

## 🌀 CHAPTER TWO: FLAME!

### A Brief History of the Black Reparations Movement in the U.S.

Although exposed to the subject five decades ago, I have been actively working on issues involving reparations since 1975, at a time when the topic was not popular, was on the fringes, and was not fashionable. It was a time when one would be branded as a militant (which I was) or a revolutionary (which I was) or just plain crazy, which I most definitely was not. So, it gives me much pleasure today that some of the leading minds in this country and around the world — scholars, historians, economists, attorneys, sociologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, politicians, and more, domestically and internationally — are promoting the right to, and need for, reparations.

I am pleased to have “graduated” from speaking on the issue of reparations in church basements and Black Nationalist and left-leaning forums, to have been on the reparations circuits of law schools and universities since 2018 — speaking at Yale Law School, Harvard Law School, University of Pennsylvania Law School, New York University Law School, Howard Law School, Columbia Law School, Elon Law School, Georgetown Law School, Boston College of Law, College of William and Mary, Tulaloo College, and more. I’ve addressed the issue of reparations in testimonies before Congress, the Maryland legislature, the DC City Council, the U.S. Helsinki Commission, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the California Reparations Task Force, and before countless professional and grassroots organizations. I don’t share this to impress, but to impress upon you that both the public at large as well as government entities are hungry for information and knowledge about reparations, and that it is an issue whose time has come.

Despite, or perhaps because of, today’s surge in attention to this issue of longstanding import, I feel it critical that we all understand that the demand for reparations in the U.S. for unpaid labor and terrorism during the enslavement era and post-slavery discrimination is not novel or new and did not begin in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The claim did not drop from the sky with Ta-Nehisi Coates’ brilliant *Atlantic* article “The Case for Black Reparations” or from Randall Robinson’s impassioned book *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*, both of which galvanized the issue in different decades and thrust it into the national conversation. Talk about reparations did not start with Nikole Hannah-Jones’ article in the *New York Times* or because of threads on Twitter.

Indeed, there has been no substantial period of time where the call for redress has been neglected.

Two of the first formal records of petitions for reparations in the U.S. that were pursued and won came from formerly enslaved Black women: Belinda Sutton Royall and Henrietta Wood, who successfully sued their former slaveholders’ estates — Belinda in Massachusetts and Henrietta in Kentucky.

At the end of the Civil War, newly freed Black leaders worked closely with General Sherman in fashioning the concept of 40 acres which he incorporated in his Special Field Order #15, only to have the critical compensatory provision stripped by President Andrew Johnson.

Following the abolition of enslavement the U.S. government at the federal, state, and local levels perpetuated, condoned, and profited from policies and practices that continued to brutalize and disadvantage Blacks, including the black codes and convict leasing, the peonage and sharecropping systems, the denials of the benefits of the Homestead Act and the G.I. Bill, the redlining, the gerrymandering, the unequal education, the health disparities, the

racial wealth gap, and the disproportionate targeted treatment at the hands of the criminal punishment system.

In 1898 Callie House and Rev. Isaiah Dickerson spearheaded the first mass-based Reparations Movement in the U.S., the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief Bounty and Pension Association. Its dual mission was to organize mutual aid for its members and to pass federal pension legislation that would compensate formerly enslaved persons. The organization embraced over 300,000 dues-paying members, seeking compensation from federal agencies in the form of pensions for the aging persons formerly held in enslavement and their surviving spouses, caregivers, and heirs. Callie House was targeted, wrongfully convicted, and imprisoned for a year and a day on bogus mail fraud charges in 1917 for her grassroots organizing work.

On the heels of House's movement was Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which galvanized hundreds of thousands of Black people. That movement also was destabilized by government forces and Garvey was unjustly imprisoned and deported to his birth country of Jamaica. One of his followers — later to be known as Queen Mother Audley Moore, born in Louisiana in 1898 — championed the cause of reparations throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, being perhaps the most vocal Black Nationalist and Pan-Africanist advocate for reparations during the 1950s and '60s. In both 1957 and 1959 she presented petitions to the UN against genocide and for self-determination and land and was active in every major Reparations Movement until her transition to the ancestral realm in 1996 at age 97.

