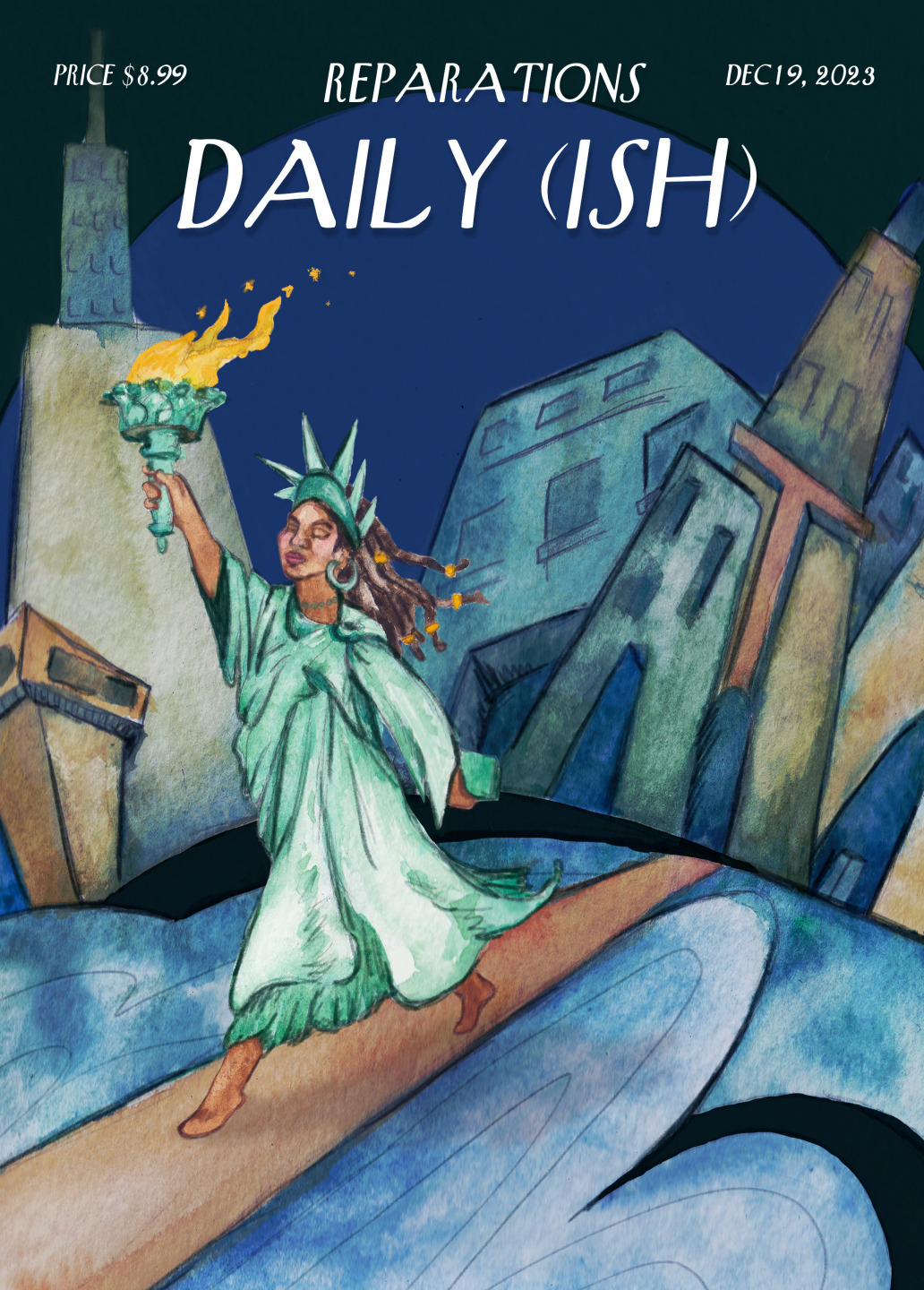


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REPARATIONS

DEC 19, 2023

# DAILY (ISH)





# REPARATIONS DAILY (ISH)

## "NEW YORK" SPECIAL EDITION

*A BLIS Collective Production*



## BLIS COLLECTIVE

**(Black Liberation-Indigenous Sovereignty)**  
is an infrastructure organization that sparks radical collaboration and narrative alignment across Black, Indigenous, and liberatory social movements to repair, decolonize, and transform culture.

Reparations Daily (ish) was launched in 2021 to spread the word of the Black reparations movement.

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I sit writing this prologue in the heart of a city that is like no other. This special edition of Reparations Daily (ish) is an ode to New York and the stories of Black people of past and present. The history of this state, much like the country, is deeply tied to Black people who were held in bondage, a narrative that is often overshadowed by monuments like the Statue of Liberty, a symbol of hope and optimism. But, there is a deeper tale that lies beneath the surface – a legacy whose stain have not yet been washed away from the graves of the African Burial Grounds in Lower Manhattan to the hallowed ground of Seneca Village, buried beneath the acres that we now call Central Park.

It was the late, great Notorious B.I.G., a New York icon, who echoed the words, “It was all a dream.” And today, we stand on the cusp of the dream of reparations in becoming a reality. New York has become the second state to create a statewide reparations commission that will examine the legacy of slavery, anti-Black discrimination, and its modern-day impact, then propose policy recommendations to address that harm.

It’s a mission that extends beyond reconciling what is owed monetarily but puts the state and the country on a path of restoring the dignity of Black people, reclaiming history, and reshaping the nation’s future. This news is a testament to the unyielding spirit of the reparations movement and those who have dared to dream of a liberated world.

Across the state, from Buffalo to Brooklyn and from Rochester to Harlem, the dream of reparations is coming to life, fueled by the courage of those who have dared to demand that Black lives not only matter but also deserve to be repaired.

This edition, which was entirely created by New Yorkers, was written during a historic time in our history. The pieces in this edition explore many of the same topics that the commission itself will examine, but more so, should provide you moments of reflection on what reparations could look like in our state.

Throughout these pages you’ll find art, commentary, poetry, and activities from New Yorkers both new and old to the reparations movement. Let this New York edition serve as a reminder that there is power in DREAMING, and together, we can collectively reckon with the legacy of slavery and build a more just and equitable state for all of us.

# INTRO POEM: WHO SAID IT WAS SIMPLE

AUDRE LORDE

There are so many roots to the tree of anger  
that sometimes the branches shatter  
Before they bear.



PICTURE PROVIDED BY CURT SAUNDERS

Sitting in Nedicks  
The women rally before they march  
Discussing the problematic girls  
they hire to make them free.  
An almost white counterman passes  
a waiting border to serve them first  
and the ladies neither notice nor reject  
the slighter pleasures of their slavery.  
But I am bound by my mirror  
as well as my bed  
see causes in colour  
as well as sex

and sit here wondering  
which me will survive  
all these liberations.

*Audre Lorde was a Caribbean-American writer, feminist, and activist. Her work confronts issues of racism, sexism, and homophobia. A self-described "Black, lesbian, mother, warrior, and poet," Lorde has inspired countless poets and writers today.*

According to the New Amsterdam History Center, the first enslaved Africans were brought to what we now know as Manhattan on August 27, 1627. A group of approximately 22 individuals were transported by the Dutch West India Company, a key entity in the Atlantic Slave Trade, and the organization that established New Amsterdam at the southern edge of modern-day New York City.

