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LIBERATION
VENTURES

A DREAM IN OUR NAME

Aria Florant



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FOREWORD

Angela Glover Blackwell

This is a season of hope. The American people are undergoing a historic racial reckoning. In the summer of 2020, after George Floyd was murdered, between 15 and 25 million Americans participated in demonstrations. There were events in every single state and 40 percent of all the counties in the U.S, making it the largest movement for racial justice in the history of the nation. What we have seen since then is an extraordinary convergence of Americans around racial justice: Black, Latinx, Asian Americans, Native, immigrants, Muslims, and millions and millions of white Americans (90 percent of the U.S. counties where demonstrations took place were majority white) all coming together for justice. But racial reckoning is only one step toward the societal transformation that can lead to reparations.

This report offers us a framework for channeling aspirations for racial healing into a discipline that can build a culture of repair. As you will read, building the culture of repair will require racial *reckoning*, *acknowledgment* of the harm, *accountability* by individuals and institutions, and *redress* for the harms done. These four components bring together broad collective compensation necessary to spark the process of repair with deep structural transformation to ensure lasting change, both of which are necessary to make racial repair and reparations real.

Decades, generations, centuries of struggle have brought us to this tuning point. The justice advocates of today aren't fighting to make the nation's systems more fair, they are building new systems with a vision of the future where everyone thrives. The extreme actions around the country to refuse and reject the nation's history – from banning books to erasing entire fields of study – are a reflection of just how strong the winds of liberation are blowing. It is a season of hope.

Mariame Kaba said, "hope is a discipline." The perception and depth she packed into these four simple words has stayed with me. It is this kind of hope, the kind of hope that is not just a feeling but a practice, where I would like to situate this report and the work of building a culture of repair that this report outlines. It takes discipline to hold onto hope; as Mariame has said, to wake up everyday and recommit ourselves to a belief in a better future for everyone. But also, there is a discipline that justifies hope. It's a discipline rooted in critical thinking about how we arrived at this juncture, the purposeful and persistent collection of information, working to build a vision of what we want and what it will take to get there, and finding and seizing opportunities to move the agenda forward.

This report applies the discipline of hope to the quest for reparations. We can transform the possibility of this moment into the power to reshape the nation and achieve a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.



Angela Glover Blackwell

Founder in Residence
PolicyLink

PREFACE



Thank you for bearing witness to our words and ideas. This report serves as an introduction to **Liberation Ventures** (LV)—a newly founded organization working to accelerate the reparations movement—and to LV’s **Racial Repair framework**, which is our vision for repairing the wounds of chattel slavery and its legacy, which continues to harm Black people today. We believe that when Black people heal and thrive, so too can our nation.

Liberation Ventures is building a multiracial democracy that works for all of us—by making racial repair a reality in the United States. We are realizing *A Dream In Our Name*, where reparations for Black people unlocks true belonging for us all. Founded in April 2020, LV’s role is to build infrastructure that supports and grows the reparations movement. Our three pillars of work include mobilizing financial resources into the movement, changing narratives about reparations, and strengthening relationships and connective tissue to build the movement’s capacity.

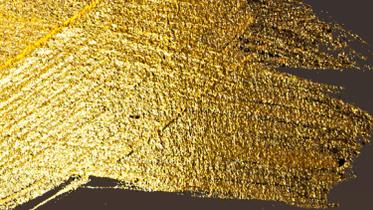
This report is intended to accelerate ongoing conversations about how *all of us* stand to benefit from Racial Repair. Through this framework, we apply a new lens on what comprehensive reparations can mean, who it is for, and what role we each can play. We clarify the component parts of “repair” to translate it from being an abstract term to an implementable action. Fundamentally, we’re broadening the vision for reparations to ensure that *all* people see themselves in the work of repair, and we’re calling forth our collective responsibility to do this necessary work.

The content in this document is meant to speak to many different audiences. Liberation Ventures is a bridging organization—meaning our role is to bring new people and organizations into the work of racial repair. We hope that the clarity and rigor behind the framework helps movement leaders articulate what comprehensive racial repair must include, across public, private, and social sector institutions. We hope that the historical context and case studies throughout the document demonstrate the wide array of precedent for this work, situate Black Americans as deeply deserving of reparations, and move those who are currently ‘reparations curious’ toward a posture of unequivocal support. Finally, we hope that the body of evidence for the benefits of repair—drawn from across the disciplines of psychology, economics, sociology, management, history, governance, and more—brings people of all races into our movement by illustrating that racial repair is not just about Black people, but all people; and therefore, not just about the past, but about the future.

We invite you to use this report in a number of ways. Read it and discuss it with your friends and colleagues. Apply the framework to individual relationships in need of repair, in order to experience the power of each of the components working together firsthand. Bring it to your workplace, church, school, or community organization to catalyze discussion about if your institution has caused harm to Black communities—and let it spark action to begin to repair. As you do so, tell us what you discover. Ask

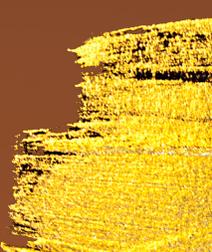
questions, [share feedback](#), and, most importantly, help us build a collective perspective on what repair looks like in action—from the micro to the macro.

Ultimately, this report is an invitation. We hope that it inspires you to dream about what the world looks like on the other side of reparations—a world with a Culture of Repair. At Liberation Ventures, we have nostalgia not for the past, but instead for a time that has yet to be. We are making moves to get us there, together.



**“ If we—and now I mean the relatively
conscious whites and the relatively
conscious blacks, who must, like lovers,
insist on, or create, the consciousness of
the others—do not falter in our duty now,
we may be able, handful that we are, to
end the racial nightmare, and achieve our
country, and change the history of the
world. If we do not now dare everything,
the fulfillment of that prophecy, re-
created from the Bible in song by a slave,
is upon us: God gave Noah the rainbow
sign, No more water, the fire next time! ”**

—James Baldwin¹



I. Introduction:

A CULTURE OF REPAIR

A Woman Walking at a Park with her Daughter, Barbara Olsen



Belinda Sutton was one of the first people to demand reparations for slavery and win. In 1783, she petitioned the Massachusetts General Court, writing:

“The face of your Petitioner, is now marked with the furrows of time, and her frame feebly bending under the oppression of years, while she, by the Laws of the Land, is denied the enjoyment of one morsel of that immense wealth, apart whereof hath been accumulated by her own industry, and the whole augmented by her servitude.”²

Digesting the gravity of Ms. Sutton’s words requires taking a pause. Her petition planted a seed for what America could become—a place with robust government policies for righting wrongs; a place where the “we” in “we the people” genuinely expands, strengthening our collective belief in the experiment of a multiracial democracy; and a place that recognizes all people’s inherent dignity, humanity, and worth.

Yet that seed was not nurtured, and America has yet to live up to the values Ms. Sutton tried to imbue in its foundation. On the whole, America took a different path: of denial, disenfranchisement, and violence. In 1964, Malcolm X described this path in his famous statement, which remains true today:

“If you stick a knife in my back nine inches and pull it out six inches, there’s no progress. If you pull it all the way out that’s not progress. Progress is healing the wound that the blow made. And they haven’t even pulled the knife out much less healed the wound. They won’t even admit the knife is there.”

Equally true is that when Black people have knives in their backs, so too does America; conversely, when Black people thrive, America thrives. Speaking to the centrality of Black people to the American economy and democracy, Nikole Hannah-Jones writes, “We were told once, by virtue of our bondage, that we could never be American. But it was by virtue of our bondage that we became the most American of all.”³

While Malcolm X’s allusion to the knife in the backs of Black people was, at least partly, metaphoric, literal violence inflicted upon Black bodies is frequent; witness George Floyd’s nine-minute execution or that of Walter Scott—an unarmed Black man shot in the back while running away from a white police officer. Racism is, first and foremost, visceral; as Ta-Nehisi Coates writes, it “dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth... the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body.”⁴

The knife is also a symbol, representing the violence embedded in the United States’ founding: the genocide of Indigenous peoples and the chattel slavery of Africans. Though it has been 400 years since slavery began, it has been only 155 since its legal end. The knife has remained in place, and over that time, the wound has continued to fester.

General William T. Sherman’s Special Order No. 15—the promise of 40 acres and a mule for each formerly enslaved person—was the answer to a radical question in 1865, when General Sherman asked a delegation of Black leaders:

“What do you want for your own people?”⁵ Notably, any discussion of General Sherman’s order must acknowledge that the land that he promised was stolen Indigenous land. Ultimately, President Andrew Johnson nullified the order and directed that the land be returned to former owners of enslaved people.

To this day, white enslavers are the only people who have ever received federal government restitution for the transatlantic slave trade, who were compensated for their loss of human property.⁶

Today, despite an ongoing call to consciousness about the scale and pervasiveness of racial injustice in this country, white supremacy continues to brew. This is most recently evidenced by the January 6 insurrection in 2021; the mass shooting in Buffalo, New York, in May of 2022; and ongoing anti-history attempts to censor conversations about race, racism, and slavery from education.

Consistent with this country’s founding, the 155 years since slavery are riddled with contradiction. At different points throughout this time, American society has denied the knife, driven the knife further in, and, incrementally, attempted to remove it. People seeking to hoard power and wealth architected the fundamental and (intentionally) flawed logic of chattel slavery—the distortion of science and the denial of truth that strips Black people of their humanity and exploits it for profit—which continues to be a heavy anchor dragging societal progress. Twelve years of Reconstruction could and would not undo the damage wrought over the prior 250, and the need for comprehensive repair has never subsided.

It is time for the US to finally walk a difficult but necessary path: the path that Ms. Sutton set for this nation. This demands that we collectively confront the shame of our origin and intentionally repair the cycles of harm that it has caused and continues to create. It is time to transform the contradictions of this country’s founding and make the phrase “all men are created equal” true.

**It is time to build a Culture of Repair.
It is time for reparations.**

HOW WE GOT HERE

In her petition, Ms. Sutton described the end of slavery:

“Fifty years her faithful hands have been compelled to ignoble servitude for the benefit of an Isaac Royall, untill, as if Nations must be agitated, and the world convulsed for the preservation of that freedom which the Almighty Father intended for all the human Race, the present war was Commenced—The terror of men armed in the Cause of freedom, compelled her master to fly—and to breathe away his Life in a Land, where, Lawless domination sits enthroned—pouring bloody outrage and cruelty on all who dare to be free.”⁷

The end of the Civil War did not deliver fully realized freedom. Reconstruction brought about real political, social, and economic gains for Black people and our society as a whole, which we more fully explore in the Redress section of this report. However, these gains were stalled when political support for Reconstruction policies declined, President Rutherford B. Hayes withdrew the federal troops who had enforced them, and white vigilante violence proliferated. In “The New Reconstruction,” Adam Serwer describes how Black economic opportunity was stymied:

“Throughout the South, when freedmen signed contracts with their former masters, those contracts were broken; if they tried to seek work elsewhere, they were hunted down; if they reported their concerns to local authorities, they were told that the testimony of Black people held no weight in court. When they tried to purchase land, they were denied; when they tried to borrow capital to establish businesses, they were rejected; when they demanded decent wages, they were met with violence.”⁸

Decades later, we’ve taken steps forward and steps back. The 13th Amendment abolished slavery, yet the clause “except as punishment for a crime”—as well as a myriad of legal actions from Black Codes⁹ to the War on Drugs—has kept the American criminal legal system rooted in the practices of slavery, and mass incarceration continues to disproportionately target and disenfranchise Black people, men and boys in particular.

The Civil Rights era secured policy wins—and yet many challenges persist today that its landmark legislation was intended to fix. An increasing share of Black people are earning college degrees despite school segregation and inequitable funding, but they are hobbled by overwhelming, disproportionate debt¹⁰ after graduation. Black people have made strides in income and wealth, yet the median white household still holds almost eight times as much wealth as the median Black household.¹¹ Though Black people attained the right to vote, misinformation, intimidation, felony convictions, and other exclusionary tactics continue to disenfranchise Black voters. Additionally, key protections originally enacted by the Voting Rights Act¹² have been gutted. Supreme Court Elena Justice Kagan reminds us of the connection, and lack thereof, between our policies and our ideals:

"What is tragic here is that the Court has (yet again) rewritten—in order to weaken—a statute that stands as a monument to America's greatness, and protects against its basest impulses. What is tragic is that the Court has damaged a statute designed to bring about 'the end of discrimination in voting.'"¹³

As a nation, we are trying to make progress. However, our solutions are too often sub-scale, focused on treating symptoms without addressing root causes.

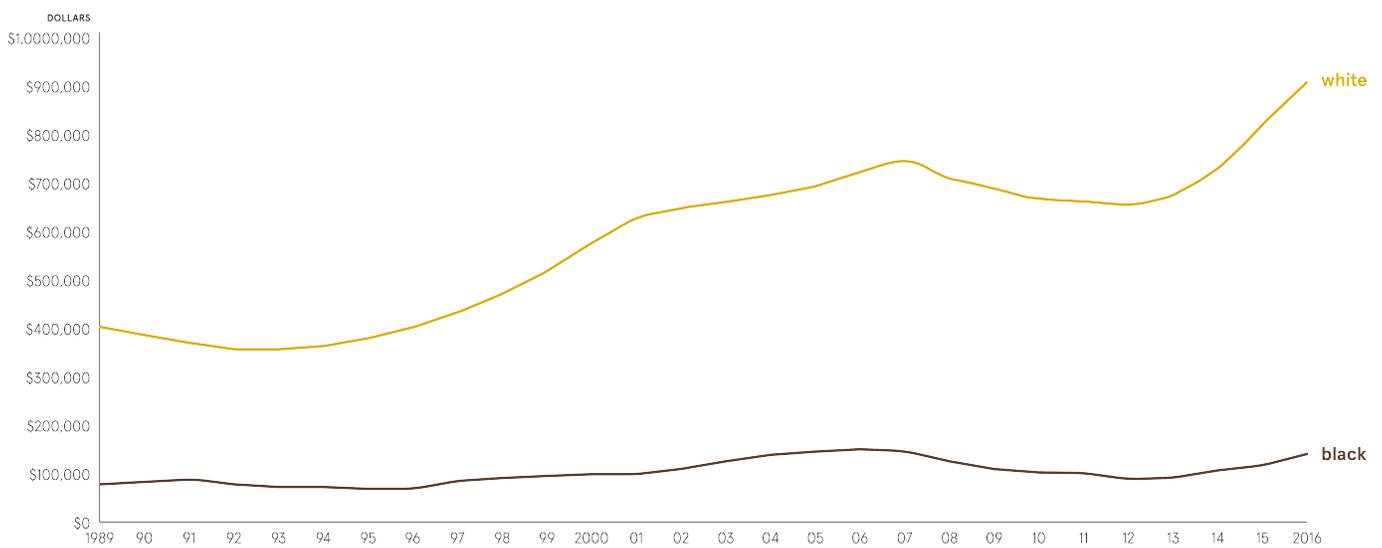
At Liberation Ventures (LV), we believe that two root causes—wealth disparities and anti-Black narratives—act as anchors that hold other unjust systems in place.

Wealth Disparities

The Black-white wealth gap is massive and persistent. When many people think about the drivers of wealth, the stock market, business, or the economy come to mind. However, these all operate according to government policy—and it is public policy that has been the most influential driver of wealth accumulation over the last century, specifically through policies that enabled white people and wealthy people to build more wealth.

This story begins with Black people as wealth; Black bodies owned by plantation elites. It is critical to view this history through an intersectional lens, as Black women were not only considered property themselves but also created additional wealth for their owners by giving birth. Sexual violence was rampant, creating inextricable links between violence, patriarchy, health, and wealth that continue to manifest today. In fact, Black women are two-to-three times more likely to die of pregnancy-related causes than white women.¹⁴

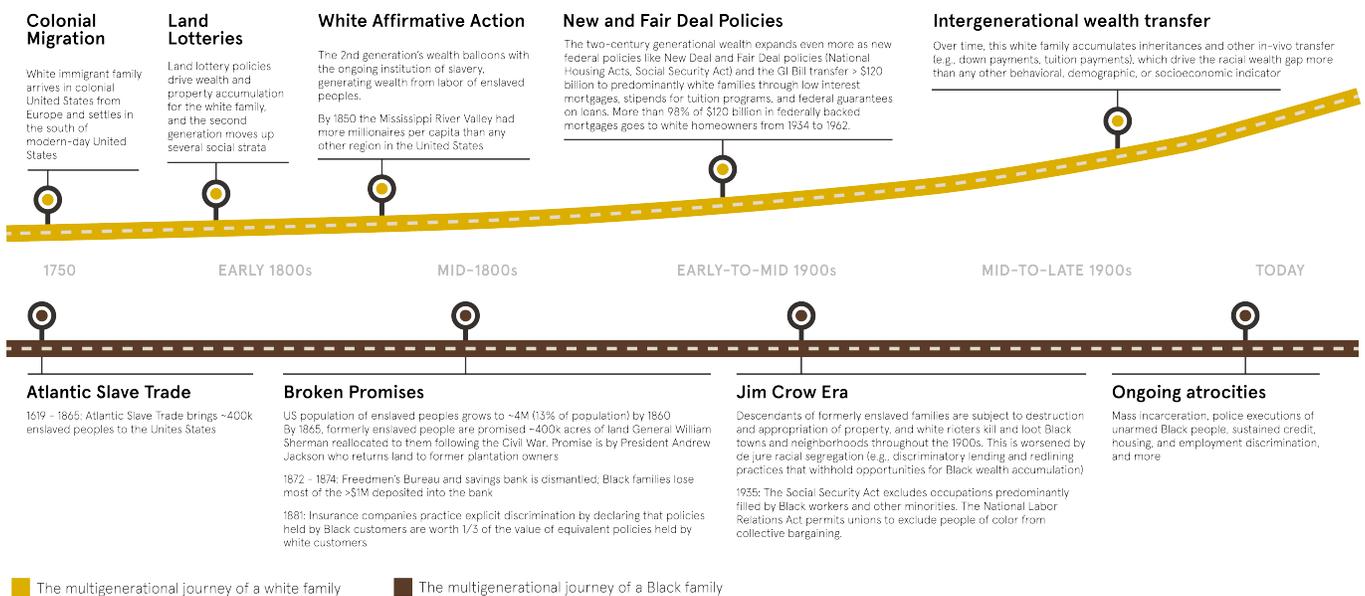
Black and white mean net worth from 1989 to 2016



Source: Federal Reserve Board, Survey of Consumer Finance. Visualized with Smooth Lines, Survey Data from 1989 to 2016

After the war, a litany of federal policies enabled white wealth to compound, while extracting or stalling Black wealth. The Homestead Act granted land to white settlers and farmers in 1862, around the same time that General Sherman’s order was revoked. The National Housing Act guaranteed low-interest loans to white homebuyers, while the GI Bill provided stipends to white veterans for mortgages and education. When there was finally enough public will for the government to prioritize Black Americans’ economic security, federal policy shifted into an era of what Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor has termed "predatory inclusion"¹⁵; programs meant to promote Black homeownership instead empowered racist financiers, which caused thousands of foreclosures in Black communities. Finally, local government and private sector policies contributed as well, through zoning, redlining, predatory lending, and more.