Malcolm X talked about the concept of reparations in his speeches. Martin Luther King, Jr. proposed a "Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged," which emphasized redress for both the historical victimization and exploitation of Blacks as well as their present-

day degradation. Consistently, the Nation of Islam's publications *Muhammad Speaks* and later *The Final Call* demanded that the U.S. exempt Black people from all taxation as long as we are deprived of equal justice. The religious organization has long called for the establishment of a separate territory which former enslavers are obligated to financially support for at least 20 years. And as earlier illuminated, in 1966 the Black Panther Party listed the issue of payback for slave labor and the overdue debt of 40 acres and a mule as point number three of their Ten-Point Program.

In March 1968 the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika proclaimed in its Declaration of Independence, "We claim no rights from the United States of America, other than those rights belonging to oppressed people anywhere in the world, and these include the right to damages, reparations, due us for the grievous injuries sustained by ourselves and our ancestors by reason of United States' lawlessness."

In April 1969 the *Black Manifesto* was adopted at the National Black Economic Development Conference, which included a demand that white churches and synagogues pay \$500,000,000 in reparations to Blacks in the U.S., routed as only the beginning of the amount owed. The following month civil rights activist James Forman interrupted Sunday service at the Riverside Church in New York to announce the reparations demand from his *Black Manifesto*.

In 1972 the National Black Political Convention in Gary, Indiana adopted the Anti-Depression Program of the Republic of New Afrika. It was an act authorizing the payment of a sum of money in reparations for slavery and a negotiating commission between representatives of the U.S. and the RNA to determine kind, dates and other details of paying reparations. The Mississippi Loyalist Delegation to the Democratic National Convention accepted the Anti-Depression Program that same year.

In addition to those groups already mentioned, from the 1960s through the 1990s just about every militant Black organization had the issue of reparations as part of their platform in some way, shape, form, or fashion, including the African People's Socialist Party, whose African National Reparations Organization spearheaded annual Reparations Tribunals, the December 12<sup>th</sup> Movement which mobilized internationally, the Washington, DC-based People's Organization, the National Black United Front, the New Afrikan People's Organization, the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, the National Conference of Black Lawyers, the Black Radical Congress, and more.

**B**road national attention to the call for reparations for descendants of Africans enslaved in the U.S. unquestionably accelerated with the 1987 founding of N'COBRA. The spark for its founding emanated from a September 1987 conference on Race and the Constitution at Harvard Law School, spearheaded by the National Conference of Black Lawyers (NCBL). Reparations had always been part of Black Nationalist and Pan-Africanist agendas, but now there was interest from a Black legal organization, fueled by receptiveness from Adjoa Aiyetoro, a key NCBL leader.

Aiyetoro invited Imari Obadele, President of the Republic of New Afrika, Chokwe Lumumba, co-founder of the New Afrikan People's Organization, and me, along with economist Richard America, to address the issue of the constitutionality of reparations on a panel at Harvard and to discuss whether a U.S. constitutional amendment was needed to effectuate reparations. The three of us long-standing champions in the New Afrikan Independence Movement jointly concluded that there was no need to amend the Constitution because the basis for the Black Nation's claim for reparations already existed within the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment: Section 1: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude . . . shall exist within the United States.

. . . Section 2: Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation." Our papers from that conference were later compiled in a small, power-packed, lengthy-titled paperback, reprinted in this book's Appendix, *Reparations Yes!: The Legal and Political Reasons Why New Afrikans – Black People in the U.S., Should be Paid Now for the Enslavement of our Ancestors and for War Against Us After Slavery.*

Our presentations both at the Harvard convening and in our co-authored 1987 book were replete with historical precedents for reparations, New Afrikan Political Science, and analyses of international law including our revolutionary fervor promoting the right to self-determination. Indeed, we felt the issue of self-determination for the descendants of Africans held as slaves in the U.S. to be key and central to a reparatory justice remedy. After the enslavement era Black people never had the opportunity to decide what our future would hold, with full appreciation of our options and reparations to put our choices into reality. Would we repatriate back to Africa? If so, how? Would we settle in the independent Haiti Republic or somewhere else in the diaspora? Would we accept the U.S. offer of 14<sup>th</sup> amendment citizenship into the new white nation it was developing and strive to make a multiracial democracy real? Due to severed homeland ties, would we plant our own flag in the ground in this country that we worked and built, negotiate with Native peoples, and establish our own independent Black Nation on soil claimed by the U.S.?

