

The Case for Reparations:
The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch and
a Program to Understand and Close the Racial Wealth Gap

by

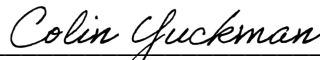
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Date: 4/13/2021

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in the Divinity School of Duke University

2021

ABSTRACT

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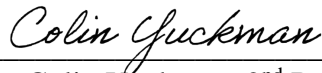
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Abstract

Considerable attention is being given to the growing problem of the racial wealth gap in the United States of America. Understanding this chasm requires a critique of the government's imprimatur on the institution of slavery, the legalization of Jim Crow, and the myriad of ways institutional racism¹ has been suffused into the fabric of America², directly impacting African Americans ability to acquire and accumulate wealth. After the official end of slavery in 1865, the Emancipated were promised a type of reparations in the form of "40 acres and a mule." However, with the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, his successor Andrew Johnson rescinded the order, forcing blacks into quasi-slavery in the form of vagrancy laws, sharecropping and convict leasing. Then, the next fifty years of Jim Crow segregation effectively allowed the country to improvise new ways to subjugate blacks into a new caste system with alternative laws at the hands of the political and economic elite, this was especially prevalent in those areas once reliant upon slave labor. Blacks were routinely subjected to literacy tests, black codes, vagrancy laws, poll taxes and grandfather clauses, which were meant to restrict political participation, economic inclusion and social integration, lasting from 1877 well into the 1950s.

This research proposes that the commodification of black bodies served as the underpinning of American capitalism, and demonstrates how slave labor across the South, benefitted other parts of the country, even the world, and served as the driving

¹ By institutional racism, I assert as racist beliefs, ideas and attitudes that are maintained within any social structure, which seeks to marginalize or oppress a group based on socially constructed hierarchies that privileges white people. W.E.B. Dubois in *The Souls of Black Folks* believed that racism in general is the result of capitalist social structures. J. Angelo Corlett argues that racism within social structures occurs when "some person acts, fails to act, or attempts to act in a discriminatory manner toward another person or group of persons based on prejudicial beliefs or attitudes about the targeted person's or groups ethnicity." J. Angelo Corlett, *Race, Racism & Reparations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), pg. 58.

² Throughout this research I will use the United States of America and America interchangeably to refer to the same country.

force behind an emerging national economic system. The amalgamation of two-hundred and forty-six years of enslavement, ninety years of legalized Jim Crow segregation, sixty years of separate but equal and thirty-five years of racist housing policies, locked generations out of economic opportunity and gave rise to ubiquitous pathologies across the nation. These and other injustices were supported by local municipalities and bolstered by the United States Federal Government, which warrants a substantial justice claim.

In 1989, the late John Conyers (D-MI.) began presenting a bill before the House of Representatives to develop a commission to merely study the social effects of slavery, segregation and its continuing economic implications. The bill has remained tabled in the House of Representatives for the past thirty years. In a historic move in 2019, a group of panelists were able to present cogent arguments before the House of Representatives, debating the pros and cons of reparations, however since the landmark hearing no further action has been taken on the matter. This research aims to justify a reparations program by establishing the myriad of ways historical kleptocracy, state-sanctioned segregation and federally supported laws set the stage for the current and ever-growing racial wealth gap. To construct this argument, I draw upon historical, sociological, theological and political scholarship, in an effort to establish the United States of America has yet to atone for the moral injury of slavery and should be held culpable for its lingering effects. Therefore, I propose the federal government should be held responsible for acknowledging, redressing and bringing closure to these and other reprehensible acts, and a mea culpa is only one step toward national healing and wholeness.

I utilize Walter Rauschenbusch's work, *Christianizing the Social Order* which examines the symbiotic relationship between Christianity and social reform, as he critiqued the economic conditions of his day and argued for radical social, political, and economic changes in the structures that crippled the vulnerable and the underserved. His understanding of reform and justice could play a vital role in moving the Church and the nation toward penance. In this work, I propose that reparations are not only a moral claim but a biblical and theological mandate, that will be analyzed and synthesized through past and contemporary scholarship. I will conclude with the idea that reparations is the only actionable recourse that will effectively close the racial wealth gap, in order to facilitate wholeness for the American descendants of slaves. This research will conclude that cumulative injustices leveraged against Blacks have had damaging effects on the present, and many of the injustices were supported and sanctioned by the United States federal government and executed by state legislatures. Therefore, my research argues that the federal government should be held culpable for the current social, political and economic damages experienced by contemporary African Americans.

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Acknowledgements

The completion of this body of work was deeply personal, gratifying, immensely rewarding and was hard to stomach at times. This work is a tribute to my ancestors who struggled, fought, sacrificed and died, so that I could have the opportunity to conduct this research. I am thankful that God blessed me the perseverance, ingenuity and life experiences to make this thesis a reality. It is my hope that this body of work will be considered among the already existing research to ensure reparative justice for the American descendants of slaves. While God gets the glory, there are a number a people who certainly deserve some credit for their support, encouragement and praise for their sacrifice, in helping me make this long-awaited dream become a reality.

To my mother, Barbara Campbell. I am eternally grateful for your tireless sacrifices, support and unwavering commitment to me during the writing of this project, it has been the fuel that I needed to cross the finish line. Growing up, I watched how hard you worked to ensure a roof over our heads and there are no words to describe how much I love and appreciate you. It is my hope that this body of work allows you to see that your unwavering commitment to your family was worth it every step of the way. Thank you so much for not giving up and seeing things through.

To my sisters, Amy and Aundrea. Only you know how much of this writing was a very real and lived experience and yet through it all, we are strong and appreciative for those difficult times. I hope that this body of work inspires you to reach for your dreams and allows you to see that you can achieve anything you set your mind to. I love each of you so much and appreciate your care, concern for me during some of my most challenging times.

To my grandmother, Lore Campbell. This is your degree. You have lived through many of the experiences that this research has highlighted. Your strength through it all has been the encouragement that our entire family needed to endure the challenges of Mississippi. Thank you for your dedication to family and committing to raising your brothers and sisters after the death of your mother, Martha. When you made the sacrificial decision to quit school and work the cotton fields and worked as a domestic to provide for your family, it is a true testament to who you are and what you mean to this family. Your strength and will are amazing and I am so grateful that you are alive to witness this monumental moment.

To my late father, Gary Brown. Although you never lived long enough to see this day, I will never forget our last conversation and the way you expressed to me how proud you were to have a son who would soon be a 'doctor.'

To the late Dr. T. Vaughn Walker, as my childhood pastor and seminary professor, I thank you so much for believing in me and for giving me a chance to exercise my gifts. While under your leadership, I experienced the love of a shepherd and in your classroom, I witnessed the excitement of a professor who truly cared for his students. Your final act of love for me was writing the letter of recommendation that allowed me admission into Duke Divinity School. In our final email exchange, you stated, "I am proud of you and all of your accomplishments." It is my prayer that I continue to make you proud.

To Dr. F. Bruce Williams, thank you for that much needed talk at T.G.I.F. and for entrusting your pulpit to me and for allowing me to keep my candle lit by your fire. To my pastor and mentor, Dr. Kevin Cosby. You have been a trail blazer and an inspiration.

My time under your tutelage has been the most consequential. You taught me the beauty of taking risks, the passion and practicality of preaching and the need to make social justice and advocacy the centerpiece of ministry. The opportunities you afforded me have opened unimaginable doors. I hope that your reading of this project allows you to see the indelible impression that you made on me.

To Rev. Donnie Garris and the members of the Antioch Missionary Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. There are no words that can describe what you mean to me and the trust that you placed in me. I am so grateful for the healing of my brother and friend, whom I affectionately call 'Pastor G'. I certainly consider it a privilege to call you a friend for life. You and Regina are a Godsend.

To my beautiful daughter, Christian. You are the answer to a prayer that I never prayed. I love you so much because you have made me a better man. You seem to know when the weight of the world is on me and you always know what to say and for that, I love you to the moon and back. You travelled with me to Duke several times and I hope that the completion of this program is the inspiration that you need to be the pediatrician that you want to be.

To my beautiful daughters Kennedy and Kamryn, I have watched the two of you bloom and blossom into awesome young ladies. Your futures are bright and full of unimaginable possibilities. I love the both of you dearly and pray nothing but the best for the two of you, and I hope that I continue to be an example of what can happen with hard work, dedication and commitment.

To my awesome and amazing wife, Kennesha. While there are no words that can truly express my gratitude for your support in allowing me space to complete this body of

work, please accept these words as an expression of my thanks, gratitude and acknowledgment of your dedication. This project has challenged our family and marriage in ways that are unimaginable, but I am grateful for you and only hope that you see the fruit of your patience and support. I love you dearly.

To Dr. David Emmanuel Goatley, Dr. Colin Yuckman, Lacey Hudspeth, John Zambenini, Judith Heyhoe and the entire Duke Divinity School staff, thank you for your feedback and constructive criticism that my writing and research needed. You have certainly helped this dream become a reality. To Dr. Anthony Everett, thanks for challenging the Kentucky Annual Conference to give me a chance. To the members of the Genesis Church in Louisville, Kentucky, you gave me the opportunity of a lifetime to serve as your pastor, to grow, to fail and to learn as a leader. To the members of the Plaza Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, thank you for allowing me to serve as your pastor, we accomplished great things together.

Last but not least, to my therapist Dr. Alan Arauz. Thank you for your insight, wisdom encouragement and concern for my mental well-being. Our talks have been priceless and have seen me through some dark moments. To Dr. Mona Shaban, my nephrologist. You saved my life! From day one you were committed to my health and well-being and promised that I would never see a day on dialysis and that I would make a full recovery. You are an amazing physician and I thank God for you.

Introduction

A mentioning of the names Lehman Brothers, Aetna, Brooks Brothers and USA Today conjures a sense of pride and American exceptionalism. These institutions are well-known, and each play a different role in the ecosystem of America; whether it be finance, education or commerce they serve as bastions in the American way of life. While each are uniquely different, they have one thing in common: they all benefited from unpaid slave labor. Lehman Brothers was once the nation's top investment firm, until its collapse in 2008 following the mortgage crisis, but in 1850 Lehman started as a cotton broker in Montgomery, Alabama after constructing a cotton warehouse and becoming the largest buyer and seller of cotton, then he later launched the New York Cotton Exchange.¹ Aetna is known in the business world as an insurance magnate, but a deep investigation yields the company's involvement in providing insurance coverage on slave ships and its cargo.² Brooks Brothers initially produced plantation clothes for slave owners and slave traders.³ Before *USA Today* became one of the nation's most prominent newspapers, its profits were derived from the sale of advertisements that promised rewards for the capture and return of runaway slaves and upcoming slave auction notices.⁴ Slavery created the foundation of American capitalism, eventually making it the wealthiest country in the world. Some of the aforementioned companies and organizations have acknowledged their involvement in and direct benefit from slave labor

¹ "Lehman Bros. Founded in Montgomery," *Huntsville Times*, September 2008. Encyclopedia of Alabama, s.v. "Lehman Brothers," by Herbert Jim Lewis, <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-2160>.

² Rachel Swarns, "Insurance Policies of Slaves: New York Life's Complicated Past," *New York Times*, December 18, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/18/us/insurance-policies-on-slaves-new-york-lifes-complicated-past.html>. (accessed Oct. 6, 2020).

³ Jonathon Micheal Square, "A Stain on an All-American Brand: How Brooks Brothers Once Clothed Slaves," *VESTOJ*, <http://vestoj.com/how-brooks-brothers-once-clothed-slaves> (accessed Oct. 6, 2020).

⁴ James Cox, "Corporations Challenged by Reparations Activist," *USA Today*, February 21, 2002, <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/money/general/2002/02/21/slave-reparations.htm>. (accessed Oct. 6, 2020).

and have attempted to reconcile their tainted history by developing tangible initiatives to assist African Americans, in the form of academic scholarships, financial grants and programs for upliftment, while others have offered an apology. Charles P. Henry maintains that many organizations and companies will neither offer an apology nor admit their involvement in slavery because “it would undermine the concept of American exceptionalism and expose the economic exploitation at the heart of White supremacy⁵ that now must be viewed as part of the American creed.”⁶ This exploitation, by conservative projections was no minor incident, according to the historian Edward Baptist. He estimates companies, organizations and individual families exploited the labor of nearly 3.2 million slaves, with an estimated net worth of \$1.3 billion in market value. Only in exceptionally rare instances were slaves allowed to own assets or benefit from their labor, and those realities were cemented into law and enforced through violence. Would an apology compensate an entire race of people for centuries of systematic discrimination, state-sponsored terrorism, social suffering, political disenfranchisement and economic disadvantage? If not, how should America atone for the original sin of slavery? And if America reckons with its reprehensible past, how should this generation of African Americans be redressed?

In 2014, Ta-Nehisi Coates presented a compelling and articulate case for reparations as a step toward national reckoning in the groundbreaking essay *The Case for Reparations*. He proposed the enslavement of African people in America spurred the

⁵ White supremacy is the belief that white people constitute a superior race and should, therefore dominate society, typically to the exclusion or detriment of other racial and ethnic groups. Eddie Glaude, Jr. purports “White supremacy involves the way a society organizes itself, and what and whom it chooses to value. It is a set of practices informed by the fundamental belief that white people are valued more than others.” Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul* (New York: Crown Press, 2016).

⁶ Charles P. Henry, “The Politics of Racial Reparations,” *Journal of Black Studies* 34.2 (2003): 132.

economic engine that eventually fueled modern-day capitalism, due to the production and exportation of cotton, tobacco, sugar cane and other goods and services on the backs of slaves. He rightly argues, “the wealth accorded to America by slavery was not just in what the slaves pulled from the land but in the slaves themselves, the vending of the black body and the sundering of the black family became an economy unto itself, estimated to have brought in tens of millions of dollars to antebellum America.”⁷ With a bevy of arguments, his case implicates every configuration of historical and contemporary society, and the irreparable harm done to its descendants, which deserves to be presented and heard in the judicial, executive and legislative body that represents all Americans.

The present-day disparities cannot be compartmentalized in the isolated past, those injustices have current ramifications. In no other place is this disparity more pronounced than in the racial wealth gap, which according to a recent study by the Brookings Institute found that a typical White family has a net worth of \$171,000, nearly ten times that of a black family at \$17,150.⁸ This gap in wealth reveals the effects of accumulated inequality and discrimination, as well as differences in power and opportunity that can be traced back to the inception of the nation. Moreover, it is forecast the average wealth of Blacks will be \$0 by 2053 if the current economic trends continue.⁹ Historic exploitation not only created this economic chasm but has now left generations

⁷ Ta-Nehisi Coates, *We Were Eight Years In Power: An American Tragedy* (New York: One World Publishing, 2017), pgs. 182-183.

⁸ Kriston McIntosh, Emily Moss, Ryan Nunn and Jay Shambaugh, “Examining The Black-White Wealth Gap,” *The Brookings Institute*, February 27, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/02/27/examining-the-black-white-wealth-gap/> (accessed May 9, 2020).

⁹ Jamiles Larty, “Median Wealth of Black Americans ‘Will Fall to Zero by 2053’”, *The Guardian*, September 13, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/sep/13/median-wealth-of-black-americans-will-fall-to-zero-by-2053-warns-new-report> (accessed Oct. 8, 2019).

of African Americans bereft of resources necessary for adequate housing, sufficient healthcare or wealth to bequeath to succeeding generations. A number of opinions are circulating on how to close the racial wealth gap, which include improving financial literacy, increasing educational achievement, credit management, better saving and spending habits or entrepreneurship, as options. While these tenets are necessary to financial stability, they only place the burden of responsibility on Black America to correct a problem they did not create. “Only reparations would close this chasm, and surely as the creation of the wealth gap required the cooperation of every aspect of society, bridging it will require the same,”¹⁰ according to Ta-Nehisi Coates.

This research focuses on a comprehensive reparations program that acknowledges the current and historic economic plight of Blacks, the need for significant investments in underserved communities, undoing the current contributors of wealth disparity and cash payments to American descendants of slaves. The argument for reparations will be buttressed with sociological data, historical unpacking, theological insights, political zeal, and a biblical mandate for justice. To accomplish this monumental task, I argue that there are four moments in American history that contributed to and could have changed the financial trajectory of Black America. The contributors to the racial wealth gap include, but are not limited to, the institution of slavery (1619-1865), the failure of Reconstruction (1865–1877), the Jim Crow era (1877-1968) and exclusion from New Deal social programs (1933–1939). Each of these historical moments colluded with major sectors of the American economic and political systems and effectively prohibited Blacks from social, economic and political progression. While an apology would be meritorious,

¹⁰ Coates, ‘The Case for Reparations,’ pg. 200.

I propose that no apology offered could suffice for the centuries of abuse and theft, which birthed the present-day realities, nor would it adequately address financial disparity. The United States Federal Government must be held responsible for its involvement in, support of, and direct benefit from slave labor, and I believe that redress should be in the form of a comprehensive reparations program.

This research is divided into three sections: the problem, the purpose and the program, and encompasses four chapters that work to create a roadmap from slavery and its many machinations toward a program for reparative justice. Chapter 1 “The Free Labor That Built America” examines the commodification of black bodies as the impetus behind the development of American capitalism. I argue that slavocracy created an economy that was fundamental to enriching generations of Whites. Then, at the conclusion of the Civil War, America attempted to right the wrongs of slavery through Reconstruction, with the allotment of land grants and the creation of the Freedman’s Bureau. However, the rescinding of land grants was a massive setback for Black Reconstruction, forcing the Emancipated into a quasi-form of slavery, giving rise to the Jim Crow era, and creating even more obstacles toward economic freedom. Chapter 2 “The Memo No One Has Read” examines the social policies that created the pathologies and financial crisis now plaguing Black America. I explain the current dilemmas in Black America are the direct consequence of slavery, institutional racism and social policies that have disproportionately birthed mass incarceration, disparities in health and housing and the racial wealth gap. Chapter 3 “Christianizing the Social Order” seeks to appropriate the principles of the social gospel as ascribed by ethicist and theologian Walter Rauschenbusch. The Social Gospel serves as a means of changing and

challenging the social, political and economic structures of America to bring about national reform and healing. I argue that reparations are a biblical concept and a justice claim that all Americans should support, in an effort to facilitate wholeness, equity and closure to our current racial obstacles. Chapter 4 “An Idea Whose Time Has Come” explains and examines reparations and explains why the passage of H.R. 40 is the vital step in moving toward reparative justice. This chapter offers a cogent look at the historical, theological, and sociological case for reparations and endeavors to answer the question: So, Now What? and what the Church should do as a consequence of understanding the role the United States Federal government played in the harm inflicted upon generations of African Americans. This chapter examines the development of empire, through commodification, extraction and violence, and a biblical call for repentance and reparative justice and the responsibility that Christians have in making this a reality. This body of work seeks to become a model that church leaders can utilize in teaching congregants and community members of the historical injustices inherited by African Americans and why reparations is the only redress in holding the government accountable, in order to effectively close the racial wealth gap.

The Free Labor That Built America

“Slavery is that slow poison, which is daily contaminating the minds and morals of our people. We become callous to the dictates of humanity and all the finer feelings of the soul. We lose that idea of the dignity of man, which the Hand of Nature had implanted in us, for great and useful purposes.”¹

**George Mason, July 1773
Virginia Constitutional Convention**

A study of American history exposes one to the viciousness of Stalin’s Soviet Union, the brutality of the Nazis in Germany, and the barbarity of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya. These atrocities are well documented, and their lingering effects are still felt in those respective nations. Often missing from the historical list is one nation that is responsible for some of the most gruesome crimes against humanity in the history of the world – The United States of America. While America touts the indiscretions of other nations, we are reluctant to truly confront the depth of kidnapping, brutality, enslavement and later oppression of African people on American soil. America is often perceived as a melting pot and a land of opportunity, a place where others can find the freedom, fairness, and democracy that is often denied in their own country. Historians have examined the depths of slavery, and many contend it to be one of the most reprehensibly accepted institutions in America that continues to plague the country. A recounting of the trans-Atlantic slave trade can be gut wrenching, with the thought of humans being loaded into the bowels of cargo ships for a journey that took one to six months, depending on the weather conditions. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade was an arduous journey that deprived the kidnapped of human comfort as they slept, defecated, menstruated, gave birth and

¹ Robert Friedenber, “The Papers of George Mason,” *Southern Speech Communication Journal* 37.3 (1972): 326.

even died in the bowels of slave ships. Marcus Rediker recounts these horrors in *The Slave Ship*, “from the late fifteenth to the late nineteenth century, 12.4 million souls were loaded onto slave ships and carried through the ‘Middle Passage’ and across the Atlantic Ocean, where 1.8 million of them died, and their bodies were cast overboard to the sharks that followed the ships. The other 10.6 million who survived were thrown into the bloody maw of a killing plantation system.”² Much of this history has been sanitized by revisionist who characterized slaves as idyll, happy, well treated ‘workers’ and in most instances, slavery was considered to have the endorsement of God for the subjugation of an entire race of people for their exclusive benefit. According to *The Christian Doctrine of Slavery*, George Armstrong a Presbyterian minister, concluded “It may be that Christian slavery is God’s solution to the problem [of labor] about which the wisest statesmen of Europe confess themselves ‘at fault’.”³ The assertion that ‘Christian slavery’ was condoned by God, so that Whites could exploit the labor of the Black race, for self-benefit is unequivocally heretical. This jaded view of Scripture allowed the white church to become complicit in the evils of slavery, and many slaveholding Christians were convinced they were doing God’s work by caring for what they believed to be an inferior people.

In 2001, a delegation from the United States of America attended the United Nations World Conference Against Racism, where participants were shown graphic images of beatings and lynching’s, and listened to barbaric stories of torture, rape and violence. The presentation was so graphic and incomprehensible in scope, the delegation was said to have walked out of the meeting as leaders “acknowledged and profoundly

² Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), pg. 5.

³ George D. Armstrong, *The Doctrine of Slavery* (New York: Charles Scribner Publishing, 1851), pg. 134.

regretted the massive human suffering and tragic plight of millions of men, women and children as a result of American chattel slavery. Slavery was one of the most appalling tragedies in human history and the trans-Atlantic slave trade was one of the gravest crimes against humanity.”⁴ In 2019, the New York Times Magazine debuted the *1619 Project*, an exhaustive expose` describing the linkage between the crime of slavery and its impact on modern life. The project illuminated the manner in which the shadow of slavery is still cast over the cultural, social, political, religious and economic sectors of American life, and disclosed the ways in which institutional racism has contributed to health disparities, mass incarceration, the criminal justice system and the wealth gap, all of which commenced with slavery.

The wealth gap in particular and the longevity of its effects cannot be underestimated, Joy DeGruy attests, “slavery guaranteed the prosperity and privilege of the South’s White progeny while correspondingly relegating its Black progeny to a legacy of debt and suffering.”⁵ The unparalleled bounty of slavery allowed America to tolerate centuries of commodifying the black body in pursuit of the development of plantations, incentives and other business interests those plantations would engender. In 1793, Eli Whitney impacted the American economy with the invention of the cotton gin, a machine that easily and quickly separated cotton fibers from their seeds, enabling greater productivity than manual separation. Whitney’s invention made it possible for Southern planters to harvest and clean cotton for domestic sale and international export, as the global demand increased for cotton it precipitated even greater profits.

⁴ “World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance,” <https://www.un.org/WCAR/dh/> (accessed Apr. 24, 2020).

⁵ Joy DeGruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Portland: Joy DeGruy Publications, 2005), pg. 117.

Unfortunately, slaves immediately felt those effects, through brutal beatings, dehumanization and terror. Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman contend “without the development of the cotton gin, slavery might have disappeared. However, the rise of the cotton culture gave a new impetus to black bondage. The booming world market for cotton stimulated the domestic demand for slaves and reinvigorated the slave trade.”⁶ Slave labor undoubtedly created an economy that profoundly enriched generations of White slaveowners, along with various consumers around the world with unprecedented prosperity.

It is to that end that I stake my claim on a comprehensive reparations program for the American descendants of slaves, due to the draconian institution of slavery turning a poor fledgling nation into a financial colossus, by exacting two centuries of brutal enslavement on Black people for the sole purpose of personal, national and international aggrandizement. The avarice of slaveowners, colluded with several major sectors of the American landscape in the North and South, leading to the economic ascendancy of America, due to the toil of millions of Black people. The expropriation of Black labor lies at the center of global and American capitalism and set the stage for the coming years of inequity, resulting in what Manning Marble calls “the systematic underdevelopment of black people.”⁷ This underdevelopment stands at the heart of the racial wealth gap, due to years of theft serving as the underpinning of American capitalism. The amalgamation of two-hundred and fifty years of slavery, and the failure of Reconstruction, paved the way for the one-hundred years of subsequent Jim Crow segregation, which locked multiple

⁶ Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of Negro Slavery*. pg. 60.

⁷ Manning Marble, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America: Problems in Race, Political Economy and Society* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 1983), pg. ix.

generations out of economic opportunity and gave rise to the current racial wealth gap, warranting a substantial justice claim against the United States Federal Government. While “no amount could provide compensation for the suffering, gross injustice and shameful humiliation of the Negro in America down through the centuries, a price can be placed on unpaid wages, in the form of a massive program, by the government, of special compensatory measures which could be regarded as a settlement in accordance with the accepted practices of common law.”⁸

This chapter demonstrates how the exploitation of Africans created a slave economy that was propped up by two critical factors: profitability and justifiability. These critical factors condoned the continued kidnapping of Africans and paved the way for industries such as slave breeding, which allowed humans to be bred like animals and their offspring sold to the highest bidders. The dehumanization of an entire race happened due to “our nations unflinching willingness to use violence on nonwhite people and to exert its will on seemingly endless supplies of land and labor. Given the choice between modernity and barbarism, prosperity and poverty, lawlessness and cruelty, democracy and totalitarianism, America chose all of the above.”⁹ Therefore, in choosing all of the above, America must be held responsible for one of the most gruesome crimes against humanity, the evil of slavery. In order to do so, multiple American institutions conspired to justify the brutalization of African people for the sole purpose of personal and national enrichment, robbing them of their humanity and dignity.

⁸ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pg. 73.

⁹ Matthew Desmond. “In Order to Understand the Brutality of American Capitalism, You Have To Start On The Plantation,” *The New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html> (accessed Sept. 16, 2019.).

I. The Anatomy of Exploitation

Imagine two groups sitting at a table playing a game of Monopoly. The first group has had the liberty of making several fruitful trips around the board and has amassed an enormous amount of wealth, which has enabled them to purchase Park Place, Board Walk, and several major hotel chains. The enormity of the first group's wealth has afforded them the privilege of purchasing more property, acquiring more land and leveraging greater resources to expand their labor force, giving them a net worth in the millions. This wealth has given them a major advantage over the second group who has not even had a fair chance to play the game. After the passage of time, the first group has been forced to give the second group an opportunity to play the game, so as a good gesture, the first group gives the second group \$200. The first group has never paid the second group a single dime for their labor, ingenuity and sacrifice, which has made them extremely wealthy. While the second group has the desire and skillset to play the game of Monopoly, the truth is; they will never catch up, nor will they ever be equal to the first group, due to the unequalled amount of time the first group has been given to play the game. When the second group discovers they have been cheated the entire game, they attempt to hold the first group accountable for generations of unpaid labor, until they discover the first group has also acquired all of the get out of jail free cards.

