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Reparations is a Battle Cry:

The Radical Roots of the Reparations Movement in the United States

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of Art in

African American Studies

by

Broderick Nicholas Dunlap

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Broderick Nicholas Dunlap

Master of Art in African American Studies

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Professor Scot David Brown, Chair

Contemporary Black political discourse has recently engaged several different propositions and models seeking to actualize reparations for chattel slavery in the United States as a major political project. On September 30, 2021, the state of California established the Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans after the ratification of Assembly Bill 3121.¹ As reparations has entered mainstream political discourse, it is important to historicize the contemporary movement and the organizations leading the discussions regarding reparations. This project will begin with tracing back the reparations movement to some of the first recorded demands of financial restitution made by formerly enslaved Africans in the United States. Furthermore, this project will explore how demands of reparations for slavery and racist oppression have evolved in the contemporary social-economic and political

¹“AB 3121: Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans,” State of California - Department of Justice - Office of the Attorney General, May 3, 2021, <https://oag.ca.gov/ab3121>.

landscape. This project will investigate the political ideologies and frameworks that influenced the demands crafted by leading theorists and advocates for the reparations movement during the 20th century.

The thesis of Broderick Nicholas Dunlap is approved.

Sobukwe Okpara Odinga

Peter James Hudson

Scot David Brown, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

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Abbreviations

ADOS: American Descendants of Slaves Foundation
AFRICOM: United States Africa Command
BPM: Black Power Movement
BPP: Black Panther Party for Self-Defense
COINTELPRO: CounterIntelligence Program
CPUSA: Communist Party of the USA
CRC: Civil Rights Congress
CRM: Civil Rights Movement
IBA: International Black Appeal
MXGM: Malcolm X Grassroots Movement
NAIM: New Afrika Independence Movement
NAPO: New Afrikan People's Organization
NAPS: New Afrikan Political Science
NBEDC: National Black Economic Development Conference
N'COBRA: National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America
OAU: Organization of African Unity
PG-RNA: Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika
RAM: Revolutionary Action Movement
RNA: Republic of New Afrika
SBA: Small Business Administration
TANU: Tanganyika Afrikan National Union
UN: United Nations
UAEW: Universal Association of Ethiopian Women
UNIA: Universal Negro Improvement Association
US/USA: United States of America

Introduction

Contemporary Black political discourse has recently engaged several different propositions and models seeking to actualize reparations for chattel slavery in the United States as a major political project. On September 30, 2021, the state of California established the Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans after the ratification of Assembly Bill 3121.² In recent years The American Descendants of Slaves Foundation (ADOS) has risen to prominence in the reparations movement demanding several forms of restitution for chattel slavery. These demands are primarily centered around economic concessions such as Small Business Administration (SBA) loans, increased federal funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and prison reforms in the form of “investment into counseling, job training, and rehabilitation for our incarcerated.”³ Prior to the rise in popularity of ADOS, The National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N’COBRA), were the leading advocates for reparations for chattel slavery. Founded in 1987 by former leaders of organizations from the Black Panther Party, The Republic of New Afrika and the Revolutionary Action Movement; N’COBRA was able to draft and present H.R. 40 to federal legislators with the support of Michigan Congressman John Conyers. The proposed bill aimed to:

address the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity of slavery in the United States and the 13 American colonies between 1619 and 1865 and to establish a commission to study and consider a national apology and proposal for reparations for the institution of slavery, its subsequent de jure and de facto racial and economic discrimination against African Americans, and the impact of these forces on living African Americans, to make recommendations to the Congress

²“AB 3121: Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans,” State of California - Department of Justice - Office of the Attorney General, May 3, 2021, <https://oag.ca.gov/ab3121>.

³“American Descendants of Slavery.” #ADOS. <https://ados101.com>.

on appropriate remedies, and for other purposes.⁴

Another group that has been a persistent advocate for reparations for African Americans is The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM). Founded in 1990 as an outgrowth of the New Afrikan People's Organization (NAPO)⁵, it has historical roots to the Black Power Movement. MXGM describes itself as “committed to self-determination, reparations, human rights for New African people and opposes sexism and genocidal policies of the US empire.”⁶

This project will situate MXGM's call for reparations as rooted in the work of prior political activists, formations and organizations in the history of the reparations movement at-large. MXGM's predecessors made the impacts of colonialism and imperialism central to their analysis of the capitalist political economy, thus making them better equipped to address all the consequences of chattel slavery in the United States. This project's primary objective is to understand the motivations behind these movements and organizations and identify insights applicable to the reparations movement in the contemporary context. The political frameworks deployed by MXGM gives them the ability to address the contradictions and challenges in current reparations debates. In the United States, Black women have led the charge in articulating material and financial restitution for slavery and institutional racism immediately following emancipation, during the Reconstruction Era and into the twentieth century. Some of the most progressive and forward-thinking formulations of reparations are a result of a radical Black feminist framework.

⁴“H.R.40 - 117th Congress (2021-2022): Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act,” Library of Congress, 1989 <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/40?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22hr+40%22%5D%7D&s=4&r=1>, 1.

⁵ Edward Onaci, *Free the Land: The Republic of NEW Afrika and the Pursuit of a Black Nation-State* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 141.

⁶“The New Afrikan People's Organization and Malcolm X Grassroots Movement Position on the Question of Reparations,” n.d, 5.

In the US, Black women were excluded from mainstream political participation until the 1920s. They were often relegated to domestic labor, which left them vulnerable to sexual violence in addition to economic exploitation in the workplace because these jobs have historically been low-paying and unregulated. The lived experiences of Black women made them better equipped than their male counterparts to come up with more holistic approaches to the reparations question. For formerly enslaved women, “pensions and land were seen as provisions that could supply them with autonomy.”⁷ “Queen Mother” Audley Moore is considered the mother of the modern-day Reparations movement and a pioneer in the Black Nationalist movement in the United States.⁸ Historian Ashley Farmer posits that Moore formulated a form of “reparationist politics” that claims “extensive economic restitution”⁹ is the only acceptable means of rectifying the atrocities committed during the middle passage, slavery, and Jim Crow. By emphasizing the shared common history of Africans in the Americas and the need for some form of redress for slavery, Moore established reparations as a foundational political demand for organizations across the Black political spectrum using this reparationist politic. Moore’s reparationist political framework is central to the work and ideas of MXGM.

This project will begin with tracing back the reparations movement to some of the first recorded demands of financial restitution made by formerly enslaved Africans in the United States. Furthermore, this section will explore how demands of reparations for slavery and racist oppression have evolved in the contemporary social-economic and political landscape. The

⁷ Ana Lucia Araujo, *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: a Transnational and Comparative History* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2018), pg. 183

⁸ Nkechi Taifa, *Black Power, Black Lawyer: My Audacious Quest for Justice* (Washington, DC: House of Songhay II, 2020), 175

⁹ Ashley D. Farmer, “‘Somebody Has to Pay’: Audley Moore and the Modern Reparations Movement,” *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International* 7, no. 2 (2018): pp. 108-134, <https://doi.org/10.1353/pal.2018.0019>, pg. 109.

opening chapter will also investigate the global implications of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and its role in developing the capitalist mode of production and the current capitalist political economy that is underdeveloping Black communities globally. The second chapter is devoted to the life and work of Queen Mother Moore.¹⁰ Moore's lived experiences and work as a lifelong Black nationalist organizer are integral to her formulation of reparationist politics, which would be influential during the watershed era of the Black Power Movement and beyond.

The Black Power Movement of the late sixties and seventies was one of the most polarizing eras of the 20th century in the United States. This division was likely due to the incredibly ambitious political and economic programs initiated by organizations such as the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) and the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM). These two organizations, among several others, rejected the widely held presumption that support from white liberals was necessary to build a sustainable mass movement for Black liberation. In the third chapter, this project will examine the influence Moore's reparationist politics had on the Black Power Era and how these organizations began to articulate demands for reparations in ways they felt were valuable to them and the movement at large.

Although there were several organizations that demanded reparations in their manifestos, four organizations made reparations central to their political and economic objectives: the National Black Economic Development Conference (NBEDC), The Republic of New Afrika (RNA), NAPO and MXGM. Chapters four, five, and six will provide a detailed investigation and analysis of their formulations of reparations models and explore the political frameworks that guided their programs. The sixth chapter will also examine the history and origins of the MXGM and explore the political frameworks of the organization that guide their work and influence their

¹⁰ I will refer to Audley Moore as "Queen Mother" Moore throughout the paper because that was the title given to her during the Black Power Movement and the name she is often referred to from the 1960's until her death in 1997.

ideas for reparations for slavery and economic self-determination. The concluding chapter will explore how the political frameworks constructed by the aforementioned organizations can help enrich reparations discourse presently and be a guide to constructing reparations models that can be useful in the contemporary context.

A Short History of the Struggle for Reparations in the United States

On July 4, 1776, a group of elites representing the thirteen colonies of the British colonial project in North America seceded from their oppressors and created the nation that came to be United States of America. The authors of the Declaration of Independence claimed they were breaking away from the British Empire to pursue their god-given rights to equality, life, liberty, and happiness.¹¹ Ironically, included in this fight for freedom from their colonial masters were enslaved Africans. Not only did the American ruling class benefit from their manpower during the war for independence, but the profits generated by the labor of enslaved Africans also provided them with the economic resources necessary for taking up arms in the first place. In addition to the capital they generated, British forces recognized enslaved Africans as a fighting force integral to success in the war and offered emancipation and full citizenship to those who decided to defect and fight for the British.¹² Despite the country proclaiming to value principles of equality, liberty and dignity, chattel slavery remained legal for nearly a century after the Declaration of Independence was written. From 1619 to 1865, the system of the enslavement of Africans for the purpose of generating capital endured, and was essential to the economic development of the United States and the global capitalist economy. As Black nationalist activist Queen Mother Moore asserted at the 1969 twelfth session of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Africans in the western hemisphere were integral “to the

¹¹ “Declaration of Independence: A Transcription,” National Archives and Records Administration (National Archives and Records Administration), accessed September 19, 2021, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>.

¹² “Slavery, the American Revolution, and the Constitution,” Digital history, accessed September 19, 2021, https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/active_learning/explorations/revolution/revolution_slavery.cfm.

very foundation of capitalism on which today imperialism stands as a barrier to your development and our liberation.”¹³

As Africans in the Americas began to secure emancipation, they began to seek recompense for centuries of unpaid labor and extraordinary violence and oppression. Propositions for reparations were not thought of as handouts but seen as back-pay for stolen labor. Early literature on reparations did not use the term but instead used synonyms like repayment, restitution, and atonement.¹⁴ One of the first recorded petitions for financial redress for slavery was from Belinda Sutton, during the American Revolutionary War. Her owner fled the country during the war and abandoned all his property, however, the owner granted Sutton a three year pension in his will. After the pension payments stopped, Sutton appealed to Massachusetts lawmakers for a continuation of the pension payments arguing that her former masters lived comfortably from her labor while she lived in poverty.¹⁵ Although Sutton was triumphant in her fight for restitution, successful petitions for reparations were few and far between. Historian Robin Kelley recounts a story of an enslaver asking a Black family he held captive to return. In the story the emancipated slave, Jourdon, requested back pay totaling over eleven thousand dollars plus interest to “test his sincerity.”¹⁶ Jourdon did not experience the same success as Sutton but one thing is evident: emancipated Africans understood the wealth accumulated by their former masters was built on the backs of their stolen labor and they sought fair compensation for their work.

