

To: Mayor Deborah Frank Feinen, City of Champaign; Mayor DeShawn Williams, City of Urbana; Ms. Jilmala Rogers, Champaign County Board; Chancellor Charles L. Isbell, Jr., University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

FROM: The Champaign-Urbana Reparations Coalition cureparations@gmail.com

Memorandum

A funded intergovernmental Champaign County Reparations Commission for African Americans

We ask that:

- **The City of Urbana, The City of Champaign, The County of Champaign, and the University of Illinois establish and fund a Champaign County Reparations Commission for African Americans to study the need for reparations and bring recommendations for action to the public governing bodies and the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (UIUC).**
- **Each governmental body shall nominate one member to serve on this 11-person Commission. At least 51 percent of the commission are to be community members to ensure that the leadership and recommendations authentically represent African American residents of Champaign County.**
- **Each governmental body shall contribute \$25,000 to the work of the Commission. Expenses will include research costs, public meetings venues, and appropriate stipends.**
- **Working towards reparations will require additional research into local histories of discrimination and subsequent harm, the preparation of a harm report, community education and involvement, identification of potential models of repair, location of funding sources, and finally presentation of legislation to enact repair.**

Each of the entities named above brings particular expertise and will find particular areas of redress. Laws and policies in this County have systematically contributed to and exacerbated racial inequalities. Absent an honest look at our history and its repercussions in our present, we cannot reach our potential for the future. For the benefit of all, African American people must lead the process of repairing historical and present injustices. Hence we propose the creation of this intergovernmental task force.

WHO WE ARE - Champaign-Urbana Reparations Coalition

The Champaign-Urbana Reparations Coalition (CURC) seeks reparations for African American people. Our goal is to address the historic and ongoing harms caused by systemic racism and discrimination and, guided by those most impacted, to work towards creating a more just and equitable society for all. While the harms of the legacies of enslavement to African Americans are stark, these harms affect all of us. We believe that reparations are a necessary step towards rectifying the injustices of the past and creating a more equitable future. We began work in May 2023, led by Dr. Jeff Trask.

NATIONAL SNAPSHOT

Data cited by the Descendants Truth and Reconciliation Foundation indicate that African American people in the US own 10% of the median wealth of white people, have lower life expectancies and higher unemployment, are 20% more likely to report psychological distress and 50% less likely to receive counseling or mental health treatment, will earn \$1 million per person less than individual white people during their lifetimes, are 40% less likely to own a home, and are five times more likely to be imprisoned. <https://www.descendants.org/what-we-do/why-now>

Slavery and the subsequent caste system has created the foundation of the US financial portfolio, on which all other wealth was built. Everyone in the US is currently benefiting from the effects of slavery. If connections can easily be traced from slavery to the financial well-being of the nation today, they can also be traced from slavery to the overall challenges in African American lives today. This is not to mention the post-slavery experience, stretching from the rise of the KKK after Reconstruction to Jim Crow laws, housing discrimination and redlining to mass incarceration and other current injustices. Our nation must be held accountable for the legacies of slavery.

In 2016 the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent called on the United States to provide reparations for slavery, finding compensation necessary to combat “the disadvantages caused by 245 years of legally allowing the sale of people based on the color of their skin.” Adequate reparations include cessation and guarantees of non-repetition, restitution, compensation, satisfaction, and rehabilitation.

LOCAL HISTORY

According to “24/7 Wall Street” in June 2023, Champaign-Urbana ranks #20 in the country in the list of worst cities for Black Americans. An index of eight variables measuring racial socioeconomic gaps was used to determine the rankings. “It is important to note that this list does not rank the cities where Black Americans face the worst conditions, but rather the cities where the socioeconomic gaps between the white and Black populations are the largest.” <https://247wallst.com/special-report/2023/06/14/the-worst-cities-for-black-americans-9/>

As in other parts of the country, African Americans in Champaign County are disproportionately suffering from myriad health issues, such as high infant mortality rates and various cancers.

