p>	<p>Ownership and willingness to take responsibility for harmful actions and commit to non-repetition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black community land trusts, community investment trusts, and worker cooperatives to rebuild land ownership and economic self-determination • Large, unrestricted grants or endowments to Black-led organizations and institutions to enable greater levels of self-determination • Efforts to help Black families and communities reclaim wrongfully stolen assets and land • Funding staff position(s) and research efforts for local and state initiatives and reparations commissions to explore and create redress for specific, historic harms • Pilot programs in guaranteed income, baby bonds, and other asset-building initiatives for and with Black communities • Debt relief for Black farmers and broader efforts to direct federal funding resulting from recent policies to Black-led and Black-serving organizations and institutions
 <p>REDRESS</p>	<p>Acts of restitution, compensation, and rehabilitation; proactive steps taken to embed racial justice into systems and “heal the wound”</p>	
<p>Intangible investments</p>	<p>Convene conversations on reparations internally with board and with peer funders and other stakeholders; elevate topic of reparations externally and among peers; ensure Black and grantee representation in decision-making bodies on Board and in organizational leadership</p>	

(NOTE: This is not an exhaustive list of reparations and repair investments. These are ideas from conversations with movement leaders meant to showcase the breadth of potential opportunities.)

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We are deeply grateful for and inspired by the pioneering organizations and movement leaders who were interviewed for and are quoted in this piece. In addition, we recognize that this research stands on the shoulders of the work of so many across time who have been fighting for reparations since before emancipation. We believe that we can win reparations in our lifetime—and we owe that belief to the giants who knew that they likely would not see success in theirs and yet still worked tirelessly to cover so much ground before us.

SECTION 2



Philanthropy has a huge opportunity—and responsibility—to live into a culture of repair and resource the reparations ecosystem. In this *Stanford Social Innovation Review* article, “A Reparations Roadmap for Philanthropy,” we explore three key roles for philanthropy in building a more equitable future, provide examples from fellow funders of what it might look like to advance this work, and offer a framework for building a culture of racial repair.

A Reparations Roadmap for Philanthropy

By Aria Florant, Tonyel Edwards, Cora Daniels, Alexandra Williams, and Maurice Asare

Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION Review
Informing and inspiring leaders of social change

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Today in the United States, if the wealth of white households remained stagnant, it would take Black families 228 years to catch up. That is more than [10 generations](#).

Let that sink in a moment.

It is a simple data point with a profound implication. The consequence of centuries of history, with harms that will last for centuries to come without meaningful actions now. The late historian John Henrik Clarke, was [fond of saying](#) that “all history is a current event.” That is because, as he says, “the events which transpired 5,000 years ago, 5 years ago, or 5 minutes ago, have determined what will happen, 5 minutes from now, 5 years from now, or 5,000 years from now.”

The existence of the \$11.2 trillion Black-white wealth gap is not the result of individual “bad” choices or the biased myths that some groups are more hardworking than others. Instead, there is a growing understanding that the gap is a result of a [pattern of race-based policies](#), fueled and sustained by anti-Black narratives, that have systematically demolished the wealth and humanity of Black people while reinforcing inequities across generations. In fact, there is a [\\$300](#)

[billion disparity in wealth flow](#) between white and Black families every year, and intergenerational wealth transfer drives 60 percent of that disparity.

What can be done today to chart a path for more equitable tomorrows?

Increasingly, that conversation is turning to reparations for Black people and building a culture of racial repair as the missing link. As Ibram X. Kendi, founder of the Center for Antiracist Research at Boston University, shared at SSIR's 2023 Frontiers of Social Innovation conference: “How can you truly create equity in this country if certain populations have had wealth, resources, and land literally taken from them? To begin that conversation on creating equity, for me, really starts with a conversation about reparations.”

Because of that opportunity for transformation, Liberation Ventures, a reparations field catalyst and intermediary working to accelerate the Black-led movement for racial repair, and The Bridgespan Group, a global nonprofit

that advises mission driven organizations including philanthropy, came together to explore the role that philanthropy could play in the movement for reparations and racial repair, as a pathway toward a more equitable future. We interviewed more than 45 movement leaders, scholars, and funders, conducted a literature review, and surveyed senior philanthropic leaders representing more than \$12 billion in assets. Here we share practical advice for philanthropy through examples of funders engaged in the work. (For more on [the case for philanthropy to play a role in reparations and racial repair](#) and an overview of the wide-ranging movement work toward reparations, please see our companion article on [Bridgespan.org](#).)

“There are ways that philanthropy has undermined social movements and organizations trying to build power,” says Thenjiwe McHarris, co-founder of Blackbird, a movement organizer. “However, there have also been moments when philanthropy has played a vital role in supporting efforts to win on key issues.”

The time for such an effort is now. As the baby boomer generation passes away, an estimated \$84 trillion [is projected to be passed down](#) to heirs, with some \$16 trillion transferred in the next decade alone. To put that in perspective, that’s 43 percent more than what it would take to [eliminate the entire Black-white wealth gap](#). Rather than reinforcing the nation’s inequity, philanthropy could leverage this wealth transfer to set a new path.

Of course, philanthropy’s role in reparations is not to replace the federal government in providing the scale of redress and racial healing the nation needs. Nor are philanthropic grants to Black-led organizations reparations. However, there is a massive opportunity for philanthropy to abundantly resource the ecosystem of organizations working to advance

reparations as well as build a culture of repair that centers the healing, wellbeing, and safety of Black people. For funders who believe in racial equity and aspire to a thriving multiracial democracy, we invite you to see reparations for Black people and building a culture of repair as a necessity to reach that goal.

What It Looks Like for Philanthropy to Advance This Work

It’s important to acknowledge a core tension in raising the issue of philanthropy’s role in reparations. The accumulation of wealth over time that underlies large-scale philanthropy depends on and benefits from the same systems and policies that have systematically excluded Black people from similarly building wealth.

“We talk about people having excess but don’t talk about excess because of Native genocide and 400 years of enslaved labor. [Philanthropists] do not have excess by chance. You have things to give away from your garden because you had free seeds, free water, and free labor and that allows you to stockpile money,” says Morgan Dawson, co-CEO of Threshold Philanthropy.

However, this tension is exactly why philanthropy is a prime actor to catalyze a culture of repair. Through our conversations, three key roles emerged for philanthropy.

Live into a culture of racial repair in your own institution. This may include reckoning with the origin of your own wealth or the context in which your endowment was created, investigating your historical internal and investment practices, acknowledging past mistakes, shifting approaches in governance and decision making to be accountable to reparations

movement leaders and communities you aim to support, and engaging in acts of redress and repair.

