

Resolution on Reparations for Slavery, Indigenous Genocide and Systemic Racism in North America/Turtle Island¹

Adopted March 21, 2021

Rabbi "אמר רבי חמא בר חנינא: גדולה תשובה שמביאה רפואות לעולם, שנאמר: "ארפא משובתם אוהבם נדבה" Chama bar Chanina said: Great is teshuvah, that it brings healing to the world, as it is said, "I will heal their turning-away, I will love them freely." (Hosea 14:5)

--Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 86a

What happens when United States citizens do not learn the story that Indigenous peoples had long existed here on these lands prior to contact with Europeans for many, many thousands of years — 20,000 according to Western science, since time immemorial in Indigenous traditions?

What happens to the settler-colonial story of "civilizing" the wilderness when we remember that pre-contact Indigenous people possessed all the so-called hallmarks of civilization (language, religion, science, governance, the arts, cities and villages)? Or when we forget the story that Indigenous peoples gave aid to early European travelers in need on all of our shores — east coast, west coast, Gulf coast, the interior — preventing those travelers from succumbing to the elements for which they arrived unprepared, because to us, every life was sacred and hospitality was one of the responsibilities of being human?

What happens when we bury the story that the majority of those same travelers murdered Indigenous peoples in waves of increasing violence, forced (rather than offered) a new religion on us; what happens when no one hears the story that we fought back and resisted across every inch of this continent and were cheated, lied to, stolen from, massacred by U.S. military troops?

... What does trauma look like when no one admits it is trauma?

--Deborah A. Miranda, [blog post](#) excerpt², February 6, 2020

It is impossible to achieve equality or to end racial injustice without acknowledging and materially addressing past and continuing harms. Reform without reparations ignores the substantive reality that Black communities are starting from a 250 year deficit of wealth, opportunity and access.... [From] 1619 [to the present] racialized terror, abuse, exploitation, oppression and theft (plunder) have all resulted in the post- and present traumatic condition in African Descendants in America that is evident in the

¹ The places where we live have had many names over the millennia. The term "America" is first known to have appeared in a 1507 map by German cartographer Martin Waldseemüller. The name "Turtle Island" is used by some Indigenous tribes and people to refer either to the continent also called North America, or to the earth. For thousands of years this continent was home to hundreds of peoples with distinct identities and languages. Any name we use to describe this land has its own history, and no name exists that honors all of its histories and peoples. (See <https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2016/07/how-did-america-get-its-name/>, and <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/turtle-island>)

²Deborah A. Miranda, *Land Acknowledgement: Why Do It? On Bad NDNS*

<https://badndns.blogspot.com/2020/02/land-acknowledgment-why-do-it.html?fbclid=IwAR30RLRKcZtkUdI8wA7jNVGVKBe4CAta2KSIXLuTRFo7JSvkoyTFavSQ8F8>

economic deterioration social and educational decline, political and cultural disorder within our communities that demands reparatory justice.

--N'COBRA (National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America), [HR 40 Primer](#)

Whereas, The economic, social and political systems of the United States were built on the foundations of forced migration and enslavement of Africans and their descendants (chattel slavery) and on the genocide of Indigenous people; and

Whereas, African Americans and Indigenous people continue to experience material, social, emotional and spiritual harm as a result of continuing systems and structures of oppression, and as a result of continuing experiences and transmission of trauma; and

Whereas, African American communities have called for exploration of Reparations that might take many forms, including formal apology from government entities; direct compensation to descendants of enslaved people; policies and programs to reverse the historic injuries and the harms of enduring systemic racism, and more;³

Whereas, Reconstructionist Jewish communities include many people with African American and Indigenous heritage, and Reconstructing Judaism has signaled its commitment to becoming an anti-racist organization and movement by naming RRA member Rabbi Sandra Lawson as its inaugural Director of Racial Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; and

Whereas, American Jews with European heritage and white skin have benefited from and continue to benefit from systems that privilege white people over Black, Indigenous, and people of color in access to education, employment, housing, healthcare, transportation, healthy food, freedom from police violence and incarceration, wealth-building and other pathways to physical, economic and social well-being; and

