



Written by [James Murphy](#) on February 25, 2021

Obama Comes Out for Slavery Reparations; Blames “White Resistance” for Not Doing It Himself

On Monday, former president Barack Obama said that present-day reparations for slavery are “justified” more than 150 years after the institution was abolished in America. Obama made the remarks during an episode of his new podcast with musician Bruce Springsteen, *Renegades: Born in the U.S.A.*

Obama called reparations “justified,” and echoed the *New York Times*’ 1619 Project by saying, “there’s not much question that the wealth ... the power of this country was built in significant part — not exclusively, maybe not even the majority of it, but a large portion — was built on the backs of slaves.”



AP Images

The former president’s statement would seem to represent an [about-face](#) on the issue. During his historic 2008 run for the presidency, Obama was against slavery reparations, saying, “I have said in the past, and I’ll repeat again, that the best reparations we can provide are good schools in the inner city and jobs for people who are unemployed.”

Also, in a 2004 questionnaire, Obama told the NAACP that he feared that paying out slavery reparations would signal the end of the discussion on race relations in the United States. “I fear that reparations would be an excuse for some to say, ‘We’ve repaid our debt,’ and to avoid the much harder work.”

Obama’s flip-flop on the issue of slavery reparations comes at a time when the House of Representatives, led by Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Texas) is again [debating H.R. 40](#), a bill that would create a commission to study reparations and make other recommendations regarding so-called systemic racism in America moving forward.

As for why the former president didn’t address the 150-year-old issue during his administration, Obama again blamed white people. “And what I saw during my presidency was the politics of white resistance and resentment,” Obama said. “The talk of ‘welfare queens’ and the talk of the ‘undeserving poor,’ and the backlash against affirmative action.”

“All that made the prospect of actually proposing any kind of coherent, meaningful reparations program struck me, politically, not only a non-starter but potentially counterproductive,” the former president concluded.

Obama acknowledged the fact that white people living now might have a problem ponying up massive amounts of tax dollars to pay for a sin that none of them had any part of. The former president said that it was “perfectly understandable why working-class white folks, middle-class white folks, folks who are having trouble paying their bills or dealing with student loans, wouldn’t be too thrilled,” with “a massive program that is designed to deal with the past but isn’t speaking to their future.”

Gee, thanks, Obama. Thanks for acknowledging that Americans of today (regardless of color) might



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have a problem with paying for a politically motivated program intended to pay people who have never experienced slavery for having endured it.

Apparently, Americans of the present should also be expected to pay for the negative effects of Jim Crow laws, which were mainly enacted and supported by southern Democrats in the decades after the Civil War.

“The systemic oppression and discrimination of black Americans continued under Jim Crow,” Obama said. “[It] resulted in black families not able to build up wealth, not being able to compete, and that has generational effects.”

We can contrast Obama’s dire description of the victimhood of black Americans with the view of another black American, Representative Burgess Owens (R-Utah). Owens recently said that bringing up the issue of reparations was impractical and, perhaps, cruel.

“It is impractical and a non-starter for the United States to pay reparations,” Owens said recently. “It is also unfair and heartless to give Black Americans the hope that this is a reality. The reality is that Black American history is not one of a hapless, hopeless race oppressed by a more powerful white race. It is instead a history of millions of middle-and-wealthy-class Black Americans throughout the early twentieth century achieving their American dream.”

Well said, Mr. Owens.

Obama and people such as Sheila Jackson Lee insist that America has never truly “apologized” for the sin of slavery in any meaningful way.

“We never went through a true reckoning and so we just buried one huge part of our experience and our citizenry in our minds,” Obama remarked.

Perhaps that “reckoning” was buried along with the 620,000 soldiers who died in the American Civil War.

Perhaps, also, the politics of today make it more appealing for Democrats such as Barack Obama and Sheila Jackson Lee to keep fueling racial animosity instead of quashing it — once and for all.



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