

REPARATIONS

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The Runnymede Trust is the UK's leading independent racial justice think tank.

Proudly independent, we speak truth to power on race and racism without fear or favour. From broadening the curriculum to exposing the Windrush scandal, our work is rooted in challenging structural racism and its impact on communities of colour. Our authoritative research-based interventions equip policy makers, practitioners and the general public with the tools to deliver genuine progress towards racial justice in Britain.

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This report is commissioned and published by the Runnymede Trust to show that reparations are not only necessary but achievable and, when done right, benefit us all. The chapters collected here do not represent the views of Runnymede Trust as an organisation, but they offer a taste of work being done in academic and civil society spaces. By commissioning and publishing this paper we hope not only to destigmatise the conversation around reparations, but offer a proactive way to bring this to life, in furtherance of our charitable objectives of racial harmony.

September 2025.

FOREWORD

DR SHABNA BEGUM
CEO,
RUNNYMEDE TRUST

Reparations are not just about the past – they are about the present we live in and the future we hope to build.

There is an impressive Grade A listed property in Fife, Scotland, which was acquired through wealth extracted, in part, from my father’s natal village of Chattak in what was then India in the eighteenth century. That property remains an asset in the family that benefited from the process of extraction dating back some 250 years. There is no blue plaque or public acknowledgement of that historical or geographical connection.

But this is no exception. Across Britain, the proceeds of empire and slavery that provided the resource for the country that we know today are buried in plain sight. Slavery, colonialism and imperial power engineered the racial inequalities that we still experience and confront. Whether it is wealth, health, policing or education – all inequalities that the Runnymede Trust has written extensively about and worked tirelessly to address – the genealogical roots of all of these inequalities stretch back to this period. And while the past cannot be undone, it can and must be addressed.

The word ‘reparations’ still sparks discomfort in public debate. Prime Minister Keir Starmer has framed

discussions of reparations as merely ‘spend[ing] a lot of time on the past’, and Leader of the Opposition Kemi Badenoch has dismissed them as ‘a scam’. But neither of these perspectives align with those of experts and leaders who have committed careful, informed thought to the issues.

To insist on a conversation about reparations is not an effort to impose a backwards-looking collective punishment on a nation. Reparations should be understood as a commitment to the future: a commitment to repair, to restore dignity, to rebalance the uneven scales and to build a more just society for all. In this light, reparations are not about blame but about responsibility. They are not about division but about collective renewal. Those that take the discussion and caricature it quite literally in black-and-white terms betray a deep ignorance about a society’s journey to justice and liberation for all.

This project does not offer easy answers. Rather, it offers something more honest and thoughtful. It offers an invitation to all of us – citizens, communities, institutions and governments – to take the question of reparations seriously. And it gives us the knowledge we need to respond to that question with integrity, courage and care.

INTRODUCTION

REPARATIONS:

A DEBT LONG DEFERRED
BUT STILL OWED

PROFESSOR KEON WEST
HEAD OF RESEARCH,
RUNNYMEDE TRUST

In the summer of 2020, a statue fell into Bristol Harbour. And as Joseph Harker points out (Chapter 2), it took with it the facade of a history of economic justice and the willingness to keep a public secret. Edward Colston, memorialised till then as a philanthropist, was recognised in the broader British consciousness as what he had always been – a profiteer of human misery and a symbol of Britain’s unexamined debt to its colonial past. The act shocked some but resonated deeply with many more, laying bare the fact that the effigies and scars of empire and slavery remain etched in the very structures of British society.

This project by the Runnymede Trust continues in the spirit of that public reckoning, with the goal of turning passion, promise and aspiration into practical policy and action. It invites readers to reflect on a pressing, yet often dismissed, question: what does economic justice look like, even after generations of injustice?

Through 11 chapters written by experts and leaders in their fields, this collection makes the case that reparations for slavery and colonialism are not an abstract utopian dream but an urgent, practical and necessary policy conversation for contemporary Britain.

Reparations, as Dr Kojo Koram reminds us (Chapter 3), are neither unfamiliar nor unprecedented. Many other nations have already paid reparations for harms committed against other ethnic and national groups. Furthermore, as both Dr Klarke Stricklen (Chapter 6) and Professor Kehinde Andrews (Chapter 9) point out, Britain already paid vast sums in reparations at the abolition of slavery – an astonishing £20 million, equivalent to over £100 billion today, which was still being repaid by taxpayers until 2015. Perversely, however, these sums were paid not to the people who had been enslaved, but to those who had enslaved them.

This report reminds us that reparations are not just about historical accountability – they are about recognising the structures and systems that still shape economic injustice today. As Nonhlanhla Makuyana movingly details (Chapter 11), the legacy of racial capitalism continues to entrench death-dealing inequalities that disproportionately affect communities of African and Caribbean heritage. From decaying housing to over-policing and underfunded schools, the debt is visible in everyday life.

These social problems disproportionately impact communities of colour in the UK, but it is also important to note that these issues are a shared experience across working-class communities of all ethnicities, including the white working class. The benefit of interrogating and addressing these issues is not one that exclusively accrues to Black Caribbean and African people: it potentially has much wider social application. Understanding reparations requires us to confront the exploitation that underpins our current economic system which locks working-class communities into increasingly precarious economic and social positions.

This report is not a lament; it is a blueprint. It offers readers a diversity of visions for reparative justice – from global ecological accountability in Saurabh Arora and colleagues' 'pluriversal manifesto' (Chapter 10), to the fundamental restructuring of 'aid' put forward by Natalie Sharples (Chapter 8), to the reimagining of UK drug policy by Clemmie James and Natalie Sharples (Chapter 4) and Mary Ryder (Chapter 5), to new visions of education policy by Lavinya Stennett (Chapter 7), and to proposals for a National Commission on Reparative Justice as outlined by Dr Kojo Koram (Chapter 3). These are practical, achievable policy responses, grounded in legal precedent, historical fact and moral clarity.

Most of all, this project destigmatises conversations on reparations in the UK. It does so by rooting the discussion not in guilt but in truth; not in division but in the pursuit of shared justice. In these chapters, we are reminded that the past is not past, and that a fairer future depends on our willingness to confront it, honestly and courageously.

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THE UK RACIAL WEALTH DIVIDE AND THE NEED FOR GLOBAL REPARATIONS

STEPHEN WALCOTT
HEAD OF POLICY,
RUNNYMEDE TRUST

Half of the global population live in poverty, owning just 2 per cent of global wealth between them while the richest 10 per cent own 76 per cent.¹ Global wealth disparities are connected to histories of colonialism; the extraction of resources, land and people; and the legacies of these processes that see vast sums of wealth flow from the Global South to the Global North.² After decolonisation, many newly independent countries were left not only with weak, export-based economies but with little choice other than to borrow from their former colonial powers.

The question of whose interests the withdrawal of physical colonial control served is a matter of debate, but what is

clear is the intentional economic ruin that formerly colonised countries were left to contend with.

Those subject to colonial rule were forced to compensate their oppressors. Haiti was subject to a £21 billion payment (in today's money) by France in return for the recognition of its independence, to compensate its former colonial powers.³

The Democratic Republic of Congo – one of the most resource-rich countries on earth – inherited the debts of its former colonial ruler, Belgium.⁴ In the UK, the Abolition of Slavery Act 1833 prompted a compensation payment to slave owners that was only paid off by taxpayers in 2015.⁵

1 War on Want (2023) Profiting from Power: The Role of Debt in the Global Economy, London, <https://waronwant.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/Profiting%20from%20Poverty%20debt%20report%20WEB.pdf>.

2 Runnymede Trust (2022) Confronting Injustice: Racism and the Environmental Emergency, London, https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/61488f992b58e687f1108c7c/62d83cf937af0a0d208d4501_FinalDesign5pm_compressed.pdf.

3 Hickel, J., Sullivan, D. and Zoomkawala, H. (2021) 'Plunder in the post-colonial era: Quantifying drain from the Global South through unequal exchange, 1960–2018',

New Political Economy 26(6): 1030–1047.

4 Debt Justice (2023) The Colonial Roots of Global South Debt: A Tale of Plunder, Exploitation and Resistance, London, <https://debtjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/The-colonial-roots-of-global-south-debt.pdf>.

5 Bukata, E., Mahmoudzadeh, M., Oliver, A. and Savage, M. (2025) Why the UK Wealth Divide Matters: A Call for Action, London: Runnymede Trust, https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/61488f992b58e687f1108c7c/683edc099b54305c7566058d_UK%20racial%20wealth%20divide_perspectives%20paper_v2.pdf.

These extortionate sums are not only unjust but serve to protect the economic interests of former colonial powers. To pay these debts, indebted nations had, and continue to have, little choice but to borrow from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank. To do so, many have had to comply with structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) that mandate spending cuts, privatisation and deregulation. This has led to the Global North draining \$152 trillion from the Global South between 1960 and 2018. In 2017 alone, \$2.2 trillion's worth of commodities were extracted from the Global South, enough to end extreme poverty 15 times over.⁶

On top of this, between 1970 and 2022 the Global South paid \$2.5 trillion in interest payments to lenders alone.⁷ 'Today, a total of 3.4 billion people now live in countries that spend more on debt interest than on either health or education',⁸ directly funnelling money away from investment in essential services in formerly colonised countries, into the pockets of elite Western powers. When Jamaica signed its latest structural agreement, its loan was 147 per cent of its GDP. Austerity is, for many formerly colonised nations, a permanent state.⁹

6 Hickel et al., 'Plunder in the post-colonial era'.

7 Debt Justice (2022) Colonialism and Debt: How Debt Is Used to Exploit and Control, London, <https://debt-justice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Colonialism-and-Debt-briefing.pdf>.

8 UNCTAD (UN Trade and Development) (2025) 'Global public debt hit a record \$102 trillion in 2024, striking developing countries hardest', 26 June, <https://unctad.org/news/global-public-debt-hit-record-102-trillion-2024-striking-developing-countries-hardest>.

These unjust systems are also upheld by violent attacks and a lack of support for anti-racist ideologies. Political figures such as Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso and Patrice Lumumba in the Democratic Republic of Congo were assassinated after taking an unapologetic anti-colonial stance and rejecting loans from the IMF. If the Global North supported alternative visions for formerly colonised nations to make a material difference to the lives of their citizens, there might well be fewer push factors for people to migrate to countries like the UK,¹⁰ reducing the migration that is a central facet of the UK wealth divide.

While the British Empire no longer has sovereign control of Global South nations, many of today's legal and economic systems serve to maintain the imperialist and capitalist interests of Western elites.¹¹

This is the continuation of the constructed racial hierarchies that were used to justify colonialism and the maintenance of power over communities of colour.

9 Koram, K. (2022) *Uncommon Wealth: Britain and the Aftermath of Empire*, London: John Murray

10 Refugee Action (2023) *Asylum in the UK: A Front Line for Racial Justice*, London, www.refugee-action.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Asylum-In-The-UK-A-Front-Line-For-Racial-Justice-Briefing.pdf.

11 Koram, *Uncommon Wealth*.

TODAY, A TOTAL OF
3.4 BILLION PEOPLE
NOW LIVE IN COUNTRIES
THAT SPEND MORE ON
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ON EITHER HEALTH OR
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Similarly to the global situation previously described, inequality is a defining characteristic of the UK. The UK has the third-highest level of income inequality among OECD countries, and is the most unequal country in Europe.¹² Wealth disparities in the UK are nearly twice as high as income inequalities;¹³ the wealthiest 1 per cent in the UK hold the same amount of wealth as the least wealthy 50 per cent,¹⁴ and 70 per cent of land in the UK and Ireland is owned by less than 1 per cent.¹⁵

12 OECD (2024) 'Society at a glance: OECD social indicators', 20 June, www.oecd.org/en/publications/society-at-a-glance-2024_918d8db3-en/full-report/income-and-wealth-inequalities_7ac4178f.html#boxsection-d1e10936-0ee0a256aa.

13 Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2025) 'Household total wealth in Great Britain: April 2020 to March 2022, 24 January, www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/bulletins/totalwealthingreatbritain/april2020tomarch2022;

14 ONS, 'Household total wealth'.

15 Cahill, K. (2002) *Who Owns Britain and Ireland?*, Edinburgh: Canongate.

The wealthiest 1 per cent hold at least £3,121,500 in wealth; the wealthiest 10 per cent of households hold over £1,200,500 compared with just £16,500 held by the least wealthy 10 per cent. In London, there are 227,000 millionaires¹⁶ and 2.2 million people living in poverty.¹⁷ In his assessment of wealth and poverty in the UK, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Professor Phillip Alston, has described the situation as 'not just a disgrace, but a social calamity and economic disaster, rolled into one'.¹⁸

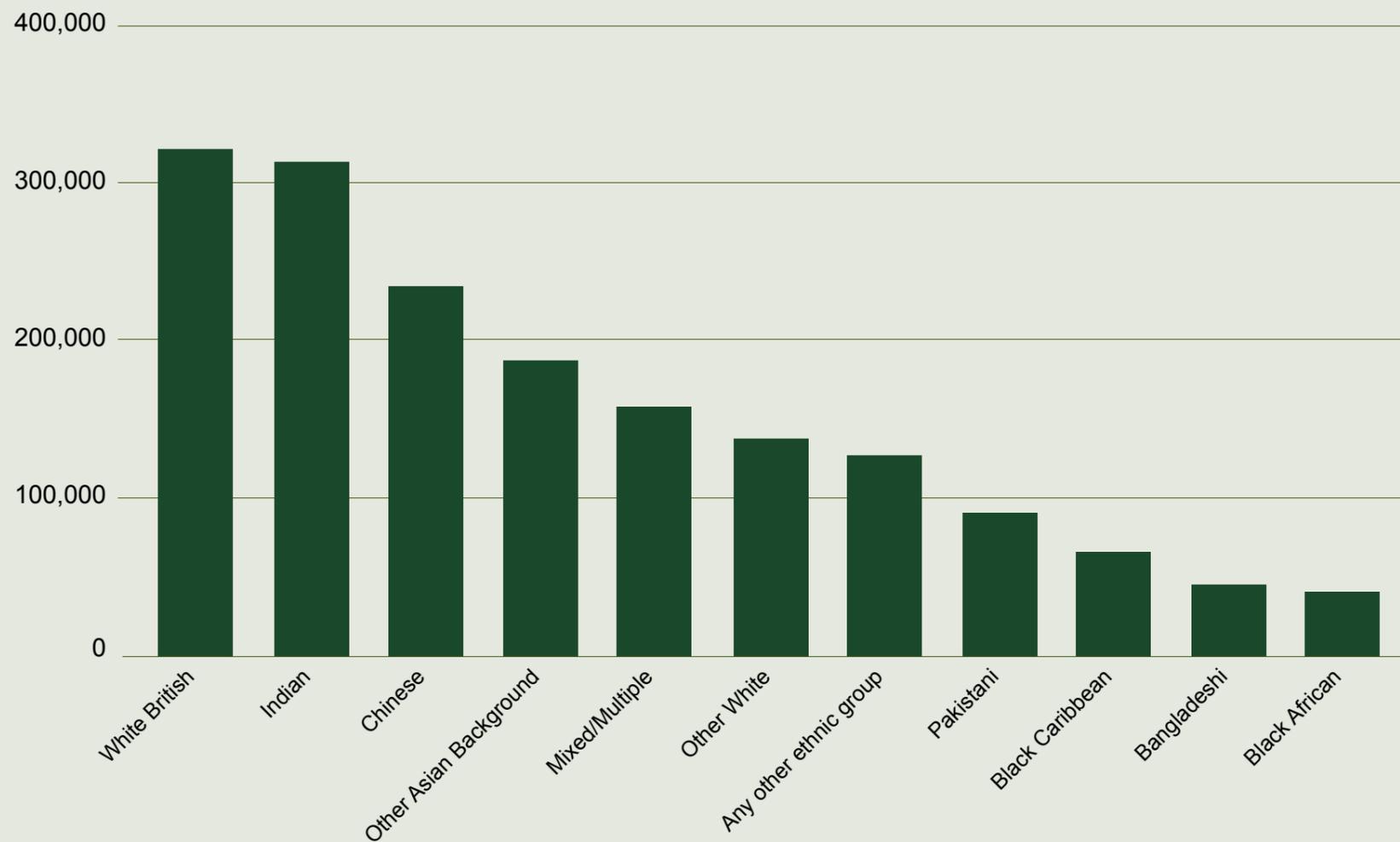
16 Savory and Partners (2025) 'London's millionaires in 2025: Wealth statistics', 29 April, www.savoryandpartners.com/blog/london-millionaires-wealth-statistics.

17 Trust for London (2025) 'Poverty over time', <https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/poverty-over-time/>.

18 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2018) 'Statement on visit to the United Kingdom, by Professor Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights', www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Poverty/EOM_GB_16Nov2018.pdf.

INEQUALITY
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COUNTRY IN EUROPE.

FIGURE 1. Median household wealth by ethnicity, April 2020-March 2022



Source: ONS 2025¹⁹

Wealth is not spread evenly across different ethnicity groups. Between April 2020 and March 2022 Black African (8x), Bangladeshi (7x), Black Caribbean (5x) and Pakistani (3.5x) households held far less wealth than White British households (Figure 1).^{19 20}

The story of global wealth inequalities is intimately connected to (neo)colonialism and imperialism, and this provides the backdrop to domestic wealth disparities.

