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U.S. Reparations for black American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS)

Introduction

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a quintessential adult educator and social justice advocate. The Highlander Research and Education Center has to its training credit Dr. King, Rosa Parks, and Septima Clark who, as attendees, learned strategies and models for adult literacy and civic engagement used to power the American Civil Rights movement. Dr. King was an explicit advocate for restorative justice for black American citizens via reparations (Coates, 2014). We share the common aims of human fulfillment and positive social change with the association. We also agree that AAACE's vision is operationalized in its mission to advocate for public policy and social change that expands adult growth and development, ultimately resulting in more productive and satisfying lives.

Our Purpose

It is with this aim in mind that we present our position on Reparations and Restorative Justice for black American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS). It is our stance that Americans harmed by the imposition of government-sanctioned slavery and its intergenerational negative impacts (e.g., Jim Crow segregation, Black Codes, white massacres, redlining, lynching, mass incarceration, and police brutality) can only be repaired when targeted socioeconomic recovery is established toward black ADOS and their families.

Historical Context

Congressional 20th-century advocacy for reparations took the form of legislation introduced in 1989 by the late Representative John Conyers, H.R. 40, which he repeatedly reintroduced in the House until his retirement in 2017. The current Presidential campaign has witnessed the deepest level of national engagement with the black reparations project since the Reconstruction Era (1866-1873); not since then have figures at such high levels of the government engaged in conversation about recompense planning on behalf of ADOS peoples. In fact, on June 19, 2019, the House Judiciary Committee held the first and only hearings on H.R. 40. Among those leading the current conversation and scholarship on reparations is William Darity who provided written testimony to the Judiciary Committee hearings, recommending significant revisions of H.R. 40 (Darity, 2019).

AAACE Historical Advocacy for Social Justice and Adult Civic Engagement

The AAACE traces its origins to 1921 when, under the auspices of the National Education Association (NEA), its earliest activities involved providing support to teachers of immigrants and those adults enrolled in formal school-based programs. The Association later expanded to non-formal community-based programs for adults who needed literacy skills, Adult Basic Education (ABE), and General Education Development (GED) instruction (Rose, 2008). The Association continues to frame its identity in connection to its broad base of adult education professionals involved in public policy advocacy, research, and inter-academic cooperation.

Under an independent structure, members of AAACE are better able to critique and police each other and function as gatekeepers, relative to the trajectory of the group's activities. Subsequently, the pillar of adult education relevant to social justice public policy formation and civic engagement remains viable.

Professional societies and their roles in the support of knowledge development and dissemination, through publications and conferences, have given both stability and legitimacy to the field of adult education. Moreover, through these associations, diverse voices of the practitioners and members are heard and afforded respect. However, such ambitions were not always realized.

Alain LeRoy Locke, born in 1886 during the post-reconstruction era, is a paramount figure in

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the negro adult education literature and became known as an essential leader in the cultural revolution known as the Harlem Renaissance (Guy, 1996). Under the auspices of the American Association for Adult Education (AAAE), in the mid-1930s, Locke was tasked with developing curriculum (called the Bronze Booklets) intended for African American adult education discussion and study groups (Guy & Brookfield, 2009). W.E.B. Du Bois was commissioned by Locke to be among the initial set of contributors to the project. However, the work entitled *The American Negro Creed* was thwarted. Due to what would be characterized as Du Bois' extreme evolution in ontological thought about the conditions of African American life, his contribution came to be viewed as too radical. His *Negro Creed*, "was censored by the Associates in Negro Folk Education (ANFE) and AAAE" thereby removing it from the adult education literature (p. 66). The authors revisit the dilemma of Du Bois via this position paper submission yet, we are not dissuaded. The danger of being *out-of-sight* in the larger discourse of adult education advocacy for the descendants of the formerly enslaved blacks is the reality that ADOS trauma and economic bottom-caste status in America will remain *out-of-mind*.

