



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on July 16, 2019

Beto Favors Reparations but Now Admits His Ancestors Owned Slaves

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Back in April, presidential candidate and former Representative Robert Francis “Beto” O’Rourke (D-Texas), shown on left, said he would back legislation that would provide reparations to the descendants of American slaves, who were freed by the passage of the 13th Amendment in 1865. But on July 15, he was forced to make an embarrassing admission:

I was recently given documents showing that both Amy and I are descended from people who owned slaves. Along with other possessions listed in their property log were two human beings, Rose and Eliza.

O’Rourke, who announced his campaign for the 2020 presidential election on March 14, said at a conference of the National Action Network in New York in April that that he would back a bill sponsored by Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Texas) that would create a commission to study the issue of reparations for the descendants of former slaves.

Afterward, O’Rourke said that he’d discussed the issue with Brian Stevenson, the executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative. “Foundational to reparations is the word repair, foundational to repair is the truth,” O’Rourke said. “Until all Americans understand that civil rights” also involves “the injustices that have been visited and continue to be visited on people, we will never get the change that we need to live up to the promise of this country. So absolutely I would sign that into law,” O’Rourke said.

But on July 14, O’Rourke’s support for providing reparations to the descendants of slaves who were freed 154 years ago became personal when he wrote on Medium: “Something that we’ve been thinking about and talking about in town hall meetings and out on the campaign — the legacy of slavery in the United States — now has a much more personal connection.”

O’Rourke wrote that ownership of other human beings conferred advantages not just to his great-great-grandfathers, but to their descendants as well. “They were able to build wealth on the backs and off the sweat of others, wealth that they would then be able to pass down to their children and their children’s children. In some way, and in some form, that advantage would pass through to me and my children,” O’Rourke wrote.

O’Rourke apparently feels a sense of guilt over this injustice. If he is sincere, why not form a charitable organization to which he and other descendants of slave owners can contribute money to the descendants of former slaves. (If they can be identified, since many American blacks are the descendants of free black ancestors who were not slaves.)

For the government to use tax money paid by the many Americans whose ancestors never owned slaves (which, considering the very large immigration to this country in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, may be a majority of Americans) to pay reparations to today’s descendants of slaves seems like a gross miscarriage of justice.



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While there are provisions in the law for inheriting property, it would be a hard case to make that the penalties for injustices perpetrated by one's ancestors are also hereditary.

Photo of Beto O'Rourke: [Gage Skidmore](#) via [Wikimedia](#)

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Warren Mass has served The New American since its launch in 1985 in several capacities, including marketing, editing, and writing. Since retiring from the staff several years ago, he has been a regular contributor to the magazine. Warren writes from Texas and can be reached at wmass@thenewamerican.com.



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