Manuel de Gerrit de Reus van Angola, also known as Manuel de Gerrit de Reus, was one of the earliest enslaved Africans brought to New Amsterdam by the Dutch West India Company around 1626.<sup>1</sup> It is told that he was likely captured from a Spanish or Portuguese ship, and he was amongst the first group of enslaved Africans to clear Indigenous land to make way for the bustling city we now inhabit today.<sup>2</sup> As his name suggests, Manuel was born in Angola, and was rented out to Gerrit Teussen de Reus, a settler farmer. His story is particularly notable because he is one of the rare cases of a “half-free,” person.<sup>3</sup>

In 1644, he and a number of other enslaved Africans petitioned the Dutch West India Company for their freedom, and were granted a conditional form of freedom.<sup>4</sup> They were required to pay annual dues to the Company and remain available to work, but they could own land and make a wage – though this “freedom,” came with the stipulation that their children “at present born or yet to be born, shall serve the honorable West India Company as slaves.”<sup>5</sup> Manuel and the others were granted a plot of land in New Amsterdam but were made to pay “30 bushels of grain and a hog valued at 20 guilders,” if they missed just one payment they would be forced to return to slavery.<sup>6</sup> So, while they may have been somewhat “free,” in name, these people could not create multi-generational free communities and were just one missed harvest away from returning back to bondage.

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1 Brown, Noah. Half-Hanged, Half-Freed: Manuel de Gerrit de Reus. 2021

2 IBID.

3 New Amsterdam History Center. Manuel de Gerrit de Reus.

4 Brown, Noah. Half-Hanged, Half-Freed: Manuel de Gerrit de Reus. 2021

5 IBID.

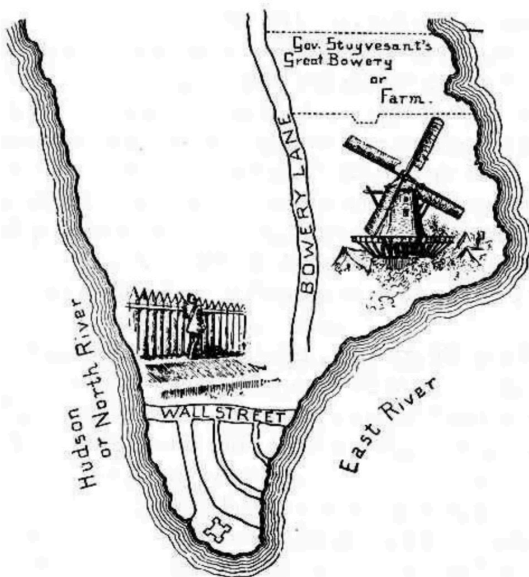
6 IBID.

Manuel's story and this concept of "half-freedom," or what I might call "semi-liberty," is an important one that we reexplore given the historic commission that will be studying the legacy of slavery in New York. It begs the question, have we really achieved a liberated society and lived up to the ideals espoused in the Declaration of Independence?

This idea of "half-freedom," can be seen as precursor to the partial emancipation that we witnessed after the abolition of slavery and the oppression that Black American still face today. It reflects how our anti-Black systems, laws, and culture maintain a grip on the status and liberties of Black people today, and perpetuate cycles of disadvantages that echo the conditions of "half-freedom."

It also serves as a metaphor for the incomplete integration of Black people into the full promises of American citizenship and societal participation. Despite the gains made by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Black Americans still face a "conditional" citizenship, where rights and freedoms are guaranteed in theory but often undermined by systemic bias and institutional barriers.

It encourages me, as it should encourage you, to ask the question, can reparations be the pathway to full freedom?



Map of the City of New Amsterdam (New York) in 1660.

SOURCE: HALF-HANGED, HALF-FREED, MANUEL DE GERRIT DE REUS

# WHAT WAS HERE BEFORE: THE HISTORY OF SENECA VILLAGE

TREVOR SMITH

Central Park is one of my favorite places to write. It is where I got to clear my mind, and it offers a space for creativity amidst the chaos of the city. This park, a blend of communion, art, and nature, also bears the somber history of Black and Indigenous people's suffering.

Before it was known as Central Park, and before colonist arrived, the area was the ancestral homeland of the Lenape People, called Lenapehoking. This land supported their way of life, which included fishing, hunting, and farming. The name Manhattan itself derives from the Lenape word "Manahatta," meaning "hilly island."<sup>7</sup> Any discussions about land and reparations in the U.S., must recognize that these lands were originally inhabited by Indigenous people.

It is also vital to note that the parks' development led to the destruction of Seneca Village, a key Black settlement founded in 1825.<sup>8</sup> This village, nestled between West 82nd and West 89th streets, was a significant Black community in New York, birthed from the endeavors of Andrew Williams, a 25-year old Black shoe shiner who purchased a small plot of land and started the community that would become an oasis for Black people within the city.<sup>9</sup> In an interview with CBS, Cynthia Copeland, the president of the Institute for the Exploration of Seneca Village History, said that "Seneca Village was a place of opportunity. It was a reaction to racism."<sup>10</sup>

To build Central Park, in 1853, the city invoked eminent domain, which grants the government power to take private property for public use, to clear out Seneca Village.<sup>11</sup> At the time around 1600 people were forced out of the community, and although landowners were compensated for this loss, many felt that the compensation was deeply inadequate to what had been put into creating the town.<sup>12</sup>

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7 Smithsonian. National Museum of American Indian. Manahatta to Manhattan.

8 Central Park Conservancy. Before Central Park: The Story of Seneca Village. Jan, 18 2018.

9 IBID.

10 CBS. Uncovering the history of Seneca Village in New York City. February, 6 2022.

11 Fitzpatrick, Lucy. Seneca Village: The Forgotten Community Under Central Park. April 7, 2021.

12 IBID.



According to historians, the story of Seneca Village is important because “its history and its residents do not conform to the conventional historical narrative of Central Park, New York City, or even the United States.”<sup>13</sup> It highlights resilience and economic empowerment, echoing the spirit of places like “Black Wall Street,” in Tulsa. Despite this, historical news coverage often disparaged the community, depicting it as squalid to justify the park’s creation. One article from the New York Times argued that “the people in the areas lived in shanties in which the pigs and the Patricks lie down together while little ones of Celting and swinish origin lie miscellaneously, with billy-goats and there interspersed.”<sup>14</sup>

In another article by the New York Daily Times, the reporter wrote:

“West of the reservoir, within the limits of Central Park, lies a neat little settlement, known as ‘Nigger Village.’ The Ebon inhabitants, after whom the village is called, present a pleasing contrast in their habits and appearance of their dwellings to the Celtic occupants, in common with hogs and goats, of the shanties in the lower park of the Park. They have been notified to remove by the first of August.”<sup>15</sup>

Now a vast 843-acre park, Central Park draws 42 million visitors annually, as reported by the Central Park Conservancy.<sup>16</sup> Yet, how many are aware of the history of Seneca Village? How many are aware that there were once churches, schools, and recreation spaces that existed where they stand? How many are aware that there was once a community that thrived and sought refuge here? It’s likely very few.

We must acknowledge and convey the whole truth. Central Park, while beautiful, was not formed naturally but through the upheaval of Seneca Village and the erasure of Indigenous histories.

We must bring the story of Seneca Village back to life and remind all who visit Central Park, that there was something much more beautiful here before.

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13            IBID.

14            IBID.

15            IBID.

16            Central Park Conservancy.

# REPARATIONS ARE THE ONLY WAY TO MAKE EQUALITY REAL FOR BLACK NEW YORKERS

NEW YORKERS FOR REPARATIONS

In December 2023, right after Governor Kathy Hochul made history by making New York the second state to launch a reparations commission, a group of advocates launched a new coalition,

***New Yorkers for Reparations.***

## **The coalition stands on the following**

### ***values:***

- Reparations are how we create a New York and a future where freedom is for all.
- We believe in a culture of repair and principled struggle.
- We move the public.
- We are action-oriented.
- We stand on shoulders and stand shoulder to shoulder.
- Reparations are a comprehensive solution commensurate to the harm caused.