In a real sense, African Americans have been engaging for centuries in a real-life Monopoly game. A game that has significantly enriched and empowered Whites, due to the historical sweat equity of Blacks, allowing them to amass power and bequeath wealth to succeeding generations. The current "disadvantaged status of contemporary African-Americans cannot be divorced from the historical process that undergirds racial

inequality. The cumulative disadvantages of blacks have created cumulative advantages for whites, resulting in a process that has cemented blacks to the bottom of the social hierarchy.”¹⁰ The genesis of those advantages have their roots in the exploited labor of nearly 4 million slaves, which created an economy that was integral in establishing the United States of America as a world economic power. The result is that Whites now have considerable social, political, and economic advantage over contemporary American life.

The classic research of Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman *Time on The Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* evaluates slavery through an economic lens and allows readers to ascertain the development of the Southern slavocracy. They employ a process known as cliometrics, “the systematic application of mathematical and statistical methods, to the study of history, in an effort to determine: (1) the profitability of slavery or (2) whether slavery was a racist-colonialist phenomenon that existed for primarily noneconomic reasons.”¹¹ In other words, cliometrics examines the behavior of enslavers and investors to ascertain their real motivation for the continuation of the peculiar institution of slavery. The enslavement of 4 million people over two centuries, permitted Southern plantation owners to monopolize slave labor and to profit immensely on three levels: first, slaves were viewed as commodities to be sold; secondly, they were seen as objects to be rented; and thirdly, they were merely producers of products such as cotton, sugar cane, tobacco and rice. On each level monetary gain was the ultimate objective, and this research discloses the many ancillary systems that justified and supported the entire brutal system. If money were not the reason for centuries of

¹⁰ Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* (New York: Routledge Press, 1997), pg. 51.

¹¹ Constance Holden. “Book On Slavery Stirs Up a Scholarly Storm,” *Journal for the American Association for the Advancement of Science* 186.4168 (1974): 1004-1007.

enslavement, then how did the system take root and persist in the South for more than two hundred years? And if the system were not profitable, then why did opponents of slavery not force the system out of existence? I surmise that monetary gain and power were the primary motivations for the continuation of slavery, resulting in an American and global economy supported by two critical factors: profitability and justifiability.

A. Profitability

The magnitude of a slaveowners profit has been greatly debated. Historians and economists have argued that profitability has been difficult to solve, due to the lack of agreement on how to define this vexing problem. The question of profitability takes into account the many hands involved in the process of attempting to turn a profit: the slaves, slaveowners, plantation owners, middlemen, the slave traders, the banks, the Southern and American economy, and other outside investors. As it stood, determining profitability during the antebellum period was difficult to estimate due to confusion over determining whether slavery was a social system or a business enterprise. That is, was slavery initially imposed as a means of free labor (i.e. a social system) or was profit serendipitously discovered as the agricultural economy evolved due to the growing demand for goods. I hold that the slave economy flourished primarily due to the use of violence and the extortion of land which resulted in a new business enterprise.

In many Southern colonies, plantations were already producing goods like rice, tobacco and sugar cane, and the expansion of these enterprises not only required more land but more labor. Therefore, wealthy planters turned to slave traders who imported human chattel to meet their ever-growing needs, allowing the creation of a feudal system. Some plantations spanned thousands of acres, controlling hundreds and, in some

instances, thousands of slaves allowing “the institution to dominate the political and economic thinking of the entire South and to shape its social patterns for two principled reasons: (1) Staple crops (i.e. rice, tobacco, sugar cane) produced on plantations by employing slave labor, gave owners significant influence and (2) non-slaveholders hoped they would become owners of slaves.”¹² The slow emergence of a slave economy eventually proved to be a profitable enterprise for plantation owners, investors and the Southern economy.

There were those who disagreed with the profitability argument and viewed slavery during the Antebellum period as a social system rather than a business enterprise. The most vocal pioneer of the unprofitability argument was Ulrich B. Phillips, who believed slavery would have become a relic and eventually dissipated without the Civil War. His controversial essay *The Economic Cost of Slaveholding in the Cotton Belt*, argues that slavery was unprofitable, yet he praises the entrepreneurial skills of plantation owners who delineated “the plantation system as a means of organizing labor and slavery, as a means of capitalizing upon that labor.”¹³ He argues that slavery in the South was unprofitable on four fronts:

- (1) The initial cost of slaves was expensive. According to estimates, “the average price of a Negro was about \$500, an infant was valued at \$100, and a prime wench for field work cost \$800 or \$900.”¹⁴

¹² John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), pg.186.

¹³ Harold D. Woodman, “The Profitability of Slavery: A Historical Perennial,” *The Journal of Southern History* 29.3 (1963), pg. 311.

¹⁴ Phillips, *The Economic Cost of Slaveholding in the Cotton Belt*, pg. 265.

- (2) The overhead of slave labor was costly because it included: (a) interest upon the capital invested in a slave, (b) insurance policies to protect against death, illness, accidental injury or flight from service, (c) the diminishing value of a slave by reason of increasing age due to the ‘wear and tear’ on an individual and (d) taxation assessed upon the capitalized value of the slaves.¹⁵
- (3) The slave was considered “unintelligent,” “inherently inept,” and “an unbearable burden on America,” suggests that unprofitability was due to the lack of intellectual capacity on the part of the slave.
- (4) The system of slavery was competitive and cut-throat due to overvaluation and overcapitalization of labor, which threatened many purchasers into bankruptcy.

In Phillips view, these factors forced plantations to operate at a deficit due to “the Antebellum planter investing all of the capital he owned, earned or could borrow into the purchase of more slaves and land, as the slave holding system absorbed the planters earnings; for the greater the profits of the planters the more slaves they wanted and the higher the slave prices.”¹⁶ According to Phillips, the oblique nature of the system led to unprofitability, seems to contradict his notion of “the greater the profits of the planters the more slaves they wanted.” His statement does not negate that profit was made, rather it infers greed on the part of slaveowners who used excess profits to purchase more slaves, in hopes of turning an even greater profit. The British economist J.E. Cairnes

¹⁵ Ibid., 268.

¹⁶ Phillips, “The Economic Cost of Slaveholding in the Cotton Belt”, pgs. 270-271.

purports that profits were not seen due to “the desire for conspicuous consumption,”¹⁷ and the historian Kenneth Stampp believed that “managerial inefficiency or a tendency to disregard the middleclass virtue of thrift and living beyond their means”¹⁸ was the reason profit was not witnessed. Slaveowners admitted that their extravagances and greed were the reason for unprofitability, for example Edwin Hall, a Southern planter and slaveowner stated, “the deeper we are involved [slavery], the more anxious do we become to conceal it from the world, the more strenuous to maintain the same showy appearance. . .we cannot bear the thought that the world should know that we are not as wealthy, as it was willing to believe us to be, and thus lose the importance attached to our riches.”¹⁹ Therefore, the suggestion that slavery was unprofitable and would have extinguished without the prompting of the Civil War holds zero merit. This view has been disputed by historians and researchers who substantiate the enormity of wealth produced by slaves, and rather than abolishing slavery, enslavers were seeking to expand their enterprise. The demand for slave labor was so prurient, that even an 1808 law abolishing the slave trade, but not ownership of slaves, was not enough to prohibit participation in the lucrative enterprise, because by banning the import of slaves from Africa would actually increase their value.

According to Claude Anderson, “a white person with a slave never lacked economic opportunity, since his human capital could always be transformed into other

¹⁷ J.E. Cairnes, *The Slave Power: Its Character, Career, and Probable Designs: Being An Attempt to Explain the Real Issues Involved in the American Contest* (New York: Harpers Row, 1969), pgs. 165, 169.

¹⁸ Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), pg. 390.

¹⁹ Larry Gara. “A New Englanders View of Plantation Life: Letters of Edwin Hall to Cyrus Woodman,” *Journal of Southern History* 18.3 (1952): 343-354.

forms of wealth, such as loaning the slave's labor or selling the slaves."²⁰ In fact, when other forms of wealth (i.e. cash or property) were not available, the slave became a type of gift or vivo transfer of wealth to succeeding generations. Slaveholders would often setup apprenticeships for their slaves to serve as investments that would ultimately benefit their heirs. The vending of the Black body and the destruction of the Black family created another type of economy, estimated to have rendered millions to the Antebellum South. For example, slave breeding became another enterprise slaveowners employed to enhance their already profitable cadre of slaves. This coercive and violent reproductive practice allowed owners to arbitrarily select women to reproduce future generations of slaves, while the offspring would either be sold on auction blocks or raised to serve on their master's plantation. This egregious practice is detailed in *Slave Breeding: Sex, Violence and Memory in African American History* and chronicles the malevolent behavior of slaveowners who enforced the "commodification of sex among the enslaved and the offspring they produced, highlighting one of the most brutal aspect of the 'chattel principle' in the slave holding South."²¹ Fogel and Engerman assert, "slaveowners engaged in deliberate breeding because of the economic consequences, which yielded nearly \$3,000,000 from this exploitive process in 1860."²²

It is important to note: not all Whites owned slaves, for many were too poor, yet they all benefitted from the system. For those who did own slaves, it was the slaveowners' most significant investment and represented the majority of their wealth.

²⁰ Claude Anderson, *Black Labor/White Wealth: The Search for Power and Economic Justice* (Edgewood, Maryland: Duncan & Duncan Publishers, 1994), pgs. 133-135.

²¹ Gregory Smithers, *Slave Breeding: Sex, Violence and Memory in African American History* (Gainesville, FL.: University Press of Florida, 2012), pg. preface.

²² Fogel and Engerman, *Time on The Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery*, pgs. 48 & 131.

The enormity of wealth produced by the slavocracy was unrivaled, especially with the increased production and export of cotton. As the South produced the majority of the world's cotton, it correspondingly created more millionaires per capita in the Mississippi River Valley, than anywhere else in the nation. Even Ulrich Phillips noted, “the demand for labor in the cotton belt was translated into an unprecedented demand for negro slave labor,”²³ and their labor was so beneficial “that by 1860, ten of the richest men in America lived not just in the South but in the Natchez district of Mississippi.”²⁴ In 1810, the appetite for slaves during the cotton boom was so massive, that the price of a slave was \$900 and the cotton crop was worth \$12,495,000; by 1860, the price of a slave was \$1,800 and the cotton crop was valued at \$248,757,000,²⁵ according to 19th century estimates. Sven Beckert states, “cotton constituted 61 percent of the value of all U.S. products shipped abroad. By the late 1860s, cotton grown in the United States accounted for 77 percent of the 800 million pounds of cotton consumed in Britain, 90 percent of the 192 million pounds used in France, 60 percent of the 115 million spun in the Zollverein, and 92 percent of the 102 million pounds manufactured in Russia, with an estimated export value of \$333 million.”²⁶

Slave labor was extremely expensive due to the significant amount of capital invested into the labor aspect of the system, however any “expenditures made for the purchase of slaves brought with it tremendous advantages; slave labor was an investment

²³ Phillips, “Economic Cost of Slaveholding in the Cotton Belt”, pg. 259.

²⁴ Zambelli, “Looking At History Through An Economic Lens”, pg. 56.

²⁵ Craig Walenta. Constitutional Topic: Slavery. https://www.usconstitution.net/consttop_slav.html (accessed May 25, 2020).

²⁶ Sven Beckert, “Empire of Cotton,” The Atlantic Magazine, December 12, 2014, <https://amp.theatlantic.com/amp/article/383660/> (accessed May, 5, 2020).

that produced a great deal more than it consumed.”²⁷ This investment created an intricate web of speculation, credit, bonds, insurance and other related expenses necessary to manage a slave enterprise, because “slaves were not just the labor in the operations, they modernized credit markets, created complex forms of financial instruments and trade networks through which slaves could be mortgaged, exchanged, and used as leverage to purchase more slaves. In the highly profitable, speculation-based market economy, many White men-built fortunes in slave backed securities,”²⁸ states Edward Baptist. Slaves were easily exploited, and any capital invested in them was not necessarily an expense but an advance on work that would exponentially profit the owner over many years. Harold Woodman notes, “the Antebellum Period was highly profitable and beneficial to the economic well-being of the South,”²⁹ due to three critical ingredients: free labor, endless land supplies and slave backed credit. These components were the trifecta of a lucrative business enterprise that became entrenched in the South due to “an unhallowed alliance between the lords of the lash and the lords of the loom,” as stated by Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner. Without question, the cotton plantation was Americas first big business, and the use of violence and coercion increased, as planters, owners and investors sought to aggressively expand their enterprises.

B. Justifiability

While profit was the underlying incentive to continue the institution of slavery, there were efforts on multiple fronts that sought to justify the subjugation of Africans in

²⁷ Robert Worthington Smith, “Was Slavery Unprofitable in the Antebellum South,” *Journal of Agricultural History* 20.1 (1946):62-64.

²⁸ Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery And The Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), pgs. 244-248.

²⁹ Harold D. Woodman. “The Profitability of Slavery: A Historical Perennial,” *The Journal of Southern History* 29.3 (1963): 304, 318.

perpetuity. In order to do so, enslavers had to create systems to convince themselves that slavery was not only profitable but also justified through the doctrine of white supremacy. This justification was expressed in religious, biological and cultural absurdities that were birthed out of racist European thought. Religiously it was believed, “God ordained whites to conquer, civilize and Christianize the African heathen,” biologically it was stated by some that “the animal characteristics of Africans suit their bestial treatment by whites,” and culturally by others that “whites held superiority and a responsibility to conquer and use the human and material resources of ‘lesser’ people for the advancement of the more ‘noble and advanced’ ones.”³⁰ Albert Taylor Bledsoe a staunch defender of slavery concluded, “no fact is plainer than that the blacks have been elevated and improved by their servitude in the country. We cannot possibly conceive, indeed, how Divine Providence could have placed them in a better school of correction.”³¹ These and other jaded ideas permeated every sector of American life and became intrinsically linked with violence and dehumanization, enabling slavery to be perpetuated. How then, were these ideals codified into the fabric of American society? Furthermore, how did enslavers convince themselves that the enslavement of Africans was a justifiable practice?

The Three-Fifths Compromise

Slavery, “America’s original sin,” according to James Madison created the fountain of modern American capitalism. In 1787, during the Constitutional Convention, the future of slavery was the most debated topic. Northern delegates wanted to abolish

³⁰ Maulana Karenga, Introduction to Black Studies (Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 1993), pg. 122.

³¹ Albert Taylor Bledsoe, “Liberty and Slavery; or, Slavery in the Light of Moral and Political Philosophy,” pgs. 413-416.

the institution, while the South wanted to continue and expand their enterprise. The elimination of slavery came to a unanimous consent, with the exception of South Carolina, who threatened to abandon the union if slavery was abolished. Unwilling to lose South Carolina, slavery remained legal under the Constitution, allowing slaveholders to legally deny slaves their personal freedom and rights nor could they benefit monetarily from their labor. James Madison maintained, “Slaves are merely property, and in no respect whatsoever a person . . . in being compelled to labor, not for himself, but for a master; in being vendible by one master to another; and in being subject at all times to be restrained in his liberty and chastised in his body, by the capricious will of another, the slave may appear to be degraded from the human rank, and classed with those irrational animals which fall under the legal denomination of property.”³² This statement was codified into the founding documents of America, and solidified the fact that Blacks would always be cast as slaves (i.e. property) not as human beings.

The compromise came as states sought to determine the number of representatives to be sent to the House of Representatives; the North viewed slaves as property and the South contended, they should be counted among the population, but only for tax purposes. Slaveowners defended their view of humans as property, while at the same time justifying their crimes and abuse for economic benefit and political power. This would allow Southern states to have greater power in the soon-to-be-formed federal government, making the federal government complicit in the continued dehumanization and subjugation of Blacks. Their solution to this problem was the Three-Fifths

³² James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, “The Apportionment of Members Among the States”, February 12, 1788 <https://guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/text-51-60#s-lg-box-wrapper-25493430> (accessed June 2, 2020).

Compromise, which allowed “slaves to be counted as a person, three-fifths of a states slave population would be counted toward that states total population, thus making slaves three-fifths of a human.”³³ In 1857, the legal apparatus gave its ultimate support for the continuation of slavery, when the Supreme Court rendered a decision in the Dred Scott case, which affirmed that the Negro had no rights that the White man was bound to respect.

Biology, Anthropology and Academics

Significant intellectual resources were expended to prove and rationalize the untenable positions of enslavers. Kenneth Stampf states, “Proslavery writers showed remarkable resourcefulness in their persuasive prose and polemical essays spun out of religious, historical, scientific, and sociological arguments to demonstrate that slavery was a positive good.”³⁴ One of those persuasive voices was the preeminent biologist Carl Von Linnaeus, who was responsible for the development of the taxonomic system used to classify life and the characteristics that made various life forms fall into different categories. He expanded this system to account for different types of humans, which laid the foundation for beliefs about race that became a permanent feature of anthropological thought and language. In *Outcasts From Evolution*, he assigns the following descriptors to various ethnic groups: “Homo Americanus as reddish, choleric, obstinate, contented, and regulated by customs; Homo Europaeus as white, fickle, sanguine, blue-eyed, gentle and governed by laws; Homo Asiaticus as sallow, grave dignified, avaricious, and ruled by opinion; and Homo Afer as black, phlegmatic, cunning, lazy, lustful, careless, and

³³ Degruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, pg. 51.

³⁴ Stampf, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South*, pg. 383.

governed by caprice.”³⁵ Some academicians proffered their thoughts to the myth of racial inferiority by suggesting the head-size of slaves indicated their lack of intellectual capacity. Josiah Nott in *Collections on the Natural History of the Caucasian and Negro Races*, used fictitious evidence that suggested the Black man was slightly above the level of an ape. These nefarious and erroneous ideas were disseminated throughout academic institutions, and leading universities such as Harvard, Cornell, and Columbia’s academic leaders worked assiduously to make them authoritative reference points for those seeking to rationalize the system of slavery and the inferiority of Blacks. In recent years, the psychologist Richard Herrnstein and political scientist Charles Murray argued in *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Public Life* that lower IQ scores were innately tied to race. As these fallacies circulated throughout various institutions, they gradually began to foster the assumption of racial superiority and allowed White supremacy to become cemented and justified throughout America.

The Church, The Bible and White Jesus

The early White Church became a leading ally in the perpetuation of slavery, by using redacted Bibles to emphasized complete obedience to masters and erroneous interpretations to justify their crimes. The South had become so reliant upon slave labor that, “to overturn slavery was seen as going against God’s ordained pattern,”³⁶ which would also negatively impact the Southern economy. While the commodification of the Black body was malevolent, the use of Scripture to enforce social order and to preserve White patriarchal hierarchy to justify slavery was psychologically and spiritually

³⁵ John S. Haller, Jr., *Outcasts From Evolution: Scientific Attitudes of Racial Inferiority, 1859-1900* (Chicago: Illinois Press, 1971), pg. 4.

³⁶ Michael Emerson and Christian Smith. *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pg. 27.

damaging. Many prominent preachers like George Whitfield, who also owned slaves and believed that God permitted slavery for a larger purpose: Christianizing and uplifting the heathen Africans. In his view, “their condition [enslavement] must be better, when disposed of in a [C]hristian country, where they are treated with mildness and humanity, and required to perform no more than that portion of labor which in some way or another is the common lot of the human race.”³⁷ Forrest Wood states, “this allowed Georgia’s white Christians to unite under Whitfield’s message,”³⁸ forging an even greater alliance between the White church and the institution of slavery. This section describes the historical roots of the White church and the use of the Bible to justify the institution of slavery.

Slaves were permitted to attend White churches, but rather than integrating them into the congregation, many sat in the gallery or special sections often at the back of the sanctuary. In some instances, “white congregations developed the ingenious scheme of constructing a partition several feet high to separate the master from the slaves.”³⁹ Although slaves were permitted to worship with Whites, they were convinced that the only means of redeeming the soul of the slave was their complete subjugation to their divinely created purpose: slavery. To accomplish this task the White preacher used the pulpit to dehumanize slaves and to enforce White supremacy by misinterpreting Biblical passages and using them as their number one tool. In 1936, the National Humanities Center interviewed 2300 former slaves and wanted to know specifically about their

³⁷ Lester Scherer. *Slavery and the Churches in Early America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Press, 1975), pg. 77.

³⁸ Forrest Wood. *Arrogance of Faith: Christianity and Race in America from the Colonial Era to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 1991), pg. 275.

³⁹ Franklin. *From Slavery to Freedom: History of Negro Americans*. pg. 200.

religious practices, Bible reading, preaching and baptismal experiences. The responses of the formerly enslaved revealed the theological abuse of slave-owning preachers and Christians in the Antebellum South. Clayborn Gantling a former slave said, “We always went to white churches on Sunday with passes but they never mentioned God; they always told us to be good niggers and mind our missus and masters.” Richard Carruthers stated, “When the white preacher come, he preach and pick up his Bible and claim he gittin’ the text right out from the good Book and he preach: “The Lord say, don’t you niggers steal chickens from you missus. Don’t you steal your masters hawgs. That would be all he preach.”⁴⁰ The abolitionist Frederick Douglass commented, “For all slaveholders with whom I have ever met, religious slaveholders are the worst. I have ever found them the meanest and basest, the most cruel and cowardly, of all others.”⁴¹ The usage of the racial epithet *nigger* in a congregational setting seemed to further entrench in the minds of Blacks their stigmatized status even in the eyes of God. While one would be led to believe that of all of the slaveowners in the South, those who professed Christ would have acknowledged the inherent evil and Biblical contradiction of slavery.

According to Albert Raboteau, one of the chief concerns of enslavers was the spiritual awareness slaves would experience after receiving the gospel and many feared the “egalitarianism implicit in Christianity and the threat to the security of the slave-master hierarchy, a complaint they feared would ruin their slaves.”⁴² Howard Thurman in

⁴⁰ National Humanities Center, “Religious Practice of Enslaved African Americans in the Southern United States,” <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/community/text3/religionslaveswpa.pdf> (accessed June 6, 2020).

⁴¹ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845; electronic ed., Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1999), <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/douglass.html>, pgs. 77-78.

⁴² Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pg. 102.

Deep River and the Negro Spirituals Speak Life and Death wrote, “it was dangerous to let the slave understand that the life and teaching of Jesus meant freedom for the captive and release for those held in economic, social and political bondage.”⁴³ In an effort to enforce subjugation, rather than foster equality, Christianity would be weaponized and manipulated on three fronts: “First, they [preachers] encouraged colonial legislatures to declare that slaves remained slaves even when baptized. Secondly, baptism did not negate slave status within the British kingdom, and finally Christian liberty in no way changed temporal bondage.”⁴⁴ For example, there was no emphasis on the Apostle Paul’s assertion in Galatians 3:28, “there is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. For you are all Christians, you are one in Christ Jesus,” because once slaveowners were convinced that baptism nor conversion would not effectively set their slaves free, the White church became an even greater agency for maintaining and perpetuating the institution of slavery.

Enslavers were not concerned with the salvation of “blacks because they were seen as less than fully human, they did not possess a soul and were incapable of learning, and the simple indifference of White Christians led to a lack of interest in proselytizing slaves.”⁴⁵ The greater emphasis was placed upon an orderly society based on fears of chaos and revolts, due to the slaveowners quest for economic and political power. In their minds, slavery was given biblical justification and had the endorsement of God, because Southerners had accepted slavery as a necessary evil to defend a positive good, and chief among their political and economic arguments were the “religious convictions that

⁴³ Howard Thurman, *Deep River and the Negro Spiritual Speaks Life and Death* (Indianapolis: Friends United Press, 1975), pg. 16.

⁴⁴ Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, p.23.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 22.

slavery had the blessing of God and the sanction of the Old and New Testaments.”⁴⁶ One school of thought birthed out of this jaded understanding of scripture was the Hamitic Curse, which argued Black inferiority was the result of Noah’s curse upon the children of Ham (Gen. 9:20-27). Ephesians 6 became a text enslavers coalesced around to justify subjugation because it held “a set of orderly hierarchies, so that the power of slaveowners over slaves paralleled the power of husbands over wives and parents over children. Slavery was legitimate, so the argument went, because it was like a marriage.”⁴⁷ Some defenders of slavery used biblical figures such as Abraham who possessed slaves or the Book of Philemon, in which Paul admonishes a runaway slave to return to his master.

The development of the slavocracy required the complete complicity of multiple allies in the American North and South in order to be effective, because the North wanted goods and services and the South was willing and able to supply those needs due to the accessibility of endless amounts of land and free labor at their disposal. While the debate loomed over whether slavery was a social system or a business enterprise, the fact remained, profit motive was connected to every configuration of society and was harnessed to turn even greater profits. In order to do so, slave traders were willing to make the arduous and often risky journey across the Atlantic Ocean to kidnap Black bodies, slaveowners were willing to pay premium prices for their spoils, banks extended credit and allowed slaves to be mortgaged and insurance companies compiled policies to insure the life of the slave. Politicians protected the institution, while the Founding Fathers codified it into the original founding documents of the country to ensure its

⁴⁶ Elizabeth L. Jemison. “Proslavery After the Emancipation” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 72.4 (2013): pg. 258.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Proslavery After Emancipation., pg. 255.

perpetuity. Slavery was so lucrative that intellectuals crafted and disseminated erroneous ideals, inventors developed machinery to speed up cotton production and the White church was willing to exploit Scripture to enforce human subordination. Each of these machinations were inextricably linked to terror, violence, rape, dehumanization, and even death, as Whites maintained a sense of entitlement to the Black body. Enslavers were so convinced of the institution; they were seeking to eventually expand their billion-dollar enterprise westward.

In *Battle Cry of Freedom*, James McPherson chronicles the prominence that slavery held in the cultural, social, economic and political spheres of the South and in the American psyche. The entrenchment of slavery in the minds of Southerners was an absolute necessity to their way of life, and anything that threatened to obliterate or hinder its expansion would be a cause for war. In an effort to stave off expansion, it was initially believed the Civil War was fought over the morality of slavery, but in actuality, it boiled down to economics, political control, and expansion. The Civil War lasted five years and was the deadliest war ever waged on American soil, with 600,000 dead and the South left decimated, “the consuming tragedy was so costly that generations would pass before people could begin to say whether what it had bought was worth the price.”⁴⁸ For generations of Blacks the price was paid, for it purchased delayed freedom and deliverance from the treachery of the Confederate South. However, with the conclusion of the Civil War, a question remained: Had the South been cleansed of the economic and intellectual addiction to slavery? Without question, the inclination was difficult to break, particularly since it was attached to an entire governing system that enriched enslavers

⁴⁸ Coates. “We Were Eight Years In Power: An American Tragedy,” pg. 77.

and institutions. In order to foster a culture of dominance, White southerners initiated an extraordinary “campaign of defiance and subversion against the new biracial social order imposed on the South and mandated by the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which abolished slavery.”⁴⁹ The idea of racial superiority had become so infused into the American culture, that it would continue to impede the progress of the formerly enslaved.