A Litany of Federal Policy has enabled white wealth to compound, while extracting and stalling Black wealth



Source: CUNY, University of Virginia, PBS, Library of Congress, Harvard University, *When Affirmative Action Was White* (Ira Katznelson), *The Political Economy of Education, Financial Literacy, and the Racial Wealth Gap* (Darity, Hamilton), Washington Post, New York Times 1619 Project, The Atlantic, Black Past:: California Newsreel; History.com; JSTOR Daily

The Black-white wealth gap continues to increase, despite the rise of public awareness in recent years.¹⁶ McKinsey & Company recently conducted a study that examined the drivers of the disparity in annual wealth flow between white and Black families. Sixty percent of that disparity is driven by intergenerational wealth transfer; only 40 percent is driven by savings potential and return on investments.¹⁷ Said differently, 60 percent of the problem is derived from wealth being passed from one generation to the next—not through educational, employment, or investment opportunities that Black people do or do not have access to. Yet most interventions to close the gap focus on addressing the latter. If we are to get serious about actually closing the gap, it is time to address its biggest driver: wealth transfer.

Anti-Black Narratives

Anti-Black narratives are also critical in the creation and maintenance of unjust systems—and therefore must be dismantled as we work toward repair. For the majority of our history, the stories America told about Blackness were designed to degrade, dehumanize, or exploit Black people for the political and/or economic gain of the white elite. Simultaneously, America’s stories about whiteness were designed to associate it with superiority, trustworthiness, and “normalcy” or the “standard.” These stories reinforced each other; racial hierarchies were created to justify slavery and were then validated by religion as well as pseudo-scientific theories of white superiority and eugenics. They were, for example, propagated by major universities well after the end of slavery; David Starr Jordan, the president of Stanford University from 1891 to 1913, was a well-known eugenicist.¹⁸ Ultimately, these narratives evolved into harmful stereotypes that paint Black women as welfare queens, Black men as criminals with superhuman strength, Black people as lazy, etc.¹⁹ They continue to be perpetuated through the media and advertising industries, dog-whistle political tactics, and more.

Instead of telling the truth about how four centuries of systemic anti-Black exploitation created today’s inequitable America, these narratives claim that Black people themselves are responsible for their condition, papering over the intentional concoction of policies and violence that have disenfranchised Black people across time. This indoctrinates individuals into a whole worldview of racist ideas.

When aggregated, these harmful narratives create an environment where policies such as reparations are deemed unnecessary and infeasible. In addition, they ensure that intentional attempts to create anti-racist institutions—institutions that close racial disparities, rather than widen them—are met with skepticism and resistance.

After the Civil War, the US was at an inflection point. As exemplified by Ms. Sutton’s petition almost 100 years prior, this country had another opportunity to live up to its ideals. Instead, those in power designed systems and structures that would keep Black people from thriving—conditions that, having yet to be repaired, continue to prevent the country as a whole from building and benefitting from a true multiracial democracy.

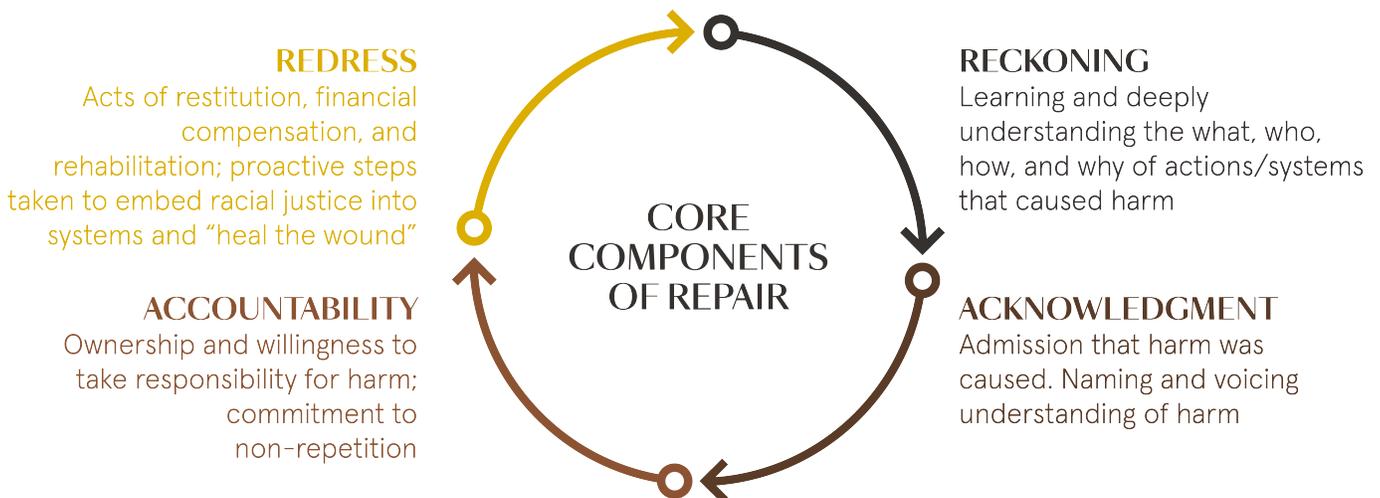
The knife is still in America’s back, and our shared wound has been festering for the last 400 years. The events of the last decade—including the establishment of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2013, the Ferguson Unrest of 2014, Donald Trump’s election in 2016, the summer uprisings of 2020, the Big Lie,²⁰ and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic—have laid our collective pain bare; spilling it forth onto sidewalks and street corners, airwaves and council meetings. Our wound is now, more than ever in our lifetimes, visible to ourselves and the world.

WHERE WE NEED TO GO

America needs a **Culture of Repair**. We need to collectively cultivate norms, practices, rituals, and values that repair harm and heal our shared wound in an ongoing, sustainable way. This requires an understanding of both the components of repair and the actions necessary to systemically catalyze it. If we, as a society, can clearly define repair, then we can embed it into our institutions, communities, and daily lives. Without a granular focus on the components of repair, we risk evading the hard work of systemic change and settling for superficial adjustments. We, again, remove the knife only a few inches and allow the wound to continue to fester.

The Racial Repair Framework

At Liberation Ventures, we define repair as an ongoing, iterative, four-part cycle of Reckoning, Acknowledgment, Accountability, and Redress. As we see it, the power of repair comes from each of its constituent parts reinforcing the others. Without Accountability, for example, Acknowledgment alone fails to deliver a commitment of no harm in the future; think of when a friend or partner hurts us and apologizes but then repeats the offense. Similarly, true Redress cannot be paid without Acknowledgment, like a lawsuit in which a company pays damages but does not admit wrongdoing. Alone, each component feels unsatisfactory. Together, they make each other real.



The Racial Repair Framework
by Liberation Ventures

Reckoning, Acknowledgement, Accountability, and Redress comprise the framework in which a comprehensive reparations portfolio can be set. Notably, this disrupts the predominant—yet flawed—notion that reparations is only about money. Given its legal origins, we reserve the term “reparations” for when our four-part cycle is applied to public institutions. However, we also believe that many other types of institutions have caused harm to Black communities—including private companies, churches, nonprofits, and foundations—and therefore also have a part to play in repair. When applying the cycle to these stakeholders, we use the phrase “Racial Repair.” This distinction guards against dilution of the term reparations, and importantly, we believe that any action taken by private or social sector institutions does not supplant government responsibility and the key role of public policy.

The power of our framework is that it applies to many forms of harm. We intentionally avoid prescribing specific policy recommendations in this report because additional learning is needed—by us and across the movement—to confidently endorse the most effective policies. In addition, any reparations policy portfolio must be tailored to the specific harm it is meant to repair, based on direct input from impacted communities.

Therefore, this report is neither a policy proposal nor an accounting of harm caused. Instead, it draws from interdisciplinary, academic evidence and lived experience to break down the concept of repair into its four parts, ultimately demonstrating its cumulative societal benefits. Throughout, we shift between micro and macro contexts, moving from the individual and interpersonal to the systemic and cultural. We do this because we believe the framework to be useful across that spectrum, in large part because institutions are made up of individuals. Institutions cannot act on their own; they often mirror the values and norms of the people who run them, and it’s the people within them who bear the responsibility for institutional transformation. However, we are not implying that individual transformation will inevitably lead to systems change. Finally, though our framework could be useful for repair outside of the domain of race, we don’t make that claim here; we solely focus on Racial Repair.

Liberation Ventures exists to build a just, multiracial democracy and society, and this report is intended to accelerate ongoing conversations about how all of us stand to benefit from Racial Repair. It applies a new lens on what comprehensive reparations can mean, broadening the vision to ensure that all people see themselves in the work of repair and calling forth our collective responsibility to do this work. Evidence shows that relationships and connectedness are critical for repair, so we specifically highlight stakeholder roles and ways to partner with each other.²¹ In doing so, we invite all people to be architects of repair and to imagine new futures for this country premised on integrity, truth, and solidarity.

Finally, this report seeks to expand our collective conception of reparations. To date, reparations has been primarily thought of as an economic project (i.e., cash for Black people), but we believe that this narrow definition does our country an immense disservice. Reparations is not only an economic project; it's also a political and cultural project—one rooted in the future as much as the past. We align with Olúfémi O. Táíwò's "constructive view" of reparations: "a historically informed view of distributive justice, serving a larger and broader worldmaking project. Reparation, like the broader struggle for social justice, is concerned with building the just world to come."²² As students of history, we know that the future durability of large-scale policy depends on the comprehensive influence of cultural narratives and practices. We also know that building a Culture of Repair is a project that will not only restore Black people but will also transform everyone.

Reparations is not only an economic project; it's also a political and cultural project—one rooted in the future as much as the past.

Section 2 offers definitions for each part of repair, draws on empirical research to support each component, outlines roles and potential obstacles, and provides case studies that illustrate the importance of the full cycle. In Section 3, we honor the giants upon whose shoulders we stand and discuss other frameworks that are often used with some success in similar contexts. Finally, Section 4 weaves the story together, capturing unanswered questions and inviting you to join us in seeking answers—and taking action.

At Liberation Ventures, we have nostalgia for a time that has yet to be—and we are accelerating progress to get us there, together. 2020 held the eruption of longstanding and compounding pain, made visible by the largest multiracial protests in history, and support for reparations is growing. In the wake of a pandemic, which exposed the structural disadvantages endured by Black people and communities, we have an opportunity to end anti-Black racism and generational injustice in American society. And **if we can achieve it, we just might fulfill a new dream: a Dream in Our Name.**

II. Our Vision:

THE RACIAL REPAIR FRAMEWORK

People Dancing in the Street, Akasha Rabut



“Because being American is more than a pride we inherit it’s the past we step into and how we repair it”

Amanda Gorman

At Liberation Ventures, our Racial Repair framework consists of four components: Reckoning, Acknowledgment, Accountability, and Redress. Here, we examine definitions for each component, as well as roles, benefits, and the key challenges and questions that we’re still grappling with—and that we invite you to grapple with alongside us.

RECKONING

We define the activity of Reckoning as a seeking of understanding: grappling fully with the *what, who, how, and why* of something. In our case, that “something” is harm caused. Reckoning involves learning—individually, in our relationships, and as a society. In the context of Malcolm X’s knife analogy, Reckoning is how we understand how and why the initial violence (or stabbing) occurred.

Though Reckoning comes first in this report, it doesn’t have to. The Cycle of Repair is truly continuous, with no beginning and no end. However, some amount of Reckoning is a prerequisite for full Acknowledgment because it is very difficult to fully acknowledge something that we don’t understand.

There are ample opportunities for individuals to reckon with the hard truths of America’s history. Innumerable thinkers have produced a corpus of work making the state of racism in our country very clear. In these works, one can engage deeply with accounts that illuminate the original trauma of slavery and its legacy within our society.

Reckoning can also be evidenced by shifts in institutional or cultural knowledge. Public or “macro-level” moments are often referred to as “reckonings.” Recent examples include George Zimmerman’s acquittal in 2013, the murder of Michael Brown in 2014, and the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery in 2020—cumulative moments that led to waves of protests, the latter being the largest we’ve ever seen.²³

Based on our definition, however, we question whether we can actually call these moments “reckonings.” When they happen, they are often followed by a wave of good intentions, especially from institutions. Statements are made condemning the harm, and money is committed to Black communities. However, rarely do institutions actually do the work to understand how that harm was caused in the first place—let alone recognize their role in it. Rarely do they reflect on how their institution has actually perpetuated the harm and assess whether or not their current practices continue to perpetuate that same harm. **In the whirlwind of figuring out how to do good, institutions rarely consider how to do less bad.** Therefore, it is unclear whether any deep Reckoning truly occurs—because that

Reckoning would require grappling with the trauma, embedded at individual and societal levels, that explains how we got here.

Real-world cases help highlight what deep Reckoning looks like, both individually and institutionally. Starting in 2006, the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland undertook a comprehensive process of addressing its ties to slavery.

The Reckoning process began when a resolution from the church's General Convention issued an apology for its role in abetting slavery and called on individual dioceses to research their history. The Maryland Diocese eventually uncovered that, throughout its history, it had used crops harvested by enslaved laborers to finance its growth, operated under church leaders who were themselves enslavers; wielded biblical teachings to justify the institution of slavery; and upheld segregation in its parishes for 100 years after abolition.²⁴

In 2010, Bishop Eugene Taylor Sutton—the diocese's first Black bishop—formed a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to push the church to uncover the details of its past. In 2014, the diocese instructed its parishes to research their historical connections with slavery, though only about 20 congregations out of more than 100 took up the charge. Those that participated, however, produced the "Trail of Souls," a project that physically and digitally guides visitors through sites that demonstrate the diocese's historical connections to slavery.²⁵ Ultimately, the diocese voted to stand up a fund with \$1 million in seed funding—drawn out of the endowment and representing more than 20 percent of the Diocese's operating budget.²⁶ In 2022, the diocese made its first round of awards: Within the church's boundaries, six community-based organizations serving the Black community received \$30,000 each.²⁷

The actions taken by the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland show us that Reckoning is something that all of us can do. Spurred by its internal motivation, at least as it appears from the outside, the diocese undertook the work of Racial Repair. At best, however, Reckoning happens in partnership between institutions that have caused harm and communities who have been harmed. In this case, it's important to highlight that it does not appear that descendent communities were comprehensively engaged prior to the distribution of grants, nor is it clear whether or not they benefitted.

Another example of Reckoning, this time at a much larger scale, was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa. Much has been written about the TRC, as arguably the most famous attempt at Racial Repair, so we do not repeat it all here. However, as a Reckoning process that has been both widely acclaimed and fiercely criticized, it offers some informative lessons.

The TRC began operating in 1996, borne out of South Africa's transition from apartheid. The commission continued working until 2003, when it issued the second part of its final report, the first part having been published in 1998. The TRC was made up of three committees: the Committee on Reparations and Rehabilitation (CRR), the Committee on Human Rights Violations (CHRV), and the Amnesty Committee (AC). It was primarily the job of the CHRV to do public

truth-telling and Reckoning. The committee held public hearings with victims that were televised and broadcast on the radio. Overall, they received 22,000 statements regarding human rights violations and aired a select 8 percent.²⁸

Some participants in the CHRV hearings appreciated the ability to establish an official record of the harms done, one in particular based on their own stories, while also learning from other testimonies throughout the process. One participant said, “A lot of things happened that we did not know about...I would recommend it to get the truth out.” Another noted, “I think[,] initially, it gave me a sense of...inner fulfillment. It gave me a sense of fulfillment in that I was finally able to speak about that particular morning out in the open to people who would not shoot me, people who would not put me in jail, and people who would understand what I am saying.”²⁹

However, we would be remiss if we did not note the wide disagreements regarding the degree of the TRC’s efficacy. While many acknowledge that it was important to keep the country from heading further toward internal violence, others—Black South Africans, in particular—feel that it did not center the needs of the harmed party. The very definition of “victim” used by the TRC limited its scope to individual instances of human rights violations during apartheid, leaving untouched the systems and structures that comprised the apartheid state itself.³⁰ As a result, the process failed to fundamentally change the economic reality that Black South Africans faced—and still face.³¹ In this report, we discuss the TRC to highlight what is possible when it comes to a large-scale, national truth-telling effort. We believe that truth-telling is necessary but not sufficient.

Black Family Running To The Ocean, Erin Brant



Small-Scale Reckoning Makes a Big Impact

Several of LV’s partners—organizations throughout the reparations movement—are working toward Reckoning on smaller scales (i.e., within family histories, as well as in community or state-level institutions).

Founded by Lotte Lieb Dula, Reparations4slavery is a portal for white families walking the path of racial healing by engaging in direct repair. Dula and her African-American partners—Briayna Cuffie, Asia Dorsey, and Tamara Rhone—have crafted a two-year reparations curriculum that provides the historical basis for reparative action. The opening session, “The Racial Wealth Gap: Understanding the Economic Basis for Repair,” uses Dula’s and Cuffie’s family stories as the backdrop; the two also teach a course in reparative genealogy that brings Black and white people together to research their heritage, acknowledge their connection to slavery, and daylight the history of those who were enslaved.

Small-Scale Reckoning Makes a Big Impact CONT.

Sarah Eisner has been on this journey for a few years. In 2019, she made contact with the great-great-great-grandson of Zeike Quarterman, a man whom her great-great-great-grandfather, George Adam Keller, had enslaved. In a single email exchange with Randy Quarterman—whom she found through Google, and whose generosity and openness allowed her to investigate this issue further—she was stunned to learn that Zeike Quarterman's descendants still owned 10 acres of land just outside of Savannah, Georgia, given to them by Keller in 1890. However, the Quartermans were about to lose part of the land by eminent domain and were not going to be paid for it because it was held as heirs' property. This launched Eisner into an investigation of how she could help. Fast forward a few years, Eisner and Quarterman co-founded the Quarterman & Keller Foundation, which supports Black land preservation; provides more than 20 scholarships for Black students in undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education work; and gives grants to Black farmers and land co-ops in Georgia, as well as tax payments for Gullah Geechee people in Georgia and South Carolina.