¹³ Erik S. McDuffie, “‘I Wanted a Communist Philosophy, but I Wanted Us to Have a Chance to Organize Our People’: the Diasporic Radicalism of Queen Mother Audley Moore and the Origins of Black Power,” *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 3, no. 2 (2010): pp. 181-195, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17528631.2010.481968>, pg. 182.

¹⁴ Araujo, *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: A Transnational and Comparative History*, 2.

¹⁵ Ana Lucia Araujo, “The History of Black Women Championing Demands for Reparations,” *Truthout* (Truthout, June 1, 2019), <https://truthout.org/articles/the-history-of-black-women-championing-demands-for-reparations/>.

¹⁶ Robin D.G. Kelley, “‘A Day of Reckoning’: Dreams of Reparations,” in *Freedom Dreams: the Black Radical Imagination* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), pp. 110-134, 111.

Jourdon and Belinda Sutton's demands for indemnification are not solely anecdotal. Following emancipation, abolitionist Sojourner Truth began to advocate for reparations for slavery through land redistribution. In 1870, she circulated a petition requesting Congress to provide land to the "freed colored people in and about Washington" to allow them "to support themselves."¹⁷ Sojourner Truth's appeals for restitution were never seriously considered by those in power. However, demands for reparations have persisted. After the sabotage of Reconstruction, survivors of the slave trade began to establish organizations whose central political aim was securing compensation for formerly enslaved Africans.

The National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, and the Bounty and Pension Association touted membership numbers in the tens of thousands and formed a movement that pressured the US Congress to draft legislation that would compensate freed people for their work during slavery.¹⁸ Federal lawmakers were dismissive towards the movement and responded with legal attacks towards a prominent leader in both organizations, Callie House. House was accused of committing mail fraud but the activist was unphased by these accusations and declared the attacks on her and the movement were racist. House was a former slave and a widowed mother of five that worked as a washerwoman and recognized the lack of support elderly former slaves had received and the deplorable conditions they were forced to live in as a result. Witnessing and experiencing the aftermath of slavery motivated the activist to organize for reparations. House was found guilty of committing fraud through the mail in 1916 and was forced to serve one year in prison.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ana Lucia Araujo, "The History of Black Women Championing Demands for Reparations."

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Since then, conceptions of reparations have developed and evolved to address the transgressions inflicted upon diasporic Africans since the end of slavery as well. In the United States, the federal government has never officially atoned for the atrocities that occurred during slavery or any of the racial terror that followed despite there being several legal petitions and mass movements demanding redress. According to international law, the term reparations is used to describe “the redress of physical, material, or moral damage inflicted on an individual, a group of individuals, and even a nation.”²⁰ Beyond the economic exploitation through stolen labor during slavery, the oppression of African Americans has been endemic to American society and culture. An extensive history of the theft of wealth and resources during events like the Greenwood Massacre of 1921 in Tulsa, Oklahoma; cultural and historical deprivation by inaccurately depicting African culture in school curricula and mainstream media, mass incarceration, and state-sanctioned violence motivate demands of accountability and indemnification.

Chattel slavery in the United States was outlawed in 1865 (except as punishment for a crime), however, the deleterious effects of the nation’s original socioeconomic system are still prevalent today. The free labor coerced from enslaved Africans generated the surplus value that funded the industrial revolution in Europe. Without the technological advances that resulted from the industrial revolution, the development of the capitalist mode of production would not be possible. According to Guyanese Historian Walter Rodney the English county of Lancashire was the epicenter of the industrial revolution “and the economic advance in Lancashire depended first of all on the growth of the port of Liverpool through slave trade.”²¹ The capital accumulated by the planter class in the United States during slavery propelled the country into a global

²⁰ Ana Lucia Araujo, *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: A Transnational and Comparative History*, 2.

²¹ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London, UK: Verso, 2018), 98.

superpower. However, the US is not the only former colonial power that profited from slavery and owes a great deal of restitution to Africans in the Americas. From its inception, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade has had global implications. Although every European country may not have been directly involved in the slave trade, the growing demand for raw materials and commodities produced by enslaved Africans made slavery an essential component to the budding capitalist economies throughout Europe. In *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Rodney provides an example of how profound the impact of slavery was on the burgeoning global capitalist economy: “Sugar from the Caribbean was re-exported from England and France to other parts of Europe to such an extent that Hamburg in Germany was the biggest sugar refining center in Europe in the first half of the eighteenth century.”²²

In the eighteenth century, David Barclay was not only involved in the trafficking of Africans but also owned a large plantation in Jamaica. David Barclay and his brother Alexander would go on to marry into banking families and take over what is now the multinational Barclays bank.²³ James Watt, the Scottish inventor credited for making improvements to the steam engine, relied on capital from slave owners to mass produce his invention.²⁴ In France, the labor of enslaved Africans became integral to their economy. According to Rodney, “during the eighteenth century, the West Indies accounted for 20 percent of France’s external trade.”²⁵ The raw materials harvested by enslaved Africans were traded throughout western Europe developing markets and economies that created the superpowers that dominate the global arena presently. While the western world lives in decadence, Africans throughout the diaspora continue to experience the harmful effects of slavery. The slave trade was a profit generating industry and

²² Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 99.

²³ Eric Eustace Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 101.

²⁴ Eric Eustace Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, 102-103.

²⁵ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 90.

the motivations for continuing the practice were largely economic. However, the construction of race and racism by the European bourgeoisie to justify the preservation of The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, lead to extraordinary exploitation and tremendous violence inflicted upon Africans in the Americas. This exploitation and violence has been the motivating factor of calls for reparations. The exploitation of Africans since they arrived in 1619 has resulted in Africans in America being forced into a political and economic underclass that still exists.

In the United States, estimates for compensation for chattel slavery have ranged from \$3 billion to \$17.7 trillion.²⁶ In his article “The Case for Reparations,” Ta-Nahesi Coates reveals that “white households are worth roughly 20 times as much as black households, and that whereas only 15 percent of whites have zero or negative wealth, more than a third of blacks do.”²⁷ The lack of support for African Americans from local and federal government agencies immediately following the Emancipation Proclamation resulted in the wealth gap between white and Black families that presently exists. In *Long Overdue: The Politics of Racial Reparations*, Charles Young posits:

It is true that there are no living former American slaves, but every African American has either directly or indirectly experienced racial discrimination or has been indirectly influenced by it. The failure to treat reparations as a legitimate issue acknowledges that America is far from being a “color-blind” society.²⁸

As substantial as these numbers may seem, according to American economist William Darity, these figures are “*underestimates*.”²⁹ These numbers can be considered underestimates because the oppression of African-Americans goes beyond economic exploitation. The inherently violent

²⁶ William A. Darity and A. Kirsten Mullen, *From Here To Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 260.

²⁷ Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic* (Atlantic Media Company, June 2014), <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>.

²⁸ Charles P. Henry, *Long Overdue: The Politics of Racial Reparations* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009), 177.

²⁹ Darity and Mullen, *From Here To Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*, 261.

socioeconomic system of chattel slavery resulted in immense physical and psychological injury in addition to economic underdevelopment. De facto and de jure exclusion from suffrage, along with cultural and historical deprivation of Africans in America calls for not just financial compensation but a more holistic approach to developing demands for reparations.

Contemporary conceptions of reparations have been centered around economic concessions like Small Business Administration (SBA) loans, increased federal funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and prison reforms in the form of “investment into counseling, job training, and rehabilitation for our incarcerated.”³⁰ Although financial recompense and economic stimulus is undeniably necessary in Black communities, one could argue, current proposals for reparations would ultimately only stimulate the American economy and would not emancipate Africans internationally. Without a structural change to the systems and institutions responsible for the oppression and exploitation of Africans, Black suffering will continue. The capitalist mode of production would not be possible without the stolen labor of enslaved Africans and the capitalist political economy is the root cause of anti-Black racism and oppression. If reparations are to reconcile for past transgressions and improve the material conditions of Africans in the US and throughout the diaspora, the contemporary reparations movement must consider investigating the benefits of alternative modes of production, such as socialism. By interrogating the economic motivations of the slave trade one must interrogate the socioeconomic system the trade gave birth to.

Demands for reparations have always been and must continue to be about more than a “paycheck and apology.”³¹ One could argue that compensation isn’t the sole purpose of

³⁰ “American Descendants of Slavery.” #ADOS. <https://ados101.com>.

³¹ Kelley, “‘A Day of Reckoning’: Dreams of Reparations,” 128.

reparations: “The demand for reparations was about social justice, reconciliation, reconstructing The internal life of Black America, and eliminating institutional racism.”³²

As Sojourner Truth stated, African Americans needed the resources from reparations “to support themselves.”³³ From this perspective, reparations are not the end goal, but instead, a means to an end: self-determination and liberation. According to Civil Rights Activist and scholar James Forman, “Reparations did not represent any kind of long-range goal in our minds but an intermediate step on the path to liberation.”³⁴ In an interview with *The Black Scholar*, Queen Mother Moore declared two issues as the most pressing matters in the Black Freedom movement: reparations and self-determination. In the interview Moore proclaims: “Reparations is the main issue. The white imperialists have got to recognize their crime against us... When you destroy a people or anything you are obligated to restore it.”³⁵ Moore viewed reparations as a viable alternative to civil rights and ultimately a vehicle to self-determination. In the same interview, Moore challenges the idea of African Americans struggle to obtain “first class citizenship”:

We began to talk about wanting to be first class citizens. We didn't want to be second class citizens. You would have sworn that second class was in the constitution. Also that citizens have to fight for rights. Imagine a citizen having to fight for civil rights! The very thought of it is repulsive. And I resent it and I reject this "citizenship" that was imposed on me. From the bottom of my heart, I reject it.³⁶

Moore challenged African-Americans to demand more. Privileges in the imperial core, such as voting and inclusion in public institutions, are portrayed as the destination, instead of the vehicle,

³² Kelley, “‘A Day of Reckoning’: Dreams of Reparations,” 114.

³³ Ana Lucia Araujo, “The History of Black Women Championing Demands for Reparations.”

³⁴ Kelley., “‘A Day of Reckoning’: Dreams of Reparations,” 123.

³⁵ Queen Mother Moore, "The Black Scholar Interviews: Queen Mother Moore," *The Black Scholar* 4, no. 6/7 (1973), 54.

³⁶ Moore, "The Black Scholar Interviews: Queen Mother Moore," 51.

to achieve the original goal of self-determination and liberation. Consequently, formations in the contemporary reparations movement have tried to obtain restitution with the goal of further assimilation and the chance to participate in inherently anti-Black political, economic, and social institutions.

Over the duration of the twentieth century, militant anti-colonial and anti-capitalist formations and organizations began to materialize across the African diaspora. In Africa and in the United States, these organizations emerged in response to the imperialist expansion in Africa and for unmitigated racial terror and violence domestically. Several of these organizations made reparations central to their political demands and goals. According to historian Ana Lucia Araujo, the end of the Cold War made a tremendous impact on the reparations movement in Latin America and west Africa. For example, despite having the largest population of Africans outside the continent, Brazil was under a military dictatorship that controlled the government from 1964 to 1985. The political landscape of Brazil during this period: “hindered the ability of Black organizations to effectively fight against racism and, in turn, for civil rights. This context also prevented the emergence of calls for financial and material reparations as occurred in the United States during the same period.”³⁷

Much like Brazil, the political landscape shaped demands for reparations in the United States. As Africans in America gained more rights, privileges, and access to public institutions, demands for reparations evolved. Over time, reparations have developed from individual requests for back pay from former slaves to organized mass movements advocating for acknowledgment from American lawmakers and the United Nations (UN). Specific demands for reparations have shifted and changed over time from symbolic demands like official apologies or

³⁷ Ana Lucia Araujo, *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: a Transnational and Comparative History*, 154

changes in school curriculums to insisting on financial and material resources for Africans in America. However, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade transformed the entire globe. Africans across the globe have been impacted by the structures created to maintain a racist hierarchy established during slavery. Due to the global nature of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, it is shortsighted that prominent organizations in the contemporary reparations movement in the United States have not sufficiently adopted a Pan-Africanist orientation.

