

Racial terror and broken promises: Why this is the right time for reparations (blog #97)

Kamilah Moore Interview

Jean's Introduction 00:11

Hello, everybody. I only recently discovered that California has a task force on reparations for African Americans in that state. Now, as you probably know, reparations is a hot topic. How do we make up for the gross inequities between African Americans and Whites in this country? There are inequities and disparities in health, wealth, education, criminal justice, and so forth. People have been calling for reparations because there seems to be no other way to bridge that gap.

According to the Brookings Institute, African Americans are the only group that has not received any form of reparations for illegally enforced racial discrimination. Native Americans received land and billions of dollars for being driven off their lands. Payments were made to Japanese Americans for their internment during World War II. The Marshall Plan provided reparations to Jews for the Holocaust. Now, I'm not claiming that any of these efforts were sufficient by any means. But they did implicitly acknowledge the harm that was done.

In contrast, in this country, slavery and Jim Crow created the disparities that I just mentioned but nothing has been done to bridge them. I'm delighted to tell you that the state of California is now moving ahead with a reparations task force, and I'm even more delighted to bring you the chair of that task force, [Kamilah](#) Moore. [Kamilah](#) Moore is a reparatory justice scholar and attorney. Here she is to talk about the important and controversial work of the California Reparations Task Force.

Jean 2:36

Hello, everybody. I am beyond delighted to introduce to you [Kamilah](#) Moore, who is chair of the California Reparations Task Force. And yes, you heard me, there's actually a task force in California to address reparations to African Americans, descendants of Africa. Does it include other groups, or is it just mainly African Americans?

[Kamilah](#) 03:11

African Americans specifically.

Jean 03:15

It's happening, folks. This is something that people have been talking about forever, for 40 years that I can remember. And it's actually happening. The whole state, you know, the saying where California goes, so goes the nation. And so my hope is that this is the beginning of something that will sweep the nation. [Kamilah](#) is a reparatory justice scholar and an attorney with a specialization in entertainment and intellectual property

transactions. She's chair of this task force, and it's a very esteemed task force with senators, state senators, and Amos Brown, who is nationally famous on this.

Kamilah 04:02

Yes.

Jean 04:03

So this is quite an amazing thing.

Kamilah 04:07

Again, my name is Kamilah Moore, and I'm the chairperson of the California Reparations Task Force. I'm from Los Angeles, California, or Leimert Park, originally, some people call it South Central LA. So, I grew up in a predominantly African American neighborhood. But, individually, I grew up in a household with a strong, Black American single mother who worked full time, also raising three children, also was going to school at the same time, but even through all those responsibilities, she also instilled into her children a deep sense of pride for African American and Black American history and culture. Also as a child, I loved to read, and sometimes I would even read slave narratives.

Jean 04:58

Whoa.

Kamilah 04:58

And so, that was very... like how many children are out there reading slave narratives, right? But so that is, you know, it alludes to me just reflecting back on my life, from a very early age I had this very deep sense of pride about African American history and culture. And I also had a deep understanding of what was owed to us based off of our contributions to this country, particularly based on 250 years of forced labor. And so, I carried that knowledge with me, when I went to undergraduate at UCLA, I was highly involved in African American activism.

Jean 05:36

Hang on a minute, before you go further, you said "was owed to us"?

Kamilah 05:42

Yeah.

Jean 05:42

That's a subject of contention. So explain how you can make a definitive statement about "owed to us."

Kamilah 05:52

That's great. Thank you for asking me that question. Because this is something that has been uncovered through this historic process that is the California Reparations Task Force. So when I say "owed to us," I'm speaking to a particular point of time in this country, particularly the Reconstruction period in this country, whereby you had the Emancipation

Proclamation that was issued by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863, which declared all enslaved Black people to be free.

But then that's where you have Juneteenth that came along, two and a half years later, there were still Black people in this country that thought they were still to be enslaved, and it took Union troops going into the far western parts of the Confederate States, particularly Galveston, Texas in 1865, to free the rest of our ancestors, so to speak.

But during that period, as I said, it was a period of reconstruction, where there were promises to these newly freed African slaves to help from the federal government, there were federal government promises, to help these newly freed African slaves transition from slavery to freedom. And some of that assistance would have looked like the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau and the Freedmen's Bank, which was established, but it was very short lived after it was destroyed and dismantled after the promise of reconstruction was broken, particularly after the assassination of President Lincoln and the emergence of Andrew Johnson. And then also you have Special Order 15 by General Sherman that essentially declared that these newly freed Africans would obtain 40 acres and a mule.