Resource the reparations and repair ecosystem. This can include investing integrated capital—grants, non-extractive investments, and nonfinancial support—into the reparations ecosystem at community, state, and national levels. It may require considering how to integrate the reparations ecosystem into existing portfolios, into place-based strategies, and into designing new portfolios or initiatives.

Increase the use of Black asset managers and Black-owned investment firms. Shifting endowments to [mission-](#)

[related investments](#) will benefit Black communities and contribute to racial repair. Many we spoke with pointed out the obvious tension of the endowment corpus—95 percent of most foundations’ wealth is invested rather than distributed in grants. “Pick any gap. At what rate do you close it at 5 percent?” asks Dorian Burton, managing partner of the Southern Reconstruction Fund. Although managing endowments is a vital lever for philanthropy to engage, it’s a subject we plan to explore in more depth in follow-up writing beyond this article. Meanwhile we encourage funders to review [resources from the Justice Funders network](#) to learn more.

Live Into a Culture of Racial Repair in Your Own Institution

One of the most overlooked aspects of the reparations movement from those on the outside is how central building a culture of repair is to the work. The movement is motivated by the belief system that harm has been done that warrants repair and healing is necessary to prevent the drivers of our inequity from being repeated.

What might it look like for philanthropy?



Infographic by The Bridgespan Group and Liberation Ventures

“My question for philanthropy: can you support us in healing?” asks Richard Wallace, founder and executive director of Equity and Transformation, which is fighting for drug war reparations in Chicago. “One of the challenges is if you’re responding to a particular harm and you haven’t had an opportunity to heal, then what you’ll produce is ultimately a reflection of that harm as opposed to what it is you’re truly working toward.”

Liberation Ventures offers [one way of thinking about racial repair with a framework](#) that consists of an ongoing, iterative cycle of reckoning, acknowledgement, accountability, and redress. Below, we share how each of the components of repair might look for philanthropy and how one particular funder, the Bush Foundation, is trying to live into the cycle.

Reckoning

The purpose of reckoning is not to disparage a personal or institutional legacy, but rather to ensure the foundation operates from a place of truth and understanding of past harms. David Ragland, co-founder and co-executive director of the Truth Telling Project, notes that knowing your own story can be a critical motivator to compel sustained support. “The only way you get people who are authentically engaged is if they’ve done the work of knowing, connecting, accompanying, and being accountable to the communities with whom they work,” Ragland shares.

While starting with an understanding of how institutions or individuals came to accumulate wealth is one approach to reckoning, others include reviewing historical and current investment practices to understand potential harms,

unintentional exclusion, and negative impacts for Black communities those investments might have led to.

For The Bush Foundation, a regional private foundation that was founded in 1953 by Edyth and Archibald Bush, who was an executive of the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company (now the multinational known as 3M), reckoning has taken the form of a deep look into the history of race-based policies and the harms inflicted on Black and Native communities in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and the 23 Native nations that share that geography. The foundation’s leaders came to understand how the lasting legacy of such policy—including slavery, the Homestead Act, redlining, and Indian boarding schools—have had lasting negative impacts on the ability to build generational wealth for Black and Native American people.

In addition, the Bush Foundation actively involved its board for years in its equity journey to better understand how to serve the region. This included staging debates at its board meeting in 2019 where members of the senior staff were placed on opposing sides of various critiques of philanthropy. One of the debate topics was whether the foundation should move to a reparative approach for grantmaking in the future. “It was just an exercise at the time, but setting up learning opportunities like that put our board in a position to be open and ready for discussions about reparations and bold reparative action,” says Jackie Statum Allen, a grantmaking director at the foundation.

Importantly, reckoning does not have to be an isolated, individual act. Nor does it have to precede giving to the reparations ecosystem. But it can strengthen resolve and institutional commitment to racial repair.

Acknowledgement

The Bush Foundation now talks openly about the harms done to Native American and Black communities from broken treaties, slavery, and Jim Crow laws and the connection of these race-based policies to the racial wealth gaps in its region of investment. The funder writes: “Those gaps are the result of generations of unjust policies targeting Native and Black communities. There are direct through lines from broken treaties to unemployment rates, slavery to incarceration rates, redlining to homeownership rates.”

That work also paved the way in 2021 for the board to approve a \$100 million initiative for Black and Native American communities across the region, in recognition that these communities have experienced the most longstanding harm.

Acknowledgement can also look like sharing the process and findings of your reckoning with broader audiences. For instance, John Palfrey, CEO of MacArthur Foundation, [wrote publicly](#) about its Truth, Accountability, Repair, and Healing process. In the coming months, the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) will publicly share wealth origins analyses for seven foundations alongside a methodology for funders to use themselves. The research was commissioned by If foundation (formerly known as Consumer Health Foundation), whose own wealth origin story is included.

“If you are serving on the Board of a philanthropic institution, whether it’s a family foundation or otherwise, knowing your history is part of your fiduciary duty,” says Beth McCaw, the founding funder of Threshold Philanthropy. For McCaw that includes “being able to acknowledge all the times that your life could have taken a different turn, or an opportunity that

wouldn’t have been available to you ‘but for’ being white.” McCaw explains that it does not matter if, as a white person, she can trace her family history to “directly participating in the enslavement of others” because part of being white in this country is to have “directly benefited” from the inequity and harm that system established.

Accountability

The Bush Foundation’s \$100 million initiative, or 10 percent of its \$1 billion endowment at the time, is to seed two community trust funds of \$50 million each, and stands in addition to its recurring existing \$50-60 million commitments, thus roughly tripling its grantmaking for the year. Edgar Villanueva, founder and CEO of the Decolonizing Wealth Project, worked with the foundation on its journey to develop the initiative. The inspiration for the \$100 million was his challenge to philanthropy to acknowledge harm done by embracing asset tithing or giving 10 percent of assets to communities of color. (Bush Foundation financed the project by following in the footsteps of the Ford Foundation and [issuing a social bond](#).)

To find the two stewards for the funds, Bush used an open process invitation that included four open-ended questions and no word-count restrictions. It was a way of lowering the [barriers often experienced by nonprofit leaders of color](#) in seeking funding. Additionally, rather than making decisions behind closed doors, the Bush Foundation reached out to a few dozen community and philanthropy leaders for feedback during the initiative’s design phase. A panel of community leaders from across the region interviewed finalists and advised the foundation on which organizations to select. Black-led Nexus Community Partners and Indigenous-led NDN Collective were

chosen to steward the new funds for their respective communities.

The Bush Foundation also sees this work as an opportunity to be accountable to movement leaders in its community. “[Nexus and NDN Collective] have developed programs that reflect what their communities shared, and we support them. We have to show them: we trust you and believe in the high potential of the programs they have developed,” says Allen, who is one of the co-leads of the initiative. “We are power sharing in this way, because it will make the work better.”