Queen Mother Moore and the Reparations Movement

Audley Moore was born on July 27th, 1898 in New Iberia, Louisiana, her parents passed away when she was still in grade school and she moved to New Orleans with her sisters. Shortly after moving to New Orleans, she gained employment as a domestic worker. During her time as a domestic worker, Moore was subjected to the intersection of economic exploitation and sexual violence that Black women endure.³⁸ These experiences coupled with the extreme racial violence during World War I prompted her to follow Marcus Garvey and join the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Moore joined the UNIA after being impressed by Garvey's oratorical skill and his emphasis on racial pride during a speaking engagement in New Orleans. Garvey's Black nationalist ideology provided a Pan-African framework for her political work for the remainder of her life. As a member of UNIA, Black self-determination, race pride and the implementation of economic programs became central to Moore's politics. Garvey's "Back to Africa" movement also put the Black struggle for equality in the US in a global context. For Queen Mother Moore, it was Garvey who "raised in [her] a certain knowledge of [her] belonging to people all over the world, the African people."³⁹ Restitution for the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, Jim Crow, and institutional racism was also an essential element to the Garveyite movement:

In speeches at the New York Liberty Hall, Garvey demanded European colonial powers "hand back" the land, riches and culture that they had stolen from African people. His followers also supported the "establishment of a central nation for Black people" and backed efforts to secure federal funding for African Americans to immigrate to Africa as restitution for slavery.⁴⁰

³⁸ McDuffie, "I Wanted a Communist Philosophy, but I Wanted Us to Have a Chance to Organize Our People," 184.

³⁹ Ashley D. Farmer, "'Somebody Has to Pay': Audley Moore and the Modern Reparations Movement," 110.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

After the deportation of Garvey and subsequent collapse of UNIA, Moore joined the Harlem branch of Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA).

The party's staunch support of the Scottsboro Boys, a group of young Black boys falsely accused of raping two white women in Alabama, is what initially attracted Moore to the CPUSA.⁴¹ The opportunity to organize her own people was enticing to Moore and she would remain a member of the CPUSA until the 1950's. Prominent Black CPUSA member Harry Haywood's "Black Belt Thesis" which framed Black self-determination as integral to a global revolution intrigued Moore as well. While Moore was a member of the CPUSA, she collaborated with powerful Black feminists such as Claudia Jones and Louise Thompson Patterson. The result was the formulation of a "path-breaking analysis of Black women's 'triple oppression' characterizing Black women across the diaspora as the vanguard for global, transformative change."⁴²

Moore dedicated several decades of her life to building the CPUSA to a formidable alternative to mainstream politics in the United States. However, McCarthyism, sexism and racism caused Moore to eventually break from the party. In spite of this, ideas of Black self-determination, anti-imperialism, combatting "triple-oppression" and a democratic economy stuck with her and she never abandoned the Black nationalist ideology she adopted during her time with the UNIA. After her departure from the CPUSA, Moore continued to work towards Black liberation; she would go on to be a mentor to prominent activists and theorists such as Malcolm X and Robert F. Williams. From 1951 to 1954 Moore worked with leftist organizations that prioritized redress for racial violence in their political programs. During this same time period

⁴¹ Erik S. McDuffie, "I Wanted a Communist Philosophy, but I Wanted Us to Have a Chance to Organize Our People": the Diasporic Radicalism of Queen Mother Audley Moore and the Origins of Black Power," 184.

⁴² Ibid.

she was a member of the Civil Rights Congress (CRC) who, presented to the United Nations a petition entitled *We Charge Genocide* authored by CRC chairman William Patterson. The petition was supported by Moore and it would serve as a point of departure for her theoretical conceptions of reparations.

In 1954 Moore would return to New Orleans to tend to a family matter, but that did not hinder her organizing. Shortly after her return to New Orleans, she founded the Universal Association of Ethiopian Women (UAEW).⁴³ The Black feminist, anti-capitalist and pan-African politics the activist developed during her time in the UNIA and CPUSA were evident in the campaigns the UAEW embarked upon. Moore established the UAEW to “uplift and inspire” the local Black community and “organized poor and working-class African American women based on their historic and present-day connections to the slave trade.”⁴⁴ From 1957 to 1960, her organization advocated against the death penalty, and championed appeals to the United Nations for Black women to receive state aid. Due to the Suitable Home Law, a piece of legislation that barred women from receiving aid if they “did not conform to white standards of motherhood and domesticity”⁴⁵ Black women in Louisiana were arbitrarily excluded from government assistance. The appeals to the international community for Black women to receive aid from the state inspired Moore and the UAEW to investigate all other forms of redress owed to African Americans. During their research, they came across an excerpt that would shift the focus of the organization’s political goals in a significant way. In an interview with *The Black Scholar* Moore recounts discovering the quotation:

We saw in an old encyclopedia, Presbyterian or something, encyclopedia, that those who find themselves captives and do not place before their captors a judicial

⁴³ Ashley D. Farmer, “‘Somebody Has to Pay’: Audley Moore and the Modern Reparations Movement,” 112.

⁴⁴ Ashley D. Farmer, “‘Somebody Has to Pay’: Audley Moore and the Modern Reparations Movement,” 113.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

demand for their liberation within a hundred years are considered satisfied and belonging to their captors. The statute of limitations goes into effect. We went to work when we saw that.⁴⁶

According to vice president of the UAEW, Dara Abubakari, after finding this excerpt they began a “campaign to encourage African Americans to file a formal reparations claim with the US government before the centennial anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1963.”⁴⁷

Queen Mother Audley Moore moved to Philadelphia with her sisters in 1962⁴⁸ and established the Reparations Committee of Descendants of United Slaves. Slaves Inc. The primary objective of the Committee was to formulate demands for financial compensation from the federal government for slavery and Jim Crow.⁴⁹ The following year Moore wrote *Why Reparations? Reparations is the Battle Cry for the Economic and Social Freedom of More than 25 Million Descendants of American Slaves*. *Why Reparations?* was one of the the first major theoretical works on reparations that demanded substantial financial compensation for slavery.⁵⁰ One of the first demands listed sought “money damages for the victims of these injustices with which to begin a program of rehabilitation.”⁵¹ In addition to the atrocities Africans in America endured during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Period, Moore asserts that the justification for reparations extends far beyond slavery. Moore also listed lynching, rape, Jim Crow, disenfranchisement and, widespread contempt and disdain as significant violations of the human rights of Africans in America.

⁴⁶ Moore, "The Black Scholar Interviews: Queen Mother Moore," 51.

⁴⁷ Farmer, “‘Somebody Has to Pay’: Audley Moore and the Modern Reparations Movement,” pg 113.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Kelley, “‘A Day of Reckoning’: Dreams of Reparations,” 119.

⁵⁰ McDuffie, “I Wanted a Communist Philosophy, but I Wanted Us to Have a Chance to Organize Our People,” 187.

⁵¹ Audley M. Moore, “Why Reparations? Reparations Is the Battle Cry for the Economic and Social Freedom of More Than 25 Million Descendants of American Slaves,” *Why Reparations? Reparations Is the Battle Cry for the Economic and Social Freedom of More Than 25 Million Descendants of American Slaves* (Los Angeles, CA: Reparations Committee Incorporated, 1963), pp.4.

The Reparations Committee believed the Civil Rights Movement of the time would fall short of their goal of equality if they did not call for significant financial compensation in addition to their demands of political empowerment and inclusion. Moore and the reparations Committee argued that the March on Washington on August 28, 1963, was an anti-climax to the mass mobilizations that lead up to the historic march and suggested that it was a disappointment because they did not demand reparations.⁵² Moore begins to articulate the theoretical underpinnings of her reparationist politics in *Why Reparations?*:

The fact that Reparations has not yet been included along with the integrationist leaders' demands is because they underestimated the depth and the bitterness of our suffering and the intelligence of our people... Without Reparations, our people can never be on equal terms with the white sons of our former slave masters who continue to reap the abundant benefits of the wealth created by our foreparents through their centuries of unrequited labor.⁵³

Moore and the Reparations Committee argued that the unprecedented wealth accumulated by the United States would not be possible without the unpaid labor coerced from enslaved Africans. While the United States was rapidly becoming a world power, Africans in America were barred from economic and political participation. The high levels of poverty in Black communities are a direct result of chattel slavery. Moore and the Reparations Committee surmised that “the payment of Reparations is an absolute necessity if the Government of the United States is ever to wipe the slate clean.”⁵⁴ Moore goes further and contends that it is the duty of every “well-meaning and patriotic American to help this long overdue and just effort to erase the blot and stigma from the unfortunate past of America’s history.”⁵⁵

⁵² Moore, *Why Reparations? Reparations Is the Battle Cry for the Economic and Social Freedom of More Than 25 Million Descendants of American Slaves*, 11.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 5.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 4.

In *Why Reparations?* Moore listed the recorded historical examples of countries paying financial restitution to nationally oppressed groups. More specifically the United States paid reparations on three separate occasions. “The United States paid and continues to pay reparations to American Indians, for denial of citizenship rights and loss of personal property.” In September, 1962 the United States paid reparations to the Philippines for the damages caused during World War I. Finally, Moore stated that the U.S. “paid reparations to Japanese Americans — for denial of rights, seizure of property and confinement in concentration camps during World War II. Reparations were paid to individual Nisei and was tax free.”⁵⁶ Because of the precedents set by the United States, Moore concluded “that there can be no argument against the just claim for Reparations for the American Citizens of African descent.”

To mitigate the violence and oppression due to slavery and racism Moore also proposed that Africans in America receive preferential treatment in addition to substantial financial compensation. According to Moore and the Reparations committee, this preferential treatment would come in the form of “a hiring quota in every level of our industry, implemented with an intensified on the job training program.”⁵⁷ Moore suggested that the job quota should be proportionate to the population of Africans in America. From her perspective, this would just be the first step towards righting the wrongs of slavery and racist oppression. In order to be truly equal to their white counterparts, Africans in America needed preferential treatment when considered for educational, economic and political opportunities. If the federal government of the

⁵⁶ Moore, *Why Reparations? Reparations Is the Battle Cry for the Economic and Social Freedom of More Than 25 Million Descendants of American Slaves*, 4

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 11.

United States did not honor the demands of the Reparations Committee, Moore asserted “America cannot be classified as a civilized nation.”⁵⁸

According to historian Ashley Farmer, Moore’s pamphlet was gender-conscious and an “attempt to move from an intellectual, social, and legal justification for reparations to a concrete plan of distribution of remunerative funds.”⁵⁹ She explicitly opposed the idea of trickle-down economics and advocated for democratic collective control of the resources acquired through reparations. Moore also framed the sexual violence endured by Black women as a form of oppression and constantly reiterated the importance of including women in her formulations of reparations and Black nationalism.