II. The Failure of Reconstruction

As a result of 246 years of slavery, according to Merah Stuart this exploitation forced Blacks on an economic detour that excluded them from the ability to acquire and accumulate wealth. This is a detour no other ethnic group in this country has been required to travel, one that has diverted Blacks from the peace and prosperity that remained elusive for centuries. The country wanted to put Blacks on a path toward freedom and sought to determine how to right the wrongs of two and a half centuries of state-sanctioned bondage. On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation declaring, “that all persons held as slaves held within the rebellious states are, and henceforward shall be free.” The President requested General William T. Sherman to meet with a delegation of Black leaders who feared the backlash of racial animosity to determine what more should and could be done to ensure the stability of the emancipated. Douglas Egerton in *The Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of American’s Most Progressive Era* notes that one of those leaders was the Reverend Garrison Frazier who explained, “the way we can best take care of ourselves is to have land and turn it and till it by our own labor . . . We want to be placed

⁴⁹ Douglas A. Blackmon. *Slavery By Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008), pg. 42.

on land until we are able to buy and make it our own.”⁵⁰ General Sherman signed Field Order 15 which would have bequeathed 400,000 acres of confiscated land exclusively for ex-slaves where they could live free of White control and manage their own economic and political affairs.⁵¹ In conjunction with the promise of land, President Lincoln enacted a significant piece of legislation, The Freedmen’s Bureau, also known as the U.S. Bureau of Refugees, an institution for social uplift which rendered practical aid, housing, medical and legal assistance to nearly 4,000,000 newly freed Blacks. This newly formed institution was established to administer the Southern Homestead Act of 1866, “which provided a legal basis and mechanism to promote black land ownership, transforming slaves from farm laborers to yeomanry farmers.”⁵² According to the *North American Review*, “The Bureau Act of 1865 legalized Sherman’s Special Order, by providing that each negro might have forty acres at a low price on long credit; the Bureau Act of 1866 confirmed the sale of lands to negroes; General Oliver Otis Howard ordered that no lands be restored to disloyal owners, and the military authorities were directed to receive no application for restoration.”⁵³

The signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, the repatriation of land and the establishment of the Freedmen’s Bureau appeared to be the dawning of a new day in America, and if slaveholder oligarchies could be destroyed and “deliver on its promise of dividing up plantations and giving each freed slave “forty acres and a mule” as

⁵⁰ Douglas R. Egerton, *The Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of American’s Most Progressive Era* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), pg. 100.

⁵¹ The land was bounty from the Confiscation Act, which declared that the Union could seize the property of Confederate supporters, or property that had been “abandoned” by Confederate soldiers. The government purposed the land to pay the expenses of the war, to punish the Confederates, and to provide for Union loyalist and freed slaves. Walter L. Fleming. “Forty Acres and a Mule,” *North American Review* 182 (1906): 721.

⁵² Oliver and Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth*, pg. 14.

⁵³ Fleming, 729.

reparations for slavery,”⁵⁴ then “it would have made a basis of real democracy in the United States.”⁵⁵ These gestures on the part of the federal government provided the momentum needed to move Blacks toward complete emancipation. The successes of the Freedmen’s Bureau cannot be overestimated because they were achieved against insurmountable odds. By 1869, the organization was able to relieve the suffering of Blacks and Whites by developing hospitals, providing free transportation, the issuance of land and securing jobs at fair wages.

The greatest success of the Freedmen’s Bureau was in the area of education, as schools were founded and worked with philanthropic and religious organizations to ensure intellectual and skills development. For example, Howard University, Hampton Institute, Atlanta University, Fisk University, Storer College, and Biddle Memorial (Johnson C. Smith) were all established as a result of the Freedmen’s Bureau. John Hope Franklin remarked, “Education was promoted so vigorously that by 1867 schools had been set up in the remotest counties of each of the confederate states.”⁵⁶ One Freedmen’s Bureau official recorded, “Throughout the entire South . . . an effort is being made by the colored people to educate themselves.” He identified “at least 500 schools” built, staffed, and run by black people. In Georgia, for example, by the fall of 1866, African Americans “financed entirely or in part 96 of 123 day and evening schools.” Harriett Beecher Stowe said of such monumental progress, “They rushed not to the grog-shop but to the schoolroom – they cried for the spelling-book as bread and pleaded for teachers as a

⁵⁴ Claude F. Oubre, *Forty Acres and a Mule: The Freedmen’s Bureau and Black Land Ownership* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), pg. 40.

⁵⁵ W.E.B. Dubois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880* (New York: Harcourt Brace Press, 1935), pg.

⁵⁶ Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, pg. 308.

necessity of life.”⁵⁷ The quest for freedom, along with the desire for education became the driving force for those seeking to lose the physical and mental shackles of the past.

As Blacks vacated White churches to organize their own denominations and independent congregations, the Black church began to experience phenomenal growth, and became the bedrock and pillar of the Black community due to its focus on spiritual maturation, community development, visionary leadership and group economics. *The Black Church in the African American Experience* notes, the centrality of the black church during the Reconstruction period and its profound influence on future leaders such as Booker T. Washington and Frederick Douglas. Lincoln and Mamiya write, “During Reconstruction when many African Americans left the plantations or were driven off, they settled in nearby communities, often led by their pastors, and their churches became the first communally built institutions. As the dominant institution in their various communities, black churches performed other critical roles and functions in the economic sphere to ease somewhat the onerousness of abject deprivation.”⁵⁸ The focus on cooperative economics, community and institutional building were a direct result of the Freedmen’s Bureau. In their own congregational settings, Blacks were now free from the dehumanizing theology and preaching of their White oppressors and came to understand that “freedom is not a gift from the white slave master but a natural right of divine creation.”⁵⁹ Centuries would pass before Blacks would be fully delivered from “the picture of the self-effacing, patiently-suffering white Jesus held up by conservative

⁵⁷ James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), pg. 5-7,11.

⁵⁸ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), pg. 244.

⁵⁹ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1975), pg. 127.

evangelicals and revivalist at the turn of the century, as the authoritative image of what it is like to be a Christian.”⁶⁰

The influence of the Freedmen’s Bureau on the socioeconomic, educational, political and spiritual components of Black life were unrivaled. While these landmark accomplishments catapulted the formerly enslaved to unimaginable heights, there was considerable angsts toward the program by Northerners who believed it was too expensive to continue and Southerners who vehemently opposed Blacks asserting their rights and assuming control of “their lands.” While the program was successful, it was unable to break the control of resentful Whites who were bent on assuming hegemony over Blacks, who wanted more economic and political participation in the South. The Reconstruction revolution would be violently overthrown by ex-Confederates, as the Ku Klux Klan and other hate mongers wanted to reestablish the Antebellum order. W.E.B. Dubois remarked on this pivotal moment in American history, “the slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; and then moved back again toward slavery,”⁶¹ because it was difficult for Whites to accept the fact that Blacks were asserting their humanity and rights, a posture that was unusual in the American experience.

The trajectory of American history would be forever altered for Blacks in the South who had spent the last several years attempting to relinquish the chains of their past. Those chains would reemerge in the form of black codes, literacy tests and vagrancy laws, as threats about returning “the whip,” in order to reestablish the Southern hierarchy. On April 14, 1865, John Wilkes Booth, a Confederate sympathizer who wanted to see the

⁶⁰ Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans* (Maryknoll, NY.: Orbis Books, 1973), pg. 168.

⁶¹ Dubois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880*, pg. 30.

return of the slavocracy, commandeered his way into Ford's Theatre and assassinated President Abraham Lincoln. His death eventually dashed the hopes and dreams of the emancipated who fought in the Union Army, in an effort to secure land and a prosperous life in the South. Vice-President Andrew Johnson assumed the mantle of leadership and joined the ranks of Southerners who wanted their land and slaves back. The decisions of Andrew Johnson were the most consequential to the future of Blacks who wanted to remain free of White hegemony, as he decimated the Freedmen's Bureau bill and challenged the rights of Blacks by asserting, "America would remain a white man's government."⁶² Further, "the land that General Sherman had given to freed slaves in Georgia was returned to the original owners before a full harvest season had elapsed."⁶³ The period of Reconstruction was one of the most tumultuous, yet hopeful times in American history, as the nation sought to transition ex-slaves to freedom, while providing them with the resources necessary to attain self-sufficiency.

The Southern mindset needed rebuilding, especially in those areas of the deep South where residents had grown accustomed to slave labor, while also enjoying the fruits of economic and political power. Their need to enforce subjugation led to the terrorization of Black leaders and anarchic behavior on the part of Whites, even Ulrich Phillips acknowledged, "the Negroes were discovered to be cheap and useful laborers for domestic service and plantation work because whites were seeking their own welfare and comfort for economic reasons."⁶⁴ The federal government worsened matters by

⁶² Andrew Johnson, "The Papers of Andrew Johnson," vol. 10: February-July 1866, ed. Paul H. Bergeron (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), pg. 174-175.

⁶³ Paul A. Cimbala, "The Freedmen's Bureau, the Freedmen, and Sherman's Grant In Reconstruction Georgia, 1865-1867," *Journal of Southern History* 55 (1989):597-598.

⁶⁴ Phillips, "Economic Cost of Slaveholding in the Cotton Belt," pg. 258-259.

capitulating to Southern demands with the support of Andrew Johnson, by pardoning former Confederates, restoring the already confiscated land promised by General Sherman, and failing to buttress a Congressional bill that ensured financial support for another three years. The cumulative effects of these actions restored home rule and was a major setback to Black progress. While the Freedmen's Bureau was the most significant piece of legislation ever granted to Blacks and encouraged self-sufficiency while simultaneously lifting them out of poverty and changing their economic future, it was not given the proper amount of time to actualize its true potential.

On July 1, 1869, funding for the Freedman's Bureau was discontinued due to the spurious belief that the bill would cause Blacks to become dependent on the federal government. Radical Republicans wanted a more robust agenda that allowed Blacks to establish for themselves a condition of respectability and prosperity, but many Congressional leaders were unwilling to grant those rights. Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro state, "had the Freedmen's Bureau succeeded, black landowners would have been much more prevalent in the South by 1900, and their wealth much more substantial."⁶⁵ The Freedmen's Bureau was a breath of fresh air for a people who were suffocating from the debilitating effects of slavery and the ravages of war, and "demonstrated that the government could administer an extensive program of relief and rehabilitation and suggested a way in which the nation could grapple with its pressing social problems."⁶⁶ The most cogent explanation for the unfulfilled promise of land to the freedmen is best understood in the honest anecdotal summation from a White Southerner. He was asked, "Wouldn't it have been better for the white man and the Negro" if the land

⁶⁵ Oliver and Shapiro, "*Black Wealth/White Wealth*," pg. 15.

⁶⁶ Franklin, "From Slavery to Freedom," pg. 309.

had been provided? He emphatically responded, “No, for it would have made the Negro ‘uppity’” . . . and the real reason why it wouldn’t do, is that we are having a hard time now keeping the nigger in his place, and if he were a landowner, he’d think he was a bigger man than old Grant, and there would be no living with him in the Black District . . . Who’d work the land if the niggers had farms of their own?”⁶⁷ The travesty of the Reconstruction failure was the inability to persuade Whites to see “that their interests were intimately tied up with the conditions of the emancipated and that Reconstruction represented a lost opportunity, a moment when black and white laborers could have united to seek common goals but failed to do so.”⁶⁸ The Freedmen’s Bureau was not a failure, it was allowed to fail, and this would have lingering effects well into the future.

As this pivotal moment was sabotaged, it consequently paved the way for the most consequential century in American history called Jim Crow. The use of violence and intimidation reversed the social, political and economic outcomes of the Freedmen’s Bureau and the Civil War, as Whites in the South engaged in a campaign to economically disenfranchise and politically constrain those who exercised their newly earned rights, and anyone who asserted themselves would be killed or publicly lynched and “it would remain this way for another half-century, until the civil rights movement methodically swept it away.”⁶⁹ This era forced Blacks into a form of subjugation that created a system that resembled the nascent industry of slavery.

⁶⁷ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1944), pg. 226-227.

⁶⁸ Eric Foner, “Black Reconstruction: An Introduction,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 112:3 (2013): 409-418.

⁶⁹ David M. Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York: Simon Schuster, 1996), pg. 139.

III. The New Era of Oppression

Reconstruction afforded the emancipated the much-needed support from the federal government and laws that ensured their protection, a guarantee that Blacks had not experienced prior to the Civil War. The Constitution was ratified on behalf of the emancipated to include the 13th Amendment which abolished slavery, the 14th Amendment ensured equal protection under the law and the 15th Amendment protected their rights to vote. However, with the dismantling of the Freedmen's Bureau, the assassination of Abraham Lincoln and a Confederate sympathizer in the White House, they all converged to jeopardize the gains of Black Americans. There was a concerted effort to resurrect the Antebellum South at the end of Reconstruction, and a new era of oppression would be ushered in called "Jim Crow." Jim Crow was a caricature that was popularized by Thomas Dartmouth Rice, also known as the 'Father of Minstrelsy,' who in blackface sought to satirize the egregious policies of Andrew Jackson. The Jim Crow character performed like a buffoon, spoke with exaggerated and distorted diction in an effort to imitate a docile Black man. The minstrel show was intended to convey the image of a willfully ignorant, zealously lazy, yet joyous Black man who enjoyed entertaining and being servile to Whites. As a result of Rice's minstrel show, Jim Crow became a pejorative term meaning "Negro" and later embodied a set of customs, laws and etiquettes meant to demean Blacks from the 1870s well into the 1960s.

The Jim Crow era was a visceral response to Reconstruction, in which Southern legislatures legalized segregation in public spaces such as schools, transportation, bathrooms and private businesses, in an effort to reestablish social dominance over Blacks. These *de jure* structures extended beyond busses, bathrooms and businesses, but

the White supremacists' ideologies would eventually infiltrate every aspect of American life, resulting in irreparable harm to the descendants of slaves (this will be described in greater detail in Chapter 2). This system would marginalize Blacks for years to come in a myriad of ways, including but not limited to: housing discrimination, restrictive covenants, healthcare systems, voting, and banking are just a few institutions that peddled in discriminatory practices and policies. Carol Anderson calls the attitudes of Whites toward Black progress 'white rage' and this rage moved via the Jim Crow system with sheer imperceptibility. In *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* she says, "White rage was not about violence, but rather it worked its way through the courts, the legislatures, and a range of bureaucracies. By working the halls of power, it achieved its end far more effectively and far more destructively."⁷⁰ This destructiveness moved throughout the South as "the demise of slavery intensified the racially hostile attitudes among whites, who as a result of these attitudes, established antiblack institutions . . . giving way to systematic subjugation of African Americans for over a century at the hands of White political and economic elites . . . and it did so with a particular force and severity in those areas of the South that had been previously reliant on slavery as an economic engine."⁷¹ While the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery, making it illegal to physically place another human being in bondage, Jim Crow allowed legislatures to reestablish a new form of slavery.

The conclusion of chattel slavery left "plantations financially and intellectually bereft because slaves were the true experts capable of operating large-scale cotton

⁷⁰ Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), pg. 3.

⁷¹ Avidit Acharya, Matthew Blackwell and Maya Sen, *Deep Roots: How Slavery Still Shapes Southern Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), pgs. 38, 126.

productions.”⁷² Blacks were then coerced into a form of neoslavery that criminalized Black men and compelled them to work these plantations without pay, and many were repeatedly brought and sold into this brutal system well into the 20th century. In some instances where slavery was extremely prevalent, the hostility of Whites toward the free Black population was so heinous, they would pressure free blacks to (re)enslave themselves. The Antebellum South was determined to reemerge and would exploit Black labor in the form of sharecropping, the strictures of vagrancy laws and convict leasing, which “subjected blacks to animalistic treatment—a revivification of the most atrocious aspects of antebellum bondage,”⁷³ which would have implications on future generations. Following the end of the Civil War, freedmen were homeless and often loitered in public spaces because they were left without homes, land or resources to care for themselves or their families. As cities and towns experienced overwhelming congestion, “these conditions prompted legislatures to establish the notorious Black Codes, which were intended to establish a system of peonage or apprenticeship resembling slavery.”⁷⁴ The implementation of Black Codes would be their solution for population control, and a way to garner cheap and easily exploitable labor that permitted the agricultural needs of the South to be met, by “the local co-optation of the criminal justice system, voter disenfranchisement measures (such as poll taxes and literacy test), and informal institutions or social norms that promoted the maintenance of the Southern racial hierarchy.”⁷⁵ These new codes were enforced by White police officers and state militias, often comprised of Confederate veterans from the Civil War and they effectively

⁷² Blackmon, “*Slavery By Another Name*,” pg. 26.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pg. 52.

⁷⁴ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford Press, 1974), pg. 23.

⁷⁵ Acharya, Blackwell and Sen, “*Deep Roots: How Slavery Still Shapes Southern Politics*,” pg. 140.

marginalized blacks in the South and parts of the North. The ways in which Black Codes were executed would have an indelible impression on the future of lawmaking and impact future generations in the area of the criminal justice system, housing policies, the over-policing of African Americans and mass incarceration.

Vagrancy Laws

As former slaves fought to assert their freedom and economic autonomy during and after Reconstruction, White landowners moved to re-dominate the labor force. After the dismantling of the Southern Confederacy, vagrancy laws were enacted to ensure the continuation of White control. The return of domination would require the enforcement of an array of interlocking statutes that were designed to criminalize Black life and suffering. Henry William Ravenel, a South Carolina planter quipped, “There must be stringent laws to control the negroes and require them to fulfill their contracts of labor on the farms.”⁷⁶ Under the guise of Jim Crow, vagrancy laws never “enunciated their applicability only to Blacks, but it was widely understood that these provisions would rarely if ever be enforced on Whites.”⁷⁷ It was illegal for a Black person to be found wandering with no viable means of support, therefore being unemployed or homeless was considered criminal. By 1865, being a vagrant meant “that virtually any freed slave not under the protection of a white man could be arrested at any time for a crime. For example, an 1865 statute in Mississippi required “[e]very freedmen, free negro and mulatto shall, on the second Monday of January, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-six, and annually thereafter, have a lawful home or employment, and shall have evidence

⁷⁶ Arney R. Childs, ed., *The Private Journal of Henry William Ravenel, 1859-1887* (Columbia, S.C., 1947), pg. 256.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 53.

thereof.”⁷⁸ These laws were even more scrupulous in South Carolina, where children of freed slaves could be apprenticed to their former masters, and Blacks were prohibited from holding any occupation other than a farmer or a servant. Violation of these statutes warranted harsh penalties, which could include plantation labor, heavy fines or a lifetime of indebtedness.

Sharecropping

Sociologist Andrew Hacker surmised that slavery was a social system designed to keep Blacks in a position of permanent subordination. He notes, “black men, women and children were brought to this country for a singular purpose: to work. Their labor, unlike that of other Americans, would be subject to the vagaries of a market economy, and this economic reality has been a pervasive fact of black life.”⁷⁹ However, the Southern economy could not predict the conclusion of slavery as it had developed, but sharecropping would permit landowners to use the labor of freedmen to meet the agricultural needs of the South. The Emancipation Proclamation, the Civil War, the Thirteenth Amendment, and Reconstruction dramatically changed the power hierarchy on three levels:

- (1) Economically: White planters and businessmen continued to demand cheap labor, which now had to be negotiated with the Freedmen.
- (2) Politically: freed Blacks had the votes to alter the balance of power and, in some cases, completely rule local areas.

⁷⁸ Dubois, “*Black Reconstruction*,” pg. 174-175.

⁷⁹ Andrew Hacker. *Black and White, Separate, Hostile and Unequal* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons Press, 1992), pg. 102.

(3) Socially: the end of slavery had equalized the legal status of poor Whites and poor Blacks, leading to a large loss in relative status.

These new dynamics empowered Blacks to leverage their labor and, in most instances, demand pay, often in the form of harvested crops, which created the concept of sharecropping. Landowners needed labor and freedmen wanted jobs, and sharecropping was the solution that permitted laborers to occupy the land and till the crops, in return for a share of the harvest. While sharecropping was viewed as a positive step in labor relations and Blacks were being compensated for their labor, they were still obfuscated by unjust laws that hindered their upward mobility. Further, the pay was never commensurate to the amount of labor exerted and never were they allowed to own the land they tilled.

While the labor supply remained relatively low and the demand was high black workers demanded payment in the form of a share of the crops they helped to produce, while also “negotiating an employer-employee relationship which one could expect to earn around \$1 to \$2 per week.”⁸⁰ In many instances, the sharecropping agreement never favored the laborer, because many were subject to high interest rates, unpredictable harvests, and unscrupulous landlords and merchants who kept families severely indebted. Then, there were laws that favored the landowners, which made it difficult and illegal for sharecroppers to sell their crops and prevented them from moving if they were indebted to their landlord. Therefore, by making the sharecropping arrangements a type of enslavement, further prevented the Freedmen from experiencing the freedom of ownership they so desperately wanted.

⁸⁰ Acharya, Blackwell and Sen, *Deep Roots*, pg. 132, 149.

Convict Leasing

Vagrancy laws prohibited blacks from loitering or not having verifiable employment under the control of a White man and anyone found in violation of these requirements would be subject to heavy fines, severe plantation work and even convict leasing. This extreme law allowed the state prisons to collude with local landowners by leasing out the convicted to plantations for a fee. Making the convict leasing system a functional replacement for slavery, by subjecting “blacks to serve extraordinary sentences and using the court system to extract money or [preferably] labor from them under a system called “peonage,” or debt bondage, had the effect of sharply increasing the number of people incarcerated, especially black men.”⁸¹ This form of bondage is detailed by Douglas Blackmon in his book *Slavery By Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*. He highlights the abhorrent abuse of African Americans under this socially engineered system as Whites profited from the system, which was meant to suppress black citizenship, and it compelled African Americans into servitude through the use of a tainted court system.

This new form of black labor reshaped the Southern economy by utilizing skilled masons, miners, blacksmiths and furnace workers to construct the railroads which revolutionized the trading system. Once again, the slavocracy reared its ugly head and made the convict leasing system a useful mechanism for White supremacy, as the plantation agriculture continued to dominate the South and benefit the North with requested goods and services. In a real sense, this atrocious system of exploited labor has not ended, rather it has evolved with the criminal justice system. Michelle Alexander

⁸¹ Ibid., 143.

asserts, “the current reality of the prison system harks back to the days of the Civil War, when former slaves and their descendants were arrested for minor violations, slapped with heavy fines and then imprisoned until they could pay their debts. The only means to pay off their debts was through labor on plantations and farms –known as convict leasing.”⁸² This lucrative practice continues to have historical roots in the Jim Crow era, as millions of poor Blacks remain trapped in the criminal justice systems, which treats them like easily disposable commodities.

The system of slavery lasted for nearly 246 years and made America into a financial colossus due to the international and domestic export of cotton, tobacco and rice, all with free black labor. There is a substantial case to be made against the United States Federal Government for its involvement in and perpetuation of the institution of slavery. While many argue that slavery was so long ago, we cannot dismiss the lingering affects enslavement has had on contemporary American life. The generations of psychological trauma, dehumanization, theft and political disenfranchisement are serious claims to warrant reparations for this generation of African Americans. The past is not easily divorced from the present and as the remainder of this research will demonstrate, slavery was foundational to the development of racial wealth gap. Moreover, the failure of the Founding Fathers to emphatically denounce the institution, resulted in the slow poison of slavery infecting every single facet of American life and as we will see, nowhere is this infection more pronounced than the racial wealth gap.

⁸² Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), pgs. 156-157.

The Memo No One Has Read

“Negro poverty is not white poverty. Many of its causes and many of its cures are the same. But there are differences - deep, corrosive, obstinate differences - radiating painful roots into the community and into the family, and the nature of the individual. These differences are not racial differences. They are solely and simply the consequence of ancient brutality, past injustice, and present prejudice.”¹

President Lyndon Baines Johnson

Slavery was abolished 150 years ago, a number that represents the average lifetime of two individuals put together and serves as a stark reminder of how close we are to the past. The past is so hauntingly close to contemporary American life, that its effects are visible in every facet of the American ecosystem. There are “structural characteristics of our economy, that are heavily infused at every point with both an inheritance of racism and the ongoing authority of white supremacy,”² as stated in a report from the Samuel Dubois Cook Center on Social Equity at Duke University. African Americans have shouldered the weight of those effects, while much of White America continues to enjoy the fruits of historical oppression. Some are dismissive of the past and its proximity and refuse to believe that 336 years of systematic oppression and injustice did not simply vanish into thin air. When Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) was asked his opinion on reparations for the American descendants of slaves, he responded, “Slavery was so long ago, and it would be pretty hard to figure out who to compensate, and none of us currently living are responsible for what

¹ Lyndon Baines Johnson, Commencement Address at Howard University, June 4, 1965.

² William Darity, Jr., Darrick Hamilton, Mark Paul, Alan Aja, Anne Price, Antonio Moore, and Caterina Chiopris. 2018. “What We Get Wrong About Closing the Racial Wealth Gap.” Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity at Duke University; Insight Center for Community Economic Development. <https://insightcced.org/what-we-get-wrong-about-closing-the-racial-wealth-gap/> (accessed Feb. 22, 2020).

happened 150 years ago.”³ This is a shockingly cavalier statement from an individual whose family owned fourteen slaves,⁴ and while his argument is not only a belief held by many Americans, it greatly belittles the issue and ignores the very obvious connections between the not-so-distant past and the present. Seth Cohen states in *Reparations Now: A White Man’s Appeal for America To Pay What Is Due*, while those currently living may not be responsible for what happened 150 years ago, “White Americans have a special and unquestionable responsibility to take up the cause of reparations and to make them happen, because Whites have benefitted from the country’s unpaid debt to the ancestors of slaves, therefore we must take up the mantle of responsibility and pay reparations in an attempt to right a historic wrong.”⁵ Generations of economic exploitation have given rise to the racial wealth gap and continues to be a constant reminder of the myriad of ways in which the past has evolved and carried forward into the present.

Charles P. Henry observes that centuries of White supremacy and racism have cast a shadow over the social, economic and political systems of America, resulting in “an overwhelming amount of evidence of a growing disparity between blacks and whites on basic socioeconomic indicators.”⁶ Often times these disparities are not easily detected

³ David A. Love, “Mitch McConnell’s Reparations Comment Belittles the Issue,” CNN, June 19, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/19/opinions/slavery-reparations-hr40-mitch-mcconnell-love/index.html> (accessed Jun. 29, 2020).

⁴ A recent report uncovered that McConnell’s family owned fourteen slaves while living in Athens, Alabama. Much of their wealth was built from free slave labor and free land. Sandy Mazza, “In McConnell’s Boyhood town Where his Family Owned Slaves, The Reparations Debate Thrives,” The Courier Journal, July 14, 2019, <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/politics/mitch-mcconnell/2019/07/13/mitch-mcconnell-family-benefited-from-slavery-for-generations-records-show/1709330001/> (accessed Jun. 29, 2020).

⁵ Seth Cohen, “Reparations Now: A White Man’s Appeal for America To Pay What Is Due,” Forbes Magazine, June 28, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/sethcohen/2020/06/28/reparations-now/#2c6ca864547e> (accessed Jun. 29, 2020).

⁶ Charles P. Henry, “The Politics of Racial Reparations,” The Journal of Black Studies 34.2 (2003):131-152.

because they have been masked by the financial successes of a few, which include celebrities, athletes, and entertainers, while overlooking the fact that collectively millions of Blacks are languishing in poverty and lack opportunity. Antonio Moore argues that the hiddenness of Black suffering and inequality has created the illusion of economic progress, without having to tackle the issue of the racial wealth disparity. He utilizes a concept called the *decadent veil*,⁷ “which looks at Black America through a lens of group theory and seeks to explain the illusion of group success that has taken form over a thirty-year span. The new veil of economics has allowed a broad swath of America to become desensitized to Black poverty, but also hypnotized by Black celebrity, and this distorts the outside community’s view of Black America’s actual financial reality.”⁸ The financial state of Black America is so dire, according to economists Derrick Hamilton and Trevon Logan, that “when it comes to wealth, the paramount indicator of economic security, there has been virtually no progress in the last 50 years.”⁹ Exactly how bad is the financial state of Black America?