Our theory was that a reparations settlement must include the manifestation of each of these options through a national plebiscite, inclusive of both direct and group benefits. For those who wish to repatriate, we wrote that they should have sufficient resources to make that reintegration a reality, as well as for those who seek to emigrate elsewhere. For those who wish to force this country to respect our rights as full citizens, that option must be accompanied

by transformative changes in policies and practices, closure of the Black/white wealth gap, elimination of educational and health disparities, cessation of mass incarceration disproportionately impacting Black people, and release of Black political prisoners and prisoners of war. And for those who wish to establish an independent New Afrikan nation-state on this soil, following the model of five states in the Deep South or elsewhere, should likewise have the economic resources and political diplomatic recognition to make that self-determination choice a reality.

Thus, the issue of reparations for Brothers Imari and Chokwe and myself was nothing new, special, or separate from what we had been engaged in for years as part of the New Afrikan Independence Movement, but what would come next and how it was handled was pivotal to the momentum we see today.

Black Reparations Commission President Dorothy Benton Lewis – also known as Oravouche (and later crowned as Queen Mother Nana Yaa Asantewaa Ohema), who worked closely with the Republic of New Afrika and the African National Reparations Organization – had earlier witnessed firsthand while growing up in Fairbanks, Alaska, the movement around the Native Alaskan Land Claims reparations issue. She envisioned a similar mobilization for African descendants in the U.S. I often referred to Dorothy as a “Reparations Expert Extraordinaire,” as she brought a renewed level of vigor, relentless advocacy, and professionalism to the movement for reparations in the U.S. Working closely with the RNA and its Foreign Affairs Task Force, she urged Brother Imari to convene a national gathering on reparations to discuss how to increase its exposure in the U.S. and make the issue of reparations a household word.

I credit Brother Imari Obadele for downplaying the New Afrikan independence politics outlined in *Reparations Yes!* and agreeing to issue the call for reparations-loving people to convene in Washington

to discuss, among other agenda items, dealing with an independent Black foreign policy, how to move the issue of reparations for Black people in the U.S. forward. The memorandum of formal invitees to this historic gathering included Dr. James Turner (Chair and founder, Department of Africana Studies, Cornell University); Sonia Sanchez (poet and author); Dorothy Benton Lewis (founder, Black Reparations Commission); Omali Yeshitela (Chair, African People’s Socialist Party); Chokwe Lumumba and Ahmed Obafemi (founders, New Afrikan People’s Organization); Sylvia Hill and Gay McDougall (Southern African Support Project); Abubadika (Sonny Carson); Haywood Burns (NCBL and Dean, CUNY Law School); Omowale Satterwhite (The Community Development Institute in Palo Alto, California); Dr. Manning Marable; Aisha Muhammad; Dr. Ron Walters; Adjoa Aiyetoro (NCBL); Bobby Seale (co-founder, Black Panther Party); Elombe Brath (Patrice Lumumba Coalition); MS State Senator Henry Kirksey; Askia Muhammad (Nation of Islam); Nzinga Warfield-Coppock, and of course myself, clad in the ideological armor of the Republic of New Afrika. Brother Vincent Godwin (later known as Kalonji Olusegun) chaired the five organizing meetings. Not everyone was able to travel to DC for that first meeting and, of course, there were countless others who did attend the organizing sessions, particularly many activists in the DC area, who were not mentioned above but played pivotal roles over the years.

Obadele could have demanded that the diverse organizations and individuals he summoned to Washington had to refer to Black people as “New Afrikans.” But he didn’t. He could have demanded that the only way forward must be “nation-to-nation” reparations. But he didn’t. We all could have succumbed to the very present U.S. government–orchestrated COINTELPRO counterintelligence program that was tearing Black and progressive organizations apart. But we did not.

The higher ground was taken, and Obadele made the unifying national call for a mass-based gathering of activists not beholden to any specific ideology, and it was out of that historic September 26, 1987, gathering that N'COBRA was born, bringing diverse groups under one umbrella.

It was the perfect storm. The Black Power Movement was open and receptive to a broad-based approach to advance the issue of reparations. The Black activist legal community sanctioned the largely Black Nationalist effort. And we were all invigorated by movement of the Civil Liberties Act in Congress, which would become law the following year, granting reparations to Japanese Americans. And so it was in the throes of this fertile environment that N'COBRA picked up the long-standing mantle of justice, reinvigorated the demand for reparations for descendants of Africans enslaved in the U.S., and broadened the concept through massive public education, accompanied by legislative and litigation-based initiatives.