In addition to working with your board to bring them along a journey of repair, other funders we spoke to also highlighted the importance of centering the needs of staff. Ensuring an internal culture, salaries, and benefits that enable staff to have the stamina needed to build relationships and approach the work of repair with their grantees is also necessary to live into a culture of repair.

Redress

The Bush Foundation funded a design phase for as long as each steward needed (which ended up being 12-18 months) to build-up their internal infrastructure, engage their communities, teams, and experts on legal, financial, and other areas in developing a plan for how they would use their respective resources.

Nexus created the [Open Road Fund](#) which will provide \$50,000 grants to at least 800 Black residents in the region to “[create tangible pathways to liberation, prosperity, and healing on their own terms.](#)” According to Nexus: “This \$50 million belongs to our community and offers the opportunity to make a positive impact, but it is not reparations. The fund’s resources aren’t

enough to correct all the harm done to the Black community over the last 400 years. However, it is a step in the right direction toward cultivating wealth and prosperity.”

Resource the Reparations and Repair Ecosystem

The abundance of imagination and activity happening across the movement for reparations offers a variety of entry points and is a reminder that there is no lack of opportunity for philanthropy. However, philanthropy is currently underinvesting in the movement writ large. The 31 organizations with a focus on reparations in Liberation Ventures’ 2023 portfolio reported a combined annual revenue of less than \$20 million in 2022, or about 1/1000 the annual revenue of the five largest nonprofits in the United States.

Importantly, there is something particularly perverse about a reality where a movement working to secure reparations for Black people and build a culture of racial repair for all of us, is forced to rely on under-paid and unpaid Black labor to get it done, because of the profound underinvestment across the ecosystem.

Take the [much publicized](#) case of Bruce’s Beach in southern California in which philanthropy was conspicuously absent. In 2021, thanks to years of community organizing and local activism, an oceanside plot once owned by a Black couple that was seized by local government officials during the height of Jim Crow was finally returned to descendants of Willa and Charles Bruce. The inheritance, almost 100 years late, was significant. A year after the deed was returned, the Bruce’s great-grandsons sold the land back to Los Angeles County for the appraised value of nearly \$20 million. Kavon Ward,

a lead organizer in the effort, shared that philanthropy was not involved until the tail end. Instead, “it was Black women using their own resources, time, and energy, who got this done,” says Ward, who went on to found Where Is My Land, which now has a waiting list of more than 700 Black families with compelling claims for stolen land and lost wealth. She adds, “When I think about if philanthropy was more involved, I think about how it would have minimized the level of stress that Black women had to endure throughout the fight. People expect Black women to save the world, but they don’t see the human in us and see that it affects us, and we need help with dealing with the traumas we experience trying to save the world.”

Here is what resourcing the reparations ecosystem might look like.

Integrate Reparations and Repair Strategies Into Your Existing Portfolio

Funders with diverse focus areas ranging from housing (Melville Charitable Trust) to education (The 1954 Project) to arts (Surdna Foundation) are incorporating reparative strategies. The case for climate reparations is increasingly being raised by organizers, [think tanks](#), and [activists](#). And for funders concerned about our democracy, consider that reparations is fundamentally about creating a true multiracial democracy, since without eradicating the Black-white wealth gap and anti-Black narratives, our democracy will always be under threat. “I wish funders could understand how holistic reparations is and how repairing the harms the Black community endures repairs humanity,” says Robin Rue Simmons, founder of FirstRepair. “The kind of full repair that centers Black communities can connect to whatever issue a funder prioritizes.”

Whatever your portfolio’s focus, there is an opportunity to consider how reparations and building a culture of repair may be integral to reach the impact you aspire to achieve. For instance, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) invests in “Building a Culture of Health” through four broad focus areas, including a Healthy Communities portfolio which seeks to “support those working to create communities where the physical, economic, and social conditions ensure all residents have a fair opportunity to thrive and live their healthiest life.” This work includes a grant to Dr. Mary Bassett, director of the François-Xavier Bagnoud (FXB) Center for Health and Human Rights, to explore reparations as a public health strategy to help eliminate racial disparities in health outcomes and achieve health equity. As part of this effort, FXB has convened a consortium of Black researchers across different disciplines who will contribute to this field and body of research. In 2022, FXB released “[Making the Public Health Case for Reparations: A Landscape Report](#).”

Arriving at explicit reparations related grants is part of RWJF’s commitment to improving health by advancing health equity. In 2016, RWJF commissioned economist William “Sandy” Darity of Duke University to prepare a white paper on the racial wealth gap to help inform its strategic priorities. This officially introduced the foundation to reparations in depth and the potential roles philanthropy could play. Importantly, through these internal efforts and conversations with grantees over the years, RWJF has come to understand and integrate into its investment approach that disproportionate illness and death for Black Americans has [less to do with race and more to do with racism](#).

“Our reparative work comes from understanding root causes,” says Maisha Simmons, senior director at RWJF. She shares that New Jersey, where RWJF is based, was known as the “slave state of the North” for being the last to abolish slavery. That legacy of slavery and Jim Crow is still visible today as the state’s 564 municipalities foster some of the highest levels of inequity in the nation. Given that context, RWJF is a funder of the New Jersey Reparations Council, a collaboration of local and national experts dedicated to “acknowledge, confront, and repair” the harm from New Jersey’s involvement in slavery and “its lasting impact on Black people in the state.” The [non-governmental council](#) was launched on Juneteenth 2023 by the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice (NJISJ) and RWJF has signed on to NJISJ’s call for the state to also create an official task force.

Support Place-Based Reparations Efforts

Evanston, Illinois, made headlines in 2019 when it announced a program to repair harms created by local discriminatory housing policies. In the years since, the Evanston Community Foundation (ECF) has taken a proactive role in advancing dialogue, strategizing, and allocating funds toward Evanston’s reparations efforts. “For ECF and any foundation in this work, we have to recognize that our proper place is backing leaders and members of the Black community in our locales and across the country to do the work they think is most prescient and important to repair the harm that was done,” says ECF CEO Sol Anderson.

For ECF that means connecting directly with donors and board members on issues related to structural racism and helping

them see how they can incorporate that understanding into their choices on what they fund through the community foundation. The foundation also set up a fund for the reparations ecosystem in its community. “Community foundations are unique among foundations in that we can hold funds for other entities. We have donor-advised funds, agency funds, and so we decided to also hold the funds for the Reparations Stakeholder Authority of Evanston (RSAE). We were able to set it up in a way where we do not charge management fees and, at their request, we meet with them monthly to talk about strategy,” Anderson explains. “[ECF and RSAE] used our relationships and connections to introduce reparations conversation in the faith-based community and raised more than \$800,000 from 19 faith-based institutions that will all go toward the reparations stakeholder agency fund that they can use to do whatever reparations work they feel is needed in the community.”