In 2016, the Center for American Progress summarized findings from the Federal Reserve Bank which revealed the lack of progress and several key drivers perpetuating the racial wealth gap:

⁷ An idea established by W.E.B. Dubois which refers to the racial duality Blacks experience due to their racialized oppression and devaluation in a white-dominated society.

⁸ Antonio Moore, “The Decadent Veil: Black America’s Wealth Illusion,” *The Huffington Post*, December 6, 2017, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-decadent-veil-black-income-inequality_b_5646472 (accessed Jun. 30, 2020).

⁹ Derrick Hamilton and Trevon Logan, “Here’s Why Black Americans Have Struggled For Decades To Gain Wealth,” *Market Watch*, March 4, 2019, <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/heres-why-black-families-have-struggled-for-decades-to-gain-wealth-2019-02-28> (accessed Jul. 6, 2020).

- Black households have fewer personal savings accounts. Blacks are more likely to experience negative income shocks but are less likely to have access to emergency savings.
- The wealth gap persists regardless of household education, marital status, age or income. The median wealth for White households with a college degree equaled 70 percent of the median for White households without a college degree.
- African Americans have fewer assets than Whites and are less likely to be homeowners, own their own business, and/or to have a retirement account. The data revealed that when blacks owned such assets, they were worth significantly less than similar assets owned by Whites.
- Black households have more costly debt. In 2016, Blacks owed \$35,560, less than 40 percent of the \$93,000 in debt owed by Whites.

However, Blacks owed larger amounts of high interest debt, such as installment loans, credit cards, car and student loan payments.¹⁰

These indicators could explain why there has been no economic progress for Black America, and it highlights the vicious financial struggle of many Black households. The lack of sufficient wealth means that Blacks are less economically mobile and therefore unable to grow their wealth over time.

¹⁰ Angela Hanks, Danyelle Solomon and Christian Weller, “Systematic Inequality: How America’s Structural Racism Helped Create the Black-White Wealth Gap,” *The Center for American Progress*, February 2018, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/reports/2018/02/21/447051/systematic-inequality/> (accessed Mar. 23, 2019).

In the previous chapter, I detailed how the commodification of Black bodies developed the slavocracy and enriched slaveowners and succeeding generations of Whites. The defunding of the Freedmen's Bureau forced Blacks into quasi-slavery and set the trajectory for one-hundred more years of financial exploitation with the aid of Jim Crow statues such as convict leasing, sharecropping, and vagrancy laws. In this chapter, I examine the actual legacy of slavery and Jim Crow, and the ways in which historic racism has carried forward into contemporary society via the systems and structures of America and have exacerbated the racial wealth gap. I underscore the ways in which Blacks were excluded from New Deal social policies during the Great Depression and the manner in which the racist application of those social policies created unequal housing markets that kept Blacks from taking advantage of new opportunities to accumulate wealth. This chapter looks behind the decadent veil and examines how the past made the present possible and the ways in which slavery and Jim Crow opened the door for the creation of the racial wealth gap. These historic injustices and other maladies shall set the stage for a cogent argument on the ultimate need to challenge and change the existing systems and structures of America that can lead to a comprehensive reparations package for the American descendants of slaves.

I. The Dilemma of Black America

A Pew Research Center survey asked respondents if they believed the legacy of slavery has affected the positioning of Black Americans, in which 63% of respondents believed that slavery has affected the position of Black people, with only 37% believing that slavery has little to do with their positioning. Among racial lines the responses were much more pronounced, with 59% of Blacks believing that slavery has affected their

situation a great deal, with 26% of Whites and 29% of Hispanics believing that slavery has not affected the position of Black people in America today.¹¹ There is a sentiment among Whites who believe that Black poverty has nothing to do with the legacy of slavery, but rather Blacks are poor and economically behind because they lack ability and motivation, and that structural inequities, historical or contemporary are not to blame for their position. Even White Christians have misunderstandings about the social realities affecting Black people. Robert Jones in *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*, asked evangelicals if slavery has affected the contemporary positioning of Blacks, they responded, “the presence of injustice is the unsurprising outcome of a fallen world, not a call for action. These inequalities exist because African Americans just don’t have the motivation or willpower to pull themselves up out of poverty.”¹² The notion of inability or the lack of willpower are ideas birthed out of historical views of biological and anthropological inferiority, as ascribed by early academicians, historians, and biologists who expended considerable intellectual energy characterizing Blacks as inferior and apathetic. These erroneous assumptions presupposed that poverty, and the lack of social mobility was solely due to Black deficiency and could be eliminated if blacks could be the antithesis of these racialized ideals. The dissemination of these fallacies fostered the assumption of Black inferiority and they continue to be used to blame African Americans for their current social and economic positioning.

¹¹ Juliana M. Horowitz, “Most Americans say the legacy of slavery still affects black people in the U.S. today,” Pew Research Center, June 17, 2019 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/17/most-americans-say-the-legacy-of-slavery-still-affects-black-people-in-the-u-s-today/> (accessed Jul. 6, 2020).

¹² Robert Long, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020), pgs. 94, 98.

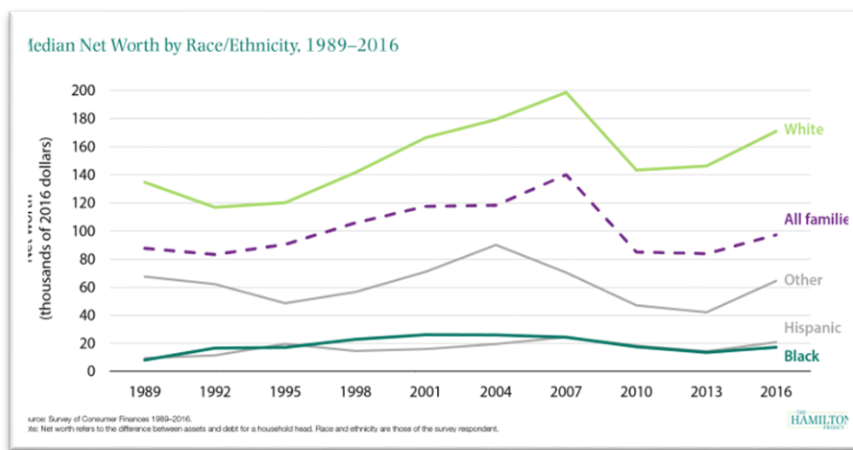
The presumption of laziness is an idea also held by some African Americans, who believe that Blacks are behind economically and socially because they have not taken advantage of the gains earned during the Civil Rights Movement, nor have they availed themselves to the educational opportunities bestowed upon them as a result of *Brown v. Board of Education*. In 2004, the notion of ‘laziness’ became popularized by Bill Cosby in a series of blistering public comments about poor Blacks that became known as the infamous ‘Pound Cake’ speech. The *Washington Post*, reported that Cosby praised the work of Civil Rights activists who “marched and were hit in the face with rocks to get an education, and now we’ve got these knuckleheads walking around.”¹³ The entertainer scorned poor Black people and blamed their position in life on their failure to get an education, so that they could rise above their blighted circumstances. While many found nuggets of truth in what Cosby articulated, some held the notion that his rhetoric went too far. Hamil Harris asserts, “Cosby went overboard when he absolved White America and the government of any responsibility for the ills of the poor Black community.”¹⁴ While Cosby’s remarks are not isolated and can be heard in many sectors of Black America, they often fail to acknowledge the accumulated economic injustices, social barriers and subpar educational systems that have often hindered black progress, at times with the complicity of the federal government. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated in 1967 and his words remain true today, “the root of difficulty in Negro life today is pervasive economic want and a society that is always eager to cover its misdeeds with a cloak of forgetfulness, cannot fully repress an ugly past when the ravage persists into the

¹³ Hamil Harris, “Some Blacks Find Nuggets of Truth in Cosby’s Speech,” *The Washington Post*, May 26, 2004, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2004/05/26/some-blacks-find-nuggets-of-truth-in-cosbys-speech/852ea711-fe22-45fe-8caf-2f98f87f6297/> (accessed Jul. 6, 2020).

¹⁴ Harris, “Some Blacks Find Nuggets of Truth in Cosby’s Speech”.

present.”¹⁵ The present-day social and economic disparities between African Americans and Whites cannot be compartmentalized in the isolated past, those injustices have current ramifications, and in no other place is this inequality more visible than in the racial wealth gap.

According to a recent study by the Brookings Institute, a typical White family has a net worth of \$171,000, nearly ten times that of a Black family at \$17,150,¹⁶ and the Institute for Policy Studies forecast the median wealth of Blacks will be \$0 by 2053 if the



current economic trends continue.¹⁷ This chasm reveals how accumulated injustices have created a disadvantaged

status for contemporary African Americans, and further reflects a country that has not rendered equal opportunities to every American. One of the central beliefs of the American dream is the postulation that everyone has an equal opportunity to pursue and generate wealth, own a home, start a business or obtain a decent education. The American dream portends that with hard work, reaching the aforementioned goals can

¹⁵ King, *Where Do We Go From Here?*, pgs. 108-109.

¹⁶ Kriston McIntosh, Emily Moss, Ryan Nunn and Jay Shambaugh, “Examining the Black-White Wealth Gap,” The Brookings Institute, February 27, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/02/27/examining-the-black-white-wealth-gap/> (accessed Mar. 25, 2020).

¹⁷ If the racial wealth gap is left unaddressed, the median Black household wealth is on a path to hit zero by 2053. Dedrick Asante Muhammad, Chuck Collins, Josh Hokie and Emanuel Nieves, “The Road To Zero Wealth: How The Racial Wealth Divide Is Hollowing Out America’s Middle Class,” Prosperity Now and The Institute for Policy Studies, September 3, 2017, https://prosperitynow.org/files/PDFs/road_to_zero_wealth.pdf (accessed October 8, 2019).

become a reality, but for millions of African Americans “that dream appears to be little more than a white man’s conjuring, designed to conceal a country’s sins and hold its citizens harmless for crimes committed against black humanity over the past 400 years.”¹⁸ From slavery to Jim Crow, to redlining and school segregation, there has been a concerted effort to keep Blacks marginalized and there have been discriminatory policies that have consistently hindered African Americans from having the opportunity to fully realize the American dream.

There is an assertion that improving one’s financial literacy, increasing educational achievement, employing better saving and spending habits or starting a business will result in an improved financial status. While these principles are necessary for maintaining financial stability, they place the burden of responsibility on African Americans to correct a problem they did not create, nor would either of these options change their economically disadvantaged status. There are no autonomous actions or group decisions that African Americans can make to close the racial wealth gap. The only solution is broad and imaginative policies that focus on pure reparations, wealth creation, and undoing the many underlying structural contributors to the racial wealth gap to address this inequity.

Income versus Wealth

In *Black Wealth/White Wealth*, authors Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro argue that Whites in general have economic security because they have been able to amass assets and pass their wealth from generation to generation. Often omitted from the

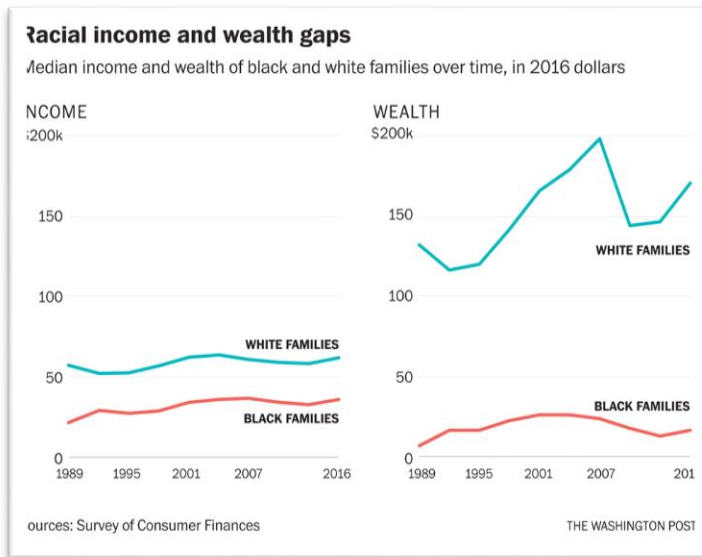
¹⁸ Joe Scarborough, “I still believe in the American Dream. But I know why so many others don’t.” *The Washington Post*, July 16, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/07/15/i-still-believe-american-dream-i-know-why-so-many-others-dont/> (accessed Jul. 16, 2020).

conversation is “the accumulation of wealth for some Whites is intimately tied to the poverty of wealth for most Blacks. Just as Blacks have had “cumulative disadvantages,” Whites have had “cumulative advantages,” resulting in a process that has cemented blacks to the bottom of the social hierarchy, while artificially raising the relative position of some Whites in society.”¹⁹ The lack of wealth is and has been the defining feature of Black life since the ending of slavery in 1865. For example, at the end of the Civil War, the emancipated wanted greater economic and political inclusion, particularly after the 15th Amendment granted Black men the right to vote. In an effort to block their desires, White politicians enforced poll taxes on impoverished Blacks, the group least likely to have resources or wealth. Unfortunately, for those unable to render the tax, they were criminalized and forced under the burden of vagrancy laws, stripped of their dignity, and many were ‘leased out’ or forced into sharecropping, because they did not have resources or verifiable employment. As Nikole Hannah-Jones notes in *What Is Owed?*, “White Americans have long known that in a country where Black people have been kept disproportionately poor and prevented from building wealth, rules and policies involving money can be nearly as effective for maintaining the color line as legal segregation.”²⁰ Perhaps a clearer understanding of wealth accumulation versus earning an income may aid in helping others to understand the racial wealth gap, and the manner in which wealth is passed along to give the succeeding generation an economic advantage.

¹⁹ Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* (New York: Routledge Press, 1997), pg. 51.

²⁰ Nikole Hannah-Jones, ““What Is Owed,” *The New York Times*, June 30, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/24/magazine/reparations-slavery.html> (accessed Jun. 30, 2020).

Wealth is the difference between what we own and what we owe, or the difference between the value of our assets, minus our debts. It captures the financial well-



being of a family and it is not generated solely by an individual, rather it is accumulated across generations. Income refers to salaries earned and received over a period of time for an occupation or a job performed.

Income cannot be transferred in the manner that wealth can, which allows families to build on the gains of the preceding generation. In 2016, the Survey of Consumer Finance concluded, “it would take approximately 260 years for the wealth of the average Black family to achieve 90 percent of the wealth of the average White family.”²¹ Wealth then becomes the most vivid illustration of the cumulative impact of racism over time and when those resources are managed well, it can ensure economic security well into the future. The death of a parent or grandparent could ensure some type of inheritance from the deceased to the living children or grandchildren. The transference of wealth serves as a steppingstone to ensure the succeeding generations financial stability, by giving them an economic floor to build upon. Inheritances include cash or property such as homes, jewelry or land, down payments on homes or the establishment of a trust fund for future

²¹ Christopher Ingram, “A new explanation for the stubborn persistence of the racial wealth gap,” *The Washington Post*, March 14, 2019 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/us-policy/2019/03/14/new-explanation-stubborn-persistence-racial-wealth-gap/?outputType=amp> (accessed Jul. 10, 2020).

college education. During the enslavement of Blacks, White parents would transfer the ownership of land and slaves to their children. For example, John Knox Witherspoon had a son named David, he also owned several slaves and acres of land. In his will, John stipulated “three of the captives [slaves] were to be leased out and the income from their labor was to be used to pay the tuition and fees for his son to attend Princeton University.”²² These types of intergenerational transfers allowed Whites to enrich and educate their children and to build wealth in perpetuity, albeit with the labor of slaves.

II. The Deal That Was No Deal for Black America

Another significant reason Whites as a group have economic advantage over African Americans is partly due to the New Deal social programs of the 1930s. After the stock market crashed in 1929, the country plummeted into a Great Depression as major stock prices fell and the devastating effects rippled around the world, as many individuals lost their incomes and others fell into foreclosure as unemployment began to rise in the United States. The country needed the assistance of the federal government to mitigate the pain of unemployment and economic collapse. Therefore, President Franklin D. Roosevelt enacted a series of economic policies called the New Deal, estimated to be worth \$50 billion and catapulted the country out of the depression. Within the New Deal legislation were two key provisions to assist the country: First, the G.I. Bill would provide economic relief for soldiers returning home from World War II, allowing them to access low interest loans to purchase homes and grants for those seeking advanced education. Secondly, Social Security Insurance was a federally managed retirement

²² William Darity, Jr., Jason Deitrich, and David Guilkey, “Persistent Advantage or Disadvantage? Evidence in Support of the Intergenerational Drag Hypothesis,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 60:2 (April 2001): 439-440.

account which set aside a portion of one's income, to be used during times of unemployment but ultimately it was reserved for retirement. Mehrsa Baradaran says of the signature legislation, "he [Roosevelt] had a difficult decision to make, equal treatment of the races or large-scale historic social reforms. He chose the latter, and the choice had long-lasting effects. Without explicit racial exclusions, the laws were crafted in such a way as to exclude most Blacks from the social welfare programs."²³ While Black and White soldiers served in World War II, Black veterans could not utilize their post-war benefits like their White counterparts and a key aspect of the Social Security program excluded domestic and farm workers, positions predominately held by Blacks at the time. This critical omission excluded 60 percent of Blacks across the country and 75 percent of Southerners who worked these professions. Ira Katznelson described the New Deal Reforms as "white affirmative action" because the federal government utilized resources to provide economic relief and financial advantage to White Americans.²⁴ The exclusion of Blacks from the New Deal programs resulted in irreparable harm to subsequent generations in the area of homeownership and wealth building.

Homeownership

One of the emblematic features of the American dream is the purchase of a home. This single investment allows purchasers to build wealth in the form of equity, provided the property increases in value over time. The equity allows the borrower to build wealth, which can be utilized to pay off debts, invest in college education or to make

²³ Mehrsa Baradaran, *The Color of Money: Black Banks and the Racial Wealth Gap* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), pg. 101.

²⁴ Historian Ira Katznelson explains "the wide array of significant and far reaching public policies that were shaped and administered during the New Deal were crafted and administered in a deeply discriminatory fashion." Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White* (New York: Norton Press, 2005), pgs. 17, 51.

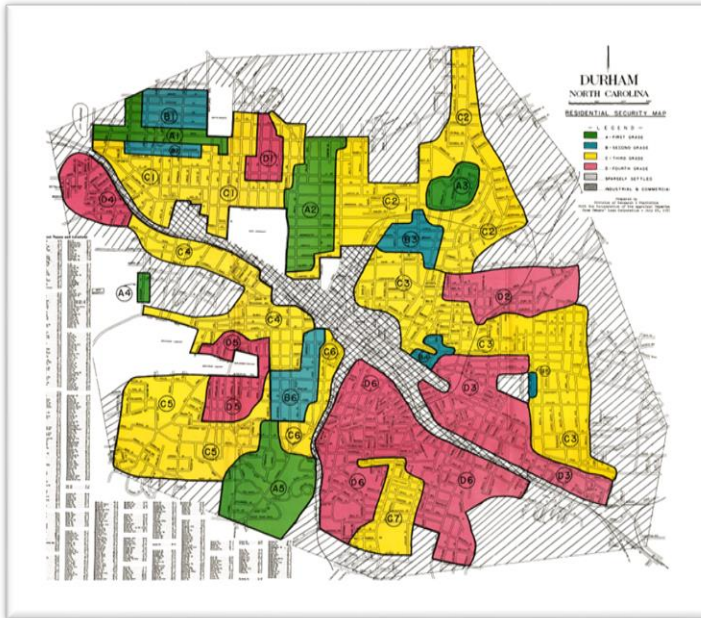
enhancements to the home, which helps to increase the value of the property. While the seeds for the racial wealth gap were sown during slavery and Jim Crow, it would be decades of discriminatory housing policies that would widen the wedge between Blacks and Whites on an economic basis. The G.I. Bill was mandated on a federal level, without any consideration to race, however it was implemented locally at the discretion of racist lenders who colluded with the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), permitting Blacks to be exploited and excluded on multiple levels. Decades of racist housing policies played a crucial role in keeping Blacks from acquiring property, building equity and accumulating wealth for the future.

While the policies of the Roosevelt Administration were progressive in nature, they were being built on a regressive racial hierarchy that allowed the mortgage industry to develop an exclusionary credit system and practice known as redlining. Before banks infused communities with mortgage credit, the Homeowners Loan Corporation (H.O.L.C.), a government-sponsored organization charged with the responsibility of financing and refinancing homes was able to employ racist practices that segregated America throughout the 20th century. The H.O.L.C. mapped out Americas racial geography and used census data to develop meticulously color-coded systems to determine lending risk. For example, a 1937 map (see below)²⁵ of Durham, North Carolina demonstrates how the categories were noted: (A) Green “Best”, (B) Blue “Still Desirable”, (C) Yellow “Definitely Declining”, and (D) Red “Hazardous,”²⁶ with green

²⁵ Elizabeth Friend, “Depression-Era Redlining Leaves Parts of Durham Less Green,” <https://www.wunc.org/post/depression-era-redlining-leaves-parts-durham-less-green> (accessed Jun. 20, 2020).

²⁶ “HOLC “REDLINING” Maps: The Persistent Structures of Segregation and Economic Inequality,” https://ncrc.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2018/02/NCRC-Research-HOLC-10.pdf (accessed Jul. 20, 2020).

being the mostly ‘white’ communities and red being ‘black’ communities. These maps allowed loan officers, appraisers and developers to evaluate lending risk, while



systematically denying loans and capital investments in communities where even the presence of a single Black family was enough to warrant rejection. Redlining allowed banks to discriminate against African Americans with surgical precision by refusing to

approve mortgages to residents in predominately Black communities, with the support of the FHA. Even as Black veterans returned from World War II with the promise of government supported mortgages, Richard Rothstein observes, “they did not apply because they knew the Veterans Administration would reject them on account of race. Therefore, Black veterans did not gain wealth from home equity appreciation as did White veterans, nor could their descendants inherit that wealth as did White veterans’ descendants.”²⁷

The consequences of these exclusionary policies disproportionately affected African Americans and resulted in a caste system that has left many Black communities plagued with higher levels of poverty, lower performing schools and communities with greater incidents of crime, because communities that were redlined on government maps

²⁷ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), pg. xi.

more than 80 years ago continue to struggle economically. The *New York Times* reported, “If you were to lay those redlining maps over almost any city in America with a significant black population, then you will see that the government-sanctioned segregation patterns remain stubbornly intact, stealing years of black homeownership and wealth gains.”²⁸ These policies gave birth to the euphemistic phrase *ghetto*,²⁹ often used to describe low-income African American neighborhoods, but never associated with government policies that segregated communities, exploited Black residents and left them with little to no opportunity for escape. As New Deal programs refused to mortgage Black neighborhoods, the FHA would continue to award mortgage loans to White Americans, which eventually created the modern White middle class. Ira Katznelson succinctly describes what the federal government did to lift White America, while simultaneously harming Blacks: “At the very moment a wide array of public policies was providing most White Americans with valuable tools to advance their social welfare, ensure their old age, get good jobs, acquire economic security, build assets and gain middle-class status --most Black Americans were left behind or left out, allowing the federal government to function as a commanding instrument of White privilege.”³⁰ While the New Deal Program provided economic relief for White Americans suffering from economic loss, the program failed to afford the same luxury to Blacks who served the

²⁸ Hannah-Jones, “What Is Owed.”

²⁹ In 1948, the term ghetto was first introduced by Robert Weaver in a book called *The Negro Ghetto* which describes how the government segregated the nation. In 1965, Kenneth Clark published *Dark Ghetto* which noted the lack of opportunities in New York City’s Harlem neighborhood, after the Kerner Commission published: “White society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintained it, and white society condones it.”

³⁰ Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White*, pgs. 17, 51.

country with dignity, and yet they were denied access to funding, loans and other opportunities.

III. The Disease That Revealed It All

As Black Americans were systematically excluded from home purchases, they were also being generationally deprived of wealth building, an action that would eventually leave many communities decimated due to a lack of resources, another pathology was simultaneously growing under the surface: inequality. Inequality of outcomes results when individuals or communities do not possess an equal level of material wealth or overall economic wellbeing. Disparities in living conditions are visible in predominately Black and White communities, especially those that suffered from years of redlining policies. These noticeable differences are seen in income and wealth, education and employment, homeownership and even the overall healthiness of community members. Health experts and sociologists have long studied the correlation between one's socioeconomic status (SES) and positive health outcomes. The economic vulnerability of lower SES African Americans, according to the Center For Disease Control, has led to the disproportionate diagnosis of chronic diseases, such as hypertension, heart disease, kidney failure, cancer, asthma, and diabetes resulting in a 5-to-7-year lower life expectancy rate as compared to Whites.³¹ Many of these indicators were unknown to the larger society until COVID-19 revealed these hidden health inequities in 2020. COVID-19 or Coronavirus is an airborne virus that is spread through respiratory droplets when an infected person sneezes or coughs. Its symptoms mimic the

³¹ The Center for Disease Control and Prevention, “Health, United States 2018 – Data Finder,” https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/hus/contents2018.htm?search=,Black_or_African_American (accessed July 22, 2020).

flu or a common cold and can be deadly especially when an individual has multiple co-morbidities, such as those commonly experienced in the African American community. When preexisting health conditions, along with “policies, systems, and environments all combine to limit opportunities for health equality, the outcomes can be catastrophic. Those with lower educational levels, higher rates of poverty, food insecurity, low-quality housing, limited transportation options, the threat of crime, and a host of other “social determinants” can all contribute to health disparities.”³² Communities that are currently suffering from the destructive nature of COVID-19 are those African American neighborhoods that lack significant investment, stemming from generations of redlining.

Epidemiologist from the University of Alabama discovered that African Americans from Alabama, comprised 36% of confirmed cases and 47% of deaths, despite being only 27% of the total population. In Louisiana, 56% of COVID-19 deaths were African Americans, while only being 33% of the population. In Michigan, African Americans are 14% of the population, 33% of confirmed COVID-19 cases and 40% of the deaths.³³ While COVID-19 does not specifically target African Americans, they are however, at a greater risk of exposure due to working in low-wage frontline jobs (i.e. essential workers), the daily usage of public transportation, and residing in communities where healthy food options are scarce. These subpar conditions in Black communities have made an increasingly vulnerable and dangerous conditions. These social conditions, when coupled with preexisting health concerns are a recipe for disaster, as stated by Lisa Cooper, a professor of medicine and public health at John Hopkins University. She states,

³² Mona N. Fouad, John Ruffin, Selwyn M. Vickers, “COVID-19 Is Disproportionately High in African Americans. This Will Come as No Surprise. . .,” *American Journal of Medicine* 0.0 (2020):1-2.

³³ Fouad, Ruffin and Vickers, “COVID-19 Is Disproportionately High in African Americans. This Will Come as No Surprise. . .,”.

“These problems have been going on for a long time, a lot of folks are acting surprised by this. It’s not because of their race that this is happening. This virus isn’t going after black people. It’s because of structural inequities that have led to poor health and greater exposure to the virus.”³⁴ Therefore, could it stand to reason that much of the Black death stemming from COVID-19 can be linked to centuries of economic injustice, which have now manifest in the structural inequalities of America, resulting in present day health disparities.