Jean 07:29

Yes, 40 acres and a mule.

Kamilah 07:30

That was denied. So what I mean by owed, I'm talking to these very deliberate promises from the federal government during the Reconstruction period that were short lived, but yet dismantled by racists like Andrew Johnson.

Jean 08:04

Okay, so you're dating the "owed" back to Reconstruction era?

Kamilah 08:10

Yes, yes.

Jean 08:12

Okay. I interrupted you, I'd like you to finish your story. You went to college. You said you specialized in, focused on what again?

Kamilah 08:22

I went to UCLA for undergrad and I majored in generic political science. I had minors in education and film, but I focused my activism work, student activism work on African American issues. But then also, I went to Columbia Law School two years after I graduated from UCLA, and I intentionally chose to go to Columbia Law School because they had really great programs in terms of international law and human rights law. And I had this understanding that I want to be a reparatory justice scholar, I want to fight for reparations for the African American community. I want reparations as a topic to be taken more seriously. And so, I utilized my law school experience to do that, for lack of a better word.

Jean 09:16

Whoa. This is a straight trajectory here from reading slave narratives, to choosing a law school where you can specialize in reparations and justice.

Kamilah 09:29

Exactly.

Jean 09:30

That's incredible.

Kamilah 09:33

Thank you.

Jean 09:35

Okay, so here you are, you graduate. How did the task force even come to be?

Kamilah 09:43

Great question. So I credit the task force existence to now Secretary of State Shirley Weber. She's the first African American Secretary of State of California, but she also served in the California State Legislature as an assembly member. And in 2020, she championed AB 3121, which is the bill that this task force's scope and powers are predicated on.

Secretary Shirley Weber is very well respected. She was very well respected in the California State Legislature. She was able to shepherd bipartisan support for this effort. And then ultimately, Governor Gavin Newsom signed the bill into law in October 2020. And it took about a year or so for applicants to apply and to be selected by the three different elected officials who appointed the nine members of the task force. And so I was appointed by the Speaker of the California State Assembly, Anthony Rendon, and the nine member task force had our first meeting in June of last year.

Jean 10:51

Okay, so you applied?

Kamilah 10:53

Yes. Anyone in the state of California could apply.

Jean 10:58

So you applied, and you got it. And so that means your credentials, and/or your contacts, were worthy enough that they said she can do this. So how did you become chair?

Kamilah 11:14

Yes. So I became chair at the first meeting that the task force had in June of 2021. That is where we elected amongst the nine members who was going to serve as chair and vice chair, and essentially, I came prepared with a speech detailing why I would like to be chair and essentially the task force members were convinced and elected me to serve this role.

Jean 11:41

So I'm going to have you back to talk about goal directedness and achievement and put yourself forward. This is a remarkable story. I mean, just who you are is a remarkable story. So you wanted to be chair, and you came prepared to say this is why I should be chair. And why did you want to be chair?

Kamilah 12:05

It's a great question. I wanted to be chair for a couple of reasons. But one, you know, as I stated before, I went to law school with a particular intention in mind to study reparations, so that once I graduated, I could speak to reparations on a level of a particular expertise and knowledge base. And so I think, out of all the nine members of the task force, I think I'm the only one who dedicated a significant portion of their academic experience on actually studying reparations, which I just found to be personally significant.

So not only did I attend Columbia Law School for law school, where I studied reparatory justice while there, I also studied abroad at the University of Amsterdam law school. And I wrote a masters thesis on global reparatory justice for the transatlantic slave trade, slavery, and their legacies. And I obtained a Master of Laws or an LLM, from that institution, for international criminal law.

Jean 13:28

That's amazing. You know, I'm sitting here thinking, well, of course, there's going to be a reparatory justice scholar somewhere, but it literally never crossed my mind that someone would devote their life to this subject, rather than have it as a separate topic. Okay, so keep going.

Kamilah 13:51

Exactly, precisely. So, I dedicated the majority of my studies, professional studies on reparations. And so I used that as leverage essentially to be chair of the task force. And then also, you know, the law that mandates this task force. If you look at the law, it says that the final plans for reparations have to comport with international human rights law standards, and so yeah, I'm the human rights law expert, essentially on the task force.