The new social contract drawn following the Second World War promised fairness and opportunity and was defined by nationalisation, strong trade unions,

[holdtotalwealthbyhouseholdreferencepersonhrpethnicityandhrpsex](https://www.ons.gov.uk/people-populationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/adhocs/2980summarystatisticsforhouseholdtotalwealthbyhouseholdreferencepersonhrpethnicityandhrpsex)

²⁰ Small sample size of Bangladeshi households means this data should be treated with caution.

regulation, high taxes and a welfare state. Yet many migrants from newly independent nations, invited to help build the welfare state and the NHS, were subject to colour bars on housing and employment which excluded them

²¹ Walcott, S. and Nightingale, G. (2025) *How Racism Affects Health*, London: Runnymede Trust and Health Foundation.

²² Walcott, S. and Robinson, S. (2025) 'Wealth is health: Housing, health inequalities and communities of colour', LSE blog, 8 January, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/inequalities/2025/01/08/housing-health-and-communities-of-colour>.

²³ ONS (2025) 'Summary statistics for household total

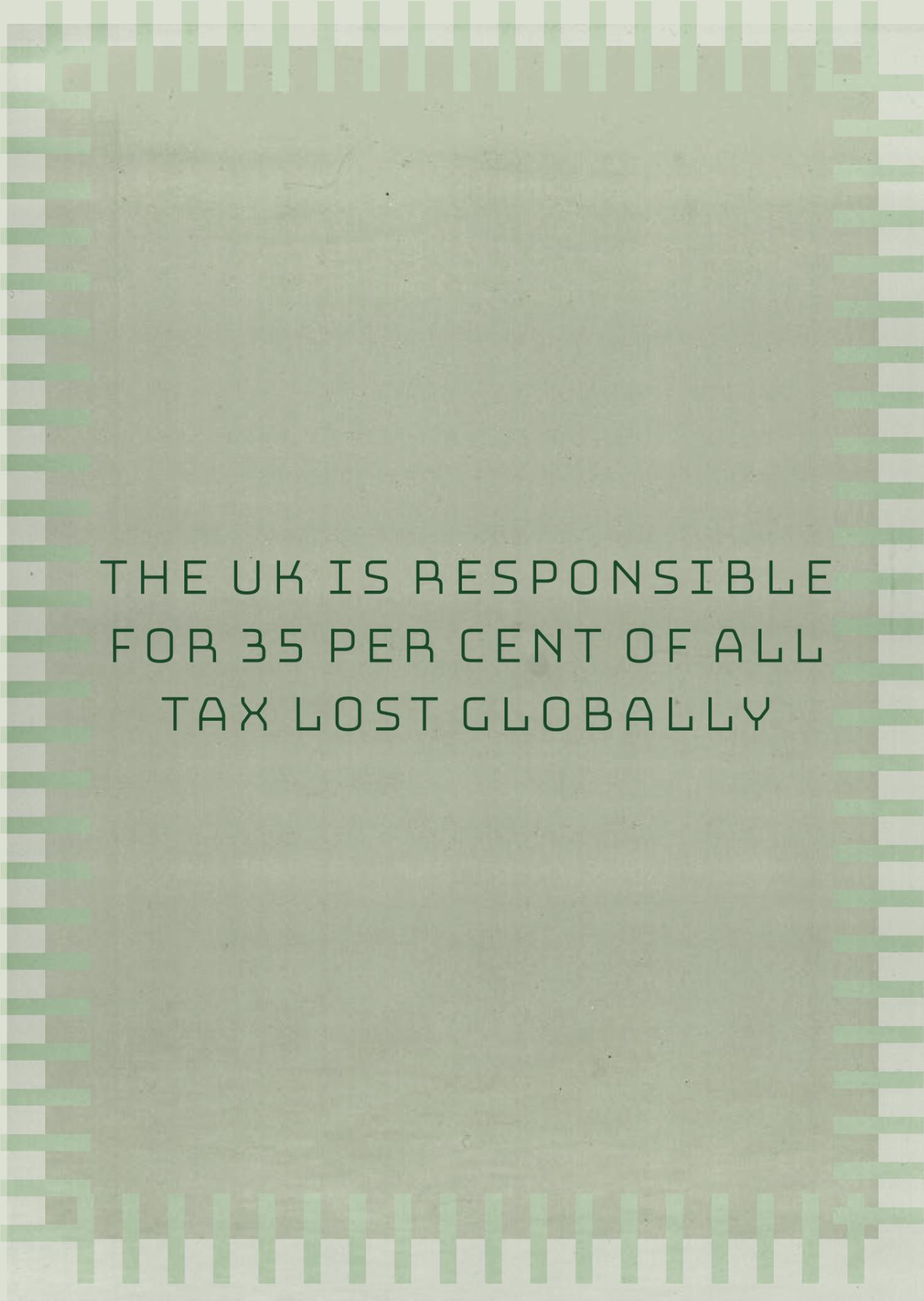
from the wealth they helped to create. The best homes and the best jobs – key markers of the ability to build wealth – were prioritised for the white British, and this drove not only poverty but also health inequalities.²¹

When this context is coupled with neoliberal domestic policies, we can see how wealth disparities widen. Property makes up the largest proportion of total wealth. This has been enabled by the Right to Buy policy and the widespread, powerful aspiration towards homeownership as a means of wealth accumulation.²² But homeownership and its associated wealth has not benefited all; the median property wealth held by Black African, Black Caribbean, Mixed, Bangladeshi and 'Any Other Ethnic Group' households is £0, compared with £120,000 for White British, £126,500 for Chinese and £142,600 for Indian households.²³

²⁴It is important to note that the higher-than-average wealth of Indian households cannot be used to dismiss the racial wealth divide. The global context of migration patterns is vital: some Indian migrants are 'twice migrants' who migrated first to East Africa and then on to the UK, and who thus arrived with economic and educational – and therefore class – advantages. The 'Indian experience' is also influenced by caste and class inequalities in India.

wealth by household reference person (HRP) ethnicity and HRP sex', 27 August, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/people-populationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/adhocs/2980summarystatisticsforhouseholdtotalwealthbyhouseholdreferencepersonhrpethnicityandhrpsex>

²⁴ Small sample size of Bangladeshi and Chinese households means this data should be treated with caution.



THE UK IS RESPONSIBLE
FOR 35 PER CENT OF ALL
TAX LOST GLOBALLY

There is also a national geographical context: where people reside in the UK has implications for homeownership and wealth accumulation.

The shift away from the post-war contract of the 1980s has widened wealth inequality. This is best illustrated by how regressive British tax systems are.

The UK is responsible for 35 per cent of all tax lost globally, with corporations avoiding tax due to loopholes and registering profits in ‘tax havens’ including British Overseas Territories.²⁵ Alongside tax avoidance, the wealthiest continue to benefit from tax cuts. In the 1960s and 1970s, to build the welfare state and a fairer, healthier country, the highest income tax rate reached 95 per cent²⁶ while the main rate of corporation tax reached 52 per cent.²⁷ Both rates have been slashed by around half since then. Tax reforms have not always followed political ideology.

Capital Gains Tax (CGT) was introduced by Labour chancellor James Callaghan

in 1965 at a flat rate of 30 per cent. Later, Conservative chancellor Nigel Lawson aligned CGT rates with income tax before they were slashed by Gordon Brown in 2008, and the highest rate now sits at 24 per cent.

While it would take much more analysis to account for the introduction of new taxes during these periods and to understand who the ‘tax burden’ fell on, there is a clear trend towards tax cuts for the wealthiest. This is driving economic challenges in the UK: when the wealthiest people and corporations in society are not paying their fair share, working people have to foot the bill. It means less public money for house-building – a key driver of rising property prices, which creates and exacerbates wealth disparities – and less money to support people through the cost-of-living crisis and out of poverty.

Our public services are already at breaking point, and it is unsustainable to expect already struggling households to prop them up as the rich get richer.

²⁵ War on Want (2023) ‘Why we need to fix global tax rules!’, 14 November, <https://waronwant.org/news-analysis/why-we-need-fix-global-tax-rules>.

²⁶ Koram, Uncommon Wealth.

²⁷ Finance Act 1974, www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1974/30/enacted.

With wealth comes power, and the ability to influence democratic politics, government and market conditions to gain individual or corporate advantage. There is currently no policy or mechanism to impose a ceiling on wealth inequality: the wealth of the richest can theoretically spiral to infinite levels. It can accumulate passively with preferable interest rates (for savings) and ballooning asset values, exposing the myth of meritocracy.²⁸ The intergenerational passing on of wealth through inheritance further bakes in existing inequalities, particularly racial inequalities. There is no doubt that opportunity today is more akin to an inheritocracy than a meritocracy.

In light of such extreme historical and contemporary financial injustice on both global and national levels, it is clear that correcting the racial wealth divide requires radical action beyond superficial interventions. Some liberal, anti-racist initiatives such as reversing the ethnicity pay gap, improving asset ownership for people of colour, or broader diversity, equality and inclusion initiatives certainly serve a purpose. However, they stop short of the widespread structural, systemic change required for real racial justice. For that, we must consider

reparations, in all their most profound and systemic forms.

The solution isn't merely to build more wealth. Replicating the same systems of harm will always create winners and losers; continuing a cycle of property ownership merely reinvents frameworks of domination. The answer is to redistribute, repair and create a renewed alternative that serves all. It's not simply a call for a cash payment from wealthy elites, or for charity and philanthropic gestures that fail to confront structural harm. It's an opportunity to radically redesign our political and economic systems in a way that benefits all working-class communities and addresses the myriad crises facing the globe today.

The UK is at a T-junction, with a sharp right turn no longer a blind spot but in full view. In 2024 we saw the worst racist riots in decades. The public is right to be angry, but that anger is misdirected towards migrants, Muslims and people of colour by our political and media elites. It is a distraction from the actual issue: the chasm in wealth levels which is depriving so many communities, and the urgent need for reparations.

IT'S AN OPPORTUNITY
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GLOBE TODAY.

²⁸ Bukata et al., Why the UK Wealth Divide Matters.



EDWARD COLSTON, GEORGE FLOYD & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

JOSEPH HARKER
SENIOR EDITOR
(DIVERSITY AND DEVELOPMENT)
AND CO-FOUNDER, SCOTT TRUST
LEGACIES OF ENSLAVEMENT
PROJECT, GUARDIAN

Remember the toppling of the Edward Colston statue – that summer’s day in the city of Bristol when anti-racism protesters, after years of fruitless campaigning for the removal of the monument to the brutal enslaver, took matters into their own hands?

That was 2020, the year of global Black Lives Matter protests sparked by the murder of George Floyd by US police in Minneapolis. But the action in Bristol, two weeks after the killing, moved the discussion onwards. As well as arguments over modern-day racism, there were renewed questions over its intersection with the past, and why it is that in our streets and town squares we still glorify the lives of those who were complicit in crimes against humanity – literally putting them on a pedestal.

More and more, historical racism began to enter the conversation. And some questions were raised at the Guardian newspaper, which was launched in Manchester in 1821. Its founder, John Edward Taylor, was known to have been a cotton merchant.

As the chairman of the Scott Trust, which now owns the Guardian, said: ‘We must acknowledge that as cotton and textile merchants, some of Taylor and his funders’ family businesses would almost certainly have traded with cotton plantations that used enslaved labour’.²⁹

So in July 2020 the Trust commissioned independent research into the Guardian’s founders. And when Nottingham University and then Hull University’s Wilberforce Institute came back with their findings,³⁰ the Trust discovered that not only Taylor but all nine of his traceable financial backers had made money via slavery-produced cotton. At a stroke, it became clear that this was not just a story of one man’s slavery connections but of those of an entire city.

29 Quinn, B. (2020) ‘Scott Trust commissions research into Guardian founder’s possible links to slave trade’ Guardian, 17 July, www.theguardian.com/media/2020/jul/17/scott-trust-commissions-research-into-guardian-founders-possible-links-to-slave-trade.

30 Goptar, C. (2020–22) The Scott Trust Legacies of Enslavement Report, Hull: Wilberforce Institute, University of Hull, www.hull.ac.uk/research/institutes/wilberforce/the-scott-trust-legacies-of-enslavement-report.

It was at this point that I joined the programme team, working to draw up a response that matched the scale of the new information. It was important to me and to the whole team that we didn’t try to downplay the research or make excuses. The brutality of this evil industry was well known at the time the Guardian was founded: this was 14 years after the parliamentary campaign led by William Wilberforce to abolish the slave trade had achieved its success.

The research, led by Dr Cassandra Goptar,³¹ showed that Taylor was an agent for a company buying slavery-produced cotton from the US Sea Islands, just off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina. And one of his funders was a co-owner of a plantation in Jamaica. (Though the trade in slavery had been abolished, enslavement itself remained legal in the British Empire until 1833.) Other funders had connections to slavery in Brazil.

31 Goptar, C. (2023) ‘How we uncovered the Guardian founders’ links to slavery’, Guardian, 28 March, www.theguardian.com/news/ng-interactive/2023/mar/28/the-cotton-thread-guardian-founders-slavery-john-edward-taylor.

Thankfully, the board of the Scott Trust, now chaired by Ole Jacob Sunde, was committed to telling the whole story, and it was a particular stroke of good fortune that one of its members was the leading historian David Olusoga.³² Matthew Ryder KC, a former deputy mayor of London, was also a member. Moreover, editor in chief Katharine Viner – who also sits on the Scott Trust – had already laid the groundwork for addressing the Guardian’s past. In a landmark essay in 2017³³ she wrote of the nineteenth-century newspaper: ‘It was highly profitable, but in becoming so it got too close to the Manchester cotton merchants who paid for the advertising that supported the paper. It even sided with the slave-owning South in the American civil war.’

So how should we respond to the Wilberforce Institute’s research? It was immediately obvious that the Scott Trust should issue a full apology for its founders’ connections to transatlantic slavery.

32 Olusoga, D., Goptar, C., Wolfe-Robinson, M., Topham, L., Healey, A., Zepherin, A., Desalu, M., Lewis, R.A., Macfarlane, K., Otukoya, J. and Lamborn, K. (2023) ‘David Olusoga on the Guardian’s links to slavery: “That reality can’t be negotiated with”’, Guardian, 28 March, www.theguardian.com/news/video/2023/mar/28/david-olusoga-examines-the-guardians-links-to-slavery-that-reality-cant-be-negotiated-with.

Yet this clearly wasn’t enough: after all, without the blood, sweat and tears of generations of enslaved people in the Americas, and the profits that were extracted from them, would the Guardian even exist? Though the Guardian is now a major global media organisation with millions of readers each day and bases in the US and Australia as well as the UK, it was founded by one man in Manchester and crowdfunded through a small number of local business contacts.

As Olusoga said at the time, the Guardian now had a new origin story. This was not one that denied Taylor’s commitment to social justice for the working people of Manchester, which drove him to start the newspaper in the aftermath of the 1819 Peterloo massacre:³⁴ but it was one which accepted that this same man and his colleagues, who considered themselves liberals, were also prepared to profit from an economy built on slavery.

33 Viner, K. (2017) ‘A mission for journalism in a time of crisis’, Guardian, 16 November, www.theguardian.com/news/2017/nov/16/a-mission-for-journalism-in-a-time-of-crisis.

34 Narewska, E., Holborn, M. and Golding, E. (2013) ‘John Edward Taylor and Peterloo’, Guardian, 1 August, www.theguardian.com/gnmeducationcentre/john-edward-taylor-peterloo-teaching-resource-gnm-archive.

Knowing this, it was also clear that we had to be fully transparent about those links. So the editor in chief commissioned an editorial project to examine multiple aspects of the research, what it meant and why it still matters. This was ultimately launched alongside the findings as 'Cotton Capital',³⁵ edited by Maya Wolfe-Robinson and consisting of feature-length articles, a magazine, video explainers and a podcast series.³⁶ The project examined the significance of the research, why it is that so few people know of Manchester's strong bonds to slavery, the inhumanity of the cotton

economy in the Americas and why the inequality created during this era still continues.

Yet telling this story still wasn't enough, and we felt we had to go beyond our core journalism and into work which more directly addressed how to repair the injustice. We had a number of consultation meetings: with our own staff, including, crucially, staff of colour; with outside reparations experts such as Professor Olivette Otele; and with others involved in restorative justice in the UK, US and the Caribbean.

³⁵ Guardian (2023) 'Cotton capital: How slavery changed the Guardian, Britain and the world', www.theguardian.com/news/series/cotton-capital.

³⁶ Guardian (2023) 'Cotton Capital. Episode 6: Reparations – podcast', 8 May, www.theguardian.com/news/series/cotton-capital-podcast.

“AFTER ALL, WITHOUT THE BLOOD, SWEAT AND TEARS OF GENERATIONS OF ENSLAVED PEOPLE IN THE AMERICAS, AND THE PROFITS THAT WERE EXTRACTED FROM THEM, WOULD THE GUARDIAN EVEN EXIST?”

These discussions soon coalesced into six distinct categories of impactful work, and so we committed to:

1 REPARATORY JUSTICE IN JAMAICA AND THE US

We are funding a programme aimed directly at descendant communities in Jamaica and the southern United States, where the Guardian founders had strong links. This required us to bring in an outside expert and so Ebony Riddell Bamber – who has a long professional record of community engagement, advocacy and social justice – became our programme director. Supported by a team based in Manchester, the US and Jamaica, and in close consultation with local descendant communities, she is leading a process to identify and nurture reparative justice partnerships in each location.