## **The coalition seeks to accomplish the following**

### ***goals:***

- Create a statewide movement of people who are politically educated about reparations and who can advocate for the passage of reparations policy.
- Ensure the commission is informed by as many New Yorkers, particularly Black New Yorkers, as possible.
- Ensure the commission takes a comprehensive and transformative justice approach to its recommendations.
- Tell a fuller and more complete story of New York and how we arrived at this point of inequity.

**In support of the official launch of the commission, New Yorkers for Reparations assembled statements from a diverse group of public figures and advocacy organizations representing New Yorkers across the state.**



**New York State Senator James Sanders Jr:**

*“Today marks a monumental step towards healing and justice in New York. The launch of the Reparations Commission isn’t just about acknowledging the past, it’s about building a more equitable future for all. I believe this commission, with its diverse expertise and commitment to truth-seeking, has the power to craft transformative policies that address the systemic harms inflicted on Black communities for generations. This is just the beginning, and I stand ready to work alongside the commission and New Yorkers to ensure their recommendations become reality. Now is not the time for silence or inaction. This commission must reckon with the whole truth and deliver bold remedies. From economic disparities to wealth gaps, the legacy of slavery and discrimination still casts a long shadow. I look to the commission to address these harms, from education to healthcare to housing, and pave the way for a brighter future. For generations, Black New Yorkers have faced systemic injustices. The commission is a beacon of hope for healing and progress. Together, we can dismantle the walls of inequity and build a New York where opportunity thrives for all.”*



### **Congressman Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D (NY-16):**

*"I am so excited to celebrate the announcement of the New York State Reparations Commission. The Reparations Commission is the first step towards forging a path that acknowledges America's original sin and addresses centuries of discrimination, redlining, and institutionalized oppression. We must be honest with ourselves and tell the truth about our history and how it impacts our communities today, so that together we can build a better future. In this process, and in commissions across the country, we must ensure that these efforts remain community-led. From Massena to Seneca Village, every zip code should be engaged in this path to reparations. Our collective healing must happen not just here in New York but across the country, so that we can truly root out the lasting impact of slavery. In Congress, we are working on transformative legislation to create a reparations commission, and we are grateful to the grassroots efforts like those here in New York for setting an inspiring example. I am incredibly proud as a Black man and a New Yorker that we are taking this step in the right direction to foster racial healing, and I look forward to continuing to fight for these policies at the federal level."*

### **Heather McGhee, board chair, Color of Change:**

*"Reparations can be seed capital for New York's prosperous future. The Governor needs to fully fund and support this new Commission so that it can engage New Yorkers across the state in better understanding how past state policies of enslavement and discrimination continue to drain wealth from New York's communities."*

### **New York City Comptroller Brad Lander:**

*"When our office recently analyzed the data on racial wealth disparities, we found the median household net worth of white New Yorkers to be nearly 15 times that of Black New Yorkers. The average white New York high school graduate has net worth three times greater than the average Black college graduate. These numbers add up to opportunities denied to millions of Black New Yorkers; wealth disparities perpetuated across generations, and a poorer city and state for all of us since inequality holds back economic growth for all. The findings of the report clearly support the establishment of a commission to study these inequities and potential reparations, and this announcement represents a historic step towards improving the lives of everyone in New York."*

**Dr. Darrick Hamilton, Nominated Member of the New York State Reparations Commission, University Professor, Henry Cohen Professor of Economics and Urban Policy, and Founding Director of The Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy at The New School:**

*"I'm humbled, proud and grateful to be selected to serve on this historic Reparations Commission. This is a first step for New York State to begin to formally acknowledge and take responsibility our well-documented sordid history and ongoing legacy of the state-sanctioned economic and even violent exploitation and exclusion Black people from full participation in our economy. In New York City alone, this legacy manifest in a gross and unjust economic imbalance where the typical Black families have a fraction of, 15 times less than, the wealth of White families. This commission a major step in advancing this movement towards healing, righting these wrongs and promoting a more just future grounded in the human rights and dignity for all New Yorkers and beyond."*

**Dr. Ron Daniels, Nominated Member of the New York State Reparations Commission, President, Institute of the Black World 21st Century, and Convener of the National African American Reparations Commission.**

*"The establishment of the New York State Reparations Task force catapults New York into the center of the surging U.S. and global reparations movement. Following on ground-breaking work of the California Reparations Task Force, the New York Task Force has an opportunity to educate the people of this state and the nation that the harms, the injuries inflicted on people of African through enslavement and its legacies were not just "down south," they also occurred "up south" where the wealth of the "empire" state was built of enslaved labor. Moreover, even after slavery was abolished, its harmful legacies persisted and persist right up until the present, hampering the full development of Black people in this state. New York has the opportunity and obligation of leading the nation in repairing these injuries through the enactment of comprehensive reparations."*

**Nicole Carty, Executive Director of Get Free:**

*“When Black people get free, we all get free. Our generation fully backs this reparations commission so they can provide us with a roadmap to making freedom and equality real in New York. Gen Z and Millennials across race and place demanded our elected leaders take urgent action on reparations because we know that the lies and laws created to dehumanize, exploit, and control Black people are a threat to dignity and freedom for all. While MAGA Republicans want to continue this legacy by whitewashing our history and stoking fears against our efforts to create a more equal future, we’re bringing New Yorkers together to reckon with the whole truth of our history and repair the ongoing impacts of white supremacist lies, laws, and violence from their foundation.*”

**Trevor Smith, Co-founder, Executive Director, and Collective Member of the BLIS Collective:**

*“Today marks another pivotal moment in our march toward true justice and liberation for Black people, in New York, and across the nation. We are deeply encouraged by the expertise, experience, and commitment to reparations demonstrated by the appointed commissioners and invite them to be in conversation with the coalition for the duration of the commission. Nationally, there exists a ‘hope gap’ on the topic of reparations within Black communities, where over 70 percent of Black people support reparations, but less than 10 percent believe it is possible in their lifetime. The work of the commission has the potential to address this and profoundly reshape the narrative surrounding reparations both within New York and across the country. The BLIS Collective is inspired to support the work of New Yorkers for Reparations and the commission to ensure the eventual recommendations are turned into tangible and transformative policy and cultural changes.”*



**Lanessa Chaplin, Director of the New York Civil Liberties Union Racial Justice Center:**

*“Today, New York state takes a historic step to reckon with the egregious and entrenched legacy of slavery in New York. The only way to build a fairer New York is to face our history and create a roadmap to repair the harm of our state’s legacy of white supremacy, which impacts Black New Yorkers to this day. Today, median household net worth for White New Yorkers is nearly 15 times greater than the median household net worth of Black New Yorkers. But repairing does not only require reconciling our past. We must also face our shared present and dismantle its racist structures and systems. By launching a formal reparations study commission, we are charting the course to address anti-Black discrimination and injustice and make equality a reality for all New Yorkers.”*

**Richard Brookshire, CEO and Co-founder of the Black Veterans Project:**

*“The New York State Reparations Commission has a historic opportunity to lay bear the unfiltered truth of how anti-Black racism has shaped the institutions and economy of our state. From enslavement to institutional discrimination reverberating across generations, we have a collective mandate as New Yorkers to secure the historical record at a time of right-wing erasure and provide impactful policy remedies that can place us all on a path of true equity and equal opportunity. New York’s role in obstructing access to the GI Bill following World War II and continued disinvestment in the communities Black veterans call home must be reckoned with. Black Veterans Project looks forward to supporting the Commission’s work and advancing the inter-generational struggle for a true reckoning.”*

**New Yorkers for Reparations is a new statewide coalition whose mission is to increase the movement for reparations across the state of New York.**



PICTURE PROVIDED BY CURT SAUNDERS

ART INTERLUDE:  
A QUESTION OF REMEMBRANCE

TREVOR SMITH

Isn't it odd that we close our eyes to remember?  
As if the darkness  
Is actually light,

As if,  
In the shadows of our eyelids,  
Reside those dreams of our ancestors,

Isn't it odd that we demonize those,  
Who point out,  
Injustice?