The Legacy Coalition is specifically focused on Reckoning with America's history of lynching. The organization's mission is to secure reparative justice for American citizens whose ancestors were lynched in acts of racial terror during the Jim Crow era. Founded by Evan Lewis, whose great-grandfather was lynched, the Legacy Coalition seeks to expose previously unknown cases of racially motivated violence and build a coalition of American lynching descendants to secure Redress. The organization is also committed to developing and instituting a comprehensive series of programs to address the unique experiences of descendants, ultimately promoting descendants' healing from the collective trauma of racial violence and amplifying their agency and impact in pursuit of reparations as restorative justice. The Legacy Coalition operates in partnership with Northeastern University's Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project, founded by Professor Margaret Burnham.

Finally, the Truth Telling Project (TTP) was co-founded by Dr. David Ragland, Congresswoman Cori Bush (D-MO), and other Ferguson activists. Dr. Ragland and Dr. Melinda Salazar, TTP's current co-executive directors, launched the Grassroots Reparations Campaign in 2019 to create a culture of reparations that emerges from spiritual practice, transformative education, and action. Their online courses examine the historical, spiritual, conceptual (ethical and moral), and practical dimensions of reparations as a global movement; inviting scholars, activists, and practitioners to explore seminal writings and experiences, as well as offering embodied practices and possibilities for action. Inviting a broad coalition to recognize their participation and/or complicity in upholding systems of white supremacy, the TTP network is committed to acknowledging history and building a new reality for current and future generations. As Dr. Ragland writes, "Reparations is a spiritual practice. Reparations is a midpoint between truth and reconciliation."³²

How Reckoning Differs Across Roles

The essential question we ask ourselves here is: *Who needs to reckon—and with what?* Anti-Black racism and white supremacy are adaptive rather than technical challenges, which means there are no technical solutions that would immediately eliminate anti-Blackness if only enough resources were applied, and there’s no expertise that could automatically extract white supremacy from systems, culture, hearts, and minds. In other words, the work of repairing our systems and culture of its embedded anti-Black racism, and thus enabling Black healing and thriving, requires focused attention and learning from all factions of our society.

People from all racial and ethnic demographics must grapple with the history and legacy of chattel slavery in the US. A proactive stance is required to countervail the information vacuum created by conventional education systems, which currently do not provide (and, in many cases, actively suppress) curricula through which students can learn the full extent of anti-Black oppression. In recent years, Black scholars have expansively produced material to support people of all ages in learning the truth of America’s history—and everyone should be consuming it. Contemporary literature builds on decades of Black scholars who told the truth about our history; W.E.B. Du Bois was rewriting the history of Reconstruction as far back as 1935, not just as an academic project but as a rebuke to the popular anti-Black racism of the time.³³

As we more deeply begin to answer the question of who needs to reckon with what, our individual positions in the racial hierarchy take paramount importance. Non-Black people and institutions must reckon with their current racial positioning relative to Black people—and the power that it brings.

In particular, this includes individuals and institutions that have directly caused harm. Federal, state, and local governments alike cause harm to Black communities. Social, faith-based, educational, and private-sector institutions cause harm as well. Take, for example, medical device companies that have embedded racism into their products, such as the Oximeter that was found to give inaccurate oxygen readings on people with darker skin color,³⁴ or banks

In the end, when institutions do not reckon with the harm they cause, we all lose. This failure to reckon feeds into a culture in which harm is allowed—even encouraged—to be perpetuated. Over time, that harm hurts not only Black communities but all of us.

that “financed the slave trade and in some cases ‘repossessed’ humans in bondage.”³⁵ Take tech companies that are creating anti-Black facial recognition software that surveils Black activists³⁶ and misidentifies suspects, increasing wrongful convictions.³⁷ Or take the industry of philanthropy, which has withheld resources from Black-led organizations and communities, promoted white savior narratives, and impeded systemic progress through power hoarding, extractive

grantmaking processes, and movement capture. In the end, when institutions do not reckon with the harm they cause, we all lose. This failure to reckon feeds into a culture in which harm is allowed—even encouraged—to be perpetuated. Over time, that harm hurts not only Black communities but all of us.

As stated in the definition of Reckoning, these institutions must grapple with the who, what, and why of the harm that they have caused. And importantly, most of us can work from where we are positioned to catalyze that Reckoning—in our workplaces, across our local governments, and even within our own families and households.

Many people occupy a category that writer and educator Michael Rothberg terms “**implicated subjects**.” He writes that implicated subjects are “neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator, and yet in which most people do not occupy such clear-cut roles.”³⁸ In the context of the US, where so much harm happened a long time ago, most people are implicated subjects, which is why it is critical to distinguish this role from perpetrators and victims. People in this category haven’t knowingly and/or directly caused harm to Black communities, but all of them participate in and perpetuate systems and institutions that have. This participation is what requires implicated subjects to take responsibility for structural harm—and their participation in repair is essential for transformation. Reckoning with this reality means becoming aware of this responsibility and learning how to reckon with our history in ways that agitate and transform our current systems and institutions.

Finally, Black people must reckon with the intersections of our identities that confer power or the lack thereof. **Intersectionality**, a term coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, highlights the fact that the Black community is not a monolith, especially when it comes to power.³⁹ Power differentials show up across class, sexual orientation, body type, skin color, documentation or incarceration status, gender identity, and more. The purpose of Reckoning with our intersections is to understand the role that we are best suited to play in the movement for liberation based on our proximity to different forms of power.

The Individual and Collective Benefits of Reckoning

Reckoning involves several different mindsets, behaviors, and skills—all of which we will likely not cover in this report, and we welcome your perspective on what we might be missing. Here, we describe the individual and collective benefits of Reckoning as they relate to truth-telling, empathy and perspective-taking, emotional regulation, and healthy dialogue.

Truth-Telling

We begin with the benefits of telling the truth. In a controlled study, researchers at the American Psychological Association (APA) found that “telling the truth when tempted to lie can significantly improve a person’s mental and physical health.”⁴⁰ Studies also show that “heightening awareness of in-group advantages, as opposed to out-group disadvantages, facilitated lower prejudice toward disadvantaged out-group members. And this prejudice reduction was mediated by greater collective guilt in participants who focused on white privileges.”⁴¹

This research reveals how when people with in-group advantages better understand those advantages, it can cause guilt that leads to lower prejudice. Brené Brown’s research further describes this dynamic:

“Empathy and guilt work together to create a force that is adaptive and powerful. We feel guilty when we hold up something we’ve done or failed to do against our values and find they don’t match up. It’s a psychologically uncomfortable feeling, but one that’s helpful. The discomfort of cognitive dissonance is what drives meaningful change.”⁴²

In other words, truth-telling drives guilt for those in an advantaged position, which, in an ideal scenario, can lead to behavior change that assuages cognitive dissonance. There is ample research that supports this finding; scholars have found guilt to have a positive effect on reducing colorblindness and promoting racial empathy rather than fear.⁴³ In addition, other scholars have found that it corresponds with anti-racist attitudes and behavior but can also motivate defensiveness and disengagement.⁴⁴ More scholarship is necessary to understand the role of guilt and cognitive dissonance in the specific context of Racial Repair.

People Dancing in the Street, Akasha Rabut



The Difference Between Guilt and Shame

Importantly, guilt is distinct from shame—and we do not believe that shaming has a role in repair. We ascribe to Brené Brown’s definitions: guilt, as mentioned above, is “holding something we’ve done or failed to do up against our values and feeling psychological discomfort,” whereas shame is defined as “the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging—something we’ve experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection.”⁴⁵ While guilt drives improvement, shame drives unethical, destructive behavior and “corrodes the very part of us that believes we can change and do better.”⁴⁶

Truth-telling also proves beneficial in the form of honest communication. Researchers compared honest communication to kind communication, examining how honesty impacts wellbeing. Ultimately, the studies revealed that:

“[I]ndividuals find honest communication to be more enjoyable, meaningful[,] and socially connecting than they expect... The choice to be less than fully honest with others is driven by individuals’ inaccurate expectations of how unenjoyable honest conversations will be. However, individuals’ post[-]hoc appreciation for honest conversations is driven by how meaningful those conversations are.”⁴⁷

Finally, the collective benefits of truth-telling mirror the individual. As Philosopher Margaret Urban Walker writes:

“Truth[-]telling, just like any suitable reparations vehicle, has the potential to [a]ffect quite real and profound changes in our intertwined epistemic and moral worlds. Like any reparations measure, concerted truth-tellings invite trust but more immediately offer grounds for hope of renewed relationships between victims and their communities, if not between victims and those responsible for their harm.”⁴⁸

Empathy and Perspective-Taking

Empathy and perspective-taking are also critical for Reckoning, as they enable us to step outside of our own experiences to better understand that of others. These behaviors benefit us by helping us comprehend the multitude of our own individual identities, as well as who we are in relationship to others.

“Hearing and sharing personal stories helps us recognize what is the same between us but also what is different. Being able to recognize the universality of comparing sameness to difference not only helps us appreciate what is different about ourselves and others; but what may also be different and even contradictory within ourselves.”⁴⁹

Perspective-taking, in turn, motivates action: “[W]hen members of the advantaged group take the perspective of the disadvantaged, they become proponents of reducing disadvantage because they see it as a fundamental right of the disadvantaged group.”⁵⁰ We find evidence for this dynamic in multiple places. In a study of 111 college-aged white people, researchers find that active perspective-taking reduces implicit racial prejudice.⁵¹

Perspective-taking and deep listening are inextricably linked. Both are required for Reckoning, and both have individual and collective benefits. From friendships and romantic relationships to parenting and professional spaces, deep listening benefits people across every domain of our lives. In relationships, we know that listening to understand (versus listening to respond) leads to greater relationship satisfaction. In parenting, we know that deep listening promotes healthy development, secure attachment, and mental health in children.⁵² Finally, organizations see benefits from deep listening. Deep listening makes employees more relaxed, self-aware of strengths and weaknesses, cooperative, and willing to reflect.⁵³

Studies show that deep listening is also more likely to support listeners in finding commonality with each other. In a study on mindfulness-based deep listening, research found the following:

“[Commonality] has come up in numerous discussions, but was particularly pronounced in one workshop when a participant, who identified as an older, White male was paired with another participant who identified as a younger woman of color. Given their differences, they both expected to have little in common with each other. Yet, in taking the time to really listen to one another, they were surprised to hear common themes across each of their stories, especially when it came to their hesitance to talk about race-based politics with family and friends. This commonality surprised them both, and provided them with a basis for connection as they engaged in the follow-up discussion with one another. Stories like this emerge every time we facilitate this activity.”⁵⁴

Emotional Regulation

Though this section is meant to discuss the benefits of Reckoning, our research also suggests that there are benefits that accrue from developing the skills needed to reckon. For example, “the ability to acknowledge, validate, and facilitate discussion of feelings was crucial to constructive race talk.”⁵⁵ These emotional-management skills are likely to flow into—and support—other areas of our lives. A study focused on the psychology of racial dialogues found that the enhancement of compassion minimizes emotional dysregulation and makes conversations safer. In fact, naming and supporting feelings allows us “to open to a sense of self-compassion and feel the empathy and compassion of others rather than move toward the connection-ending experience of humiliation.” This can transform “...fear into courage and may ultimately begin to feel the joy of being more real with others.”⁵⁶ Developing the compassion, empathy, and emotional regulation needed to support dialogue on the topic of race may also enable us to build stronger, more meaningful connections with other people in all areas of our lives.

Healthy Dialogue

Required for Reckoning across lines of difference, healthy dialogue also carries its own benefits related to relationship building, empowerment, and emotional regulation. Researchers found that in conversations between friends, talking about race-related experiences can enhance both closeness between cross-race friends and learning for white participants.⁵⁷ In addition, dialogue supports action. Students who had participated in dialogues also displayed increased investment in promoting racial equality and a sense of empowerment.⁵⁸ Finally, compassionate dialogues also enhance mutual understanding. According to researchers, creating “safe-enough” spaces for the expression of emotion in dialogue enhances mutual understanding, the ability to engage in deliberation, and emotional self-regulation.⁵⁹

We believe that this evidence contributes to our theory of repair as “muscle building.” The more we practice the skills of repair, the better we get at effectively repairing. Overall, our research on Reckoning demonstrates that the effort we make to learn and understand history, others’ experiences, and our own positionality in the world is what opens us

up to compassion, empathy, and emotional connection. Reckoning improves our physical and mental health, enables us to live in alignment with our values, and helps us understand who we are. Through Reckoning, we make sense of ourselves and the moment we are in, and we ground ourselves to enable forward progress.

Challenges and Critical Questions

We face several headwinds when it comes to embedding the practice of Reckoning into the fabric of our society. This report does not attempt to provide an exhaustive overview of these headwinds for each component of our Cycle of Repair, but rather we explore a few considerations that rise to the surface as oppositional cultural forces to understand and mitigate. In doing so, we also ask: What would you add?

First, the widespread prevalence of social media as a way to receive information prohibits the deep learning and reflection that real Reckoning requires. Clickbait headlines and 140-character stories have shortened our attention spans, sapped nuance from our public dialogue, and created an environment where deeper learning requires real intention—especially for adults with busy lives. The critical question here becomes: *In this media and informational landscape, what is the best way to develop a shared understanding of the anti-Blackness that our country was founded upon and still perpetuates today?*

Second, anti-history campaigns designed to gin up the conservative base, and the ensuing conversation about teaching structural racism in schools, have created harmful disinformation about what it means to learn about structural racism. Even before the explosion of opposition to “critical race theory,” there was no federally mandated curriculum for teaching the history of chattel slavery and its legacy.⁶⁰ On the contrary, many schools still perpetuate the lost cause narrative as it relates to the Civil War. The critical question we need to ask here is: *What will it take to build the public will to teach the truth at scale?*

Finally, there are powerful narratives embedded into American society that actively sow confusion about the truth of our past. The myth of meritocracy,⁶¹ American exceptionalism, pulling oneself up by one’s bootstraps, and the concept of colorblindness all actively erase the role of systemic advantages in determining a person’s opportunities and outcomes in life. Dismantling those narratives requires people with power, especially implicated subjects, to experience a sense of loss (i.e., the loss of the idea that they achieved everything they have on their own merits, or the loss of a glorified ideal about who their ancestors were)—and this loss is a powerful push toward denial. Therefore, the question becomes: *Given what we know about humans’ propensity to loss aversion,⁶² what would it look like to empower people to face that loss? Specifically, as it relates to meritocracy, what might transform merit from being about success in a rigged system to instead being about transforming that system, so that it accounts for historic inequity and benefits us all?*

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

If Reckoning is about a journey toward deep understanding, Acknowledgment is the naming of that understanding. In the case of reparations and repair, Acknowledgment is the understanding of historical context, lasting legacies, and of another person's experience. Acknowledgment is giving voice to learning and perspective-taking, often for the benefit of achieving greater clarity, deepening understanding, or ensuring another person or community feels seen and understood. Acknowledgment is the admission that the literal and metaphorical knife remains squarely in Black people's—and America's—back.

Acts of Acknowledgment can be literal (e.g., an apology or recounting of harm caused) as well as symbolic (e.g., erecting a memorial or monument). Full Acknowledgment is the opposite of all forms of denial, including factual denial (i.e., denying the very facts of a situation or historical event), interpretative denial (i.e., reinterpreting or minimizing the facts), and implicatory denial (i.e., gaslighting of certain parties).⁶³

Much of the research indicates that Acknowledgment and apology are intertwined. According to Aaron Lazare, a psychiatrist and author of *On Apology*, a genuine apology takes three parts. First, one must “acknowledge the offense adequately”; second, one must “express genuine remorse”; and third, one must “offer appropriate reparations, including a commitment to make changes in the future.”⁶⁴ For Lazare, Acknowledgment is the most essential part of an effective apology. Acknowledgment involves:

“1) identification of the party/parties responsible and party/parties to whom the apology is owed; 2) acknowledging the offending behaviors in adequate detail; 3) recognizing the impact these behaviors had on the victim(s); and 4) confirming that the grievance was a violation of the social or moral contract between parties.”⁶⁵

In other words, Acknowledgment requires an identification, a detailed recounting, a recognition of harm, and an understanding of social or moral violation.

Shared understandings are critical for apology and Acknowledgment. Philosopher Nicholas Tavuchis writes, “Apology attests to, validates, confirms, records, also objectifies—to the extent that what it refers to is ‘objective’ for all concerned parties—truth or an accurate view of social reality.”⁶⁶ In addition to pleading guilty and expressing remorse, an apology “presupposes cognitive and evaluative congruence in the form of shared definitions of the violation, its severity, history and implications.”

This presupposition implies the importance of Reckoning prior to apology. In other words, a learning process is required to arrive at a shared understanding of the harm caused.

Finally, apologies must not only look backward but also set intentions for the future. As legal scholar Martha Minow states, “Apologies implicit in acts of reparation acknowledge the fact of harms, accept some degree of responsibility, avow sincere regret, and promise not to repeat the offense.”⁶⁷ Imani Perry, an interdisciplinary scholar of race, law, literature, and African-American culture, sums it up well: “The only meaningful apology now is transformation.”⁶⁸

**“The only
meaningful
apology now is
transformation.”**

As demonstrated above, our literature review found that most scholars define full Acknowledgment or apology as a cluster of concepts or actions that span the four components of LV’s framework. This research is the evidence for why each of the components is insufficient to enable Racial Repair on its own. Practiced together, each of these components activates the innate power of the others.

We chose to define Acknowledgment more narrowly—not only for the sake of clarity but also to more clearly speak to the institutional and chronological challenges of Acknowledgment within the US context. Specifically, we believe that apologies are most powerful when they come from the party who caused harm. In our context, this means any institution that has caused harm to Black Americans. As it relates to chattel slavery, we are talking about the federal government.

Through our framework, we delineate between Acknowledgment and apology, while still housing them under the same umbrella. Distinct from apology, Acknowledgment is critical for people who are not directly culpable for harm, but who are instead implicated subjects in that harm. Despite over 150 years passing since emancipation, non-Black people must still acknowledge the harm that has been caused.

It is also important to restate that though Acknowledgment is an essential component of our Repair framework, Acknowledgment alone is insufficient and potentially harmful, even when paired with good intentions. Too often, apologies have been used as a tool for distraction, and the terrain of Acknowledgment is littered with empty apologies and trust erosion that have taken place over centuries (more so than any other component). Lazare lists multiple examples of when this is the case, including vague and incomplete Acknowledgment, minimizing the offense, questioning the damage, or acknowledging the wrong thing. Additionally, *how* one apologizes also matters. Conditional apologies, passive voice, and the choice of language or vocabulary have real impacts on the effectiveness of the apology itself.⁶⁹

Acknowledgment Alone Is Not Enough

We often see examples of the pain of Acknowledgment alone, as well as insufficient Acknowledgment. First, we invoke the experience of Indigenous communities on the topic of land acknowledgments delivered by non-Indigenous people. While some view them as an act of respect, others have a heavy critique. “Read me your Declaration of Change. Detail your Plan of Procedure. Show me your Map to Equality,” writes Indigenous poet CMarie Fuhrman. “[A]nd then, just maybe then, I might be convinced that your Land Acknowledgement is not but another broken treaty.”⁷⁰ Too often, apologies without action only serve as a painful reminder of broken promises, outright lies, or attempts to placate communities that have been harmed.