3 A WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

This is aimed at a global Black audience, showcasing our journalism and the groundbreaking work of our new correspondents. It launched in autumn 2024, entitled 'The Long Wave'.

2 NEW REPORTER ROLES

These roles were aimed at covering descendant communities across the world, whose stories have long been under-reported by the Western media. We created correspondent roles in the UK (covering health and inequalities, and a Manchester-based community affairs correspondent); two US race and equity reporters; a Caribbean correspondent based in Jamaica and a South America correspondent based in Brazil (which has the largest slave-descendant population in the world, over 100 million people); and correspondents in East and West Africa.

4 CAREER-ENHANCING OPPORTUNITIES

We created new UK-based bursaries to fund Black students through postgraduate journalism courses; fellowships for aspiring journalists in the US; and Australia-based cadetships. And we're currently developing a separate fellowship scheme focused on mid-career journalists.

5 TAKING THE STORY BEYOND GUARDIAN READERS

Community groups and campaigners on both sides of the Atlantic to enhance public understanding of the deep roots of transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacies and inequalities. We are partnering with the Science and Industry Museum in Manchester,³⁷ for an exhibition on the slavery connections of the cotton industry which created such wealth in the city. Ahead of its launch in 2027, we'll be bringing in the expertise of local communities and creatives and descendant voices across the Atlantic.

6 FURTHER RESEARCH

We are continuing our partnership with the Wilberforce Institute and looking into further aspects of transatlantic enslavement in the regions connected to the Guardian founders.

OUR EXPERIENCE SHOWS
THAT IT'S NOT SO MUCH
WHAT ORGANISATIONS
FIND THAT MIGHT DAMAGE
THEIR REPUTATION, BUT
HOW THEY REVEAL IT.
BY OWNING UP FULLY TO
SHAMEFUL ACTS OF THE PAST,
IT'S POSSIBLE TO GAIN YOUR
CUSTOMERS' RESPECT.
BY TRYING TO HIDE THE
TRUTH, YOU RISK LOSING IT.

37 Osuh, C. (2025) 'Transatlantic slaver's role in shaping Manchester to be explored in exhibition', Guardian, 16 January, www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/16/transatlantic-slavery-role-manchester-exhibition-guardian-science-industry-museum.

38 GNM press office (2023) 'The Scott Trust publishes review into the Guardian's historical connections with transatlantic slavery, issuing an apology and outlining a programme of restorative justice', Guardian, 28 March, www.theguardian.com/gnm-press-office/2023/mar/28/the-scott-trust-publishes-review-into-the-guardians-historical-connections-with-transatlantic-slavery-issuing-an-apology-and-outlining-a-programme-of-restorative-justice.

For all six categories, we wanted the impact to be significant, meaningful and long-lasting, so we committed to a ten-year project,³⁸ with a budget of significantly more than £10m. The Legacies of Enslavement programme,³⁹ as it became known, was launched in March 2023.

Naturally, we were concerned at how our announcement might be received. We knew the right-wing media would criticise us, and they didn't disappoint: 'The Guardian wants to drag us all into its pit of shame', wailed Stephen Glover in the Daily Mail.⁴⁰

But we'd always factored in that kind of knee-jerk reaction, from people who seem unwilling to acknowledge the centuries-long brutality of slavery, its enduring impacts or the moral duty to atone. More important to us was the reaction of communities descended from those who were enslaved. We hoped they'd feel that our motives were genuine, and would understand that we wanted to

work in close consultation with them on everything we do.

The reaction so far, from the Black media and from campaigners and community groups on both sides of the Atlantic, has been largely positive and supportive. The depth of Dr Gooptar's research has been particularly powerful in gaining trust: in further research work before the launch, she identified specific plantations where the produce of slavery was bought and sold and traced the names of enslaved individuals who were connected to the Guardian founders.

Vitaly important too was the response of Guardian readers. How would they react to the fact that this liberal paper, which many identify with strongly, had such a troubling past? For many readers, the most emotionally powerful part of our editorial project was the list of named enslaved people⁴¹ that Dr Gooptar had uncovered: they ranged in age from 90-year-old Toby to Sarah, Hannibal and Abba, just six months.

39 Guardian (2023) 'The Scott Trust Legacies of Enslavement report', 28 March, www.theguardian.com/the-scott-trust/ng-interactive/2023/mar/28/the-scott-trust-legacies-of-enslavement-report.

40 Glover, S. (2023) 'Imagine the mortification at the citadel of woke! But the Guardian wants to drag us all into its pit of shame', Daily Mail, 28 March.

41 Guardian (2023), 'In memoriam: The enslaved people linked to the Guardian', 28 March, www.theguardian.com/news/ng-interactive/2023/mar/28/in-memoriam-the-enslaved-people-linked-to-the-guardian.

Two days after our launch we held a live online event,⁴² attended by around 2,500 readers and featuring key figures from the project, including our editor in chief. Before and during the event we received hundreds of questions for the panel. Thankfully the audience was overwhelmingly positive, with the vast majority saying the project made them feel more supportive of the Guardian than before. Their reasoning was that they'd appreciated our honesty, the fact we'd left nothing out in telling them this story, that we'd published the research in full and that we'd made a clear commitment to atoning for the past.

This is a point I'd like to stress to all institutions looking into their history – and there are many who have slavery connections in Britain and the United States. They often fear the public response, yet our experience shows that it's not so much what organisations find that might damage their reputation, but how they reveal it. By owning up fully to shameful acts of the past, it's possible to gain your customers' respect. By trying to hide the truth, you risk losing it.

⁴² Guardian Live (2023) 'Cotton Capital: The Guardian's founders and transatlantic slavery', YouTube, 31 March, www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_d3DCNEt6M.

Above all, Legacies of Enslavement is a project about the truth, and about facts. It aims to challenge centuries of ignorance and denial. Slavery did happen, and the wealth it generated did create many institutions which are still thriving today. In Britain, when slavery was finally prohibited in 1833, enslavers were compensated to the cost of £20 million (equivalent to billions today). Those who had been enslaved received nothing: they had no land, no property and no means of creating wealth. Is it any wonder the inequality has been so long-lasting?

Britain's connections to slavery continued until the late 1800s, in the profiteering of several businessmen from slavery in the Americas. Indeed, there were people born into slavery who were still alive well into the twentieth century, their lives overlapping with people still alive today. So this isn't ancient history, as is so often portrayed. It's not an issue to move on from and forget, and the murder of George Floyd did not occur in a vacuum. The historic injustice has not been healed: that will only happen when there is a concerted attempt to deal with the racial inequalities which are so clearly present today.

THE HISTORIC
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PRESENT TODAY.

3

RETHINKING REPARATIONS:

FROM EXCEPTION TO
STANDARD PRACTICE IN
INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE

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BIRKBECK SCHOOL OF LAW,
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

In recent years, in response to calls from Caribbean nations for reparations related to the transatlantic slave trade, the debate around reparations for historical injustices has grown in visibility in the United Kingdom and in its Caribbean partners in the Commonwealth.

While there are a number of arguments on both sides of the debate regarding this specific claim of reparative justice, the issue that I wish to take aim at in this chapter is the extent to which UK political discourse often frames reparations as unprecedented, impractical and impossible to even imagine. As I argue below, reparations are in fact a standard component of international human rights law and transitional justice frameworks. By highlighting global precedents and examining the legal, moral and practical dimensions of reparative justice, the chapter is aimed at destigmatising and normalising the concept of reparations as a legitimate policy tool for addressing historical wrongs.

Current political discourse in the UK regarding reparations for the transatlantic slave trade has been characterised by dismissal and de-legitimisation by mainstream politicians across the political spectrum. The leader of the Tory Party, Kemi Badenoch, described calls for reparations as a ‘scam’.⁴³ The leader of the Reform Party, Nigel Farage, suggested that Britain should explore retaliatory reparations claims against other nations like France in response.⁴⁴ And the current Labour government under Prime Minister Keir Starmer has steadfastly refused to engage substantively with the issue.

This framing misrepresents reparations as an exceptional and unreasonable demand, when in fact they are an established mechanism in international justice. Instead of falling into this rhetorical trap, we should start by recontextualising the reparations debate by demonstrating that:

1

REPARATIONS ARE NOT UNUSUAL; THEY ARE A STANDARD ELEMENT OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW AND HAVE FREQUENTLY BEEN USED BY OTHER NATIONS IN RESPONSE TO HISTORICAL INJUSTICES.

2

THE UK’S CURRENT REFUSAL TO ENGAGE WITH REPARATIONS STANDS IN CONTRAST WITH BOTH THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT’S HISTORICAL BEHAVIOURS AND THE ACTIONS OF PRIVATE BRITISH CITIZENS CONFRONTING THEIR FAMILY HISTORIES.

3

PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO REPARATIVE JUSTICE EXIST THAT COULD ADDRESS BOTH HISTORICAL WRONGS AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES.

⁴³ Badenoch made a statement to parliament to this effect in 2024, also using the same description on GB News (2024) ‘Badenoch answers questions from GB News viewers and listeners’, 17 October (shared on the GB News account on X).

⁴⁴ Wilde, G. (2024) “Never!” Nigel Farage says Starmer ‘can not show weakness’ on slavery reparations – “We must stand firm”, GB News, 24 October.

REPARATIONS IN INTERNATIONAL LAW AND PRACTICE

Contrary to the portrayal in British political discourse, reparations are an established feature of international human rights frameworks. The United Nations has developed comprehensive guidelines outlining when violations of international human rights law create a right to remedy and reparation.⁴⁵ These guidelines provide a structured approach to addressing historical injustices through legal mechanisms.

Numerous international precedents demonstrate the feasibility of reparations.

NAURU AND AUSTRALIA (1989)

The International Court of Justice awarded the Republic of Nauru reparations from Australia to compensate for the damage caused by phosphate mining during the colonial administration. Following the judgement, Australia and Nauru agreed a settlement of 107 million Australian dollars, with a commitment to spend a further \$2.5 million annually on environmental remediation.

CANADA'S INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS SETTLEMENT (2006)

The Canadian federal government agreed to provide 2.8 billion Canadian dollars in reparations to survivors of the Indian Residential Schools programme.⁴⁶

45 OHCHR (2005), Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law, Geneva, www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-and-guidelines-right-remedy-and-reparation.

46 Halpert, M. (2023) 'Canada settles residential

schools lawsuit for \$22.8bn', BBC News, 21 January, [https://indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca/article/frequently-asked-questions](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-64362246#:~:text=Canada%20has%20agreed%20to%20pay,by%20its%20residential%20school%20system; Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada (no date) 'Frequently asked questions: Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement', <a href=).

GERMANY AND NAMIBIA (2021)

The German government recognised the genocide against the Herero and Nama ethnic groups and committed to pay US\$1.3 billion to descendants in modern-day Namibia.⁴⁷

UGANDA AND THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (2022)

The International Court of Justice issued a judgment for Uganda to pay the DRC US\$330 million for mass violations of human rights and humanitarian law following conflict between the two African nations.

Even a cursory glance of international law or transitional justice initiatives across the globe gives the lie to the assumption that any reparative justice policies that Britain engaged in would serve as an unprecedented example of historical punishment. Instead, reparations should be better understood as a recognised mechanism used within various jurisdictions for addressing historical wrongs that still impact vulnerable communities today.

47 BBC (2021) 'Germany officially recognises colonial-era Namibia genocide', 28 May, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-57279008.

THE UK CONTEXT: HISTORICAL IRONIES AND CONTEMPORARY RESPONSES

The UK government's current reluctance to engage with reparations discussions is not only short-sighted in terms of the increasing mainstreaming of such initiatives internationally: it also creates a significant disconnect between Britain's own historical approach to reparations and the one assumed to be the norm by modern political and media discourse. This dissonance becomes particularly stark when considering that the British government has already paid reparations related to slavery. However, the reason for the widespread amnesia regarding Britain's previous issuing of slavery reparations is that these payments were actually made to the slave owners after abolition for loss of property, rather than to those who were enslaved or

their descendants for the harms they experienced on the plantation.

The 1837 Slave Compensation Act provided £20 million (approximately £17 billion in today's value⁴⁸) to 40,000 claimants compensating them for 'property' lost through abolition. British taxpayers continued paying off this debt until 2015, a fact briefly highlighted and then quickly retracted by the UK Treasury in a deleted social media post in 2018.⁴⁹

In the absence of any state-level leadership on paying reparations to enslaved people and their descendants, some British citizens with ancestral connections to slavery have taken personal initiative.

48 Various figures have been proposed as the modern-day equivalent to the £20 million compensation figure: Kehinde Andrews explores this in more detail in Chapter 9 of this report.

49 Olusoga, D. (2018) 'The Treasury's tweet shows slavery is still misunderstood', Guardian, 12 February, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/12/treasury-tweet-slavery-compensate-slave-owners.

THE GLADSTONE FAMILY

The living descendants of former prime minister William Gladstone, whose family received compensation for over 2,500 enslaved people in Guyana and Jamaica following the abolition of slavery, travelled to Guyana in 2023 to formally apologise and pledge £100,000 to the University of Guyana's International Institute for Migration and Diaspora Studies.⁵⁰

These individual actions highlight the potential for meaningful engagement with historical responsibility, contrasting sharply with the government's refusal to participate in the conversation.

50 Smith, J. and Lashmar, P. (2023) 'William Gladstone: Family of former British PM to apologise for links to slavery', Guardian, 19 August, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/19/william-gladstone-family-of-former-british-pm-to-apologise-for-links-to-slavery>.

THE TREVELYAN FAMILY

In 2023, Journalist Laura Trevelyan resigned from her position at the BBC to advocate for reparations, and her family publicly apologised for their role in slavery in Grenada while announcing £100,000 in reparations.⁵¹

51 BBC News (2023) 'Laura Trevelyan: Why I quit the BBC to fight for slavery reparations', 27 March.

RECONCEPTUALISING REPARATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

In response to recent calls from the Commonwealth's Caribbean representatives for the UK to begin engaging in reparations discussions, Keir Starmer has presented a false dichotomy between addressing 'today's challenges' such as change and engaging in 'very long, endless discussions' about slavery.⁵² This framing fails to recognise the flexible and multifaceted nature of reparative justice.

Contemporary scholars such as Olúfẹ̀mi Táíwò have demonstrated that reparations are not limited to financial compensation but can encompass a broad range of structural policies beyond direct monetary payments.⁵³

Some potential structural changes that could form the basis of reparative justice initiatives include:

REDISTRIBUTION
OF VOTING POWER
IN INTERNATIONAL
FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS
SUCH AS THE WORLD BANK
AND IMF

GLOBAL CLIMATE FINANCE
MECHANISMS SUCH AS THE
PATENT-FREE SHARING
OF GREEN ENERGY
TECHNOLOGIES OR THE
CREATION OF A CLIMATE
FUND THAT AT-RISK
COUNTRIES CAN DRAW ON
AS NEEDED

STRUCTURAL ECONOMIC REFORMS ADDRESSING PERSISTENT
INEQUALITIES, SUCH AS DEBT CANCELLATION AND THE
DISMANTLING OF TAX HAVENS

52 Rogers, A. (2024) 'Sir Keir Starmer rejects calls for reparations to avoid "long and endless discussions about the past"', Sky News, 23 October, <https://news.sky.com/story/sir-keir-starmer-rejects-reparations-calls-to-avoid-long-and-endless-discussions-about-the-past-13239609>.

53 Táíwò, O. (2022) *Reconsidering Reparations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

IN 2023, A UN JUDGE SUGGESTED THE
UK SHOULD PAY \$24 TRILLION FOR ITS
INVOLVEMENT IN SLAVERY ACROSS 14
COUNTRIES, DESCRIBING THIS FIGURE AS
AN 'UNDERESTIMATION' OF THE ACTUAL
DAMAGE CAUSED.

By rejecting engagement with reparations discussions, the UK government risks ceding control over how the issue is framed. In 2023, a UN judge suggested the UK should pay \$24 trillion for its involvement in slavery across 14 countries, describing this figure as an 'underestimation' of the actual damage caused.⁵⁴ Without constructive participation, the UK cannot influence how reparative justice might be conceptualised or implemented.

Another common objection to reparations involves questions of practicality: who should pay, who should receive payment and in what amount? But as noted by the US author Ta-Nehisi Coates, these questions often serve to trivialise and dismiss the issue rather than engage with it substantively.⁵⁵

Plantation slavery was exceptionally well documented, with detailed accounting records tracking the purchase, sale and 'ownership' of enslaved people. This documentation makes it relatively straightforward to identify beneficiaries of the slave trade, many of whom remain influential in contemporary British society.

This historical record creates both opportunity and responsibility. Unlike many human rights violations that are conducted in secrecy, the transparent nature of the transatlantic slave trade provides a clear evidentiary basis for addressing its legacies.

54 Nevet, J (2023) 'UK's £18tn slavery debt is an underestimation, UN judge says', BBC News, 23 August, www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-66596790.