Jean 14:31

Philosophically, for 40 years probably, or more, I've heard debates about whether there should be or should not be reparations, and would reparations for one group of people disenfranchise another group of people, and what about the people who never enslaved anybody and they're just trying to do their job and raise their families, why should they have to pay for it? How do you answer those questions?

Kamilah 15:09

Those are great questions. And so philosophically speaking, I like to say, you know, there's this term called standing in the shoes. So, yes, no one alive today was a plantation owner, so to speak. But that doesn't negate that slavery existed in this country, that it was facilitated and orchestrated by the federal government and state governments. And that also doesn't negate that there are literal badges and incidents, or lingering negative effects

of the institution of slavery, that particularly negatively impact the African American community.

And so when we talk about reparations for the institution of slavery, again, it's not necessarily about slavery, it's really about the broken promise of the federal government of reconstruction in this country, right? It's really about there were promises made by the federal government to newly freed African slaves after emancipation that they reneged on, and that reneging on that broken promise has had unrelenting negative impacts against the African American community.

And so not only are African Americans standing in the shoes of their ancestors, and that's a terminology that was used for the descendants of Jewish Holocaust victims, right? Reparations, in some instances have been paid not only to actual victims of the Holocaust, but of their descendants, under the understanding that the descendants of these Holocaust victims are standing in the shoes of their ancestors.

The same kind of philosophical argument should apply to African Americans who descend from chattel slavery. So we're owed reparations for the institution of slavery as we're standing in the shoes of our ancestors. But we are also owed reparations due to those broken promises of reconstruction by the federal government that are still impacting us today.

Jean 17:28

What's fascinating to me is that you're laying this on slavery. And I had thought that the harm, the current harm was done during segregation in terms of theft of labor, theft of property.

Kamilah 17:51

Yes.

Jean 17:52

Does that figure into your committee's thinking?

Kamilah 17:59

Yes. And so not only are we studying the harms or the atrocities perpetuated against the African American community during the period of enslavement, but we're also addressing the atrocities committed against the African American community during the Jim Crow period. And then also the atrocities perpetuated against the African American community more contemporarily.

But yes, in our historic 500-page report, each chapter is pretty much what we're characterizing as a badge and incident of slavery. So there's a chapter on racial terror, which really talks about the White supremacist terror, the land theft, and all things that happened during the Jim Crow period. There's a chapter on political disenfranchisement that discusses the political disenfranchisement that occurred during the Jim Crow period.

And then there are other chapters in the report that also do. All throughout the report, there are significant studies to the atrocities that have been perpetrated against the African American community, particularly during the Jim Crow period.

Jean 19:11

Yeah, one of the things in talking to -- because of the work I do -- in talking to Whites who are learning about this, what I'm discovering is they literally do not -- many, many do not -- know about the racial terror. They do not know what that was like. And I grew up in the segregated south, so I have vivid memories. I used to lie in bed when we went to see my grandmother in rural Arkansas. We were scared that the White men were going to come in the middle of night and grab my father and brother.

So I mean, every night that I was there, I'm a child, waiting for the White people to show up, the White men to show up with hoods to kidnap my father and brother. So this is just one little child, and it never happened. Imagine those for whom it did happen. And most Whites don't... I think that people don't get that for whatever reason.

Kamilah 20:16

A lot of people don't get that. I think this reminds me of a particular framing that I hope penetrates society more. I consider you and that story that you raise, you're a Jim Crow survivor, right? Just like there are Jewish Holocaust survivors. You're a Jim Crow survivor, you survived Jim Crow and the genocidal policies that define that period. And then that could lead to what reparations are owed to Jim Crow survivors who are Black American or African American elders, who faced that racial terror every day, even if in your case, the KKK never did it. But that's still a terror that left a mark on you.

Jean 21:04

Yeah, okay. What I would love for you to do is you mentioned several of the chapters, racial terror. Just slowly, because I want the readers, the listeners to absorb everything, just the major chapters of what you investigated.

Kamilah 21:28

So there are 13 chapters in this historic interim report and in each chapter defines what we call a badge, an incident of slavery. So we found that there are innumerable or countless different badges and incidents of slavery in this country. But for the purposes of this report, we focused on the major 13, that is an incidence of slavery that still impacts African Americans today.

These badges and incidents of slavery still exist in this country and still impact African Americans today in this country, because and part of, again, that broken promise of reconstruction. If the federal government continued with their plan of creating a Freedmen's Bureau or Freeman's bank, freedmen schools, that were dedicated to, again, transitioning these newly freed African slaves and their descendants, from slavery to freedom.

