

The Case for Reparations

An Executive Summary

Beth Emet Social Action Committee
Reparations Group 2021

For more than thirty years, a movement has been growing in this country in support of reparations for Black Americans. This movement has recently gained momentum from the notoriety afforded the 2020 murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery. Partly as a result, an increasing number of white Americans have become aware of the enormous disadvantages for people of color, in their access to housing, health care, nutrition, education and job opportunities and, especially, in their treatment by law enforcement and their disproportionate incarceration.

Contrary to much historical narrative, the harm to Black Americans did not end with emancipation. Jim Crow laws in the south and government-designed segregation nationwide continued for more than a hundred years after 1865. Their effects are still felt today in the decreased values of Black-owned property and the lower, and declining, share of Black homeownership. None of the antipoverty programs or laws banning discrimination in housing or employment have addressed the root causes of racism.

The intention of reparations is twofold: (1) to acknowledge and compensate for the harm that pervasive structural racism has caused to our society and to individuals; and (2) to move forward by reconciling ourselves with our past. This is important for all Americans, not just for Black Americans.

Reparations will not alone close the wealth gap for Black Americans. No amount of money could adequately compensate for 400 years of systemic subjugation. Reparations first focus on formally acknowledging collective responsibility for past wrongs and their continuing effects. Funds paid under reparations are a means to acknowledge past wrongdoing and attempt to reverse its effects in the present, knowing that we cannot reverse all the harm done.

[H.R. 40](#) has been introduced in the House of Representatives in every session of Congress since 1989. This year, for the first time, it progressed through the Judiciary Committee, and Senator Cory Booker introduced a companion bill, S. 40 in the Senate. Both call for the creation of a commission to study reparations for Black Americans.

Closer to home, the Evanston City Council passed two ordinances supporting reparations. The first acknowledged the systemic racism present in the City's residential zoning between 1919 and 1969, and the second established a method to pay reparations of up to \$10 million through allocation of cannabis tax receipts. The first payments are planned for November 2021 and will be focused on [restorative housing](#). A companion non-profit, the [Evanston Reparations Community Fund](#), has been created to build an endowment so that reparations can continue after the City funding is exhausted. The Fund is also not subject to the degree of restrictions faced by reparations paid by a municipality.

Other cities have begun to follow Evanston's lead. The Chicago City Council has discussed, but has not yet passed, a resolution to establish a commission to consider reparations. In addition, eleven mayors, including those of Los Angeles and St. Louis, have formed a working group to advance reparations in their cities. Other cities or counties, such as Amherst, MA and Kalamazoo, MI have passed reparations ordinances and others are in progress.

What Can We Do?

Our most important Jewish religious and social moral values support reparations. This includes taking care of the Jewish people, including Jews of Color and Marginalized Ethnicities who have faced and continue to face America's systemic racism.

As individuals, we can support reparations in several ways:

- Join with others at Beth Emet to help inform and educate our congregation on this movement, which is fundamental to addressing systemic racism in our country.
- Inform our representatives, both locally and nationally, that we support reparations and ask them to do so.
- Contribute to organizations that advance or fund reparations.

As an important religious institution with a strong history of social action, we should endorse reparations both locally and nationally. Beth Emet is in Evanston, and we should support Evanston the reparations movement. We should follow the Union for Reform Judaism and the Religious Action Center in their support of H.R. 40 and S. 40.