



2022 Reparations Advocacy Priorities

A Call for the Establishment of a Reparations Task Force in the State of New Jersey

With respect to matters of racial justice, New Jersey has too often been on the wrong side of history. In 1704, the Colonial Province of New Jersey introduced the “Slave Code,” which prohibited enslaved Africans and free Africans from owning property. In the Colonial period, New Jersey incentivized the importation and practice of slavery by providing each English white settling family with 150 acres of land *and* an additional 60 acres for each enslaved Black person who worked on that land. It was an effective strategy. By the 1800s, more than two-thirds of all enslaved Black people in the North were held captive in New Jersey. To add insult to injury, New Jersey opposed the Emancipation Proclamation and was the last Northern state to abolish slavery. Following the Civil war, New Jersey refused to ratify the Reconstruction Amendments. Too often churches, especially older churches dating to the colonial period, have been complicit in this.¹ Throughout much of its history, the State of New Jersey has acted against the interests of its citizens of color, especially African-Americans.

As the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice rightly observes, “even after becoming the last Northern state to end slavery, New Jersey developed its own system of sharecropping which set a groundwork for continued economic exclusion of Black residents for generations. From redlining to racially restrictive covenants to barriers in implementing the GI Bill for Black veterans, barriers to wealth-building for Black families continued, while policies supported wealth-building for white residents.” These policies were buttressed by federal policies.²

It is deeply distressing that the simple step of creating a Task Force to study the question of Reparations for the State of New Jersey has repeatedly failed to gain traction in the legislature or adequate support from the Governor. Proposed legislation (2022 New Jersey Bills A938/S386) is being met with avoidance, delay and resistance, often under the cover of semantics even as municipalities across the State of New Jersey are increasingly speaking out and calling for meaningful reparations work in the state.

As faith leaders committed to the respect and dignity of every human being, and to the values of truth, justice and love, the New Jersey Coalition of Religious Leaders supports this legislation and believes it is past time for both the Senate and Assembly to bring to the floor, pass, and send to Governor for signature the Reparation Bills A938/S386, to create a New Jersey Reparations Task Force.

¹ See Tisby, Jemar *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church’s Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing 2019).

² See Richard Rothstein’s *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York, London: Liveright Publishing Corporation – W.W. Norton & Company, 2017) for a review of the many ways in which federal, state and local governments systemically and systematically conspired to deprive Black citizens their rights and to deprive them of property and wealth over generations.