And again, if the federal government continued with this promise of protecting African Americans from racial terror and other forms of discrimination, these badges and incidents of slavery that we've been discussing throughout this task force and that are outlined in this report wouldn't exist, but they still exist because of a lack of federal and state action.

So the 13 chapters of the report, the 13 major badges and incidents of slavery we decided to focus on, one of course is enslavement, but then after that, there's racial terror, political disenfranchisement, housing segregation, separate and unequal education, racism in environment and infrastructure, pathologizing Black families, control of creative and intellectual Black life, stolen labor and opportunity, unjust legal system, mental and physical harm and neglect. And then lastly, the wealth gap.

Jean 23:42

Whoa. That's it. When I saw that list, I said they got it. They have the whole, all of the ingredients that went into the recipe, they have it. There was one thing you said that pathologizing the Black family.

Kamilah 24:01

Yes.

Jean 24:03

Talk about that. Why was it necessary to pathologize the Black family?

Kamilah 24:10

Oh, that's a good question. That's a great question, actually. Why was it necessary to pathologize the Black family? I think that chapter gets to kind of the psychological warfare for lack of better words. And I know it's a strong term, but the psychological terror that was enacted against the African American community and after emancipation, that still exists today, right? And we see it from messages in the mainstream media, that Black Americans that we're lazy, that there's no fathers in the home and the Black mother as a welfare queen, and all these negative images and stereotypes existed and were created by White supremacists, to make Black Americans feel less than.

So, you know what, this chapter on pathologizing the Black family, we thought as a task force that it's important to illustrate that these negative stereotypes that are associated with African Americans and our families are rooted in White supremacy. They're not rooted in any facts about the integrity of our families. And also, this chapter talks about how policies have been directed to disrupt the Black family and how that manifests today. So for instance, in the report, it states that African Americans in the United States make up 14% of the American population, but Black children make up 23% of those in foster care. So we are vastly doubly represented in the foster care system.

Jean 26:04

Right. And, thus the whole thing of deserving this. The reason they're like that is because they deserve it. Because if they were right, they wouldn't have all of these problems.

Kamilah 26:18

Exactly.

Jean 26:21

Okay, so let's talk about control over creative cultural and intellectual life.

Kamilah 26:29

Yes, so this chapter, chapter nine, control over creative cultural and intellectual life, is a really great chapter, because in this chapter, not only does it talk about the atrocities perpetuated against the African American community, nationally and in California, but in this chapter, you really see the contributions that African Americans gave to this country despite the ongoing harms against us.

So those contributions look like in this chapter, the amount of patents, the scientific inventions that African Americans have created, yet we found in our studies that there are a lot of missing patents that African Americans were not able to get, so they weren't able to actually patent their inventions and their innovations, because of racism in this country. In this chapter, we also talk about African American musicians whose intellectual property was stolen or not respected.

We talk about, for instance, the lack of resources in the state of California for allocating resources for African American archives, and archival support. So, you know, in this chapter, we're essentially talking about entertainment, arts, sports, media, intellectual property innovations, and how Black people are still, to this very day, you know, their intellectual and cultural rights are being trampled upon.

Jean 28:16

That takes us into what's called cultural appropriation.

Kamilah 28:20

Yeah.

Jean 28:23

What do you think about that, is there a limit to that? How far does that go?

Kamilah 28:28

I mean, there's a difference between, like, a lot of people say cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation, and some say it's a fine line. But now in this report, we do tackle cultural appropriation head on, and we even talk about the history of cultural appropriation in this country, particularly for African Americans, it starts as early as probably even before, you know, with Elvis Presley.

Jean 28:55

Yes.

Kamilah 28:56

And how he worked with the White music industry to take over songs that were written by Black women and Black men and how they are still to this day, those Black women and men who created those songs, they don't have any royalties, their descendants aren't able to capitalize off of those songs as well.

But yeah, we're also even talking about more contemporarily like TikTok creators, there's Black TikTok creators who start trends on TikTok like dance trends, yet they're not being fully recognized for their art. And so yeah, we're just connecting the dots in this chapter, between the roots of cultural appropriation, which, you know, is White supremacy, and it's a badge, an incident of slavery where Black Americans, our ancestors' rights were deprived and our autonomy was also not respected.