Encouraged by the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 which granted reparations to Japanese Americans, and in response to the dogged persistence of a Detroit constituent known as "Reparations Ray" Jenkins, Congressman Conyers expressed interest in introducing a reparations bill for the enslavement era and its vestiges in Congress. He felt the recent passage of the reparations act for Japanese Americans, which started with a commission to study the issue, would be a strong precedent for Black people.

Was everyone in this latest iteration of the Reparations Movement in one accord with a reparations study bill? Absolutely not. There were heated differences of opinion, with many in the Movement questioning the need for continued study – saying that it was time for “reparations now!” Differences are not new. There were differences within the Japanese American community as to their strategy for

reparations. There were differences within Jewish communities as to strategies. I'm sure there were differences within Native American Indigenous communities as well. The key to success, however, lies in how differences are handled. Do they devolve into negative personal attacks, or are they handled with respectful discussion and analysis?

After invigorating principled debate, and an agreement to respectfully disagree by some, the majority strategic decision was made to work closely with Congressman Conyers and his staff in fashioning federal legislation. This resulted in the 1989 introduction of the Commission to Study Reparations Proposals for African Americans Act, later to be numbered during each Congress as H.R. 40, in remembrance of the thwarted 19<sup>th</sup> century promise to provide freed Blacks 40 acres and a mule. In essence, Representative Conyers' study commission bill provided the cover and vehicle to have a public policy discussion on the issue of reparations, not only in the Congress of the United States, but across the country as well.

As chair of N'COBRA's Legislative Commission during those early years, I found that the approach proved to be powerfully strategic. Its beauty was that the H.R. 40 study commission bill was a less threatening and much easier approach through which to garner the much-needed support for the concept of reparations for Black people that had been lacking in America across the country. Indeed, it was the perfect education and mobilization tool that served to fertilize the ground for later broader mainstream acceptance.

From 1989 through the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, N'COBRA chapter members and supporters influenced several state legislatures and scores of city councils across the country to introduce and/or pass reparations-themed legislation or resolutions endorsing H.R. 40. In 1990 the Louisiana House of Reparations passed a resolution in support of reparations. In 1991 State Senator Bill Owens introduced legislation into the Massachusetts Senate providing for

the payment of reparations for slavery, the slave trade, and individual discrimination against the people of African descent born or residing in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In 2001 the California State Assembly passed a resolution in support of reparations. Also in 2001, a bill was introduced in the New York State Assembly by Assemblyman Charles Barron to create a Commission to Quantify the Debt Owed to African Americans.

N'COBRA chapters throughout the country encouraged city councils to endorse H.R. 40 with the passage of successful resolutions in Pine Bluff, AK; the CA City Councils of Alameda County, Berkeley, Compton, Foster City, Inglewood, Los Angeles, Oakland, East Palo Alto, and San Francisco; the District of Columbia; Atlanta, GA; Chicago and Evanston, IL; Baltimore, MD; Detroit, MI; Jackson and Claiborne County, MS; St. Louis, MO; the N.J. City Councils of Camden, Passaic County, Paterson, and Newark; Cleveland, OH; Philadelphia, PA; Dallas and Fort Worth, TX; Burlington, VT; and Richmond, VA. There are likely others that were not captured in this listing, but it is significant to note that these legislative mobilizations occurred over two decades before candidates vying for the 2020 Democratic nomination took center stage.

The call for reparations was resurrected from the embers of the militant fringes to include Black professional and fraternal organizations, including NCBL, the National Bar Association, the National Association of Black Political Scientists, the National Association of Black Social Workers, the NAACP, Delta Sigma Theta, and Sigma Gamma Ro, amongst other civil organizations and religious groups.

Individuals started to go to the public, via writing and activism. Protesters demonstrated in the streets, holding marches and rallies across America. Dorothy Benton Lewis, Randall Robinson, Mary Frances Berry, Raymond Winbush, Robert Westley, and others wrote books and articles. Reparations advocates led by Attorney Deadria

Farmer-Paellmann challenged corporations that benefited from the profits made from the trafficking of human beings. N'COBRA's Adjoa Aiyetoro spearheaded the organization's Litigation Strategies Committee, where we developed the five injury areas for redress touted today, of peoplehood/nationhood, education, criminal punishment, wealth/poverty, and health.