In *Deep Roots: How Slavery Still Shapes Southern Politics*, the social scientists grapple with the myriad of ways in which past behaviors and attitudes have shaped contemporary policy practices. They make the observation that states where slavery was prevalent and racial resentments were high, “residents were less likely to support welfare or other kinds of redistributive programs and are less likely to support other kinds of progressive policies, especially if they believe African Americans will benefit.”³⁵ For example, one of those *progressive policies* is the Affordable Care Act (ACA), or commonly known as Obamacare, which ensured healthcare coverage to more than 20 million Americans, granting eligibility to nearly all low-income individuals with incomes at or below 138 percent of poverty (\$17,236 for an individual in 2019).³⁶ Many Southern their legislatures and governors opted out of Medicaid expansion policies, leaving millions of their constituents uninsured. The connection between policy expansion and racial resentment appears to have disproportionately impacted lower-income African

³⁴ Michael Ollove and Christine Vestal, “COVID-19 Is Crushing Black Communities. Some States Are Paying Attention.” *Pew Trusts*, May 27, 2020, <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2020/05/27/covid-19-is-crushing-black-communities-some-states-are-paying-attention> (accessed Jul. 26, 2020).

³⁵ Acharya, Blackwell, Matthew and Sen, *Deep Roots: How Slavery Still Shapes Southern Politics*, pg. 59.

³⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of The Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2019 Poverty Guidelines. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines> (accessed Jul. 28, 2020).

Americans, more than any other racial group. In a report by the Kaiser Family Foundation, “Southern states are home to an estimated 92% of the 2.5 million people who fall into the Medicaid coverage gap, people who would be eligible for coverage if their state were to expand Medicaid but who are too poor to qualify for subsidies on a health insurance exchange.”³⁷ Could this explain the higher COVID-19 mortality rates among African Americans? Is there a correlation between states with deep racist histories and those currently without access to adequate healthcare? While Blacks would greatly benefit from such progressive policies, poor Whites would have been aided from these policies as well, yet it seems that historical racism has suffused the system and plays a critical role in the failure to expand. As a result, Blacks are the greatest casualties of a system that has historically been infused with racist attitudes. The confirmed cases and increased mortality rates undoubtedly reveal the historical impact of chattel slavery, Jim Crow segregation and systematic exclusion from social policies that has left Black America financially crippled.

The aforementioned inequities are the lingering effects of racist attitudes stemming from slavery, decades of legalized discrimination in the form of Jim Crow and the consequences of redlining, resulting in a massive racial wealth gap. The lack of educational opportunities and socially isolated communities have left many without access to jobs, quality healthcare or homeownership. These accumulated disparities have manifest themselves in wealth and poor health outcomes. The failure of America to truly

³⁷ Rachel Garfield, Kendal Orgera, Anthony Damico, “The Coverage Gap: Uninsured Poor Adults in States that Do Not Expand Medicaid,” *Kaiser Family Foundation*, January 14, 2020, <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/the-coverage-gap-uninsured-poor-adults-in-states-that-do-not-expand-medicaid/> (accessed Jul. 27, 2020).

grasp the systemic nature of racism and the manner in which it has been carried forward within the systems and structures, explains why African Americans have not made economic progress. Poverty is not the result of Black deficiency or individual failings, while personal choices play a critical factor in outcomes, the racial wealth gap is the consequence of racially infused structures that have created accumulated disadvantages that African Americans have been forced to live with for centuries. Consequently, those who hold the power to change the structures are less inclined to alleviate the inequity or to support policies that could fix and close the racial wealth gap because from their vantage point the system is not the real problem.

Fortunately, America may have reached what Malcolm Gladwell calls ‘a tipping point,’ a moment when an idea or a trend has crossed a threshold and we as a country must reckon with our racist past. The 2020 deaths of Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky and George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, again exposed what Black America has been wanting the country to attend to: the lack of concern for Black wellbeing and life. The heinous acts at the hands of law enforcement and a global pandemic seems to have galvanized the nation to coalesce around Black Lives Matter and has sparked serious conversations around reparations. The concept of reparations is one of the most divisive topics in American politics. In a 2019 *Gallup Poll*, attitudes toward reparations remain divided, with most Americans 67% stating the government should not make such payments, but almost a third believing it should, including the solid majority of Black Americans 73% supporting the proposal. Within party lines, Republicans overwhelmingly 92% disapprove of such a measure, while Democrats are divided 49% against the idea, even when African Americans 85% continue to be their most loyal

voting constituency.³⁸ Reparations are not a handout, nor is it holding others accountable for something they played no direct part, although many benefited from slavery in the form of inherited wealth. Rather, reparations is a justice claim against the United States Federal Government and, its responsibility for and direct benefit from unpaid slave labor. Roy Brooks describes bringing the government into account as “a moral obligation to atone for its past atrocities; for which our government has not atoned for slavery or Jim Crow; ergo, our government is morally obligated to tender such atonement- states the logic and morality of slave redress.”³⁹ The failure to provide any kind of meaningful reparations package to the descendants of slaves will continue to have ongoing racial and structural ramifications, and will further exacerbate the racial wealth gap.

³⁸ Mohamed Younis, “As Redress for Slavery, Americans Oppose Cash Payments,” Gallup, July 29, 2019, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/261722/redress-slavery-americans-oppose-cash-reparations.aspx> (accessed Jan. 26, 2020).

³⁹ Roy L. Brooks, *Atonement and Forgiveness: A New Model for Black Reparations* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), x.

Walter Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel

“Structures of evil do not crumble by passive waiting. If history teaches anything, it is that evil is recalcitrant and determined, and never voluntarily relinquishes its hold short of an almost fanatical resistance. Evil must be attacked by a countering persistence, by the day-to-day assault of the battering rams of justice.”¹

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Isabel Wilkerson in her book *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontent*, recalls the day she purchased a new but older house when she later noticed a small crack in the corner of the living room. The crack was small and somewhat obscured, so she decided to ignore it. As years passed, she began to observe the once small crack was worsening and causing the floorboards to bow. Over time, the tiny flaw began to affect the structure of her home and ultimately threatened the integrity of the entire house. Unfortunately, a small crack later resulted in thousands of dollars in repair bills, because she ignored it and deemed it small and incidental. Consequently, the damage cost her more in the long run because she failed to deal with the crack years ago.

The United States of America is that old house, and we as a nation are learning that whatever you ignore never really goes away, it only grows worse. Many have trivialized the severity of slavery, Jim Crow segregation and generations of racist policies and practices as trivial or incidental, and these injustices have been treated as something that African Americans should simply ignore and stop talking about. Wilkerson notes, “Americans are loath to talk about enslavement and it is commonly dismissed as a sad, dark chapter in the country’s history. It is as if the greater the distance we can create

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), pg. 128.

between slavery and ourselves, the better to stave off the guilt or shame it induces.”² But our nations failure to appropriately deal with the past, has resulted in broken structures and systems that have grown progressively worse. The nations ambivalence concerning the effects of racism and White supremacy that permeate the structures of America has and will continue to cost the nation greatly if we continue to turn a blind eye to what has been staring back at us for a long time.

The country has reached a catastrophic moment, a phase where the cracks within the structures of society can no longer be hidden or ignored because the integrity of the entire house has been threatened. The uncontrolled spread of COVID-19 revealed the cracks in the structures of Americas healthcare system, as African Americans have disproportionately succumbed to the virus. The cracks within the structures of Americas policing system were revealed, as we watched for 8 minutes and 46 seconds the state-sanctioned killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota and later the cold-blooded killing of Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky as she slept in her home. Then in Brunswick, Georgia, two self-deputized White men hunted down and lynched Ahmaud Arbery as he jogged down the street of his neighborhood, while a third accomplice recorded the entire incident. These moments and others like them are the results of centuries of injustice, inequity, and racism flowing through the interlocking systems and structures of America. Consequently, millions took to the streets in protest of the nation’s unwillingness to confront generations of racism, police brutality, White supremacy and social inequity. While some Americans are impervious to social disparity and the cracks within the American ecosystems, it has become increasingly easy to blame President

² Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of our Discontent* (New York: Random House, 2020), pg. 43.

Donald Trump or to view him as a destructive aberration of the brokenness of America. However, the cracks in America's structures were there long before Donald Trump, we simply ignored them, as Ibram Kendi states, "he [Trump] has held up a mirror to American society, and it has reflected back a grotesque image that many people had refused to see: an image not just of the racism still coursing through the country, but also of the reflex to deny that reality."³ In other words, the confluence of Donald Trump, police brutality, national protests, and COVID-19 revealed the ugliness of society and has shown the world what many have simply ignored: that racism flows through Americas social, judicial, political and economic structures.

These moments have intensified the need for courageous and imaginative leadership to reform America's systems and structures that for far too long have resulted in unjust outcomes. The present precipice has challenged the nation to confront the violent legacy of slavery and the dehumanizing tradition of systemic racism that continues to pervade every configuration of contemporary society. Structural racism has informed our religious, historical, cultural, political and economic institutions and has emerged in the form of interpersonal racism. While many states have recently passed landmark legislation to remove historic symbols, monuments and icons of hate from public spaces, yet the structures and systems that supported them remain intact. We celebrated the removal of the Confederate Flag in Mississippi, marveled at Black Lives Matter murals that adorned the streets of American cities, and embraced the allyship of Whites who are equally as outraged by the accumulated injustices leveraged against

³ Ibram X. Kendi, "Is This the Beginning of the End of American Racism?," *The Atlantic*, September 1, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/09/the-end-of-denial/614194/> (accessed Aug. 8, 2020).

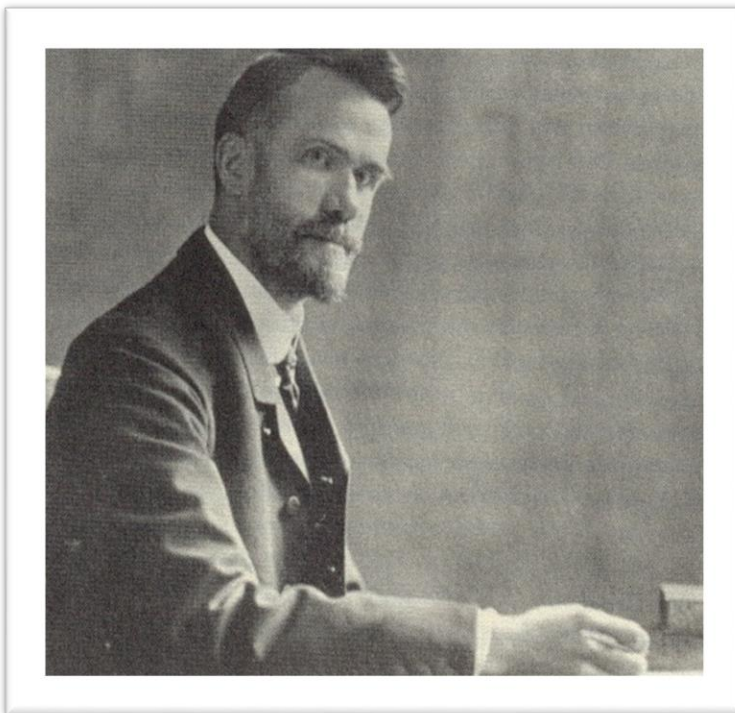
African Americans. We as a nation must have the moral courage and imagination to completely reform and dismantle systems and structures that have long served as conveyors of White supremacy. While gestures, symbolism, and allyship are meaningful, they will not remedy centuries of social, political and economic harm historically inflicted upon African Americans. Therefore, the nation needs an informed and substantive dialogue around structural reform that leads to reparative justice for African Americans, in an effort to right the many wrongs caused by the nation. Only reparations would fix the racial wealth gap, and since the creation of the wealth gap took the complicity of multiple aspects of society, closing the wealth gap will require the cooperation of every aspect of society.

In the previous chapters, I demonstrated how slavery created an economy that served as the underpinnings of American capitalism. The slavocracy colluded with major sectors of the American ecosystem to provide clear support, cover and justification for slavery and Jim Crow segregation. This evil continued to permeate the systems and structures, resulting in African Americans being blocked from taking advantage of key pieces of legislation, which included the promise of land grants, the dismantling of the Freedman's Bureau, and New Deal Programs that aided in creating the American middle class. Many Americans are oblivious to these and other injustices and are unaware of the ways in which they have been carried forward within the structures of America and currently contribute to the racial wealth gap. As the nation begins to reckon with its racist past, renewed conversations have emerged around social reform and reparations, because it is clear: the systems and structures of America are broken and in need of innovative and imaginative reform, if reparative justice is to occur for the American descendants of

slaves. In this chapter, I look to the principled work of Walter Rauschenbusch and his examination of the symbiotic relationship between Christianity and social reform, which seeks to radically improve the social, political and economic conditions that affect the vulnerable, the poor and the underserved. My aim is to demonstrate how Rauschenbusch's understanding of social reform which gave birth to the Social Gospel Movement, could play a pivotal role in moving the nation toward structural reform, penance and reparative justice for the American descendants of slaves.

Who is Walter Rauschenbusch?

A teacher asked, "Walter, what are you going to be when you grow up?" "John the Baptist," the young Rauschenbusch replied. At the time he would not have considered his response to be prophetic, but he certainly fulfilled his childhood ambition and devoted



his life to be a voice in the wilderness, heralding the Kingdom of God. Like the Old Testament prophets who sought to challenge social indifference, political corruption and economic greed, Rauschenbusch refused to allow the ruling class to perpetuate such malevolence. He changed

the face of American religion through his ministry, writings and teachings that were

instrumental in inviting the church to join the struggle for social justice. In 1886, Rauschenbusch began his pastorate at the Second Germany Baptist Church in New York City, during his eleven-year pastorate, he became deeply distressed by the social and economic plight of his people. The church was immersed in a neighborhood that possessed the pathologies characteristic of neglected communities: intense poverty, economic disparity, poor educational systems, sickness and violence, earning it the name Hell's Kitchen. As a young pastor, he desired to evangelize this community, but admitted his education had not prepared him for the crisis of those struggling under the evils of a burgeoning capitalistic system. As the American economy surged after World War II, and the population doubled as immigrants came to the United States in search of opportunities, the malignant gap between the rich and poor continued to grow.

Rauschenbusch wanted to find a theological way to confront the social milieu of his day, as he grew increasingly frustrated with theology that obscured the social dimensions of sin and salvation. He was challenged to attend to the economic and social patterns that “allowed people to make peace with others’ poverty, while ignoring their own complicity in causing it, and felt the affluent must be made to see the human costs of the economic system that gave them their wealth.”⁴ He believed that the Church and society should “fuse the Christian spirit with theological thought and social realities, by expanding the view of salvation, and to challenge the structural order of society, in order to meet the physical, political and spiritual needs of the weak.”⁵ For Rauschenbusch, Hell's Kitchen represented the amalgamation of structures that gave rise to poverty and

⁴ Paul M. Minus, *Walter Rauschenbusch: American Reformer* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988), pgs. 61, 65.

⁵ Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1945) pgs. 18, 21.

inequity, and the only remedy to correct these social issues was human agency challenging and changing the structures that contributed to those realities.

As Rauschenbusch struggled to develop a theological framework around his understanding of social justice, he strongly believed that poverty and economic injustice could be eliminated, if Christians were courageous enough to confront its causes and dismantle corrupt systems. A pivotal moment for him and one that changed the trajectory of his thinking was the fervent prayer of Father Edward McGlynn, a well-known Catholic priest and social reformer. As he invoked the words, ‘Thy Kingdom come! Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,’ “he realized for the first time the social significance of those holy words, as it lifted congregants off their seats with a shout of joy, and Rauschenbusch was stirred.”⁶ At the time, two innovative economists, Henry George and Richard Ely believed “the church was neglecting its responsibility to shape a new socioeconomic order, and to do so required a recovery of the whole truth that includes a social as well as an individual Gospel that proclaims social regeneration, individual and social salvation.”⁷ As the ideas of social and individual salvation congealed, Rauschenbusch began to formulate a theological basis for a social mission that would encourage Christians to become involved in social reform. While the task was enormous and the resistance great, he firmly believed that “God’s hand was in the movement for social justice, and he knew that a key task for him was to discover how to restate the Christian message in ways that made the message and social mission plain and inescapable.”⁸ This set the framework for the Social Gospel Movement, which sought to

⁶ Minus, *Walter Rauschenbusch: American Reformer*, pg. 62.

⁷ Richard Theodore Ely, *Social Aspects of Christianity and Other Essays* (New York: T.Y. Crowell, 1889), pgs. 148-149.

⁸ Minus, *Walter Rauschenbusch: American Reformer*, pg. 68.

deal with structural inequity, societal evils, and economic inequality by appropriating Christian ethics and biblical principles to social justice issues. One of his most highly publicized writings on this new movement was *Christianity and the Social Crisis* which repudiated traditional Christian teachings on individual salvation and believed that Christians should work to change the social structures of life that perpetuated poverty. Bruce Bawer asserts, “Rauschenbusch’s enthusiasm for a religion that views people as less individuals than as parts of a social organism can make one very uncomfortable. Nonetheless, Rauschenbusch’s legalistic contemporaries were unfair to accuse Social Gospelers of exchanging religion for social work.”⁹ For Rauschenbusch and his contemporaries, the need to improve the socioeconomic conditions of the poor and marginalized was considered the building up of the kingdom of God.

The Social Gospel and the Black Church

The Social Gospel Movement and its ideas found resonance with black church leaders who clearly understood the connection between the gospel and its applicability to social structures and systems that created adverse economic conditions for African Americans. It is important to note: Rauschenbusch’s message of social reform exclusively targeted poor Whites and immigrants, his work later found favor with Black leaders who appropriated his social gospel message into their ministry contexts. One of those leaders was Benjamin E. Mays, a minister, civil rights leader and the President of Morehouse College, and believed that economic injustice could not be fixed with piecemeal reforms but believed the church should be the leading voice in the area of social and economic affairs. In his book, *A Gospel for the Social Awakening: Selections*

⁹ Bruce Bawer, *Stealing Jesus: How Fundamentalism Betrays Christianity* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1997), pg. 95.

from the Writings of Walter Rauschenbusch he states, “social change must deal with the root causes of social maladjustment and that it must be politically effectual.”¹⁰ Martin Luther King, Jr. credited Rauschenbusch with making the greatest impression on his theological thinking and elevating his concern for social justice issues. In 1955, as King and other civil rights leaders were organizing the Montgomery Bus Boycott to protest legalized segregation, the social gospel was instrumental in addressing the social and economic concerns of Blacks. King stated, “It has been my conviction ever since reading Rauschenbusch that any religion which professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the social and economic conditions that scar their soul, is a spiritually moribund religion only waiting for the day to be buried.”¹¹ For thought leaders like Mays, King, and others, the social gospel made Christianity relevant to specific situations by bringing society into harmony with the ethical values of justice while encouraging cultural transformation. Gary Dorrien has written extensively about the infusion of the social gospel into the black church tradition and cites Rauschenbusch for creating “the model for social justice ministries that remain at the heart of black social Christianity.”¹²

While Rauschenbusch found significant popularity among black leaders, it is imperative to understand that he was often mute on the issue of race relations in America. Rauschenbusch knew very few African Americans and confessed no real moral authority on the subject of race. In *Breaking White Supremacy: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the*

¹⁰ Benjamin E. Mays, *A Gospel for the Social Awakening: Selections from the Writings of Walter Rauschenbusch* (Eugene, Oregon, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1950), pg. 24.

¹¹ Martin Luther King, Jr. *Stride Toward Freedom* (San Francisco, Harper Collins Publishers, 1958), pg. 91.

¹² Gary Dorrien, “Notes on Kingdom Coming: Rauschenbusch’s Christianity and the Social Crisis,” *Christian Century* (November 27, 2007), pg. 29.

Black Social Gospel, “Rauschenbusch’s painfully belated attempts to address racial justice . . . he later confessed that he had been silent about racism, because it seemed overwhelmingly tragic to him.”¹³ However, in a rare commentary on the issue of slavery he understood, “we are continuing to sin because our fathers created the conditions of sin by the African slave trade and by unearned wealth, they gathered from slave labor for generations.”¹⁴ While Rauschenbusch was not vocal on race relations, his observations on the connection between the slave trade and the unearned wealth of succeeding generations elevated his consciousness of the gross injustices Africans suffered at the hands of slave traders.

The Social Gospel still contains the paradigmatic principles and theological framework to encourage the dismantling of unjust economic systems and structures that have contributed to the enormous racial wealth gap. While the era in which Rauschenbusch pastored the Second German Baptist Church is vastly different, there are striking similarities between the social conditions of those experienced by members living in Hell’s Kitchen and those currently understood by African Americans today. ‘Hell’s Kitchen’ was not only a descriptor used to portray his mission field, but it is also a reality for many African American communities presently stricken with low performing schools, suffering from environmental racism, over policing and brutality, poverty, dilapidated neighborhoods and mounting crime rates. All of these pathologies stem from centuries of unjust policies, structures and systems that have undoubtedly contributed to and created the racial wealth gap. For Rauschenbusch, the unregenerate nature of the

¹³ Gary Dorrien, *Breaking White Supremacy: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black Social Gospel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), pg. 35.

¹⁴ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1945), pg.79.

economic, political and social systems of America are the root cause of the economic chasm and he considered it inimical to those burdened by its realities. How can we appropriate the principles of the Social Gospel and utilize them for social reform that leads to reparative justice for African Americans? Charles Henry argues, “If the focus can be kept on group harm then the solution lies in the restructuring of institutions and relationships that produced gross disparities in wealth and well-being.”¹⁵ Therefore, by examining how the systems and structures have been racialized, and used to contribute to the disproportionate harm of African Americans, the Social Gospel could be instrumental in creating a path forward that supports a fair and sustainable economic and political systems that rights historical wrongs and prevents such injustices from carrying forward into the future.

Rauschenbusch, Reform, and Reparations

The Social Gospel traces its roots back to the ministries of the Hebrew prophets who “were religious reformers demanding social action to deal with present-day situations in the life of the people, they demanded neighborly good will and humane care of the helpless. But their most persistent and categorical demand was that the men in power should quit their extortion and judicial graft. They had a radiant hope of the future when their social and religious ideals would be realized.”¹⁶ This prophetic spirit infused the Social Gospel as Rauschenbusch sought to challenge structural injustices which created barriers that interfered with opportunities to access the resources needed to live a dignified life. His outrage served as a catalyst and moral framework that also speaks to the current economic and social crisis plaguing African Americans as the nation makes

¹⁵ Charles P. Henry, “The Politics of Reparations,” *Journal of Black Studies* 34. (2003): 147.

¹⁶ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York: MacMillan Press, 1912), pg. 51.

urgent calls for social and structural reform. For Rauschenbusch, Christianity in its revolutionary nature is not a matter of getting individuals to heaven, but of transforming life on earth into the harmony of heaven, and a central tenet of the Social Gospel is a keen awareness of the transformative aspect of the Kingdom of God. He believed, “the work of Christ is a redemptive force bearing on the social order, even in movements that do not acknowledge a faithfulness to Jesus Christ.”¹⁷ In other words, the redemptive work of the Kingdom of God is not limited to Christianity, but encompasses the just actions of any person or organization seeking to advance the cause of justice on earth.

Black Lives Matter (BLM) is an example of a decentralized movement which has no religious affiliation, while advocating non-violence and civil disobedience against police brutality and racially motivated violence experienced by African Americans. BLM debuted in 2013 after the tragic killing of Trayvon Martin and the subsequent acquittal of his killer in Sanford, Florida. At the time BLM held an unfavorable view, as among the public, due to misunderstandings about the organizations’ vision and goals, which was a nationwide call for justice and social reform. As part of the BLM broader goals, the leadership maintains their focus to be “racial injustice, criminal justice reform, economic justice, LGBTQIA+, access to healthcare, quality education and voting rights.”¹⁸ Since the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota at the hands of a police officer, which sparked several weeks of civil unrest across the country, BLM has garnered unprecedented support across racial, political and social lines according to a recent online survey by Civiqs (an online polling company). According to the survey, BLM has gained

¹⁷ Walter Rauschenbusch, *The Social Principles of Jesus* (New York: Association Press, 1916), pgs. 33,71.

¹⁸ Black Lives Matter, “#WhatMatters2020,” <http://www.blacklivesmatter.com/what-matters-2020> (accessed Aug. 28, 2020).

a 28% increase in support over a three-month period, following the shooting of Breonna Taylor, the spread of COVID-19 which disproportionately affected African American communities and the killing of George Floyd. As of August 29, 2020, BLM has a 52% approval rating among Americans who publicly express solidarity with the aims of BLM and the need for justice and social reform.¹⁹ Recently, BLM advocated for the defunding of police departments, and to invest those funds in Black communities for social uplift.

Another organization, American Descendants of Slaves (ADOS), was founded by Antonio Moore and Yvette Carnell, as a lineage-based movement advocating for a robust agenda that leads to reparative justice for African Americans. The non-religious movement seeks to hold the government accountable for the original sin of slavery and the ensuing policies that address the harms of Jim Crow, redlining and mass incarceration. The founders assert, “Our movement aims to make the U.S. descendants of slavery whole by foregrounding the necessity of recompense for the wide-ranging damages done to black Americans throughout our nation’s history. If America truly hopes to heal from the tragedy of slavery and the systemic racism that followed, the country will need to pay a debt to the American descendants of slavery in the form of cash payments, large scale programs and structural reform.”²⁰ The closing of the racial wealth gap will necessitate a new deal for Black America that addresses multiple generations of oppression and exclusion.

¹⁹ CIVIQS, “Do You Support or Oppose the Black Lives Matter Movement,” August 29, 2020, https://civiqs.com/results/black_lives_matter?uncertainty=true&annotations=true&zoomIn=true (accessed Aug. 31, 2020).

²⁰ Antonio Moore and Yvette Carnell, “The Roadmap to Reparations,” <https://ados101.com/roadmap-to-reparations> (accessed Aug. 31, 2020).

While the Social Gospel has its roots in a different generation, its objectives are similar to the current aims of BLM and ADOS, as both seek structural transformation that leads to economic, social and political justice for the marginalized and oppressed. Accomplishing these goals according to the Social Gospel requires the complete cooperation of individuals working together to ensure structural and institutional reform that leads to economic and social equality. Rauschenbusch believed that God and the government played a vital role in achieving this level of economic justice, because “the government is the principal agent for implementing just social and economic policies,”²¹ which leads to a more equitable society. In the article *Economic Justice: A Biblical Paradigm*, the authors argue that God has chosen governmental structures to restrain and correct evil through the use of human agency, in order to dismantle exploitive systems and policies that hinder justice. Mott and Sider state, “God’s way of exerting power is through human creatures, who are God’s lieutenants on the earth. God’s intention is for human institutions, including the government, to be the channels of intervening power.”²² As stated throughout this research, reparations is a justice claim and a debt owed by the United States Federal Government, the overarching institution that should emphasize structural reform and the implementation of national policies that address the racial wealth gap, which includes but is not limited to a comprehensive reparations program, access to healthcare, addressing mass incarceration, the elimination of student loan debt, a living wage and significant investments in communities that suffer from generations of redlining. The racial wealth gap continues to be a vestige of the inequities born from and

²¹ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1926), pg. 429.

²² Stephen Mott and Ronald Sider, “Economic Justice: A Biblical Paradigm,” *Transformation* 17.2 (2000): 53.

reinforced by slavery and Jim Crow, and continues to be exacerbated by an economic system that has eroded the power of government and the people it is intended to serve. Therefore, by reforming the economic systems and structures of America and addressing centuries of harm inflicted on African Americans, the Social Gospel calls for and demands the creation of an equitable playing field and a radical redistribution of the nation's wealth that will in substance make the American descendants of slaves' whole.

