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# How Reparations Advocacy Funders Hope to Survive the DEI Backlash

9-11 minutes



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When I [first started reporting](#) in 2022 on the funding landscape for nonprofits advocating for reparations for slavery and the systemically racist laws and policies that followed abolition, the philanthrosphere was slowly getting on board with the issue. By 2023, funder support for this work had [risen to a surprising level](#): 80 national funders had provided grants for these efforts, according to a Sept. 2023 report by a team that included researchers from The [Bridgespan Group](#).

But 2023 was also the year that the U.S. Supreme Court [banned affirmative action](#) in college admissions, followed quickly by a lawsuit against the [Fearless Fund](#), which sought to award \$20,000 grants to Black women-owned small businesses; the fund lost in 2024. Lawsuits and other attacks on diversity and racial equity efforts have only escalated since, culminating in the recent [Trump administration executive order](#) claiming such efforts are illegal and mandating that federal agencies take an active role challenging them in the public, private and education sectors. Three funders specifically cited in the 2023 Bridespan report — the Ford, MacArthur and Hewlett foundations — all have far more than the \$500 million in assets that the administration has set as the criteria for its first round of potential attacks. In this climate, it's natural to wonder whether a movement that advocates that federal, state and local governments make monetary reparations for their history of discrimination against Black Americans has a fighting chance to attract further support from the traditionally risk-averse funding universe.

It's still way too soon to assess the impact of the anti-DEI executive orders, but conversations with one funder that backed reparations research and two deeply involved funding intermediaries leave room for some cautious optimism about the future of reparations advocacy funding during and beyond the second Trump term.

[William T. Grant Foundation](#) President Dr. Adam Gamoran was eager to share work resulting from the funder's [\\$300,000 2021 grant](#) to the Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity at Duke University to support research about the feasibility of paying reparations to Black descendants of enslaved people. Headed by

Dr. William “Sandy” A. Darity Jr., the Cook Center funding led to a new book, [“The Black Reparations Project: A Handbook for Racial Justice,”](#) and [a research paper](#) that explores “the potential positive ripple effects of a child-centric reparations policy strategy.” Darity [is a leading scholar](#) advocating for direct payments to slavery’s descendants to close the country’s [estimated \\$11.2 trillion Black/white wealth gap](#). [The Russell Sage Foundation](#) also has supported Darity’s work with a fellowship, as well as awarding more than \$450,000 to researchers at other institutions for other reparations-related research since 2020.

“We are very excited about the work that Sandy Darity has performed,” Gamoran said during our conversation, “and we’re very excited to see that Professor Darity has received support from other foundations.” Darity’s work is one of only two reparations-related research projects that Grant has supported so far, but Gamoran expressed his foundation’s continued interest in the topic. “We’re focused on reducing inequality in youth outcomes,” he said, and “reparations to Black American descendants of slavery is one strategy that is being considered. So that’s the context in which [reparations-related research] work came to us and continues to be of interest to us.”

Asked about his foundation’s response to the Trump administration’s executive order, Gamoran said, “We have no plans to change the way we do business. We have no plans to change our funding priorities, which are reducing inequality in youth outcomes and improving the way evidence from research is used in policy and practice.”

“I really think foundations need to hold the course and to play a leadership role and not be intimidated into anticipatory obedience

from these threats, which really have nothing to do with our missions,” he added.

While the Grant Foundation’s Gamoran was outspoken about staying the course, [Decolonizing Wealth Project](#)’s founder and CEO [Edgar Villanueva](#) and Aria Florant of Liberation Ventures expressed concerns about the future. At the same time, the funding intermediaries have continued to flourish even as the anti-equity backlash started taking hold. In December, Liberated Capital, a project of Decolonizing Wealth, announced another \$2 million in grants to Black-led, reparations-focused nonprofits through its #Case4Reparations fund. Including that \$2 million, #Case4Reparations has announced or moved a total of \$8.7 million in grants since its 2021 launch.

Liberation Ventures, meanwhile, has seen striking growth since its own inception in 2020. When IP [first profiled the funding intermediary in 2023](#) it had raised a total of roughly \$6 million; as of December, CEO Aria Florant said that number had grown to over \$45 million from almost 80 funders. Florant said that Liberation Ventures has deployed almost \$10 million since its founding. The organization is also poised to announce an ambitious, 10-year Reparations Grantmaking Blueprint as part of its [overall 25 year plan](#) to help build “a multiracial democracy that works for all of us — by making racial repair a reality in the United States.”

Villanueva and Florant share a conviction that there is no hope for reparations advocacy at the federal level for the next four years, and are looking to play a longer, more local game. “We are under no illusions that the federal work is possible or even desired right now,” said Florant. “We don’t want to see a Trump administration

execute reparations.” For his part, Villanueva expressed reservations about the planned May 17 [“National Reparations Rally”](#) in Washington, D.C. Even though some #Case4Reparations grantees are involved in the effort, Villanueva, said, “I’m deeply committed to reparations, but is there a different path toward reparations that we need to be thinking about in this political moment where all types of rights are being attacked?”

While many of the #Case4Reparations Fund’s grantees are advocating for federal reparations legislation, neither the fund itself nor Liberation Ventures is focused at that level. “Our strategy was always to build a bottom-up movement,” said Florant, because before her organization’s formal 2023 launch, “we did so much learning about what was effective in other social and political at-scale movements, both in the U.S. and around the world.”

Citing examples like marriage equality and marijuana policy, Florant said, “building the mass movement is critical” before attempting to influence federal policy. “State and local work, in particular in the U.S., is what helps build the snowball effect to the federal government, rather than some huge policy coming from” the federal government.

The argument has merit, particularly when backed up by the example of state and local wins like the [introduction of a reparations-related bill in Illinois](#) and the [\\$5.9 million that Palm Springs, California](#) agreed to pay to Black and Latino families who were displaced from their neighborhood in the 1960s. Liberation Ventures grantees were part of both advocacy efforts.

For their part, most of #Case4Reparations Fund’s grantees past and present have had a local focus “because that’s where we’ve

seen more opportunity,” said a spokesperson for Decolonizing Wealth. However, “many of the grantee partners working on local issues are also in coalition with one another to push for a federal reparations program, so it isn’t as cut and dry as who is working locally vs. who is working nationally.”

The question is whether their focus on local work will assuage Liberation Ventures’ and the Case4Reparations Fund’s backers, particularly given that the Trump administration’s executive order specifically includes state and local governments as targets of the federal government’s scrutiny along with (at least to start) foundations with endowments of \$500 million or more. “I think it’s going to be increasingly hard moving forward to fund race-specific stuff, let alone something as radical” as reparations, Villanueva said.

The fact that Villanueva’s organization has a lot of general operating support and “a significant base of individual funders or donors makes a difference,” he said. But at the same time “we’re very much seeing a shift that is causing us to have conversations about the future of this work.” Part of that, he thinks, is due to some funders who “joined the bandwagon” when racial equity work overall was a hot item, and how “it’s easy to check out” now the political environment has changed.

Florant argues for staying the course. The work that funders and nonprofits do now may not move the needle under Trump, but will lay the groundwork for the future. It’s necessary to continue funding reparations work to build “the infrastructure we will need when eventually the pendulum does swing back,” she said.

“We have to be ready. If we don’t invest now, the movement will

atrophy, and we'll actually be behind where we were right now," Florant said. "We'll be scrambling to catch up, and we won't be able to take advantage of those windows of opportunities."