⁵⁸ Moore, *Why Reparations? Reparations Is the Battle Cry for the Economic and Social Freedom of More Than 25 Million Descendants of American Slaves*, 12.

⁵⁹ Ashley D. Farmer, “‘Somebody Has to Pay’: Audley Moore and the Modern Reparations Movement,” 119.

Reparations during the Black Power Movement

Moore's groundbreaking formulations of reparations and nationalism served as an ideological foundation for several organizations involved in the Black Power Movement (BPM) in the United States. A continuation of the preceding Civil Rights Movement (CRM), the BPM was a result of African youth in America who became frustrated and disillusioned due to the lack of material change in their communities through incremental reforms such as the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Activists began to question the viability of depending on support from white liberals and the federal government to address their needs. The decision to seek alternative avenues such as armed self-defense, economic development, and autonomous Black-led political institutions to achieve their goals was a distinct divergence from the CRM. BPM activists began to develop political frameworks less concerned with garnering the support of whites and prioritized empowering and protecting Black communities.

Prominent organizations in the BPM felt the need to take a more militant stance against racism, capitalism, and imperialism because of the unabated racist violence and exploitation endured domestically and abroad. They were also inspired by the wave of independence movements throughout Africa and modeled their political programs after the organizations that were leading national independence campaigns. During this period, organizations began to formulate economic demands and programs to go along with the political demands such as the right to vote and equal representation in government. Several organizations began to emphasize the need for developing economic programs in unison with their political programs, and reparations were considered the avenue to acquire the capital and resources necessary to implement, sustain and expand their projects.

Queen Mother Moore had been organizing for several decades by the time the Black Power movement began to take shape and her work was well known amongst Black Power activists already. Shortly after Moore moved to Philadelphia in 1962, she began to mentor young activists in the area and was influential in the Marxist and Black nationalist orientation of the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM). Founder of RAM, Muhammad Ahmad (formerly known as Max Stanford) credits Queen Mother Moore for the group's decision to implement demands for reparations as one of the organization's primary objectives. RAM was an influential organization in the BPM because it was one of the first to apply a Marxist ideology to their political and economic plans. The organization was also the first and only secular political organization Malcolm X joined after leaving the Nation of Islam.⁶⁰ Co-Founder of The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP), Bobby Seale, was a member of the Oakland, California chapter of RAM and Huey Newton organized with RAM's front organization, the Soul Students Advisory Council.⁶¹ Although the two activists would leave RAM due to disagreements on strategies to grow the organization, RAM and Queen Mother Moore's political influence was evident. The Black Panther Party's Ten Point Program made demands for self-determination, reparations, and a UN-supervised plebiscite:

1. We Want Freedom. We Want Power to Determine the Destiny of Our Black Community. We believe that Black people will not be free until we are able to determine our destiny.
3. We Want An End to the Robbery By the Capitalists of Our Black Community. We believe that this racist government has robbed us, and now we are demanding the overdue debt of forty acres and two mules. Forty acres and two mules were promised 100 years ago as restitution for slave labor and mass murder of Black people. We will accept the payment in currency which will be distributed to our many communities. The Germans are now aiding the Jews in Israel for the

⁶⁰ "Max Stanford," The Malcolm X Project at Columbia University, 2001, <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ccbh/mxp/stanford.html>.

⁶¹ Huey P. Newton, J. Herman Blake, and Fredrika Newton, "Bobby Seale," in *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2009, 1973), pp. 109-114, 72, 110.

genocide of the Jewish people. The Germans murdered six million Jews. The American racist has taken part in the slaughter of over fifty million Black people; therefore, we feel that this is a modest demand that we make.

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.⁶²

The BPP rose to prominence during the Black Power Era due to their emphasis on Self-Defense and survival programs. However, their political program prioritized the need for reparations to sustain and expand their survival programs. Similarly to Moore, they believed reparations must include land and the resources to develop the land and build autonomous Black communities.

BPM organizations sought to build autonomous communities and Moore argued that reparations were the only way to make these ambitions achievable. Moore was a fervent advocate for reparations at the inaugural Black Power Conference of 1967 in Newark, New Jersey attended by prominent activists Amiri Baraka, Florynce Kennedy, and H. Rap Brown. For the veteran activist, reparations was the most pressing issue in the struggle for Black liberation. Moore was chair for the economic panel of the conference and used her position to emphasize the need to make reparations a central political demand of the national movement going forward. At the conclusion of the conference, attendees introduced a resolution for “full restitution, in the form of reparations (money damages) for the injuries [African American] have endured.”⁶³ Reparations had been made a priority to movement leaders and conference attendees on paper but one could argue they did not do the same in practice.

When activists gathered for another Black Power Conference in 1968, Moore reiterated the necessity to prioritize a mass movement focused on acquiring reparations for slavery and

⁶² Newton, Blake, Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* 121-124.

⁶³ Ashley D. Farmer, “‘Somebody Has to Pay’: Audley Moore and the Modern Reparations Movement,” 121.

institutional racism. “I can assure you that reparations is the crux of our problems here. It is the crux of our solution to our problems.”⁶⁴ Moore addressed conference attendees in a speech admonishing them for their lack of action regarding the issue, pointing out that they had several workshops on other topics but neglected to address reparations. She argued that reparations was the only practical way to achieve the ambitious goals organizers at the conference were setting. “We are talking about setting up a government, a nation within this country. What are you going to do for your heavy industry and all of your means of production if you don't have reparations?”⁶⁵ For Moore, a mass movement centered on acquiring reparations would expose the contradictions of Americentric identities and political practices and consequently their limitations. The activist argued that reparations were for more than the economic exploitation and resulting racial oppression but destruction of African American culture. Enslaved Africans were “de-nationed” and “they changed us from the African into the Negro.”⁶⁶ Abandoning an American identity and embracing an African heritage also strengthened legal petitions for nationhood and reparations in the international arena. By identifying as Africans in America and not simply negro or Black, Moore hoped to foster relationships with newly liberated African countries so they would eventually support their petitions for plebiscites and reparations to the United Nations.

Moore’s influence on the BPM manifested in several ways, this is evident in the work carried out by organizations like RAM and the Black Panther Party and several others. Her reparatationist frameworks provided a launching board for Black nationalist formations within the national Black Power Movement. Moore’s conceptions of reparations also established an

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ashley D. Farmer, “‘Somebody Has to Pay’: Audley Moore and the Modern Reparations Movement,” 122.

explicitly internationalist orientation that several organizations would embrace as well. Although RAM and BPP made reparations a point of emphasis in their respective political programs, the following organizations made it their primary objective.

The National Black Economic Development Conference and The Black Manifesto

On May 4th, 1969 James Forman interrupted the Sunday service of Riverside Church in New York to deliver what would be known as “The Black Manifesto” on behalf of the National Black Economic Development Conference (NBEDC). The NBEDC was backed by the Episcopal church, the National Council of Churches and the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization. The purpose of the conference was “bringing Black leaders together to discuss how to implement Black Power, not just socially but economically.”⁶⁷ Prominent Black activists such as Fannie Lou Hamer and Julian Bond were listed as leaders of the group. In the Manifesto, Forman demanded “fifteen dollars for every Black brother and sister in the United States” totaling approximately \$500 million from “Christian white churches and Jewish synagogues.”⁶⁸

The activist informed the congregation this demand was “only a beginning of the reparations due to us as a people.” Forman and the NBEDC recognized the economic underdevelopment that resulted from slavery and sought reprisal; the group coalesced “because racist white America has exploited our resources, our minds, our bodies, our labor.” The demand for reparations was restitution for being “exploited and degraded, brutalized, killed and persecuted.”⁶⁹ Forman explicitly stated that The NBEDC was not attacking churches, however, he also posits that white Christian churches and Jewish synagogues “are part and parcel of the system of capitalism.” He also asserts that “we are not unaware that the exploitation of colored peoples around the world is aided and abetted by the white Christian churches and

⁶⁷ Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, “Jim Forman Delivers Black Manifesto at Riverside Church,” SNCC Digital Gateway, July 14, 2020, <https://snccdigital.org/events/jim-forman-delivers-black-manifesto-at-riverside-church/>.

⁶⁸ The Black Manifesto, *The Church Awakens: African American Struggles for Justice*, Archives of the Episcopal Church.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

synagogues.”⁷⁰ Although the Conference was seeking financial restitution for African Americans the internationalist orientation of the Black Manifesto was evident; Forman informs his audience:

The white Christian churches are another form of government in this country and they are used by the government of this country to exploit the people of Latin America, Asia and Africa, but the day is soon coming to an end.⁷¹

Forman continued his indictment of religious institutions by elaborating on the role they had in establishing the slave trade and, developing the capitalist mode of production and political economy:

We know the churches came with the military might of the colonizers and have been sustained by the military might of the colonizers... We were captured in Africa by violence. We were kept in bondage and political servitude and forced to work as slaves by the military machinery and the Christian church working hand in hand.⁷²

The Black Manifesto recognized the role religious institutions played in advancing European colonialism and capitalism and their demands for financial restitution sought to remedy the detrimental effects of these socioeconomic systems.

Although the NBEDC did not mince words with the congregation when expressing their demands from the church, Forman elucidates that the conference does not intend to alienate or condemn Black Christians. Forman stated that “we want them to understand how the racist white christian church with its hypocritical declarations and doctrines of brotherhood has abused our trust and faith.”⁷³ The motives for confronting religious institutions for financial restitution for slavery appear to be strategic in nature. The conference planned to demand reparations from several other institutions that had roots in the slave trade as well. The purpose of the Manifesto was to “force the racist white Christian church to begin the payment of reparations... not only by

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

the church but also by private business and the U.S. government.” Forman elaborated that the NBEDC felt focusing on the church and the harm they have inflicted upon Africans was a cause that all Africans in America could rally behind.

When one considers the fact that formerly enslaved individuals were seeking thousands of dollars plus interest in back-pay for years of unpaid labor, fifteen dollars per Black person is a modest demand. Individual payouts of fifteen dollars would not be enough to compensate for centuries of exploitation and oppression in any time period. However, for the NBEDC individual payments were not the primary purpose of reparations. Instead, leaders of the conference formulated a lengthy plan on what to do with the money and they primarily focused on building infrastructure in African American communities throughout the United States. The NBEDC planned to allocate the majority of the money to land and education. \$200 million was assigned to the establishment of a Southern Land Bank “to help our brothers and sisters who have to leave their land because of racist pressure, for people who want to establish cooperative farms, but have no funds..”⁷⁴ According to their plans for reparations in the Manifesto, education was of utmost importance to conference leadership, they called for “the establishment of a Black University to be funded with \$230 million.”

In addition to the emphasis on the need for land and education for Africans in America, they also highlighted the need for African Americans to organize politically. The Manifesto demanded \$20 million to establish a National Labor Strike and Defense Fund. The conference stated “This is necessary for the protection of Black workers and their families who are fighting racist working conditions in this country.”⁷⁵ Despite their considerable demands for capital, one of the conference's most significant demands was for the establishment of the International Black

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Appeal (IBA). The internationalist orientation of the group becomes evident when Forman begins to elaborate on what the responsibilities of the IBA would be, which were “producing more capital for the establishment of cooperative businesses in the United States in Africa, our Motherland.”⁷⁶ Despite not being a formal member of the conference, this particular group was to be led by Forman; the NBEDC considered this one of their most important demands because of what the capital would be used for.

