



Written by [James Murphy](#) on February 11, 2021

Slavery Reparations to Receive New Hearing in Congress

Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Texas) has reintroduced [H.R. 40](#), a bill that if made law would create a congressional “commission to study and consider a national apology and proposal for reparations for the institution of slavery.” The commission would also study “racial and economic discrimination against African-Americans” and make recommendations on “appropriate remedies” for so-called systemic racism moving forward.

Jackson Lee first introduced the legislation in 2019, where it didn’t make it out of committee. The idea for such a commission was first proposed by Representative John Conyers (D-Mich.) in 1989.



Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee: AP Images

Next week, the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, chaired by Representative Steve Cohen (D-Tenn.), is scheduled to hear testimony on the bill.

“Truth and reconciliation about the ‘original sin of American slavery’ is necessary to light the way to the beloved community we all seek. The uncomfortable truth is that the United States owes its position as the most powerful nation in the world to its slave-owning past,” said Jackson Lee.

Jackson Lee’s pitch for the new commission sounds much like the authors of the *New York Times*’ [1619 Project](#), which argues that America’s true founding was in 1619, when the first slaves arrived to America, and not 1776 when we declared our independence from Great Britain.

NAACP CEO Derrick Johnson offered his support for the new commission: “This is the initiating process that members of Congress, particularly members of the Congressional Black Caucus, have been pushing for since the bill was initiated by John Conyers in the 70s,” he told CNBC. “At the NAACP we supported that effort then, we continue to support the effort, it’s something that’s needed and necessary in order for many, many individuals who have been harmed as a result of strict structural barriers to be made whole.”

Driesen Heath, a researcher for Human Rights Watch who is scheduled to testify at the hearing next week, sounded her support for the bill in a tweet that sounded much like a threat: “Until there is a commission to study and develop proposals for reparation [i.e. through #HR40/#S40], Black people will have no choice but to defend their humanity and continue to insist that their lives matter.”

Is Heath threatening more civil unrest like America experienced in 2020 following the death of Minneapolis criminal George Floyd in police custody?

Republican opposition to reparations appears resolute. Minority leader Mitch McConnell brings up a good point: “I don’t think reparations for something that happened 150 years ago, for whom none of us



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currently living are responsible is a good idea,” McConnell said. “We tried to deal with our original sin of slavery by fighting a Civil War, by passing landmark civil rights legislation. We elected an African-American president. I think we are always a work in progress in this country. But no one currently alive was responsible for that, and I don’t think we should be trying to figure out how to compensate for that.”

And lest you think GOP opposition to reparations is a whites-only club, consider new Congressman Burgess Owens (R-Utah). Prior to his election, the former NFL player was asked to testify at the 2019 hearing considering HR40. Owens, who is black, was [dead set against](#) such a scheme.

“I learned a long time ago slavery is not a gene in the DNA helix. It’s our actions, it’s our attitudes, it’s our belief,” Owens said at the time. “I do not believe in reparation. Because what reparation does it points to a certain race, a certain color and it points them as evil. And it points to the other race — my race — as one that has not only become racist, but they’re also beggars.”

Owens also pointed out which political party it was that supported many of the historical injustices that the new commission would look to address.

“Let’s point to the party that was part of slavery, KKK, Jim Crow and has killed over 40 percent of our black babies — 20 million of them,” Owens said. “How about the Democratic Party pay for all the misery brought to my race?”

Owens is 100 percent correct. Democrats are not looking to right a historical wrong with talk of reparations and collective national apologies. They’re only attempting to garner votes and further the divide between the races. That’s not just counterproductive to the country — it’s evil.

Jackson Lee can expect nothing but support in the fight ahead from the White House. One of President Biden’s first acts was to issue an [executive order](#) promoting so-called racial justice. It’s very clear that the Democrats’ vision of the future United States is of a nation that remains divided along lines of race and gender.

And, frankly, that’s a sick vision for America.



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