10 Takeaways From Sandy Darity’s New Report, ‘Resurrecting The Promise Of 40 Acres: The Imperative Of Reparations’

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Here are 10 takeaways from Sandy Darity’s new report: “Resurrecting The Promise Of 40 Acres: The Imperative Of Reparations.” (Photo: William Darity Jr./Justin Cook/Minneapolis Fed)

It seems that 2020 is the year of us seeing America clearly.

The murder of George Floyd put a global spotlight on police brutality against Black people in the U.S., and the covid-19 pandemic unveiled disparities in healthcare and lifestyle.

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These two life-changing events highlight the urgent need for reparations for the Black descendants of the American slave trade, reparations activists say.

Many in the Black community are calling for reparations and went to Twitter during the last few weeks to express their support for the reparations movement and ADOS.
Two of the most noted reparations activists, William “Sandy” Darity Jr. and Andrea Kirsten Mullen, have released a new report, “Resurrecting the Promise of 40 Acres: The Imperative of Reparations for Black Americans.

In it, they argue why the time is now for reparations. “Resurrecting the Promise of 40 Acres” was published by the Roosevelt Institute, a think tank, student network and nonprofit partner to the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum.

Darity Jr. is a professor of economics, public policy, and African and African American studies at Duke University and a senior fellow at the Roosevelt Institute. Mullen is a writer, folklorist, museum consultant, and lecturer whose work focuses on race, art, history, and politics. They co-wrote the book, “From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century.” Darity has also written, “Persistent Disparity: Race and Economic Inequality in the United States since 1945” and “The Black Underclass: Critical Essays on Race and Unwantedness,” among others.

Here are 10 takeaways from “Resurrecting The Promise Of 40 Acres: The Imperative Of Reparations.”

**Wealth gap goes way back**

The wealth gap between Black and white people is enormous and growing. In 2106, the net worth of a typical white family was $171,000 — nearly 10 times greater than that of a Black family — $17,150, according to The Brookings Institute. Today’s Black-white wealth gap began long ago with the unfulfilled promise to freed slaves of 40 acres in 1865, Darity and Mullen reported.

“The payment of this debt in the 21st century is feasible—and at least 155 years overdue,” they wrote in “Resurrecting the Promise of 40 Acres: The Imperative of Reparations for Black Americans.”

**It’ll cost to close the wealth gap**
“ADOS, I think they’re starting to get it,” Reporting-live-from-the-Kremlin tweeted @wishbumpycoulda.

Jecory Arthur (@jecoreyarthur), a Louisville Metro Council District 4 candidate, tweeted, “We are done with this system. We are resetting it. We are the ones. Who’s ready? #ADOS #BlackLivesMatter.”

“I can smell #Reparations for #ADOS in the air. Can you?” AmericanDOS-N-NYC @AmericandosN tweeted.

Donwurryboutitsweehart (@ShanShoots2) tweeted: “Reparations always been touchy until I found out THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA HAS PAID EVERYBODYYYYY BUT BLACK PEOPLE.”
Darity and Mullen estimate that it will cost the government anywhere between $10 trillion and $12 trillion to dismantle the wealth gap between Black and white people in the U.S.

**Revamping HR 40**

HR 40 is a bill that calls for a commission to study and develop reparations proposals for African Americans. It was first introduced in 1980 and has been presented several times. The bill seeks a commission to examine slavery and discrimination in the colonies and the U.S. from 1619 to the present and to recommend remedies.

Darity and Mullen think there should be changes made to the proposal.

"...HR 40 is not adequate in its current form and requires revision," they wrote in the report. "Unlike the original text that uses 1619 as the starting point, we designate 1776 as the point of origin for the case for Black reparations. The culpable party is the United States government, and it did not exist in 1619."

The report also stated that Congress should be involved. "While the current version of HR 40 distributes appointment of the commissioners between the executive and legislative branches and unspecified ‘grassroots organizations,’ the commission should be appointed by Congress as well — since, ultimately, legislation for Black reparations must be enacted by Congress," the report said.
Why monetary compensation?

“Ultimately, respect for Black Americans, as people and as citizens — and acknowledgment, redress, and closure for the history and financial hardship they have endured — requires monetary compensation. Reparations would enable the descendants of the enslaved to receive the inheritance that was properly theirs all along. The payment of this debt is feasible and at least 155 years overdue,” the report stated.

Black reparations eligibility

According to Darity and Mullen, two main criteria determine who is eligible for reparations.

First, an individual must prove that they have at least one ancestor who was enslaved in America. Secondly, an individual “must demonstrate that they have self-identified as Black, negro, or African American on an official document — perhaps making public the self-report of their race on the U.S. Census — for at least 12 years before the enactment of a reparations program or a study commission for reparations, whichever comes first,” they wrote in the report.

First chance at reparations

According to Darity and Mullen, the U.S. had a chance to set things right with former slaves early on and failed when it failed to deliver the promised 40-acre land grants to the newly emancipated.

“The reparations plan we put forward designates Black-American descendants of U.S. slavery as the target community. This community’s claim for restitution anchors on the U.S. government’s failure to deliver the promised 40-acre land grants to their newly emancipated ancestors in the aftermath of the Civil War (Fleming 1906, 721-737). That failure laid the foundation for the enormous contemporary gap in wealth between Black and white people in the U.S. If the land allocation had been made to the freedmen and freedwomen, and had that ownership been
protected, we speculate that there would be no need to consider the case for Black reparations,” the report stated.

Calculations

Darity and Mullen propose using the 40-acre land grants themselves as a route for calculating the size of a potential Black reparations bill. “If a typical household consisted of four persons, the allocation would have amounted to 10 acres per person. With 4 million emancipated persons at the close of the Civil War, the overall distribution of land to the formerly With an average value of an acre of land set at $10 in 1865, the overall value of the allocation would have been $400 million. The present value compounded at a 6-percent interest rate (the average rate of return plus an inflation adjustment) amounts to $3.1 trillion,” according to the report.

It will be necessary to add on a 9-percent interest rate, said financial expert John Talbott. In doing so, the final estimated reparations bill would be $16.5 trillion.

Systemic reparations

Reparations should not be doled out piecemeal, the authors said. Just as racism has been systemic, so should reparations. The incremental efforts that some institutions have made so far
for reparations have been admirable, according to the report, but not enough for fundamental change to alter structural, racial economic inequality in the country.

**Government should pay its debts**

It has been established that the nation was built by slaves and that countless institutions, from churches to universities to corporations, benefited from the slave trade. Now Darity and Mullen argue that the debt of free labor needs to finally be paid back.

“Therefore, the federal government—the core institution that established and maintained the system of racial injustice and the core institution that can provide all-encompassing structural change — must meet the debt. Indeed, state governments have neither the obligation nor the capacity to execute an appropriate comprehensive plan for Black reparations,” the report stated.

**Commission needed**

Darity and Mullen call for a commission to be established that would “parallel” the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians — a group appointed by the U.S. Congress in 1980 to conduct an official governmental study into the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.

Such a commission for reparations for Black descendants of the American slave trade, “can be a valuable prelude to the design and enactment of legislation for Black reparations,” according to the report. The commission could be the one that is designated in HR 40, but the two authors suggested changes.
“While the current version of HR 40 distributes appointment of the commissioners between the executive and legislative branches and unspecified ‘grassroots organizations,’ the commission should be appointed by Congress as well — since, ultimately, legislation for Black reparations must be enacted by Congress,” Mullen and Darity wrote.

The two suggested that commissioners should not receive a salary although there must be a salaried professional staff to support the commissioners’ efforts.