55 Coates, T.-N. (2014) 'The case for reparations', *The Atlantic*, June, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evidence and precedents examined, this chapter proposes the following policy recommendations for the UK government:

1

ESTABLISH A NATIONAL
COMMISSION ON REPARATIVE
JUSTICE

2

ENGAGE CONSTRUCTIVELY
WITH COMMONWEALTH
PARTNERS

3

DEVELOP A FLEXIBLE
REPARATIONS FRAMEWORK

4

MAKE A FORMAL
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND
APOLOGY

5

CREATE A REPARATIVE JUSTICE FUND

CONCLUSION

FOR ME AND FOR MANY OF THE
OTHER AUTHORS OF THIS REPORT, THE
QUESTION IS NO LONGER WHETHER
REPARATIONS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED,
BUT HOW THEY MIGHT BE THOUGHTFULLY
IMPLEMENTED TO ADDRESS HISTORICAL
INJUSTICES WHILE CREATING A MORE
EQUITABLE FUTURE.

Reparations for historical injustices are neither unprecedented nor impractical. Instead, as this debate grows both in the UK and in the Commonwealth countries that we purport to be in partnership with, it is important to always start from the recognition that reparations represent an established mechanism for remedying historical wrongs within international human rights frameworks. Whether critics agree with or disagree with arguments for reparations, they should not be allowed to adopt the intellectually dishonest position that this is a historically unprecedented claim. The UK government's reluctance to engage with this issue places it at odds with international norms and historical responsibility.

By reframing reparations as a standard tool of justice rather than an exceptional demand, the UK has an opportunity

to transform a contentious issue into a constructive dialogue about addressing both historical wrongs and contemporary challenges. Rather than being dragged reluctantly into this conversation by external pressure, the UK could demonstrate leadership by proactively engaging with reparative justice as a means of strengthening its relationships with Commonwealth partners and addressing persistent global inequalities. For me and for many of the other authors of this report, the question is no longer whether reparations should be considered, but how they might be thoughtfully implemented to address historical injustices while creating a more equitable future.

4

RETHINKING REPARATIONS:

FROM EXCEPTION
TO STANDARD PRACTICE
IN INTERNATIONAL
JUSTICE

CLEMMIE JAMES
CHAIR, INTERNATIONAL
COALITION ON DRUG
POLICY REFORM AND
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

NATALIE SHARPLES
HEAD OF POLICY
AND CAMPAIGNS,
HEALTH POVERTY ACTION

The war on drugs has operated more effectively as a system of racial control than as a mechanism for combating the use and trafficking of narcotics.

(UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, 14 March 2019)

Prohibition, or the so-called ‘war on drugs’, is not a war on plants but on people and the planet – particularly people of colour and Indigenous, peasant or Afro-descendant communities around the world. Prohibition is a political and economic system of harm that exemplifies legacies of systemic racism, originating from the histories of enslavement and the transatlantic slave trade. Across the globe, it has marginalised people of African descent and other racialised communities through discriminatory targeting. It has inflicted mass arrests, family separations and systemic police violence and denied people access to housing, employment and healthcare.⁵⁶

These harms have disproportionately affected racialised communities and embedded inequality and corruption into social, health, economic and legal systems.

In England and Wales, Black people are more than four times as likely to be stopped and searched than white people.⁵⁷ In 2016/17, Black and Asian people in England and Wales were convicted of cannabis possession at 11.8 and 2.4 times the rate of white people, despite lower self-reported use.⁵⁸

56 Packer, C. (2025) ‘9. Racial justice’, in *The Legal Regulation of Drugs: The Potential to Deliver Racial Justice*, London: Health Poverty Action, www.healthpovertyaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Legal-reg-briefings-9-Racial-justice.pdf.

57 Home Office (2024), ‘Stop and search, arrests and mental health detentions, March 2024: Stop and search

summary data tables, year ending 31 March 2024’, www.gov.uk/government/statistics/stop-and-search-arrests-and-mental-health-detentions-march-2024.

58 Shiner, M., Carre, Z., Delsol, R. and Eastwood, N. (2018) *The Colour of Injustice: ‘Race’, Drugs and Law Enforcement in England and Wales*, London: StopWatch, Release and the International Drug Policy.

PROHIBITION IS
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OF AFRICAN DESCENT
AND OTHER RACIALISED
COMMUNITIES THROUGH
DISCRIMINATORY
TARGETING.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, LAND RIGHTS AND THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

The imposition of colonial drug prohibition has profoundly harmed Indigenous communities. The coca leaf and cannabis plant have long been used by Indigenous communities for traditional, medicinal and religious reasons across continents. Like other minority groups, these communities are violently targeted by state efforts to eradicate illicit crops, and disproportionately incarcerated for drug-related offences and use.⁵⁹

In the case of Indigenous peoples, prohibition plays a particular role in entangling systemic racism with disruption of deep-rooted traditions, land dispossession and climate injustice.

59 Astwood, J.R. (2025) '4. Indigenous rights', in The Legal Regulation of Drugs, www.healthpovertyaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Legal-reg-briefings-4-Indigenous-rights.pdf.

Organised drug criminals produce and traffic drugs in remote regions that are easier to occupy and control, and harder to police – often national parks and Indigenous lands.

As a result, the drug trade and its associated destructive and violent activities have a particular impact on regions of environmental sensitivity. This includes the Amazon basin, Colombia's Pacific coast, Central America's Moskitia region and Mexico's Lacandon Biosphere Reserve. Here, Indigenous communities are targeted by drug traffickers who appropriate their crops and displace them from their lands.⁶⁰

60 International Coalition for Drug Policy Reform and Environmental Justice (2024) *Revealing the Missing Link to Climate Justice: Drug Policy*, London: Health Poverty Action, www.healthpovertyaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/REPORT-Revealing-the-Missing-Link-to-Climate-Justice-Drug-Policy.pdf.

IN THE CASE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES,
PROHIBITION PLAYS A PARTICULAR
ROLE IN ENTANGLING SYSTEMIC RACISM
WITH DISRUPTION OF DEEP-ROOTED
TRADITIONS, LAND DISPOSSESSION AND
CLIMATE INJUSTICE.

In countries such as Colombia, Brazil and Honduras, 'Narcos' regularly use violence, threats and cash to buy up or take over large areas of Indigenous land, while 'buying off' with money or threats of violence anyone who stands in their way, whether that be park rangers or government officials.⁶¹

The sheer scale of the money involved in drug crime makes it a key enabler of other crimes. The vast illegal profits that the drugs trade generates are laundered into other extractive industries in these areas. Criminals who traffic drugs frequently diversify their activities into other forms of organised crime, many of

61 International Coalition, *Revealing the Missing Link*

62 In 2017 estimated at US\$426–652 billion; UNODC (UN Office on Drugs and Crime) (no date) 'Key issues', <https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/en/education/tertiary/organized-crime/module-3/key-issues/intro.html>.

which cause environmental devastation. Activities such as cattle ranching, palm oil plantations, logging enterprises and mining are among them. Drug crime thus effectively becomes the investment bank for such activities. As well as the violence and murder perpetrated by cartels, this destroys governance, creates instability, undermines state infrastructure, and imposes huge health and environmental devastation on environmentally sensitive regions. Many have become sites of dispossession, environmental violence, biodiversity loss and rapacious extractivism.

63 Sharples, N. (2025) '5. Climate justice', in The Legal Regulation of Drugs, www.healthpovertyaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Legal-reg-briefings-5-Climate-justice.pdf.

PROHIBITION CREATES AN ILLEGAL MARKET AND EMPOWERS AND RESOURCES ORGANISED DRUG CRIME

While the link between drug trade and environmental crime is increasingly recognised,⁶⁴ what is still ignored is that it is prohibition that creates organised crime. Without prohibition, drug crime cannot exist. The UN Office of Drugs and Crime defines organised crime as ‘a continuing criminal enterprise that rationally works to profit from illicit activities that are often in great public demand’.⁶⁵ The act of making certain drugs illegal created that demand. Prohibition rewards those who trade in drugs with immense power and wealth and enables the creation of powerful networks which undermine states and terrorise and murder Indigenous and other communities. Despite this, the much-needed repeal and reform of drug prohibition has been absent from the climate agenda.

WHAT COMES NEXT?

While the scale of harms caused by prohibition are immense, today we have an unprecedented opportunity to transform drug policies into a tool for reparative justice. Drug reforms are beginning to happen around the world, providing an immense opportunity to repair decades of harm. Over 100 countries now have harm reduction policies and 30 countries, or 51 jurisdictions, have some form of drug decriminalisation.⁶⁶ Soon, more than half a billion people will live in jurisdictions where cannabis is legal. Legal regulation of not only of cannabis but cocaine, psychedelics, ketamine and MDMA/ecstasy is being discussed right now in various countries.⁶⁷ It is time for a reparative approach based on transitional justice.

It is clear that ending the drug war cannot be situated within criminal legal reform efforts. It requires acknowledging the truth about events that have occurred, bringing perpetrators to justice, providing reparations for victims, preserving the collective memory of violations and guarantees of non-repetition. This means designing these new markets in ways that acknowledge, end, and repair past and current harms and affirmatively seek to prevent racial disparities.

This requires the will to build policies around the needs and priorities of those most harmed, making Indigenous peoples, drug farmers, small-scale traders and those currently persecuted under prohibition central to the development of emerging regulations. It requires ending the criminalisation of people who use, supply and produce drugs, expungement of criminal records for those incarcerated, employment opportunities and public services for people involved in the low levels of the trade, and support so that they can transition to roles in a legal

market. And it requires robust legislation to protect Indigenous knowledge from corporate theft.

Licensing for production and sale are key tools in a reparative approach. Affirmative licensing for small-scale growers, traders and people previously criminalised, reducing or exempting them from fees and bureaucracy, establishing quotas for numbers of small local growers, and proactive support to enable small operators to meet the required processes and standards to enter the market must go hand in hand with the robust regulation of big corporations to ensure that they cannot dominate the market and replicate the harms of prohibition.

Likewise, protecting Indigenous biocultural heritage and knowledge systems and ensuring companies cannot patent Indigenous substances and knowledge that they have held for centuries to use for their own profits must be central to regulation.

64 UNODC (2024) World Drug Report 2024, Vienna, www.unodc.org/unodc/data-and-analysis/world-drug-report-2024.html.

65 UNODC (no date), ‘E4J University Module Series: Organized crime. Module 1: Definitions of organized crime’, www.unodc.org/e4j/ru/organized-crime/

[module-1/key-issues/defining-organized-crime.html#:~:text=Organized%20per%20cent%20crime%20per%20cent%20is%20per%20cent%20a%20per%20cent%20continuing,often%20per%20cent%20in%20per%20cent%20great%20per%20cent%20public%20per%20cent%20demand.](http://www.unodc.org/e4j/ru/organized-crime/module-1/key-issues/defining-organized-crime.html#:~:text=Organized%20per%20cent%20crime%20per%20cent%20is%20per%20cent%20a%20per%20cent%20continuing,often%20per%20cent%20in%20per%20cent%20great%20per%20cent%20public%20per%20cent%20demand.)

66 Harm Reduction International (no date) ‘What is harm reduction?’, <https://hri.global/what-is-harm-reduction>; Talking Drugs (no date), ‘Drug decriminalisation across the world’, www.talkingdrugs.org/drug-decriminalisation/.

67 Sharples, N. (2025) ‘Introduction’, in The Legal Regulation of Drugs, www.healthpovertyaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Legal-reg-briefings-Intro.pdf.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR A COUNTRY SUCH AS THE UK?

The UK should move primary responsibility for drug policy away from criminal justice to the Department of Health to put policy making where the relevant competences lie. This responsibility should be shared with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, which holds the so-called 'aid' budgets, in order to align domestic and international drug policies with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The enormous revenue potential from drug taxation must be harnessed and invested in Black, and other communities who have been marginalised under prohibition and used to improve health, education, public services and equity programmes.

Reforms should be monitored, and those responsible for them should be held accountable by a formal and diverse board, made up in the majority by people who have been marginalised by racist drug policies, with regular data collected, published and scrutinised.

Finally, repealing the system of prohibition and the environmental chaos it creates need to be brought into the climate reparation debates. A particular responsibility here lies with the climate justice movement in the global minority world, which has the privilege of distance from the everyday violence and corruption that characterises the many forest frontiers around the world, and is therefore ideally placed to leverage its resources and privilege to promote

WHILE THIS MIGHT ALL SOUND AMBITIOUS, THE REALITY IS THAT DRUG REFORMS ARE HAPPENING, SO THERE ARE PRECEDENTS – GOOD AND BAD – BEING SET RIGHT NOW FOR WHAT REFORMS COULD LOOK LIKE.

reform. Vulnerable frontline communities – from peasant groups to Indigenous nations – cannot be left to speak out alone.

While this might all sound ambitious, the reality is that drug reforms are happening, so there are precedents – good and bad – being set right now for what reforms could look like. While the US commercial cannabis market remains dominated by large corporations, primarily owned by white, male entrepreneurs,⁶⁸ thanks to dedicated advocacy there are examples of approaches which go some way towards reparations. These include pardons and expungement in states such as California, Maryland and Massachusetts; business licensing in Michigan, Nevada and Colorado

designed to help individuals arrested and convicted of cannabis offences to participate in the legal market;⁶⁹ and the reinvestment of tax revenue for social good such as in New York, Illinois and New Jersey.⁷⁰ Bolivia's Community Coca Control policy recognises the importance of coca for Indigenous communities, allowing small farmers to grow small amounts of the crop for local markets. While we recognise the limitations of their implementation, Jamaica's cannabis reforms were explicitly designed to rectify the harms suffered by the Rastafarian community under prohibition. These include a tiered licensing system to support transitional Ganja growers and other incentives to help them participate in the market.⁷¹

68 Minority Cannabis Business Association (MCBA) (2022) MCBA National Cannabis Equity Report, Washington, DC, <https://mjbizdaily.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/National-Cannabis-Equity-Report-1.pdf>.

69 Network for Public Health Law (2022) Adult-Use Cannabis Social Equity Tool Kit, Edina, MN, www.networkforphl.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Toolkit-Adult-Use-Cannabis-Revised-9-29-22-draft.pdf.

70 Network for Public Health Law, Adult-Use Cannabis.

71 Klein, A., Rychert, M. and Emanuel M.A. (2022) 'Towards social justice and economic empowerment?

Exploring Jamaica's progress with implementing cannabis law reform', *Third World Quarterly* 42(11): 2693–2711.

The tide is turning. There is growing public and institutional support for much-needed transformational change; in 2024 both the UN Office for the High Commissioner on Human Rights⁷² and Amnesty International⁷³ adopted bold reform positions supporting the transition away from the war on drugs to responsibly regulated drug markets. There is an urgent need for other social and environmental voices to show the same leadership.

In 2025 the World Health Organisation is reviewing the coca leaf to determine if a miscarriage of justice occurred when the coca leaf used traditionally by Andean and Amazonian communities was placed in the same drug control schedule as heroin and cocaine nearly 75 years ago by the UNODC.⁷⁴

Overturning the current situation and legally regulating the coca leaf could vindicate the rights of Indigenous peoples and lead to legal rural livelihoods, environmental regulations and potential tax revenue.

72 OHCHR (2024) 'Türk urges transformative change in global drug policy', 14 March, www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/03/turk-urges-transformative-change-global-drug-policy.

73 Amnesty International (2024) 'Time for change: Advancing new drug policies that uphold human rights', 22 June, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol30/8042/2024/en.

It could also, however, open the doors for corporate capture and further exploitation.

Amnesty International is calling on states to adopt new models of drug control that put the protection of people's health and other human rights at the centre. This should include the decriminalization of the use, possession, cultivation and acquisition of drugs for personal use, and the effective regulation of drugs to provide legal and safe channels for those permitted to access them.⁷⁵

Before us sits an unprecedented opportunity to design new markets that end the harms of prohibition and deliver reparative justice, this is something we all need to get behind.

Drug reforms need to be designed with multi-stakeholder engagement and promote a multi-species perspective, creating a future that vigorously promotes racial justice, Indigenous rights and land justice to deliver climate justice.

74 Transnational Institute (2023) 'Coca chronicles: Monitoring the UN coca review', 17 October, www.tni.org/en/article/coca-chronicles-monitoring-the-un-coca-review.