Jean 30:02

I had no idea TikTok folks were being ripped off. It makes sense, but I never thought about that.

Kamilah 30:15

Oh, yeah, definitely.

Jean 30:19

Wow. Well, I don't want to go into that. But I'm wondering how can they protect their stuff, if they put it out there?

Kamilah 30:26

Well, that's a good question. You know, I'm also an attorney who specializes in intellectual property transactions, for instance, for the TikTok creators who create these dance trends that go viral. And then you have White TikTok stars who pretty much try to learn the dance, and then they get famous, and they get some brand deals off of a dance that they didn't create. It's important for the Black TikTok creators to copyright their dance trends.

But again, that goes to an educational gap, a lot of Black Americans who create these trends, they don't know much about intellectual property copyright, how to protect their rights. But that's one step.

Jean 31:10

Okay, so in other words, if you're going to put it out there, copyright it.

Kamilah 31:15

Yes, definitely.

Jean 31:17

That's the bottom line. Okay, so let's talk now about the wealth gap.

Kamilah 31:21

Okay.

Jean 31:25

Just explain what that is.

Kamilah 31:26

Yes, so the wealth gap describes the amount of money and wealth that White Americans have in this country as compared to what wealth African Americans have in this country. So let's take assets, for example, right, wealth is measured in the amount of assets you have minus debt, where that rate can get complicated. But what we found, and this is reflected in this study is, for instance, in 2019, White households owned nine times more assets than Black households. And so, that's significant.

And this is something that Senator Steven Bradford, who's on the California Reparations Task Force, has said, time and time and again, while you can inherit generational wealth, you can also inherit generational debt. So you see in this country, how White Americans have inherited generational wealth, due to, in some ways, the institution of slavery in this country if they're descendants of slave owners. But even if they're not descendants of slave owners, White Americans have inherited generational wealth due to federal and state policies, like FHA home loans, like the Homestead Act.

There are still instances of White Americans inheriting generational wealth, due to federal and state practices and laws, like FHA home loans that were systematically denied African Americans, but were given to White Americans to start owning homes and most wealth is in home ownership, right? Like the Homestead Act, where the federal government essentially gave free land to White Americans. But the Homestead Act, African Americans were denied assistance via the Homestead Act.

So again, whether or not White Americans are the descendants of slave owners, they still, by and large, have inherited generational wealth. And African Americans, in contrast, have inherited generational debt because of the denial, one because of being descendants of slaves, and our ancestors did not receive reparations or the 40 acres and a mule that would have offset anything. But also, because we were denied these governmental policies like the Homestead Act and the FHA loan, that we've inherited generational debt, and that manifests itself in this ever widening and increasing wealth gap in this country between White or European Americans and African Americans.

Jean 34:38

Yeah, I'd heard the wealth gap, I had never heard of the generational debt. I've never heard that phrase before. I've seen that Whites have on the credit line they're in the plus, and Black families are in general on the minus, they have more debt than they have assets. But I hadn't heard of it as generational debt. That's exactly what it is.

Kamilah 35:09

Exactly. And even in California, we found in the report, for instance, today, right? African American households have an average median value of assets estimated at \$200. So African Americans in California have \$200 worth of wealth or assets, whereas White

households in California have average assets of \$110,000. So you're comparing \$200 to \$110,000.

Now, that in and of itself is a demonstration of the gross wealth gap in this country. And it's not because African Americans are less than, it's not because we're shiftless or we're lazy, it's because there are entire systems that were mechanized and weaponized against us to keep us at the bottom class economically.

Jean 36:02

Do you think that was deliberate?

Kamilah 36:06

I do. I do think there were deliberate policies enacted by the federal and state government that ensured that African Americans would be a bottom caste in this country, economically speaking. And it's not just the belief, right now that we have released this historic 500-page report, there's evidence, substantial evidence to back that claim.

Jean 36:35

Let's take how to make this not a conspiracy theory.

Kamilah 36:38

Right.

Jean 36:40

What's the evidence? And who is the "they" who did it?

Kamilah 36:45

Hmm. So for instance, if we're going to stay on the wealth gap, let's talk about the federal government, so the "they" would be the federal government. The federal government created programs that subsidized low cost loans, which allowed millions of average White Americans to own their home for the first time. So, of the \$120 billion worth of new housing subsidized between 1934 and 1962, less than 2% of those homes went to non-White families. Other bedrocks that create the American middle class, like Social Security and the GI Bill, they also mostly excluded African Americans.