As if,  
It's too far-fetched,  
To **love**,  
And **love**,  
And **love**,  
**Blackness.**

*Curt Saunders is a Brooklyn-born, Jamaican-American Art Director and Photographer. He has a keen eye for artistic cultural references, and a passion for finding the intersections of identity, divinity, and community.*

# ARE REPARATIONS REALLY POSSIBLE?

DE•ANDRE BROWN

The recent enactment of a reparations commission bill in New York has reignited discussions about the feasibility of reparations. Are reparations really possible? The legacy of slavery, discrimination, anti-Black racism, and dehumanization have had on Black people in America is much deeper and engrained than meets the eye. This impact is often invisible to many Americans, particularly because of the false narrative promoted by modern policies that situate our society as a fair one. The truth is that the playing field is not as fair as it appears.

The entire cultural and economic system of the United States has been built off the backs of Black and Brown people for centuries, and they haven't had the opportunity to benefit from it. Our people had no choice but to give their lives for someone else's profit. For generations, Black and Brown people were exploited, disposed of, and treated like cattle meant to serve until death. Following the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, which legally ended slavery in the United States, there was widespread backlash from white communities across the country. In response, numerous towns and lawmakers enacted Black codes and Jim Crow Laws that were designed to mirror and perpetuate the oppression seen during slavery under the guise of legality.

The influence of these malicious social codes on our culture is very much still prevalent today, underscoring the critical need for reparations. The legacy of such injustices may seem distant to the broader public, but for Black communities, the repercussions are a daily reality.

The capitalist condition further exacerbates the poor economic conditions of Black people and isolates us from each other, hindering the collective recognition of the necessity for transformative change. This has led to a situation where, after living under these conditions for so long, many believe that change is unattainable. Research from the Pew Research Center shows a significant disparity in perceptions – more than 50 percent of people across age and race demographics believe the legacy of slavery has affected Black people's social position today. And while 77 percent of Black people believe that they should be paid reparations, less than 40 percent of individuals from other demographics agree. This highlights a stark contrast in our understanding: although the effects of slavery are widely recognized, there remains a disconnect in agreeing to a solution to this issue.

Throughout American history, there has been a notable absence of policies specifically designed to address racial disparities in the same direct and substantial manner as those that have favored white individuals. This disparity in government support is evident in various policies and practices, including the Homestead Act, the GI Bill, and increasing access to white homeownership. These are all things that our government can do for other communities. From federal, to state, to county, to your local neighborhood, our government should serve the people, but in New York and across the country, Black communities have been left out of these policies.

The legacy of slavery and the enduring influence of white patriarchy are global phenomena with deep-seated effects that have shaped our society for centuries. While there may be a hesitation around reparations, the answer is affirmative. While reparations alone may not solve every problem faced by the Black community, they represent a critical step towards acknowledging and rectifying the historical injustices that have been perpetuated by the American system, which has consistently failed to adequately address the wrongs inflicted upon Black communities.

Understanding the significance of reparations requires us to look beyond the immediate moment, recognizing that our struggle is part of a larger historical continuum. Just as past generations sacrificed and fought not only for their liberation but also for the freedom and betterment of future generations, we, too bear the responsibility to challenge and dismantle the structures of inequality.

The pursuit of reparations is a testament to our collective commitment to justice – it acknowledges the profound impact of anti-Blackness and positions us to confront these issues head-on. The journey may discomfort those who have benefited from the status quo, but it is a necessary discomfort that comes along with building a society that reflects the values of equity. Are reparations really possible? Yes, if we truly commit to them.

*De'Andre Brown is a current City College of New York student, nonprofit founder, and changemaker from the county of Westchester.*

# FRAMING ACTIVITY: BECOMING REPARATIONISTS

## **Becoming Reparationists**

*A framing that offers an invitation to become a person wholly devoted to the repair, advancement, and liberation of Black people across the globe.*

### **Articulate:**

- What are the different social identities you self-identify as? (i.e., feminists, abolitionists, runner, mother, etc.)
- Why are these social identities important to you? When did they form?
- Over the past ten years, have you formed any new social identities? If so, how were they formed/established?

### **Align:**

- How does being a reparationist intersect with any other social identity you might have?
- In what ways, if at all, does the “Becoming a Reparationist” frame intersect with the work that you/your organization does? What role does identity play in your work?

### **Amplify:**

- How can you employ the “Becoming a Reparationist” frame in conversations about identity, history, and relationships across the Black diaspora?
- What audiences might resonate most with this frame and why?
- Where does this frame already show up within society? Where are there opportunities for this frame to grow in parts of society, and why?



## ACTIVITY:

**You have a friend in the reparations movement who identifies as a reparationist. You ask them what that means, and in response, they ask you to answer the following questions:**

- *What personal social identity do you identify with the most?*
- *What five words describe what this social identity means to you?*
- *What values do you think are attached to this social identity and why?*
- *What five words describe what you think being a reparationist should mean?*
- *What activities do you think a reparationist should be engaging in on a daily basis?*

*This framing activity was developed by Trevor Smith through the work done in the Reparations Narrative Lab, a program of Liberation Ventures, whose mission is to accelerate the Black-led movement for racial repair.*

**October 1966**

## **Black Panther Party Platform and Program**

**What we want  
What we believe**

1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.
2. We want full employment for our people.
3. We want an end to the robbery by the white man of our Black Community.
4. We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings.
5. We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of the decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society.
6. We want all black men to be exempt from military service.
7. We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of black people.
8. We want freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.
9. We want all black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their black communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.
10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, and peace. And as our major political objective, a United Nations-supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the black colony in which only black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate, for the purpose of determining the will of black people as to their national destiny.

The term “**reparationist**” currently lacks an official dictionary definition, but as the global movement for reparations gains momentum, this may soon change, offering remedies for the enduring harms of slavery and anti-Black discrimination but also allowing individuals to identify themselves with this centuries-old movement.

Can reparationist be a distinct identity, akin to feminist or abolitionist, a label worn with pride by progressive individuals showcasing their belief in reparative compensation for Black people? It turns out that, although the reparationist identity has not entered mainstream consciousness, people active in the movement have been calling themselves reparationists for years.

For Jumoke Ifetayo, the path to becoming a reparationist started at an early age. Influenced by his mother, Ifetayo began wearing traditional African clothes to school in Atlanta to reclaim a sense of his cultural heritage. “My mother started to wear traditional African clothing in the ’70s, and when I graduated from 7th grade, we had an honors ceremony, and my high school counselor asked me to wear a suit, and I said, ‘yes ma’am’ and showed [up in] a four-piece African suit,” Ifetayo says. Since then, he has continued to don traditional African clothing and served as a member of the National Coalition for Blacks for Reparations in America (N’COBRA), one of the oldest national organizations dedicated to securing reparations for Black people in the United States.

In research about traits of pluralists, the Pop Culture Collaborative (PCC), a philanthropic intermediary working to transform the narrative landscape in the U.S., conducted research about traits of pluralists that suggests that people who identified as pluralists shared a set of core life events. A pluralist, in the context of political and social theory, is someone who believes that power should be distributed across a diverse group of people. According to Bridgit Antoinette Evans, the organization’s CEO, this research helped PCC see that “a pluralist identity formation may have a journey that starts early in life.” Evans points out that, as people move through these core life events, behavior or identity sets itself.