75 Amnesty International, 'Time for change'.

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5

REPARATIONS AND JUSTICE IN A POST-PROHIBITION WORLD

MARY RYDER
CAMPAIGN COORDINATOR,
TRANSFORM DRUG POLICY
FOUNDATION

In 2018, Antigua and Barbuda prime minister Gaston Browne announced plans to reform cannabis legislation with a courageous statement:

‘I have issued a genuine apology to the Rastafarian Community.’ Acknowledging decades of persecution and repression at the hands of the police, he called for Rastafarians to ‘be given a stake in production and benefits to be derived going forward’, framing this inclusion as ‘reparations for Rastafarian, for the wrongs inflicted on this significant minority group in our Countries, through the so-called “war on drugs” which evidently was prompted by pernicious prohibition’.⁷⁶

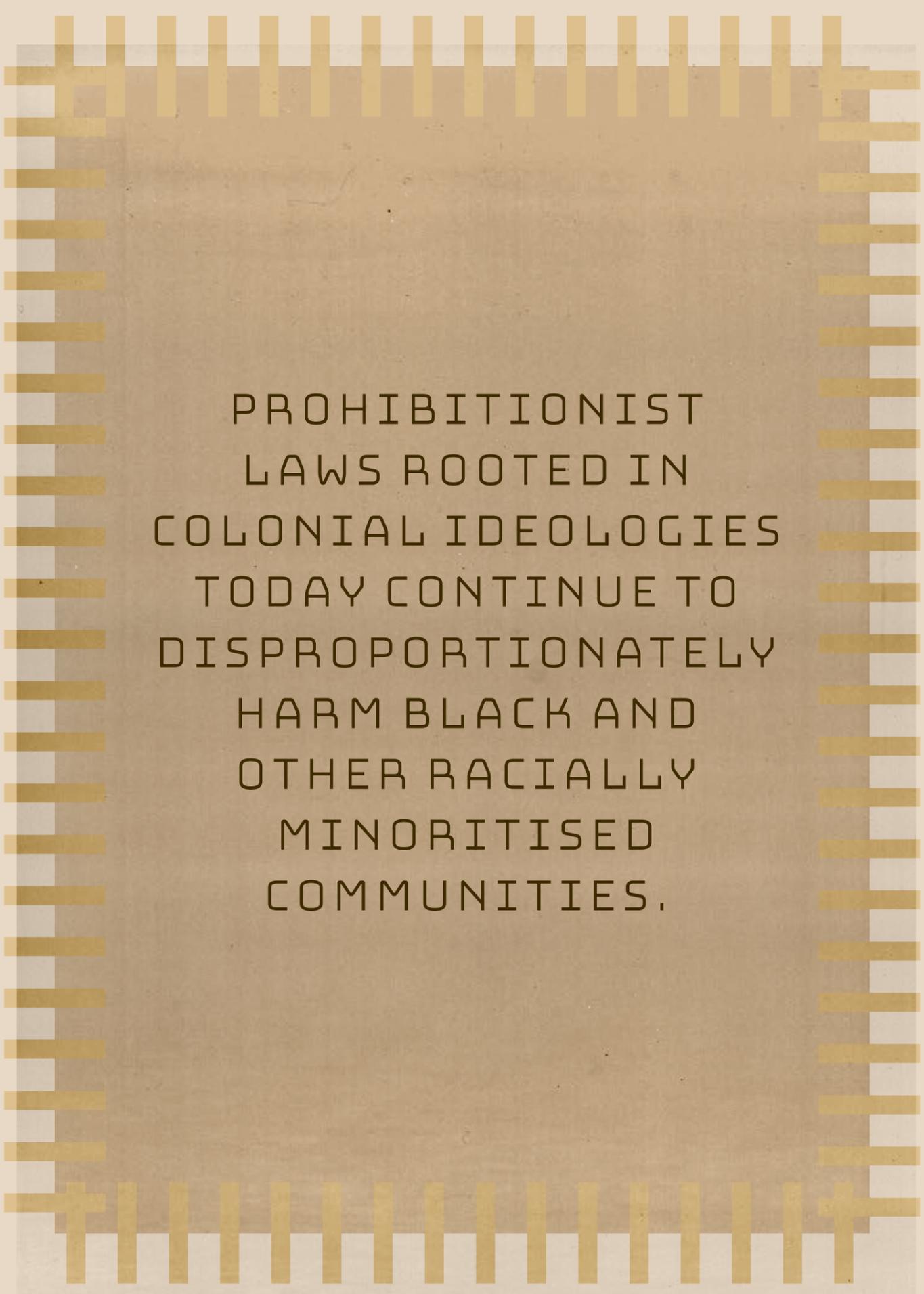
⁷⁶ Jamaica Gleaner (2018) ‘Antigua and Barbuda PM apologises to Rastafarians’, 18 April, <https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/news/20180418/antigua-and-barbuda-pm-apologises-rastafarians>.

This recognition of historical injustice stands in stark contrast to UK prime minister Keir Starmer's declaration in October 2024 that 'reparations for slavery would not be on the agenda' – a position that reflects a broader unwillingness to confront the enduring legacies of racial injustice in Britain. The British prime minister's casual dismissal of reparations is especially troubling in the context of UK drug policy, where prohibitionist laws rooted in colonial ideologies today continue to disproportionately harm Black and other racially minoritised communities.

As drug law reform gains momentum globally, the need to integrate reparative justice into legal drug markets is emerging as both a critical challenge and a transformative opportunity to address the social, racial and economic injustices of drug prohibition. This requires not only domestic reforms but also protections for the communities across the world who have historically been involved in the production and supply of illicit drug markets. Equity frameworks intended to help redistribute economic power to marginalised and disproportionately impacted communities in legal cannabis regulation are increasingly informing broader debates around reparations and justice in the regulation of other plant-based drugs – including cocaine and heroin.

At the Transform Drug Policy Foundation, we advocate for the legal regulation of cannabis, cocaine and other drugs not as an end in itself, but as a way to reduce harm and address systemic injustice. Legal regulation raises fundamental questions: how can new legal markets create economic opportunities for excluded and marginalised communities? Will those most harmed by prohibition benefit from legalisation?

This chapter explores how regulated drug markets can serve as vehicles for structural reparations – policies that go beyond symbolic gestures or financial compensation to meaningfully redistribute power and resources, end punitive drug law enforcement, rebuild civil society and promote inclusive, sustainable development. In other words, can people in Britain and elsewhere – especially those who use or sell drugs – expect greater access not only to economic opportunities but also to safer communities, improved health outcomes, reduced stigma and discrimination, and greater social inclusion under legally regulated markets than under illegal markets in a context of prohibition?



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Calls for reparative justice in drug policy are significantly driven by the growing recognition of the colonial architecture through which global prohibition was formulated and implemented. The 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs is the foundation of global drug prohibition. The treaty aims to eliminate drug production, supply and (non-medical or -scientific) use of specific drugs through coordinated international enforcement action, under the guise of protecting humanity from a ‘serious evil’ that we have a ‘duty to combat’.⁷⁷ But global drug prohibition is not neutral: as Gaston Browne identifies, the prohibition of cannabis was primarily motivated not by concern for the health or wellbeing of users but to serve ‘the racist, political and economic interests’ of the then global powers. The UK – among other major consumer countries and former colonial

powers – bears a specific responsibility for those harms and a duty to help address them today.

Cocaine markets offer a particularly challenging but urgent case study. While opioid markets have rightly drawn focus due to overdose crises in the Global North, and cannabis regulation has advanced rapidly in many countries, cocaine has received comparatively little attention in drug policy reform debates. Nevertheless, in the UK, the number of cocaine-related deaths is rising sharply⁷⁸ while global cocaine production continues to increase to meet growing demand despite decades of intense enforcement – fuelling environmental destruction, undermining Indigenous rights, driving prison overcrowding, and destabilising key producer and transit countries across Latin America.⁷⁹

77 UN (1961) Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961, www.unodc.org/pdf/convention_1961_en.pdf, preamble.

78 ONS (2024) ‘Deaths related to drug poisoning in England and Wales: 2023 registrations’, 23 October, www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsrelatedtodrugpoisoninginenglandandwales/2023registrations.

79 International Coalition for Drug Policy Reform and Environmental Justice (2024) *Revealing the Missing Link to Climate Justice: Drug Policy*, London: Health Poverty Action, www.healthpovertyaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/REPORT-Revealing-the-Missing-Link-to-Climate-Justice-Drug-Policy.pdf.

WITHOUT ADEQUATE SAFEGUARDS, THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALL LEGAL DRUG MARKETS RISKS REPEATING PAST PATTERNS OF EXPLOITATION AND VIOLENCE UNDER TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATE CAPITALISM, UNDERMINING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS.

BLACK PEOPLE ARE OVER FIVE TIMES MORE LIKELY TO BE STOPPED AND SEARCHED FOR DRUGS THAN WHITE PEOPLE, DESPITE SIMILAR RATES OF USE, AND ARE CONVICTED OF CANNABIS POSSESSION AT NEARLY 12 TIMES THE RATE.

For a range of cultural and political reasons, winning support for the regulation of stimulants such as cocaine is likely to prove more difficult than for substances such as cannabis. Nevertheless, the harms associated with global cocaine markets highlight the need for an equity-oriented model of regulation. Without adequate safeguards, the development of all legal drug markets risks repeating past patterns of exploitation and violence under transnational corporate capitalism, undermining sustainable development, social justice and human rights. Unless mitigating these risks is prioritised from the outset, the communities most harmed by prohibition will once again be excluded from the benefits of reform.

In the UK, drug enforcement continues to drive structural injustice through over-policing and racial profiling among Black and ethnically minoritised communities.

Black people are over five times more likely to be stopped and searched for drugs than white people,⁸⁰ despite similar rates of use, and are convicted of cannabis possession at nearly 12 times the rate.⁸¹ A criminal record can have a long-term impact on an individual's life outcomes, from employment discrimination to housing opportunities, perpetuating the trauma of unjust criminalisation and other forms of structural racism. In the US, drug law reform advocates have demonstrated how drug arrests contribute to school exclusion, deportation, housing problems and family separation.⁸²

The idea that drug offences are 'minor' ignores their profound social impacts. These patterns of harm are sustained and systemic, constituting a moral and policy imperative for both reform and reparations.

80 Home Office (2024) 'Police powers and procedures: Stop and search and arrests, England and Wales, year ending 31 March 2023 (second edition)', 14 March, www.gov.uk/government/statistics/stop-and-search-and-arrests-year-ending-march-2023/police-powers-and-procedures-stop-and-search-and-arrests-england-and-wales-year-ending-31-march-2023; 'Stop and search', 3 July, www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/crime-justice-and-the-law/policing/stop-and-search/latest.

81 Kincova, E. and Rolles, S. (2022) *The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971: Counting the Costs*, London: Transform Drug Policy Foundation, <https://transformdrugs.org/assets/files/PDFs/Misuse-of-Drugs-Act-Briefing.pdf>.

82 Frederique, K. (2021) 'Written testimony of Kassandra Frederique, executive director, Drug Policy Alliance', Hearing on 'Undoing the damage of the war on drugs: A renewed call for sentencing reform', US House of Representatives Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security, 15 June, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/JU/JU08/20210617/112776/HHRG-117-JU08-Wstate-FrederiqueK-20210617.pdf>.

A REPARATIVE MODEL FOR DRUG REFORM

In 2009, the Transform Drug Policy Foundation's *After the War on Drugs: Blueprint for Regulation* laid out for the first time a set of pragmatic options for the future legal regulation of cannabis, stimulants, psychedelics and opioids.⁸³ Suitable models for legal regulation ranged from highly controlled approaches such as prescription-only and pharmacy sales, to more flexible systems including licensed retail and consumption spaces, which can be operated under a variety of supply models, including government monopolies, commercial enterprises and not-for-profit organisations. Since then,

these regulation models have helped to inform the debate in other contexts and expand the conversation to include social justice, equity and reparations.

The conversation has shifted: what was once a question of how legal regulation might theoretically work in practice has now evolved to the question of what we can learn from the implementation of legally regulated markets, particularly as early experiences of cannabis legalisation have brought the issues of social and racial justice to the fore.

⁸³ Rolles, S. (2009) *After the War on Drugs: Blueprint for Regulation*, London: Transform Drug Policy Foundation, <https://transformdrugs.org/assets/files/PDFs/blueprint-for-regulation-fulltext-2009.pdf>.

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In the United States, many states have been early introducers of measures to acknowledge and address the disproportionate harms of cannabis prohibition, often using tax revenue from the legal market to fund these tools for redress. In particular, so-called 'social equity programmes' aim to prevent legal markets from being dominated by large corporations by redistributing opportunity and investment to the communities most harmed by prohibition. These measures include licence fee waivers, access to grants and loans, and technical support such as legal and business training for equity applicants. For example, in Oakland, equity participants received licence fee waivers and three years of free rent and security.⁸⁴ Illinois has dedicated 25 per cent of cannabis tax revenue to investing in impacted communities to 'address the impact of economic disinvestment, concentrated poverty, violence and the historical overuse of criminal justice responses'.⁸⁵

Crucially, social equity models also involve the automatic expungement of criminal records for activities that are now legal. Missouri, for example, has allocated \$7 million to expunging cannabis offences.⁸⁶

84 City of Oakland (2025) 'Cannabis Equity Program'. www.oaklandca.gov/Business/Business-Taxes-Licenses-Permits/Cannabis-Permit/Cannabis-Equity-Program.

85 Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (2024) 'ICJIA awards \$35 million in Restore, Reinvest, and Renew (R3) Program Grants', 29 August, <https://r3.illinois.gov/news/icjia-awards-35-million-in-restore-reinvest-and-renew-r3-program-grants>.

While the outcomes of equity programmes have been mixed, they reflect a fundamental shift from a focus on individual blame and criminality to an acknowledgement of systemic harm and the need for structural redress. Measurable successes have so far been limited, but policy and practice continues to evolve. Social equity must be a consideration and a central pillar of all drug law reform in the UK.

Another way to avoid corporate capture of the market is through the not-for-profit association model, also known as collectives, cooperatives or Cannabis Social Clubs (CSCs). Originating in Spain in 2001, CSCs allow registered adult members to collectively grow and share cannabis for personal use. These private, non-profit organisations provide community-based environments that encourage responsible use of quality-controlled products, while avoiding the risks of commercialised models and profit-led incentives to initiate or increase consumption. This model could be readily adapted or expanded to include other drugs, yet its potential as a reparative tool – particularly to address the harms of prohibition in traditional producing countries – requires further consideration and development.

86 NORML (National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws) (no date) 'Marijuana pardons and expungements: By the numbers', <https://norml.org/marijuana/fact-sheets/marijuana-pardons-and-expungements-by-the-numbers>.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The UK has an opportunity to learn from drug law reform in other jurisdictions. With careful policy design, we can implement fairer, more inclusive regulation models from the outset, likely starting with cannabis but in the future for cocaine and other drugs as well. Future drug markets should be designed to deliver reparations through five core pillars.

RECOGNITION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

UK drug policy reform must begin with a public acknowledgement of the historical and ongoing harms caused by prohibition, both at home and abroad. Given the UK's central role in shaping and enforcing global drug control regimes, we have a moral responsibility to address and repair these harms. A formal apology for the human suffering that has flowed from militarised drug interventions supported by the UK should accompany reforms, alongside efforts to challenge stigma against drug-producing communities and people who use drugs.

COLLABORATION AND ALLYSHIP

Communities and people currently or previously involved in, or disproportionately impacted by, illegal drug markets must be central to the design, implementation and evaluation of future legal frameworks, to ensure that future policy meets their needs and creates real opportunity for them to participate and benefit. A post-prohibition future cannot be imposed globally by the Global North. It must be locally grounded, historically informed and led by those who have lived through the consequences of the drug war, making a moral imperative for dialogue, solidarity and collaboration.

ENDING CRIMINALISATION AND POLICING HARMS

It would be both inconsistent and unjust to seek only the end of mass criminalisation without addressing the continued stigma of criminalisation carried by those caught under past laws, particularly those from socially and economically marginalised communities. Regulating jurisdictions must respond to this issue from the outset by deleting past criminal records for activities previously criminalised but now within the scope of the law, as well as releasing those serving sentences under past laws. In addition, racist enforcement must end, with a shift away from over-policing and towards public health and harm reduction.

EQUITY AND PARTICIPATION

Guaranteeing equity in future markets includes ensuring that people with past convictions and residents of disproportionately policed communities have prioritised access to licences. Financial and administrative barriers to accessing the new legal market should be minimised, and support should be actively provided through training, apprenticeships and grants.

REINVESTMENT AND GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY

Revenues from legal markets must be reinvested in a way that is proportionate to the harms enacted on Black and other racially minoritised communities by prohibition. This includes funding for harm reduction, mental health services, housing and youth programmes in the UK, as well as supporting sustainable development and fair trade in drug-producing regions abroad.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A POST-PROHIBITION FUTURE

Drug prohibition is an ongoing tool of structural injustice that continues to punish marginalised communities both in the UK and around the world. A post-prohibition future demands more than market regulation. It requires us to reckon with the colonial and racial logics that underpin current systems, and it requires policies that redistribute power and resources.

Legal drug markets must also be more than an economic opportunity; they must be vehicles for reparative justice. This means centring impacted communities in every decision, prioritising equity in access and investing in the futures that prohibition tried to erase.

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HISTORICAL OVERUSE
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RESPONSES'.

6

REPARATIONS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY:

LESSONS FROM THE
BRITISH SLAVE COMPENSATION
PROGRAMME

KLARKE STRICKLEN
DPHIL STUDENT, RHODES SCHOLAR
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When the British parliament enacted the Slavery Abolition Act 1833 to abolish the institution of African slavery in the British colonies, it simultaneously afforded British slave owners a £20 million compensation fund, nearly £100 billion today.⁸⁸

Those who had formerly been enslaved received no compensation and walked away as ‘disenfranchised labourers’.⁸⁹

Many scholars and advocates in the Caribbean and Britain have referenced this historic compensation programme in arguments supporting reparations and at the start of formal discussions with country leaders, most recently Prime Minister Keir Starmer and the Labour government. Starmer, in response to Commonwealth leaders lobbying to initiate formal talks on reparations in autumn 2024, responded, ‘We do not pay them’.⁹⁰

88 Draper, N. (2010) *The Price of Emancipation: Slave-Ownership, Compensation and British Society at the End of Slavery*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 106–107. Various figures have been proposed as the modern-day equivalent to the £20 million compensation figure: Kehinde Andrews explores this in more detail in Chapter 9 of this report.

90 Mason, C. (2024) ‘Time has come for reparations dialogue, Commonwealth heads agree’, BBC News, 26 October, www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c207m3m0xpjo; Dodds, A., Minister for Development, response to questions on the Labour Party’s stance on reparations in United Kingdom, HC Debate (25 February 2025) vol. 762.

89 Beckles, H. (2013) *Britain’s Black Debt: Reparations for Caribbean Slavery and Native Genocide*, Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 144.