Second, political theorist Lawrie Balfour, speaks to the emptiness of attempted Acknowledgment devoid of deep Reckoning:

“Crucially, the [2005 US Senate apology for lynching] resolution is silent about the effectiveness of lynching as a mechanism for suppressing black political participation on the one hand, and stifling the economic prosperity of African[-]American individuals and communities on the other. The acknowledgment that victims were ‘deprived of life, human dignity, and the constitutional protections accorded all citizens of the United States’ neither mentions how lynch mobs participated in entrenching mythologies about sexually predatory [B]lack men with the assistance of US newspapers, nor addresses the nation’s longstanding silence about the sexual crimes—widespread and unpunished—that were committed against African[-]American women and girls.”⁷¹

Through missing or withholding context, insufficient Acknowledgment sends a message that the apologizer does not actually understand what they are apologizing for—and therefore fails to engender trust that the harm will not happen again. As Lazare wrote, an adequate level of detail is required for a genuine Acknowledgment. For many issues, this also means demonstrating an understanding of the contemporary legacies of historical harms.

Third, Angelique M. Davis, an author and political scientist, writes about the importance of critically examining apologies from state legislatures, as many explicitly preempt Accountability and Redress. A 2009 Connecticut bill wrote that the provisions of this resolution, “do not provide any person with a right of action, or the grounds for a right of action, against the state for the payment of damages or reparations or for injunctive relief.”⁷² **Given the insufficiency of inadequate apologies, Acknowledgment mechanisms should be designed to ensure that they do not exclude the other aspects of the Repair framework.**

Finally, the Juneteenth holiday is a recent example of the limited outcomes that come with Acknowledgment alone. In June 2021, Congress passed the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act, recognizing Juneteenth as a federal holiday. Advocates had been working for this since the ‘60s, and in 2016, activist Opal Lee walked from Fort Worth,

Texas, to Washington, DC, gathering 1.5 million signatures along the way for a petition to make Juneteenth a federal holiday. In addition, for more than a decade preceding the 2021 bill, Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) introduced a resolution in the House recognizing the historical significance of “Juneteenth Independence Day.”

Reactions to the holiday were complex. In many ways, it was a huge win. It created an annual ritual to remember, reflect on, and talk about America’s history of slavery. Thus, the act of Acknowledgment created space for Reckoning to occur. On the question of how to observe the holiday, Steve Williams, the president of the National Juneteenth Observance Foundation, suggests that Juneteenth celebrations should include readings of the “freedom documents”: the Emancipation Proclamation; the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery; and General Order No. 3, the document that finally informed enslaved people in Texas of their freedom in 1865.⁷³

Simultaneously, many fear that federal recognition will dilute the meaning of the holiday or enable it to be used as a political or corporate tool, such as “Juneteenth sales” like we see around the Fourth of July. As Seattle Times reporter Crystal Paul writes:

“Juneteenth was one of the few times of the year I didn’t have to think about the uncomprehending gaze of non-Black people... Part of me is hopeful that Juneteenth will inspire non-Black people to learn more about Black culture and examine their own anti-Black biases before they join the party. Another part of me fears our holiday will forever be changed from a loud, carefree[,] and Black-as-hell party in the streets to another place where we have to consider the non-Black gaze or teach others how not to hate us or patiently guide them on their journey toward undoing anti-Black racism.”⁷⁴

However, the most instructive part of the complexity of a national Juneteenth holiday, in our view, is that it passed unanimously in the Senate and with strong support in the House while the *John Lewis Voting Rights Act* has yet to be passed as of the time of this report’s publication, lacking sufficient Senate votes to pass.⁷⁵ This context is important. It sends a message to Black people that other components of repair—especially Accountability in the form of policy change, as well as material Redress—are not a priority. In so doing, this cheapens the meaning of Juneteenth as a symbol in the first place and may sow disrepair between Black communities and government. Acknowledgment alone is insufficient, and without the other components of LV’s framework, its impact is undermined.

One of the best examples we have seen of institutional Acknowledgment is a series run by *The LA Times* in September of 2020. The editorial board published a long-form acknowledgment that chronicled a full history of problematic beliefs and actions by the paper, from the deeply rooted white supremacy of its founders and its racist coverage of communities of color in Los Angeles, California, to the lack of diversity in its newsroom. The acknowledgment contained an apology, which read: “On behalf of this institution, we apologize for *The Times*’ history of racism. We owe it to our readers to do better, and we vow to do so.”⁷⁶ The piece was coupled with a letter penned

personally by Patrick Soon-Shiong and Michele B. Chan, co-owners of *The LA Times*, who wrote about their own personal experiences with racial injustice and commitment to progress:

“Over its history, *The Times* has also mirrored, and in some cases propagated, the biases and prejudices of the world it covers, reflecting and shaping attitudes that have contributed to social and economic inequity. Today, we are beginning the process of acknowledging those biases of the past and taking positive action to affirm a commitment that our newsroom will not tolerate prejudice.”⁷⁷

But perhaps the most unique aspect of the coverage was the way that the paper created the space for its Black journalists to tell their own stories. Greg Braxton, Sandy Banks, and others wrote individual pieces illustrating their own perspectives on being Black in the newsroom, adding the powerful color of lived experience to the otherwise intellectual, fact-based Acknowledgment. In letters to the editor about the series, many highlighted this component as especially impactful, including this submission:

“When I read the initial pieces, I almost gave up because [they] were so negative and divisive. But I kept on because I wanted to see why they were being published. I have been so moved by the individual articles... Those journalists’ pieces have given me much better insight into how people think and feel, and how they react to the things that happen to them. They have helped me understand what is meant by systemic racism, and to become aware of its prevalence in our society. Through their eyes and their stories, I can now see how much systemic racism has framed my views of society and our communities, and how it did so just by reading this newspaper over these many years. We need to hear many voices and views.”⁷⁸

The Black journalists’ stories are a generous and courageous offering to others, in service of greater understanding. Such offerings should always be treated with respect, never taken for granted or dismissed, and Black people should always have a choice about whether or not to disclose the details of our lived experience. However, when this happens, the power of the interaction between Reckoning and Acknowledgment is clear: Deep Reckoning leads to more powerful Acknowledgment, public Acknowledgment by one party can create space for Reckoning by another, and everyone benefits when we put Black people’s own articulations of their experience at the center.⁷⁹

How Acknowledgment Differs Across Roles

Several crucial questions arise concerning the roles of those doing the Acknowledgment, the roles of those receiving it, and everyone in between.

Though all people can name harm, there is explicit weight on non-Black communities to acknowledge the experiences of Black Americans. Martha Minow suggests that the apologizer adopt a stance that “grants power to the victims, power to accept, refuse, or ignore the apology.”⁸⁰ Official apologies often fail in this regard; merely issuing an

apology doesn't necessarily ascribe agency to a harmed party and often fails to empower the community to whom the apology is due.

People and institutions that have caused harm can name their full understanding of that harm and apologize. Implicated subjects can name the ways in which their lifestyle choices and circumstances—the neighborhood where they live, the school where they send their kids, the intergenerational wealth passed down to them, the food they eat, and the clothes they buy—all contribute to a system that has harmed and continues to harm Black people (nationally and globally). This naming sets the stage for new choices that come during Accountability. But as previously discussed, the naming matters because it makes visible the problems within our culture and makes it easier for others to begin the Reckoning process. It begins to create a surround sound for change.

Ultimately, the Acknowledgment process must ensure that Black people feel heard—deeply and completely.

When those who have caused harm acknowledge and/or apologize for that harm, Black communities have a choice about how to receive that Acknowledgment, which elevates the question of our role to play in repair. Writing about the context of healing after mass violence, Martha Minow writes that survivors “should occupy a position of personal power and social power to articulate the lived meanings of the values at stake in the acknowledged violation.”⁸¹ We interpret this to

mean that Black communities must have the agency and internal capacity to clarify, deepen, and correct others' understanding of harm caused to Black communities. Ultimately, the Acknowledgment process must ensure that Black people feel heard—deeply and completely.

At this juncture, the question of forgiveness often surfaces. In this report, we do not make the case for Black people—or anyone who has been harmed—to forgive. At this point, we've not found evidence that forgiveness is integral to repair. That is not to belittle the healing power of forgiveness; while we do not know the definitive origin of the quote, we believe that “resentment is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.” However, while repair is a relational process, forgiveness is individual. As psychologist Nedra Glover Tawwab explains:

“When we don't forgive, we are bound to our anger, to our anguish, to our pain. We don't recognize that because we feel victorious in our grudge holding. We feel righteous in hanging on to the ways we have been wronged, but forgiving someone does not release accountability. It doesn't mean that you're ok with what happened. Forgiveness means that we accept what happened, we recognize that it can't be undone, and we choose to release the power it has over us.”⁸²

She goes on to clarify that this does not require reconnection with the person or entity that we have chosen to forgive.

It is important to note the realities and necessities of partnership between Black and non-Black communities to advance Racial Repair. Not only can Black people not win alone, but Black people also did not create the problems that we are trying to solve. Non-Black people hold a massive responsibility to become Agents of Repair. However, they cannot do so effectively without the partnership of Black people because they do not experience (anti-)Blackness themselves. Therefore, Black people must occupy positions of agency and partnership; during Acknowledgment (and, to some extent, Reckoning) this often looks like articulating, clarifying, and translating the Black experience.

It must be noted how extensively our country is designed to keep this kind of partnership from happening. Our schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces remain segregated; in many cases, some are more segregated than before the end of Jim Crow. Our world is structured so that those who experience harm do not have the resources or power to stop it alone, and those with most of the resources and power are able to ignore the harm being caused. In our view, partnership between Black and non-Black people is a revolutionary act. “Though we start from different levels of privilege or advantage, this journey is not a matter of figuring out who should bow to whom, but simply one of figuring out how best to join forces,” writes Olúfemi O. Táíwò in the conclusion of his book *Elite Capture*. “We will need each other to get to where we’re going. And getting there, after all, is the point.”⁸³

The Individual and Collective Benefits of Acknowledgment

There are many forms of Acknowledgment and a number of individual and collective benefits. In this report, we focus specifically on apologies, museums, and memorials. As in Reckoning above, we also ask: What would you add?

Research shows that physical benefits accrue to people who are apologized to.

Jeremy Anderson, a professor of psychology, and his colleagues found that a genuine apology resulted in faster systolic blood pressure recovery for those who rank high in trait hostility.⁸⁴ Said differently, receiving a genuine apology had a literal physiological impact, helping people’s hearts recover more quickly from a state of anger. In a follow-up study, researchers confirmed Anderson’s findings.⁸⁵

Additionally, mental and emotional benefits accrue to the person doing the Acknowledgment. Philosopher Ernesto Verdeja describes the process as “ritual cleansing” and “expurgation: purification by removing objectionable matter.”⁸⁶ Edward Ball, a white author who wrote about his own family’s role in slavery, describes its impact on him saying that “an apology does more for white people than it does for Black, because it allows us the opportunity to acknowledge that our history has been at least as marked by the legacy of slavery as the lives of Black people have been marked by it.”⁸⁷

Researchers in a major literature review also found that expressing repentance “may reap private mental and physical health benefits,” including increased feelings of confidence and wellbeing, and “short-term increases in psychological arousal followed by a long-term decrease in health problems.”⁸⁸ Some research finds, however, that these benefits are more likely to accrue when seeking relational outcomes rather than self-focused outcomes.⁸⁹

Similar to the findings for Reckoning, most people do not have accurate expectations about the impact of Acknowledgment:

“People overestimate the negative implication of apologizing, like whether the victim will take advantage of them after apologizing or how negatively others will perceive them after they apologized. Simultaneously, people underestimate the positive effects that an apology has on the victim like the likelihood of forgiveness or of a restored relationship.”⁹⁰

These findings align with research focused on the Armenian Genocide, Kielce Pogrom, and the Holocaust, which showed that experiencing factual Acknowledgment of harm by perpetrators led to higher levels of psychological wellbeing and a greater willingness to reconcile with the former perpetrator group.⁹¹

Finally, research also illuminates the importance of *ongoing* Acknowledgment. In a study of Acknowledgment in the context of mass atrocities committed by Pakistan against Bangladeshi civilians in 1971, “Acknowledgement of responsibility by Pakistan reduced anger and perceived injustice, and denial of responsibility increased anger but did not influence perceived injustice.”⁹² Researchers continue to find that “[o]ne-time positive gestures might not be sufficient to influence expectations from the out-group[...]but reminders of denial further reduced hope for the future. Instilling hope for the future may require continuous and persistent actions that demonstrate the perpetrator group's commitment to change.”⁹³

In addition, the collective benefits of Acknowledgment can often be found in public spaces. Monuments and memorials are an important symbolic way to collectively acknowledge harm that has happened, and these sites also create space for ongoing Reckoning.⁹⁴

The National Memorial for Peace and Justice made waves when it opened in Montgomery, Alabama, in 2018. Individuals experienced a range of reactions. Angel Smith Dixon, a biracial woman from Lawrenceville, Georgia, said, “We’re publicly grieving this atrocity for the first time as a nation. ... You can’t grieve something you can’t see, something you don’t acknowledge.”⁹⁵ Ava DuVernay, an Oscar-nominated film director, exclaimed that “[e]very American who believes in justice and dignity must come here.”⁹⁶

Similarly, accounts of the Slave Relic Museum, a Black-owned and curated museum in Walterboro, South Carolina, tie these acts of Acknowledgment to the notion of memory. Museum visitors touch the physical chains that were used to enslave people, transforming the museum into a space for memory excavation: “Physically engaging these chains

forces museum visitors to participate in the memory work of not forgetting or trivializing the enslaved and their experiences.”⁹⁷

In recent years, the act of bringing down Confederate monuments has both Acknowledged harm and created space for Reckoning. A 2020 report published by the Monument Lab found that of all the monuments that mention the Civil War, only 1 percent mention slavery; of all the monuments that mention the Confederacy, only 3 percent mention defeat.⁹⁸ Approximately 100 Confederate monuments were toppled in 2020,⁹⁹ and it is estimated that almost 95 percent remain.¹⁰⁰ These figures make it clear that a majority of American monuments actually misrepresent historical facts, inherently spreading narratives that uphold a white supremacist status quo. Real Acknowledgment will require not just creating new space but undoing—even dismantling—the old.

Finally, research has also surfaced the benefits of large-scale apologies in the context of countrywide truth and reconciliation efforts. The final report from the Gambia’s truth commission states that “[w]hen perpetrators publicly acknowledge what they have done, knowledge becomes, in a sense, truth.” This shared truth then creates the space for a path forward, further illustrated by Verdeja, who writes, “[Apologies] may communicate something beyond mere acknowledgment and point to the importance of a fundamental transformation in the relation between perpetrators and victims, creating a moral space for a new beginning.”¹⁰¹

In addition, we found that following the delivery of nationwide apologies for historical injustices, support rises for said apologies. This was replicated across two contexts, Australia and Canada. “In Australia, support for the apology went up 13 [percent] days after the apology was offered compared to two weeks before. Similarly, in Canada, support rose 29 [percent] a few days after the apology compared to three months before.”¹⁰² While it is possible that this may simply be a correlation, researchers hypothesize that it is related to two theories: first, the “System Justification Theory,” which argues that people support an apology that their government offers more than an apology that their government refuses to offer because doing so makes the system appear to act in accordance with their preferences; and second, the “Cognitive Consistency Theory,” which says that perpetrator group members can maintain consistency between their usually positive evaluations of their country and the actions taken by their country. This speaks to the value—and force—of congruence.

It is also important to note that the force of congruence can go both ways. In many instances throughout American history, it has served as a mechanism for upholding white supremacist ideology rather than suppressing it. Violence after the end of slavery was “meant to terrify and control Black people, but perhaps most importantly, it served as a psychological balm for white supremacy: you would not treat human beings this way,” writes Nikole Hannah-Jones.

“The extremity of violence was a symptom of the psychological mechanism necessary to absolve white Americans of their country’s original sin.”¹⁰³

During World War II, Black Americans joined the armed forces to fight for democracy abroad, only to come home to a country that did not treat them as full citizens. As Hannah-Jones adds:

“To answer the question of how [white Americans] could prize liberty abroad while simultaneously denying liberty to an entire race back home, white Americans resorted to the same racist ideology that Jefferson and the framers had used at the nation’s founding: that Black people were an inferior race whose degraded status justified their treatment.”¹⁰⁴

In reflecting on the end of apartheid in South Africa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu spoke to the power of Acknowledgment. He “thanked Meyer and Wessels and described their sincerely expressed sorrow as ‘helping to pour balm on the wounds of many. Wounds cannot be obliterated[,] but they may nevertheless be soothed by acknowledgment, insofar as the insulting and degrading moral message implied in the initial wrongs is officially unstated.’”¹⁰⁵ Full, genuine Acknowledgment makes us feel seen and understood by the people around us, and it affirms our own and others’ humanity.

Challenges and Critical Questions

Public Acknowledgment of the harm embedded in this country’s founding requires us to speak and process collective shame. As stated earlier in this report, shame is distinct from guilt, and the pain of feeling shame creates an instinct to stay silent and hide the thing that makes us feel shameful. In “Transforming Ghosts into Ancestors: Unsilencing the Psychological Case for Reparations to Descendants of American Slavery,” Bryan K. Nichols and Medria L. Connolly write:

“Shame is often a disabling and overwhelming emotion that tends to generate behaviors designed to ‘kill the messenger.’ Since shame feels like an indictment of the soul, the soul paralyzing experience is one of helplessness to correct the situation. This, then, represents a massive problem for those of us advocating for reparations as the salve to heal the profound historical wounds of this country.”¹⁰⁶

If we cannot face our past, then we certainly cannot repair it. So, we must ask the question: *How can we develop the resilience we need to work through that shame—and therefore open ourselves up to the opportunities for repair that would bring?*

In addition, many hold an implicit assumption that apologizing puts the apologizer in a “one-down” position; in other words, that an apology will cause one to lose face or give another party undue power or influence over them. Unfortunately, this assumption is reinforced by legal mechanisms; for example, organizational leaders often fear that apology will be equated to an admission of legal liability, which is a fear that is often unfounded.¹⁰⁷ So, we ask: *How can Acknowledgment and apology become a new standard for how one saves face?*

Finally, Acknowledgment is easier in groups. Imagine, for example, a foundation that decides to publicly acknowledge that the original investment made to create its endowment came from a company that utilized the labor of enslaved people. Alone, this may feel like a risky decision, potentially exposing the institution to criticism and reputational stain. In a cohort of 10 other organizations making similar acknowledgments, however, the action is more likely to be seen as a courageous exercise of leadership in the sector. This illuminates the question: *How can we create communities of people doing the right thing, that entice more and more people to be part of them in order to feel a sense of belonging? How can we invite people into a project that does not blame people for something they are not personally responsible for—but rather empowers them to act to make things right?*

On the specific topic of Repair within philanthropy, many practitioners have accelerated a movement to disrupt traditional norms of philanthropy, such as long and tedious grant application and reporting processes, funding with stipulations and strings attached, and all-white institutional leadership and governing boards that hoard power over decision-making. In particular, Edgar Villanueva’s book *Decolonizing Wealth*¹⁰⁸ catalyzed significant internal work among many philanthropic institutions, and the Resonance Framework¹⁰⁹ from Justice Funders guides foundations on how to reduce extractive practices and increase regenerative ones.