Still, Anderson, like many others in the movement we spoke with, do not see local reparations efforts like the one in Evanston as the final destination or as a way to absolve federal responsibility. Rather, “local reparations is the beginning. This is chapter one of the story we’re working toward.”

Create New Portfolios

In 2022, Omidyar Network, a social change venture founded by Pam and Pierre Omidyar, launched its newest focus area, Building Cultures of Belonging, to invest in “the people and institutions equipping our increasingly diverse society to turn toward one another rather than against each other.” The new focus area houses two complimentary grant portfolios with an initial commitment of \$35-40 million over four years. One portfolio, New Belonging, invests

in earlier stage ideas, innovations, and civic infrastructure for bringing the nation's increasingly diverse society together. The other portfolio—to be announced this year—explicitly seeks to strengthen a culture of repair in the US at a time when, as the funder says, diverse communities are acknowledging the “foundational harms of colonialism and slavery, and their modern-day legacies.” Omidyar Network sees this as multi-generational work and plans to collaboratively invest in the growing ecosystems of Black-led and Indigenous-led repair and healing efforts including organizations that advance relational, cultural, spiritual, and material approaches to repair.

“This work aims to heal our past so that we can fully experience our thriving future,” says Vanessa Mason, principal at Omidyar Network, who leads the repair portfolio.

The new Building Cultures of Belonging focus area was incubated for four years with early exploratory grants and learning that included discussions with approximately 60 different field leaders and experts, fielded a national survey and held focus groups, and commissioned a study on the global truth, reconciliation, and repair ecosystem. The funder began to see [intersections between questions from the past, present, and future](#), including: How will we repair harms from centuries of racism and violence directed to Black and Indigenous communities? Why are cultural conflicts intensifying now? What does the future of human diversity hold?

To What End? Expanded Possibilities

There are always those who say some issues are too big, some challenges too tough, some realities too stubborn to change. But philanthropy has proven the naysayers wrong before.

Take the journey to marriage equality. Today a majority of Americans still say legalization of [same-sex marriage has been good for society](#). That was not always the case; far from it. In fact, a Pew Research Center poll conducted in [2004 found that only 31 percent](#) of US adults favored same-sex marriage. Then, just a decade later, after strategic organizing, state campaigns, narrative change, and advocacy, marriage equality became the law of the land. Philanthropy's critical role as a funder, convener, and amplifier of the movement, has been [widely documented](#).

Now consider, in 2022, another Pew study found that overall support for reparations is 30 percent—about the same level once in favor of same-sex marriage. It is a sign that, with the right strategy and funding, we could be at a similar inflection point. In fact, according to a [historical review of reparations polling](#), that support has been climbing steadily over the past 25 years, in part due to the significant support of young people. Approximately 45 percent of Americans age 18 to 29 support reparations [in the Pew Research](#). Other polls have found that number to be [as high as 57 percent](#).

When thinking about building a culture of repair, the questions for philanthropy then become, what can the next decade bring? And what role will philanthropy play? Also, given the current legislative attacks on trans communities and LGBTQ+ rights, how will philanthropy show up to protect meaningful wins over time?

“Oftentimes I think that when you want to do something, you find a way to do it. When you don't want to do something, you find excuses as to why not to do it,” says Pat Clark, chief program officer for the Fund for Nonviolence, a private foundation in Santa Cruz, California. When the Fund for Nonviolence went through a strategic

refresh in 2020, it named Reparations, Accountability, and Healing as its newest program area.

Clark challenges other funders to enter this work. “Once you understand that so much of the wealth has been gained on the backs of people of color and marginalized

people—then I think reparations makes sense. If you believe that there’s no reason to have the kind of gap in wealth that exists today—reparations makes sense. If you believe you have a responsibility to make corrections from your position of power and wealth—then reparations makes sense.”

SECTION 3



Whatever your portfolio's focus, there is an opportunity to consider how reparations and racial repair may be integral to reach the impact you aspire to achieve. These four Reparations Movement Profiles showcase nonprofits working toward reparations and repair in critical lanes: land ownership, the criminal legal system, the media, and education.



Reclaiming Black Land

“In the case of Evanston, there was a housing policy that was enforced, a law that was anti-Black, that really shaped our racial segregation that we still have today and stripped away wealth and opportunity from our Black residents.”

—Robin Rue Simmons, former alderman of Evanston, Illinois;
architect of the Evanston Reparations Legislation;
and founder and executive director of [FirstRepair](#)

It is no secret that real estate is a major wealth driver in the United States. The first time the federal government considered reparations for Black people was in 1865, at the conclusion of the Civil War. Union general William T. Sherman issued a special order to reserve a total of 400,000 acres of coastal land for the formerly enslaved Black population—an order that, following Abraham Lincoln’s assassination, was quickly rescinded. This is often referred to as the promised-but-never-delivered “40 acres and a mule.” Meanwhile, from 1862 through 1890, with the passage of [the Homestead Act](#), nearly 50 million acres of land were distributed to white settlers. It is critical to acknowledge that all this land was stolen from Indigenous people.

As historian Andrew W. Kahrl, who has researched how the seizure of Black land along the coasts has directly contributed to white wealth, points out, for “so many real estate markets formed in 20th-century America, value was created and capital accumulated through racialized forms of dispossession, while [Black exclusion from these same markets served to protect and enhance those values.](#)” In other words, Black people’s property loss, through deeply discriminatory policies and their implementation, was the real-estate industry’s financial gain. It was a pernicious form of state-sanctioned theft.

Approaches to steal Black land and prevent Black land ownership took many forms. A few examples include:

- **Heirs' property leads to involuntary land loss.** Heirs' property refers to when descendants inherit property without a will or formal estate planning strategy. The practice was common during Reconstruction, when Black people did not have access to the legal system, and continued for decades thereafter during the Jim Crow era, when Black Americans were distrustful of white Southern courts. After several generations, heirs' property leads to "fractured" titles among multiple family members that make it difficult to legally prove ownership of land and easy for speculators and developers to prey on these families. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has recognized it as the [leading cause of involuntary Black land loss](#). Approximately [76 percent of African Americans still do not have wills](#), more than twice the percentage of white Americans. Today, an estimated 30 to 40 percent of Black-owned land in Southern states is heirs' property.
- **Biased implementation of the GI Bill denied home ownership opportunities.** The GI Bill in 1944 included a host of benefits for military veterans, including low-cost mortgages, college tuition, and unemployment insurance, that are credited with creating a thriving (white) middle class after World War II. However, the GI Bill was structured in a way that [denied those benefits](#), including the refusal of mortgages and loans to purchase homes, to the 1.2 million Black veterans who served in World War II's segregated ranks. By the early 1950s, [only 2 percent of homes built with government-backed mortgages](#) since World War II were occupied by Black people or other people of color.
- **Discriminatory lending practices by the USDA hurt Black farmers.** The USDA routinely discriminated against Black farmers with biased loan denials, loan-processing delays, crop-disaster payment withholdings, and a variety of other practices. This led to the 1999 class-action lawsuit *Pigford v. Glickman*, which resulted in a \$1.2 billion settlement to Black farmers, a landmark legal recognition of racist implementation of USDA policies and practices. However, confusion around paperwork and deadlines led to thousands of claims from Black farmers being denied, while others have yet to receive their settlements. Disparities persist; in 2022, [just over a third of Black farmers were approved for federal aid](#), compared to 72 percent of white farmers who applied for the same loan.
- **Redlining and biased use of eminent domain for urban infrastructure projects limited wealth-building opportunities.** Established in 1934, the Federal Housing Administration ([FHA](#)) [aided segregation](#) by refusing to insure mortgages in and near Black neighborhoods, a policy known as redlining. At the same time, the FHA also subsidized builders who were creating entire whites-only subdivisions and also recommended that highways be constructed as an intentional way to separate Black from white neighborhoods. These housing policies have had lasting impact. Today, [formerly redlined areas generally remain more racially segregated and economically disadvantaged](#), with lower home values and lower median household income.

To put numbers to the impact, in 1910, just 47 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, Black farmers owned more than 16 million acres. By 1997, Black farmers were stripped of more than 90 percent of those 16 million acres. Today, [Black farm ownership is at just](#)

[three million acres](#). This land loss is [roughly estimated to be worth \\$326 billion today](#). That wealth loss extends beyond farmland, as residential homes, small businesses, and entire thriving Black communities have been destroyed in urban redevelopment projects or taken by eminent domain at the bequest of white neighbors or political officials, developers, and speculators using loopholes to acquire property at below-market prices. Sometimes white racist vigilantes, enabled by government officials who turned the other way, were responsible for such land theft, as in the cases of the [Tulsa Massacre](#), [Rosewood Massacre](#), and [Wilmington Massacre](#), among others. Additionally, as Richard Rothstein documents in his book, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, an onslaught of discriminatory federal and local housing policies during Jim Crow undermined the ability of Black families to own homes and build wealth.

A group of economists whose research focuses on the racial wealth gap [writes in *The New Republic*](#): “This enormous loss not only cost the families who saw their land and dreams taken from them, but destroyed a rural Black middle class that had, by sheer will, emerged in the aftermath of slavery. Since family wealth is iterative—growing slowly at first, adding to itself, and accumulating and expanding over time—this blow to a nascent Black middle class has reverberated down the generations.”

Today, that generational impact is seen in a Black homeownership rate that is declining instead of rising. The home ownership rate for Black Americans is now 43 percent, which is lower than it was in 2010. Conversely, the [rates of white, Asian American, and Latinx homeownership continue to grow](#), with the white home ownership rate, at 72 percent, nearly 30 percentage points higher than it is for Black Americans.

A diverse set of organizations and actors are fighting to reclaim and protect Black land.

[The Federation of Southern Cooperatives](#), a 56-year-old regional cooperative and rural economic development organization born out of the civil rights movement, helps Black farmers, landowners, cooperatives, and other low-income rural people in the South to develop cooperatives, retain their land, and advocate for policies that support Black farmers and land ownership. This includes offering heirs’ property assistance or mediation in Southern states to reverse the trend of Black land loss through inheritance-law loopholes. The [Center for Heirs’ Property Preservation](#), based in South Carolina, also offers legal education and direct legal services to resolve heirs’ property title issues and provides technical assistance to historically underserved landowners on sustainable land use.

[Where Is My Land](#) helps Black families reclaim stolen land. The organization is working hard to remedy past harms, and its founder, Kavon Ward, was instrumental in winning back ownership of Bruce’s Beach in California for the descendants of Willa and Charles Bruce (see “Philanthropy’s Role in Reparations and Building a Culture of Racial Repair”). However, despite Ward’s success, the organization has found it difficult to secure multiyear funding commitments, and without an increase in resources to grow its team, it will be difficult to keep pace with the urgent demand. Today, Where Is My Land has a waiting list of more than 700 Black families with compelling claims for land theft.

“Reclaiming the land and providing some sort of restitution is important for healing,” says Ward. “For some of our clients, the courts have failed them, everybody has failed them,

and they're living in poverty. They are still fighting, because that's what they feel like their life is dedicated to.”

As land ownership continues to be the principal way most families build wealth in America, addressing these historic wrongs is a necessary component of repair to truly ensure equitable opportunity for all.

Organizations exploring reclaiming and preserving Black land (this list is not exhaustive, nor have the organizations been independently vetted by the authors):

[Where Is My Land](#) | [Federation of Southern Cooperatives](#) | [Center for Heirs' Property Preservation](#) | [Land Loss Prevention Project](#) | [Brown Grove Preservation Group](#) | [Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition](#) | [Pierce Chapel Cemetery](#) (Black burial grounds since 1840) | [The Brownsville Project](#) | [Jubilee Justice](#) | [National Black Food & Justice Alliance](#) | [Black Farmer Fund](#)



Repair and Redress for the War on Drugs and Mass Incarceration

“We knew we couldn’t make it illegal to be either against the war or Blacks, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and Blacks with heroin and then criminalizing them both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night in the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.”

—John Ehrlichman, President Richard Nixon’s domestic policy advisor, in a 1994 interview¹

The War on Drugs, initiated by President Richard Nixon, transformed America as states began to institute harsh mandatory sentences for drug possession that could range from 15 years to a lifetime in prison. It paved the way for the police surveillance of Black people and decades of mass incarceration that directly tore apart Black communities.

At the war’s peak, [drug convictions jumped](#) from 15 adults with convictions per 100,000 adults in 1980 to 148 in 1996, an almost 10-fold increase. Still today, close to [80 percent of federal and 60 percent](#) of state prisoners who are incarcerated for drug offenses are either Black or Latinx, the vast majority of them for nonviolent crimes like possession or small-time dealing.

¹ This quote was first featured in a 2016 article in *Harper’s Magazine* by Dan Baum, alleging that Ehrlichman said these words to Baum during an interview for his book in 1994. Ehrlichman’s family questions the truth of this retelling. See Tom Lobianco, “[Report: Aide Says Nixon’s War On Drugs Targeted Blacks, Hippies](#),” CNN, March 2016; Dan Baum, “[Legalize It All: How to Win the War on Drugs](#),” *Harper’s Magazine*, April 2016; Alicia Inez Guzmán, “[The War on Drugs Failed, But the Suffering It Caused Continues](#),” *Rolling Stone*, November 2021.