- a) Raising money for the program of the National Black Economic Development Conference.
- b) The development of cooperatives in African countries and support of African Liberation movements.
- c) Establishment of a Black Anti-Defamation League which will protect our African image.⁷⁷

The demand is significant for several reasons, the first, is it appears that the NBEDC fully intended to continue to coalesce and establish economic programs that developed more skilled labor. It is also evident that the NBEDC viewed reparations as a way to develop a democratic and cooperative economy within African communities globally. In addition to this, conference leaders were explicit in their desire to build stronger connections with Africa and support the liberation movements that were occurring during that time. For the NBEDC, the resources for reparations were to be used to build infrastructure and develop alternative modes of production.

To ensure that white Christian churches and Jewish synagogues would come to the negotiating table, the NBEDC primarily adopted a strategy of disruption. In the Black Manifesto, Forman encouraged all Africans in America to “seize the offices, telephones, and printing apparatus of all church-sponsored agencies and to hold these in trusteeship until our demands are

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

met.”⁷⁸ In addition to seizing offices and resources, the Forman called for Black people to organize sit-ins in white and Black churches. He also states the demonstrations were not a “continuation of the sit-in movement of the early sixties” and “self-defense should be applied if attacked.”⁷⁹ The attempt to build a militant movement for reparations is in agreement with the Black Power era’s politics. The desire to build infrastructure and connections with Africa is an evolution from previous demands of individual payments or symbolic gestures and seeks to challenge the socioeconomic system responsible for Black oppression.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

The Republic of New Afrika and Anti-Depression Program

Queen Mother Moore founded, co-founded and influenced several formations within the BPM. One in particular, The Republic of New Africa (RNA) took heed of Moore's words during the Black Power Conference of 1968 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and made reparations their central political aim. As Moore predicted, the pursuit of reparations resulted in the creation of a new "New Afrikan" identity that rejected the mainstream American way of living. The RNA viewed reparations as a vehicle to economic and political self-determination by acquiring land and resources to develop the land. Aside from Moore, the RNA gleaned the political frameworks for nation-building conceptualized by Julius Nyerere and the Tanganyika Afrikan National Union (TANU) who promoted the African Socialist political ideology of Ujamaa.⁸⁰ The decision to adopt this political ideology coupled with the construction of the "New Afrikan" identity, can be directly attributed to the influence of Moore who declared in an interview with Mark Naison "I wanted a communist philosophy, but I wanted us to have a chance to organize our people."⁸¹ Moore emphasized the need for "a thoroughly democratic structure needed to be in place so that ordinary people could decide what to do with the money." Reparations are to be "both substantial and community-controlled"⁸² to build industry and develop Black communities.

The RNA was an outgrowth of the Black Government Convention in Detroit, Michigan held in March 1968. Organized by Imari and Gaidi Obadele (formerly known as Richard and Milton Henry respectively), 500 activists came together to discuss the "destiny of the 'captive Black nation' in America"⁸³ Influential Black nationalists such as Betty Shabazz, Amiri Baraka

⁸⁰ Onaci, *Free the Land: The Republic of NEW Afrika and the Pursuit of a Black Nation-State*, 53.

⁸¹ McDuffie, "I Wanted a Communist Philosophy, but I Wanted Us to Have a Chance to Organize Our People," 182

⁸² Kelley, "'A Day of Reckoning': Dreams of Reparations," 119.

⁸³ Onaci, *Free the Land: The Republic of New Afrika and the Pursuit of a Black Nation-State*, 1.

and Queen Mother Moore were in attendance. At the conclusion of the Convention, dozens of attendees signed a document “declaring to the world that they would struggle for the complete independence and statehood of the Black nation.”⁸⁴ Queen Mother Moore was the first person to sign the declaration and proclaimed “Hallelujah, Hallelujah! I’ve lived to see the day!”⁸⁵ For the veteran activist, the decision to establish an independent, Black nation-state was the culmination of decades of hard work.

The original leaders of this new nation, Imari and Gaidi Obadele were brothers who had been longtime advocates for the civil rights of Black people through reform and inclusion. However, once under the tutelage of Malcolm X and Queen Mother Moore their political goals began to shift towards seeking revolution and self-determination.⁸⁶ The influence of Moore’s conceptions of Black nationalism and self-determination is evident in the political ideology of the RNA. The RNA demanded the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina along with substantial financial compensation to develop Black-controlled industries, infrastructure and government as a form of reparations.⁸⁷ In many ways, The RNA made tremendous strides towards achieving Moore’s desires. Not just because they prioritized reparations and self-determination as political demands but through the development of their own political framework.

The political framework of New Afrikan Political Science (NAPS) pushed the boundaries of Black Power era politics because instead of seeking liberation within the United States, NAPS advocated for independence and statehood.⁸⁸ According to historian Edward Onaci, “New

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Onaci, *Free the Land: The Republic of New Afrika and the Pursuit of a Black Nation-State*, 11

⁸⁷ Araujo, *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: a Transnational and Comparative History*, 143-144.

⁸⁸ Onaci, *Free the Land: The Republic of NEW Afrika and the Pursuit of a Black Nation-State*, 42.

Afrikan Political Science provided a framework through which RNA activists developed alternative understandings of such common political terminology and its iconography.”⁸⁹ This is particularly evident with their adoption of the political principle of Ujamaa, a form of African socialism that was a distinct divergence from other prominent organizations at the time such as the Black Panther Party and Revolutionary Action Movement, who subscribed to the teachings of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and Mao Tse Tung.

In 1962, Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere promoted the concept in a pamphlet titled “Ujamaa—The Basis of African Socialism” Nyerere articulated his conceptions of this unique form of African socialism and explained how it differed from other forms of socialism.

True socialism is an attitude of mind. It is therefore up to the people of Tanganyika... to make sure that this socialist attitude of mind is not lost through the temptations to personal gain which may come our way as individuals, or through the temptation to look on the good of the whole community as of secondary importance to the interest of our own particular group... Ujamaa is opposed to capitalism which seeks to build a happy society on the basis of exploitation of man by man; and it is equally opposed to doctrinaire socialism which seeks to build its happy society on a philosophy of inevitable conflict between man and man.⁹⁰

Queen Mother Moore along with the RNA decided the best way to address the vestiges of slavery that impacted African Americans was through building a democratic economy to achieve collective uplift. However leaders and members of the RNA recognized this would require a cultural shift as well and they concluded that Ujamaa’s emphasis on collectivism was the best fit for their organization and their goals.

Prior to the Black Government Convention that gave birth to the RNA, several BPM organizations made demands for reparations but failed to clearly articulate what reparations

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰Seth M. Markle, “A Motorcycle on Hell Run: Tanzania, Black Power, and the Uncertain Future of Pan-Africanism, 1964-1974,” in *A Motorcycle on Hell Run: Tanzania, Black Power, and the Uncertain Future of Pan-Africanism, 1964-1974* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2017), pp. 43-75, 49.

should be or how to obtain them. The RNA and their leadership made it a priority to develop a program to make a coherent and comprehensive case for reparations. The result of their work was the Anti-Depression Program, a series of legislative requests with the goal “to end poverty, dependence, cultural malnutrition” and “promote inter-racial peace.”⁹¹ The Anti-Depression program provided a plan on what to do with the money, land, and other resources acquired through reparations. In 1972, members of the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika (PG-RNA), filed their proposed program with the U.S. Congress. The program included a demand for the peaceful ceding of land, \$300 billion in financial restitution for New Afrikans and passing an act that would permit negotiations for reparations between the United States and RNA.⁹² To justify their requests, the RNA relied heavily on historical precedent and legal interpretation.

The Anti-Depression Program demanded “compensation for war, forced trafficking, and enslavement.”⁹³ RNA activists believed slavery, the racial violence and exploitation should be considered acts of war. In the legislative request, the authors argued:

The landless new African nation in America during time of slavery arose from forced mingling of persons from several African subraces... This new African nation was subjected to a warfare by the United States as brutal as any ever waged by one people against another. New African manpower was destroyed during slavery under the white American nearly as systematically as Jewish manpower under the Nazis...⁹⁴

Framing African Americans as a “landless nation” was essential to legal arguments made by the RNA because reparations typically “involved payment from one nation to another for war damage.” The Anti-Depression chronicled several incidents when the U.S. government deployed

⁹¹ Onaci, *Free the Land: The Republic of New Afrika and the Pursuit of a Black Nation-State*, 196.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Onaci, *Free the Land: The Republic of New Afrika and the Pursuit of a Black Nation-State*, 197.

⁹⁴ Imari Abubakari Obadele, “The RNA Anti-Depression Program,” in *Foundations of the Black Nation* (Detroit, MI: The House of Songhay, 1975), pp. 73-106, 82.

its military to quash rebellions led by enslaved Africans. In 1831, Nat Turner's rebellion was defeated by army troops. Nearly three decades later, the U.S. Marines vanquished an attempt led by John Brown in the 1859 battle at Harper's Ferry, Virginia. The strict adherence to the Black Codes following major slave rebellions was framed as a military occupation of the New African nation.⁹⁵ According to RNA leadership, attempts to establish independent communities were sabotaged and attacked by U.S. forces, bounty hunters, and indigenous people employed by the state. For the RNA, these acts of war were the justification for their demands for reparations in the form of land and substantial financial compensation.

The initial demand for the peaceful forfeiture of land outlined the several practices adopted by the US to expand the nation's borders. The RNA elaborated on the five methods the U.S. acquired 'possessive sovereignty' over land.⁹⁶ The first method was acquisition by Treaty; although the RNA questioned the validity of the treaties, they acknowledged the U.S. acquired much of their territory because "The Indians yielded much of their land as the results of treaties." The authors of the legislative request stated that some of these treaties followed warfare and settler occupation. Nevertheless the United States' possessive sovereignty rested on the recognition of over 300 treaties.⁹⁷ Purchase and Mutual Consent were the methods that required the least amount of bloodshed. The U.S. acquired Alaska, Florida and the territory from the Louisiana purchase for a total of \$24 million. In the case of mutual consent, the U.S. gained territory in west Florida in 1810 "as a result of the people there declaring themselves U.S. citizens and the U.S. President proclaiming an acceptance of this self-determination."⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Obadele, "The RNA Anti-Depression Program," in *Foundations of the Black Nation*, 83.

⁹⁶ Obadele, "The RNA Anti-Depression Program," in *Foundations of the Black Nation*, 76.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

The RNA also listed conquest and seizure as the primary methods by which the U.S. expanded their territory. Most of the American Southwest, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines were acquired as a result of the Spanish-American War of 1899. That same year, the U.S. annexed the Hawaiian republic through a congressional joint-resolution. Ultimately these processes to accumulate territory for the United States displayed the legislative and executive branch's ability to "direct the ownership of American land."⁹⁹ They also pointed out that during the acquisition of Texas and Florida, the federal government recognized the self-determination of the inhabitants of the respective territories. RNA leaders demanded The New Afrikan Declaration of Independence receive the same level of recognition settlers in Texas and Florida received when they declared their citizenship. In order to gain popular support for the peaceful ceding of land and subsequent secession from the U.S. the RNA called for plebiscites throughout the Black Belt. Once again, they used historical and legal precedent to vindicate their demands. In 1967 Puerto Ricans were given the opportunity to vote on whether they wanted to become a state, a commonwealth, or independent. Despite there being several examples of legal precedent of the US redistributing land, and recognizing the sovereignty and self-determination of various groups, what made the RNA unique (and ultimately enemies of the state) was New Afrikans were attempting to seize American land instead of expanding the national borders.