ACCOUNTABILITY

When Reckoning and Acknowledgment are fully on the table, Accountability invites us to claim full ownership of the harm that has been excavated and named, take responsibility for it, and commit to changing our behavior to ensure non-recurrence. While Reckoning and Acknowledgment look backward into the past, Accountability shifts our focus to the present and asks us to commit to being a force for change in the future. It carries a weighty quality, as Viktor Frankl speaks to: “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.” Accountability is the space to link the past to the future and choose a courageous course of Redress. Accountability removes the knife.

Two cases stand out that shed light on what Accountability does and does not look like.

Making waves since 2019, Evanston, Illinois, proposed, designed, and implemented a reparations program. The program targets Black residents of Evanston who were harmed by discriminatory housing laws between 1919 and 1969, which severely limited their ability to build wealth in the form of home ownership. Alderwoman Robin Rue Simmons led the charge to see the legislation to fruition, and in 2021, the Evanston council voted to offer grants of \$25,000 to the targeted population or their descendants. In May 2022, the City began disbursement.

Evanston illustrates what it looks like for a city to take ownership of the harm it has caused in the past and begin to redress it. The Big Payback, a documentary that chronicles the Evanston process, highlights not only the efforts of Alderwoman Rue Simmons but also how white residents of Evanston pushed for Accountability.¹¹⁰

At the time of this report’s publication, 20 million dollars have been allocated to the reparations fund over the next 10 years, but only \$400 thousand have been dispersed. Rue Simmons speaks clearly about how these efforts are just a start, and that other forms of Redress are needed in Evanston to make the Black community whole. We recognize these facts, and simultaneously believe that the Accountability that the City of Evanston has taken thus far can and should be emulated.

While Evanston illustrates what Accountability can look like, there are many examples of what it does not. Here, we highlight the case of Johnson & Johnson (J&J), a company that has been embroiled in years of litigation over the talc used in one of its signature products: baby powder. The talc contains asbestos and has caused cancer in longtime users. In 2020, a Missouri appeals court ordered the company to pay \$2.1 billion to 22 plaintiffs, and J&J discontinued sales of talc-based baby powder in North America.¹¹¹ However, the company continues to sell the product in other parts of the world—and plaintiffs outside the US have received no Redress, let alone Accountability from J&J.

The lack of Accountability here is clear: J&J has not stopped causing harm, either by changing the ingredients of the product or ceasing to sell it altogether. In addition, this case raises another important insight into the roles of

different stakeholders in Accountability. The US court system was able to exert external pressure on the company to both discontinue sales as well as pay redress to those impacted. However, that pressure only extended so far, and J&J maintains the ability to choose how to act in contexts where that pressure does not exist. This highlights an important distinction about who is ultimately responsible for ensuring Accountability, which we discuss in the next section.

Media 2070, one of LV's partners, is a great example of how institutions can exert pressure on other institutions—or even entire sectors—to hold themselves accountable. Media 2070 is a consortium of media-makers and activists, collectively dreaming up reparative policies, interventions, and futures in the media industry specifically. Their goal is to radically transform who has the capital to tell their own stories by 2070—less than 50 years from today. Their work makes visible the ways in which the media has taken part in and supported state violence and harm against Black people, and it highlights how the media can serve as a lever for racial justice. Media 2070 underscores the repair and reconciliation necessary in the media industry to build strong, free, democratic communities. Their work began with an essay that details the history of American media's participation in anti-Black racism and harm, creating a clear on-ramp to Reckoning for media organizations that are committed to Racial Repair.

How Accountability Differs Across Roles

Perhaps more so than any other component of our Cycle of Repair, the word “accountability” gets used colloquially and is often conflated with other concepts—such as punishment, transparency, and external pressure—in confusing and unhelpful ways. We owe immense gratitude to a number of thinkers who have written with depth and breadth on the topic of Accountability; specifically, what Accountability is, what it is not, and who must take Accountability.

Of the many sources that have informed our investigation of this subject, our thinking has been most deeply shaped by Prison Industrial Complex abolitionist, Mariame Kaba. She makes the case that because real Accountability can only come from within, the sole party able to truly hold themselves accountable for harm committed is the individual or institution who caused it. Though individual and institutional Accountability are distinct, we maintain that institutions are, in the end, made up of people who make decisions about how those institutions operate.

“You can't force somebody into being accountable for the things they do. That is not possible,” Kaba writes. She insists that:

“People have to take accountability for things that they actually do wrong. They have to... say, ‘This is wrong[,] and I want to be part of making some sort of amends or repairing this or not doing it again.’”¹¹²

Reparations are a large-scale project that cannot wait for every individual to voluntarily take Accountability. However, we still find that when enough stakeholders take Accountability, it accumulates.

Kaba also references longtime activist Connie Burk, who defines Accountability as:

“an internal resource for recognizing and redressing the harms we have caused to ourselves and others. Accountability is an active process through which people have to make a decision that they recognize the harms that are occurring, they want to try to redress them, and they’re thinking about the harms through the lens of what’s been done to others but also what’s been done to them.”¹¹³

What’s been done to them—the people who caused harm. In our view, there is too little conversation in the public domain about the impact that causing harm has on a person. Some scholars and activists have begun opening this discussion, especially Resmaa Menakem. In his book *My Grandmother’s Hands*, he writes:

“A particularly poisonous form of secondary trauma involves not only witnessing the harming of another human being, but *inflicting* that harm. Often, the perpetrator tries to avoid this trauma by dissociating (a form of flight) during the event, and then, immediately afterward, overriding any impulse to process the trauma or discharge its energy from his or her body. Such attempts to flee from trauma only deepen it—and create an extreme form of dirty pain. Because the perpetrator knows he or she has committed a moral transgression, his or her actions also create profound shame. Therapists call this a *moral injury*.”¹¹⁴

Nichols and Connolly also speak to the concept of moral injury. They write that:

“opening one’s awareness fully to the horrors of this crime against humanity is too much for many white Americans to bear. This lack of integration between the fact of slavery and its emotional resonance creates a dual consciousness that prevents the moral wound of slavery from healing. It seems that many white Americans are more than willing, whether consciously or unconsciously, to allow the African[-]American community to carry the trauma of slavery alone.”¹¹⁵

Additionally, they contend that this is a major factor that prevents the wound from healing; as they say, the “communalization of trauma”¹¹⁶ is fundamental to repair. As discussed earlier in the report, repair is a relational process.

Accountability is a critical part of the antidote to moral injury. In *Until We Reckon: Violence, Mass Incarceration, and a Road to Repair*, Danielle Sered writes that “Accountability is the corollary to grief for those of us who are responsible for harm, and it is as essential as a grieving process is in restoring us to our best selves.”¹¹⁷

On an individual level, this is clear. The corollary is trickier for institutions, given that institutions themselves cannot feel the emotions associated with taking Accountability or the lack thereof. However, we find evidence (discussed below) that institutions that hold themselves accountable for their actions reap several benefits. So, while it may not be possible for an institution to viscerally *feel* the restoration that Accountability brings, our research finds that when institutions prioritize building, maintaining, and preserving trust with their stakeholders—trust that gets broken when institutions *don't* hold themselves accountable for wrongdoing—they put revenue, and ultimately the success of the institution, at risk.¹¹⁸

If the role of the stakeholders who cause harm is to take Accountability, then the role of implicated subjects is to both take action to decrease anti-Black racism within their own domains and put pressure on stakeholders who cause harm to take Accountability.

It is our firm belief that all people must be Agents of Repair, which is what we mean by holding oneself accountable to taking action within one's own domain. Whether one is a school principal, a health worker, a CEO, a public figure, a nonprofit volunteer, or a sports star, there is a role for each and every person to use their positioning to decrease anti-Black racism within their sphere of influence. Absolutely no one is off the hook.

The recent leadership of Ronald Heifetz, a white, male professor of leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School, provides an example. Professor Heifetz developed a framework called **Adaptive Leadership** and has taught experiential learning classes on it for almost 40 years. His classes use a unique teaching method called “Case-in-Point,” which means that students bring their own experiences into the classroom and those experiences become a big portion of the course's syllabus. As such, students bring all types of experiences with societal challenges into the classroom, including climate change, government corruption, international development, sexism, racism, and poverty. Since 2021, however, Professor Heifetz has decided to focus the course on how his framework applies to anti-Black racism and sexism. This means that all students are required to examine their experiences trying to exercise leadership on those issues. Every year, hundreds of students take his class—many come to the Kennedy School primarily to do so—and most of those students are people who would not have otherwise chosen a class on anti-Black racism. Because Professor Heifetz chose to hold himself accountable for addressing anti-Black racism within his own domain, hundreds of students will now be better equipped to exercise leadership on anti-Black racism out in the world.

As a white man, Professor Heifetz took a risk. He faced skepticism from university administration, other faculty, and students. Stepping into the arena is risky; non-Black people might experience criticism, hesitation, and/or fear of

saying or doing the wrong thing. At worst, they may make mistakes and cause harm because they do not have proximity to the lived experience of Blackness. Therefore, as discussed in the Acknowledgment section, implicated subjects must partner with Black people in this work. This partnership is crucial to begin recognizing one's own blind spots, understand the role one is best suited to play, and develop the internal fortitude and resilience that will enable one to claim their role with full integrity to the work at hand. The stakes in this undertaking are too high to allow fear and perfectionism to lead to inaction.

In our research, we have found a number of other concepts—including pressure, transparency, and punishment—are often conflated with Accountability. We contend that placing external pressure on people or institutions through demands for transparency, for example, can help reinforce, incentivize, and create the conditions for true Accountability—however, it's not, on its own, actual Accountability.

We define **external pressure** as the mechanism by which less powerful actors create conditions where more powerful actors are more likely to hold themselves accountable. This includes community organizing, building narrative power, unionizing workers, and more. In addition, our democratic and legal systems are intended to exert this kind of pressure, although they too often fall short of influencing very powerful actors. There is promise here, however. In 2005, for example, JP Morgan Chase was pushed to recognize two subsidiaries' past ownership of enslaved people, due to a Chicago ordinance requiring that firms doing business with the City disclose any history of participation in the slave trade.¹¹⁹ Regardless, structural reform is still needed on a wide variety of fronts to make these mechanisms more effective.

We define **transparency** as a tool that amplifies the mechanism of external pressure. Our research found that "Accountability of government officials for misconduct relies on availability of information about their activities. There can be little Accountability for misconduct without transparency."¹²⁰ There is also data that demonstrates how "[h]igher perceptions of transparency will be associated with higher levels of trust in charities."¹²¹

Finally, we place **punishment** in a category apart from pressure and transparency. Though punishment is frequently conflated with and substituted for Accountability, we do not view it as an effective tool for achieving true Accountability. Furthermore, we believe that punishment causes immense harm to individuals, especially regarding the criminal legal system. Unlike pressure and transparency, punishment does not require any ownership or behavior change from the person who caused harm. Instead, punishment is an exertion of control. Kaba is clear: "There's an assumption that being anti-punishment means that you're not pro-accountability; that couldn't be further from the truth."¹²²

In an institutional context, Redress without Accountability can look like punishment (e.g., if a corporation is mandated to pay fines to people it has harmed). In such a case, we recognize the benefit that the Redress payment may have on the party who has been harmed. However, without the corporation taking Accountability, there is no evidence that it will not repeat that harm in the future, draining the efficacy of the repair. As stated above, the *full* Cycle of Repair is needed. Taken together, each component makes the others real.

So, while the roles of Black people and implicated subjects are often understood as “holding someone accountable,” we agree with Kaba’s stance that holding someone else accountable is not truly possible. Our research concurs that the best organizational systems create conditions for intentional Accountability from within. As a study of public sector executives found:

“For the designers and reformers of administrative systems[,] the solution is not to institutionalize one form of accountability, legitimized according to a single ideology. Instead of encouraging administrators to surrender to an imposed and partial measure, efforts to enhance accountability should recognize and build on the processes [that] enable the construction of a more robust and *privately anchored* experience of accountability.”¹²³

However, Black people and implicated subjects can play important roles in exerting external pressure, pushing for increased transparency, and taking action within their own domains. Indeed, there has never been a time when Black people have *not* pushed America to hold itself accountable to realizing its founding ideals.

The Individual and Collective Benefits of Accountability

Germany’s trajectory after WWII demonstrates the benefits of a state holding itself accountable. When the Holocaust ended, reconciliation and reparations were not popular. Only 29 percent of Germans believed that Jewish people were owed restitution from the German people.¹²⁴ In large part due to immense pressure from Western allied governments, they were paid anyway. As Coates writes, “Reparations could not make up for the murder perpetrated by the Nazis. But they did launch Germany’s reckoning with itself, and perhaps provided a road map for how a great civilization might make itself worthy of the name.” The key word here is launch; it was not until a generation after the Holocaust that a bottom-up student movement created the memorials, monuments, and ongoing culture of memory that Germany has today. As Clint Smith writes in *Monuments to the Unthinkable*, “Germany’s effort to memorialize its past is not a project with a specific end point.”¹²⁵ As of 2019, 15 percent of Germany’s population harbors antisemitic attitudes compared to 24 percent and 34 percent in Western and Eastern Europe, respectively.¹²⁶

In addition, community supports Accountability—and creates additional benefits for those who hold themselves accountable. People are more likely to hold themselves accountable when in a community of other people who are holding themselves accountable as well. A powerful example of this dynamic includes 12-Step programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA). In these programs, individuals hold themselves accountable to sobriety and receive strong support in doing so—notably from a group of other people in the same position. These programs offer strong empirical evidence of the benefits of taking Accountability in community, including the fact that 12-Step programs create improved psychological functioning and greater self-efficacy.¹²⁷ “If you want to change your behavior, find some other people who are trying to make the same change,” says Keith Humphreys, a professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Stanford, who conducted a research study on the effectiveness of AA. His 2020 study found that AA is up to 60 percent more effective than other interventions.¹²⁸

Finally, institutions that hold themselves accountable perform better. In examining a sample of companies that made announcements attributing blame for recent poor performance to either themselves or an external factor, researchers found that companies that blame themselves begin to perform better following the announcement while those that blame others continue their weak performance. (Both groups of companies were exhibiting poor company-specific performance prior to the announcement, which indicates that external factors were not to blame.)¹²⁹ As Michael C. Jensen, a professor at Harvard Business School, explains:

“People tend to view integrity as a virtue that is ‘nice to have,’ but not as something that is directly related to performance. They fail to link the difficulties in their lives or in their organizations to out-of-integrity behavior. But the increases in performance that are possible by focusing on integrity are huge: I’m not talking about a 10 per cent increase in output or productivity—it’s more like 100 to 500 per cent. At my organization [the Social Science Research Network (SSRN)] after three years of implementing these notions, our CEO Gregg Gordon will tell you that we’ve seen in excess of a 300 per cent increase in output, with essentially no increase in inputs. And our people are happier.”¹³⁰

Challenges and Critical Questions

The conflation of terms inhibits our collective ability to create a culture of true Accountability. Because we so often conflate Accountability with punishment, we lack imagination about what Accountability could look like without punishment. We think about worst-case scenarios (e.g., what to do with people who cause massive amounts of harm), and we try to create structures that are sure to keep us safe. Unfortunately, they fall woefully short. The question here becomes: *How do we increase our capacity as a society to imagine new futures—in which Accountability, not punishment, is embedded across systems? What conditions do we need to support people and institutions in holding themselves accountable—and how might those conditions also contribute to building a liberatory world?*

Even in a context where Reckoning and Acknowledgment have taken place, defensiveness can inhibit Accountability. For implicated bystanders in particular, many people who benefit from our current systems claim innocence on the question of Accountability for changing them, using the excuse “I did not enslave anyone.” That may be true, but regardless, successful repair necessitates engagement from all people. To that end, we ask: *How can we expand the Accountability frame from only being about the past to also creating a shared, just, and equitable future?*

A feeling of hopelessness, even powerlessness, also gets in the way. Systems and structures can feel so complex, and the challenges of anti-Black racism so massive, that it can be hard to figure out how to intervene. And if we can't figure out how to intervene, then we can't figure out how to take Accountability for our role—for how to make our little corner of the world better. Powerlessness breeds hopelessness, and despair is the ultimate enemy of progress. The question becomes: *How can we identify opportunities within our sphere of influence to make progress on anti-Black racism? And what might it look like for our work to cause a ripple effect?*

Finally, Menakam describes the clean pain—distinct from dirty pain—that comes with taking Accountability. He writes:

“Clean pain is about choosing integrity over fear. It is about letting go of what is familiar but harmful, finding the best parts of yourself, and making a leap—with no guarantee of safety or praise. This healing does not happen in your head. It happens in your body. And it is more likely to happen in a body that can stay settled in the midst of conflict and uncertainty. When you come out the other side of the process, you will experience more than just relief. Your body will feel more settled and present. There will be a little more freedom in it and more room to move. You will experience a sense of flow... The alternative paths of avoidance, blame[,] and denial are paved with dirty pain. When people respond from their most wounded parts and choose dirty pain, they only create more of it, both for themselves and for other people.”¹³¹

Choosing to experience clean pain requires an awareness of, and an ability to manage, one's own physiological state. Taking Accountability is uncomfortable; individuals must be able to manage that discomfort in order to practice Accountability. However, America's culture of conflict aversion teaches the opposite, and—particularly in conversations with white people about race and racism—reinforces the reflex to hide or deny in order to maintain comfort.¹³² Developing the capacity to take Accountability for the past includes literally transforming how we settle our bodies. We ask: *How can we build this capacity at scale?*

REDRESS

Accountability creates the space for meaningful Redress; removing the knife provides possibilities for healing America's shared wound. In the same way that treating a bleeding wound requires a number of tools—such as gauze, a tourniquet, antibiotics, stitches, and bandages—different dimensions of Redress are needed to make Black people—and America—healthy and whole.