Racial Wealth Gaps and Negative Socioeconomic Projections

Without massive programmatic and economic infusion into the ADOS community, the collective net wealth of black Americans has been projected to be zero by the year 2053 (Rhinehart, 2019). The socio-economic condition of ADOS is not due to the group having a cultural undervaluation of education, as is often claimed. A more apt indicator of financial circumstance between white and black Americans is the wealth disparity between those groups (Hamilton & Darity Jr., 2017). By 2016, the mean difference in wealth between the average black and white households has been estimated to be \$800,000. With respect to the nexus between education and wealth, the median black household head with a college degree has two-thirds of the net worth of the median white household head who never finished high school.

A reparations initiative, directed for the benefit of black American descendants of slavery in the United States, can eliminate the immense gulf in black and white wealth. Darity contends that since the claim for legislative redress must be made on the United States government, the beginning date for the bill of particulars must be assigned to the founding of the Republic [1776], not the landing of enslaved persons [whom he refers to as native black Americans] at Jamestown, ca. 1619 (Pousoulides & Tong, 2019, para. 13).

COVID-19 Impacts and Public Health Disparities for ADOS

A contemporary testament to the continued legacy of negative disparate impact for ADOS during periods of national crisis is most saliently evidenced by the horrible rates of infection deaths among African Americans due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The harsh realities experienced by ADOS communities have again been laid bare for the world to see, revealing the abysmal wealth, employment, health care, housing gaps, as well as food insecurity, banking and finance, and broader social inequalities and indignities.

Research has shown, however, that mortality risk is still the case despite changed behaviors among black adults in their efforts to employ infection mitigation activities (e.g., wearing facemasks, stopped shaking hands and washed hands more frequently). African Americans have led other racial groups in their exercise of best practices to reduce COVID-19 infection (Elflein, 2020). However, when it comes to protective behaviors that require the economic means to make purchases (e.g., buy hand sanitizers, stockpile food, and other supplies) blacks fell behind all other social groups.

In early May, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported that in many Southern states like Alabama (48.1%), Georgia (49.6%), Louisiana (53.9%), the death rate for blacks from the coronavirus equals or exceeds that of whites. In the case of Alabama, at the time we are writing, no reported deaths are

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recorded for Native American, Asian, or Hispanic groups (CDC, 2020). Nationally, the available estimates indicate that the black rate of COVID-19 mortality is 2.2 times the Hispanic and Asian rates and 2.4 times the white rate (APM Lab 2020). We postulate that the legacy of slavery in the United States, economic injustice, and systematic anti-black racism have converged in the production of dreadful morbidity and mortality outcomes for ADOS in America.

ADOS Academic Achievement Gaps

Given a level of household income, blacks get more years of schooling and earn more credentials than whites (Mangino, 2010, 2014). Material disparities for ADOS also are reflected in US educational attainment outcomes. Hamilton (2019) identifies three anecdotal myths grounded in racist frameworks holding that black Americans are less industrious than immigrant blacks. The ADOS cultural inferiority trope foregrounds this section of the position paper due to that specific meme being a result of “insufficient attention to how selective immigration disparate pre- and post-1965 racial context shape [the]social and economic trajectory of black immigrants and black Americans” (p. 8). Almost two decades ago, a sample cohort taking the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen (NLFS) found that blacks of immigrant-origin constituted 29% of the freshmen class entering private institutions but only 23% of those enrolling in public schools (Massey, Mooney, Charles, & Torres, 2007).

Within the Ivy League, perhaps the most exclusive segment of American higher education, students of immigrant origin made up 41 percent of entering black freshmen. Given that first- and second-generation immigrants make up just 13 percent of the African American population, the overrepresentation of immigrant origins is substantial within all segments of elite academia (pp. 267-268).