The following legislative request was a payment of "300 billion dollars reparations for slavery and unjust war against the Black nation to the Republic of New Africa."¹⁰⁰ The authors of the Anti-Depression Program argued that the United States accepted the principle of reparations on several occasions: "The United States has played prominent official roles in other reparations settlements." Imari Obadele, co-author of the Anti-Depression Program, used the

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Obadele, "The RNA Anti-Depression Program," in *Foundations of the Black Nation* 81.

legal precedents of the United States supporting some form of restitution for groups and nations in the aftermath of both world wars. In the aftermath of the first World War, the United States supported an Allied Reparations Commission that ordered Germany to pay 132 billion gold marks to the Allied Forces. Although the U.S. acknowledged their alleged right to reparations they did not accept them. After World War II, President Harry Truman played a leading role in negotiating post war reparations claims against Germany and Japan. In addition to their public support for reparations following both World Wars, the US also “has paid reparations to various Indian nations and groups for damages and fraud committed against them by US citizens, the several states and the United States.” Similarly to the NBEDC, the RNA viewed reparations as a means to develop self-sufficient and autonomous Black communities.

Although there are several parallels between the NBEDC and RNA’s formulations of reparations, the RNA provide more comprehensive guidelines for what reparations demands should look like. RNA leadership viewed lack of employment, access to housing and adequate healthcare, education and the denial of economic or political power the most pressing problems African Americans face.¹⁰¹ The demand for \$300 billion in reparations was regarded as the solution to all the problems plaguing Black people. The Program outlined a budget of \$57.5 billion for the first two years. \$35 billion was earmarked for the acquisition of land and the construction of 4,000 new communities built specifically for Black families. \$20 billion was dedicated to the “partial payment of reparations direct to descendants of slaves (formula is \$10,000 per descendant; \$4,000 direct to individual). \$2.5 billion would go to assisting Black families relocate to the new communities.¹⁰² The RNA claimed this plan would “directly affect the lives of ten million Blacks in America” and “significantly improve the quality of life for all

¹⁰¹ Obadele, “The RNA Anti-Depression Program,” in *Foundations of the Black Nation* 92-97.

¹⁰² Obadele, “The RNA Anti-Depression Program,” in *Foundations of the Black Nation* 103.

thirty million Blacks in America.”¹⁰³ The RNA formulated three processes to determine how the rest of the funds would be distributed: Black community organizations, the plebiscite, and The Congress of Reparations Commissioners.¹⁰⁴

The Congress of Reparations Commissioners was the final legislative request of the Anti-Depression Program. The primary purpose of the commission was “to determine kind, dates, and other details of paying reparations.”¹⁰⁵ To support their calls for the establishment of the commission the RNA summarized an extensive history of the United States forming commissions to address a wide array of issues. The Four-Powered Allied Control Council “participated in the implementation of World War II reparations judgements.” The aforementioned US-Puerto Rico Commission that determined the status of Puerto Rico was among numerous commissions the United States participated in. The recording of the several commissions the US has formed or participated in was to exhibit the power American lawmakers possess to create commissions to begin the negotiating process for reparations. The Reparations Commission was to be composed of representatives from grassroots organizations to form state congresses. The group would be charged with registering Africans in America and implementing “reparations referendums.” These referendums would be a commitment of five percent of personal reparations payments that would generate \$1 billion to fund various community programs.¹⁰⁶

Although incredibly ambitious, RNA activists believed the Anti-Depression bill was a necessary measure to solve most of the problems African American communities throughout the country faced. For Obadele, this money was not for individual upward mobility but “would cover

¹⁰³ Obadele, “The RNA Anti-Depression Program,” in *Foundations of the Black Nation* 91.

¹⁰⁴ Obadele, “The RNA Anti-Depression Program,” in *Foundations of the Black Nation* 104-105.

¹⁰⁵ Obadele, “The RNA Anti-Depression Program,” in *Foundations of the Black Nation* 89.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

the tangible expenses such as relocating thousands of southbound families and creating an infrastructure to sustain the RNA's 'New Communities.'"¹⁰⁷ According to historian Robin Kelley the program was "deeply internationalist and humanist in that they call for the overthrow of all forms of oppression around the globe and propose to make new subjects who are self-reliant, intelligent, self-possessed, and committed to social change."¹⁰⁸ Although the legislative requests within the Anti-Depression Program were never formally accepted, the program would serve as a blueprint for organizations who aimed to formulate comprehensive programs for reparations.

Like most prominent organizations during the Black Power Era, the RNA faced severe government surveillance and interference from both federal and local law enforcement agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation's CounterIntelligence Program (COINTELPRO). Along with the biased portrayal of the RNA by American media (former RNA leader, Chokwe Lumumba, described their coverage by the mainstream media as a "mixture of sensationalism, disbelief and jest."¹⁰⁹), the RNA also had to deal with constant subversion of their organization by the FBI. For example, the RNA agreed to lease 20 acres of land in Hinds County, Mississippi from a Black farmer, Lofton Mason. The RNA agreed to lease this property with the goal to establish a community center that would become the "the hub of all RNA activities in Mississippi and the nation."¹¹⁰ With an official hub of operations the RNA hoped to develop infrastructure such as a capital and other governmental institutions. Mason was eventually exposed as an FBI informant. With most of their leadership incarcerated or in exile, The RNA

¹⁰⁷ Ibid

¹⁰⁸ Kelley Robin D G., "'A Day of Reckoning': Dreams of Reparations," 126.

¹⁰⁹ Lumumba, Chokwe. "SHORT HISTORY OF THE U.S. WAR ON THE R.N.A." *The Black Scholar* 12, no. 1 (1981): 72-81. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41067970>, pg. 72.

¹¹⁰ Robert L. Tsai, "The Republic of New Afrika, 1968," in *America's Forgotten Constitutions: Defiant Visions of Power and Community* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2014), pp. 218-253, 248.

lost momentum. Despite a decline in radical grassroots activity, the primary political objective of obtaining reparations for African in America remained a priority.

In 1987, former members of the RNA, the National Conference of Black Lawyers and other members in the New Afrikan Independence Movement established the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA) which serves as a continuation of the work done by the RNA. Two years after the founding of the coalition, members presented H.R. 40, supported by Michigan Congressman John Conyers which sought to “establish a commission to examine the institution of slavery and subsequent racial and economic discrimination against African Americans and the impact of these forces on Black people today.” Three decades later, H.R. 40 was updated to include proposals for reparations in addition to establishing a commission. A woman by the name of Nkechi Taifa, attorney and member of the RNA and a lead organizer in the effort to free the RNA-11 played an integral role in forming the group and was influential in developing proposals for reparations.

Nkechi Taifa was born on December 29th, 1954, in Washington, D.C., in a middle-class family. Both her parents were Howard University graduates and worked in the D.C. Public School System for more than twenty years.¹¹¹ Taifa grew up living in a predominately Black neighborhood and attending predominately Black grade schools. In a Junior High Black Studies class, she learned of the Chairman of the Black Panther Party, Huey P. Newton, and the national campaign to free him after being accused of killing one police officer and critically wounding another. Taifa pondered, “*Why is he in jail? And why are his lawyers white?... Where are the Black lawyers to represent the Black people?*”¹¹² She became determined to become a lawyer to represent Africans in America; Taifa followed in her parents’ footsteps and attended and

¹¹¹ Taifa, *Black Power, Black Lawyer: My Audacious Quest for Justice*, 5.

¹¹² Taifa, *Black Power, Black Lawyer: My Audacious Quest for Justice*, 40.

graduated from Howard University. It was during her time at Howard University that she was introduced to the RNA and their politics. According to Taifa, she was introduced to the RNA's politics when a man told her: "The 13th amendment freed you but the 14th amendment could not have made you a citizen. You had to have been asked if you wanted to be a citizen. And we were never been asked."¹¹³ The emphasis on self-determination in addition to New Afrikan Political Science intrigued Taifa, "The movement was nationalistic. It was scientific. It was cultural."¹¹⁴ For her, New Afrikan Political Science (NAPS) was the best ideology to build a movement for Black liberation.

The RNA's Anti-Depression Program is what pulled Taifa into the reparations movement. Taifa helped update and develop the Anti-Depression program further when she co-authored *Reparations Yes! The Legal and Political Reasons why New Afrikans, Black People in the United States, Should be Paid Now for the Enslavement of Our Ancestors and for War Against Us After Slavery* with Imari Obadele and Chokwe Lumumba more than two decades later. Queen Mother Moore's influence is evident when Taifa discusses the global implications of the reparations movement in the United States: "our quest for reparations is also part of the international movement for reparations... the success of the movement for reparations for diasporic Africans anywhere, advances the movement for reparations by Africans and African descendants everywhere."¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Taifa, *Black Power, Black Lawyer: My Audacious Quest for Justice*, 108.

¹¹⁴ Taifa, *Black Power, Black Lawyer: My Audacious Quest for Justice*, 110.

¹¹⁵ Taifa, *Black Power, Black Lawyer: My Audacious Quest for Justice*, 178.

The New Afrikan People's Organization and the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement

Although the RNA was an organization on its own, the Republic of New Afrika was also a *political objective* for several activists and organizations within a national campaign called the New Afrikan Independence Movement (NAIM). NAIM was focused on building mass support for a Black nation-state at a grassroots level and developing leadership. The primary aims of this movement were to achieve national support for political independence and statehood. New Afrikan activists believed that realizing an independent Black nation-state would lift Africans in America out of colonial subjugation as well as deal a devastating blow to western imperialist domination and white supremacy. In addition to their demands for national independence, activists and organizations within NAIM made reparations a central demand in their political programs.

The ambitious endeavor of building a separatist movement within the borders of the United States meant New Afrikan activists quickly attracted the attention of local and federal law enforcement agencies. The extralegal activities of federally backed programs like COINTELPRO resulted in violent clashes between law enforcement and Black Power and NAIM activists across the country. In "Short History of the U.S. War on The RNA" Chokwe Lumumba, recounts the case of the RNA-11. On the night of August 17, 1971, there was a "full scale military attack on the RNA Government residence" coordinated by the FBI in collaboration with the Jackson Police department. The next day at 6:30 AM, law enforcement officers fired over 300 rounds into the RNA office, where seven RNA activists were asleep. According to Lumumba, one of them was six months pregnant.