In 2015 N'COBRA elaborated on its five injury areas as follows:

1. ***Peoplehood/Nationhood:*** The destruction of African peoples' culture and the infringement of the larger culture upon Black people of African descent in the United States and the prior colonies. Jim Crow and ongoing discrimination have resulted in a denial of our right to openly express our culture, appropriation of our culture, and denial of the right and resources necessary to be a self-determining people. Throughout this country's history African descendants' efforts to be self-determining people have been met with violence and destruction as evidenced by the untold numbers of Black townships, such as Greenwood, Oklahoma; Rosewood, Florida; and Wilmington, North Carolina – townships ultimately destroyed because of the surrounding white community's jealousy and need to suppress models that refuted their claim of white superiority.
2. ***Education:*** The denial of our right to an education started in slavery with criminal sanctions imposed on our enslaved ancestors who learned, and anyone who taught them, to read or write. Maintenance of dual, separate but unequal systems from slavery to the present provided an inferior education in schools with predominately Black students of African ancestry. Federal funds were often provided schools despite this dual education system – one predominately Caucasian and the other for predominately Black students of African ancestry.

medical treatment for critical health care symptoms which have resulted in higher rates of death for Black people of African descent compared to Caucasians exhibiting these symptoms. Finally, this injury area includes an examination of post-slavery stress syndrome, a developing area of investigation by Black mental health professionals of African descent.

The strategy advanced by N'COBRA over 30 years ago achieved its goal of making reparations a household word, largely due to the tenacity of early N'COBRA leaders such as Dorothy Lewis, Johnita Obadele, Kalonji (Vince Godwin) and Kupenda Olusegun, Adjoa Aiyetoro, Kibibi Tyeimba, this author, and many, many more. It is now past time to bring that household word into reality.

I am also a proud member of the inaugural cohort of Commissioners of the National African American Reparations Commission. The group, convened by Dr. Ron Daniels, President of the Institute of the Black World 21<sup>st</sup> Century, revisited the strategy of the 1989 Reparations Study Commission bill and proposed to Congressman Conyers that the legislation be updated from a mere study to a remedy bill. This effort was conceived of and led by my fellow Commissioner Kamm Howard, then Co-Chair of N'COBRA. Thus, in 2016, H.R. 40 was revised to also incorporate the actual development of reparation proposals, now titled the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act.

After the retirement of Congressman John Conyers, the bill's reins were picked up by Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, whose tenacity catapulted the legislation's co-sponsors to an all-time high, engineered a momentous hearing in the House Judiciary Committee, and successfully moved the bill out of committee, primed for a vote on the House Floor. H.R. 40 achieved a whopping 217 committed votes as of September 2022, testament to the dogged persistence of

3. **Criminal Punishment:** The enslavement of African peoples necessitated the development of a dual punishment system that continues to exist in the U.S. This dual system punishes Black people of African descent more harshly than Caucasians for the same conduct. Examples of the dual system were found from the period of enslavement through the Jim Crow era. The ongoing discrimination is most vividly evident with the continuation of disparate punishments for crack and powder cocaine (Black people of African ancestry are more frequently charged with possession of crack cocaine and certified to the federal system where a Caucasian person would have to possess 100 times more powder cocaine to receive the same punishment).

4. **Wealth/Poverty:** The wealth gap between Black people of African descent and Caucasians created during the enslavement of African peoples has been sustained; confiscation of land and other forms of wealth continue up to present day. Black people of African descent were forced into poverty through enslavement, Jim Crow, and continuing discrimination in employment, housing, and other economic areas.

5. **Health:** The focus is on physical and mental health. Health knowledge of enslaved Africans was appropriated and enslaved Africans functioned as non-paid health care providers for others; Black people of African descent were used as subjects for torturous health experiments (e.g., the Tuskegee Syphilis Study); and Black people of African descent were denied quality health care during and post-slavery. The health injury area also includes the continuing discrimination in the provision of health care, including the disproportionately higher rate of closures of hospitals serving Black communities; lack of access to health insurance to provide affordable access to health care; the failure to validate health care protocols for Black people of African descent; and the failure to provide the appropriate

then N'COBRA Legislative Commission Co-Chair Kennis Henry, Dreisen Heath of Human Rights Watch, and Raina Batrice of Batrice and Associates. A companion legislative bill, S. 40, was introduced in the Senate by Cory Booker. State and local governments began to take center stage in the fight for reparations.