Compensation remains one of the most contentious remedies associated with reparations in public debate, as evidenced by the Labour government's response.⁹¹ However, compensation is vital to the realisation of reparations, an umbrella term used to define a set of remedies to address previous harm.⁹² For centuries, European governments and Britain benefited financially from exploitative and extractive practices that characterised the transatlantic slave trade, colonial slavery and colonisation. In the aftermath of these systems, former colonies and descendant communities have been left to grapple with their adverse effects.

The 'Ten Point Plan for Reparatory Justice' created by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Reparations Commission (CRC), if passed, would use compensation to enact programmes and initiatives critical to the development of the Caribbean countries, including repatriation, building cultural heritage and institutional sites and programmes, the dissemination of public health resources, and debt cancellation throughout the Caribbean.⁹³

91 See Blimes, L. and Brooks, C.W. (2024) 'Normalizing reparations: US precedent, norms, and models for compensating harms and implications for reparations to Black Americans', *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 10(2): 30–68 for similar discussions on contention with compensation as a measure of repair.

92 OHCHR (no date) 'Reparations: OHCHR and transitional justice', www.ohchr.org/en/transitional-justice/reparations.

A recent Brattle report suggested that the United Kingdom should pay between US\$17,141 and \$24,011 trillion in compensation for the 'enslavement period' and \$2.193 trillion for the 'post-enslavement period'.⁹⁴

However, descendants living in diasporic communities, such as in Britain, would not be included in the CRC's reparatory justice plan, effectively creating two claims for reparations against Britain.⁹⁵

In a global moment characterised by increased political action on and public attention to the campaign for reparatory justice for Africans and people of African descent, public understanding is essential to its success. The lessons of the Slave Compensation Programme can enhance public knowledge of the history behind reparations claims and normalise compensation, as it remains a crucial element of repair. This chapter will revisit the story of the making of the Slave Compensation Programme and its role within the broader context of abolition in Britain and its former colonies, building on historical narratives that can help the public to understand reparations claims and remedies.

93 CARICOM (no date) 'CARICOM Ten point plan for reparatory justice', <https://caricom.org/caricom-ten-point-plan-for-reparatory-justice>.

94 Bazelon, C., Vargas, A., Janakiraman, R. and Olson, M.M. (2023) *Quantification of Reparations for Transatlantic Chattel Slavery*, Boston, MA: Brattle, www.brattle.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Quantification-of-Reparations-for-Transatlantic-Chattel-Slavery.pdf, annex I-III.

95 Darity Jr, W. (2023) 'One size doesn't fit all: Internal versus external reparations across the Americas', *Journal of American Studies* 58: 445–461.

THE LESSONS OF THE
SLAVE COMPENSATION
PROGRAMME CAN ENHANCE
PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE OF
THE HISTORY BEHIND
REPARATIONS CLAIMS
AND NORMALISE
COMPENSATION, AS IT
REMAINS A CRUCIAL
ELEMENT OF REPAIR.

Britain played a leading role in the transatlantic slave trade, where more than 12 million Africans of diverse ethnic backgrounds, whether through capture or sale, were trafficked from the coast of West Africa to the plantations of the European colonies in the Caribbean and the Americas. Estimates by Slave Voyages find that from 1551 to 1810, over 3.2 million Africans were trafficked on ships carrying Great Britain's flag.⁹⁶ African bodies quickly became one of the most lucrative commodities and assets of the Atlantic world, and their sale to the plantations of the Caribbean and the Americas shaped an entire economy that necessitated their bondage. Slave owners would call on this history to position themselves as the inheritors of a system their predecessors had taken on to carry out the mission of the Empire. Compensation was, in fact, 'justice' for their facilitation of slavery and the debt that came with it.⁹⁷

Parliament enacted the Slavery Abolition Act 1833, formally known as An Act for the Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Colonies; for promoting the Industry of the manumitted Slaves; and for compensating the Persons hitherto entitled to the Services of such Slaves, on 1 August 1833. The law defined the period between bondage and freedom for formerly enslaved individuals, and the nature and facilitation of compensation payments to slave owners. Financing compensation required negotiation between parliament and London financiers, ultimately raising a £15 million public loan from the Bank of England and a £5 million private loan from the Rothschild Syndicate to create the £20 million compensation fund.⁹⁸ The sum accounted for over 40 per cent of the country's national budget at the time. The debt was settled only in 2015, 182 years after the Abolition Act was enacted.⁹⁹

96 Slave Voyages (no date) 'Trans-Atlantic slave trade: Estimates', www.slavevoyages.org/estimates/KxbCSvDz.

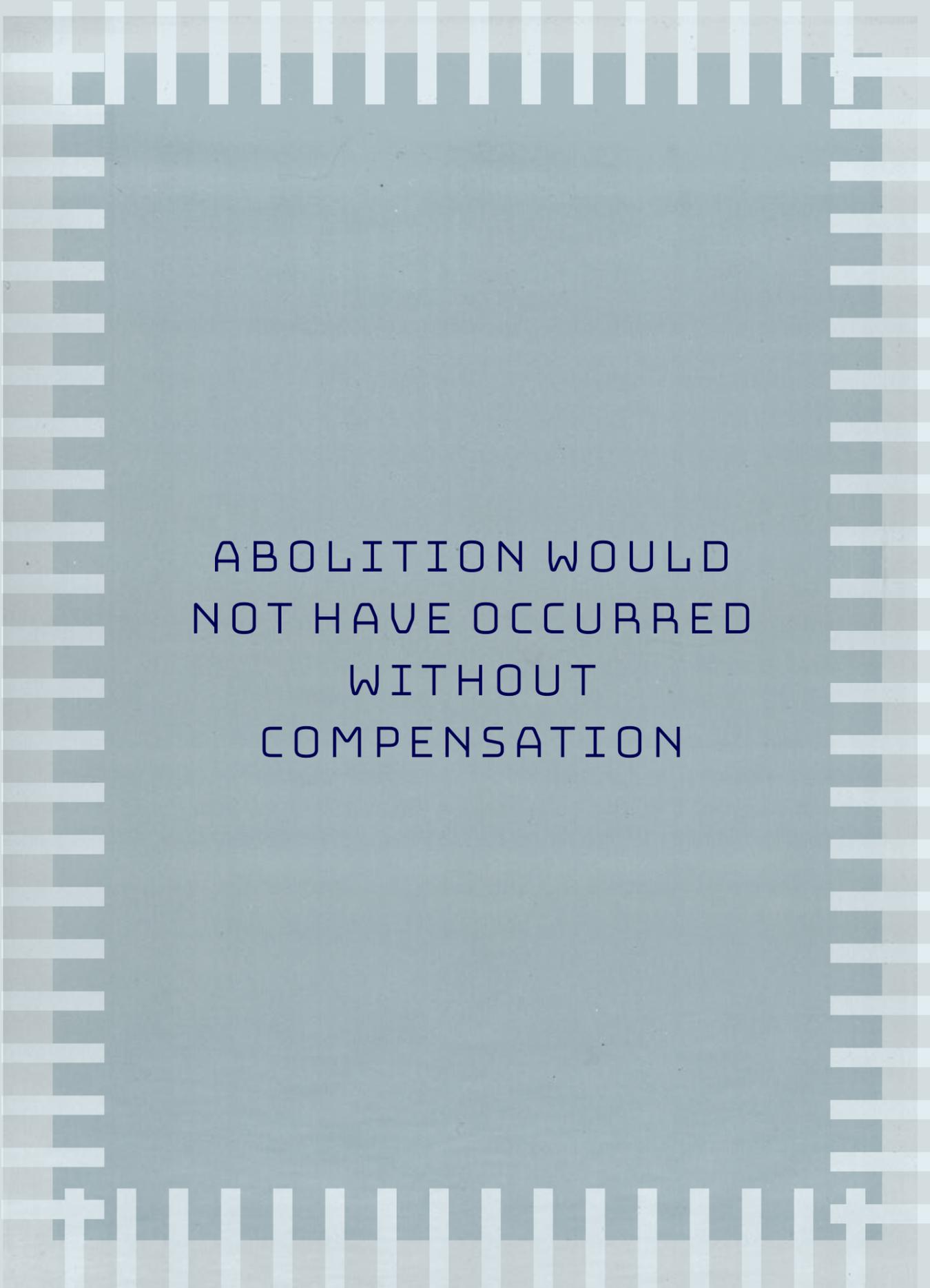
97 For references to compensation as 'justice', see Foster Barham II, J. (1823) Considerations on the Abolition of Negro Slavery and the Means of Practically Effect It, London: James Ridgway, 26–27, and sentiments expressed by the West India Lobby in the 'Abolition of slavery' motion, HC Deb (15 May 1823) vol. 9, cols 257–360, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/>

commons/1823/may/15/abolition-of-slavery.

98 Draper, The Price of Emancipation, 107–113.

99 Draper, The Price of Emancipation, 106–107; Otele, O. (2023) 'More than money: The logic of slavery reparations', Guardian, 31 March, www.theguardian.com/news/ng-interactive/2023/March/31/more-than-money-the-logic-of-slavery-reparations.

AFRICAN BODIES
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ABOLITION WOULD
NOT HAVE OCCURRED
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COMPENSATION

In the decade before the Abolition Act, leaders in the House of Commons debated the manner of abolition and, importantly, the nature of compensation.¹⁰⁰ Abolition would not have occurred without compensation, as leading abolitionists, including William Wilberforce (1759–1833) and Thomas Fowell Buxton (1786–1845), recognised the concept of slave owners’ private property rights inherent in enslaved bodies.¹⁰¹ Despite disagreeing with the morality of the concept, Buxton, like other leading parliamentary abolitionists, viewed compensation as a necessary means to maintain the relationship between the imperial government and the colonies.¹⁰² Political pamphlets of the time reveal that slave owners invoked histories of revolution and the existence of the first Black republic, ‘Hayti’, as cautionary tales.¹⁰³ Freedom for those who were enslaved would come at a price, as the preservation of the Empire, and thus the colonies, necessitated it.

By 1836, British slave owners were able to claim their compensation awards in cash or stock at the National Debt Office in London, following the adoption of the Abolition Act in their colonial legislatures and the valuation of their formerly enslaved labourers.¹⁰⁴ However, freedom did not translate into an expression of rights and privileges akin to those enjoyed by former slave owners. Black labourers and their perceived productivity remained closely linked to the financial wellbeing of the colonies. As colonial economies continued to struggle, Black ‘idleness’ was promoted as a cause of the failure of emancipation. This narrative fostered tensions and prejudices that would go on to affect descendants who ventured to Britain for economic and educational opportunities in the mid-twentieth century.¹⁰⁵ The acknowledgement of this reality helps to shape the claim for reparations, as abolition and ultimately freedom did little to atone for the harm associated with the transatlantic slave trade and slavery.

100 Nicholas Draper suggests that debates on compensation mainly addressed the nature of compensation rather than questions of its existence following Canning’s resolution, which were created in response to the 15 May 1823 abolition debate; see Draper, *The Price of Emancipation*, 92–100, and ‘Abolition of slavery’, HC Deb.

101 See Draper’s discussion of ‘property in men’ in *The Price of Emancipation*, 76–85, and discussion of private property rights in ‘Abolition of Slavery’, HC Deb.

102 Buxton viewed slave owners’ claim over the bodies of

enslaved persons as an ‘outrage’ and refused to recognise the claim as a ‘right’; this is expressed in ‘Abolition of slavery’, HC Deb.

103 Barham II, *Considerations on the Abolition*, 23–26.

104 Draper, *The Price of Emancipation*, 115–137.

105 Beckles, H.M. (2021) ‘Part 1. British emancipation as wealth extraction’, in *How Britain Underdeveloped the Caribbean: A Reparation Response to Europe’s Legacy of Plunder and Poverty*, Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 3–34.

History shows us that Britain pays compensation. For 182 years, the country grappled with the debt of slave compensation; the programme, as historian Nicholas Draper has stated, represents ‘the largest single financial operation undertaken by the British state to date’.¹⁰⁶ While the Slave Compensation Programme does not reflect the tenets of reparations, it does set a historical precedent for Britain’s engagement with compensation in the twenty-first century.¹⁰⁷ At some point, country leaders will have to come to the table, as calls and proposals for reparations will only grow.

The CRC has promoted its ‘Ten Point Plan for Reparatory Justice’ for over a decade, and with the plan addressing the needs of Caribbean citizens, descendant communities in Britain will need to devise their formal agenda.

Forums and conferences hosted by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)

for Afrikan Reparations have worked to raise awareness on the issue. Acting as a secretariat for the APPG and leader of the Stop the Maangamizi campaign, Esther Xosei has called for the creation of an All-Party Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry for Truth and Reparatory Justice in Westminster and European parliaments. Xosei describes the proposed commission as a space to enable dialogues and testimonies, effectually promoting ‘self-repair’ among descendant communities.¹⁰⁸

The commission will serve as a crucial step towards repair, but further action and organisation will be necessary for descendants in Britain to launch their plan for reparatory justice. Under the commission, a formal working group comprising scholars, activists and community leaders should be established to produce a report in line with the 2023 Brattle report. This report should highlight the ‘quantified damages’ owed to descendants and make

recommendations to address the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade, colonial slavery and colonisation affecting both descendant communities in Britain and wider British society. Researchers may find the Slave Compensation Programme helpful in this instance, as it could serve as a template for managing country debt taken on to facilitate reparations plans and the distribution of compensation via direct payments to descendants. This, in addition to the testimonials, would assist the commission in launching a campaign for reparatory justice and inform the government on the remedies necessary to combat these harmful legacies. At that point, an apology and action must follow.

Some may remember the historic apology issued by the prime minister of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte, in December 2022, for the Dutch state’s involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, slavery and colonialism. The prime minister’s address was followed by the development of programmatic initiatives to address the

legacies of harm endured by people of African descent in the Netherlands’ former colonies. At the end of his address, Rutte reflected on the past and the journey forward, sentiments that should encourage country leaders, including Prime Minister Keir Starmer, to do the same:

The book of our shared history has many pages that fill us – as people of the twenty-first century – with dismay and horror. And with deep shame. Those pages cannot be erased with an apology, nor should they be. We cannot change the past, but we can face up to it.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Draper, The Price of Emancipation, 270.

¹⁰⁷ See Araujo, A.L. (2017) ‘Introduction’, in Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: A Transnational and Comparative History, London: Bloomsbury Academic, for a brief discussion of compensated emancipation programmes and reparations as ‘interrelated’ but distinct in functioning.

¹⁰⁸ Xosei, E. (2025) ‘Transnational approaches to repair in the UK’ Journal of American Studies 58: 467–473.

¹⁰⁹ Government of the Netherlands (2022) ‘Speech by Prime Minister Mark Rutte about the role of the Netherlands in the history of slavery’, 19 December, www.government.nl/documents/speeches/2022/12/19/speech-by-prime-minister-mark-rutte-about-the-role-of-the-netherlands-in-the-history-of-slavery.

CONCLUSION

The global movement for reparations for Africans and people of African descent will define our twenty-first century and deepen the way future generations understand and engage in justice, healing and historical memory. In Britain, the Slave Compensation Programme serves as a crucial reminder of wealth accumulated from enslaved bodies and, in the aftermath of slavery's abolition, the preservation of racial and economic systems of oppression among descendant communities. There is no transformative future without reparations, and compensation will serve as an essential measure to enable the remedy of past harm. In Britain, this journey can begin with the creation of the All-Party Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry for Truth and Reparatory Justice, followed by a formal apology from the prime minister and continued action guided by descendant communities.

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WHY WE NEED TO KEEP TALKING ABOUT REPARATIONS

LAVINYA STENNETT
AUTHOR AND FOUNDER/CEO OF
THE BLACK CURRICULUM

Reparations – a word that incites passionate debate, resistance and, too often, waves of silencing and misconceptions. It is a term weighted with history, resistance and possibility.

For too long, the UK’s public discourse, especially at the highest levels of political power, has positioned reparations as an impractical, fringe idea, a demand rooted in the past rather than the present.¹¹⁰ But this framing is neither historically accurate nor morally defensible.

Reparations are not just about what happened – they are about what continues to happen. They are about the unhealed legacies of slavery and colonialism that remain embedded in today’s political economy, in housing disparities, health inequalities, education gaps and the racial wealth divide.

110 BBC News (2024) ‘Starmer rejects calls for slavery reparation talks’, 23 October, www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crlnrjd3087o.

Despite growing public awareness, several harmful misconceptions continue to cloud the reparations debate. These misunderstandings distort what reparations are, who they are for and what they can accomplish.

‘REPARATIONS CAN ONLY COME FROM GOVERNMENTS’

It is true that governments played central roles in the transatlantic slave trade and in the colonial exploitation of Africa, the Caribbean and Asia. And

it is right that they should be held accountable. However, as historian Ana Lucia Araujo notes, the responsibility for reparative justice extends beyond the state.¹¹¹ Financial institutions, universities, corporations, charities and families that profited from slavery and empire all have a role to play. Recent commitments by institutions such as the Church of England and by the Trevelyan family demonstrate that reparations can and should be pursued across society.¹¹²

111 Araujo, A.L. (2017) *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: A Transnational and Comparative History*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

112 BBC News (2023) ‘Laura Trevelyan: Why I quit the BBC to fight for slavery reparations’, 27 March.

113 CARICOM (no date) ‘CARICOM ten point plan for reparatory justice’, <https://caricom.org/caricom-ten-point-plan-for-reparatory-justice>.