Michelle Alexander famously dubbed this age of mass incarceration “[the New Jim Crow](#)” as a wake-up call to the reality that millions of Black people are systemically locked away and then relegated to permanent second-class status in America. People with convictions are routinely discriminated against legally and denied many of the same rights that the civil rights movement fought for and presumably won, including the right to vote along with access to employment, housing, education, and public benefits. For instance, according to The Sentencing Project, [one in 19 voting-age Black adults are stripped of their right to vote, often for life, because of a felony conviction](#). In some states, especially in the South, that number jumps to one in 10.

Now, more than 50 years and more than \$1 trillion later, the War on Drugs is increasingly seen by many—both liberals and conservatives alike—as a [massive and expensive failure](#). It’s also one that has harmed millions of Black individuals, their families, and all US communities. Because of that context, some see a clear connection between transforming our criminal legal system and the fight for reparations and a culture of repair. Take, for example, [Equity and Transformation](#) (EAT), an organization founded by and advocating for formerly incarcerated people that focuses on reparations for survivors of the War on Drugs in Illinois.

“People often make the connection between New Jim Crow and mass incarceration, but they don’t take the next step to talk about how that impacts access to employment,” says Richard Wallace, EAT’s founder and executive director. “We flip the script to make incarceration an eligibility criterion in the work at EAT. In doing so, we’ve educated our communities in Chicago about what reparations really mean.”

In 2019, EAT and other Black organizers helped pass the state’s cannabis legalization law, which was once hailed as one of the most equitable in the nation. Some officials even used the word “reparations” at its passage. However, implementation of the law has not lived up to the intentions organizers hoped for. In 2020, the state of Illinois reported \$669 million in sales from the cannabis industry, generating more than \$124 million in tax revenue, yet there was only one Blackowned cannabis dispensary in the entire state. That same year, the American Civil Liberties Union [named Illinois as one of the states with the highest racial disparities in marijuana-possession arrest rates](#), with Black people 7.5 times more likely to be arrested than their white counterparts.

Now, EAT and a coalition of more than 17 organizations in the area are leading “[The Big Payback](#)” campaign, with the goal of ensuring some Illinois cannabis tax revenue goes directly to survivors in the form of direct cash payments. Through a combination of grassroots organizing and political education on the effects of the War on Drugs; pilot programs to directly transfer resources to impacted people; and policy advocacy informed by community members most affected, EAT is providing an example of what repair for government failures could look like. Similar efforts to invest cannabis tax revenues into communities impacted by the War on Drugs are taking shape in other states across the United States, including New York, Connecticut, California, and Alaska.

EAT recently scaled its pilot program, the [Chicago Future Fund](#), from an initial group of 30 participants. The program now provides \$500 a month for 18 months to 130 formerly incarcerated people from the West Garfield Park, Englewood, and Austin neighborhoods in Chicago. These neighborhoods were a major target of the War on Drugs and today

have some of the city's lowest average per capita incomes at about \$16,000 to \$22,000 a year. Wallace says localized efforts for reparations are critical and offer significant opportunity for impact for philanthropy. "I think each pilot, each initiative, essentially adds to the narrative change around reparations. These efforts are part of the larger push for some of the federal policy changes, but that work has to be influenced by what's bubbling up across Black communities," says Wallace. "We can have a base of people that may be divided by state lines but collectively in agreement by the demands and the purpose of reparations."

Organizations pursuing reparations and building a culture of repair to remedy the perennial effects of the War on Drugs (this list is not exhaustive, nor have the organizations been independently vetted by the authors):

[Freedom Community Center](#) | [Marijuana Justice](#) | [Chicago Torture Justice Center](#) | [Drug Policy Alliance](#) | [Terence Crutcher Foundation](#) | [Abolish Slavery National Network](#) | [Equal Justice Initiative](#) | [Formerly Incarcerated, Convicted People and Families Movement](#) | [Cannabis Equity Illinois Coalition](#)



Media Reparations and Narrative Change

“Like all other systems in the United States, the creation of the media system was never intended to include or serve Black people. And it certainly wasn’t meant to help or support Black people in creating self-determined communities and futures. ... We need structural change to truly move forward. And that means envisioning, creating, and practicing a new media system.”

—[Media 2070](#)

Both local and national press and the media system have long histories as tools to harm and oppress Black people.

When the first group of enslaved Africans reached Virginia in 1619, early newspaper publishers profited from the slave trade with the publication of thousands of “slave ads” and, at times, even acted as brokers between buyers and sellers. Such [advertisements](#) “improved the profitability and flexibility of the slave trade while integrating it into the readers’ daily lives,” writes historian Jordan E. Taylor. During the Jim Crow era, spurious news coverage of Black people directly resulted in countless lynchings, imprisonments, and massacres.

In the case of Wilmington, North Carolina, it was Josephus Daniels, the powerful newspaper publisher of *The News and Observer* newspaper, who helped lead the [deadly overthrow of the local government](#) in 1898 because Black people held power. Contemporary media portrayals of Black people are often rife with narratives that promote Black inferiority and Black people as threats to society. For instance, the “[superpredator](#)” [media myth](#)—a false narrative spread in the 1990s that warned of an epidemic of teenage killers that never happened—helped demonize an entire generation of Black youth. Today, social media algorithms amplify the voices of white supremacists across online media platforms.

Media reparations provides a useful lens to acknowledge and repair the media's systemic anti-Black harms. [Media 2070](#), a growing national consortium of journalists, writers, storytellers, narrative-change activists, and media-makers is leading the charge for media reparations as a way to transform who has the capital to tell their own stories by 2070. In 2020, the cohort published [a 100-page essay](#) tracing the genealogy of the US media system's role in perpetuating anti-Black harm from the beginning of enslavement to the present day. In unearthing this history, this work moves us toward a future in which the media is held accountable and anti-Black narratives are an aberration rather than the norm.

Media reparations are “what is needed to create a new media system that can be grounded in historical truth, lived experience, and care for Black communities, as opposed to upholding the myth of Black inferiority, which is what media has functioned to do since the very beginning,” says Collette Watson, Media 2070 project director and vice president of cultural strategy at Free Press.

The media system is critical in the fight to advance equity and justice because the language used to talk about an issue frames everyone's understanding of it—as well as their imagination of what is possible. Therefore, [narrative work](#) is a critical focus of the reparations movement even though movement leaders highlighted to us that it is an area often overlooked by funders. That it is an area often overlooked by funders.

