

Reparations for slavery

The H.R. 40 Bill

The fight of reparations for Black Americans has been ongoing since the abolition of slavery. While there has been little progress over the last century, more people have started to advocate for reparations in light of recent unjustly events, such as the George Floyd killing and obvious discrimination. Members of the government have been pushing to pass the H.R. 40 Bill, a name that stems back to the 19th century from the saying “40 acres and a mule.” During the conclusion of the Civil War, the North confiscated 400,000 acres of land from Confederate landowners and awarded it to newly freed slaves in parcels of 40 acres apiece. However, after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, the land was then returned to the white Confederates, and the freed slaves never received any other compensation. Over 150 years later, the H.R. 40 Bill has come into discussion. The *Congressional Budget Office* summarizes: “H.R. 40 would establish a 15-member commission to study the effects of slavery and discriminatory policies on African Americans and recommend appropriate remedies, including reparations.” It is estimated that the implementation of the bill would cost \$20 million over a 5-year period. The passing of the Bill would be a huge step in helping Black families get their justified compensation, but it won’t be easy. With Democrats in office, the H.R. 40 Bill has a strong chance to pass through the House of Representatives, with backing from President Joe Biden. However, the Bill may have trouble passing through the Senate, as the majority of Republicans oppose it.

Support and Opposition of Reparations

There are many strong opinions for and against the idea of reparations. While slaves never received compensation for the centuries of unpaid forced labor and suffering they endured, many believe that their Black American ancestors should be owed for the years of hardships that resulted from slavery and post-abolition. Since the end of slavery, Black Americans have faced continued discrimination and unequal treatment, especially economically and in education. There is also an unusually high incarceration rate among Black Americans and large racial wealth gap. “Some suggestions for how to handle reparations include direct cash payments to Black Americans who are descended from former slaves. Others include a combination of financial assistance and social programs aimed at benefiting the Black community (Huddleston).” Advocates for reparations would like to see assistance for affordable housing, education programs, and grants for Black-owned businesses. A large goal of reparations is to provide Black Americans with long-term economic success. One of the largest arguments against reparations is that they would likely cost the federal government over \$10 trillion dollars, which could hurt the economy considering the high national debt. Another argument in opposition is that nobody from when slavery was abolished is still alive today. People like Mitch McConnell, a Republican Senator, believe that America has already made racial progress and want to forget the past. They argue it would be too difficult to choose who gets compensated and how much they should get. The biggest question to the debate is whether or not reparations are feasible.

Land Reparations Awarded in California

It took over 100 years to right a wrong, but on Sept. 30, 2021, California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a law returning a multi-million dollar beachfront property back over to the descendants of the original owners. Charles and Wilma Bruce bought the land back in 1912 at a time when living by the ocean was not desirable and for years ran a successful business that catered to African Americans. They had an overnight lodge, dance hall, cafe, and beach dressing test. However, when white people decided they wanted to move into the area, they made it clear that African Americans were no longer welcome. The Bruce's, as well as other African Americans who owned homes next to their property were harassed and threatened, possibly by the Ku Klux Klan. Fake "No Trespassing" signs were put up blocking patrons of the Bruce's resort walk to the beach, and a fire was started on the property, but put out before it caused damage. Eventually, the property was seized by the city through eminent domain and the land was turned into a public park and part of the property houses the Los Angeles County Lifeguard Training Center. In 2021, a community organizer, Kavon Ward, established Justice for Bruce's Beach in an effort to have the Bruce's land, as well as years of lost income, returned to their descendants. As a result of the success of the return of the land, Ward co-founded a new organization, 'Where is My Land', that is working toward helping more African Americans with similar stories receive restitution for lost wealth.

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