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A Reparations Roadmap For 21st Century Black Americans

By [KIM JOHNSON \(/PEOPLE/KIM-JOHNSON\)](/PEOPLE/KIM-JOHNSON) & [DALLAS WILLIAMS \(/PEOPLE/DALLAS-WILLIAMS\)](/PEOPLE/DALLAS-WILLIAMS) • FEB 11, 2020

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There is an ongoing, emotionally charged debate

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/23/business/economy/reparations-slavery.html>) about if and how the U.S. government should make economic amends to black American descendants of slaves, both for slavery itself and other government-sanctioned racial injustices.



Listen

49:25

Reparations are compensation given to a specific group, either in monetary form or through otherwise helpful actions, as reimbursement for past wrongdoings. Even after slavery was abolished, racially-motivated policies and practices in the United States continued to limit economic growth and prosperity for African Americans.

A bill (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/40>) to study and develop a reparations plan was reintroduced in the U.S. House of Representatives in 2019 by Texas Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee. It proposed a commission to evaluate the effects of slavery and identify an appropriate solution to make amends for the nation's past transgressions.

Numerous economists have theories about what should be paid and how to divvy it up, but there is no consensus about what specific amount to give, where to allocate monies, or who qualifies to receive it. Reparations could be a single check to descendants, or follow an atonement model (<https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-brooks-reparations-20190423-story.html>) to build generational wealth through investments in housing, education, etc.

What would a 21st-century reparations program look like? Who would qualify and how would it be implemented? Where would the money come from? Who decides where and how it should be allocated?

Could financial reparations reduce the racial wealth gap? What else could the United States government do to make amends to black Americans for the crimes of slavery and subsequent injustices?

Guests:

- **William Darity Jr.**, Samuel DuBois Cook Professor of Public Policy, African and African American Studies and Economics at Duke University (<https://sanford.duke.edu/people/faculty/darity-jr-william>) and co-author of the forthcoming book, "From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century" (<https://uncpress.org/book/9781469654973/from-here-to-equality/>)
- **A. Kirsten Mullen**, writer, folklorist, museum consultant and lecturer whose work focuses on race, art, history, and politics; co-author of "From Here to Equality" (<https://uncpress.org/book/9781469654973/from-here-to-equality/>)

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**This interview was recorded on Wednesday, February 12.*

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