Rauschenbusch maintained the idea that much of the nation's economic resources, particularly land, was held by a small group of wealthy people "who exploited these resources without providing adequate compensation to those who actually used and developed the land,"²³ states Christopher Evans. The solution to the problem of economic inequality can be found in a biblical understanding of justice, which gives special consideration to disadvantaged groups and the poor by providing basic social and economic opportunities and resources. They are as follows: 1) Distributive justice which specifies a fair allocation of a societal income, resources and power, and 2) Restorative justice specifying fair ways to correct injustice and restore socioeconomic wholeness for persons and communities. This for Rauschenbusch is *Christianizing of the Social Order*, the harmonizing of the ethical values of Christianity into the social order of the day, in order to improve the social and economic conditions of the economically disenfranchised. To do so requires:

1. Justice in the economic realm. Rauschenbusch wrote, "unjust privilege and unearned income debase the upper classes by parasitism, deprive the lower

²³ Christopher H. Evans, "Ties That Bind: Walter Rauschenbusch, Reinhold Niebuhr, and the Quest for Economic Justice," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 95.4 (2012): pg.359.

classes of their opportunity to develop their God-given life, and make genuine fraternity impossible among the classes.”²⁴

2. A just society provides for all of its members the influence of property rights. Property rights “must take the new form of a share in social wealth which will guarantee security in sickness and age and give a man an assured position in the workshop of the nation.”²⁵
3. The economic order must do away with a “one-man power” toward “the democratizing of industry that does away with the present unethical inequalities of wealth and approximate a human equality.”²⁶
4. The economic order must “organize all workers in systematic and friendly cooperation and so create the natural basis for Christian fraternity.”²⁷

The economic and social problems in America are extremely entrenched and solving them will require solutions and strategies that will fundamentally reform the systems and structures of contemporary society. To do so will demand an enormous amount of moral courage, prophetic imagination and social innovation, if we are to address the racial wealth gap. Many church and political leaders fail to see the connections between the aforementioned issues and the need for prophetic imagination, moral courage, and innovative leadership to alleviate economic and social suffering. Rauschenbusch saw and understood these connections and challenged the nation to move toward a more equitable social and economic transformation that included the reformation of all social institutions.

²⁴ Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, pg. 372.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 372.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 373.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 373.

For generations of African Americans, a disadvantaged economic status remains a permanent feature of the American economy, because the systems and structures were designed to keep African Americans, for the most part, out of economic power. The legacy of these structures and policy practices systematically blocked Blacks from owning land, earning income and building wealth, all of which continues to have lasting effects on current generations, resulting in many being immersed in economic scarcity due to the pernicious nature of racism that continues to flow through the social structuring of America. These disparities have accrued and worsened over several generations and are supported by structural racism and, white supremacy that can be traced back to the institution of slavery, the failure of Reconstruction and legalized segregation (i.e. Jim Crow) in America. The country will not become whole until it reckons with the chapter in American history that was the basis of its economic and social order. For 250 years, slavery was an American innovation and institution created by and for the benefit of the elites, while being sanctioned and supported by the federal government.

Social, racial and economic inequality remains the unsolved dilemma in America. The nation has been built on the contradiction of a promise of equality and its systematic denial. For most of the nation's history we have allowed racial inequality to fester within the systems and structures of America. Now is the time to address the brokenness of America and choose a commitment to equality that effectively closes the racial wealth gap. For Rauschenbusch, structural reform is fundamental if we are to affirm the ideas etched into the Declaration of Independence, "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." If we are to ignite the nations commitment to racial justice, we must be honest and

acknowledge the social, political and economic inequity of this country. We must reject blaming the disadvantaged status of contemporary African Americans on the moral failings of the Black community and attempt to create the social and structural support that allows African Americans to live full, fair, and socially productive lives.

One of the most memorable passages of scripture is the Parable of The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-35). In this well-known story, Jesus is presented with a poignant question from a religious scholar on the issue of salvation. He asks Jesus, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus responds, “What is written in the law?” The well-trained religious scholar recites the law, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” To which Jesus responds, “Do this and you will live.” While the scholar was skilled in the recitation of the law, he struggled with its most basic application, because the religious scholar wanted to justify his either elitist or separatist actions, so he asks, “And who is my neighbor?” So to help the religious scholar in answering his own question, Jesus responds by telling the story of a man on a journey, along a familiar stretch of highway from Jerusalem to Jericho, “the road was notorious for its robberies and became more dangerous when Herod laid off forty thousand construction workers, leaving plenty of them unemployed, some of whom turned to thievery.”²⁸ The social conditions created a climate that fostered a life a criminality and those who lived in the community were fully aware of the dangers along this road, as many were profiled, attacked, victimized, and even killed. This is what happened to a particular individual who dared to journey from Jerusalem to Jericho, he was beaten, stripped, robbed of his

²⁸ Brain C. Stiller, *Preaching Parables to Postmoderns* (Minneapolis, MN. Fortress Press, 2004), pg. 70.

belongings and left for dead. As a matter of happenstance, two members of the religious community, a Jewish priest and a Levite saw the man and they both ignored his condition. The parable points to a larger problem facing humanity: the social barriers (i.e. ethnic, racial, tribal and regional) that separate communities. Then a Samaritan came along, saw his brutal condition and decides to stop and do something to help the injured man. He bandages his wounds, puts him on his donkey and takes him to a local inn and pays for his stay. This single act of compassion “is the surprise element of reversal of expectations, as the Jews begin to see the Samaritans as neighbors and not enemies, as Jesus is breaking down the barriers that separate humanity.”²⁹

Jesus then asks, “Which of the three was neighbor to the man that was beaten, stripped, robbed of his belongings and left for dead?” The religious scholar responds, “The one who showed him mercy.” Then Jesus says, “Yes, now go and do the same.” Jesus teaches that to be a neighbor means to recognize the dignity and worth of humanity and to help those who are in need. Those with wealth, power, and privilege are challenged to assist in providing material and financial support to those most affected by social systems and structures in a world that has left many beaten and left for dead. Chamburuku and Gusha cite, “the world is being asked to take the character of the Good Samaritan instead of the priest and Levite and refuse to allow the political, economic, social and religious barriers to be excuses for not being a neighbor.”³⁰ The parable becomes relevant in a world characterized by divisions, racial strife and ethnic identities.

²⁹ Philemon M. Chamburuka and Ishanesu S. Gusha, “An Exegesis of the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-35) and its Relevance to the Challenges Caused by COVID-19,” *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies* 76.1 (2020): 3.

³⁰ Chamburuku and Gusha, “An Exegesis of the Parable of the Good Samaritan,” pg. 6.

For centuries, African Americans have travelled the dangerous road from Jerusalem to Jericho, and many have been physically beaten, stripped of dignity, and robbed of their humanity, and many have lost their lives. The noble deeds of the Good Samaritan stand to remind us of the importance of responding with compassion to aid those who have been beaten and broken by life. Yet, another angle of the story speaks to the need for social and structural reform on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. The need to advocate for change, to implement better lighting, to make a greater investment in the communities where violence, unemployment, and economic want is a consistent theme. The story reminds Christians of what Walter Rauschenbusch would suggest: “The Good News that Jesus proclaimed was intended to radically transform the economic, political, and social structures of life here on earth. The mission of the church is to participate in the creation of the Kingdom of God on earth through the spiritual transformation of Christians, who would actively participate in progressive social change.”³¹

³¹ Fahey, *Walter Rauschenbusch: Essential Spiritual Writings*, pgs. 2-3.

An Idea Whose Time Has Come The Case for Reparations

“Black reparations are damages for America’s broken contract with black people”¹

Mehrsa Baradaran, 2018

1963 was a triumphant and turbulent time in American history. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference initiated a major campaign against racial segregation in Birmingham, Alabama, which led to the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church, claiming the lives of four innocent little girls. Medgar Evers was assassinated for attempting to enforce voting rights for Blacks and seeking to end segregation at the University of Mississippi. The Vietnam War was escalating, even as many Americans opposed combat operations. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote the famous Letter from A Birmingham Jail and later delivered the iconic ‘I Have A Dream’ speech. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas by Lee Harvey Oswald, who was later killed by Jack Ruby, allowing Lyndon Baines Johnson to become the 36th President of the United States of America. At the center of national upheaval was the quest for genuine equality, freedom and a comprehensive civil rights bill that King and other leaders were demanding for years on behalf of socially and economically marginalized Blacks. Shortly after Lyndon Baines Johnson took the oath of office, he stated during a joint session of Congress,

“No memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President

Kennedy’s memory than the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill for

¹ Nellie Bailey and Glen Ford, “Black Capitalism Can’t Fix the Racial Wealth Gap,” *Black Agenda Report*, August 14, 2018, <https://www.blackagendareport.com/black-capitalism-cant-fix-racial-wealth-gap> (accessed Sept. 30, 2020).

which he fought so long. We have talked long enough in this country about equal rights. We have talked for a hundred years or more. It is time now to write the next chapter into the books of law. We have talked too long; we have done too little. And all of it has come too late. You must help me make civil rights in America a reality.”²

Several months later the Civil Rights Bill was taken to the floor of the Senate for a vote and received major opposition from key party leaders, until Senator Everett Dirksen (R-Ill.) stood to persuade his colleagues with a number of reasons they should support the bill. He closed his impassioned speech by quoting the French poet Victor Hugo, “stronger than all the armies is an idea whose time has come,” he went on to say, “the time has come for equality of opportunity in sharing in government, in education, and in employment. It will not be stayed or denied. It is here.”³ Soon thereafter, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 made legislative history by making discrimination illegal and prohibited racial segregation in schools and public accommodations. The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, with the support of the House and Senate, the President and the nation, stands as a lesson for our current troubling times and reminds us that this generation of leaders could triumph when patience, bipartisanship, and decency rule the day. The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 demonstrates the innate power of the federal government to singlehandedly overcome personal bigotry and opposition, in order to

² Lyndon Baines Johnson, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress” November 22, 1963 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oV1hkOmVDGU> (accessed Sept. 10, 2020).

³ Everett M. Dirksen, “The Civil Rights Bill” June 10, 1964, <https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/DirksenCivilRights.pdf> (accessed Sept. 10, 2020).

ensure justice and policies that mitigate the suffering of millions living under the burden of racism and segregation.

This historic moment raises three significant questions: Could the federal government in its current climate overcome similar obstacles to address and close the racial wealth gap? Is it possible for current House and Senate leadership to see, given the centuries of gross injustices African Americans have experienced and still grapple with, that time has come for the support and passage of a comprehensive reparations package? The nation has talked long enough and has done very little to adequately deal with the racial wealth gap. Yet, if the nation could find the moral courage to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964, then what would it take to make reparations a reality in America today?

Throughout this research, I have attempted to make a strong connection between two-hundred and forty-six years of chattel slavery and the development of American capitalism, with the commodification of black bodies as the underpinnings. The Emancipation Proclamation ensured the freedom of slaves, and the Thirteenth Amendment legally abolished slavery. The ex-slave, however, was only free to famine and poverty after the government failed to follow through on its promise of '40 acres and a mule' and allowed the Freedmen's Bureau to fail. These governmental failures paved the way for other forms of quasi-slavery and hegemony in the form of vagrancy laws, convict leasing and sharecropping. The Jim Crow era was a visceral response to Reconstruction attempts, which legalized segregation in public spaces and accommodations lasting from 1865-1965. This one-hundred-year era was responsible for the entrenchment of systems and structures that were heavily infused with racist attitudes and practices that would negatively impact future generations of African Americans in

the areas of the criminal justice system, housing policies, over-policing and brutality and mass incarceration. As New Deal social policies were being implemented to assist those affected by the Great Depression, Blacks were systematically excluded from participating in G.I. benefits, which included low interest home loans and college grants due to racism and the redlining practices of the H.O.L.A. The cumulative effect of these egregious acts over several generations have now cemented Blacks to the bottom of the social, political and economic hierarchy, leaving many with no opportunity for escape. The vestiges of these practices are still visible in predominately African American communities where these policies were enforced.

The nation's inability to appropriately deal with the past has resulted in broken structures and systems that have progressively worsen in Black communities and widened the racial wealth gap. Racism and White supremacy continue to permeate the systems of America and are in need of dismantling. In an effort to promote the dismantling of unjust systems and structures, I considered the conscientious work of Walter Rauschenbusch and his ideas on *Christianizing the Social Order*, which examines the symbiotic relationship between Christianity and social reform. Rauschenbusch argued that if a nation is to be radically improved, then the social, political and economic systems that create unbearable conditions for the poor and the marginalized must undergo radical restructuring. His understanding of political and social restructuring provides insight for governmental leaders who should propose and support legislation that ensures an equitable distribution of wealth and an understanding of the need for reparative justice for the American descendants of slaves. His ideas on restructuring the interlocking systems of America are intended to inform the Church of its responsibility to advocate for

fair policies that mitigate the burdens on the poor and disenfranchised, and to offer a historical understanding of the government's culpability for slavery and segregation. The Social Gospel Movement, which I believe could play a vital role in sparking innovative and imaginative ideas necessary for moving the nation toward acknowledging and addressing the roots of the slave empire, apologizing for it and working on a plan to compensate those living with historical injustices.

In this section on *The Case for Reparations*, I consider the plausibility of a reparations program that results in remedy and repair at the behest of the federal government that: 1) makes direct cash payments to the American descendants of slaves, 2) continues to address and alleviate systems and structures that have perpetuated racial disparity and 3) a national apology that acknowledges the historical wounds of slavery and segregation, that brings closure and justice that has been delayed for centuries.

What is H.R. 40?

The first step toward the aforementioned realities is the passage of H.R. 40. In 1989, the late John Conyers (D-MI.) began submitting H.R. 40, a bill seeking to establish a commission to discuss, study and develop reparations proposals to assess the enduring impact of slavery. This commission would have the uninhibited responsibility of investigating the multigenerational effects of slavery and the feasibility of compensating its descendants. As outlined in the H.R. 40 Bill, this vital and necessary step toward reparative justice would:

- 1) Acknowledge the fundamental injustice and inhumanity of slavery;
- 2) Establish a commission to study slavery and its subsequent racial and economic discrimination against freed slaves;

- 3) Study the effect of those forces on today's living African Americans;
and
- 4) Make recommendations to Congress on the appropriate remedies to redress the harm inflicted on living African Americans.⁴

Since this is the critical first step toward reparative justice, the question for reparations advocates is why has there been so much delay in passing the bill to simply study the effects of slavery? For one, Michael Tanner of the Cato Institute states, "Our national debt is already at \$27 trillion and has been exasperated by COVID-19 stimulus spending, this is hardly the time to burden the economy with more debt and taxes."⁵ Secondly, the current composition of the Senate makes it impossible to garner Republican support for H.R. 40, due to an overwhelming majority who already oppose the bill. Thirdly, Charles Henry believes that establishing such a commission or the passage of a reparations package would be detrimental to the concept of American exceptionalism. He states, "by recognizing the role of slavery and its consequences undermines the concept of American exceptionalism, which exposes the economic exploitation at the heart of White supremacy that now must be viewed as a part of the American creed."⁶

According to a *Gallup Poll*, attitudes toward reparations remain divided, with most Americans (67%) stating the government should not make such payments, but almost a third believing it should, including a solid majority of Black Americans (73%) supporting the proposal. Among party lines, Republicans overwhelmingly (92%)

⁴ Henry, *The Politics of Racial Reparations*, 137.

⁵ Tala Hadavi, "Support for a program to pay reparations to descendants of slaves is gaining momentum, but could come with a \$12 trillion price tag." *CNBC News*, August 12, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/08/12/slavery-reparations-cost-us-government-10-to-12-trillion.html> (accessed Sept. 14, 2020).

⁶ Henry, *The Politics of Racial Reparations*, 132.

disapprove of such a measure, while Democrats are divided (49%) against the idea, even when African Americans (85%) continue to be their most loyal voting constituency.⁷ Much of the division over reparations is possibly built on the failure to understand the history of slavery, the damages of Jim Crow segregation and the pernicious racism that continues to flow through the systems and structures of America. Reparations is not a handout, nor is it holding individuals accountable for something they played no direct part, although many benefited from it in the form of inherited wealth, rather it is a justice claim against the United States Federal Government, because the government created the legal conditions and authoritative framework which allowed these atrocities (i.e. slavery, Jim Crow, etc.) to take place and continue. There was overwhelming evidence of the collective and societal support for slavery and Jim Crow, and without such support many institutions (i.e. insurance companies, banks and universities) would not have succeeded. The failure to provide any kind of meaningful reparations package to this generation of African Americans will continue to have ongoing social, racial and structural ramifications.

What are Reparations?

In 2013, the late John Conyers wrote, “Many people want to leave slavery in the past, they contend that slavery happened so long ago that it is harmful, even divisive to bring it up now, but the concept of reparations is not a foreign idea to either the U.S. government or governments throughout the world.”⁸ Reparations is ultimately about

⁷ Mohamed Younis, “As Redress for Slavery, Americans Oppose Cash Payments,” *Gallup*, July 29, 2019, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/261722/redress-slavery-americans-oppose-cash-reparations.aspx> (accessed Jan. 26, 2020).

⁸ John Conyers, “My Reparations Bill- HR40,” IBW21.ORG, October 3, 2013 <https://ibw21.org/commentary/my-reparations-bill-hr-40>. (accessed Sept. 18, 2020).

redress for egregious injustices, harms and wrongs caused by a particular state or a nation, and are rendered with the hope of moving toward reconciliation and a more equitable and just future. Historically, people who have been victimized by a nation or a state have been given some form of compensation for their pain and suffering. For example, Native Americans have received land and billions of dollars for being forcibly removed from their native lands and the United States government has undertaken numerous reparations payments to compensate for multiple treaty violations. In 1971, \$1 billion and 44 million acres of land were allotted to Alaskan natives, and in 1986, \$32 million was given to the Ottawa tribe of Michigan.⁹ In more recent years, the Obama administration awarded American Indians \$3.4 billion stemming from a long running dispute over government mismanagement of tribal lands and accounts. President Barack Obama said of the settlement, “it clears the way for reconciliation between the trust beneficiaries and the federal government.”¹⁰

Stuart Eizenstat served during the Clinton Administration in a newly created position as Special Representative for Holocaust Issues and has secured over \$17 billion in restitution for damages to Holocaust survivors. John Torpey calls Holocaust reparations the gold standard of reparations claims, as “they have contributed to the construction of a master framework of reparations and reconciliation that has influenced later claims for reparations by altering the structure of political opportunity new challengers face.”¹¹ Moreover, Jewish immigrants were even able to take advantage of

⁹ Dorothy Benton-Lewis, *Black Reparations NOW!* (Rockville, MD.: Black Reparations Press, 1978), pg.1.

¹⁰ “U.S. finalizes \$3.4 billion settlement with American Indians,” *CNN* November 27, 2012 <https://www.cnn.com/2012/11/26/politics/american-indian-settlement/index.html> (accessed Sept. 14, 2020).

¹¹ Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann and Anthony P. Lombardo, “Framing Reparations Claims: Differences Between the African and Jewish Social Movements for Reparations,” *African Studies Review* 50.1 (2007):31.

New Deal social policies and programs that largely excluded Black participation. This has been highlighted by Karen Brodtkin in her book *How Jews Became White Folks*, in which she states, “The myth that Jews pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps ignores the fact that it took federal programs to create conditions whereby the abilities of Jews and European immigrants could be recognized and rewarded rather than denigrated and denied. The G.I. Bill, F.H.A. and V.A. mortgages, even though they were advertised as open to all, functioned as a set of racial privileges. They were privileges because they were extended to White GI’s, but not to Black GI’s. To African Americans, the government offered the cement boots of segregation, redlining, urban renewal, and discrimination.”¹² This is a striking contradiction to claims offered by earlier government officials who refused to fund the Freedmen’s Bureau, out of concern for ‘government dependence.’

Also, Japanese Americans were awarded \$1.5 billion for being interned during World War II. Moreover, their reparations claim was further bolstered when the United States created the Marshall Plan, also known as the European Recovery Program, in which \$15 billion in American tax dollars were used to repair and rebuild Germany. Yet, for the “domestic practice of the enslavement of African people and their descendants, it has not elicited a similar response from the federal government.”¹³ African Americans remain the only group (see chart)¹⁴ that has not received any group recompense for wrongs and harms resulting from slavery, Jim Crow segregation and other forms of

¹² Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks: What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994), pg. 50.

¹³ William Darity, Jr. and Dania Frank, “The Economics of Reparations,” *The American Economic Review* 93.2 (2003): 326-329.

¹⁴ “Why does the U.S. refuse to pay reparations to the descendants of black slaves?,” www.quora.com (accessed March 17, 2021).

ongoing racial discrimination. The question remains: If the federal government could

History of Reparations Payment

1990	U.S.A	\$1.6 Billion or 20,000 Each	JAPANESE AMERICAN
1990	AUSTRIA	\$25 Million to Holocaust Survivors	Jewish Claims of Austria
1988	CANADA	250,000 sq. miles of land	INDIAN & ESKIMOS
1988	CANADA	\$230 Million	JAPANESE CANADIANS
1986	U.S.A	\$32 Million 1839 Treaty	OTTAWAS OF MICHIGAN
1985	U.S.A	\$31 Million	CHIPPEWAS OF WISCONSIN
1985	U.S.A	\$12.3 Million	SEMINOLES OF FLORIDA
1985	U.S.A	\$105 Million	SIOUX OF SOUTH DAKOTA
1980	U.S.A	\$81 Million	KLAMATHS OF OREGON
1971	U.S.A	\$1 Billion+44 Million Acres of Land	ALASKA NATIVES LAND SETTLEMENT
1952	GERMANY	\$822 Million to Holocaust Survivors	GERMAN JEWISH SETTLEMENT
1865-Present	U.S.A	\$0 Slavery & Jim crow era	AFRICAN AMERICAN BLACK DECENDANTS

muster the moral will to compensate other groups for their descendants' pain and suffering and gave them an opportunity to litigate how those past injustices could have current ramifications, then why have African Americans not been given the same opportunity? The overwhelming amount of evidence should cause

Americans to cringe and repent, especially when compared to lesser harms experienced by Native and Japanese Americans on American soil. The only plausible reason the United States has not taken seriously reparations to African Americans is the insidious racism that has veiled itself in sophisticated arguments and outright denial of the fact that the economy has been built on, and enriched generations by exploited forced slave labor. Rashawn Ray and Andre Perry believe since “the U.S. government denied wealth to Blacks, it [the government] should restore that deferred wealth through a reparations package to their descendants that will close the Black-White racial wealth divide.”¹⁵ Particularly, while slavery afforded some White families, private businesses and

¹⁵ Rashawn Ray and Andre Perry, “Why We Need Reparations for Black Americans,” *The Brookings Institute* April 15, 2020 <https://www.brookings.edu/policy2020/bigideas/why-we-need-reparations-for-black-americans/> (accessed May 19, 2020).

organizations the ability to accrue and transfer tremendous wealth, property and advantages to succeeding generations, all accumulated from exploited slave labor.

In June 2019, the House Judiciary Committee held an historic hearing on H.R. 40, largely believed to be a symbolic gesture to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the first documented slaves to arrive in Jamestown, Virginia. The date, June 19th is significant because it marks a major African American holiday known as Juneteenth, which celebrates the official end of slavery throughout the United States. The historic hearing was held to determine if the subcommittee could authorize the usage of \$12 million to fund a 13-member commission to study the lingering effects of slavery and to make redress recommendations to Congress. Among the cadre of speakers who offered the pros and cons of a reparations program was Ta-Nehisi Coates, whose 2014 article “The Case for Reparations” rekindled public discussion and interest in reparations. His article stood on a bevy of arguments that proffered the claim for reparations, by presenting a scathing indictment against the United States government for its involvement in slavery and centuries of brutal exploitation of Africans by nearly every major institution. During the hearing Coates stated, “It is impossible to imagine America without the inheritance of slavery. As historian Edward Baptist has written, enslavement shaped every crucial aspect of the economy and politics of America, so that by 1836 more than \$600 million, almost half of the economic activity in the United States, derived directly or indirectly from the cotton produced by the million-odd slaves. By the time the enslaved were emancipated, they comprised the largest single asset in America. Three billion in 1860, more than all the other assets in the country combined.”¹⁶ Slave labor

¹⁶ Olivia Paschal and Madeleine Carlisle, “Read Ta-Nehisi Coates’s Testimony on Reparations,” *The Atlantic* June 19, 2019 <https://amp.theatlantic.com/amp/article/592042/> (accessed Sept. 17, 2020).

undoubtedly enriched generations of slave owners, private businesses and organizations, and that labor was the engine that spurred the American economy. Yet, for its involvement the United States has yet to acknowledge or compensate the descendants of slaves for their labor, pain and suffering, nor has there been any atonement for lost equity stemming from anti-Black housing policies and other racist business practices. Slavery, Jim Crow and exclusion from New Deal social policies were no diminutive acts, they robbed Black Americans of their opportunity to amass and bequeath wealth to succeeding generations, and H.R. 40 would allow researchers and policymakers to understand the contemporary consequences of those historical actions. As of date, no further activity has been taken on H.R. 40, it remains to be passed by the House Judiciary Committee.

Who would be eligible for reparations?

A major challenge for a slavery reparations program would be determining eligibility, especially since no affected slaves are alive to dispute their claim. Therefore, those seeking reparations must convincingly demonstrate the connection between the initial injustice, in this case slavery and Jim Crow segregation, and the later harms experienced by a particular group. William Darity is a leading historian and economist at Duke University and has studied the concept of reparations for thirty years and developed a criterion that could determine one's eligibility. In *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*, William Darity and Kirsten Mullens present two criteria:

First, U.S. citizens would need to establish that they had at least one ancestor who was enslaved in the United States after the formation of the republic. Secondly, they [U.S. citizens] would have to prove that they self-

identify as ‘black,’ ‘Negro,’ ‘Afro-American,’ or ‘African American’ at least twelve years before the enactment of a reparations program or the establishment of a congressional or presidential commission to study and develop reparations for African Americans.¹⁷

Meeting the threshold for the first criteria would seem like a daunting task due to the challenges of accurate record keeping. For this, Darity and Mullen encourage the assistance of websites and organizations dedicated to genealogical research, such as ancestry.com or archives.gov, which could assist in determining whether or not claimants actually descended from an enslaved ancestor. For example, when Georgetown University revealed their historic involvement in slavery, the university established the Georgetown Slavery Archive, a website dedicated to identifying individuals who believe their ancestors were sold or exploited by the university.¹⁸ Descendants were able to access census records, slaveholder logs and other pertinent documents that would assist families in verifying their claims. Providing proof of racial identity could be proven by any government-issued documents, such as a birth certificate, a state-issued driver’s license or census record. While Darity and Mullens eligibility parameters would include approximately 40 million African Americans, it does not make provisions for Black immigrants who voluntarily came to the United States of America. For those who immigrated from places such as the Bahamas, Haiti, Jamaica, or Africa, they would not be eligible to receive reparations under the current criteria, because Darity argues, “black slaves were subjected to a form of sustained, race-based discrimination unique in

¹⁷ William Darity and Kirsten Mullen, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), pg. 258.