For example, the Say the Word campaign, launched by the [New Jersey Institute for Social Justice](#) and its partners, uses various media formats, [such as explanatory videos](#), to create a better understanding of the word reparations. [Color Farm Media](#), an emergent media platform, is building an ecosystem that fosters greater equity, inclusion, and diversity in media that empowers and elevates voices who are underrepresented, overlooked, and undervalued.

Color Farm's 2023 documentary, [The Big Payback](#), highlights the work of Robin Rue Simmons, a former alderman of Evanston, Illinois, and founder of [FirstRepair](#), as it tells the story of how Evanston became home to the nation's first tax-funded reparations program for Black Americans. The documentary helped to further fuel other local reparations efforts across the country and piqued the interest and support of funders. Color Farm hopes to scale its mission of improving access and inclusion to mass media and entertainment storytelling platforms.

In August 2022, [Liberation Ventures](#) launched its first narrative-change program, the Reparations Narrative Lab, which is a hub that supports organizers, artists, and strategists to understand the current narrative landscape, create and test messages, understand audiences, design experiments, and analyze the impact of their strategies. The first phase of the Lab brought together a cohort of 13 movement leaders from across the reparations and racial justice ecosystem for nine months. The result of that work when published will serve as a tool the movement can use for organizing and storytelling.

Collectively, these efforts help build narrative power, or the ability to shape public discourse, debate, and imagery about reparations and Blackness.

There have been some moments in history that offer alternatives for a better future. For instance, the nation's first Black-owned radio station, WERD in Atlanta, was in the same building as Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference. In the early 1950s, [King would tap on the ceiling](#) of his office with a broomstick to get the attention of the WERD DJs upstairs when he wanted to make an announcement on the radio. With that in mind, advocates for media reparations are hoping for the widespread realization that "[corporate and philanthropic leaders have the power, and the historical obligation, to invest in a media future with justice as its guiding principle.](#)"

Organizations imagining new narratives for racial repair (this list is not exhaustive, nor have the organizations been independently vetted by the authors):

[Color Farm Media](#) | [BLD PWR](#) | [Inspire Justice](#) | [Color of Change](#) | [The Emancipator](#) | [Black Thought Project](#) | [Media Justice](#) | [Black Wall Street Times](#) | [M4BL](#)



Reckoning with Our History

“What we think of as history is really just memory—all of these things happened, but if we don’t learn about it, then we don’t remember it; it’s not part of our collective memory. This battle is not about history, because you can’t change the past, but you can certainly shape our perception of who we are by manipulating what we know about the past.”

—Nikole Hannah-Jones, Pulitzer-prize winning journalist and creator of The 1619 Project¹

The unprecedented calls for racial justice in the wake of the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in 2020 were met with disinformation campaigns against critical race theory, intersectionality, and other forms of racial and gender justice discourse. As some individuals, corporations, and political actors rallied around racial justice while calling for broader systems reform and for the assailants to be held accountable, others sought to undermine these efforts. Their attempts spurred a countermovement branded as “[anti-wokeness](#),” an effort designed to reject the truth and historical genealogy of the violence against, and suppression of, Black people. Without a collective understanding of the historical root causes of our inequity, it will be impossible for the nation to build a culture of repair.

While the term “anti-wokeness” is new, the kind of opposition to equity that it represents is not. Even before the Civil War, there was a concerted effort to create fear of abolition in the South. In the 1820s, abolitionists began to push more forcefully, urging the use of any means necessary to defeat slavery. In response, proponents of slavery led an equally forceful counterattack. Not only did Congress pass legal measures to limit anti-slavery speech, but abolitionist literature was criticized and intercepted in the mail, and recipients of these publications were surveilled.

1 “[Alight Align Arise: Advancing the Movement for Repair](#),” June 7-9, 2023, Atlanta, Georgia, hosted by the Decolonizing Wealth Project.

Currently, the battleground for controlling what we learn and what we talk about is the classroom. In recent months, lawmakers in over two dozen states [have attempted to regulate how teachers](#) can discuss racism, sexism, and issues of equality and justice. As one example, in 2022 Governor Ron DeSantis signed the “[Stop WOKE Act](#),” a Florida state law that bars educational institutions and businesses from teaching anything that would cause anyone to “feel guilt, anguish, or any form of psychological distress” due to their race, color, sexuality, or national origin. At least nine states have introduced legislation to specifically ban the teaching of *The New York Times’* 1619 Project, which centers slavery in American history, and six states have introduced bills to promote patriotism in education.

Against the backdrop of the passage of this legislation, 2,571 books across 37 states were [banned or challenged in 2022](#). Unsurprisingly, the banned titles consisted of characters or themes that touched on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Collectively, these disinformation efforts move the United States toward a country where Black history is stripped away.

In response to these disinformation efforts, several organizations and institutions have launched counter campaigns aimed at preserving our history. One such example is the [African American Policy Forum](#) (AAPF) led by Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw and Dr. Luke Harris. AAPF is an innovative think tank that connects academics, activists, and policymakers to promote efforts to dismantle structural inequality. These efforts embrace the intersections of race, gender, class, and the array of barriers that disempower those who are already marginalized in society.

In recent years, disinformation campaigns against critical race theory, intersectionality, and other forms of racial and gender justice discourse have surged. In response, AAPF launched the [#TruthBeTold campaign](#), aimed at advocating for federal action to disseminate knowledge as it pertains to racial and gender equity. The campaign galvanized opposition to the “Equity Gag Order,” an executive order which in 2020 prohibited activities and workplace trainings that addressed or promoted equity in federal agencies and their contractors. The order was successfully revoked by the Biden administration just four months later. In addition, the campaign is raising awareness of the widespread and lingering harms of the executive order and similar legislation, while providing organizations and institutions with the resources to challenge efforts to suppress honest conversation about the country’s history.

The attack on what the nation teaches makes the support of Black educators particularly critical right now. [The 1954 Project](#), an education initiative established by philanthropists Liz and Don Thompson as part of the Cleveland Avenue Foundation for Education Group, enables Black educational leaders to create a better, more inclusive education system by [radically redesigning how philanthropy connects with Black leaders](#). Named to draw attention to the consequence of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, as a result of which tens of thousands of Black teachers lost their jobs when Black students were integrated into white schools, The 1954 Project seeks to honor Black educators from the past and the longstanding legacy of diverse Black leaders fighting for educational equity for all students. “Enslaved Africans learned to read, write, and teach under the threat of death fully committed to the generations that they would never meet,” says Liz Thompson. “It is that depth of resolve that sets the stage for the importance of education in our community today.”

Moreover, funders have a unique role to play in preserving our history as well. For example, the [Boston Foundation](#) has embarked on a journey engaging with staff and internal stakeholders on issues of race and reparations, while also producing a dialogue series on reparations for a broader audience. Its reparations series is [available on its website](#). Boston Foundation President M. Lee Pelton shares: “To tell the truth is to look back and make an honest appraisal on how we got where we got—acknowledging racial equities and understanding all of the factors that led to these inequities. You have to understand how we got here in order to move forward.”