114 Otele, O. (2023) ‘More than money: The logic of slavery reparations’, *Guardian*, 31 March, www.theguardian.com/news/ng-interactive/2023/March/31/more-than-money-the-logic-of-slavery-reparations.

115 Khan, O. (2020) *The Colour of Money*, London: Runnymede Trust www.runnymedetrust.org/publications/the-colour-of-money.

‘REPARATIONS ARE JUST ABOUT MONEY’

The emphasis on financial compensation – while important – is too narrow. The CARICOM ‘Ten Point Plan for Reparatory Justice’ offers a broader, multidimensional model.¹¹³ It calls not only for payments but also for educational reform, psychological rehabilitation, technology transfer and debt cancellation. As scholars such as Olivette Otele have argued, reparations must address the full spectrum of damage caused: physical, economic, cultural and emotional.¹¹⁴ In this sense, reparations are as much about rebuilding as they are about redress.

‘REPARATIONS ARE ABOUT THE PAST’

This myth is perhaps the most persistent – and the most dangerous. The racialised wealth gap in the UK today is a direct result of policies and practices rooted in slavery and empire. In 2022, the Runnymede Trust found that Black Caribbean households hold, on average, just 20p for every £1 held by White British households.¹¹⁵ These disparities are not accidents of history: they are the continuation of it. Reparations are not about looking backwards – they are about creating forward-facing solutions to entrenched injustice.

A MORE EXPANSIVE VISION OF REPARATIVE JUSTICE

Reparations are not simply transactional. They are transformative. They involve acknowledging past wrongs, addressing present inequalities and designing futures based on justice. The forms that reparations can take are numerous and diverse.

EDUCATION REFORM

Curricula across the UK continue to erase or misrepresent Black history. Initiatives such as the Black Curriculum challenge this erasure and argue for education as a key site of repair.¹¹⁶

Incorporating truthful histories of empire and resistance into schools is not just symbolic: it shapes generations.

CULTURAL REPATRIATION

Thousands of African and Caribbean cultural artefacts remain in British museums, often acquired through theft or coercion. Institutions such as the British Museum house these objects not as relics of curiosity, but as evidence of a deeper colonial violence. Returning them is a tangible step towards justice and dignity.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Former colonies are among the most climate-vulnerable regions in the world, despite contributing least to causes of the crisis.

Reparations must include climate finance, as outlined in reports by the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent,¹¹⁷ to address this ecological debt.

LAND AND WEALTH REDISTRIBUTION

Historical land dispossession – whether through enclosure, settler colonialism, or urban gentrification – continues to deny Black and Indigenous communities economic sovereignty. Redistributive justice may include land return, housing support, and targeted investment in Black-owned enterprises and communities.¹¹⁸

116 The Black Curriculum (no date) 'Re-imagining the future of education through Black British history', <https://theblackcurriculum.com/>.

117 OHCHR (2024) Reparatory Justice for People of African Descent, Geneva, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/reparatory-justice-african-descent-people-1-en.pdf.

118 CARICOM, 'Ten point plan'.

REPARATIONS AS REALISTIC, NECESSARY AND ALREADY UNDERWAY

Sceptics often label reparations as unrealistic. Yet history tells another story. Formerly 'radical' ideas – abolition, civil rights, enfranchisement – are now seen as moral imperatives. Reparations are part of that lineage. International precedents abound: Germany has paid reparations to Holocaust survivors, Canada to Indigenous residential school survivors and the US to Japanese Americans interned during the Second World War.¹¹⁹

In the UK, the payment of £20 million to slave owners after abolition in 1833 – the largest government bailout at the time – was not seen as impractical. It was deemed necessary.

119 OHCHR (2005), Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law, Geneva, www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-and-guidelines-right-remedy-and-reparation.

The debt incurred was paid off by British taxpayers until 2015.²²⁰

If reparations were possible for the perpetrators of slavery, they are certainly possible for its descendants.

Furthermore, the movement is already happening. Descendants of slaveholding families, such as Laura Trevelyan and John Dower, have stepped forward to apologise and contribute to reparative funds.¹²¹ Their actions reflect a broader truth: reparations are not just about guilt – they are about responsibility. They are about the willingness to act, not a burden to explain away.

120 Olusoga, D. (2018) 'The Treasury's tweet shows slavery is still misunderstood', Guardian, 12 February, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/12/treasury-tweet-slavery-compensate-slave-owners.

121 BBC News, 'Laura Trevelyan: Why I quit the BBC'.

SCEPTICS OFTEN
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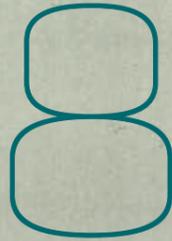
Reparations are not a plea for charity. They are a call for justice. They ask us to imagine a society rooted in equity and shared responsibility. As Black feminist thinkers have long reminded us, healing is a collective act. Writers such as Alexis Pauline Gumbs¹²² and Saidiya Hartman¹²³ frame repair as a spiritual, emotional and intellectual process – a way of reconnecting with what was lost and what could still be built.

Reparations are not about punishment. They are about transformation. They are not a threat to progress, but a necessary foundation for it. The question is not whether Britain can afford reparations. The question is whether it can afford to ignore them any longer.

¹²² Gumbs, A.P. (2020) *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*, Chico, CA: AK Press.

¹²³ Hartman, S. (2007) *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

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FROM 'AID' TO REPARATIONS FOR GLOBAL JUSTICE

NATALIE SHARPLES

HEAD OF POLICY AND CAMPAIGNS,
HEALTH POVERTY ACTION

The year 2025 may mark not only the end of so-called 'aid' but of norms that defined the post-World War era.

As a result of the 90 per cent cut to US 'aid', followed swiftly by cuts by the UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland, vaccination programmes have halted, vital food aid ceased, and over the course of a few months tens thousands of people have died.¹²⁴ One estimate predicts that 25 million more people will die by 2040 as a result of the US funding cuts alone.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ See PEPFAR Program (no date) 'Impact tracker', <https://pepfar.impactcounter.com>.

¹²⁵ Mallapaty, S. (2025) '25 million deaths: What could happen if the US ends global health funding', Nature 641(8061): 17–18.

Some of the poorest economies have been plunged into catastrophe, with currency devaluations and plummeting GDP¹²⁶ causing budget deficits, lay-offs of health workers, and increased borrowing and debt. The UN has been thrown into crisis, with restructuring and talk of mergers, forced to make what the WHO's deputy director general has described as 'terrible' choices.¹²⁷

People are losing their lives as those in power in minority-world donor countries play with the lives of people in the majority world. The power they wield reveals the dark underbelly of the aid system, which emerged out of the colonial period as an obligation of European powers towards the development of their colonies, later rebranded as 'benevolence' and 'charity'.¹²⁸

While 'aid' has undoubtedly saved many lives, it has just as certainly served minority-world interests and enabled the colonial power dynamics to continue. The 1980s structural adjustment programmes that forced African and Latin American

countries to cut public spending, privatise services and liberalise economies were both obvious and vicious. Today some of the tactics are more subtle, such as creating conditions for foreign corporate investment, enabling corporate tax theft and quietly pursuing donor agendas such as the so-called 'war on drugs' under the premise of a responsibility to the world's poor. Furthermore, the fact that 'aid' can be cut so brutally and irresponsibly in response to the political whims of Donald Trump or to appeal to right-leaning voters in the UK exposes the failures of the 'aid' narrative.

Speaking about the UK's decision to slash 40 per cent of its 'aid' budget, the Minister for International Development announced that the UK's future focus would be on 'sharing the UK's expertise', conjuring up images of the colonial civilising mission. As the UK's Governor-General of India, Lord William Bentinck, said in 1835: 'The great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India'.

126 Cilliers J. (2025) 'Data modelling reveals the heavy toll of USAID cuts on Africa', Institute for Security Studies, 28 February, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/data-modelling-reveals-the-heavy-toll-of-usaid-cuts-on-africa>.

127 Quoted in Ravelo, J.L. (2025) 'With US funding loss, WHO forced to make 'terrible' programmatic choices', Devex, 18 March, [https://www.devex.com/news/with-us-](https://www.devex.com/news/with-us-funding-loss-who-forced-to-make-terrible-programmatic-choices-109658)

[funding-loss-who-forced-to-make-terrible-programmatic-choices-109658](https://www.devex.com/news/with-us-funding-loss-who-forced-to-make-terrible-programmatic-choices-109658).

128 Manji, F. and O'Coill, C. (2002) 'The missionary position: NGOs and development in Africa', *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-) 78(3): 567–583.

AS A RESULT OF THE 90 PER CENT CUT TO US 'AID', FOLLOWED SWIFTLY BY CUTS BY THE UK, FRANCE, GERMANY, THE NETHERLANDS AND SWITZERLAND, VACCINATION PROGRAMMES HAVE HALTED, VITAL FOOD AID CEASED, AND OVER THE COURSE OF A FEW MONTHS TENS THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE HAVE DIED. ONE ESTIMATE PREDICTS THAT 25 MILLION MORE PEOPLE WILL DIE BY 2040 AS A RESULT OF THE US FUNDING CUTS ALONE.

HEALTH POVERTY ACTION'S
2017 RESEARCH SHOWED THAT
WHILE US\$162 BILLION
ENTERS AFRICAN COUNTRIES
EACH YEAR, MAINLY IN LOANS,
PERSONAL REMITTANCES AND
'AID' IN THE FORM OF GRANTS,
\$203 BILLION IS EXTRACTED
THROUGH FOREIGN
CORPORATIONS REPATRIATING
PROFITS AND ILLEGALLY
MOVING MONEY OUT OF THE
CONTINENT OR THROUGH COSTS
IMPOSED BY THE REST OF THE
WORLD AS A RESULT OF CLIMATE
CHANGE – A NET THEFT OF
\$41 BILLION EACH YEAR.

For decades the 'aid' system has successfully masked ferocious oppression and exploitation behind a narrative of 'helping' the poor in the majority world. Governments in the (mostly white) minority world have funded health, education and income generation programmes, while simultaneously enabling the post-colonial plunder of the majority world. 'Aid' has papered over colonial resource extraction, unequal power relations, and the inequitable consequences of climate change and unfair trade deals, and it enabled minority-world governments to keep corrupt and dictatorial regimes engaged in terrible human rights violations 'on their side' during the Cold War.

Meanwhile, citizens of the minority world are dishonestly told they are generously giving money to other countries to 'solve' their poverty, something that can never

be achieved while a range of exploitative structures and policies continue to create it. As writer Teju Cole eloquently put it, 'The white saviour supports brutal policies in the morning, founds charities in the afternoon, and receives awards in the evening'.¹²⁹

The scale of this continuing exploitation is formidable. Health Poverty Action's 2017 research showed that while US\$162 billion enters African countries each year, mainly in loans, personal remittances and 'aid' in the form of grants, \$203 billion is extracted through foreign corporations repatriating profits and illegally moving money out of the continent or through costs imposed by the rest of the world as a result of climate change – a net theft of \$41 billion each year.¹³⁰

129 Cole, T. (2012) 'The white saviour industrial complex', The Atlantic, 21 March, www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843.

130 Global Justice Now (2017) *Honest Accounts 2017: How the World Profits from Africa's Wealth*, London, www.globaljustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/honest_accounts_2017_web_final_updated.pdf

In 2024, the Tax Justice Network estimated that globally almost US\$500 billion (£492 billion) is stolen in tax each year as a result of multinational corporations and wealthy individuals using tax havens to underpay tax. Of this, \$340 billion is a result of corporate tax abuse. Countries of the majority world are the hardest hit, losing proportionately more of their collected tax revenue, while the minority world is the enabler. One third of all losses to corporate tax abuse are a result of the actions of EU countries, while another third is due to the UK and its ‘second empire’ – its overseas territories which operate as tax havens.¹³¹

The wealth of the minority world is therefore built on its exploitation and impoverishment of the majority world, both historically and in the present day. Perhaps one of the most pernicious aspects of the ‘aid’ architecture is the way it has cemented global race and power inequities by perpetuating the neo-colonial idea that people in the majority world are inferior and need help. This has created widespread public hostility in the minority world.¹³² Poverty is seen

as a failing of the poor (people¹³³ and countries¹³⁴), rather than a systemic and created injustice.

As well as undermining solidarity between people in the minority world and those in the majority world, this has also undermined solidarity between different groups within the minority world – such as between migrants and other parts of the working class. It fuels nationalism. People address their anger towards fellow victims, while the elites and corporations creating the poverty (in all parts of the world) continue to do so with impunity.

‘What’s it got to do with us?’ is a common reaction of those inconvenienced by demonstrations against the massacre in Gaza. When a rose-tinted view of the UK’s historic role is combined with narratives about the UK’s benevolence in the face of escalating global poverty, is it not surprising that people lack empathy or feel no responsibility for the UK’s role in creating the current genocide. So is the end of ‘aid’ a good thing? The swift, brutally and irresponsible withdrawing of funding in a way that

creates economic instability and dying children can never be described as a good thing. However, exposing the historical and current truths does open up an opportunity to demand the redistribution of global wealth, based on honest reparations and commitment to non-repetition, instead of disguising actions of self-interest as charity. So how to create a reparative approach to global justice?

First we must be honest and vocal about the causes – both historic and current – of global poverty. We need to speak about colonialism and the slave trade, and their current day manifestations, and educate our children about them. At a government level, commitment to speaking – and to teaching in schools – a more honest depiction of history would be a good start. Efforts should be focused on supporting national governments to rebuild themselves from externally imposed systemic impoverishment in order to be able to provide for their citizens without international ‘assistance’. Cancelling debts, many offered under unjust conditions, is an essential and urgent component.

Any alternative financing for so-called ‘development’ that should go to governments to fulfil their responsibilities to their citizens must be based on reparations for the damage caused, not ‘aid’ or ‘charity’. This could include looking for other ways to fund global redistributive finance. Taxes on wealth and legalising, regulating and taxing the illicit drugs trade are among the options that require urgent exploration.

Finally, and most importantly, the governments of the minority world must stop causing harm. Global deals must be made on a fair playing field. Minority-world countries must take responsibility for the climate chaos they have created and implement swift, robust action to curb it; they must negotiate fair trade deals that benefit both sides; and foreign companies extracting resources from the majority world must be subject to robust regulation and fair taxes.

The end of ‘aid’ provides an opportunity to expose this vast contradiction that has existed at the heart of global politics for decades. Let’s make sure the many lives lost as a result of these irresponsible cuts are not in vain.

131 Tax Justice Network (2024) State of Tax Justice 2024, Bristol, <https://taxjustice.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/State-of-Tax-Justice-2024-English-Tax-Justice-Network.pdf>.

132 Difford, D. (2025) ‘Britons support cutting overseas aid to increase defence spending’, YouGov, 3 March, https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/51691-britons-support-cutting-overseas-aid-to-increase-defence-spending?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

133 ‘While the public does recognise, at a high level, that the economy disadvantages lower-income people in some important ways, when members of the public think about why poverty happens they tend to focus on individual and group character traits, such as personal laziness and poor values’; Volmert, A. (2026) Talking about Poverty: How Experts and the Public Understand Poverty in the United Kingdom, Washington, DC: Frameworks Institute, www.frameworksinstitute.org/assets/files/PDF/JRF_UK_Poverty_MTG_2016.pdf.

134 The most common reason for why countries are poor cited by 52% of respondents to the Department for International Development public attitudes survey was corruption in those countries; Henson, S., Lindstrom, J., Haddad, L. and Mulmi, R. (2010) ‘Public perceptions

of international development and support for aid in the UK: Results of a qualitative enquiry’, Working Paper 2010, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.2040-0209.2010.00353_2.x.

9

THE ENSLAVED PAID THE PRICE FOR FREEDOM

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Far from being an unimaginable policy agenda, reparations were central in the abolition of slavery in the British Empire. In order to secure the political will to end the forced labour of Africans, the British government made, by some measures, the largest ever payment in its history. So proud of this history was Her Majesty's Treasury that on 9 February 2018, the following surprising #FridayFact was posted on its Twitter account:

Did you know that in 1833, Britain used £20 million, 40 per cent of its national budget, to buy freedom for all slaves in the Empire? The amount of money borrowed for the Slavery Abolition Act was so large that it wasn't paid off until 2015. Which means that living British citizens helped pay to end the slave trade.¹³⁶

136 Andrews, K. (2021) *The New Age of Empire: How Racism and Colonialism Still Rule the World*, London: Penguin.

In case the reality of this fact has not sunk in, this amount of money so large that we were paying off the debt almost 200 years later was not given to those who were enslaved but to the very people who were dispensing the torture, murder, rape and imprisonment. Esteemed Caribbean academic Sir Hilary Beckles calls the 1833 Abolition of Slavery Act ‘one of the most racist pieces of legislation ever formulated in the British parliament’¹³⁷ because of the unprecedented transfer of wealth to the enslavers. Restitution to the victims of enslavement is not an issue whose time has come but one that is long overdue.

To understand the importance of the payment of these reparations to slave owners, we need to truly understand its scale. As the #FridayFact noted, it represented 40 per cent of the national budget at the time. That would be the equivalent of the current government bailing out the enslavers with more than £500 billion. But 1833 was a time before the welfare state, so the government spent far less money.