And you can even point to the federal tax structure that also discriminates against African Americans. You can also point to the federal and the California homestead acts, which essentially gave away hundreds of millions of acres of land, almost for free, mostly to White Americans. And today, literally as many as 46 million of their living descendants reap the wealth benefits of their ancestors getting that free land from the federal and California homestead acts of which African Americans were denied.

Jean 38:23

Wow, 46 million Whites have inherited this wealth from decades past.

Kamilah 38:32

Yes.

Jean 38:33

African Americans were denied.

Kamilah 38:35

Yes. And that's approximately one quarter of the adult population of the United States.

Jean 38:43

Wow, I had never heard that before. How do you read all this and not just get horrified?

Kamilah 38:52

Literally, this year long process that we've had in studying these issues, it's been a cathartic and emotional experience, because as you said, it's just horrifying. The contributions and the sacrifices that African Americans have made to this country. Yet, we've been terrorized and vilified, and denied not only civil rights, but human rights in this country, it's really deplorable. But you know, that's where this task force steps in, we're trying to right this nation's historical wrongs against this incredible community, that being the African American community.

Jean 39:29

What's the difference between civil rights and human rights?

Kamilah 39:34

Great question. So I mean, to me, civil rights talks about mainly when we talk about civil rights in the American context, we're talking about the right to vote.

Jean 39:47

I think I got it.

Kamilah 39:49

What'd you think? What do you think is the difference?

Jean 39:52

Civil rights is citizenship rights.

Kamilah 39:56

Yes.

Jean 39:57

The rights of a citizen in a particular locality.

Kamilah 40:01

Yes.

Jean 40:03

Human rights is the right to be treated with dignity and respect no matter where you live.

Kamilah 40:12

Exactly. I couldn't have said it any better. I really couldn't.

Jean 40:18

As soon as you start looking at... something you said that made me put it together. What misconceptions did you have to conquer to even get this task force to get to where you are? I just can imagine, you all were vilified and labeled as a giveaway program and all of that. What myths did you all have to fight? And how did you fight them?

Kamilah 40:47

We're still fighting myths. And one of those major myths that we're fighting and that we're working to address and we have addressed in some ways -- but we're going to hire a communications consultant for us to continue to address misconceptions as they come up -- one major misconception that we're fighting is this idea that California never had slavery or California was a free state. And so why is California leading this effort for reparations?

Jean 41:21

Yeah, I can see that. And so what's the response to that?

Kamilah 41:26

So the response to the misconception that California never had slavery, or that it was a free state, is that it was a free state only in name. And that there were several actually over 1500 Black people who were enslaved on California soil. Actually, some enslavers brought their enslaved people from the South to California to mine for gold, and to do other forced labor in the state.

But not only were there slaves in the state of California, but actually, the state legislature in California enacted their own Fugitive Slave Act, which was interpreted as actually more aggressive than the federal Fugitive Slave Act that existed at that time. And that pretty much empowered White vigilantes to capture even free Black people who were living in the state of California, to enslave them sometimes on California soil, but also in many times and instances to be deported to the South to be re-enslaved.

Jean 42:40

And the whole nation relied on the raw products produced in the South by slaves.

Kamilah 42:50

That's an excellent point.

Jean 42:51

So the wealth, the wealth in the North, and the wealth in the West, relied on exploitation and enslavement.

Kamilah 43:01

Yes.

Jean 43:02

And sharecroppers, and all of that in the South.

Kamilah 43:07

Exactly.

Jean 43:08

Okay. So now, what you're going to do, let's get to the recommendations, because when people I know were talking about it, they said, why should you get a check, and I shouldn't get a check? So when people talk about reparations it's usually reduced to checks. But that's not the tack you took, which is why I was so thrilled by it. You all didn't say we're going to issue out checks. You took another stance. So explain how you approach that.

Kamilah 43:40

Well, you know, so this next year since we've studied the atrocities against the African American community that's reflected in this 500-page report -- the next year is, as you said, we're going to have conversations about what reparations looks like. There are some preliminary recommendations in this report that were just released, one of them being the creation of an African American or American freedmen affairs agency, and that agency will be responsible for dispensing reparations to the descended community and will also serve as a resource hub for the descendent community.

You know, there's also some preliminary recommendations in there related to education and health, like free public college tuition for African Americans from cradle to grave, or free health care as well. There isn't any conversation around compensation in this report. And it's not because we're not going to suggest cash payments, we actually are.