The path to becoming a reparationist may also similarly be sparked by a meaningful event that leads people down a path toward working to repair and liberate Black Americans in response to the harms of the transatlantic slave trade and its stain on society.

The centennial of the Tulsa Race Massacre wasn't the first moment Dreisen Heath identified as a reparatationist. Still, for Heath, who led reparations policy efforts at Human Rights Watch for the past five years, that anniversary was her spark, and crystallized for her the enormity of the reparations movement.

"Working for an organization like Human Rights Watch where international law is the organization's mandate and the right to reparations is clearly outlined, it was a no-brainer to build Human Rights Watch's U.S. domestic reparations research and advocacy program," Heath says. Still, she worries that, as more states start to consider reparations policies and as the movement continues to enter mainstream policy conversations, there will be both promises and pitfalls to the popularization of what it means to be a "reparatationist."

## **Organizing People Into Liberatory Social Identities as a Strategy**

Identity has long played a role in activist strategies and has become more prominent in modern-day racial and social justice spaces. Social identity theory was first developed in the 1970s by two psychologists named Henri Tajfel and John Turner, seeking to explore how individuals categorize themselves into social groups. Their theory posited that people derive part of their identity from their membership in social groups (such as nationality, ethnicity, gender, religion, etc.) and that this categorization influences social perception and behavior.

A key to understanding the sway of social identities, according to University of California, Los Angeles political science professor Lynn Vavreck, is "the ability to distinguish members of one group from another through a shortcut based on something like team colors, languages or accents, race or geography." Today, when someone says they are an abolitionist, a Marxist, or a liberal, it is generally understood what they stand for.

The Combahee River Collective, a group of Black and queer feminist scholars and activists, first coined the term "identity politics" in 1977. The term captured the importance of addressing the unique forms of oppression faced by individuals based on their various identities, such as race, gender, or class. The group called for a political alignment recognizing the experiences and histories of marginalized groups while emphasizing the interconnected nature of oppressive systems.

Scholar and civil rights activist Kimberlé Crenshaw built on this definition, coining the term "intersectional," which she articulated as a framework recognizing that individuals have multiple social identities that intersect in complex ways and that there is a need to consider the overlapping marginalized identities of different groups.

The landscape of social movements continually evolves, giving rise to various social movement identities. These identities, often fluid and shaped by active participation, can include modern-day abolitionists, for example, who advocate for an overhaul of the criminal legal system, or feminists who challenge patriarchy and champion gender justice. While these labels help understand an individual or organization's particular role in the social justice ecosystem, they can also feel overly rigid. These movements and identities are multifaceted, and it is through the interconnection of these identities that some activists believe societal transformation can happen.

Vanessa Thomas, the program manager at the Black Feminist Fund, identifies as a "Black feminist" because "it is specifically about bringing everything from the margins to the center and not the superficial, self-care, girl-boss T-shirts, smash-that-glass-ceiling type of feminism, but very much about bringing in everyone." For Thomas, this sets her apart from the type of feminism that some white women may embody; it means that being a Black feminist is "not simply a part of my 9-5," but that it plays a role in how she shows up in her relationships, conversations, and politics.

This infusion of Black feminism into Thomas' daily life to the point where it shapes her worldview is what Pop Culture Collaborative calls a "immersion in a narrative ocean," a coordinated ecosystem of "desired behaviors, new mental models, narrative archetypes, and specific story experiences that together will work to shift how people think, feel, and behave in the world." PCC recently updated its theory of narrative change to be more oriented toward social identity, stating that "the North Star of narrative systems work is to cultivate social identity."

This updated theory of change is one of the clearest and most specific articulations on how to build power across a mass of people, and as PCC articulates it, "create[s] the conditions for millions of people to experiment with, and ultimately, behave in accordance with new social identities."

Getting deeper than just "shifting the narrative," a term that has become increasingly popular in left-of-center philanthropic spaces, was important for PCC's Evans. "From a strategic standpoint, it's hard to quantify what shifting the narrative means, and it tends to draw people toward communications as a strategy by which to get to that end goal," Evans notes. Aisha Shillingford, who is the artistic director for Intelligent Mischief, a creative studio focused on shifting culture, noted in a Stanford Social Innovation Review piece that "building the power to shape narratives is only one component of building cultural power."

There is a growing field being cultivated in large part by organizations such as PCC, Center for Cultural Power, and Harness that is connecting the dots between cultural and policy change. “We started moving deeper into this concept of narrative oceans and narrative immersion in ideas, stories, relationships, and behavior norms as the context shaping how we move through the world,” Evans says.

Over the past few years, PCC has awarded millions of dollars to organizations such as Caring Across Generations to advance pop culture narratives about caregivers and to the Center for Cultural Power to accelerate the power of immigrants, refugees, disabled, and trans people in emerging television. While these identity-centered strategies continue to be shaped by strategists and activists, academic theorists and political scientists are more wary of their effectiveness.

## Potential Pitfalls

The use of identity has gotten its fair share of critiques from scholars and activists on the left and right of the political spectrum. In an essay in *The Atlantic* adapted from his book *The Identity Trap: A Story of Ideas and Power in Our Time*, political scientist Yascha Mounk notes that the likely outcome of an emphasis on identity politics is “a society that places an unremitting emphasis on our differences,” which he thinks could lead to the pitting of identity groups against one another “in a zero-sum battle for resources and recognition.”

Similarly critical of identity politics, Olúfemi O. Táíwò, philosopher and assistant professor at Georgetown University, argues in his book, *Elite Capture*, that in the past few decades, we have failed to build alliances across our identities and instead chosen to “close ranks—especially on social media—around ever-narrower conceptions of group interests.”

But activists, particularly those who engage in conversations with everyday people in their communities, see the use of identity, particularly liberatory identities, as a unifying force as long as it seeks to explore the depth and principles of the identity. “If a narrative ocean changes but the change within individuals is not durable, it’s a whole lot of work for a very fleeting impact,” Evans points out.

In other words, to effectively achieve the progressive transformation activists desire, it’s not sufficient to merely increase the number of individuals who identify as anti-racists, abolitionists, feminists, or reparationists. What’s crucial, according to activists such as Richie Reseda, CEO of Question Culture, a worker-owned production and artist management group, is fostering a deeper, more impactful change that is actively integrated into the fabric of our culture. Transformation, according to Reseda, rests on cultivating a daily practice of “building more



healing and accountability into the world.” Reseda identifies as an abolitionist, but his thoughts converge with the spirit of reparations through the idea of repairing and healing past harms.

The use of identity can also be used as a means for maintaining and consolidating power among dominant groups, instead of evenly distributing it. For example, white supremacist identity politics was on full display during Donald Trump’s campaign and presidency. In 2016, political scientist David Edward Tabachnick wrote in *The Hill* that while “Trumpism” is obviously “linked to the person Donald Trump, but its roots run much deeper, intertwining contemporary and traditional political trends in such a way that it makes it both uniquely American and of the 21st century, distinct from the European Fascism of the last century.”

Evans concurs, saying, “The pro-authoritarian movement’s strategy is entirely about identity formation—they understand the identity of the patriot, and they understand the way that identity creates norms in people.” The weaponization of social justice identity politics is “purely a tactic that is being used to deconstruct cultural innovation rooted in BIPOC communities.”

As the nation braces for the potential recurrence of a Trump versus Biden election in 2024, the future of progressive identity politics hangs in the balance. Will these political dynamics further divide or unite the populace? How will the reparations movement and the thousands of reparationists who have stepped into this liberatory identity since 2020 fare? Amid the uncertainty, the question of how individuals align themselves in these politically charged times becomes increasingly pertinent.