Currently, black immigrants only represent 9% (3.8 million) of the U.S. black population but account for 12% of the total black undergraduates enrolled in higher education. Interestingly, black immigrants tend to view race as a social identity to be negotiated within a racialized American context (Daoud, Mwangi, English, & Griffin, 2018). However, native-born blacks (i.e., ADOS) viewed their race as an ethnic identity where *blackness* has been framed around a psychosocial context and lineage of U.S. chattel slavery and its residual burdens. For ADOS, race-based inherited disadvantages demand both internal and external grappling with imposed negative stereotypes and unique academic motivations dissimilar from the experience of newly arrived black immigrants (particularly those who are members of the elite-class in their home country).

Mixed methods research presented by Brown (2019) at the 68th Annual AAACE conference used a Spiral Dynamic Theory (SDT) framework that assessed ADOS men's and women's worldview classifications. In the pilot study ($n=110$), subjects who self-identified as black by race statistically held more collectivist SDT worldview orientations that privileged decentralized leadership and consensus-building preferences. When asked about perceptions of social oppression and who were the more likely persons to exercise employment discrimination against black women, 86.4% of the subjects indicated white men followed by white women at 30%. A positive correlation ($r= .22, p < .05$) was shown between the country of origin and educational attainment variables.

Further analysis revealed that eight subjects in the pilot study had obtained doctorate degrees and two of them self-identified as being foreign-born blacks. In the sample, the level of degree attainment for immigrant blacks represented 25% of the total doctorates. The pilot study data is concomitant with Hamilton (2019) and Massey, et al. (2007) relative to higher levels of black immigrant academic achievement prior to entry into the United States. This is particularly notable when comparing this group to the native-born black (ADOS) population. A more expansive adult education study is recommended for purposes of data

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disaggregation. Propositions to examine more deeply the erosion of educational opportunities, intended for the descendants of formerly enslaved blacks, is in order with the undertaking of a research-based reparations project.

Academic Homeschooling and Parental Self-Efficacy. There has been an emerging radical movement among African American adults regarding homeschooling of their children. Homeschooling has generally experienced an unexpected acceleration due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic thus, leading to the closure of P-20 public educational institutions around the nation. The motivation for homeschooling among the black adult population has, at its core, stemmed from the belief that the public schools were failing their children in the areas of academic achievement, safety, and general long-standing neglect of students and facilities (Anderson, 2018).

Despite noble efforts by black adult parents to serve as the primary academic teacher for their children—particularly during the pandemic—the Coalition for Responsible Home Schooling indicates that racially (NCES, 2016), traditional homeschooling populations have been predominantly white and suburban at 59%, followed by Hispanics (26%), and least likely to be led by black adult households (8%). The employment hours that most working ADOS parents incur, typically, are not conducive to teaching in a homeschool format, leaving them with fewer options when it comes to their children’s education.

Statistically, 45% of the adults who homeschool hold a bachelor’s or graduate degree, while, on a national level, only 19% of blacks over the age of 25 hold a bachelor’s degree (African Americans in Higher Education, 2010). Moreover, black families continue to operate at the bottom of the wealth and political power pyramids of society arguably due in part to the existence of what is known as the *digital divide*, which is directly tied to wealth disparity. Poverty often leaves black families with limited access to home computer devices and the Internet (The Persisting Racial Digital Divide in Internet Access, 2010). Income and education remain influential variables on matters of digital sufficiency. For black men, in particular, social and economic mobility is predicated on unfettered access to information technology and the social media networking it offers (Conceição & Martin, 2016). In summary, reparations for ADOS would serve to narrow the digital divide by providing resources to black families that lead to applied technological literacy and educational quality equal to whites.

Unemployment and Workforce Disruption for Adult ADOS

Both health and educational disparities intersect with and are mirrored in the employment and labor statistics. The COVID-19 crisis makes the fragility of black employment more evident. Conventionally, the black unemployment rate is twice as high as the white unemployment rate (Ajilore, 2020). The employment differential is evident at all levels of education; in fact, frequently the unemployment rate for blacks with some college education even exceeds the rate for whites who never finished high school.

COVID-19’s depression level impact on the American economy is leading to staggering black job losses. By the end of April, the black unemployment rate approached 17% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020) with no apparent ceiling in sight. For those blacks who continue to have employment, they are disproportionately in jobs that place them at great risk of exposure to the coronavirus (Hawkins, 2020). Disaster is imminent.

