

March 29, 2022

Public comment on AB3121 - Eligibility

Good morning,

My name is Adjoa A. Aiyetoro. I am a founding member of the National Coalition Of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA) and served as its founding co-chair and the chair of its Legal Strategies Commission. I am a member of the National Conference of Black Lawyers (NCBL) and in 1987 I was its National Co-chair at which time NCBL became one of the three founding organization for N'COBRA. I am a descendant of enslaved Africans. I am a legal expert that knows that it is constitutional to develop a reparations plan that is based race and injury – that is the Japanese American Restitution Bill.

I am pained by the separatist and chauvinistic views of those who seek to defocus reparations from full repair and push a narrow view that will not repair but only provide money for the small group of those who can prove descendancy from enslaved Africans.

I urge you to embrace a definition of eligibility for reparations that accurately reflects those of African descent that slavery and its legacy injured and continues to injure. Those injured include descendants of enslaved Africans and freed Africans and those of African descent who came to the united states after emancipation who looked black and who continue to be treated as less than Whites because of the legacy of slavery – the Anti-Blackness on which it was based and on which the continuing disadvantaging of African descendants, black people, is based.

I know you are receiving testimony on the continuing legacy of slavery in the criminal punishment system. As my friend and fellow reparationist, Charles Ogletree said some years ago, it is an unbroken chain from slavery to now. I would add the links are different – African descendants, African Americans, are no longer in chains but the operation of the punishment system that targets us for harsher punishments, including death, has not changed.

There are also many scholarly studies that provide evidence that this pattern continues in virtually all major areas of life in the United States including health care, employment, and education. scholars such as Lui -en Wang (health care) and Angela Owuachi-Willig (employment) as well as many others attest to the continuation of Anti-Blackness that is the legacy of slavery – its direct descendant.

Providing reparations only for those who can prove their descendancy from enslaved Africans is yet another win for white supremacy as it dismisses and devalues the harms done to African descendants not enslaved who were injured by slavery due to their Blackness and who are injured by the legacies of slavery due to that same blackness. policies and practices that flowed from this Anti-Blackness, are the legacies of slavery.

Reparations is more than a check – it must be if the injuries caused by slavery and its legacies are to be meaningfully and effectively addressed. reparations must include systemic changes that will significantly decrease, if not eliminate, the Anti-Blackness embedded in the major areas of life in California and the United States.

Thank you.