¹⁸ Corinne Ruff, “Many Colleges Profited from Slavery: What Can They Do About It Now?,” *Chronicles of Higher Education*, April 19, 2016.

American history, robbing them of individual agency, voting rights and the ability to accumulate wealth and education.”¹⁹ A comprehensive reparations program will only come with the prompting of the federal government, as Walter Rauschenbusch understood “our democratic government is the principle agent for implementing just social and economic policies,”²⁰ due to the fact that Whites, who statistically oppose reparations have garnered considerable political and economic power. Therefore, the federal government must intentionally and strategically transform the social and structural conditions that made racial inequality possible.

Reparations would require a radical redistribution of financial resources from the United States treasury and award it to an estimated 40 million African Americans. To be clear, there are those who support a comprehensive reparations program but discourage individual one-time cash payments because they believe greater attention should be given to redressing the cumulative harms caused by the systems and structures sustained from slavery and Jim Crow segregation. In other words, considerable emphasis should be given to funding universal healthcare, living wages, affordable housing, the elimination of student loan debt and significant investments in impoverished Black communities that continue to suffer from a history of redlining practices. This, according to Bree Newsome, “Would amount to trillions of dollars and it mandates a wealth transfer from White institutions and families that have been sitting on slaveholder money for

¹⁹ Wesley Lowery, “Which black Americans should get reparations?,” *The Washington Post*, September 18, 2019 https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/which-americans-should-get-reparations/2019/09/18/271cf744-cab1-11e9-a4f3-c081a126de70_story.html (accessed Sept. 21, 2020).

²⁰ Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, 429.

generations.”²¹ However, the challenge to wealth redistribution will be convincing the beneficiaries that they are in possession of ill-gotten wealth?

How should reparations be paid for?

The public’s opinion toward a comprehensive reparations program depends on who is to receive reparations, from whom are these payments derived, how will these payments be made, for what reason, and why is such a program necessary. This research has sought to establish the who of reparations as nearly 40 million African American descendants of slaves, whom the United States Federal Government should be held culpable for centuries of abuse, injustice and other forms of ongoing racial discrimination. Why is such a program warranted, due to the “\$171,000 typical net worth of White families and \$17,150 for Blacks,”²² thus the racial wealth gap. But the larger questions among the optimist and pessimist of a reparations program are: how much and where will the money come from for such an undertaking? These questions are challenging local municipalities, as they seek to devise innovative strategies to address the racial wealth gap and national calls for systemic change and justice. Many church and political leaders alike, struggle with what Walter Brueggemann calls “imagination before implementation,” that is, the ability to think creatively and courageously for out-of-the-box solutions to our nation’s most complex and entrenched problems. However, there are cities like Evanston, Illinois²³ where leaders are thinking imaginatively, by making plans to use marijuana sales taxes to fund local reparations initiatives. In Asheville, North

²¹ Keith Nelson, Jr., “Reparations for Slavery: Is America Ready to Pay for Progress?,” *Complex Magazine* September 21, 2020 <https://www.complex.com/life/reparations-election-issue-2020> (accessed Sept. 22, 2020).

²² McIntosh, Moss, Nunn and Shambaugh, “Examining The Black-White Wealth Gap”.

²³ City council adopted a resolution for reparations as part of the city budget, which will be resourced by the tax revenue from newly legalized marijuana sales.

Carolina²⁴ plans are underway to make significant investments in communities and areas where Blacks face disparities, and in Burlington, Vermont²⁵ leaders have created a task force to study reparations and other racially systemic issues. In the wake of nightly protests in Louisville, Kentucky following the killing of Breonna Taylor by the Louisville Metro Police, Kathleen Parks of the Louisville Chapter of the National Action Network said, “Reparations just simply means to repair. Repair 400 years of slavery, and systemic racism and structural economic racism.”²⁶ The city plans to develop urban renewal programs to help lift displaced Black communities, more affordable housing and the creation of business incubators. These audacious and imaginative initiatives could become models that national leadership could replicate, as local municipalities seek to creatively fund local reparations programs.

Notable historians and economist have offered varying reparations proposals that utilize present-value calculations on unpaid wages and damages, and the potential valuation of the land promised to the formerly enslaved. Each proposal generates its estimates by using compound interest rates of 4, 5, and 6 percent, to calculate varying measures of return on foregone or lost income. This research has shown the restitution amounts the federal government made to other groups who have experienced harm, and the following proposals present what the United States government could owe in lost wages and damages, that are to be paid to the ancestors of the enslaved. To ascertain how

²⁴ In an historic move, the city council unanimously approves plans for reparations, beginning with a formal apology and plans to address discriminatory housing policies, increase minority home and business ownership and strategies to grow equity and generational wealth.

²⁵ The city declared racism a public health crisis and openly admitted their State constitution never officially abolished slavery, and in some instances continues to allow slavery in certain circumstances.

²⁶ Drew Gardner, “Local groups say it’s time to talk about reparations and what they really mean.” *WLKY News*, September 26, 2020, <https://www.wlky.com/article/local-groups-say-its-time-to-talk-about-reparations-and-what-they-really-mean/34169577> (accessed Sept. 27, 2020).

much a reparations package could cost, I examine the reparations proposals of Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch, Larry Neal, James Marketti and Thomas Craemer. These proposals have been compiled by Richard F. America in *The Wealth of Races: The Present Value of Benefits from Past Injustices* and each offer various parameters for which they stake their reparations claim, along with payment ranges and approximate cash payments due to African Americans.

Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch

Roger Ransom is a professor of American history and economics and Richard Sutch is dedicated to the study of cliometrics²⁷ and slavery. Their reparations proposal is constructed around an understanding of slave labor as *forced exploitation*, in which they define as “the part of labor that is not returned to the slave as food, shelter or other consumption items.”²⁸ Sutch and Ransom seek to calculate the profit engendered under the system of slavery by covering the period of 1806 to 1860 and compounding it by using 1983 inflation rates. According to those parameters, they estimate a \$3.4 billion debt owed to African Americans.²⁹ Then, by utilizing the \$3.4 billion figure and compounding it by the interest rates of 4, 5, and 6 percent, their reparations package would amount to \$14 billion, \$19 billion, and \$27.7 billion, respectively. However, according to economist William Darity, the aforementioned figures are problematic because, “first, it excludes the profits from slavery during the first thirty years of the nation’s existence; secondly, profits from the slave trade are not taken into account; and

²⁷ The systematic application of mathematical and statistical methods to the study of history, in an effort to determine the profitability of slavery or whether it was a racist-colonialist phenomenon that existed for primarily noneconomic reasons.

²⁸ Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch, “Who Pays for Slavery?,” *The Wealth of Races: The Present Value of Benefits from Past Injustices*, ed. Richard F. America (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1990), pg. 32.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pgs. 31-54.

third, the enslaved are charged with the maintenance expenses of their own coerced labor.”³⁰ Charging for maintenance is precarious because any food or shelter that a slave required was not for their benefit or choice, rather those are related expenses of maintenance that should be viewed as investments the slaveowner made for their exclusive benefit with the understanding of an even greater rate of return.

Larry Neal

As an economist from the University of Illinois, like Ransom and Sutch, Neal calculated maintenance related expenses as the responsibility of the enslaved. He estimated the difference between what slaveowners would have had to pay free black men and women for the same tasks and what they actually spent on their slaves. He justifies this empirical work by, “first, estimating the market value of the unpaid net wages of slaves who lived at various times before emancipation; secondly, estimating the number of slaves who labored without fair pay, and thirdly, multiplying the amounts by the number of slaves and aggregates them.”³¹ He deducts those slaveowner expenditures related to maintenance costs from the wages paid to a free persons labor between the years 1620 and 1840 by using 1983 estimates, amounting to \$1.4 billion owed. Neal then computed \$1.4 billion by the compounded interest rates of 4, 5, and 6 percent, and determined the approximate value of a reparations package would be \$5.7 trillion, \$8.1 trillion, and \$111.4 trillion, respectively.³²

³⁰ Darity and Mullens, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans In The Twenty-First Century*, pg. 260.

³¹ Larry Neal, “A Calculation and Comparison of the Current Benefits of Slavery and the Analysis of Who Benefits,” *The Wealth of Races: The Present Value of Benefits From Past Injustices* (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1990), pgs. 91-106.

³² Larry Neal, “A Calculation and Comparison of the Current Benefits of Slavery and the Analysis of Who Benefits,” in America, *Wealth of Races*, pgs. 91-106.

James Marketti

This reparations proposal argues the concept of *unjust enrichment*, which states the “obligation of restitution, that is, the receiving and retention of property, money or benefits, in which justice and equity belong to another.”³³ Implicit in the idea of unjust enrichment is the understanding of large-scale group oppression at the hands of those unfairly enriched. From the 1700s to the 1800s, many White families and communities were enriched directly due to slave labor on plantations and other related economic enterprises (i.e. slave breeding and auction blocks). This legal framework aided Marketti in developing a figure of \$2.1 trillion in 1983, then compounded it by the aforementioned interest rates, he found the present-day debt owed to African Americans would amount to \$8.6 trillion, \$12.1 trillion, and \$17.1 trillion, respectively.³⁴

Thomas Craemer

In his comprehensive work *Estimating Slavery Reparations: Present Value Comparisons of Historical Multigenerational Reparations Policies*, Craemer offers the largest and the most robust reparations plan by considering the prevailing average market wage by the number of hours worked. He estimates that a full twenty-four-hour period was taken from the enslaved from 1776 to 1865 and does not deduct maintenance costs from his figures and estimates slave labor amounted to \$14.2 trillion by 2015 calculations. Again, by utilizing standard interest rates he propositions the astounding figures of \$16.4 trillion, \$17 trillion, and \$17.7 trillion, respectively.³⁵

³³ Joe Feagin, “A Legal and Moral Basis for Reparations,” *Time Magazine*, May 28, 2014, <https://time.com/132034/a-legal-and-moral-basis-for-reparations/> (accessed Sept. 27, 2020).

³⁴ James Marketti, “Estimated Present Value of Income Directed During Slavery,” *Wealth of Races*, pgs. 107-124.

³⁵ Thomas Craemer, “Estimating Slavery Reparations: Present Value Comparisons of Historical Multigenerational Reparations Policies,” *Social Science Quarterly* 96.2 (2015): 649.

Darity and Mullens believe the goal of any reparations program should be complete elimination of the racial wealth gap within ten years. Recalling the figures from Chapter 2, the racial wealth gap is 10:1 or \$171,500 for Whites and \$17,500 for Blacks, and is not the result of Black dysfunction, lack of educational attainment or personal motivation, rather it is the pernicious legacy of slavery, racial animosity and accumulated discriminatory practices. The racial wealth gap will not be closed by changing individual behaviors, improving spending patterns or the acquisition of portfolio and money management skills, particularly if the structural mechanisms that fostered racial inequality remain unchanged. Rauschenbusch noted, “the chief means to approximating these ends [closing the wealth gap] is economic reform leading to a just society,”³⁶ which would level the economic playing field between Blacks and Whites.

How much could African Americans receive?

While the demand for reparations has been ongoing since the official end of slavery, at no other time in American history has the topic received such widespread notoriety and serious consideration. Many contribute the current spotlight on reparations to widespread protests against police brutality following the death of George Floyd, the nation’s current reckoning with racism and the disproportionate number of COVID-19 related deaths which have placed in public view what many African Americans have been living with for centuries: inequity. It is hard to imagine America being the wealthiest nation in the world without the exploitation of 4 million people over a 246-year time span, and it is difficult to discern how the wealth gap might be different without the infusion of racialized attitudes into the systems and structures of America. Without

³⁶ Christopher H. Evans, “Walter Rauschenbusch, Reinhold Niebuhr, and the Quest for Economic Justice,” *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 95.4 (2012): 354.

question, Americas wealth has been garnered on the backs of the enslaved and the unjust suffering of African Americans, and White America continues to benefit from centuries of exclusion, abuse, theft, and inherited wealth, all of which has its genesis with the enslavement of African people. While the reparation estimates from the aforementioned economists and historians are significant, Jason Hickel in *The Divide: Global Inequality from Conquest to Free Markets*, makes a noteworthy insight, “it is estimated that the United States alone benefitted from a total of 222,505,049 hours of forced labor between 1619 and the abolition of slavery in 1865. By using minimum wage rates, those hours, along with a modest interest rate would be worth \$97 trillion.”³⁷ Reparations advocates believe the money should come from federal and state governments, which supported and protected the institution of slavery; private businesses, universities and corporations that have openly admitted and benefitted from slavery; and even families whose ancestors owned slaves, could owe a considerable portion of their wealth to the American descendants of slaves. Whether the money comes from federal or state governments, institutions or corporations, it goes without saying, America owes a special debt to African Americans for centuries of enslavement and state-sponsored discrimination, which have profoundly impacted contemporary society.

If the eligibility criteria of Darity and Mullens were adopted by a commission to study slavery, then African Americans who could prove citizenship and their descendancy from an enslaved person, could be eligible for considerable one-time cash payments. This section is dedicated to exploring those amounts, as well as other options and programs currently being explored by reparations proponents. Robert Johnson is

³⁷ Jason Hickel, *The Divide: Global Inequality from Conquest to Free Markets* (London, England: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018), pg. 180.

founder of Black Entertainment Television and recently submitted an article entitled *Reparations Are The Only Way to Fix America's Racial Wealth Disparities*, in which he argues the only way to amend for slavery is the development of a reparations package worth \$14 trillion, with individualized payments amounting to \$357,000 to be paid over a 30-year period. Johnson understands there are those who disagree with an exorbitant one-time amount, and for those against such an idea he states, "We already pay for it. We pay for food stamps. We pay for low-income housing. We pay for welfare. All of these government and so-called public assistance programs are tax transfer payments to millions of African Americans whose current economic conditions are directly related to income inequality and the lack of equal opportunity."³⁸ For Johnson, paying reparations would eliminate the need for social service programs because it places financial control into the hands of African Americans.

Thomas Craemer offers an even greater amount Black Americans should be compensated, due to his understanding of a *comprehensive reparations* package. For Craemer, slaves lost an entire twenty-four hour day and therefore, a comprehensive reparations package should take into account that "slavery resulted in not only lost incomes and, as a consequence, lost inheritances, but also lost opportunities to accumulate capital, lost freedom, as well as pain and suffering that, if compensated at the time, would have had major implications for African American descendants of the enslaved living today."³⁹ According to Craemer, slaves had zero agency to better

³⁸ Robert L. Johnson, "Reparations for slavery are the only way to fix America's racial wealth disparities," *NBC News*, June 5, 2020 <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/reparations-slavery-are-only-way-fix-america-s-racial-wealth-ncna1225251> (accessed Sept. 28, 2020).

³⁹ Thomas Craemer, Trevor Smith, Brianna Harrison, Wes Bellamy, Trevon Logan, and William Darity, Jr., "Wealth Implications of Slavery and Racial Discrimination for African American Descendants of the Enslaved," *The Review of Black Political Economy* 47.3 (2020): 220.

themselves and the ingenuity they had was used to benefit others, therefore the continual exploitation of the slave robbed future generations of any potential promise of an inheritance. For this level of suffering, Craemer believes there could be two reparations payments, one as an African American for damages and lost wages and the other on behalf of their descendants for lost time and centuries of abuse. This payment structure would be as follows: for lost wages and damages as an American the amount could be \$140,065.21, and as an American filing a claim on behalf of an enslaved descendant the recompense could be \$336,268.15, making the total payout \$476,333.36.⁴⁰ In 1860, according to the Confederate Jefferson P. Davis, the real value of slaves was not simply in their labor or lost time but in the slaves themselves. He stated, “Our slaves . . . directly and indirectly involve a value of more than four thousand million dollars.”⁴¹ In other words, the total asset value of the slaves was approximately \$4 billion, and if compounded by present-day interest rates would amount to \$2 trillion, \$9.3 trillion and \$42.2 trillion, resulting in estimated payouts of \$50,000, \$232,500 and \$1,050,000 to be paid directly to the American descendants of slaves.

Another idea circulating among economist and reparations advocates are baby bonds, an idea postulated by Derrick Hamilton, who leads the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University, along with William Darity of Duke University. Hamilton and Darity proposes the government set aside \$80 billion per year, and secure \$200 for children born into wealthier families and \$50,000 for children born

⁴⁰ These figures can be found in *Estimating Slavery Reparations: Present Value Comparisons of Historical Multigenerational Reparations Policies*, in which he offers a fuller explanation based on the \$14 trillion debt owed.

⁴¹ Judah P. Benjamin, “You Can Never Subjugate Us” (speech to U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., December 31, 1860), *Causes of the Civil War*, <http://civilwarcauses.org/judah.htm>. “Four thousand million dollars” is another way of saying \$4 billion.

into lower income families. By allocating such funds, the government-created investment accounts would grow over time at 2%, and the resources could be used to pay for college education, a down payment on a home or the initial funding needed for a business start-up. In a recent study on baby bonds, Naomi Zewde of City University of New York, found the median net worth of a young White adult in 2015 was \$46,000 and \$2,900 for a young Black adult. She hypothesized, if at birth both children had been granted baby bonds of \$200 and \$50,000, respectively at a 2% interest rate, over time White adults would be worth \$79,159 and Black adults \$57,845, which would make Whites 40 percent wealthier than Blacks, not 16 times as wealthy.⁴² Baby bonds could end generational poverty, reduce wealth inequality, foster greater self-sufficiency among poorer families and place Blacks and Whites on a more equitable playing field. While Hamilton is not opposed to one-time cash reparation payments, he sees reparations as “a retrospective approach that is more direct, more parsimonious,” and race-specific, he said, whereas baby bonds are prospective, race-neutral, and “in perpetuity moves society toward becoming more egalitarian.”⁴³ Supporters of reparations unanimously believe eliminating student debt, ending mass incarceration, providing universal health insurance and investments in communities ravished by years of redlining policies, would in substance amount to a *comprehensive reparations* program, and achieving those ends must include robust and imaginative policies that advocate for the closure of the racial wealth gap.

⁴² Naomi Zewde, “Universal Baby Bonds Reduce Black-White Wealth Inequality, Progressively Raise Net Worth of All Young Adults,” <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5743308460b5e922a25a6dc7/t/5c4339f67ba7fc4a9add58f9/1547909624486/Zewde-Baby-Bonds-WP-10-30-18.pdf> (accessed Sept. 28, 2020).

⁴³ Anne Lowrey, “A Cheap, Race-Neutral Way to Close the Racial Wealth Gap,” *The Atlantic Magazine*, June 29, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/06/close-racial-wealth-gap-baby-bonds/613525/> (accessed Sept. 30, 2020).

Conclusion: So, Now What?

“Indeed I tremble for my country when reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep for ever: that considering numbers, nature and natural means only, a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation, is among possible events: that it may become probable by supernatural interference!”¹

Thomas Jefferson Notes on the State of Virginia, Query XVIII

Historically black people have been subjected to abuse, commodification, exploitation and systematically denied of the “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” promised to all Americans. The systems and interlocking structures of the nation, have resulted in mass incarceration, police brutality, gentrification and other forms of injustice. This research has offered past and contemporary examples of the ways in which systemic and structural racism have created the racial wealth gap. In 2020, the nation was given a front row seat to the myriad of ways in which the past has impacted the present, and the question remains whether the country will ignore the glaring evidence or courageously reckon with the new reality, in an effort to begin the hard work of facilitating healing and wholeness. Etymologically speaking, *reckoning* renders two implications: narrative and transaction. Narratively, reckoning requires a full verbal accounting of something. Transactionally, it has implications of economic justice and a fair settling of accounts. In this concluding section, I argue that the time has come for the nation to reckon with historic and institutional racism, and that the Church is uniquely positioned to appropriate a biblical and theological lens to the unjust nature of slavery and racism, to assist the

¹ Thomas Jefferson. “Notes on the State of Virginia,” PBS, https://www.pbs.org/jefferson/archives/documents/frame_1h198149.htm (accessed Dec. 30, 2020).

government in achieving the call for reparative justice for contemporary African Americans.

I have attempted to establish a case for reparations by highlighting a strong connection between four historic moments and the current racial wealth gap. Those moments included: the institution of slavery, the failure of Reconstruction, the Jim Crow era, and exclusion from New Deal social policies. These moments effectively allowed some Whites to commodify the black body for personal gain, and enabled legislatures to construct racist laws that excluded Black political and economic participation. The exploitation of Blacks became foundational for the building of the American economy and were being reinforced by the United States Federal Government. National, state, and local governments permitted failure of Reconstruction, the monetization of slave labor by business elites and corporations, redlining practices in Black communities, and the implementation of Jim Crow policies, which allowed racist practices to go unchecked. I argued that these acts were bolstered by the federal government and warrants a substantial justice claim which includes acknowledging, redressing and repairing the consequences of these reprehensible deeds. I demonstrated the current ramifications of these historic evils and the ways in which they continue to have ongoing social, political and economic implications. This research has given a clear connection to the past and the current racial wealth gap which, according to the Brookings Institute revealed that a typical White family has a net worth of \$171,500, nearly ten times that of a Black family at \$17,500. This astronomical gap exposes the effects of accumulated injustices, inequality and discrimination that continues to permeate the systems and structures of America.

In an effort to address the racial wealth gap, I considered the ethical and theological work of Walter Rauschenbusch and his understanding of the symbiotic relationship between Christianity and social reform. He understood the Church to have a special responsibility to address the justice claims of the exploited, oppressed and the vulnerable, and believed that a new socioeconomic order was possible with the appropriation of the Social Gospel. The Social Gospel seeks to dismantle structural inequities, uproot systemic evils, and combat political and economic disparity by appropriating Christian ethics and biblical principles to social justice issues. For Rauschenbusch, this meant the government had a unique and special responsibility to not only address and dismantle systems and structures that have created social and economic chasms, but to also implement policies that right historic wrongs and create a path forward for a more equitable future. I drew a correlation between Rauschenbusch's understanding of the Kingdom of God and reparative justice, by considering his understanding of the Kingdom of God as a redemptive force bearing on the social order which was intended to transform life on earth into the harmony of heaven. This required the complete cooperation of individuals working together, seeking to implement institutional reform that leads to economic and social equity, and the government serving as the overarching mechanism whereby these goals are to be met. The Social Gospel serves as a clarion call for every Christian to engage in, and deliberately challenge the political and economic structures that continue to deny distributive and reparative² justice for the American descendants of slaves.

² By distributive justice, I assert that every member of society should be guaranteed the right to live in security, dignity, and well-being, and reparative justice is the intentional act of righting the wrongs of the past, in order to facilitate wholeness, closure and redress in the present.

The closing question: why should all Christians work to repair economic disparities created by centuries of governmental policies and business practices? Furthermore, what does the bible suggest regarding reparative justice? I assert that the Church can aid in the calls for justice by understanding three critical ideas: (1) remembering is necessary for the Church; (2) reparations are a theological concept; and (3) restitution is a biblical mandate. I draw upon the biblical themes of justice, mercy and neighborly fidelity which explicate God's value for humanity, especially the vulnerable and the poor, particularly when they have experienced harm at the hands of empire (a concept that will be detailed in this section). These themes should inspire confession, atonement and repair, all of which are necessary for redress, absolution and closure.

I. Remembering is Necessary for the Church

One of the greatest obstacles to garnering significant support for a comprehensive reparations package is a clear, honest and historic understanding of the impact of slavery and the lingering effects of Jim Crow on modern life. As previously noted, much of what has been proffered in this research remains impervious to many Americans, and some believe that slavery was 'so long ago' that its impact is no longer relevant and is something we should stop talking about. One reason some oppose reparations may be because they fail to understand that reparative justice is a matter of principle not social policy, and that it seeks to hold the federal government accountable for enacting, expanding and protecting laws that empowered multiple configurations of society to exploit Black people for personal, corporate and national enrichment. In an effort to assist Christian leaders who are unaware of slavery's impact, Kelly Brown Douglas issued a poignant challenge to faith leaders and institutions (i.e. Church and seminaries) of their

responsibility to lead the effort of remembering. She highlights the manner in which the White church has been complicit and often silent concerning the issue of slavery, and the ways in which scripture was weaponized to justify White supremacist ideologies. She aptly states,

Reparations must begin with anamnestic truth-telling, meaning we must be held accountable for the past in the very present and confront the ways in which the past remains alive in the present, thus paving the way to right the present by exonerating it from the vestiges of the past. For faith communities, reparations must not only be an effort to compensate for past harms, they must also chart a pathway to a more just future. Otherwise, reparations become little more than a salve for white guilt, while the sin of white supremacy continues to thrive. Reparations must involve an interrogation of the ways in which fundamental aspects of Christian theology have been used to legitimize white supremacist realities that are now a part of the collective theological consciousness.³

Douglas places the responsibility of remembering and truth-telling squarely on the shoulders of White Christians to engage in substantive dialogue concerning the history of slavery and its lingering effects. Moreover, faith leaders are challenged to address the manner in which theology and scripture were manipulated to enforce subjugation, to establish white supremacy and a patriarchal hierarchy. This level of anamnestic truth-telling will require faith leaders to honestly critique the ways in which African Americans

³ Kelly Brown Douglas, "A Christian Call for Reparations," *Sojourners*, July 2020, <https://sojo.net/magazine/july-2020/christian-call-case-slavery-reparations-kelly-brown-douglas> (accessed Jan. 3, 2020).

are impacted by contemporary forms of racism that often unknowingly flows through the systems and structures of America. Remembering suggests that faith leaders muster the prophetic courage to speak truth to those in power, and to acknowledge the ways in which America's racist past has contributed to the racial wealth gap. Joseph Evans in *Reconciliation & Reparations: Preaching Economic Justice* issues a compelling challenge to faith leaders, especially those with a Eurocentric hermeneutic of scripture to “disturb the status quo and cause meaningful, thoughtful conversations about a species of biblical preaching that envisions economic justice as the ethical imperative for the twenty-first century, particularly for people of African descent.”⁴ Faith leaders have a theological responsibility to engage in truth-telling that addresses White supremacy, and to support the rooting out of the many social and structural systems that continue to exacerbate the racial wealth gap. For Douglas, this level of truth-telling requires the faith community to “partner with God to mend an unjust earth, and thus to move us toward a more just future, and faith communities are accountable to that future.”⁵ Until the White Church comes to terms with and acknowledges its historic complicity with slavery, and ambivalence toward the multiple injustices leveraged toward past and contemporary Blacks, then healing will remain elusive and reparative justice will be an idea that never stood a chance.

Why is it incumbent upon White Christians to engage in anamnestic truth-telling? Unfortunately, slavery became entrenched and flourished due to some White Christians justifying their racist and erroneous convictions and beliefs. This tainted history

⁴ Joseph Evans, *Reconciliation and Reparations: Preaching Economic Justice* (Valley Forge, PA.: Judson Press, 2018), pg. 5.

⁵ Brown Douglas, “A Christian Call for Reparations.”

continues to pervade many denominations who would rather engage in reconciliation, rather than anamnestic truth-telling and justice. An example of this history is the Southern Baptist Convention's formal apology for defending slavery and opposing civil rights. The leaders compiled a one-page resolution decrying racism, injustice and oppression and acknowledged that "racism profoundly distorts our understanding of Christian morality, leading some Southern Baptist to believe that racial justice and discrimination are compatible with the Gospel."⁶ Shortly after rendering this resolution, Rev. Gary Frost, a Black minister accepted the apology on behalf of Black Christians, who in return offered forgiveness. While a *mea culpa* was meritorious and the reciprocity of forgiveness was noble, it does not exonerate White Christians from centuries of complicity to white supremacy that remains in their DNA. Rather, according to Robert Jones "it was a strategy for making peace with the status quo, [and] it allowed white Christians to move past the thornier issues of repair and restitution that real repentance requires."⁷ If the nation is going to heal and recover from centuries of racism and injustice within the systems and structures in America, then Whites must reckon with this past and engage in the hard and intentional work of anti-racist practices, and uprooting racism within institutions and organizations that have historically perpetuated it.