Following the ascendancy of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency, worldwide attention to the murder of George Floyd and the re-normalization of white supremacy, 2020 Presidential candidates for the Democratic nomination became vocal on the issue of reparations and a proliferation of new organizations and reparations initiatives emerged on the scene. These included Black-led organizations, allied organizations, faith-based groups, descendant advocacy initiatives, and more. The Movement for Black Lives incorporated the issue of reparations as part of its platform. Unfortunately, and reminiscent of past COINTELPRO tactics, Internet-savvy groups began engaging in behavior and tactics criticized by many as disruptive and divisive.

A plethora of major faith-based entities passed resolutions on the issue of reparations, including, but not limited to, the National Council of Churches, the United Church of Christ, dioceses of the Episcopal Church, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, the Union for Reform Judaism, Network Lobby for Catholic Social Justice, and more. The Virginia and Princeton Theological Seminaries, as well as the Jesuits, also earmarked monies. In November 2021 the Virginia Episcopal Diocese agreed to spend \$10 million on reparations because of the church's moral complicity. The U.S. Conference of Mayors has endorsed reparations, along with Amalgamated Bank and the Players Coalition of professional athletes, coaches, and owners across leagues. Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream has issued a challenge to other corporations to step up to the plate in vocal support of reparations.

Since 2020, reparations at the state and local levels have taken center stage. California established a state-wide Reparations Commission Task Force, patterned largely after H.R. 40, which is currently engaged in historic hearings. Evanston, Illinois, has earmarked monies from its legal cannabis industry to fund reparations initiatives in the city. Chicago passed a reparations ordinance for victims of police torture in 2015, and since 2020, jurisdictions across the country have passed legislation or ballot initiatives establishing reparations commissions, task forces, or official pronouncements to examine the history of the enslavement era and its vestiges in their own backyards and think about repair. Examples include the cities of Asheville, Carboro, and Durham, NC; Providence, RI; Amherst and Boston, MA; St. Paul, MN; Denver, CO; Detroit, MI; Los Angeles, Sacramento, and Stockton, CA; Austin, TX; Tallahassee, OK; Burlington, VT; Greenbelt, MD; Kansas City, MO, the District of Columbia, and more. Slavery Disclosure Ordinances have been enacted in 16 jurisdictions, revealing historical ties to the enslavement era by financial institutions.

Although my primary focus is obtaining reparations for the enslavement era and its living legacies impacting Black people in the U.S., it is important to recognize that the pursuit for reparations in the U.S. is also part of the international movement for reparations. The descendants of Africans living in Canada, Barbados, Haiti, Jamaica, Brazil, and other areas of the diaspora are also due reparations from their particular European colonizer. Colonized African countries are due reparations as well, as are subjugated African descendants living in Europe. As such, I have worked closely with supporters of reparations throughout the world, recognizing that the success of the movement for reparations for diasporic Africans anywhere advances the movement for reparations by Africans and African descendants everywhere.



I am thrilled that my quest to have reparations seen as a legitimate concept for Black people, beginning in those early-'70s teen years, is today becoming a reality. And while I wholeheartedly agree that cash payments remain an important and necessary component of any claim for damages, my mantra is, "the harms from the enslavement era and beyond were multi-faceted, thus the remedies must be so as well. A reparations settlement can be fashioned in as many ways as necessary to equitably address the countless manifestations of injury sustained from the enslavement era and its continuing vestiges and living legacies that collectively comprise a crime against humanity."

It is critical that we create and power our own stories and narratives. As such, decades prior to popular international articulations about reparations, I cobbled together the following definition, utilizing it in my many speeches and writings:

Reparations are forms of compensation provided to those who have suffered human rights abuses or other forms of widespread systemic injustices, or to their descendants, usually in the aftermath of war, enslavement, or other forms of gross injustice. It is the act or process of repairing or restoring. In the context of Black people in the U.S., I submit the quest for reparations essentially constitutes four elements:

- 1) The formal acknowledgment of historical wrong and an official unfettered apology for the dehumanization and atrocities of the enslavement era and its vestiges and living legacies. The term unfettered is critical. Symbolic resolutions were passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate apologizing for enslavement and Jim Crow. However, the 2009 bill passed by the Senate contained a disclaimer that the apology could not be used to support a legal claim against the U.S.