Here, we distinguish between Redress and remedy. While Redress is the act that heals, remedies are the tools that are used to promote that healing. Remedies can and should be financial, which could include individual payments, child development accounts, or more sophisticated investments to remedy longstanding disparities in specific systems, such as education and health. Remedies can also be non-financial, such as redesigning governance systems within institutions to more evenly distribute power. Most importantly, just as with Reckoning, Acknowledgment, and Accountability, Redress must match both the scale and area of harm. If I am stabbed in my back, a Band-Aid on my leg does me no good.

Scholars and leaders in the reparations movement demand many different forms of remedy. Some thinkers place a heavy emphasis on cash payments to the descendants of enslaved people. The benefit of cash is that it is not paternalistic; Black people who receive cash payments would have full autonomy over how they spend it. Unfounded Anti-Black narratives about Black deservedness drive skepticism regarding what this money would be spent on. However, studies show that stereotypes about Black economic habits are false. A recent McKinsey & Company study proves as much:

“The persistent myth that Black consumers are lavish spenders is simply not true. Our analysis of publicly available but previously uncompiled microdata from the Census Bureau's Consumer Expenditure Survey shows that at similar income levels, Black households spend a smaller share of income than white households, although more goes toward the basics.”¹³³

Some groups within the movement identify a number of specific systems in which investment should be made as a form of Redress. The National African American Reparations Commission's 10-Point Plan includes investment across land, entrepreneurship, health and wellness, education, housing, and information and communications infrastructure. It also includes non-financial remedies, such as the restoration of voting rights to all formerly incarcerated persons, exoneration and release of political prisoners, revising the 13th Amendment, and opportunities for repatriation. Similarly, the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America describes five injury areas that each require a remedy: peoplehood/nationhood, education, health, criminal punishment, and wealth/poverty.

Finally, the Movement for Black Lives makes demands for five specific remedies, including lifetime free education, guaranteed minimum livable income for all Black people, ownership and control of food sources, housing and land,

transformation of school curriculum and cultural sites, and legislation that acknowledges the lasting impact of slavery and passes House Resolution 40, a bill establishing the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans.

How Redress Differs Across Roles

For institutions that have caused harm, their role in Redress is clear: They must take action to rectify the harm, and that action must meet the scale of the harm caused. Notably, implicated subjects can support this.

For the party who has been harmed, their role is more complex. First, Black people deserve agency over the process of defining the forms of remedies that will make us whole. Therefore, we *must* have the resources and capacity to do the work of imagining liberation and defining what it looks like—for us. In many ways, the work of Redress for the Black community is to dream, which requires time and space—especially when getting specific about our aspirations for our people. Articulating the many harms that reparations must repair, as well as what we want and need reparations to achieve, is a major undertaking. Black people are closest to the problem and are therefore closest to the solution. We firmly believe that when we center Black people’s liberation, everyone benefits.

Boy laughs and splashes, Frank Mckenna



The People Who Have Been Harmed Must Be at the Center of Defining Redress

There are cases in which the US provided Redress, but it was not defined by the harmed party—and therefore did not deliver repair. Such is the case with the Lakota tribe, one of the groups of Sioux peoples of the Great Plains. In 1868, various Sioux and Arapaho tribes signed the Treaty of Fort Laramie with the US, affirming their right to an area labeled the Great Sioux Reservation. The reservation included the Black Hills, a stretch of land sacred to the Lakota peoples.

Defining Redress CONT.

In 1874, gold was found on the land, and many (white) prospectors moved onto the land to excavate it. Unable to convince the Sioux to cede the land, the US government sent soldiers to seize it. In 1876, Congress passed legislation revoking the Sioux's claims to the land and threatened to withhold rations if they did not comply. At the time, the Indigenous peoples of the Plains were facing starvation due to a decrease in the area's buffalo population, caused by white hunters. Ultimately, the tribes ceded the land in exchange for food.

The Sioux began litigating the case in 1923, and after 57 years, the Supreme Court upheld the claim that the land had been seized dishonorably. The Court decided that the tribe was due the initial offering price, plus interest, which at the time totaled \$105 million and is now worth over \$1 billion.

The Lakota peoples rejected this award, viewing it as akin to a "pay-off," and they instead sought to reacquire the land. The award remains untouched.¹³⁴

This case demonstrates two critical points. First, it illustrates what happens when a harmed party is not centered in the repair process due to structural forces or other reasons. The tribe's original lawyer was not Indigenous; only when the tribe replaced him with an Indigenous lawyer did its legal representation truly understand the value of land as a remedy, differing from—and often worth more than—financial compensation.

Second, it is but one of many stories that highlight the inextricable links between Black Americans and the movement for reparations and Indigenous communities' demands for sovereignty and Landback.¹³⁵ Both Black and Indigenous communities have borne the brunt of the white supremacy that's embedded in America's founding and its current systems, and endured the trauma of state-sanctioned violence and broken government promises across four centuries. While LV's work is focused on reparations for Black Americans, we operate in solidarity with Indigenous communities and the Indigenous-led Landback movement.

Second, as far as the roles of Redress go, Black people also deserve to prioritize their own healing from the trauma of anti-Blackness—across all components of the Cycle of Repair but with a particular focus on Redress. This includes destigmatizing mental health supports such as therapy within our community. This also includes deep grieving that enables breakthroughs. In *Grief Belongs in Social Movements. Can We Embrace It?* Malkia Devich-Cyril explains that

“metabolized grief can power deep and lasting change infused with profound joy, while unmetabolized grief becomes an almost insurmountable barrier to it.”¹³⁶ Black people deserve the space to process grief in self-determined ways.

Healing also includes reclaiming the connections to our ancestors that were severed by the slave trade and incorporating their wisdom into our daily lives. It includes using the tools that we have—including faith, somatics, dance, art, and music—to process our pain and ensure we don’t project it onto others. Finally, it includes finding small, trustworthy pockets of American society where we can practice opening our hearts to the people and institutions who have historically caused us so much pain, enabling the emergence of new patterns and pathways to liberation.

The Individual and Collective Benefits of Redress

To illustrate the benefits of large-scale Redress policy, we examine five cases and provide overviews below: Reconstruction, the *Civil Liberties Act* of 1987, the Rosewood Massacre, Georgetown University, and the reparations paid to the survivors of Chicago police torture. We highlight these cases not only to describe the impact of Redress but to also tackle, head-on, some of the questions that we are most frequently asked, including: *Has the US done this before? How has it worked?* All five cases represent instances in which US institutions have taken action to change laws, implement initiatives, and/or compensate a community after harm was done.

The Reconstruction Era

Continuing in the American tradition, the story of Reconstruction is rife with contradiction. Historian Eric Foner calls it the “Second Founding”¹³⁷ for the outsized impact that this time, and the constitutional amendments borne from it, still have on American democracy. Though 40 acres and a mule were never paid, policy remedies implemented during that time continue to benefit not just Black people but all of us today.

Spanning from 1865 to 1877, the Reconstruction era brought about three critical wins: the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments. The 13th Amendment abolished slavery except as punishment for a crime; the 14th Amendment redefined citizenship to include all people born or naturalized in the US, established equal protection to those citizens, and established the right to vote for male citizens of age; and the 15th Amendment established the right to vote regardless of citizens’ race, color, or previous condition of servitude.¹³⁸ This exceptional progress was driven by Black Americans, writes Hannah-Jones in her “Democracy” essay, which opens the *1619 Project*: “Through speeches, pamphlets, conferences, direct lobbying, and newspaper editorials, Black Americans pushed an all-white Congress to enshrine equality into the Constitution, powerfully shaping what the country would be like after its second founding.”¹³⁹

Yet, in order to protect freed people's rights to citizenship as well as their overall safety from white vigilantes, Reconstruction required the federal government to instate heavy military enforcement; violence, starvation, and brutality were commonplace for formerly enslaved people. Hannah-Jones continues:

“The gains of [R]econstruction were met with widespread and coordinated white resistance, including unthinkable violence against the formerly enslaved, wide-scale voter suppression, electoral fraud, and even, in extreme cases, the violent overthrow of democratically elected biracial governments”¹⁴⁰

After only 12 years, support for Reconstruction declined, and President Rutherford B. Hayes withdrew federal troops from the South, which is widely considered to be the end of the era.

Though short-lived, Reconstruction-era laws produced transformational benefits:

The 13th Amendment banned chattel slavery and peonage (i.e., the practice of an employer utilizing forced labor to pay off a debt owed by the laborer) and allowed Congress to pass laws eradicating the “badges and incidents of slavery,” except as punishment for a crime. The 13th Amendment continues to be an effective tool in barring private entities from exercising racial discrimination.

The 14th Amendment, and specifically the right to liberty, has been used to support the rights of structurally marginalized people across the board. It confirmed the rights and privileges of citizenship, guaranteeing all Americans equal protection under the law. It was used to end state-sanctioned segregation in schools (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954), to end state bans on interracial marriage (*Loving v. Virginia*, 1967), and to require states to provide free legal counsel to indigent defendants (*Gideon v. Wainwright*, 1963). In 1971, it was used to strike down a state law prohibiting women from estate administration (*Reed v. Reed*, 1971) and was invoked to protect a woman's right to abortion (*Roe v. Wade*, 1973). More recently, this amendment protected the right of same-sex couples to marry (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015). The scope of the 14th Amendment has indeed been hollowed out over time; nonetheless, it provides important precedent.

The 15th Amendment first enshrined the right to vote in the Constitution and was used to enact the *Voting Rights Act* in 1965. It was instrumental in the creation of the most egalitarian constitutions in the history of the South, creating equitable tax legislation, prohibiting discrimination in public transportation and housing, and establishing public education in all southern states.

Hannah-Jones illustrates how Black people's emancipation benefitted everyone:

“Newly freed Black people, who had been prohibited from learning to read and write during slavery, were desperate for an education, which they saw as integral to true liberty. So Black legislators successfully pushed for a universal, state-funded system of schools—not just for their own children but for white children, too. For the fleeting moment known as Reconstruction, the majority in Congress, and the nation, seemed to

embrace the idea that out of the ashes of the Civil War, we could birth the multiracial democracy that Black Americans envisioned, even if our founding fathers had not.”¹⁴¹

Combined, the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments resulted in the greatest expansion of human and civil rights in this country, enabling the US to take a major step toward living up to its founding ideals.

The Civil Liberties Act: Reparations for Japanese Americans Interned during WWII

In 1942, responding to racist, unsubstantiated concerns that Japanese people posed a national security threat, the US military detained 120,000 people of Japanese descent—70,000 of whom were citizens. The military was empowered by an executive order issued by President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) and a law passed by Congress that made it illegal to violate military internment orders.

People were given just seven days to gather their belongings and leave their homes. They lost property and careers and were separated from family members. The camps lasted four years, with the last camp closing in March 1946.

Three notable cases of civil disobedience made it to the Supreme Court, which upheld the constitutionality of the executive order and confirmed the convictions of all three individuals: Minoru Yasui, Gordon Hirabayashi, and Fred Korematsu. In all three cases, the Court denied arguments based on the Fifth Amendment’s due process clause.¹⁴²

Reparations for Japanese-American people who endured internment happened in waves. In 1980, Congress passed a bill that created the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC), which was intended to put the facts of the case on official record. As the CWRIC worked to write its report, one of its major tasks was to hold hearings around the country where former internees would share their stories. John Tateishi of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), which had advocated for the creation of the CWRIC, wrote that this process of Reckoning was helpful, not only for the country but for the victims themselves:

“From a personal point of view in the Japanese American community[,] I think the commission served an even greater value. For the first time, Japanese Americans were given the opportunity to tell their stories of hardship and heartbreak before an official body of the government. There was a release of tears, but there was also a release of anger. And in so doing, there was a catharsis in dealing with all the pain that had been bottled up for [40] years.”¹⁴³

In 1983, the CWRIC published their report titled, “Personal Justice Denied.” The committee’s report penetrated the national consciousness, particularly because it convinced many people that the problem at hand was a fundamentally American one. For instance, a *Washington Post* article described the study as:

“a powerful indictment of a shameful wartime policy. The history of civil liberties violations and the documentation of that episode presented in the report should jolt every American. Some received money

damages for property losses that could be proved. But what compensation can there be for loss of respect, education, opportunities[,] and three years of one's life?"¹⁴⁴

Scholar Elazar Barkan makes the point that the report created a moral outrage around the issue before anyone started developing quantitative analyses of the harm, which came next.¹⁴⁵ In 1988, Congress passed the *Civil Liberties Act*, which requested a formal apology from the president and authorized \$20,000 to every former internee who was a citizen or legal resident at the time of internment. The figure was less than the JAACL had pushed for, but they were pleased nonetheless, at least at face value. The act eventually paid out \$1.6 billion to more than 80,000 individuals.¹⁴⁶ Notably, funding from the bill created space for Reckoning and Acknowledgment:

"an additional \$3.3 million was distributed to fund 135 projects, including 18 national fellowships, that were catalogued to include the areas of curriculum, landmarks/exhibits, art/media, community development, research, research resources, and national fellowships."¹⁴⁷

Upon signing the act into law, President Ronald Reagan explicitly acknowledged that internment had been wrong because racism had trumped American notions of justice, and his presidential apology was couched in language that portrayed reparations as part of America's arc toward justice:

"More than [40] years ago...120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry living in the United States were forcibly removed from their homes and placed in makeshift internment camps. This action was taken without trial, without jury. It was based solely on race. In enacting a law calling for restitution and offering a sincere apology, your fellow Americans have, in a very real sense, renewed their traditional commitment to the ideals of freedom, equality, and justice."¹⁴⁸

The benefits of the *Civil Liberties Act* were both material and symbolic. First and foremost, Redress payments put weight behind the Reckoning and Acknowledgment done by Congress, President Reagan, and other public officials, and materially benefitted the Japanese community. In addition, Redress became a mechanism for the American populace to assuage its moral outrage and incongruence, ultimately moving toward greater alignment with stated American ideals.

Reparations for the Rosewood Massacre

In the early part of the 20th century, the town of Rosewood, Florida, was a haven for Black people; a place where they could own property and live safely. In 1923, in the wake of an allegation that a Black man had assaulted a white woman, a mob of more than 100 people—likely including Ku Klux Klan (KKK) members—attacked the town, killing at least 6 people and burning churches and homes. The local sheriff, the governor, and other government officials neglected to protect Rosewood and its residents from the violence.¹⁴⁹

In 1994, about 70 years later, the Florida legislature approved a reparations package, which included: \$150,000 to be paid to each of the 9 living survivors, \$500,000 total for descendants (typically amounting to a few thousand dollars or less each), and \$100,000 in scholarships for Rosewood descendants.¹⁵⁰ (The state currently pays \$6,100 each, for a maximum of 50 descendants, to attend a public college or university each year.¹⁵¹) The scholarships in particular were borne out of the idea that there ought to be some lasting, intergenerational material benefit and remembrance, acknowledging that the payments would likely be used up quickly.¹⁵²

In considering the varying benefits of repair, Rosewood highlights how the impact of Redress differs across generations. Speaking as a first-generation descendant, Natasha Twiggs describes how the Rosewood reparations benefitted her life: “I will say for me, as a descendant and a grandchild, I'm grateful because it was able to help me finish my degree, and, as a single parent, it allowed me to send two more [kids] to school.”¹⁵³

In comparison, for some of the second-generation descendants, the scholarship felt insufficient in many ways: It is not always enough to cover a full degree, it does not go as far as to redistribute actual wealth, and society at large is still suffering from systemic racism.¹⁵⁴ One college-aged descendant noted, “We’ve been oppressed for too long for just a hot \$10,000 to suddenly erase everything. We’ll just go through this money and then be back where we started, before the reparations were handed out.”¹⁵⁵

Rosewood— and the quote above in particular—highlights the complexity of advancing local reparations within a much larger context of necessary repair. At Liberation Ventures, we believe that local reparations are important mechanisms to build momentum toward federal reparations, *and* we believe that they do not replace what is owed at the federal level. We also recognize that Redress at the level that is possible for local and state governments to meet is often woefully inadequate. And, simultaneously, the payment enlivens a real Acknowledgment of pain and begins to mend the wound. Redress paid in cases like Rosewood may not be enough, but these cases get us on our way to enough.

Georgetown University and the Jesuit Conference of Priests

In 1838, Georgetown University sold 272 enslaved people. The school was in financial duress, and, as explained by Georgetown historian Adam Rothman:

“At Georgetown, slavery and scholarship were inextricably linked. The college relied on Jesuit plantations in Maryland to help finance its operations, university officials say. ([Enslaved people] were often donated by prosperous parishioners.) And the 1838 sale—worth about \$3.3 million in today’s dollars—was organized by two of Georgetown’s early presidents, both Jesuit priests.”¹⁵⁶

Rothman makes it plain: “The university itself owes its existence to this history.”¹⁵⁷

Reckoning began at least as early as 2015: internally, the institution established a working group on slavery, memory, and reconciliation; the work was covered externally by the *New York Times*, which also began to excavate the stories of those enslaved people’s descendants. Two groups, one within the university and one outside of it, also began tracking down descendants through genealogy. Separate from the university, a collective of descendants has formed an organization called GU272.¹⁵⁸

GU272 and student groups pressured both Georgetown and the Jesuit Conference of Priests to hold themselves accountable, and in 2017, Georgetown and the Jesuits officially apologized.¹⁵⁹ The university also renamed two buildings that were originally named after the former presidents who organized the sale, and it implemented two forms of Redress: offering preferred admission to descendants, akin to legacies, as well as establishing a fund to support projects in the surrounding Black community.¹⁶⁰

The Jesuit Conference, separate from Georgetown, also made its own commitments. In partnership with GU272, it pledged \$100 million, with plans to distribute 50 percent to organizations working on racial reconciliation, 25 percent to scholarships and grants for the descendants, and the remainder to other relevant grants and research.¹⁶¹

While these efforts go further than most in uncovering and redressing the institution’s ties to slavery, they have also undergone significant scrutiny. Many feel that the process was not sufficiently community-driven or transparent and that descendants were not adequately included in the process to define Redress.¹⁶² In addition, the \$100 million that was pledged has yet to be fully raised as of the writing of this report.¹⁶³

Reparations for Chicago Police Torture

From 1972 to 1991, more than 125 individuals, most of them Black, were tortured by Chicago police.¹⁶⁴ To coerce confessions, police officers conducted interrogations that involved “mock executions, genital electrocution, and racialized psychological abuse.”¹⁶⁵ Many of these victims gave false confessions and were wrongfully convicted,

spending years or decades in prison and even facing death row. In 2015, after local activists' sustained work, a local ordinance and a complementary resolution granted reparations for the survivors, specifically 57 individuals. Reparations here utilized all four components of our Racial Repair framework:

Reckoning

Curriculum was created about the history of the torture and passing of the ordinance, which is taught in Chicago's 8th- and 10th-grade classrooms.¹⁶⁶ In addition, a community space was created specifically for the victims and others harmed by police brutality.¹⁶⁷ This community space is a great example of how to create lasting Reckoning for future generations.