II. Reparations is a Theological Concept

Slave labor created an economy that profoundly enriched generations of White slaveowners, and various corporations, and their successors both domestically and

⁶ Southern Baptist Convention Resolution on Slavery and Racism, "Resolution on Racial Reconciliation on the 150th Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention," June 1, 1995, <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/resolution-on-racial-reconciliation-on-the-150th-anniversary-of-the-southern-baptist-convention/> (accessed Jan. 12, 2021).

⁷ Robert Jones, "White Christian America Needs a Moral Awakening," *The Atlantic*, July 28, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/07/white-christian-america-needs-moral-awakening/614641/> (accessed Jan 12, 2021).

globally. As profits soared, enslavement became inextricably linked with violence, while enslavers confiscated seemingly endless supplies of land, labor and resources. The thematic thread throughout this period was commodization, extraction and violence. The Black body was made vendible for the exclusive benefit of profit and power for slaveowners. The extraction of the slave's ingenuity and labor spurred the American economy, and for those who sought to hinder this process would be met with violence and terror. The expropriation of Black labor, the extraction of physical and intellectual efficacy, coupled with violence, now lies at the center of global and American capitalism, resulting in the current racial wealth gap. Generations of physical violence, the extraction of resources and the commodification of the black body are the result of "slaveholders exploiting the advantages offered by the growing demand for cotton and sugar, as they used the powers of the federal government to create the western empire."⁸

The United States of America is now an economic, militaristic, social and political empire, due to significant generations of economic exploitation, with the complicity of the federal government. It is impossible to imagine the American empire without the brutal enslavement of four million people, and we will never know what or if there would be a racial wealth gap without slavery, social exclusion and political disenfranchisement. The federal government must now reckon with this reality, if absolution and closure are to be realized, and the Church stands in a unique position to assist local, state and national municipalities to usher in national atonement. If healing and justice are to be a reality, the Church must have a clear understanding of empire and a theological imperative for reparative justice.

⁸ John Craig Hammond, "Slavery, Settlement, and Empire: The Expansion and Growth of Slavery in the Interior of the North American Continent, 1770-1820," *Journal of the Early Republic* 32.2 (2012): 176.

A. The Making of Empire

First, the Trans-Atlantic slave trade extracted nearly 12 million people from the continent of Africa, and for those who survived the Middle Passage, they were cast onto the newly burgeoning plantation systems where their labor incentivized not only slave traders, but slaveowners, plantations and other business opportunities this exploitation engendered. The demand for slave labor was so prurient, that even laws abolishing the slave trade were not enough to end the practice, rather it opened the door for the brutal practice of slave breeding. The commodification of sex allowed the offspring to be sold, auctioned or forced to work on plantations, a practice that yielded nearly \$3,000,000 in 1860. This exploitation and extraction of the vulnerable was so sizable that the United States benefitted from 222,505,049 hours of forced labor from 1619 to 1865, yielding by modest estimates approximately \$97 trillion. This exorbitant amount of commodification, extraction and violence were essential to the development of the American empire.

Walter Brueggemann is an Old Testament professor at Columbia Theological Seminary, and extrapolates the concept of empire and its development in *God, Neighbor and Empire: The Excess of Divine Fidelity and the Command of Common Good*. He explores the practice of extraction, commodification, and the legitimization of violence to ensure subjugation, economic and political gain, and the development of empire. His research draws upon the themes of justice, mercy and neighborly fidelity as exercised within the traditions of the Old Testament. According to Brueggemann, the following are characteristic of empire.

First, empires exist by extracting wealth from the vulnerable in order to transfer it to the powerful. Secondly, they pursue a policy of

commodification, in which everything and everyone is reduced to a dispensable commodity that can be bought, sold, traded, possessed and consumed. Thirdly, those that practice extraction and commodization are fully prepared to undertake violence, on whatever scale against the vulnerable, for the success of empire.⁹

His understanding of empires usage of extraction and commodization closely parallels the development of the United States of America, and underscores the ways it is injurious as it currently functions.

The second component necessary to advance empire is the promulgation of policies whereby individuals could be brought, sold, traded, possessed, and their labor could be monetized. An examination of America's founding documents reveals the ways in which policies and laws were crafted to ensure the subjugation of Blacks in perpetuity. It is important to understand that, under the Declaration of Independence, slavery was legal in each of the newly formed thirteen states, giving slave holders the ability to deny blacks their freedom or the capacity to benefit from their own ingenuity. According to the Federalist Papers, as written by James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, slaves were classified as property and considered vendible by their owners. Moreover, in 1857 the legal apparatus affirmed in the Dred Scott decision¹⁰ that the Negro had no rights that the White man was bound to respect. Under these designations, Blacks were treated as commodities for the expressed benefit of the American empire, and the prima facie

⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *God, Neighbor and Empire: The Excess of Divine Fidelity and the Command of Common Good* (Waco, TX.: Baylor University Press, 2016), pg. 3.

¹⁰ Dred Scott was a slave who resided in Missouri, a free state, and petitioned the United States Supreme Court to affirm his rights as a free man. The courts ruled against (7-2) his claim because the justices argued that state citizenship had nothing to do with national citizenship. Therefore, Blacks could not sue the federal court because they were not considered citizens of the United States of America.

evidence of this exploitation was in the establishment of cotton plantations, businesses and future corporations, that enriched generations of slave owning families. Even following the official end of slavery, many plantations were left bereft of physical labor necessary to operate large-scale cotton productions, which permitted the crafting of vagrancy laws, and the criminalization of Blacks without any verifiable form of employment.

The third component in establishing the American empire was the use of violence against those experiencing extraction and commodification. Violence in the Antebellum South was rendered toward those who failed to meet certain goals, and was rendered in response to perceived disobedience or infractions, in an effort to establish the complete dominance of the master. Such forms of violence included beatings, assaults, burning, mutilation, branding, rape, and imprisonment. In *Ar'n't I A Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, describes how violence was meted out based on gender, as a public example for those who may have considered impudence against their master. She specifically recalls an incident in which a female slave assisted several men in a rebellious act, and as punishment for her participation, “the woman was hoisted up by her thumbs, whipped and slashed with knives in the presence of other slaves until she died.”¹¹ This brutal act of violence, along with lynching’s became tools for social control, and when conducted as a public spectacle, it elicited maximum intimidation, to promote White power and Black subjugation. The American empire must now reckon with historic violence, extraction and commodification, and must ascertain the ways in which it has enriched the nation, and many parts of the world. For this, the Church is uniquely

¹¹ Deborah White, *Ar'n't I A Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), pg. 74.

positioned to highlight this history and to shape the reparations conversation, and to demand the United States Federal Government, for its complicity, to make the American descendants of slaves' whole.

B. The Mending of Empire

Walter Brueggemann examines the development of empire and presents God as the ultimate advocate for meaningful and equitable justice for those who have been subjected to violence, extraction and commoditization. In his view, the United States of America is one of “inexhaustible consumerism, unrivalled military power, resulting in a growing economic gap between the haves and have nots, due to the forceful and willful practice of extraction and commoditization.”¹² The only way to rectify centuries of exploitation will be the extraordinary cooperation of human agency, working with God, in an effort to exercise neighborly fidelity. He defines *neighborly fidelity* as “speaking broadly and passionately against all forms of historic and contemporary aspects of violence, extraction and commoditization, by replicating the emancipatory, covenant-making God, as understood in the Old Testament, which is a crucial mandate for the well-being of society.”¹³ If reconciliation, absolution and repair are the goals, then how can the Church assist the nation in reaching these aims? In order to ameliorate the racial wealth gap, a deconstruction and cogent understanding of Brueggemann’s concept of neighborly fidelity is crucial if the Church is to partner with the government in the reparative justice movement. The theological concept of neighborly fidelity can assist leadership in the journey of anamnestic truth-telling, which should lead to involvement in

¹² Brueggemann, *God, Neighbor and Empire: The Excess of Divine Fidelity and the Command of Common Good*, pg. 6.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pg. 5,6.

the public square (i.e. government and institutions) to facilitate the conversations and actionable recourse around reparative justice. The following can serve as a guide for Christians who seek to be engaged in the call for reparative justice: All Christians should speak out against the historical extraction and commoditization of African Americans, and other forms of violence, by replicating the covenant-keeping God, for the well-being of society as a whole. This biblical concept can guide the calls for justice and the urgent need to reform America as it is currently experienced.

C. The Reforming of Empire

The racial wealth gap is a consequence of the sin of white supremacy, slavery, generations of economic and political exploitation, systemic and institutional racism, coupled with violence and intimidation to enforce subjugation. These realities have substantially contributed to the American empire, and according to Brueggemann, the only way to modify or to correct these injustices is through *human effort speaking passionately against all forms of historic and contemporary violence, extraction and commoditization*. One of the ways Christians can begin to exercise neighborly fidelity is by their willful and intentional support of H.R. 40. As noted, H.R. 40 is the proposal that the House of Representatives must pass to deputize a commission to study the multigenerational effects of slavery. This group would then suggest the appropriate ways to redress the harms currently experienced by this generation of African Americans. The support of H.R. 40 requires courage and moral conviction to implore local, state and national political leadership to exercise their civic duty in rendering justice, via the federal government, since it was the overarching mechanism whereby laws were crafted to support the institution of slavery. Brueggemann, like Rauschenbusch believes that

cooperative human agency is a necessity to confront the social dimensions of sin and injustice that permeated society. Brueggemann states, “if we take justice to be economic validation of the neighbor for the sake of the common good, we are remote from all positive law and from all ideological cant that serves as truth in the halls of power.” For him, the only way for the nation to fully recover from the debilitating injustices of the past, is the complete cooperation of human agency working together, with God and the government crafting economic and social policies that address and close the racial wealth gap.

The second way Christians exercise neighborly fidelity is by *replicating the emancipatory, covenant-making God, as understood in the Old Testament*. The Old Testament provides a plethora of models that can assist those interested in justice, equity and the reordering of society. One example can be found in Psalm 72:1-4, 13-14 (NLT), which is a call for King Solomon to be an advocate for those suffering from the effects of oppression and violence. The Psalmist writes:

Give your love of justice to the king, O God,
and righteousness to the king’s son.
² Help him judge your people in the right way;
let the poor always be treated fairly.
³ May the mountains yield prosperity for all,
and may the hills be fruitful.
⁴ Help him to defend the poor,
to rescue the children of the needy,
and to crush their oppressors.
He will rescue the poor when they cry to him;
he will help the oppressed, who have no one to defend them.
¹³ He feels pity for the weak and the needy,
and he will rescue them.
¹⁴ He will redeem them from oppression and violence,
for their lives are precious to him.

The Psalmist is petitioning King Solomon to enact justice for the poor and those who are unable to lift themselves from the power and violence of empire, by imploring the theological concepts of justice, equity and redemption. Brueggemann says of this Psalm that “justice takes on concrete social possibility and social expectation that has in purview the poor, the needy, and the weak, the ones who face and experience oppression and violence. The king and the royal apparatus are presented as ally and advocate for those who suffer in the economy.”¹⁴ The Psalm demonstrates the need for the legal apparatus, under the control of the king (i.e. the President, Congress and House of Representatives) to function on behalf of the vulnerable and the poor, so that they can fully participate and benefit from the prosperity of the nation.

The Book of Exodus is another example of human agency speaking against empire in a quest to ensure justice. It is the model for *replicating the emancipatory, covenant-making God, as understood in the Old Testament*. The call of Moses and Aaron to beseech Pharaoh to release the Children of Israel from the control of the Egyptian empire parallels the development of America on the backs of Black people. The Children of Israel are engaged in a fight against hegemony and economic violence, and are seeking to free themselves from the “smell of Egypt” (Exodus 5:21), noted as “the smell of injustice that permeates the narrative memory of Israel, not the smell of the slaves.”¹⁵ While enslaved, Israel has been subjected to centuries of predatory economic policies and practices in Egypt, forced to labor without compensation, witnessed the genocide of their family, and treated as mere commodities for the benefit of Egypt. Moses has been summoned to interrupt centuries of systemic injustice, and to participate in the liberation

¹⁴ Ibid., pg. 43.

¹⁵ Ibid., pg. 50.

of the Children of Israel from the historic smell of injustice, by demanding on behalf of God the complete freedom of His people. This is an extraordinary example of human agency actively participating in the social, economic, and political recovery of a people from the historic injustices of empire.

This juncture of history will require all Christians, regardless of race to refrain from “remaining silent behind the anesthetizing security of stain glass windows”¹⁶ and to muster the courage to demand that the modern-day Pharaoh free contemporary African Americans from the historic ‘smell of slavery.’ The scent remains within the social, economic and political structures of America, the stench is found in the predatory practices of redlining, the odor can be experienced within the criminal justice system and is manifest in wealth disparities. The only way to rid the nation from the lingering traces of slavery, Jim Crow, and generations of extraction and violence will be the passionate advocacy of all Christians engaging in what Amanda Hendler-Voss calls ‘real God-talk,’ which prophetically attends to “the raw truth that economic violence still plagues black communities as a result of an emancipation that failed to cede land or resources, Black Codes that sewed into law the alleged danger of black bodies, and the acknowledgment that inequity persists in education, healthcare, criminal justice, and wealth because it is embedded in our institutions and systems.”¹⁷ This is neighborly fidelity in action, the active engagement and call to accountability for those in power and in the pew to be responsible for the past, by engaging in anamnestic truth-telling, and remembering the true history of the American empire and the creation of the racial wealth gap.

¹⁶ King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait: Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, pg. 27.

¹⁷ Amanda Hendler-Voss, “The Souls of White Folks: On Reparations In The Church.” *The Fellowship of Reconciliation*, May 1, 2019, <https://wagingnonviolence.org/forusa/2019/05/the-souls-of-white-folks-on-reparations-in-the-church/> (accessed Jan. 13, 2021).

III. Restitution is a Biblical Mandate

The final way the nation can heal from the vestiges of the past is with the understanding that closing the racial wealth gap will be beneficial to the *well-being of society as a whole*. One of the arguments against reparations is the notion that the current generation should not be held responsible for what the previous did. Particularly, since the current generation did not own nor sell slaves, they believe they should be absolved of any culpability. J. Angelo Corlett considers this sentiment “the objection from intergenerational justice, which states that justice between generations is problematic because those who pay reparations at a particular time, must be the ones directly guilty and at fault for the harms and wrongs done to the group for which reparations are requested.”¹⁸ While the current generation may object to supporting a reparations package, Whites must recognize that they as a whole have been advanced by generations of systemic and structural inequity, and have garnered considerable social, economic and political power as a result of generations of exclusion. The call for reparations is not an individual imperative, rather it is a collective and biblical mandate directed at the government. The undeniable evidence points toward the U.S. government, who provided support, cover and directly benefitted from the harmful effects of slavery, and should be held liable for restitution. Furthermore, federal and state governments supported the institutionalization of racism (i.e. Jim Crow) and the remnants of that one-hundred-year period have current ramifications.

Christians bear a special responsibility in taking anti-racist actions that address the causes, consequences and cures for closing the racial wealth gap for the well-being of

¹⁸ J. Angelo Corlett, *Race, Racism & Reparations* (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 2003), pg. 199.

society as a whole. While prayers and allyship are important, these gestures must also include the pursuit of justice, and holding the government accountable to providing specific redress to this generation of African Americans whose ancestors bore the brunt of systemic injustice. While the act of neighborly fidelity has its origins in a theological framework, the aspect of restitution derives from the legal apparatus, if reconciliation and absolution are to be reached. Many White Christians have advocated for racial reconciliation, while ignoring the weightier matters of justice, and undoing centuries of economic and political exclusion, which should also include restitution. Biblical examples of the call for restitution and repair can be found in Luke 19:1-11, after Zacchaeus, a government official confessed to extracting and commoditizing the poor for the benefit of himself and the Roman empire. His desire for absolution “set the ethic of reparations, as a means of effecting reconciliation between the oppressed and oppressor, and with God’s very self.”¹⁹ Before absolution, Jesus demanded restitution before reconciliation, which required Zacchaeus to return any ill-gotten wealth to those he harmed unnecessarily. Once the restitution was paid, then was reconciliation possible and forgiveness was experienced.

What does this mean? Why does it matter?

The central problem that Walter Brueggemann highlights is that there are no neighbors within the empire, only allies of convenience, threats and dispensable labor. His understanding of empire is any nation with a significant concentration of wealth and power, gained on the backs of the vulnerable and the poor, and seeks to protect those privileges at all costs. Empires are self-interested, and exist to support their own

¹⁹ Anthony G. Reddie, *Working Against the Grain: Re-Imagining Black Theology in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge Press, 2008), pg. 45.

hegemony and ideology, which shapes the worldview of its inhabitants, and ultimately becomes a difficult viewpoint to break. Due to empires' focus on economic gain, political domination and social compliance, it steers away from the concerns of justice and relationship-building, while those victimized by willful exploitation remain marginalized and oppressed. Empire is diametrically opposed to neighborly fidelity, and Christians are called to challenge and disrupt the status quo by bringing attention to centuries of injustice, by integrating a Christian perspective of love and justice, for the well-being of society as a whole. The dilemma for those who fail to challenge the status quo of empire is the temptation to capitulate to 'the royal consciousness,' that is the consciousness of the dominate culture that is informed by the ideas and actions of the empire.

Brueggemann emphasizes that the construction of empire requires the pursuit of policies in which everything and everyone are considered reducible and a dispensable commodity.

The American empire was built on the back of slave labor and exploitation, and Jim Crow was legally enforced by states and permitted the exclusion of Blacks from the economic, social and political process. The manifestation of these exploitative periods remains injurious to contemporary African Americans and are witnessed in impoverished black communities that suffer from years of redlining practices; a prison industrial complex that has its roots in the nascent industry of vagrancy laws and convict leasing; and the exclusion of blacks from New Deal social policies. These accumulated injustices at the behest of empire have impacted the financial well-being of black America, which can be best understood and revealed in the racial wealth gap. While many have dismissed slavery's role in the disadvantaged economic and social standing of African Americans, the data exposes how accumulated injustices have created a wealth gap that will not be

closed by any autonomous action or group decisions. The only solution is broad and imaginative policies that focuses on undoing the structural and systemic contributors to the wealth gap and a reparations program that is committed to equity.

Brueggemann points out that it was difficult for Israel to imagine the reality of justice, particularly after years of oppression and exploitation at the hands of the Egyptian empire. The mechanism whereby imaginative policies and justice were to be achieved was through human agency working with God, in pursuit of justice to interrupt centuries of commodification, extraction and violence. Similarly, the only remedy to centuries of exploitative practices within the American empire is a comprehensive reparations program that seeks to facilitate neighborly fidelity, by engaging in a level of anamnestic truth-telling that is beneficial to the common good. If there is to be true racial reconciliation, America must confess and acknowledge the wrongs of slavery, Jim Crow and white supremacy, and there should be restitution paid to this generation of African Americans. This research has attempted to present reparations as a worthy remedy to correct historic wrongs, and a cause the Church should and could support. As Christians we should engage in the work of neighborly fidelity, disrupt the status quo, critique and expose the exploitative values of the American empire, and how they are antithetical to the kingdom of God.

The Christian call for justice is a righteous and worthy attribute, that will over time make life better for all people. Justice and righteousness are often used synonymously, to connote a proper relationship between God, self and others, which seeks to promote fairness, relationship and equality. Justice carries a multi-faceted form: first, it seeks to make things as are they ought to be and secondly, it requires the actions

and efforts of humanity to make right the broken relationships in the world today. At the end of World War II, a church in Strasbourg, France was completely destroyed by bombings, and members gathered to determine if anything was salvageable and they were pleased to learn that their statue of Christ was still intact with outstretched hands. There was one noticeable difference, both hands had been blown off. So, the leaders met with a local sculptor who offered to replace the hands as a gift to the church. However, after giving it considerable thought, they decided against replacing the hands and instead, they had a plaque made with the following inscription: “You are my hands.”²⁰ If the United States is to be healed from the debilitating effects of racism, we must remember that we are now the hands of Christ, working toward justice and righteousness. This should inspire all Christians to speak out against all forms of historical extraction and commoditization of African Americans, and other forms of violence, for the well-being of society as a whole, if we are to experience a more equitable future for all.

²⁰ Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “You Are My Hands” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2010/04/you-are-my-hands?lang=eng> (accessed Mar. 18, 2021).

A Final Word

This research has been deeply personal and enriching. My grandmother lives in Holcomb, Mississippi, a small town about 30 miles from where Emmitt Till was lynched. Many members of my family picked cotton, were sharecroppers and lived through much of what has been shared in this extensive research. When my great-grandmother died, my grandmother was in the ninth grade and was forced to quit school to care for her brothers and sisters, as well as raise her own family. As she aged, she worked as a domestic, cleaning the houses of Whites on the other side of town. My grandfather served in World War II and from what I am told, he was denied the GI benefits due to him for his service and sacrifice to this country. He later died from complications sustained from an injury after returning from the war.

When my mother was 19 years old, she like many Blacks left the South to escape the horrors of Jim Crow segregation, known as the Great Migration. She ended up in Louisville, Kentucky and during the summers, my family and I would make the eight-hour drive from Kentucky to Mississippi to spend time with my grandmother. I vividly remember exiting I-55 and driving down Highway 8 to my grandmother's house, as both sides of the highway captured my attention because they were enthralled with massive cotton fields that seemed to never end. My thirteen-year-old mind could not comprehend the significance of those fields and how much they impacted me and my entire family. I would later learn there was an even deeper connection between those cotton fields in Mississippi and the community where I lived in Kentucky.

Growing up in the Western part of Louisville, Kentucky, exposed me to a community riddled with many deficits common to many underserved urban

neighborhoods, which included concentrated poverty, health disparities, environmental malfeasance, crime and underperforming schools. This area of town had considerably high incidents of asthma and cancer diagnosis, possibly linked to the sewage treatment plant, tobacco facility and a whiskey brewery, all within ten miles of each other, known to emit harmful chemicals into the air. As a high school student, I was bussed thirty-minutes from my community to the suburbs, where I witnessed posh communities, with beautifully manicured lawns, little to no crime and schools that were noticeably better. The disparity of the two worlds intrigued and angered me, because the one I lived in and the one I visited five-days a week were vastly different. At the time, I could not understand why I felt such anger, although now I can articulate and understand those feelings, as I have matured, and come to understand the noticeable, often misunderstood difference between the two communities: economics. The wealth disparity, along with other unseen historical forces contributed to the noticeable inequities of the two communities. Later, I came to realize that the stolen labor and exploitation that occurred in the cotton fields of Mississippi were directly linked to the realities I lived with in Kentucky. The people who picked the cotton were never compensated for their labor and Jim Crow segregation relegated them to second-class citizenship. The racialized attitudes of the South seemed to permeate the systems and structures of America, leaving people like my grandmother and mother penniless and poor. With no inheritance, no safety nets, no jobs, no opportunity because the cotton fields robbed our family of opportunity and wealth, forcing us to live on food stamps, Section-8 housing and welfare.

In *The Color of Law* Richard Rothstein explains how impoverished and underserved communities are socially engineered by tracing the effects of state-

sanctioned, government-sponsored segregation and the *de jure* policies that gave birth to ‘West Louisville-type communities’ all over the country, areas that are still economically challenged, socially isolated, and politically disadvantaged due to years of racist public policy. This trifecta fostered then and even now, a highly racialized and segregated America, making it difficult and sometimes impossible for many Black families to escape. Rothstein states, “when we think of cities such as Chicago, Detroit, New York or Boston, these are often characterized by a South-side or a West-side that is almost entirely populated by black residents. Even the smallest towns have segregated black communities and these neighborhoods are usually the poorest in the city and often the most starved of public investment.”¹

It is because of these realities that reparations are in order for the American descendants of slaves. While many immigrated to America in search of opportunity and many have been able to achieve unimaginable success and the proverbial American dream. As groups such as the Irish, Italians and Jewish Holocaust survivors arrived, they were faced with many challenges, however they were not stigmatized because of the color of their skin, and in many instances, they were allowed to assimilate and benefit from mainstream White culture. However, Africans were involuntarily brought to America in cargo ships, not for their own benefit but to labor and to be subject to the wishes of their slave master for 246 years of deliberate humiliation and exploitation. These realities are impervious to many Americans who fail to ascertain the ways in which the lingering legacy of slavery, Jim Crow segregation and racialized attitudes in public policies coalesced and created the racial wealth gap. As a consequence, serious reform

¹ Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, pg. 18.

must occur if reparative justice for African Americans is to be achieved. Our nation needs bold and far-reaching economic restructuring to repair the current social, economic and political crisis many African Americans are facing. While Walter Rauschenbusch expressed his outrage at the social and economic conditions of his day and the ways in which historical exploitation produced suffering for those living in Hell's Kitchen, this is also an ongoing reality for some African Americans. The nation has reached an extraordinary *Kairos* moment, a moment when the past gives way to new opportunities that will change the way we live. The time has come for reparations to fully remedy and close the racial wealth gap.

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Biography

CHRISTOPHER CAMPBELL



is a native of Louisville, Kentucky who acknowledged his call to ministry in 1998, under the late Dr. T. Vaughn Walker, of the First Gethsemane Baptist Church. He later served the St. Stephen Baptist Church under the leadership of Dr. Kevin Cosby, where he served as the pastors preaching assistant. He received his formal education from Harry Doss High School and is a graduate of the University of Louisville with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a minor in Pan-African Studies. He was a Mae Elizabeth and Theresa Coffman Scholar at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary where

he received a Master of Arts with a concentration in Church Leadership and Administration. He is in the final stages of completing a Doctor of Ministry from Duke University where his research topic is: The Case for Reparations: The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch And a Program to Understand and Close the Racial Wealth Gap. His research will give birth to a non-profit venture called Project H.O.P.E., which seeks to address the educational challenges and economic disparities in underserved communities. In 2008, he was recognized by Who's Who Among College Students in America for outstanding academic and leadership performance. He has served as the senior pastor of the Genesis United Methodist Church, in Louisville, Kentucky. While there he served on the Louisville Urban League task force 15K, which sought to educate 15,000 Louisvillians

by 2020. He has served as a coach and church consultant for Strengthening the Black Church for the 21st Century and 20/20 Leadership a partnership with the Black Church Initiative, which seeks to revitalize congregations, encourage pastors to think outside of the box, in an effort to engage their communities. He has served as the lead pastor of The Plaza United Methodist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina from 2014-2018. While there, he was able to implement a partnership with Second Harvest Food Bank, Lifeline Screening and Bright Stars Academy. He has partnered with other organizations to lead community conversations around race relations with the Reverend Robert W. Lee, IV, police brutality and the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department and economic disparity with the University of North Carolina Charlotte. He is a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. and is married to Kennesha Denise and they have three beautiful children Kennedy, Kamryn and Christian. He enjoys golf, yoga, reading, traveling and spending time with his family. He frames his life and mission by the words of Maggie Barankitse “Lord, let your miracles break forth every day, and let me not be an obstacle in any way.”