Jean 44:41

Oh, you are?

Kamilah 44:42

Yeah. But the compensation part, we decided to reserve to our next and final report and we've actually hired five people to serve on our economic consultant team, who we refer to as the experts on compensation and they're going to assist us with that later on.

Jean 45:01

Well, the whole check thing is a source of tremendous controversy.

Kamilah 45:10

Yes.

Jean 45:11

Let's take the wealth gap. What is going to be the counter to that?

Kamilah 45:21

Well, it's interesting that you asked that question, because one of the economic consultants we're working with is Professor Sandy Darity, and he is an acclaimed economist at Duke University. And he says that, reparations aren't reparations until and unless there are sufficient cash payments given to the descendent community that closes the racial wealth gap. And so, he says that because that's the rule, in his mind, reparations can only be considered reparations if it closes a racial wealth gap.

Now, he's of the belief that no state in the union has enough money in their coffers, or in their budget, to close the racial wealth gap that exists between the White community and the Black community in this country. And so his solution is that the federal government is the only entity that could truly give out reparations to this country, because the federal government is the only entity that has enough money, essentially, to close the racial wealth gap that exists between White Americans and Black Americans.

So, for the purposes of this report, we talk about the wealth gap, because it's relevant. While there's an understanding that California may not be able to close the racial wealth gap alone, that's ultimately going to be the responsibility of the federal government. We're still working through having conversations about can California with a budget that they do have still pay out cash payments in terms of reparations for the descendant community? And there are many people on the task force who believe that California can provide reparations in the form of compensation.

Will it be enough to close the racial wealth gap? Probably not. But it's something we're working on.

Jean 47:24

Okay, so here's where I'm going to be controversial. You may have heard that of lottery winners, 75% to 80% of them go broke within two or three years, right? A flood of money, a flood of money to people who are not used to having it. I don't think it's going to eliminate the racial wealth gap, unless there are supports given along with that. Financial management, education, that the structural things that keep people impoverished have to be addressed also.

Kamilah 47:40

Mm-hmm.

Jean 48:12

I'm making an assertion, what do you think about that?

Kamilah 48:15

I completely agree and there are actually many task force members who agree with you, particularly Vice Chair Amos Brown has spoken to that numerous times. Cash payments, compensation, isn't the only answer or only solution in that, though if cash payments and

compensation are on the table there does need to be some type of financial literacy that could come with it.

And within that agency, there would actually be a business affairs office to provide ongoing education related to entrepreneurialism and financial literacy and also to provide business grants and to establish even public private reparative justice-oriented partnerships. So we don't want to see people just mismanaging their funds and giving it right back to the oppressors for lack of better words. So, for instance, in terms of the preliminary recommendations in this interim report, one of the recommendations is to create this California African American freedmen affairs agency.

Jean 49:28

Good. I'm so glad to hear that and I'm glad to hear I'm not the only one who's been thinking about that, that you all are on top of that.

Kamilah 49:35

Yes.

Jean 49:36

Okay. Well, I'm looking at the time. This has been wonderful. What's your thinking about the recommendations? What's your favorite one that you really want to see happen?

Kamilah 49:55

Well, there's so many, I'll speak on one like structural solution. And again, that is the establishment of the California African American freedmen affairs agency. That is probably my favorite one because it came from community input. But it speaks to reversing the structural racism that negatively impacts our community. Now, there'll be a freedmen education branch to offer free education and to facilitate free tuition initiatives, between claimants and California universities.

There'll be a social services branch, a cultural affairs branch, the legal affairs branch and medical services branch. So in that agency, there will be a branch to process claims. And process claims for eligibility, there will be a genealogy branch to support potential claimants in eligibility. There would be a civic engagement branch to support ongoing political education on African American history and to support civic engagement among African American youth. So, I think that recommendation -- an agency that has all those different branches that really get to all aspects of African American life in this country -- is my favorite.

Jean 51:19

That is outstanding. I'm looking at the ecology, the whole ecological system that supports a family or an individual is not enough to say what they should do. What are the structural supports around a person that helps them go in the right direction? And so, what you're talking about in that agency, then, is to have structural supports on all these different arenas.

Kamilah 51:48

Yes.

Jean 51:49

I love that.