Acknowledgment

The mayor and city council issued an official statement, declaring, "The [c]ity [c]ouncil wishes to acknowledge this exceedingly sad and painful chapter in Chicago's history, and to formally express its profound regret for any and all shameful treatment of our fellow citizens that occurred..."¹⁶⁸ In addition, a memorial was commissioned to honor the victims; however, this memorial is still in the process of being built, and there are mixed perspectives on its planned location. Vincent Wade-Robinson, one of the survivors, feels that locating the memorial in the South Side means that "nobody will see it" and would prefer to see it in downtown or "right in front of the police headquarters."¹⁶⁹ Wade-Robinson emphasizes the importance of centering harmed parties and their perspectives in repair, as they are the ones who should set the terms.

Accountability

Significant external pressure, exerted by organizers and the victims' families, was successful in forcing the removal of Jon Burge from his position as commander of the Chicago Police Department (CPD), ultimately leading to his conviction of two counts of perjury and one of obstruction of justice. However, these convictions also illustrate his own inability to take Accountability; he was convicted for repeatedly providing false testimony, denying his acts of torture.¹⁷⁰

Redress

Financial compensation, with a \$100,000 maximum, was provided to each survivor, which came from a fund totaling \$5.5 million. Survivors and their families also received job placement assistance as well as priority access to the City of Chicago's re-entry support services.¹⁷¹

We conclude with this case because it demonstrates the power of Redress—when done comprehensively—in keeping the entire Cycle of Repair in motion. As discussed in this report's introduction, the Racial Repair framework and its components are not "one and done." We view the Cycle of Repair in three dimensions, not two, much like a corkscrew that continuously spirals downward and deeply disrupts anti-Blackness. Though Chicago is still rife with

inequality, and the cycle is still needed, some of the remedies here create space for Reckoning and Acknowledgment, which helps to ensure that the next generation will practice Accountability and avoid recurrence in the future.

Challenges and Critical Questions

Disingenuous, anti-Black narratives continue to dissuade many Americans from believing that large-scale Redress is necessary. Some of the more pervasive and toxic narratives include arguments that:

- It has been too long since slavery, so it would be impossible to determine appropriate remedies after so much time has passed;
- Black people are where we are because of cultural and individual deficiencies, not structural oppression;
- Therefore, Black people are not deserving of structural solutions;
- As a society, we've already made enough progress on racial justice; and
- Attention to race and racism makes the problem worse, not better; colorblindness is the way forward.

In addition, narratives about the way that change happens—that it happens slowly and on its own, without the need for concerted effort and resourcing—disincentivize people from believing that they are capable of and responsible for making change happen.

These narratives, created and perpetuated by and from stakeholders invested in an anti-Black status quo, obscure the truth and make it extremely difficult to create a shared foundation of context and information to build from. Absent that, factions split along lines of differing perspectives and values. And despite the prevalence of many shared values, it becomes harder to see what we have in common than it is to see what we don't. The question becomes: *What will it take to create the narrative environment that will make Redress possible? How can we use collective narrative power to ensure that the benefits of Redress are sustained?*

Expanding the discussion of Redress to the broader economic context, it is also important to consider that the US is only beginning to emerge from the strong neoliberal forces that both shaped overall perspectives on the role of government and limited the government's policy vision and choices. For over 50 years, the predominant consensus was that markets would solve all of our problems, and that a critique of capitalism was unnecessary. Fortunately, that framing is shifting.¹⁷² We are seeing renewed recognition that public investments are critical, so: *How do we accelerate that shift?*

Finally, Black communities across America must drive the work to (re)define our shared aspirations for what reparations must achieve—not only at the federal level but also within states and local municipalities that have caused harm, as well as other sectors of our society. Only by defining clear goals for repair can we then build, together, the many paths that America must take to achieve it.

At Liberation Ventures, we want to see massive shifts across five domains: 1) culture, 2) narrative, 3) financial, 4) power, and 5) health. Respectively, this means that America rejects its culture of white supremacy; anti-Black narratives are eradicated; the Black-white wealth gap closes—and stays closed; Black people have and use collective and institutional power; and Black Americans reach parity in life expectancy and lead healthy, dignified lives.

We are, however, just one voice. To truly set our North Star for reparations, we need a chorus of Black brilliance weighing in. This, then, is our charge: *What outcomes do we want Redress to achieve? **What does the world look like on the other side of reparations?***

III. Literature Review:

THE SHOULDERS WE STAND ON

Adult With Child Playing Trumpet, Akasha Rabut



“There is nothing new under the sun—there are only new suns.”

Octavia Butler

Many frameworks have been used to support countries, communities, and institutions in becoming more equitable and peaceful, often including some form of reparations. **Our framework does not replace; it’s additive, drawing from several deeply rooted frameworks borne from countless scholars and practitioners across the globe who have built and contributed to the broader reparations movement. Our goal in this report is to build on established works and traditions from across time and space and apply them to the very specific context of the United States in 2023.**

This section outlines LV’s lineage along two different dimensions. First, we explore other frameworks used in relevant contexts but across different forms of harm: Restorative Justice; Transitional Justice; and more recent developments in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), racial equity, and anti-racism. Second, we articulate key proposals developed by specific individuals and organizations in the reparations movement over time, including those proposed by Professor William A. (“Sandy”) Darity, Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen, the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N’COBRA), and the National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC). Finally, we also ask: What other work should we be learning from?

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

A universally accepted and concise definition of **Restorative Justice** has yet to be established, but we embrace the oft-cited definition from expert Tony F. Marshall (1996), which encompasses its main principles: “Restorative Justice is a process whereby all the parties with a stake in a particular offense come together to resolve collectively how to deal with the aftermath of the offense and its implications for the future.”¹⁷³ Some also refer to Restorative Justice as the effort to quite literally restore justice in cases of historical injustice. We operate in the lineage of both.

Restorative Justice has roots in many ancient traditions. African, Arab, Greek, and Roman civilizations utilized restorative approaches; Germanic peoples held public assemblies where disputes were settled; Indian Hindus as ancient as the Vedic civilization believed that “he who atones is forgiven”; and, blended with Western influence, ancient Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian traditions maintain restorative approaches in North Asia today.¹⁷⁴ In addition, Restorative Justice approaches have also drawn from “circle” tradition in Indigenous communities, where parties in conflict join in a circle together to repair harm through dialogue and restitution, with the goal of restoring a peaceful coexistence.¹⁷⁵ With the advent of the Norman conquest of much of Europe in the 11th century, conceptions of justice began to change—shifting away from a focus on the relationship between the harmed party and those who caused harm and toward a focus on the state, or king, as the ultimate arbiter of “justice” and punishment.¹⁷⁶ State control of

crime—as a mechanism for controlling the population—has continued to proliferate today, with concomitant increased costs of public institutions and public responsibility and little demonstrated reduction of crime, violence, or antisocial acts.¹⁷⁷

Restorative Justice can be used in both the criminal legal system as well as in community-based settings. In the context of the criminal legal system, Restorative Justice provides an alternative to traditional sentencing, especially for young people convicted of crimes. A meta-analysis of the effectiveness of Restorative Justice practices found that:

“[C]ompared to victims who participated in the traditional justice system, victims who participated in restorative processes were significantly more satisfied, less likely to feel vengeance, and found to have reduced post-traumatic stress symptoms. For [people convicted of crimes], Restorative Justice practices were a more effective method of increasing satisfaction and decreasing recidivism.”¹⁷⁸

The Liberation Ventures Racial Repair framework is strongly aligned with the Restorative Justice framework. First, Restorative Justice requires holistic healing of an entire community, a principle on which LV is strongly aligned

“[S]ome proponents also seek to incorporate aspects of ‘transformative justice’ by seeking community as well as individual accountability and attempting to repair as much as possible the harms revealed by the offense, including structural injustices that contribute to crime.”¹⁷⁹

Ultimately, the goal of repair must be one of systemic and cultural change. As Fania Davis, longtime activist and Restorative Justice practitioner and scholar, writes, “[w]hile often mistakenly considered only a reactive response to harm, Restorative Justice is also a proactive relational strategy to create a culture of connectivity where all members of a community thrive and feel valued.”¹⁸⁰ All people in a community can provide input on what healing looks like, thus “creating the social conditions that minimize such wrongdoing.”¹⁸¹

Secondly, Restorative Justice orients its goals around the harmed party, while also considering the needs of everyone involved, including the party who caused harm. Ultimately, Restorative Justice is aimed at collective healing through “meeting the needs of the victim, holding the offender accountable for the harm caused, taking steps to repair as much as possible the harm suffered by the victim and the community, and addressing the offender’s needs to prevent reoffending and promote reintegration.”¹⁸² We share the view that repair is inherently a relational process.

Finally, Restorative Justice recognizes that punitive measures, particularly as they are deployed by the criminal legal system, most often cause more harm, disproportionately to Black communities. As mentioned earlier in this report, American society routinely conflates punishment and accountability; Restorative Justice asks us to draw a clear distinction between the two—a principle with which we are in deep alignment. Indeed, the harm caused by the carceral state is one that Black communities often seek repair *from* not *through*.



The Connections between Abolition and Restorative Justice

Concepts of Restorative Justice are often aligned with abolitionist ideas, which were birthed in the movement to abolish slavery. As slavery evolved into modern forms of policing, so too did the movement to abolish the prison industrial complex (PIC). Calls to reform and/or abolish systems of policing and incarceration in the US have taken center stage in the last decade, largely due to organizers across the country mobilizing huge numbers of people after the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, Freddie Gray, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and many others. Though there is a wide spectrum of perspectives about whether to reform the system or abolish it, 2020 saw record-low levels of confidence in the police, dropping to 48 percent and “marking the first time in the 27-year trend that this reading is below the majority level.”

The intersection between Restorative Justice and PIC Abolition lies in an important imagination about what is possible in a society where repair, care, and accountability are prioritized. As Mariame Kaba writes, “Prison Industrial Complex Abolition is a vision of a restructured society in a world where we have everything we need: food, shelter, education, health, art, beauty, clean water, and more things that are foundational to our personal and community safety.”¹⁸⁴ This is a world where crime due to desperation does not exist, where systems of accountability diminish repeat offenses, and where repair for all stakeholders is prioritized.

In considering a frame for comprehensive repair, we differ slightly from Restorative Justice regarding the role of establishing agreement about the truth. Restorative Justice processes require a *preestablished* level of agreement about the harm that has occurred—particularly who caused it and the harmed party’s deservedness of repair—in order for individuals to enter a Restorative Justice circle. The processes themselves are not designed to excavate or litigate facts in order to reach an agreed-upon truth. As expert Rupert Ross writes:

“[A]ccording to traditional teachings, people will always have different perceptions of the truth and the events that occurred... Thus, objectivity is an illusion and the question of the seriousness of the crime a futile one. The focus of justice, then, is to address the harm done and the causes of the wrongdoing, rather than the severity or the details of the offense.”¹⁸⁶

In line with this fundamental belief, Restorative Justice concerns itself most with creating a just future.

Unearthing truth is an important component of LV’s Cycle of Repair. While we recognize the value in being able to hold multiple truths in social justice and coalition-building work, there are fundamental truths that cannot be evaded when it comes to learning our country’s history. Therefore, we take a balanced approach to the valuation of the past, present, and future in the repair process. Truth-seeking helps all parties appreciate the scale of the harm, which informs an appropriate future course.

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

The Repair framework also draws from elements of **Transitional Justice**. The International Center for Transitional Justice, one of LV’s partners, defines Transitional Justice as “how societies respond to legacies of massive and serious human rights violations.”¹⁸⁷ Ruti Teitel, a professor at New York Law School, gets even more specific, stating that “Transitional Justice can be defined as the conception of justice associated with periods of political change, characterized by legal responses to confront the wrongdoings of repressive predecessor regimes.”¹⁸⁸ Within the framework of Transitional Justice, the United Nations (UN) articulates a set of “Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law.” This includes 1) restitution, 2) compensation, 3) rehabilitation, 4) satisfaction, and 5) guarantees of non-repetition.¹⁸⁹

The evolution of Transitional Justice can be characterized by three phases. The origins of the first phase can be traced to World War I, the second phase is associated with a wave of democratic transitions that took place after the Cold War, and the third phase—our current conception—has most often been utilized to address contemporary conditions of persistent conflict across the globe.¹⁹⁰ Some practitioners identify an additional iteration of Transitional Justice that expands the application of its principles to consolidated democracies with longstanding histories of systemic discrimination, like the US. In so doing, these practitioners highlight the anti-colonial potential of Transitional Justice; it becomes a channel by which the Global South can use lessons learned to inform the Global North.¹⁹¹

Transitional Justice is most often deployed at the country level immediately after a large-scale atrocity or political transition, with the goal of achieving a sustainable, peaceful society. It represents a set of tools with no one-size-fits-all formula; it is “more like a map and network of roads that can bring you closer to where you want to go: a more peaceful, just, and inclusive society that has come to terms with its violent past and delivered justice to victims. There is no one route.”¹⁹²

Transitional Justice emphasizes the importance of a set of tools that can be tailored to a specific context, which is consistent with LV’s invitation. Transitional Justice also creates a frame to identify the kinds of initiatives that are necessary and builds the capacity of institutions to define a specific path toward repair—with a particular focus on engaging harmed communities in the design and implementation of those initiatives. The Transitional Justice toolbox includes institutional reform, criminal prosecutions, reparations, and truth commissions. LV’s framework also acknowledges that every context is different and therefore avoids being prescriptive.

LV is also very aligned with the central practice of the Transitional Justice approach, which requires establishing the facts of the harm that has occurred. “Without reasonably complete truth, none of the other goals in Transitional Justice, to be discussed presently, are likely to be realized.”¹⁹³ Desmond Tutu speaks to this when he writes about Dachau, Nazi Germany’s first concentration camp:

“At Dachau, the former concentration camp near Nuremberg, there is a museum to commemorate what happened there... Over the entrance to the museum of philosopher George Santayana’s haunting words, ‘Those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it.’”¹⁹⁴

Overall, as Teitel explains, “[i]n the Transitional Justice discourse, revisiting the past is understood as the way to move forward.”¹⁹⁵

Finally, similar to LV’s framework, Transitional Justice is designed to operate at scale. The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa demonstrates the impact of a nationwide truth commission: “Those who accepted the work of the TRC were more likely than those who did not to also report relative reconciliation with the past.”¹⁹⁶ Scale means that the effort must engage people of all different identities, sectors, and positions within the system to be successful. As David A. Crocker explains, “One reason the Argentine, Chilean, and South African

truth commissions gained legitimacy was that their respective members represented a wide spectrum of political positions.”¹⁹⁷

However, this is not without its challenges. The larger the scale, the more difficult it is to keep the harmed party at the center of a negotiation regarding the path forward. Absent an element of the process explicitly designed to level the power dynamic between the harmed party and those that caused harm, it becomes difficult to support the harmed party in maintaining a full sense of agency. The TRC in South Africa is frequently cited as an example of this; civil society and grassroots groups were under-engaged throughout the process, and many feel that the confessions of perpetrators were centered over the needs of those who were harmed by apartheid.¹⁹⁸

LV’s framework builds on the Transitional Justice framework. Transitional Justice engages institutional actors and harmed communities from all different sectors of society, but it leaves more to uncover about the role of individual implicated subjects in the general population. In the context of US history where so much time has passed since the original harm—and where that harm has been embedded into systems and structures in which we are all implicated—it becomes essential to break out of the traditional victim-perpetrator binary and consider how *all* people are implicated and, working within their differing domains, can become Agents of Repair.

In addition, it feels important to note the difference in frameworks as it relates to one specific tool of Transitional Justice, which is the role of the criminal legal system. In some of the contexts in which Transitional Justice is employed, establishing a rule of law is important. “Transitional Justice processes,” Rodrigo Uprimny and María Paula Saffron write, “are ruled by the legal demands of justice... These demands are materialized in the legal imperative of individualizing and punishing perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity.”¹⁹⁹

As stated above, LV takes an explicit stance that the criminal legal system, as it currently exists, does not deliver reparative remedies—and therefore is not a part of our reparative solution to larger, historical harms. Many individual Transitional Justice practitioners also make this assessment when applying the principles to the US, in which case we are aligned.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI), RACIAL EQUITY, AND ANTI-RACISM

Our country is not set up to build people’s capacity to work with others who are different from themselves. Our schools are segregated,²⁰⁰ our neighborhoods are segregated,²⁰¹ and our professional spaces are segregated.²⁰² Fortunately, in recognizing that racial justice within an organization leads to better performance,²⁰³ many organizations and companies across sectors are currently investigating how to create spaces where employees can work better together across lines of difference. So, institutions have begun making more of an effort to build diverse and inclusive workplaces, and this often involves bringing in external expertise centered on **diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), racial equity, and anti-racism.**

Though the DEI field first emerged in the mid-1960s following the introduction of equal employment laws and affirmative action,²⁰⁴ demand for DEI, racial equity, and anti-racism expertise grew tremendously in recent years. Even with COVID-19’s initial impact on the economy, “the number of DEI-related job postings increased by 123 [percent] between May and September of 2020.”²⁰⁵

We group DEI, racial equity, and anti-racism together in this report because they are often deployed in a functionally similar way: to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in organizations. “Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) was already a growing and popular field—in 2017, McKinsey reported that \$8 billion was being spent in the United States alone on diversity training.”²⁰⁶ What began as diversity and inclusion (D&I) has now expanded to, in some cases, include E for equity, B for belonging, A for accessibility, and J for justice. The additions of racial equity and anti-racism call attention to a shift from *activities* to *outcomes*. Author and educator Ibram X. Kendi takes a binary approach by suggesting two clear-cut paths: you are either racist or anti-racist. “The defining question,” Kendi writes, “is whether the discrimination is creating equity or inequity. If discrimination is creating equity, then it is antiracist. If discrimination is creating inequity, then it is racist.”²⁰⁷

One can replace the word “discrimination” with the phrase “an organization” to apply this to institutions. Carmen Morris sums up the field at its best: “The race equity agenda is about ensuring that anti-racist practice is a wholesome part of organizational practice, embedded into the systemic functioning of a business, which supports best in class, equitable outcomes for employees and customers.”²⁰⁸

The practice of D&I is most often reduced to representation within an institution as well as elements of an inclusive culture. Consensus is building that D&I alone is inadequate because the focus is limited to activities, such as attending training, rather than creating equitable outcomes, such as parity in promotion and senior leadership. Often, companies tout their D&I efforts by essentially saying “We’re trying!” but do not actually take the time to define what equity in their organization looks like or track measurable change toward it.