## **Social Identity and Belonging**

Researchers have found that when an individual feels a stronger sense of belonging to a community or social group, they report higher overall well-being, reduced stress, and improved mental health. To white Americans in particular, reparations feel divisive, a suite of policies that would do the exact opposite of fostering inclusion and belonging, especially regarding white people.

Over the past year, a cohort of activists who participated in the Reparations Narrative Lab, a program of Liberation Ventures, whose mission is to accelerate the Black-led movement for racial repair, unpacked this and a suite of other narratives that stand in the way of further advancing the reparations conversation. (Full disclosure: the author of this piece worked as director of narrative change at Liberation Ventures while writing this story.)

The Lab centered its efforts on enhancing the movement's influence and capacity within Black communities, with the ultimate goal of achieving widespread support for reparations across all racial groups. Recognizing this, activists across the movement also acknowledged the critical part white allies play, especially in mobilizing and educating members of their white communities about the importance and necessity of reparations.

Lotte Lieb Dula, a white woman based in Colorado and the founder of Reparations4Slavery, says that her most prominent social identity today is that of a reparatonist. Her journey began after her mother's passing when she uncovered that her family built its wealth on the enslavement of human beings for more than 200 years. As a child, she was shielded from this family history, alongside the revelation that her mother was a member of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Today, Dula says she has committed herself to "un-whitewash this history and encourage other white people to find their own pieces to the puzzle and then speak publicly about it."



PICTURE PROVIDED BY OLUWAKEMI ORITSEJAFOR



This raises the question of whether Black reparatonists should expend effort toward helping white people and other non-Black individuals belong in the reparations movement or if that is the work of those communities themselves. According to David Ragland, co-founder and co-executive director of The Truth Telling Project, there is a difference between what it looks like to show up as a Black reparatonist versus a non-Black reparatonist. “We walk through the world differently and with different levels of threat depending on where we are,” says Ragland.

According to Ragland, a power analysis and a deep understanding of how we’ve arrived at this point of racial inequality and racial hierarchy will be crucial in the upcoming years to grow the movement for reparations. He surmises that true liberation lies in living our lives through these frameworks.

Conversations with modern-day reparations activists across the country reveal that a central part of this identity is based on understanding the economic, social, political, cultural, and spiritual nature of reparations. After obtaining this understanding, reparations activists stress that only when one commits to the work of transformation can one truly start the work of being a reparatonist.

Creating lasting and durable change to realize reparations will rely on “situating social identity formation as a north star of our strategies,” according to Evans and as per the new vision of PCC. “That is where sustainability lies.” Just as people identifying as “abolitionists” helped abolish slavery, it will take a critical mass of “reparatonists” to achieve reparations.

*This story was originally published in YES! Magazine and was funded by a grant from the Decolonizing Wealth Project as part of the YES! Series “Realizing Reparations.”*

# ART INTERLUDE: I MUST ASK

TREVOR SMITH

I must ask,  
How you can smile  
When I am not free?

Do you not see the scars?  
The blood,  
Puddled at my feet,

Do you not hear,  
That fire that has been brewing?  
Those crackles,  
And cries,  
Of freedom  
Echoing deep,

Do you not feel,  
The potential to love,  
The potential to heal,

I am sorry,  
But it seems like I must remind you that,  
You are not simply you,  
But we,  
Are,  
We.

So, I must ask,  
How can you be free,  
When I am not free?

PICTURES PROVIDED BY OLUWAKEMI ORITSEJAOR

*Oluwakemi Oritesajaor is a Brooklyn-based photographer, creative director, and artist. Her self-directed portraiture and editorial work operate at the intersection of art, beauty, heritage, and the contemporary African diaspora.*



“Despite the recent attention the struggle for reparations has received, the effort has been generational, a process we have documented in the New York Amsterdam News pages for many decades. We reported on the work done by the Jewish and Japanese American communities and their allies to successfully receive compensation for the historical wrongs done to them, and as early as 1946, our newspaper published a story on the effort to provide reparations to the families of victims of lynchings in the American South.

The idea roughly is this:

“When a nation or a State transgresses against the citizens of the United States, the families of the victims have the moral right to reparations. While reparations won’t bring back the dead, they help secure the future of those who have been deprived of their breadwinner. Reparations also puts the “brakes on unbridled violence,” we wrote in September of 1946. We can only imagine how American history might have changed if such a proposal had been implemented.

In 1969, we wrote about the decision by the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity’s decision to pass a resolution affirming “the concept of paying reparations to black people...” And in that same year, civil rights icon James Forman “interrupted a service in Riverside Church, New York, to present his Black Manifesto and a demand for \$500 million in reparations to blacks.”

A decade earlier, we wrote at length about a speech by Black Baptist minister Gardner C. Taylor, which forcefully called for the American government to pay reparations.

“Failing this, and with such case as the list of the black martyred dead before it, this nation ought to make some reparations to its Negro Citizens.

“Call the roll: Harry T. Moore, martyred in Florida for freedom; Emmett Till dead, bloated and buried for winking at another human being; Rev. George Lee, slaughtered in Mississippi for wanting to vote; Mack Charles Parker, lynched and unavenged with the details of the crime unknown, the murderers’ identities documented and the whole apparatus of law and order of the United States paralyzed and mute.



“One is tempted to suggest that in the light of the above, the United States Government ought to refund to every Negro income tax payer in America that portion of federal income tax which is used for those agencies which protect the civil rights of citizens, since the Negro community apparently is not covered by these provisions.”

We also documented early legislative efforts to enshrine reparations into American Law with our 1990 article “Reparations for Blacks idea gains in the House,” which documents the efforts of Congressman John Conyer, noting that “the idea of reparations for Blacks has been circulating since the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. But since Congress awarded more than \$1 Billion to 60,000 Japanese-Americans imprisoned during World War II, the proposal has gained increasing momentum, proponents say.”

There are, of course, many other articles, op-eds, and reports from our pages. Still, the point is that the Amsterdam News, and the Black Press, serve as a kind of living memory and history, denying the claim by opponents and skeptics of the reparations movement that it is a flash in the pan, inspired chiefly by the Black Lives Matter movement. While BLM may be the latest to fan the flames of the cause, the idea of reparations is as deeply rooted in America’s history as the subjugation, death, and discrimination that makes reparations both righteous and necessary.

*Damaso Reyes is the Executive & Investigative Editor at the New York Amsterdam News. He is also the Founding Editor of The Blacklight, the New York Amsterdam News investigative unit. His work has been published in The New York Times, The Associated Press, The Wall Street Journal, The Miami Herald, and The San Francisco Chronicle.*

# A NEW NEW DEAL: THE CALL FOR REPARATIVE AND UNIVERSAL POLICIES

TREVOR SMITH

In the throes of contemporary challenges from the lingering scars of systemic racism to the widening racial wealth chasm, the United States finds itself at a pivotal crossroads. Four years after the murder of George Floyd launched global protests in support of the Movement for Black Lives, we are in a moment that calls for a national policy platform that not only addresses the historical injustices faced by Black and Indigenous communities but also casts a wider net of economic reform through policies like baby bonds, guaranteed income, and universal healthcare.

This comprehensive approach acknowledges the intertwined nature of racial justice and economic inequity, asserting that the path to a more equitable society requires addressing both specific injustices and the broader economic structures that underpin inequality.

The original New Deal, while transformative in its time, left deep fissures of inequality, particularly along racial lines. It is now time for a “New New Deal” that rectifies these historical oversights by placing reparations for Black and Indigenous people at its heart. Such reparations are not merely a matter of justice; they are a step toward acknowledging and rectifying the centuries of exploitation, displacement, and marginalization that have systematically obstructed these communities from accessing the wealth and opportunities that they have significantly contributed to creating.

