

REPARATIONS AND THE NATIONAL COALITION OF BLACKS FOR REPARATIONS IN AMERICA (N'COBRA)



An Information Sheet

What is Reparations?

Reparations is a process of repairing, healing and restoring a people injured because of their group identity and in violation of their fundamental human rights by governments or corporations. Those groups that have been injured have the right to obtain from the government or corporation responsible for the injuries that which they need to repair and heal themselves. In addition to being a demand for justice, it is a principle of international human rights law. As a remedy, it is similar to the remedy for damages in domestic law that holds a person responsible for injuries suffered by another when the infliction of the injury violates domestic law. Examples of groups that have obtained reparations include Jewish victims of the Nazi Holocaust, Japanese Americans interned in concentration camps in the United States during WWII, Alaska Natives for land, labor, and resources taken, victims of the massacre in Rosewood, Florida and their descendants, Native Americans as a remedy for violations of treaty rights, and political dissenters in Argentina and their descendants.

What is N'COBRA?

The National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America is a mass-based coalition organized for the sole purpose of obtaining reparations for African descendants in the United States. N'COBRA's founding meeting, September 26, 1987, was convened for the purpose of broadening the base of support for the long-standing reparations movement. Organizational founders of N'COBRA include the National Conference of Black Lawyers, the New Afrikan Peoples Organization, and the Republic of New Afrika. N'COBRA has individual members and organizational affiliates. It has chapters throughout the U. S. and in Ghana and London. It is directed nationally by a board of directors. Its work is organized through nine national commissions: Economic Development, Human Resources, Legal Strategies, Legislation, Information and Media, Membership and Organizational Development, International Affairs, Youth and Education.

The mission of the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA) is to win full Reparations for Black African Descendants residing in the United States and its territories for the genocidal war against Africans that created the TransAtlantic Slave "Trade," Chattel Slavery, Jim Crow and Chattel Slavery's continuing vestiges (the Maafa). To that end, N'COBRA shall organize and mobilize all strata of these Black communities into an effective mass- based reparations movement. N'COBRA shall also serve as a coordinating body for the reparations effort in the United States. Further, through its leadership role in the reparations movement within the United States and its territories, N'COBRA recognizes reparations is a just demand for all African peoples and shall join with others in building the international reparations movement.

In September 2003, N'COBRA formed a 501(c)(3) corporation, N'COBRA Legal Defense, Research and Education Fund. The mission of this 501(c)(3) is to develop and implement projects to educate and seek reparations for Africans and People of African descendant. As a 501(c)(3) it will not engage in lobbying which is one of the primary focuses of the parent organization, N'COBRA.

Why are African Descendants entitled to reparations?

The Trans-Atlantic Slave "Trade" and chattel slavery, more appropriately called the Holocaust of Enslavement or Maafa,¹ was a crime against humanity. Millions of Africans were brutalized, murdered, raped and tortured. They were torn from their families in Africa, kidnapped and lost family and community associations. African peoples in the United States and the prior colonies were denied the right to maintain their language, spiritual practices and normal family relations, always under the threat of being torn from newly created families at the whim of the "slave owner." Chattel slavery lasted officially from 1619 to 1865. It was followed by 100 years of government led and supported denial of equal and humane treatment including Black Codes, convict lease, sharecropping, peonage, and Jim Crow practices of separate and unequal accommodations. African descendants continue to be denied rights of self-determination, inheritance, and full participation in the United States government and society. The laws and practices in the United States continue to treat African peoples in a manner similar to slavery - maintaining dual systems in virtually every area of life including punishment, health care, education and wealth, maintaining the myths of White superiority and African and African descendants' inferiority.

Is an apology necessary?

A necessary requirement of all forms of reparations is an acknowledgment by the government or corporation that it committed acts that violated the human rights of those making the claim for reparations. Some groups may want an explicit apology; however, neither the acknowledgement nor apology is sufficient - there must be material forms of reparations that accompany the acknowledgment or apology.

What forms should reparations take?

Reparations can be in as many forms as necessary to equitably (fairly) address the many forms of injury caused by chattel slavery and its continuing vestiges. The material forms of reparations include cash payments, land, economic development, and repatriation resources particularly to those who are descendants of enslaved Africans. Other forms of reparations for Black people of African descent include funds for scholarships and community development; creation of multi-media depictions of the history of Black people of African descent and textbooks for educational institutions that tell the story from the African descendants' perspective; development of historical monuments and museums; the return of artifacts and art to appropriate people or institutions; exoneration of political prisoners; and, the elimination of laws and practices that maintain dual systems in the major areas of life including the punishment system, health, education and the financial/economic system. The forms of reparations received should improve the lives of African descendants in the United States for future generations to come; foster economic, social and political parity; and allow for full rights of self-determination.

Who should receive reparations?

Within the broadest definition, all Black people of African descent in the United States should receive reparations in the form of changes in or elimination of laws and practices that allow them to be treated differently and less well than White people. For example, ending racial profiling and discrimination in the provision of health care, providing scholarship and community development funds for Black people of African descent, and supporting processes of self determination will not only benefit descendants of enslaved Africans, but all African descendant peoples in the United States who because of their color are

¹ This is a Swahili term meaning disaster that has been used for a number of years to describe these conditions and has been used most notably in the writings and presentations of Marimba Ani, Ph.D., noted African-centered anthropologist and activist.

victims of the vestiges of slavery. This is similar to the Rosewood, Florida reparations package, where some forms of reparations were provided only to persons who descended from those who were injured, died and lost their homes and other forms were made available to all Black people of African descent in Florida.

