

[www.newsweek.com /biden-leaves-reparations-out-racial-equity-plan-despite-lefts-call-reform-1521356](https://www.newsweek.com/biden-leaves-reparations-out-racial-equity-plan-despite-lefts-call-reform-1521356)

## Biden leaves reparations out of racial equity plan despite left's call for reform

By Alexandra Hutzler On 7/29/20 at 11:57 AM EDT

7-8 minutes

Democratic nominee Joe Biden's economic plan to combat racial inequality in the U.S. skips any mention of reparations—a concept gaining popularity in the mainstream—despite past assurances that he would at least study the issue.

The "Build Back Better By Advancing Racial Equity Across the American Economy" plan features investing in affordable housing and homeownership, bolstering small business opportunities and making public schools as well as private historically Black schools tuition-free for families with incomes under \$125,000.

While the plan was notable in terms of addressing racial wealth barriers, it also was notable for leaving out bold ideas endorsed by Black Lives Matter advocates and the left-wing of the party. It didn't include any form of direct financial compensation for Black Americans for enslavement and discriminatory policies. It also didn't address H.R. 40, a bill introduced in the House of Representatives that would study what the federal government owes the descendants of slaves and explore ways to repay that debt.

Reparations were a top-tier issue during the Democratic primary, during which many of Biden's rivals endorsed, at least in theory, monetary restitution for descendants of slaves. The idea has also been gaining momentum in cities across the country. Earlier this month, city council members in Asheville, North Carolina, unanimously approved a measure supporting "community reparations" for Black residents. Lawmakers in California and Rhode Island have also started to examine possible reparations programs.

0:00/0:00

The logo for Cedato, featuring the word "cedato" in a lowercase, blue, sans-serif font.

"My position is that you cannot really seriously talk about advancing racial equity in America in this day, in this time without addressing the issue of reparations," Nkechi Taifa, a human rights attorney and member of the National African American Reparations Commission, told *Newsweek*.

"This should not be anything to be scared about or tiptoed around. He should just go bold. Trump doesn't have a problem going bold with things he is passionate about or that his constituency is passionate about. The Democratic nominee really needs to check the pulse of the community and not be behind the eight ball," she added.

The United States has approved of reparations in the past. Financial compensation was given to the Japanese Americans 40 years after they were interned during World War II. Under the signed the Civil Liberties Act signed by President Ronald Reagan, the government offered a formal apology and paid \$20,000 to each survivor.

An ABC News/Ipsos [poll](#) published last month showed that 26 percent of Americans said they believe the federal government should pay money to Black Americans descended from slaves. Despite the low

overall support, the share of people supporting it has grown. In 2002, a Gallup poll found that only 14 percent of Americans backed the idea.

William Darity Jr., an economist at Duke University who studies racial inequality, told *Newsweek* he is "not surprised there is no commitment to reparations" as Biden "never has suggested that he supports African American reparations, and it would be startling if he were to change directions at this time."

When pressed about his position on reparations during a virtual town hall hosted by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) last month, Biden demurred and said his answer "would depend on what it was and will it include Native Americans as well." Darity Jr. noted that it would be difficult to group the two cases together as the motivations behind the compensation are different.

"Reparations for Black American descendants of persons enslaved in the United States seek the material conditions to claim full citizenship, while reparations for Native Americans are a claim for sovereignty. So the two cases cannot be combined," he said.

But Biden has previously voiced support for studying reparations, even though such language was not included in the racial equity proposal. His campaign reportedly told members of the press in a call on Tuesday that the former vice president "doesn't have a problem with the study, but he believes there are things we can do right now that we don't have to wait on a study to tell us that will change the lives of Black and brown people in America."

The Black Lives Matter movement and calls for racial justice since the police killing of George Floyd in May have pushed the H.R. 40 legislation into the spotlight. There are currently 141 sponsors of the bill, the most since it's been introduced.

Dr. Ron Daniels, the convenor of the National African American Reparations Commission, told *Newsweek* that it's his understanding that Biden supports studying reparations. If the November election is a "blue wave," as some analysts are predicting, he said Biden would be in a position to sign a historic bill.

Daniels also commended Biden on the racial equity plan, specifically it's housing and homeownership policies, arguing that it's noticeable for a presidential candidate to have such a clear Black agenda.

"We've not seen that level of commitment explicitly and I think it's a response to the fact that the black vote has been the most reliable vote for the Democratic Party and never really rewarded in relationship to its loyalty or its need," he said.



Democratic presidential candidate and former Vice President Joe Biden gestures as he speaks during a campaign event at the William "Hicks" Anderson Community Center in Wilmington, Delaware on July 28, 2020. Andrew Caballero-Reynolds/AFP/Getty Images

Other advocates have also applauded Biden's proposals as a good launching pad and a sign that he is listening to the moment. In addition to his racial equity plan, Biden also released a "Lift Every Voice" agenda for Black Americans earlier this year that pledged to invest \$900 million in gun violence reform, \$1 billion per year juvenile justice reform and address environmental justice.

"Obviously Biden is light-years of improvement from Trump in terms of racial equity and racial justice," said Dorian Warren, president of Community Change, a national organization advocating for low-income populations of color. "I would say it's a good first start but it can go further."

President Donald Trump doesn't have an explicit Black agenda, but he's repeatedly argued that he has done more for Black Americans than any other commander-in-chief. He often points to his administration's efforts at passing criminal justice reform and the low unemployment rate for Black people before the pandemic.

At a White House press briefing last week, Trump said that he's "done more for Black Americans than anybody with the possible of exception of Abraham Lincoln."

*Newsweek* has reached out to the Biden campaign for comment on the equity plan and his position on reparations but did not receive a response by publication.