The introduction of workforce development and job training programs that will repurpose the workforce readiness of the displaced ADOS worker is fundamental to avoiding the full collapse of that community going forward. These programs must remain mindful and implement measures that counter the racial wealth gap. For example, the perpetuation of lower earnings for black Americans has been reproduced in adult workforce readiness programs where ADOS continue to trail white, Hispanic, and Asian, job training completers (Hawley, Sommers, & Meléndez, 2005). Such outcomes are undesirable and

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counterproductive. Being cognizant of addressing these systematic disparities is a moral imperative because social justice includes economic justice.

Government Response: Political Leadership and Insufficient Advocacy

Public advocacy and exercise of political will and power are essential toward the realization and subsequent implementation of a national reparations program for ADOS. A perpetual hurdle for this group is the persistent misclassification of their ethnic and cultural reality through the lens of the U.S. slavery industry. The tendency to ascribe liability to black Americans, as if through some acts of personal irresponsibility—and not longstanding systematic social and economic oppression—is beyond problematic. This is especially true when prescriptive measures to address the needs of ADOS are required and grounded in the circumstance of a debt being owed to the descendants of formerly enslaved blacks living in America. Daily, instead of acknowledging and accounting for historical, systematic oppression born in U.S. slavery, these glaring disparities are written off as the individual failing of black Americans and their communities.

When the United States Surgeon General, a medical physician, uses infantilizing colloquialisms (e.g., Grandma and “pop pop”), blames the use of alcohol and tobacco, or correlations to AIDS—in the case of Dr. Anthony Fauci—as a way to explain disproportionate ADOS deaths due to COVID-19, it is infuriating. It is especially exasperating when there are research findings that demonstrate healthcare providers showed decreased empathy toward African American patients, and that they (ADOS) experience systematic bias in medical environments when compared to whites (Hoffman, Trawalter, Axt, & Oliver, 2015). This stands as further evidence of the need for greater public advocacy, adroit political leadership, and informed government responses on behalf of ADOS.

Alternative View

Those who stand in opposition to the explicit advocacy and justice claim that centers the black American descendant of U.S. slavery have offered several objections. However, the authors also considered it prudent to share our rebuttal views and response regarding the subject of reparations and restorative justice for ADOS:

- **No American currently living is responsible for slavery today. Our nation has dealt with its original sin by electing an African American President. It would be difficult to determine who to compensate.**

Response: Who are the eligible recipients? William Darity Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen (2020) offer two criteria in their new book, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the 21st Century*: First, an individual must establish that they have at least one ancestor who was enslaved in the United States. Second, an individual must establish that for at least twelve years before enactment of black reparations or enactment of a study commission for black reparations, they self-identified as black, negro, or an African American whose parentage traces back to U.S. chattel slavery. The use of nebulous terms such as people of color, minorities, or the projection of an ahistorical black and brown alliance with immigrant groups proves troublesome in this regard.

- **The Caricom Reparations Commission (CARICOM) is a grouping of black Caribbean nations that have developed a 10-point plan for slavery reparations.**

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<http://caricomreparations.org/caricom/caricoms-10-point-reparation-plan/>. The group does not include ADOS on its agenda yet immigrant blacks who are the descendants of slaves from other countries living in America should merit inclusion in any U.S. reparation plans.

Response: More recent black immigrants are likely to have a case for reparations but not from the United States government. The CARICOM reparations' commission has been activated recognizing exactly this premise, seeking compensation from the specific nations that colonized and enslaved the Caribbean nations. They did not include the native black American case in their project, nor should they have done so.

- **Universalist proposals for reparations suggest that programs to reduce poverty and increase employment for all Americans will repair ADOS and narrow the racial wealth gap.**

Response: Black American descendants of U.S. slavery constitute 13% of the nation's population but only possess 2.6% of the nation's wealth. This disproportion translates into an average deficit of \$800,000 in net worth between black and white households. Because the black-white wealth gulf is the key index of the economic consequences of the cumulative trajectory of racial injustice in the United States, reparations must set as a central priority elimination of the racial wealth disparity. This will require a national commitment of at least \$10 trillion.