Whereas, A core spiritual practice of Judaism is teshuvah, which calls on us to take responsibility for the harm we do to others (both individually and communally), to cease the harmful behavior⁴, to resolve not to repeat it⁵, and to repair the damage done to the satisfaction of those harmed⁶; and

Whereas, Our tradition recognizes the special power of communal teshuvah having an immediate impact at any time, in particular, that “in regard to a community, any time that they do teshuvah and call out with a full heart, they are answered [immediately]”⁷; and
Whereas, The Jewish people have benefited from reparations both according to our biblical tradition and in our recent past⁸; Therefore, be it

³ <http://www.ncobraonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/HR40-Primer-1.pdf>

⁴ Maimonides Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah 1:1, 2:2

⁵ Ibid., 2:1

⁶ Ibid., 2:9

⁷ Ibid., 2:6

Resolved, That we commit to the principle of Reparations, “the full acceptance of our collective biography and its consequences,”⁹ guided by the practice of teshuvah, for the harms done to and for the continuing harm experienced by African Americans and Indigenous people in North America / Turtle Island; and

Resolved, That we actively support HR 40¹⁰, the Reparations bill introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives and any sibling legislation brought before the U.S. Senate to explore and further the cause of reparations; and

Resolved, That we encourage all Reconstructionist movement bodies and affiliated groups and communities, especially those based in the United States, to engage in ongoing learning about systems of oppression and structural racism, and about how those systems have harmed and continue to harm African American and Indigenous people; and

Resolved, That we encourage all RRA members and Reconstructionist movement bodies and affiliated groups and communities, especially those in the United States, to explore our participation in and our local connections to these systems of oppression and ongoing harms, and to work in solidarity with local African American- and/or Indigenous-led groups to repair harm that has been and is being done, including in the areas of education, policing, housing, transportation, health care, environmental justice and incarceration; and

Resolved, That we encourage all RRA members and Reconstructionist movement bodies and affiliated groups and communities outside the United States to hear, understand and learn from Black and Indigenous communities in their call for sovereignty and reparations and to address systems of structural injustice and oppression where they are, and to engage in local actions to support direct reparations and teshuvah; and

Resolved, That we commit to reviewing and revising current language and curricula in the communities where we live and serve, to include acknowledgement of local histories and Indigenous place names, and to challenge dominant narratives that center¹¹ the experiences and perspectives of white Europeans, replacing them with narratives that give balanced attention to the experiences and perspectives of African American and/or Indigenous people, as described by those people; and therefore be it further

⁸ Rabbi Aryeh Bernstein, [The Torah Case for Reparations: A Jewish View](#)

⁹ Ta-Nehisi Coates, [The Case for Reparations](#)

¹⁰ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/40>

¹¹ The term “centering” is used frequently in discourses about privilege, oppression and marginalization. It can refer to dominant narratives or experiences (or the “gaze”) that are present, often without being acknowledged. Dominant narratives usually reflect power hierarchies. Some experiences that are centered in U.S. dominant culture are Christianity, whiteness, maleness, having particular physical, emotional and cognitive modes and capacities. Decentering dominant narratives and experiences doesn’t seek to replace those narratives and experiences, but seeks to make appropriate space for narratives and experiences that have been and are being excluded or marginalized.

Resolved, That we commit to centering the voices of African American- and Indigenous- heritage members of our communities, to the extent that they desire, in guiding the visioning and implementation of the foregoing.

Background material on Reparations, American Racism and Judaism and Reparations:

[D'var Torah on Parshat Bo](#) by Rabbi Ari Lev Fornari

[Slavery and Its Atonement](#), by Rabbi Toba Spitzer

[The Torah Case for Reparations: A Jewish View](#), by Rabbi Aryeh Bernstein

[Our Country Was Built on a Stolen Beam: The Call for a National Reckoning](#), by Rabbi Sharon Brous

[Caste, The Origins of Our Discontents](#), by Isabel Wilkerson

[An Indigenous People's History of the United States](#), by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz

[Bad Indians](#), by Deborah Miranda