However, reparations will not solve the stark economic inequality that exists throughout our society, regardless of race or ethnicity. Reparations must be a part of a broader and comprehensive economic agenda that seeks to dismantle the systemic barriers that all working-class people face. This is where universal policies like baby bonds, which would provide every newborn with a savings account that matures with them, guaranteed income, and universal health care come into play.

These policies are designed not only to address the symptoms of economic disparity, but also to attack its root causes, ensuring that everyone, regardless of their race or socio-economic status, has access to the opportunities and resources necessary for a dignified life. Too often are reparative and universal policies pitted against each other, but a New New Deal would assert that these types of policies can coincide and exist beside each other.



Integrating the movement for Black liberation and Indigenous sovereignty into a broader economic agenda is not just strategic—it's essential for achieving the type of systemic change that we desire. It recognizes that while the specific histories and injustices faced by Black and Indigenous communities require targeted redress, the mechanisms of economic inequality and systemic racism are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. By placing these movements in a broader framework of economic reform, we can create a more inclusive and equitable vision of justice—one that addresses both the particular injustices that stem from colonialism and slavery and the universal challenges of economic inequality.

Although critics may argue that such sweeping reforms are utopian, impractical, or too ambitious, the current moment, with democracy hanging in the balance, demands bold action. Just as the original New Deal responded to the Great Depression with innovative policies that reshaped the country's cultural and economic landscape, so must the New New Deal rise to the challenge and confront our system of racial capitalism.

Truly understanding the imperatives driving the “New New Deal” requires grappling with the concept of racial capitalism—the process by which economic systems are predicated on the exploitation of communities of color. This framework shows how wealth and power have historically been accumulated in the United States, often at the direct expense of Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized communities.

Racial capitalism not only underpins the vast economic disparities we see today but also entrenches systemic racism within the fabric of our society. A New New Deal would confront this head-on by dismantling the economic structures that perpetuate racial inequality. Institutional reparations and universal economic policies would be a means of redistributing power and wealth. This approach is not merely about economic reform; it would be a fundamental challenge to the racialized underpinnings of capitalism that have long supported those who have access to ownership, opportunity, and resources.

Such a package of transformative policies would rely on a renewed, broad-based, multiracial movement for liberation and decolonization. The movement would have to unite individuals across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines around a shared vision for a just society. This would entail fostering solidarity in principle and action by actively engaging in dialogues that bridge historical divides, and organizing collectively to demand change. Through this collective action and solidarity, the vision of the New New Deal can be realized and help transform the landscape of American society.

While the vision for a New New Deal is ambitious, it is within this ambition that its potential lies. Confronting racial capitalism head-on and building a multi-racial inclusive movement for transformation are not just strategies; they are imperatives for those seeking a more equitable and just future. As we look toward this horizon, let us be guided by the lessons of the past and the possibilities of the future, united in our pursuit of a society that truly embodies the principles of liberation.





PICTURE PROVIDED BY OLUWAKEMI ORITSEJAFOR

ART INTERLUDE:  
THE REPARATIONS GENERATION



Those born between the years 2010 and 2024 will be known as “Generation Alpha,” – the generation that holds the distinction of being the first generation birthed entirely within the 21st century. Born during the boom of artificial intelligence and advanced technological innovation, they will see an immense amount of societal transformation in their lives. It is my hope that this generation will navigate their formative years within the unfolding reparations journey for Black Americans – a truly remarkable prospect. They may very well emerge as the nation’s inaugural “Reparations Generation,” bearing witness to and actively participating in a transformational chapter in U.S. history

**- imagine that.**

ILLUSTRATION PROVIDED BY ADRIANA GRAMLÝ

*Adriana Gramly is a Bolivian-American designer raised in Kansas and is now based in Brooklyn, NY. Her work is inspired by childhood play, folklore, and the underdogs of the world.*



# RADICAL COLLABORATION: DAILY PAPER X REPARATIONS DAILY (ISH)

TREVOR SMITH

For nearly a year, Reparations Daily (ish) has graced the counters of the iconic Daily Paper NYC Flagship store, located at 18 Delancey Street in Lower Manhattan. This partnership is a testament to the forward-thinking, creative, and visionary leadership of Chris and Clayton Griggs, who manage the NYC flagship store and marketing for North America.

The fashion industry, like many others, is deeply intertwined with a history of exploitation, having benefited significantly from the legacies of slavery. The history is embedded in the industry, from the appropriation of Black cultural symbols and designs without acknowledgment or compensation to the exploitation of Black labor in global supply chains.



In this context, the collaboration between Reparations Daily (ish) and Daily Paper is emblematic of a broader movement within the fashion and cultural industry to confront these legacies head-on. The partnership also leverages fashion and culture as powerful platforms for raising awareness and fostering dialogue around the historical and ongoing impacts of slavery and anti-Blackness. It exemplifies how creative and radical collaboration can transcend organizational boundaries and turn art and culture into activism.

The role of fashion and culture in the modern movement for reparations is, therefore, multifaceted. It means that Black-owned brands can reclaim their culture and compel those whose success has been built on the legacy of harm to critically examine their roles in exploiting Black culture and hindering Black ownership within the industry.

Daily Paper is leading the charge and showcasing what it truly means for a brand to prioritize justice alongside profit. Their commitment to the liberation of Black folks is evidenced through this collaboration and serves as an example for the fashion industry at large.

As we celebrate the third printed edition of Reparations Daily (ish), we extend our heartfelt adoration and gratitude to Daily Paper, Clayton, Chris, and the entire staff at the 18 Delancey store for their unwavering support and dedication to making a difference.

*Daily Paper is an Amsterdam-based fashion and lifestyle brand established in 2012 by three childhood friends. Fueled by the rich heritage of African culture wrapped in contemporary designs, Daily Paper has truly become one of the fastest growing fashion brands out of Europe.*

# FRAMING ACTIVITY: RADICAL SOLIDARITY

## **Radical Solidarity**

*A framing that details the interconnected nature of reparations and Black liberation to other oppressed communities and transformative social movements.*

### **Articulate:**

- What does the concept of solidarity mean to you?
- How are the racial justice movement and the movement for Black Lives connected to other social movements and/or oppressed communities?
- In what ways is the history of U.S. chattel slavery connected to Indigenous genocide and land theft?
- How has solidarity shown up in progressive social movements over time?
- What does BIPOC mean to you? Does solidarity currently exist between these distinct communities? Why or why not?
- Where can solidarity be strengthened throughout progressive movements?
- How do racial solidarity and class solidarity coincide, particularly in the context of the Black reparations movement?

*This framing activity was developed by Trevor Smith through the work done in the Reparations Narrative Lab, a program of Liberation Ventures, whose mission is to accelerate the Black-led movement for racial repair.*

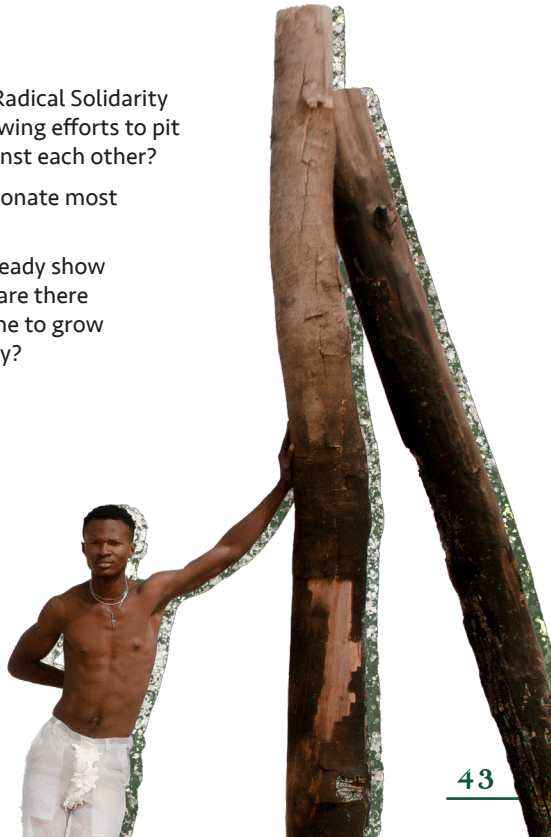


## Align:

- In what ways do you or your organization currently practice or articulate solidarity within your advocacy
- Are there specific stories of solidarity that you currently use in your advocacy/storytelling? Can they be used to support the movement for Black reparations?