Fortunately, the activists were able to escape the barrage of bullets with their lives but were arrested in the aftermath. When RNA activists fired their weapons back in self-defense, two officers were wounded and the Intelligence Squad Chief for the Jackson Police department died. The attack on the RNA residence resulted in the arrest of Imari Obadele and three other activists. The eleven activists were beaten, chained and paraded across Jackson by the police and charged with murder, assault, and waging war against the state of Mississippi. The federal government took a public stance of indifference towards the RNA, ignoring several calls by RNA leadership and former Congressman John Conyers to negotiate the organization's demands for reparations. However, the charge of attempting to wage war against the state implies the government recognized, to some extent, the validity of the RNA's claims that Africans in America constituted a nation. At the conclusion of the trial, all activists were convicted and ordered to serve sentences ranging from three to seventeen years, despite questionable testimonies and evidence. Although ten of the eleven convicted activists were released within the following decade, efforts to keep the RNA-11 out of prison hindered the organization from pursuing its initial goal of building an autonomous Black community in the heart of the Black Belt. Ultimately, the goal of the attack on sleeping New Afrikan activists was achieved. The aftermath of the shootout forced the RNA to shift its focus to securing legal support for its incarcerated comrades instead of working to achieve their political objectives. In addition to hindering the movement, the arrest and following incarceration of RNA president Imari Obadele resulted in a transfer of power to Alajo Adegbalola, Dara Abubakari, and Chokwe Lumumba.¹¹⁶

The political stances of Adegbalola, Abubakari, and Lumumba began to evolve due to the experiences they had preparing for and organizing the 1975 general RNA election. Lumumba

¹¹⁶ Onaci, *Free the Land: The Republic of NEW Afrika and the Pursuit of a Black Nation-State*, 38.

along with a contingent of other New Afrikan organizers began to question the viability of a Provisional Government because the NAIM had not yet gained enthusiastic mass support or devoted and respected leadership on a national scale. According to Lumumba, when organizers canvassed for the 1975 elections, constituents voted for whoever was presented them unveiling a serious lack of engagement within Black communities.¹¹⁷ Lumumba concluded that several structural changes were necessary within the RNA to make their goal of New Afrikan liberation more practical. Due to the ongoing legal troubles experienced by RNA leaders, Lumumba's proposed changes garnered wide support within the organization. However, he was met with hostility by former PG-RNA President Imari Obadele. According to Nkechi Taifa, Obadele described Lumumba as a "liquidationist" and accused Lumumba and others of trying to "launch a coup to destroy the popularly elected government" of The RNA. On the other hand Lumumba described Obadele as "manipulative and dictatorial"¹¹⁸

According to historian Edward Onaci, the tension between Lumumba's supporters and those loyal to Obadele lead to a constitutional crisis and consequently the formation of factions within the RNA.¹¹⁹ New Afrikans loyal to Obadele formed a political party based in Philadelphia and Washington D.C. under the banner of the Malcolm X Party and accused Lumumba and his supporters of "planning a seditious counterrevolution that needed to be stopped." and began a campaign to remove Lumumba from power immediately. The decision to establish the Malcolm X Party only intensified the animosity between Obadele and Lumumba's camps. The tension between Obadele and Lumumba resulted in an ideological split within the RNA and ultimately hindered both groups from focusing on their original goal of achieving liberation for Africans in

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Taifa, *Black Power, Black Lawyer: My Audacious Quest for Justice*, 150.

¹¹⁹ Onaci, *Free the Land: The Republic of New Afrika and the Pursuit of a Black Nation-State*, 40.

America. In an attempt to make peace and the factions met in Washington D.C. and came to a compromise that resulted in the formation of the “Reconciliation Provisional Government” of the RNA that had an equal amount of members from each faction and Imari Obadele and Dara Abubakari were elected co-presidents.¹²⁰

In an effort to keep the peace and ensure the sustainability of the Reconciliation Provisional Government, several members of the Lumumba faction resolved to establish the New Afrikan People’s Organization (NAPO) on May 19th, 1984. Despite being a product of ideological differences, members of NAPO viewed themselves as the sister organization of the RNA because achieving a sovereign Black nation-state remained their primary political objective. In NAPO’s founding document, the leadership stated “these elements share a common strategic objective- that objective being self-determination, land and an independent nation state for New Afrikans colonized by U.S. Imperialism.”¹²¹

Politically, the PG-RNA had a nationalist orientation that advocated against racism and sought political autonomy through legal means in the international courts. The differences in opinion on how the NAIM should advance their political agenda is where the tensions started. Lumumba and his supporters concluded that the only way to see significant progress towards their political objectives was through a “People’s War.”¹²² due to the indifferent attitude the federal government had towards their demands. In a profile of NAPO, described the People’s War was a multi-pronged assault on oppressive institutions. Although this movement did suggest the possibility of armed confrontation, they listed protests, rebellion, boycotts, and strikes.¹²³ In

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Chokwe Lumumba, “The Text of the Founding Statement of the New Afrikan People's Organization,” Freedom Archives Search Engine, 1984, https://search.freedomarchives.org/search.php?view_collection=121, 1.

¹²² Edward Onaci, *Free the Land: The Republic of New Afrika and the Pursuit of a Black Nation-State*, 193.

¹²³ Chokwe Lumumba, “Profile of the New Afrikan People's Organization (NAPO),” Freedom Archives Search Engine, 1984, https://search.freedomarchives.org/search.php?view_collection=121, 1.

their profile, NAPO explicitly stated that although they shared the same goals of the RNA, the New Afrikan Liberation Army and the Black Liberation Army, they had no official ties to those organizations. Another point of divergence from the RNA was NAPO's explicitly anti-capitalist orientation and a staunch commitment to "the creation of a New Afrikan socialist economy in the Republic of New Afrika."¹²⁴

As a consequence of advocating for a socialist government, NAPO adopted a Pan-African political program that supported "the liberation and unification of the Afrikan continent and the liberation and federation of all Afrikan nations and people throughout the world."¹²⁵ Similarly to the NBEDC, the founding members of NAPO proposed establishing an institution to strengthen the relationship between Africans on the continent and Africans throughout the world. "NAPO also seeks the federation of New Afrikan nations in the western hemisphere."¹²⁶ NAPO positioned themselves as a revolutionary nationalist and anti-imperialist nation that expressed solidarity with nations struggling for sovereignty globally and specifically named oppressed groups directly impacted by American colonialism and imperialism. In their profile, NAPO declares that they are "absolutely aligned with the Native American, Chicano-Mexicans, and Puerto Rican revolutionary organizations in their resolve to dismantle illegal American Empire."¹²⁷ New Afrikan activists believed that a unified revolutionary nationalist movement on a global scale would cripple the US federal government.

Although NAPO was the offspring of the RNA, New Afrikan activists from the House of Umoja and Afrikan People's Party played a pivotal role in shaping the ideological foundation of the new organization. What distinguished NAPO from their predecessors was they decided to be

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

a political party focused on building power and support at the grassroots level through political education and youth engagement with programs like the New Afrikan Scouts, instead of operating like an established government entity¹²⁸. In the text of the founding statement of NAPO, leadership argued that the problems that faced Africans in America required a scientific approach by “organizing ourselves and utilizing our resources, both human and material, in a manner that is most useful to our National Liberation Struggle.”¹²⁹ NAPO leaders felt that it was necessary to implement “survival programs” similarly to the Black Panthers to demonstrate to Africans in America that they could rely on institutions outside of the “system of subjugation that presently ensnares us.”¹³⁰ Despite the tensions that arose that gave birth to NAPO, it is evident that they were not in opposition to the political objectives in the RNA. The tensions amongst these two groups were borne out of differences in opinion on which *strategy* to employ to achieve their goals.

According to their founding document, NAPO believed that collective leadership and democratic centralism were the most appropriate processes to carry out their business. By making leadership a collective effort NAPO hoped to “eliminate elitism and individualism that has often characterized the leadership of organizations in our movement.”¹³¹ NAPO leadership also believed that these forms of governance would make them better equipped to respond to their membership and the needs of the masses. They also maintained that democratic centralism and collective leadership would “assure the discipline required to make an effective organizational response to the schemes of our colonizers.”¹³² By adopting these principles

¹²⁸ Onaci, *Free the Land: The Republic of New Afrika and the Pursuit of a Black Nation-State*, 41.

¹²⁹ Lumumba, “The Text of the Founding Statement of the New Afrikan People's Organization,” 1.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Lumumba, “The Text of the Founding Statement of the New Afrikan People's Organization,” 2.

Lumumba felt they would be better equipped to identify the needs of Africans in America. This is a stark contrast to how the PG-RNA decided to pursue their goals. Historian Edward Onaci describes the RNA as a “Pan-African nationalist niche isolated from the Black communities they wanted to serve.”¹³³

The New Afrikan People’s Organization might have differed from the RNA in strategy but they were on one accord when it came to the overall goals of NAIM. Fighting against racist domination, the right to self-defense were at the forefront of the guiding principles of NAPO. The demand for “Reparations and Freedom for our Prisoners of War and Political Prisoners” was also one of the central political demands of NAPO. They described reparations as:

A just settlement for legitimate claims that are pending against the U.S. imperialist state must be concluded. The super-profits gained because of our being brutalized and super-exploited must be returned to us. Also, our P.O.W.’S and Political Detainee who forthrightly confronted our enemies and our heroes and heroines must be returned to our nation.¹³⁴

In the aftermath of federally backed operations like COINTELPRO, grassroots organizations were forced to adjust their political strategies and demands to the new sociopolitical terrain. In addition to significant financial compensation, New Afrikan activists were compelled to demand the freedom of their incarcerated comrades. NAPO activists utilized international life to justify their demand to free incarcerated New Afrikan activists and substantial financial restitution.

In the Principles and Programme of Action of NAPO, founding members cited “loss of life, forced labor and economic exploitation, and psychological trauma” as reasons for why reparations are necessary.¹³⁵ Although the new landscape of their movements required them to recalibrate their demands and primary objectives to include freeing their comrades; NAPO

¹³³ Onaci, *Free the Land: The Republic of New Afrika and the Pursuit of a Black Nation-State*, 190.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Lumumba, “The Text of the Founding Statement of the New Afrikan People's Organization,” 2.

activists still sought *significant financial restitution* as a main goal of their political activity. To continue to garner support for the People’s War, NAPO established the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM) in 1990. MXGM’s work was guided by six major political aims: self-determination, recognition as a nation, securing basic human rights, securing the release of political prisoners and prisoners of war, ending sexist oppression and securing reparations “in the form of money, technology and land.”¹³⁶ MXGM has organized several campaigns to garner mass support, including a hip-hop festival in 1998 in Cuba, South Africa and Brazil headlined by well-known artists such as Common, and The Roots.¹³⁷

The MXGM’s most ambitious campaign was inspired by the old Black nationalist proverb: “politics without economics is symbol without substance.” From 2004 to 2010 MXGM and NAPO began to formulate the Jackson-Kush Plan, which would be funded by the revenue secured through reparations. NAPO anticipated that the successful implementation of their plan would “hasten the socialist transformation of the territories currently claimed by the United States settler-colonial state.”¹³⁸ A crucial element of The Jackson-Kush Plan was to develop “the solidarity economy in Jackson, Mississippi,” the potential capital of the RNA, “to advance the struggle for economic democracy as a prelude towards the democratic transition to eco-socialism.”¹³⁹

Leaders of NAPO and MXGM created Cooperation Jackson to achieve the political and economic objectives of the Jackson-Kush Plan. Their goals were:

1. To place the ownership and control over the primary means of production directly in the hands of the Black working class of Jackson.

¹³⁶ Onaci, *Free the Land: The Republic of New Afrika and the Pursuit of a Black Nation-State* 190.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ajamu Nangwaya, *Jackson Rising: the Struggle for Economic Recovery and Black Self-Determination in Jackson, Mississippi* (Montreal, Quebec: Daraja Press, 2017), pg. 3.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

2. To build and advance the development of the ecologically regenerative forces of production in Jackson, Mississippi
3. To democratically transform the political economy of the city of Jackson, the state of Mississippi, and the southeastern region
4. To attain self-determination for people of African descent and the radical, democratic transformation of the state of Mississippi (which we see as a prelude to the radical decolonization and transformation of the United States itself).¹⁴⁰

MXGM member and Cooperation Jackson co-founder, Kali Akuno, argues the emphasis on economic development is paramount to the success of their political endeavours. Akuno states “We have to be clear, crystal clear, that self-determination is unattainable without an economic base.”¹⁴¹ Leaders within MXGM and Cooperation Jackson concluded that the capitalist political economy made it impossible for Africans in America to achieve true self-determination. Their conclusion resulted in them creating a comprehensive economic program with the goal of developing a democratic economic base that empowered all participants and addressed inequality in Black communities.