- **All minorities are due reparations because racial discrimination negatively affects all non-white groups in America equally. ADOS and (black) immigrants are equally impacted by racial stereotypes and bigoted insults.**

Response: Similar to other reparations initiatives—for example, German reparations to victims of the Holocaust, U.S. reparations to Japanese Americans unjustly incarcerated during World War II, and U.S. reparations to relatives who lost loved ones during the 9/11 attacks—it is appropriate to make direct payments to eligible recipients to address the gap in wealth. It is a matter of public relevance that the United States remains consistent in its treatment and subsequent redress toward black American citizens harmed by structural discrimination. The actions of government-sanctioned injustice toward ADOS, the historical harm they have directly inherited as a result of that injustice (resulting in economic disenfranchisement) remain unrecompensed by the United States which has moved in precedence to restore, reconcile, and make whole other groups who have been damaged.

- **It would be difficult to determine who to pay because waves of immigrants come to the country who have faced dramatic discrimination.**

Response: These criteria exclude blacks who are post-slavery immigrants or the descendants of post-slavery immigrants to the United States for three reasons. First, only native blacks are the descendants of newly emancipated persons who were denied the promised 40-acre land grants, a denial that laid the foundation for today's racial wealth gap. Second, only native blacks have borne the cumulative impact of all three phases of American racial injustice that creates the case for black reparations: slavery, legal apartheid (or Jim Crow) in the United States, and ongoing harms

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that include mass incarceration, police executions of unarmed blacks, credit, employment, and housing discrimination, and vast education and health disparities. Finally, the native black population was produced by the coerced importation of their ancestors who came here in chains. In contrast, more recent black immigrants came here voluntarily. It is peculiar, as some propose, to expect persons who voluntarily immigrated to a racist society to demand reparations for that racism.

Reparations as a remedy would include, but not necessarily be limited to, the United States government's distribution of payments, protections, and programs as restorative justice specifically for black American adults and their children, who are descendants of persons enslaved in the United States (ADOS). The preponderance of resources from a reparations fund must be devoted to direct payments to eligible recipients, similar to the allocation of reparations monies in other cases, e.g. German reparations payments to victims of the Nazi Holocaust or U.S. government payments to Japanese Americans unjustly incarcerated during World War II.

We also hold the following position points as prescriptive:

- I. Public endorsement for reparations for black American descendants of persons enslaved in the United States.
- II. Advocacy for the enactment of a Commission to Study and Develop Reparations Proposals for African Americans. (e.g., endorse HR40 subject to revision).
- III. Collaborate with and support of the established consortium that petitions Congress for reparations for black American descendants of persons enslaved in the United States.
- IV. Urge professional associations to encourage the production of similar public policy and reparations advocacy statements for black American descendants of persons enslaved in the United States.

Conclusion

A reparations plan for African Americans is a call for compensation of a debt owed, in part, due to the free labor extracted from enslaved blacks used in the advancement of the nation's wealth which their descendants have been denied. The most salient contemporary manifestation of the denial is the mammoth disparity in black and white wealth that originates with the failure to provide the newly emancipated the land grants they were promised at the end of the Civil War. Black Americans who are the descendants of the formerly enslaved in the United State must be untethered from classifications, terminology, and narratives that do not allow them the specificity of grievance that leads to public policy and redress which charts them on a course to be made whole as citizens. #ADOS

Initiator of the Position Statement: Dr. Lisa R. Brown and Dr. William Darity, Jr.

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Recommendations for Distribution It is recommended the AAACE Board distribute this paper broadly to AAACE members and partner organizations. The paper should be posted to the AAACE website, distributed via AAACE social media outlets (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, etc.), and shared with the leadership of our partner organizations with a request that they distribute it broadly.

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