## Amplify:

- How can you employ the Radical Solidarity frame in the face of right-wing efforts to pit communities of color against each other?
- What audiences might resonate most with this frame and why?
- Where does this frame already show up within society? Where are there opportunities for this frame to grow in parts of society, and why?



When you think about slavery, Jim Crow, and other forms of anti-Black oppression, a few familiar villains probably come to mind—you might think of brutal overseers whipping Black people on plantations, cruel auctioneers ripping families apart, or sadistic police setting dogs on Black protesters. You probably don't immediately think about the thousands of lawyers who worked behind the scenes to normalize these atrocities, including lawmakers, judges, prosecutors, and private attorneys.

Yet, from the Constitution, which initially counted enslaved people as three-fifths of a person, to the Supreme Court's doctrine of "separate but equal," to contracts legitimizing the sale of human beings, the law and lawyers have played a central role in the dehumanization of Black people. Because of this history, lawyers and the law have a unique role to play in the struggle for racial justice and repair.

In New York, the movement to address anti-Black oppression led to the abolition of slavery in 1827 in the state, but that laudable effort did not disentangle New York from the exploitation of Black bodies. Until the Civil War, New York-based banks like JP Morgan accepted enslaved people as collateral for loans, and insurance firms like New York Life offered policies insuring enslavers for loss of enslaved "property." Locally, Black communities were devastated by anti-Black race riots in 1863, 1900, and 1919—mass atrocities that went largely unprosecuted. And practices like redlining continued to diminish the value of Black property and Black life well into the 20th century.

Today, as a result of these and similar accumulated injustices, the median white New York household has nearly 15 times as much wealth as the median Black household, a wealth gap 50% greater than the national average. And Black New Yorkers continue to face worse life outcomes in almost every category, from education, to health, to the criminal legal system.

To address the magnitude of this harm, the movement for reparations draws upon familiar legal principles. Just as plaintiffs who have suffered harms like battery, assault, false imprisonment, conversion, and unjust enrichment can bring civil claims to have their harms acknowledged and be made whole, reparations processes offer an opportunity to assess and respond to collective harms and injustices. And while a verdict or money judgment, or reparations process can never fully compensate for past harm, it is a meaningful step toward justice.

As the reparations process begins in New York, the first step will be establishing a comprehensive and accurate record of what occurred. Through historical documents, statistical evidence, and witness testimony, reparations commissions can reconstruct a comprehensive understanding of the past—and how it is connected to the present. One promising recent example of this work is the mammoth report of the California Reparations Task Force, which details the history of anti-Black oppression in that state and its ongoing ramifications for housing, education, political representation, the environment and other fields.

The second, and often more contentious work of reparations is to design remedies, but here as well, reference to “traditional” legal principles is informative. Civil law operates on the principle of placing plaintiffs in the position they would have been in if the harm had not occurred. While we know that this is functionally impossible or very difficult, it is a useful north star. Reparations activists suggest that we should look to see what it would take to achieve realized equality in our society by leveling the racial wealth gap and eliminating racial inequities in health, housing, education and other life outcomes.

History offers several models for direct payments to the victims of past harms and their descendants, including German payments to survivors of the Holocaust, payments authorized by Congress for victims of the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, scholarships designated for survivors of the Rosewood massacre in Florida, and housing assistance to survivors of housing discrimination in Evanston, Illinois. While it is likely that only the federal government is sufficiently resourced to meet the total cost of reparations for slavery, state and local efforts play a critical role in building momentum and creating the factual record necessary for a national undertaking.

As in the past, lawyers may present some of the biggest obstacles to justice. Conservative legal operatives like Edward Blum, a key figure in the push to dismantle affirmative action, DEI, and voting rights, has signaled his opposition to reparations efforts and sent threatening letters to the Evanston commission in an attempt to derail that effort.

Thankfully, so far, federal courts have refused to strike down reparations efforts, describing the government’s interest in remedying past discrimination by state actors as “unquestionably” compelling, particularly when those acts are well documented and the proposed remedies for those acts are narrowly tailored to address the harm committed. Now, as in the past, it is crucial to develop the robust factual record that will be necessary to support bold action to eliminate racial disparities.

Despite opposition from the likes of Blum, the reparations movement continues to grow. In New York, lawyers in particular, have an opportunity to weigh in on the right side of history, reckon with the past's harms, and help chart a brighter future.



PICTURE PROVIDED BY CURT SAUNDERS

*Taonga Leslie is Director of Policy and Program for Racial Justice at the American Constitution Society and a strategy consultant with nonprofits, foundations, and other social impact groups.*

POETRY OUTRO:  
GOOD & BEAUTIFUL & KIND

TREVOR SMITH

An uncharted revolution awaits us,  
A new genesis sits on the horizon,  
40 acres, the mule, the world,

What was taken,  
Will be reclaimed,

A symphony of abundance,  
A rush of endless possibilities,

What awaits us,  
On the other side of reparations?

It must be a world that is good,  
and beautiful and kind.

*Aren't you tired?*

## EPILOGUE:

# A REPARATIONS STATE OF MIND

### **Reparationists –**

I was recently talking to Brea Baker, whose book, *Rooted: The American Legacy of Land Theft and the Modern Movement for Black Land Ownership* will be released on June 18, 2024, perhaps by the time this printed edition has reached you.

In our conversation she said that she feels like this is the year of reparations. A year in which we'll see countries around the world more vocally grapple with the rips, tears, and fractures caused by colonialism and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. A year in which we'll see more states follow in the footsteps of California and New York and create statewide reparations taskforces that propose policy recommendations. A year in which the word reparations dances on the tips of the tongues of people across the nation on the world. Where the narratives of repair fill the air in barbershops, nail salons, barbeques, family gatherings, pushing us to grapple with the complexities of the rigged systems that pit us against each other and swallow us into a mindset of scarcity.

*This is the year indeed,*

*that we collectively step into a reparations state of mind.*

The goal of this New York edition of *Reparations Daily (ish)* was to show the breadth, depth, and brilliance of New Yorkers who are stepping further into the movement for reparations.

You've heard from lawyers, students, and organizers posing important questions and answers that *I hope* gives you the language you need to feel a part of this movement. You've read new and old poetry that *I hope* helps you peer into your own interior and interrogate how you might experiment with words and bring out the poet that exists within you and all of us. You've gone through framing activities that *I hope* gives you the tools to have these conversations with your friends, colleagues, and family.

I write this not only with the hope but with the deep-seated belief that beyond this edition, beyond the work of the newly formed New York Reparations Taskforce, beyond the broader movement for reparations, exists something vaster. Something remarkable. This movement is a portal to new beginnings – and I invite you to step into it with us.

With gratitude, determination, and radical love,

Trevor Smith

Co-Founder, Executive Director, Collective Member of the BLIS Collective

*Trevor Smith is the Co-Founder, Executive Director, and Collective Member of the BLIS Collective, a membership based movement support organization sparking radical collaboration and narrative alignment across Black, Indigenous, and progressive social movements to repair, decolonize, and transform culture. He is a writer, a poet, a son, and a brother who is committed to expanding the movement for reparations and other liberation movements.*

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