According to Akuno, Cooperation Jackson believe the the first step towards creating a democratic economic base was through controlling the means of production. To own the land, access to water and other natural resources, as well as the technology necessary to convert these raw materials into valuable products and services which would collectively lift the Black community in Jackson, Mississippi out of poverty.¹⁴² The next step in the Jackson-Kush Plan is to “build productive forces” and industrialize Jackson to change the economic position of the region and “break out of its historic position within the U.S. and world capitalist system of being

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Nangwaya, *Jackson Rising: the Struggle for Economic Recovery and Black Self-Determination in Jackson, Mississippi*, 7.

¹⁴² Nangwaya, *Jackson Rising: the Struggle for Economic Recovery and Black Self-Determination in Jackson, Mississippi*, 4.

a site of resource extraction and the super-exploitation of labor.”¹⁴³ By upending the capitalist economic model and placing the productive forces in the hands of the working-class, capital would no longer be the deciding factor for social development.¹⁴⁴ By prioritizing the needs of the working-class instead of maximizing profit, a democratically controlled economic base would be capable of “repairing the damage done to our environment and ecosystems and creating new systems that will ultimately regenerate the bounty of life on our planet, in all its diversity.”¹⁴⁵ The substantial material change that would result from the Jackson-Kush Plan would usher in a drastic change that would discourage individualism and greed.

MXGM and Cooperation Jackson activists hoped to democratically transform the economy of Jackson, MS and finally realize self-determination for Africans in America by placing control of the economy into the hands of the working-class. According to Kali Akuno, the shift from privately owned industries and technologies to a democratic economy would require the “self organization of the working class itself.”¹⁴⁶ Although Africans in America have a long history of organizing their own communities for political and economic gains these practices are not as common anymore due to the extensive efforts of the federal government. The Jackson-Kush Plan encourages Black people to organize in their unions, points of production and “where they live, play, pray, and study.”¹⁴⁷ Promoting self-organization on a mass level MXGM leaders hoped to garner enough support to “eliminate the structural barriers blocking the ‘legal’ development of the solidarity economy within the state.”¹⁴⁸ MXGM activists recognized that the

¹⁴³ Nangwaya, *Jackson Rising: the Struggle for Economic Recovery and Black Self-Determination in Jackson, Mississippi*, 5.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Nangwaya, *Jackson Rising: the Struggle for Economic Recovery and Black Self-Determination in Jackson, Mississippi*, 5.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Nangwaya, *Jackson Rising: the Struggle for Economic Recovery and Black Self-Determination in Jackson, Mississippi*, 6.

freedom to organize an alternative economic mode of production for the working class would not mean automatic success for their plans.

Considering the size of the MXGM and Cooperation Jackson, the architects of the Jackson-Kush Plan recognized their plan was a potential overextension of their organizational capabilities. However they felt this immensely ambitious plan was necessary: “We firmly believe that we must demand the impossible, both of the world and of ourselves, in order to change both subjects.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Nangwaya, *Jackson Rising: the Struggle for Economic Recovery and Black Self-Determination in Jackson, Mississippi*, 6.

Conclusion

This short history of the movement for reparations for chattel slavery in the United States exhibits the wide-ranging ideas Black people have for what reparations could be. It is important to note that reparations for slavery have never been considered a form of economic relief but back pay and restitution for centuries of stolen labor and wealth and unmitigated racial terror. The stolen labor from slavery fueled the original socioeconomic system that catapulted the United States from a conglomerate of small colonies to world power and eventually an empire. Historically, demands for reparations have always been oriented towards achieving collective goals of self-determination and liberation from the capitalist political economy that is underdeveloping Black communities globally. The shift towards focusing on closing the racial wealth gap within the United States, although necessary, would ultimately prove to be a stop-gap to deeper institutional flaws that have been oppressive and exclusionary to Africans in America. To properly address the extensive and interlocking systems of oppression currently underdeveloping African communities in the US and globally, the contemporary reparations movements would benefit from the study of certain frameworks and demands articulated by the organizations featured in this paper.

In several of the cases examined throughout this project, arguments for reparations are supported by the fact that the United States has paid restitution to people from sovereign nations. In Queen Mother Moore's *Why Reparations*, she argued that there was legal precedent for the payment of reparations to descendants of enslaved Africans because the US paid reparations to the Phillipines, Japanese-Americans, and Native-Americans. The Republic of New Afrika's Anti-Depression program listed the United States' support of the Allied Reparations Commission

and their mandate to hold Germany financially responsible for their role in World War II. In the contemporary context, securing territory to establish an independent Black nation-state in the US would be ambitious, to say the least. However, the notion that Black people in the US must cultivate a new identity that rejects American and eurocentric political, economic, and cultural practices and identities should be engaged with, in earnest. Embracing the African roots of formerly enslaved people in the US would strengthen the argument for reparations.

Relinquishing the second-class status that comes with American citizenship for Black people exposes the reality that Africans in America are closer to colonial subjects than full citizens in the US. Victims of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade were a stolen labor force that simultaneously hampered the economic development of nations throughout the African continent and accelerated the economic development of European nations and their colonies. An emphasis on the African in African-American could strengthen propositions of Black people being a “landless nation” entitled to reparations. By embracing a Pan-African orientation similar to organizations in the NAIM current reparations movements would be better equipped to hold *all* participants of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade accountable.

Another common thread throughout this short history of the reparations movement is the desire to establish autonomous Black-led and operated institutions. The purpose of these institutions would be to address the vestiges of slavery such as institutional racism and economic underdevelopment, meet the material needs of poor and working-class Africans in America and build a network with sovereign African nations. The NBEDC’s proposition to create the International Black Appeal (IBA) was an attempt to create a holistic solution to an endemic problem. An organization that addressed the political, economic, and cultural deprivation that resulted from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is still a necessary and feasible endeavor that

should be considered amongst the leaders of the contemporary reparations movement. In order for reparations to be truly reparative, there need to be institutions in place that are capable of holding responsible parties accountable long after a check is cashed.

The NBEDC's manifesto also revealed the reality that the likelihood of reparations being won through peaceful means is not likely. Demands for reparations have largely received only lip service and apathy at the federal level. As James Forman posits in the Black Manifesto, strategic mass mobilization may be necessary to bring the desired parties to the negotiating table. The NBEDC encouraged Black churchgoes to "seize the offices, telephones, and printing apparatus of all church-sponsored agencies and to hold these in trusteeship until our demands are met."¹⁵⁰ Although the NBEDC's decision to target religious institutions in their demands for reparations may have been limited, the idea of sustained disruption of their day to day operations is useful. Prolonged protests, general strikes, and sit-ins could be the most effective way to gain the attention of lawmakers at the federal level and compel them to come to the negotiating table.

Another salient point throughout this project that should be emphasized is all the organizations highlighted had an internationalist orientation to some extent. The NBEDC, RNA, NAPO and MXGM all realized that the global impacts of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade required global solutions. The NBEDC aimed to establish political and economic relationships with nations in Africa with the funds from reparations. Organizations within the NAIM believed convincing millions of Black people to renounce their American citizenship and annexing a large swath of land within American borders would deal a debilitating blow to global imperialism. Demands for reparations in the current movement should aim to relieve the material conditions for Africans in America and abroad. Currently, the United States is the most powerful military

¹⁵⁰ The Black Manifesto, *The Church Awakens: African American Struggles for Justice*, Archives of the Episcopal Church.

power in the world. The US military currently controls approximately 750 bases in over 80 countries around the globe.¹⁵¹ Demands for reparations should include measures that improve the material conditions for Africans in America and loosen the grips of foreign control in Africa.

The high rates of poverty of Black communities in the US and on the continent are intrinsically linked and are a byproduct of the slave trade. Similarly, the militarization of the African continent through programs like The United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) is directly linked to the militarization of local law enforcement agencies that occupy African communities in America through the 1033 program. AFRICOM is based in Stuttgart, Germany and their self-ordained mission is to: “with partners, counter transnational threats and malign actors, strengthens security forces and responds to crises in order to advance U.S. national interests and promote regional security, stability and prosperity.”¹⁵² The Department of Defense controlled 1033 program consigns excess military equipment to local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. Approximately 8,200 law enforcement agencies in 49 states participate in the 1033 program.¹⁵³ A reparations demand targeting the defunding and dismantling of AFRICOM and the 1033 program would improve the conditions of Africans world wide.

While one could argue that some of the formulations for reparations articulated by the organizations were overly ambitious at times and; in some cases some of the avenues these organizations planned to use are no longer viable. As capitalism has become a hegemonic force in the global political economy since the close of th 20th century, the United Nations is no longer

¹⁵¹ Mohammed Haddad, “Infographic: History of US Interventions in the Past 70 Years,” Al Jazeera (Al Jazeera Media Network, September 10, 2021), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/10/infographic-us-military-presence-around-the-world-interactive#:~:text=The%20US%20controls%20about%20750,the%20next%2010%20countries%20combined>.

¹⁵² Department of Defense. “About the Command,” United States Africa Command, accessed March 4, 2022, <https://www.africom.mil/about-the-command>.

¹⁵³ Department of Defense, “1033 Program FAQs,” 1033 program faqs, accessed March 4, 2022, <https://www.dla.mil/DispositionServices/Offers/Reutilization/LawEnforcement/ProgramFAQs.aspx>.

the neutral international forum it once was. In the same period of time, the US has become the world leader in incarceration which is underdeveloping Black communities in the US politically, economically, and socially. It is imperative that demands for reparations evolve with the contemporary social, political and economic landscape. The MXGM and Cooperation Jackson have proven adept in doing so. In many ways, their proposed models of a democratic economy perfectly encapsulate the radical imaginations of the foundational theorists of the reparations movement. These organizations aim to place the control of the means of production in the hands of the Black working class, build an ecologically regenerative economy, democratically transform the capitalist political economy and attain self-determination for all Africans in America. The goals of MXGM and Cooperation Jackson get to the root cause of global Black subjugation and provide long-term solutions that would, in theory, eradicate institutional racism and thus achieve the purpose of reparations for slavery.

As the movement for reparations has begun to gain some acceptance in the mainstream political arena with the passage of Assembly Bill 3121 in California, it is vital to remain grounded in the initial goals of the reparations movement: self-determination and liberation. Instead of using the funds acquired through reparations to close the racial wealth gap in the US, it would be more beneficial to direct resources toward building infrastructure within Black communities. My goal when I initially embarked on this project was not to attack the current leaders of the reparations movement but to challenge them to demand more. As has been articulated throughout this paper, the victims of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade are deserving of so much more than economic concessions and increased privileges within the imperial core. Reparations represent the opportunity to reclaim the cultural, intellectual, and material wealth that was stripped from Africans through slavery, colonialism, and imperialism and realize their

full potential as human beings. If one group of Africans receives reparations while the majority remain in subjugation then it would be incorrect to say the injuries from slavery have been remedied. A mass movement for reparations has the potential to upend the capitalist political economy that oppresses not just Africans but working-class people all over the world. This short history has also shown that reparations will not be simply handed over. Descendants of enslaved Africans must be willing to use all available avenues to obtain reparations including the grassroots and legislative routes. Much like all the other rights and privileges Africans in America currently enjoy, reparations movements must take on a militant character to see their goals come to fruition. Reparations is indeed a battle cry that challenges us to reach back to our past for tools to build an equitable future.

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