In addition, much of the content created to support the field has proven ineffective. Psychologist Patrick Forscher, who has conducted over 400 unconscious-bias studies, found that D&I training “had too often been used by employers as a ‘catch all,’ which failed to really tackle the specific barriers for different groups.”²⁰⁹ Said differently, a few hours of training is not enough to enable leaders to develop an anti-racist worldview.

Liberation Ventures rejects surface-level tactics that do more to “diversity wash” (i.e., virtue signaling actions that do not actually make an organization more equitable) a brand than to change actual outcomes. We believe that becoming an Agent of Repair requires vigilance, learning, and awareness of the historic and present-day racism embedded into systems and structures, as well as an understanding of where and how we as individuals are positioned within them. Some racial equity practitioners acknowledge this. Kendi writes, “Like fighting an addiction, being an anti[-]racist requires persistent self-awareness, constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination.”²¹⁰

Finally, the DEI framework does not inherently require reckoning with the past, nor does it account for the scale of the harm that people and institutions have caused. DEI proponents do not ask, “What harm has this institution caused throughout its history, and whom has it harmed? What is owed in order to make both the harmed party and the institution whole?” Instead, they ask, “What is the racial makeup of our organization and leadership? How inclusive is our culture? How do we get to parity?” These questions are important but do not go far enough. Liberation Ventures fundamentally believes that America owes a debt to Black people.

Despite our criticisms of DEI, we deeply value the work of many DEI practitioners and academics who have done rigorous excavation of diversity, inclusion, and other related abstract terms—providing in-depth, concrete definitions and enabling the framework to be effectively practiced. This aligns with what this report—and LV at large—aims to do with the concept of Racial Repair.

There are too many DEI standard-bearers to name here, but we highlight a couple. PolicyLink²¹¹ has been holding the torch on defining Racial Equity for two decades and now works across sectors to advance equity in every domain of society. PolicyLink recently published blueprints for racial equity in the federal government²¹² and within corporations,²¹³ bringing immense value to the field. In addition, Brené Brown is cracking the code on what Belonging looks like at work, through frameworks that support colleagues in building trust²¹⁴ and addressing shame.²¹⁵ Finally, the Othering & Belonging Institute, directed by John A. Powell, partners with community organizations to run participatory processes that create more equitable and democratic outcomes.²¹⁶ All set themselves apart by taking great care to surface evidence-based insights and build clear, effective tools that support organizational leaders to implement DEI.

We also appreciate DEI’s applicability across institutional contexts—public, private, and social—and its ability to speak to the roles of people across race. LV is aligned with Racial Equity practitioners like Carmen Morris, who states, “This process will be a lengthy one. There are no quick-fix solutions, and leaders and managers must endeavor to be true to their commitments, in a real and authentically driven way.”²¹⁷

Finally, we care deeply about outcomes—and know that racial equity and anti-racism give us a clear pathway to measuring progress. We see LV’s Racial Repair framework as working in concert with the concept of racial equity; equity is the metric that we use to measure whether or not comprehensive repair is taking place.

DEMANDS FOR REPARATIONS ACROSS TIME

The movement for reparations is older than emancipation itself. Freed and enslaved Black people organized, filed lawsuits, and filed petitions for restitution since before abolition, usually at great risk to their individual safety. After Belinda Sutton, there was Callie House, who created the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty, and Pension Association—organizing tens of thousands of formerly enslaved people to push Congress to pass a bill that would provide slave pensions.²¹⁸ When this was unsuccessful, she hired an African-American lawyer named Cornelius Jones and sued the federal government. As Hannah-Jones explains:

“The audacity of a Black woman demanding payment for her stolen labor and the stolen labor of millions of others, even if it would come directly from proceeds of the cotton they’d picked, brought down the full wrath of one of the most powerful governments in the world. The Treasury Department, under President Woodrow Wilson, first issued a press release insisting the United States owed nothing and that formerly enslaved people, if they had a claim at all, should seek reparations from ‘their masters.’ A federal court then rejected the claim, citing government immunity—which says that the government must consent to being sued—and the [US] Supreme Court upheld the decision. Not content with crushing the lawsuit, the government went after both Jones and House, accusing them of mail fraud.”²¹⁹

Callie House was ultimately convicted and sentenced to prison, where she served one year.²²⁰

Many activists have carried the torch since then. Marcus Garvey called for reparations in the early 1900s,²²¹ with an emphasis on repatriation to Africa; Audley “Queen Mother” Moore took the issue to an international stage in the 1950s when she brought a petition to the United Nations.²²² The Republic of New Afrika was founded by activists in 1968 as a Black separatist movement to form a new, Black nation on land in the southeastern US;²²³ and James Forman delivered the Black Manifesto in April 1969, calling for reparations from white churches and synagogues for their role in the slave trade.²²⁴ In 1987, Adjoa Aiyetoro and Imari Obadele helped found N’COBRA, the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America, which still operates today.²²⁵

Throughout this time, academics and journalists also helped define, research, and make the case for reparations. In the 2000s, Randall Robinson published *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*; Mary Frances Berry published *My Face Is Black Is True*; Roy Brooks published *Atonement and Forgiveness: A New Model for Black Reparations*; and legal scholars like Charles Ogletree, a former professor at Harvard Law School (HLS), published, lectured, and organized his peers through the Reparations Coordinating Committee.²²⁶ In 2014, awareness of the movement for reparations swelled with “The Case for Reparations” by Ta-Nehisi Coates in *The Atlantic*.

Finally, politicians picked up the mantle in 1987, when Representative John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) first introduced HR40, the *Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act*. For most of its almost 40-year history, the act languished without the required votes for movement; however, it passed out of committee for the first time in 2021.

It is the audacity, dignity, and hope of these people—and so many more—that fuel Liberation Ventures and the broader reparations movement today. Many current, prominent scholars and journalists have joined the choir, amplifying the call for reparations ever louder, including Margaret Burnham, William A. (“Sandy”) Darity, Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen (whose framework we discuss below), Darrick Hamilton, Nikole Hannah-Jones, Robin D.G. Kelley, Heather McGhee, Andre Perry, Clint Smith, and Olúfẹ̀mi O. Táíwò. Bernice Johnson Reagon once said, “[I]f you are not working on something that you cannot complete, you are actually missing the point.”²²⁷ While we believe that we can win reparations in our lifetime, we owe that belief to the giants who knew that they likely would not see success in theirs—and yet still worked tirelessly to cover so much ground before us.

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In their book, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*, William A. (“Sandy”) Darity, Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen deliver a thorough accounting of the harms that Black Americans have faced in the last 400 years, making a powerful case for what is owed. Darity and Mullen define reparations as acknowledgment, redress, and closure (ARC). They write:

“Acknowledgment constitutes the culpable party’s admission of responsibility for the atrocity. Admission should include an enumeration of the damages inflicted upon the victims and the advantages appropriated by the culpable party. Redress constitutes the acts of restitution, steps taken to ‘heal the wound.’ Closure constitutes an agreement by both the victims and the perpetrators that the account is settled.”²²⁸

LV’s Racial Repair framework—of Reckoning, Acknowledgment, Accountability, and Redress—builds directly from the first two components of ARC, utilizing Acknowledgment and Redress.

We differ on the idea of closure. According to Darity and Mullen, closure means that Black American descendants of US slavery will make no new claim on the government for redress unless there is a continuation of atrocities and/or the initiation of new atrocities.²²⁹ Given that Darity and Mullen are focused primarily on the specific harm of the institution of chattel slavery—not the decades of harm caused by institutions formed in its legacy—this makes sense. However, LV includes not only chattel slavery but also many other types of harm directed toward Black people as requiring repair, including the era of pervasive lynching that occurred across the country after emancipation, the institution of Jim Crow,²³⁰ and our current system of mass incarceration.

We see a need for Racial Repair across institutions and across time. We recognize that, in many ways, the harm of slavery is still being perpetuated. Therefore, our goal is not to reach a state of closure but rather to create the conditions in which reparative norms, behaviors, and practices are ongoing and commonplace. We think about this like strength training; building our nation’s muscles for repair requires ongoing discipline and resilience. The more we train, the more we build strength, flexibility, and endurance. But if we stop, our muscles atrophy, and we backslide. This is why our framework is founded on four components in a *continual cycle*. Durable culture change requires constant maintenance, across generations and geographies.

LV has also learned from our relationships with NAARC, N’COBRA, and M4BL, whose proposals we explored in the Redress section. Members of these organizations continue to provide important leadership in our movement. Elders, including Dr. Mary Frances Berry, Joe Brooks, Dr. Ron Daniels, Kenniss Henry, Kamm Howard, Rev. Nelson and Joyce Johnson, Dr. Omowale Satterwhite, Nkechi Taifa, Makani N. Themba, Dr. Akinyele Umoja, and many others, hold the wisdom of our ancestors.

We continue to learn from this wisdom and incorporate it into our work, particularly through two themes. First, since emancipation, there have been differing perspectives within the Black community on the form that reparations could take. As time passed and different communities of Black Americans sustained different forms of harm, these perspectives widened. The expansiveness of NAARC’s and N’COBRA’s proposals illustrates the need to tailor reparations policies to specific Black communities based on specific harm. In addition, they clarify that reparations can and should be defined much more broadly than just a financial payout; that reparations also must be designed to transform systems, as well as help heal the psychological harm that the legacy of slavery has caused.

Second, our elders remind us of the importance of clarifying what reparations are—and what they are not. The Reparations Toolkit created by M4BL describes many important issues surrounding the definition of reparations, and LV follows their lead in describing what reparations are not:

- Reparations are not individual white people paying individual Black people;
- Reparations are not individuals or foundations donating money to Black institutions;
- Reparations are not just saying “sorry”; and
- Reparations are not the same as divesting from extractive industries for the future but instead requires reckoning with, and acknowledging, the past.

It is the shoulders we stand on—the people and their decades of work, thinking, and discussion—that have brought our movement to where it is today. Too often, that work has gone unacknowledged. **We honor the contributions of the many, many leaders who have advanced this cause, and we recognize that it is fully due to their efforts that we are able to make the progress we are making today.**

By building on decades of movement leadership, LV’s framework for Racial Repair aims to shift the emphasis of our country’s conversation about reparations in a few ways.

First, we weave some of the central tenets of Restorative Justice into historic demands for reparations by inviting complexity into our reflection on roles and positionality. We make the case for why people of all races must become Agents of Repair, positing that repair is a process that happens together, across lines of difference, and that everyone has something to gain.

Second, on the topic of scale, we bring essential elements of Transitional Justice into the current conversation about racial equity—because we see the past as a guiding light for our future. We must cultivate a deep understanding of the scale of harm caused in the past in order to design solutions that meet the scale of the problem today. Correspondingly, we need all people—in different roles—to be Agents of Repair in order to operate at the scale we feel is necessary.

Third, we put a stake in the ground about the necessity of understanding Racial Repair as ongoing, cyclical work. In our view, progress is measured by tracking equity in life, health, and wealth outcomes. Over time, our aspiration is that US society will evolve such that harm decreases and the capacity to repair it increases—wherever and whenever it is caused.

IV. Conclusion:

OUR INVITATION

Boy on Body of Water, Mwabonje



“[Reparations] is for all of us. If you’ve harmed someone, you have to do things to become healthy and whole. That’s what the case for reparations, for me, is all about – it’s about how a society heals from injustice.”

Bryan Stevenson

Repair has the potential to transform us—as people and as a nation. On an individual level, repairing relationships with people in our lives provides connection, belonging, and love—the essential nutrients of humanity. As repair expands, so too does connection, belonging, and love. Reckoning with and providing Acknowledgment of another’s lived experience affirms their humanity.

Through Accountability and Redress, we remember that our destinies—and our wholeness—are interconnected. When we are able to fully express our pain, and that pain is received by others with real care, the burden of carrying the pain alone is lifted. When our loved ones, neighbors, and society at large express their commitment to repair, our inherent value, worth, and dignity as individuals begin to be restored.

At Liberation Ventures, we are doers *and* dreamers who believe that imagination is critical on the journey toward transformation. Today’s structures and systems were once imagined and designed to operate the way that they do—and they can be reimagined and redesigned too. Visioning widens the lens of our understanding of human history, illustrating the astounding level of change—or worldmaking, as political scientist Adom Getachew calls it²³¹—that has come before us and is possible to come in our future. Through imagination, we reject the notion that our current economic and political order is fixed, and we invite ourselves to define not only what systems we want to dismantle but also those that we wish to create.

We are seeking to build a society in which Black people feel safe, which requires economic and democratic systems that promote this safety. Our dream is a society in which Black people have fully realized freedom and autonomy to make their own choices in life, including where to live, what to eat, how to make a living, and when to have children (if at all). We dream of a society in which Black people can trust American institutions because those institutions have stopped causing harm. And we dream of a society in which people of all races and ethnicities feel whole in the ways that only Racial Repair can provide.

This report is a first step in answering the question of why Racial Repair is beneficial for all, and most importantly, it is an invitation to share your perspective. We need your perspectives because we know that harvesting insights from all types and identities of people, all over the country, is the only way we will achieve a collective vision for repair and define the actions we can take to build a Culture of Repair. We are not afraid to name what we don’t know and to own

that we're still learning; this report serves as an intervention to help all of us learn together. **We know it doesn't yet answer the question of exactly what we can do, but that is the next step. To get there, we want to learn from you about the actions, initiatives, practices, and policies that you've seen be effective.**

We are still holding a number of questions about our framework. One of the most critical questions is: *What actually makes the cycle revolve?* We know that building power—both grassroots organizing and top-down, federal action—is necessary. We also ask: *What else is needed to keep the cycle in revolution? What kind of power is necessary in order to tip an institution into meaningful Redress, or to make the entire cycle spin faster? What will help ensure that people and institutions who use this framework develop solutions that truly meet the scale of the harm caused?*

In addition, we wonder about the construct of the cycle itself. *Does any component really need to come first, or can we truly enter the cycle at any point? Do we sometimes need to cycle between only two components, Reckoning and Acknowledgment for example, before we have enough inertia to hit Accountability? Or is this not a cycle at all? Are all four components necessary at once—like a four-part defibrillator, meant to shock this country's soul?*

Finally, there are many elements of this work that we were not yet able to fully explore in this report. In future writing, we look forward to integrating intersectional perspectives much more fully. In particular, we intend to incorporate learnings from the Black identities whose structural marginalization is compounded, including Black women, trans and gender-nonconforming people, undocumented people, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, and poor and working-class people. We are also interested in exploring the role of intragroup partnership (within race), in addition to the intergroup partnership (across race) that we discuss here. We know that truly immersing a Culture of Repair will require people to work across lines of ideological and intersectional difference **within** their racial group and across identities. Finally, there is much more to say about why partnership across race (and therefore, levels of power) is so difficult to build and maintain—and what conditions enable it to flourish.

As a bridging organization, LV's role is to speak to and be in community with many different stakeholders, recognize patterns of convergence and divergence, and make connections that nourish the reparations movement at large. Upon publishing this report, we hope for a few outcomes. First, we hope that practitioners, especially racial justice practitioners, will put our framework into practice—and then share their reflections and/or feedback. Here, we ask: *Based on your lived experience, is this framework complete, or is something missing? What conditions enable you to engage in repair? What stories do you have of successful repair, and what meaning do you take from those experiences?*

Second, we hope that academia, think tanks, and other research institutions will engage with our framework and add even more rigor to our research. *We ask: What evidence are we missing? Who can fill the gaps that exist? How can we partner to bring actionable, relatable learnings about what repair means to the country at scale?*

Finally, we hope that funders will recognize the deep need for resources to power this work. Across the country, people and organizations are bringing themes of repair to life, and it takes money to sustain their efforts. It also takes money to synthesize, translate, codify, and package insights from the ground for wider application.

To that end, we invite you to share your feedback, ideas, stories, opportunities for partnership, and more in the survey linked [here](#).

Together with you, Liberation Ventures is working to weave these ideas, questions, and capacities into the fabric of American institutions. From schools and workplaces to communities to churches, we are building a world where we all have the motivation and infrastructure to repair harm whenever and wherever it is caused—and ultimately live more fulfilling, healthy, and connected lives.

At the end of her petition, Belinda Sutton describes what she is owed:

“She prays, that such allowance may be made her out of the estate of Colonel Royall, as will prevent her and her more infirm daughter from misery in the greatest extreme, and scatter comfort over the short and downward path of their Lives—and she will ever Pray.”²³²

Though Ms. Sutton’s story seems lifetimes away, the fruits of her labor are visible today. She worked on the plantation of a man named Isaac Royall Jr., who in 1781, donated to a professorship that enabled the founding of Harvard Law School.²³³ At the time of this report’s publication, Harvard Law School has educated two US presidents, eight sitting congressional senators, and 16 Supreme Court justices; not to mention countless other civil rights attorneys, public defenders, private and social sector leaders, and more. Elitism aside, the impact of HLS graduates permeates American society. Though few know Belinda Sutton’s name, the number of people who have benefitted from the wealth that she created is immeasurable.

Hers is just one of the many stories that remind us how present the past truly is; how easily the lines from slavery to its modern-day legacies are drawn. Thus, the past is not really the past but a present specter calling for a liberated future.

In the words of Baldwin, “We must now dare everything.” If we can muster the courage to embark on the journey of Racial Repair, we can build a country in which we are all healthy, safe, and free.

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About Liberation Ventures

Liberation Ventures is building a multiracial democracy that works for all of us—by making Racial Repair a reality in the United States. By mobilizing resources, narratives, and relationships, Liberation Ventures is realizing the promise of reparations for Black Americans.

About the Author

Aria Florant is the co-founder and managing director of Liberation Ventures, which accelerates the Black-led movement for Racial Repair. Prior to LV, Aria served public and social sector clients at McKinsey & Company and helped found the McKinsey Institute for Black Economic Mobility. She was also an organizer in East Palo Alto, California, focusing on youth development and civic engagement. In 2017, she helped launch the first-ever round of programs at the Barack H. Obama Foundation. Aria's writing has been published in major media outlets across the globe, including *Nonprofit Quarterly*, *Yes! Magazine*, *Aargauer Zeitung*, and *Luzerner Zeitung*. Aria received a BA in Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity from Stanford University, an MBA in Management for Social Change from The Wharton School, and an MPA in Management, Leadership, and Decision Sciences from the Harvard Kennedy School.

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