- 2) The recognition that the injury has continued throughout the years, and still manifests today. This provision is pertinent. The harms did not end with the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment in 1865. The harms from the enslavement era and its living legacies are generational, continuing today.
- 3) The commitment to redress by the federal government which sanctioned the enslavement and subsequent vestiges, and by states, cities, corporations and industries, academic and religious institutions, and private estates which continued the injustices and enjoyed unjust enrichment.
- 4) The actual compensation/redress, in whatever form or forms are agreed upon. Agreement is pertinent. It is unacceptable for the offending party to dictate the terms of the redress.

Shortly after the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the United Nations General Assembly formally addressed the issue of reparations in its December 16, 2005, "Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law." That Resolution identified five standards that any effective reparations settlement should include: restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition.

Restitution, wherever possible, should restore the victim to the original situation before the gross violation of international human rights law or serious violations of international humanitarian law occurred. Restitution was defined to include restoration of liberty; enjoyment of human rights, identity, family life, and citizenship; return to one's place of residence; restoration of employment; and return of property.

Compensation was cited as any economically assessable damage, as appropriate and proportional to the gravity of the violation and the circumstances of each case. Such damages were described to include physical or mental harm, lost opportunities, loss of earnings and earning potential, moral damage, and costs for services.

Rehabilitation was defined to include medical and psychological care, and legal and social services.

Satisfaction entailed the cessation of continuing violations, truth-telling, search for the disappeared and the identities of the abducted, assistance in the recovery, identification and reburial of bodies, restoration of dignity and reputation, public apology and acceptance of responsibility, sanctions against liable parties, commemorations and tributes to victims, and truthful accountings of harms.

Finally, the UN Resolution asserts that Guarantees of Non-Repetition should include effective civilian control of military and security forces and that they abide by international standards; an independent judiciary; protection of those media and legal and health-care professions; law enforcement training, codes of conduct and human rights education; prevention and monitoring of social conflicts; and review and reform of laws that contribute to or allow gross violations of human rights.

These very helpful worldwide standards for reparations are increasingly becoming part of the domestic U.S. reparations nomenclature. And as African descendants worldwide evolve in our understandings of what reparatory justice means for us, such definitions will necessarily be refined, honed, and tiered to our respective realities.

I am proud to be part of a very specific reparations genealogy, having sat at the feet of Black radical activist legends. Queen Mother

Audley Moore has been crowned as the undisputed Mother of the modern-era Reparations Movement in the U.S. Although the genius and role RNA President Imari Obadele played is largely absent from the popular annals of reparations lore, he has been publicly acknowledged as the Movement's Father. And the many contributions of my colleague, now ancestor, Dorothy Benton Lewis, a quiet and humble reparations advocate hailing from Alaska and also crowned as a Queen Mother, has yet to be written.

I consciously and consistently uplift the memories and call out the names in libation of a few of the reparatoinist luminaries I worked with, now ancestors, who fanned the flames for the dynamism we see today: Queen Mother Moore, Imari Obadele, Chokwe Lumumba, and Dorothy Lewis; as well as remembrances of the reparatoinist spirits of Belinda Sutton Royall, Henrietta Wood, Callie House, Isaiah Dickerson, Marcus Garvey, Elijah Muhammad, Reparations Ray Jenkins, Chokwe Lumumba, Ahmed Obafemi, Christopher Alston, Dara Abubakari, Charshee McIntyre, Hannibal Afrik, Njeri Alghanee, Kalonji Olusegun, Kwame Afoh, Milton McGriff, Ronald Walters, Herman Ferguson, Omowale Kefing, Earline Arikpo, Nia Kuumba, Marilyn Killingham, Conrad Worrill, Hodari Ali, Askia Muhammad, MA State Senator Bill Owens, Congressman John Conyers, and so many countless others, most of whom may not have graced the pages of history books, but upon whose ancestral shoulders we firmly stand in our long-standing pursuit for reparatory justice.