Who must make reparations?

N'COBRA seeks reparations at this time from two groups: governments and corporations. There are individuals, families, and religious institutions that directly benefited from slavery in the United States, and who, if acting in good faith, would contribute to reparations funds for use in assisting in the reparations process. However, we choose to focus on government and corporations because of their particular role in the horrific tragedies of chattel slavery and the continuing vestiges of slavery we live with today. In addition, we recognize that all White people to some extent have benefited from slavery and the underlying lie of White Supremacy that allowed it to exist for two and one-half centuries in the United States. This lie has led to what is commonly called "white skin privilege" and results in significant benefits to White people. The process of reparations would include creating ways to change the culture of "white skin privilege" that was created to sustain chattel slavery and its continuing vestiges.

How will the United States and its residents benefit?

Reparations are a way of making peace with the past. Reparations will allow United States' residents to make peace with a significant part of this country's shameful past and end the intergenerational trauma of its current effects. It will allow the story of the Maafa (The Trans Atlantic Slave "Trade" and chattel slavery), Jim Crow and ongoing racial discrimination and violence against Black people of African descent to be accurately recorded and inclusive of the African descendants' perspective. It will demonstrate the link between chattel slavery and the current social, health, economic and political status of African descendants and therefore destroy the myth of White Supremacy. In setting the record straight and devising and implementing reparations packages to aid in healing African descendants, the nation as a whole will become stronger. Truth and atonement are essential ingredients for a just and peaceful society. Although some may assert that reparations will increase racial divisiveness, this does not have to be the result. Indeed, it should decrease racial divisiveness because it is an acknowledgment that allows us to go forward rather than remain stuck in the pain of the present that is caused by the unresolved pain of the past.

What strategies does N'COBRA utilize and endorse?

Since its inception N'COBRA has embraced public education, mobilization, organization, and more recently, transformation, to obtain reparations. It has organized town hall meetings and rallies in cities throughout the United States, bringing long-time reparations advocates, the newly converted, and skeptics together to talk about the necessity of reparations to obtain racial justice. Its members and leaders have participated in conferences, radio and television programs and people's tribunals discussing conditions that require reparations and strategies for moving forward. N'COBRA utilizes a periodic membership newsletter "Reparations Now!," a quarterly news magazine "Black Reparations Times" and a website, www.NCOBRA.org, to inform the public about the Reparations movement.

N'COBRA supports legislative initiatives. In 1988, Detroit Advisory Board member, Reparations Ray Jenkins, encouraged Congressman John Conyers to introduce a Reparations Bill. In Washington, the DC Chapter held public meetings to discuss the drafts and provided comments on the drafts to Congressman Conyers. N'COBRA remains committed to the passage of H.R. 40 although Congress has not yet favorably acted upon it. N'COBRA puts this in context: the Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Bill took 12 years to pass in Congress, a bill much less contentious than H.R.40. N'COBRA has organized a number of legislative lobby days on Capitol Hill during which people lobbied Members of Congress to support H.R. 40. Buttressed by this success, N'COBRA's Legislative Commission initiated, A Year of Black Presence

lobbying initiative, inspired by "The Debt" by Randall Robinson. This project enhances N'COBRA's presence on Capitol Hill, by increasing the numbers of reparations supporters lobbying for the passage of H.R. 40.

N'COBRA also supports State and municipal legislative initiatives. Its members have participated in the successful efforts in Michigan, Louisiana, District of Columbia, California, Illinois, Ohio and other places to obtain resolutions in support of reparations initiatives.

N'COBRA, along with the Reparations Coordinating Committee and other organizations, is developing lawsuits that raise the issue of the legal right of African descendants to reparations based on the continuing vestiges of slavery. These lawsuits will focus on the many areas in which we as African people continue to suffer due to the legacy of slavery including health, wealth/poverty, education, self-determination and the imposition of criminal punishments.

N'COBRA engages in direct action to obtain reparations. Its leadership organized a highway slowdown on the Washington Metropolitan Area Beltway in the early 90s, and demonstrations in front of federal buildings. From these demonstrations it created Reparations Awareness Day on February 25. The Economic Development Commission initiated an annual demonstration on April 4, on which day people are asked to boycott school or work and engage in reparations education and mobilization activities. As a part of the Economic Development Commission's work Black Friday was developed in August 2003. People of African descent are encouraged to only patronize Black businesses on Fridays. Black businesses are asked to support Reparations, principles of cooperative economics, and a code of professional responsibility by which they agree to service their customers with the utmost integrity and quality of service. N'COBRA also joins in direct actions organized by other groups.

What is N'COBRA's relationship to the international reparations movement?

Although N'COBRA's primary focus is on obtaining reparations for African descendants in the United States, it is a part of the international movement for reparations. Under the leadership of its International Affairs Commission, N'COBRA works closely with Africans, African descendants and supporters of reparations for Africans and African descendants throughout the world. N'COBRA members were very active during the preparatory process for the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) and the Non-Governmental Organization Forum and government conference held in Durban, South Africa in 2001. N'COBRA leaders were in the leadership of the African and African Descendants Caucus formed during the WCAR preparatory process. N'COBRA leaders play a leading role in the International Front of Africans for Reparations (IFAR) formed at the African and African Descendants Conference in Bridgetown, Barbados in 2002. N'COBRA understands the status of Africans and African descendants in the United States, throughout the Diaspora, and on the Continent is based on the same or similar crimes against humanity. N'COBRA acknowledges that the success of the movement for reparations for Africans anywhere advances the movement for reparations for Africans and African descendants everywhere.

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