Kamilah 51:51

And since you're a social worker, I'll read off the social services and family affairs branch would exist to identify and mitigate the ways that current and previous policies have damaged and destabilized Black family. So services might include treatment for trauma and family healing services to strengthen the family unit, stress resiliency services, financial planning services, career planning, and civil and family court services.

Jean 52:21

Wow. Just cover the gamut.

Kamilah 52:23

Yes.

Jean 52:24

So are you excited every day to go to work? I mean this is just wonderful.

Kamilah 52:29

Now, this has been an exciting process, it has been an honor and a privilege to serve. You know, the nine member task force, we don't get paid for this work.

Jean 52:38

Oh, you don't?

Kamilah 52:39

No. This is a labor of love, a purely volunteer position.

Jean 52:44

Wow, how much time does it take from you?

Kamilah 52:48

It takes a lot of time, insofar as I've actually had to take some time off from my real job. But now I'm getting back into the job market because I got bills to pay.

Jean 52:58

You literally worked on this virtually full time.

Kamilah 53:01

At a certain point I had to. Yeah.

Jean 53:04

Wow. Well, as a citizen of the United States, I want to thank a citizen of the United States and of California, for the work you're doing on our behalf, and I fervently hope this work will spread.

Kamilah 53:23

Likewise, me too. Thank you.

Jean 53:26

Thank you. I have enjoyed this. How can people reach you?

Kamilah 53:31

Yes, so people can reach me personally on Twitter, I provide updates regularly on the task force in our work and the press that we've been receiving. So my Twitter is KamilahVMoore, and that's V as in Victoria. So KamilahVMoore is my Twitter.

But if you'd like to learn more about the task force, you can subscribe to our mailing list. And that information can be found on our website at oag.ca.gov/AB3121. And on that website, you can again, subscribe to our mailing list, find out more about the individual task force members. And then you can also find links to our historic report, and our executive summary and our key findings and all that great stuff.

Jean 54:19

Okay, so I fervently hope that listeners will go to the website and look at this magnificent work. The gamut is covered. I mean, I just was totally blown away. So thank you, Kamilah, for talking with us. And I wish you, well I don't know, good fortune, speed, whatever, in your work. And I admire that you're doing this as a labor of love that makes it even more impressive. Thank you.

Kamilah 54:55

Thank you, Jean. I really appreciate this conversation. I thoroughly enjoyed it, it was amazing.

Jean's Closing 55:00

All right, so many takeaways. The most startling to me was the concept of generational debt. I knew there was such a thing as generational wealth. And so it's logical that there will be generational debt. But the concept was a revelation to me. So how can people escape generational debt that has accumulated over centuries and inherited by family after family after family in that tree? In this country, individuals are assumed to be responsible for their own lives. Yet, how can millions of people overcome the generational debt they inherited through no fault of their own?

The counter are those who say, how can individuals who were not responsible for slavery, or segregation, or sharecropping, or all of that be responsible for things their ancestors did? Many of us as African Americans inherited generational debt, so that many Whites inherit

generational wealth. I remember teaching a class talking about how in World War II, many World War II vets got FHA loans. They were denied, for the most part, to people of color. One student in one of my classes commented that her grandparents had gotten that loan and that her family still had that house. She's not responsible for what her grandparents got. But she is enjoying the benefits of that house, and the wealth that's accumulating in that house year after year. So how can we make this fair? No one is taking away that family's house.

But what should happen to the descendants of those who had no such opportunity, and who were legally deliberately denied from that opportunity? As Warren Buffett said, "The womb from which you emerge determines your fate to an enormous degree for most of the seven billion people in the world." The California reparations task force is seeking equal footing, at least in California.

My second takeaway is that the task force is going to address systemic structural factors that keep the oppression ongoing. They are looking at public transportation, prison reform, healthcare reform. They are looking at the structural aspects in our government policies that perpetuate discrimination. That's so exciting to me that a government entity is taking this on and looking at the systems that keep all of us from having a fair shot. It's efforts like this that give me hope. And I hope those of you who are listening can see the potential here.



Kamilah Moore

Kamilah Moore is a reparatory justice scholar and an attorney with a specialization in entertainment and intellectual property transactions.

While studying abroad at the University of Amsterdam, Moore wrote a master thesis exploring the intersections between international law and reparatory justice for the trans-Atlantic slave trade, chattel slavery, and their legacies.

She earned a Juris Doctor degree from Columbia Law School in New York City, a Master of Laws degree in International Criminal Law from the University of Amsterdam, and a Bachelor's degree from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

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