Organizations and resources working to preserve our truth and history (this list is not exhaustive, nor have the organizations been independently vetted by the authors):

[Equal Justice Initiative](#) | [NAACP Legal Defense Fund](#) | [The 1619 Project](#) | [Facing History & Ourselves](#) | [Shorefront Legacy Center in Evanston](#) | [Mapping Prejudice](#) | [The Redress Movement](#) | [Kinfolk](#)

SECTION 4



A big misconception about reparations and repair is that it is a discussion only about history rather than an investment in the future. Get inspired by this collection of quotes from movement leaders and allies who are working toward a more equitable future and what they envision on the “other side” of reparations.

What Do You See on the “Other Side” of Reparations?



Robert Smith III

Senior Program Officer of the Thriving Cultures Program, [Surdna Foundation](#)

“Right now I get to choose a card, but there are only 12 cards. But what if I had all 52 cards, and the jokers, and I could choose whatever I wanted to do or be? I think that’s what the world after reparations looks like for Black people. And I think, for all of us, it means that everyone gets to live in that truth of everyone offered a full deck, and some haven’t been cheating the game the whole time.”



Chi-Ante Singletary-Jones

Founder and Chief Reparations Officer
[Cypress Fund](#)

“I feel like on the other side of reparations, I might not have hair because I would be so free. My hope is that reparations is a step on the pathway to allow Black folks to release the stress and the weight of the world. My post-reparations world looks like community and joy and love—all of those things.”



Kimberlé Crenshaw
Co-founder and Executive Director
[African American Policy Forum](#)

“Race no longer has the predictable outcomes that it has. That is actually not that radical. Ultimately, in the Kingdom of Heaven there would be no bad outcomes, but in this life, it would at least mean that those bad outcomes are not tied to Blackness.”



Richard Wallace
Founder and Executive Director
[Equity and Transformation](#)

“The open container that will exist around Black identity, expression, life, in the US is the greatest benefit that reparations will bring.”



Brea Baker
Chief Equity Officer
[Inspire Justice](#)

“Do you know how it’s beautiful to be by a lake and to have access to a slowed-down life, the kind where childhoods are full of roaming? [White people] get to benefit from that kind of slowness and pass that on to their children and their children’s children, and to know that generations of their family will have access to that intergenerational level of slowness. That should be something everyone, regardless of race, has access to.”



Robin Rue Simmons
Founder and Executive Director
[FirstRepair](#)

“On the other side of reparations for the Black community, it looks like pure joy and liberation. For the rest of the world, it looks like the mountaintop that King preached about.”



Sol Anderson

President and CEO

[Evanston Community Foundation](#)

“The opportunity for Black boys and girls to start their lives without having to jump in and fight for every inch that they gain. I have an emotional reaction—it is hard for me to grasp what it would mean to walk into any room and realize that there’s not something to prove.”



Nkechi Taifa

Founder

[Reparation Education Project](#)

“We wouldn’t have the mass incarceration that we have, the type of health care system that we have, we wouldn’t have the type of education system ... I’m talking about a whole new society. That’s my vision for the future with reparations, with what I call reparatory justice.”



Maco Faniel

Director of Organizational
Learning and Development
[Weissberg Foundation](#)

“For me it’s a world where everyone has what they need to be able to thrive so that we won’t have a need for exclusion, punishment, or confinement. It’s a world where reproductive justice is settled, where Puerto Rico and Washington DC are states, where Black girlhood and womanhood is not contested daily, where prisons and jails don’t exist, and where we have a livable wage and so many other things. In [Christian scripture](#) it says something like ‘what is hope that can be seen’—this is the thing that keeps me going because it’s very easy to take on a pessimistic viewpoint. So, I have a hope for a better world.”



William “Sandy” Darity

Professor of Public Policy, African
and African American Studies, and
Economics, [Duke University](#)

“Wealth disparities have suppressed the capacity of Black American descendants of persons enslaved in the United States to fully develop their talents and has deprived the nation of their complete level of inventiveness and creativity. ... Reparations will not satisfy folks who want to maintain a significant advantage over Black people.”



Kamm Howard

Director
[Reparations United](#)

“We create new pyramids, and the world has a total new order, and thousands of years from now, hundreds of years from now, this moment will go down in history as a pivotal moment for humanity.”



Edgar Villanueva

Founder and CEO, [Decolonizing Wealth Project](#) and [Liberated Capital](#)

“The healing on the other side of reparations will be tremendous. I am so tired of hurting and seeing my communities hurt, and Black communities hurt from the ongoing cycles of violence that happen as a result of colonization and the enslavement of Black people. We believe this principle of seven generations in Indigenous communities—that is, that what happens now is going to impact the next seven generations. I’m excited to imagine a future where our youth are not impacted by these historical traumas.”



David Ragland

Co-founder and Co-executive
Director for Culture, Organizing and
Reparations, [The Truth Telling Project](#)

“For me reparations is a decolonial world-re-making project that allows us to begin to dream freely about who we could be if we didn’t have the pressures of making a dollar over everything. I think that this planet is demanding it so much that reparations could be or will be healing for this entire planet.”



Jean-Pierre Brutus

Senior Counsel, Economic
Justice Program
[New Jersey Institute for Social Justice](#)

“It’s a world I don’t think I will personally recognize because it would be a different world. It would be a world-making event to invoke the language of Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò and Adom Getachew. At a small individual level, interactions would be based on mutuality and respect.”



Temi Bennett

Co-CEO

[if, A foundation for Radical Possibility](#)

“I see subversively marooning from capitalism in the best way that we can. Pursuing self-determination through cooperative economics. I see Black people being valued as human beings and reaping the benefits of our genius and labor.”



Collette Watson

Project Director, [Media 2070](#)

Vice President of Cultural Strategy

[Free Press](#)

“I believe reparations are inevitable. It’s such a softer time, and we are able to live into our softness. We can access intimacy of all kinds and not feel that that vulnerability makes us somehow weak or puts us in the stance of victimhood. And Blackness is understood so much more broadly, beyond binaries and borders.”



Ricshaw Adkins Roane

Executive Director
[Weissberg Foundation](#)

“I’d like to borrow something I heard recently and turn this question around to say, ‘What would you be doing if you didn’t have to fight for justice?’ So, on the other side of this, I am a librarian. I am surrounded by books, and I get to read all day because I am not fighting for my people, for recognition of both our contributions and what has been and continues to be taken from us. On the other side is true liberation, it’s the ability to exist in our fullness.”

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