- According to the Illinois Department of Public Health, Champaign County is second in the state in infant mortality (rate of 9.4), surpassing Chicago (6.3) and East St. Louis (9.3). <https://dph.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/idph/publications/idph/data-and-statistics/vital-statistics/infant-mortality-statistics/IMR%20by%20county%202015-2019.pdf>
- 2019 statistics show that the infant mortality rate among African American women was 11.4 compared with 4.4 for Caucasian women <https://dph.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/idph/publications/idph/data-and-statistics/vital-statistics/infant-mortality-statistics/IMR%20demographics%202015-2019.pdf>

The discriminatory housing practices of redlining and restrictive covenants in Champaign County negatively affected Black families in a multitude of ways. When looking at a map of Champaign-Urbana overlaid with a mapping of race, the effects of these practices are apparent and ongoing. Examples resulting from this discrimination include the presence of predatory lenders, food deserts, racial wealth gaps, and higher crime rates in predominantly Black neighborhoods. The Champaign County Clerk's office has uncovered 18 local subdivisions that deployed restrictive covenants impacting 774 parcels to keep Blacks out of certain neighborhoods.

African Americans were admitted to the University of Illinois from its founding in the late 1800's but were not permitted to live on campus until a token integration of two women in 1945. Housing discrimination at the University of Illinois continued to exist without much abatement into the early 1960's.

The racial oppression of white supremacy was expansive and was prevalent and punishing for employment opportunities. Regardless of qualifications, Black workers were systematically discriminated against in hiring, where the only jobs made available were lower-paying manual labor, which was less secure and segregated. In 1968, the unemployment rate in Champaign-Urbana was 2.6 percent for whites, and between 12 and 20 percent for Blacks, depending on the season. Especially oppressive was the lack of employment opportunities for Black professionals.

The Illinois State Board of Education's 2022-23 school report card shows unacceptable achievement gaps between Black and white students.

- In Urbana just 2% of Black third graders are grade-proficient in mathematics compared to 24% of white students, remaining at 2% for Black eighth graders and dipping to 21% of white students in eighth grade. One percent of Black students are proficient in language arts in third grade compared to 16% of white students. www.illinoisreportcard.com/District.aspx?source=trends&source2=achievementgap&Districtid=09010116022
- In Champaign, 7% of Black third graders read at grade level compared to 42% of white students in third grade; 7% of Black students in 8th grade test at grade level in language arts compared to 46% of white eighth graders. In math in Champaign only 10% of Black third graders test at grade level compared to 49 % of white students; by 8th grade the scores are 1% for Black students and 33% for white students. www.illinoisreportcard.com/District.aspx?source=trends&source2=achievementgap&Districtid=09010004026

According to WBEZ and the Investigative Project on Race and Equality, in 2022, the City of Champaign's Black population was 17.9%. Yet, it constituted more than 56% of traffic stops. In Urbana, Black people represented 18.3% of the population. However, they made up nearly 46.5% of that city's traffic stops. Champaign County Sheriff's Annual Reports note that over the last five years the average percentage of jail bookings to the Champaign County Jail is 57% African American.

ASSETS

We are fortunate to be able to build on previous commitments that the cities, county and University have made to work towards racial equity. At UIUC the Call to Action to Address Racism & Social Injustice Research Program in the Vice Chancellor's Office is just one of the university's antiracism initiatives. In Urbana "A RESOLUTION COMMITTING TO END STRUCTURAL RACISM AND ACHIEVE RACIAL EQUITY" was passed in 2021. Champaign County received the report of its Racial Justice Task Force in 2017. The Champaign Unit 4 School Board in 2020 passed a resolution declaring racism to be a public health crisis.

In this community we have ample resources for historical research such as the Doris K. Wylie Hoskins Archive on Cultural Diversity, the African American Heritage Trail, the Champaign County History Museum, the University of Illinois Library and the Champaign County Historical Archives at the Urbana Free Library. Numerous faculty at the University of Illinois are skilled in archival research and committed to community engagement. Communities such as Evanston, IL, and Providence, RI, have been leaders in reparations as have Georgetown University and St. Louis University and can provide models for action.

The Champaign-Urbana Reparations Coalition stands ready to assist the Commission in historical research, sharing examples of reparation initiatives from around the country, identifying members to serve on the Commission, and assisting with public events. We urge that the _____ pass an ordinance to start this work and look forward to working with you.

Thank you for your consideration.