The equivalent in modern terms when economic growth is taken into account is often quoted as £17 billion.¹³⁸

137 Beckles, H. (2016) ‘Britain’s Black debt’, lecture, Oxford University, 26 January.

138 Olusoga, D. (2018) ‘The Treasury’s tweet shows slavery is still misunderstood’, Guardian, 12 February, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/12/treasury-tweet-slavery-compensate-slave-owners.

But that is a gross underestimate, because we have to consider the amount of money in relation to the wealth of the time;. In 1833, £20 million would have been 5 per cent of the UK’s GDP, and the same percentage of GDP today is more than £100 billion.

Therefore, the British government paid the equivalent of £100 billion in order to buy the freedom of enslaved people.¹³⁹ The only bailout of any industry that is comparable is the £200 billion paid to the banking sector after the 2008 financial crash. The £100 billion is a historical anomaly, but the transfer of wealth to the enslavers was more staggering.

The Abolition Act was passed in 1833 and came into force in 1834, but slavery was not actually over until a full four years later in 1838. Beckles is so against the Act not only because of the cash payment to the enslavers, but because those who were enslaved were also forced into a four-year period of ‘apprenticeship’ during which they had to toil on the plantations for free for three-quarters of their time. This was justified by the claim that enslaved people had to learn to be free. He estimates that the value of this forced labour was more than the £100 billion.

139 Milne, C. (2020) ‘This is what we know about the government loan to pay slave owners compensation after slavery was abolished in 1833’, Full Facet, 2 July, <https://fullfact.org/economy/slavery-abolition-act-loan/>.

In 2034, when Britain inevitably engages in jubilant self-congratulation for the bicentennial of abolition, the reality will be that the anniversary of the completion of abolition will not take place for another four years, because of the length of time for which enslaved people had to pay for their own freedom.

Beckles is right that the Abolition Act is not something to celebrate but was a mechanism of further exploitation. The travesty of how slavery was abolished brings to mind Malcolm X’s analysis of reparations:

If you stick a knife in my back 9 inches and pull it out 6 inches, there’s no progress. If you pull it all the way out, that’s not progress.

*The progress is healing the wound that the blow made. And they won’t even admit the knife is there.*¹⁴⁰

140 Malcolm X (1964), television interview, www.facebook.com/profile/100064758128618/search/?q=if%20you%20stick%20a%20knife%20in%20my%20back/.

If we are charitable regarding abolition, it represented pulling the knife out possibly three inches. The formerly enslaved were left destitute on the very same land they had been kidnapped to with little choice but to survive at the whims of their former owners, who were made even more wealthy due to their so-called freedom. Conditions in the Caribbean barely improved in any meaningful sense, leading to such uprisings as the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica in 1865, which was brutally put down by the British.¹⁴¹

The worst way to view slavery is as a distinct harm, separate to the genocide of the natives and continued colonial exploitation after abolition, and into the present day. The knife in our backs is not slavery: it is white supremacy, and that is a system that has continued unabated since abolition.

141 Hutton, C. (1995) ‘Review of “The Killing Time”: The Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica, by G. Heuman’, Social and Economic Studies 44(1): 191–205.

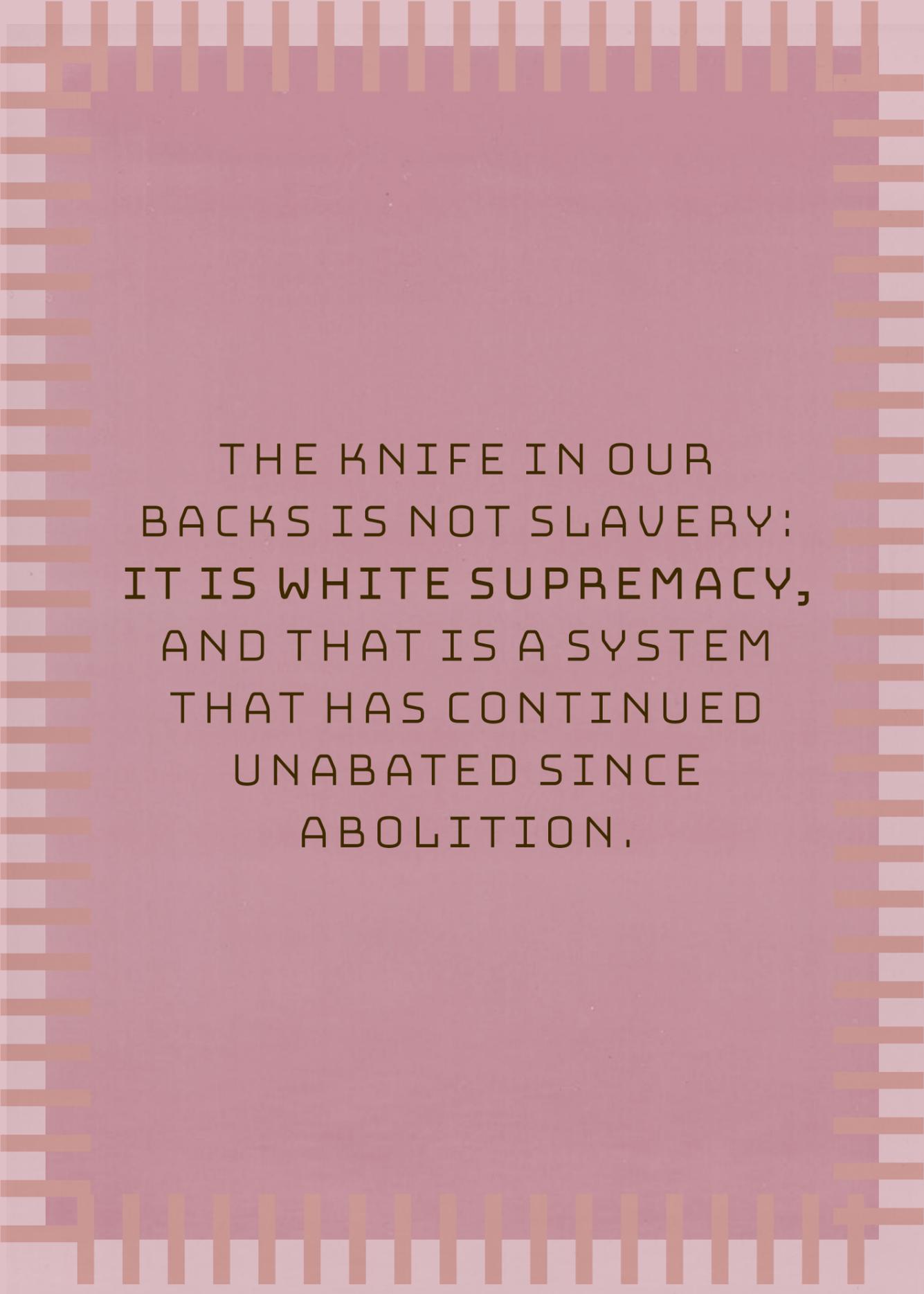
Any honest appraisal of reparations has to acknowledge that transatlantic slavery caused significant damage, and that nothing has been done to repair the wound. The poverty that still plagues the Caribbean cannot be separated from the vast majority of the population being trafficked, enslaved and tortured on the islands. Because of the debt that is clearly owed and has never been repaid, the population has never been able to catch up and the supposedly independent nations find themselves in a dependent relationship with their former mother countries.

This side of the equation seems relatively obvious, but its counterpart is not so well understood. In rejecting reparations, I have often heard the argument that no one is alive now who was alive then, and therefore there are no perpetrators left to repay the debt. But just as the poverty from slavery is still with us, so is the wealth.

The British government spent 40 per cent of its budget bailing out the slave owners because of the centrality of the system to the nation's finances. Just like the big banks, the plantation economy was too big to fail. None of the wealth which propelled Britain, and the rest of Europe, would have been possible without enslaving millions of Africans.

The much-vaunted Industrial Revolution was powered by gold, silver, tobacco, indigo, sugar and cotton, all of which were procured in the Americas by enslaved labourers.¹⁴² The steam engine, canals, cotton mills, trains, everything that is the foundation of the West, depended on slavery. This is why there was so much objection to the abolition of a system that built the country, as well as the fact that many of the politicians were either enslavers themselves or funded by them. The £100 billion may seem like a lot, but in reality it was drop in the ocean of wealth that flooded into Britain off the backs of those who were enslaved.

¹⁴² Williams, E. (1964) *Capitalism and Slavery*, London: Andre Deutsch.



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If we see abolition as not a noble gesture to enslaved people but a gift to the enslavers meant to ease the transition to other forms of racial oppression, then the case for reparations becomes even clearer. Abolition did not happen because Britain wanted it to: the country had to move into a new economic form of labour exploitation, and the Abolition Act paved the way for it to do so. The death knell of slavery came when Britain abolished the trading of enslaved people in 1807. Prime Minister William Pitt (the younger) made the calculation in 1786 that British plantations could breed future generations of enslaved people, giving them a competitive advantage over French colonies that depended on continued human trafficking and so put William Wilberforce on his abolitionist crusade.¹⁴³

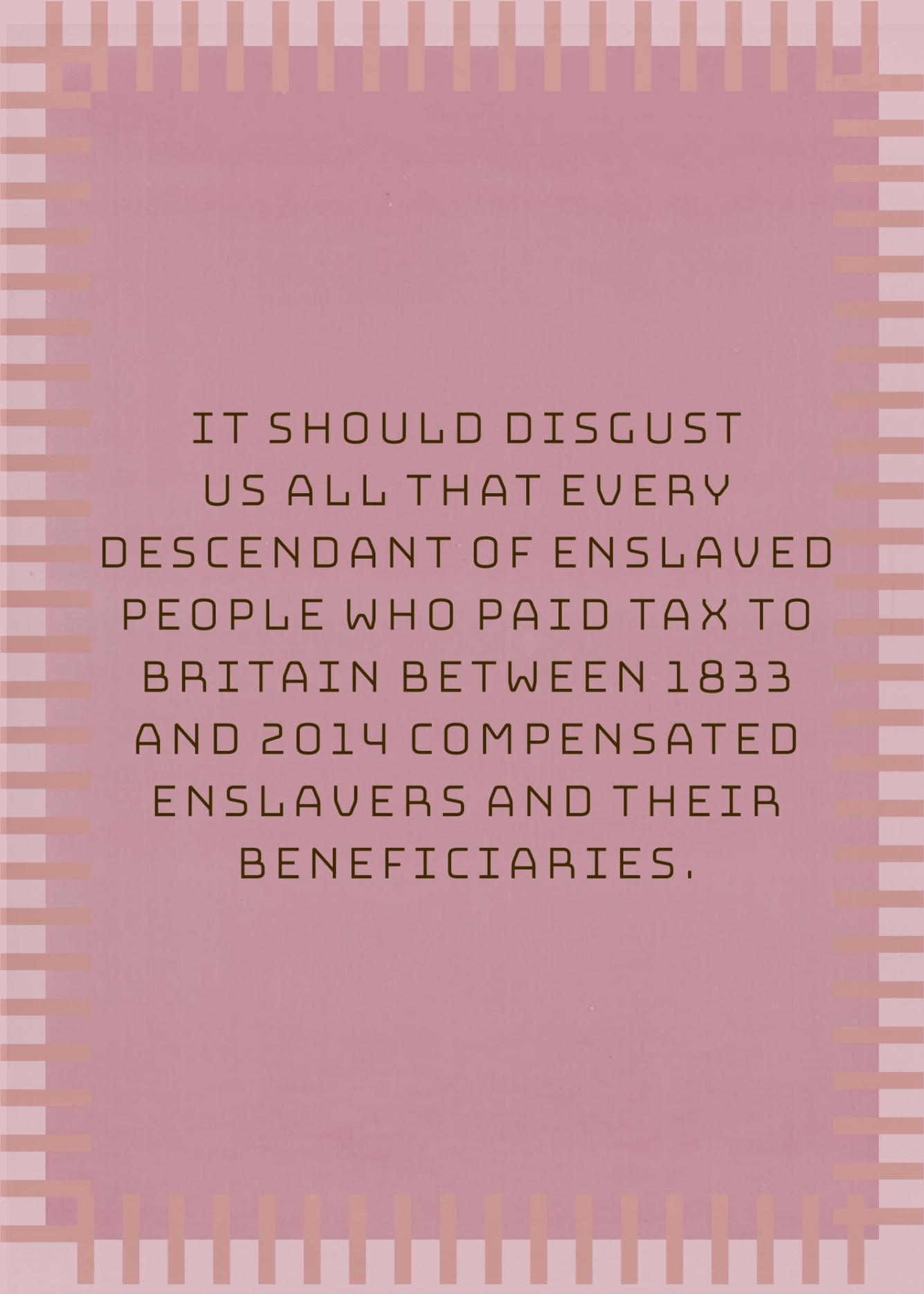
But the political will to end the trade came only after the Haitian revolution in 1804, when those who were enslaved rebelled and claimed their freedom by defeating the French, Spanish and British forces that tried to maintain the system of slavery in the former colony. Approximately 60 per cent of the enslaved Haitians were African-born, so importing new Africans became seen as

dangerous: far better to rely on those who had been 'broken in' from birth. Resistance therefore led to the first abolition, as is true of the second. Rather than breed future generations of enslaved people, after the trade was abolished, as Stella Dadzie¹⁴⁴ explains, the birth rate on the plantations plummeted, only returning to previous rates after complete abolition of the system. In other words, Black women knew what was expected of them and refused to comply. This meant that by the 1830s there were far fewer enslaved people on British plantations than had been expected, and the Sam Sharpe rebellion in 1832 brought home the fragility of a system keeping people in bondage like horses and cattle.

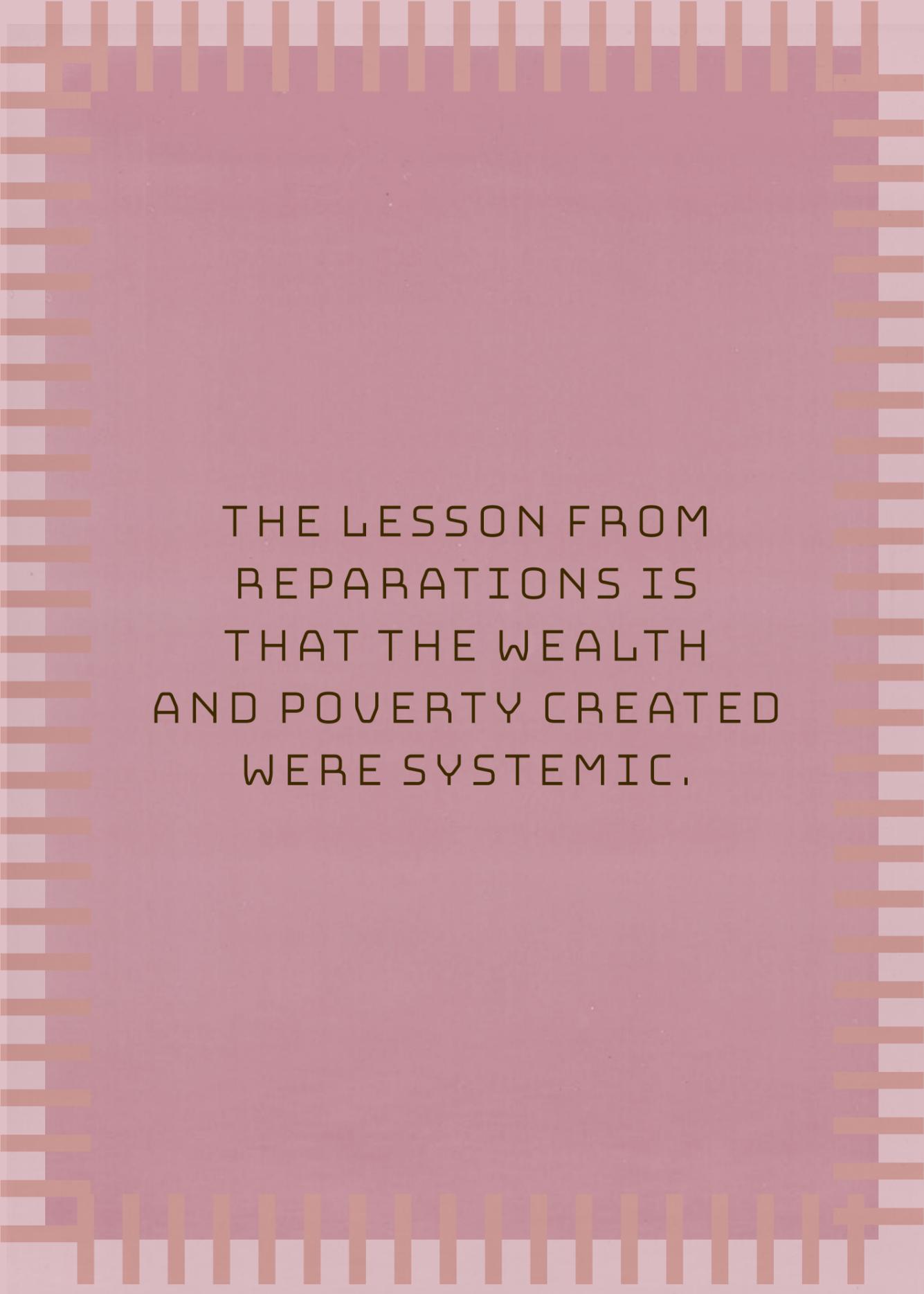
Those who were enslaved themselves made the system unworkable. In addition, the wealth generated from slavery allowed the British Empire to swell in the East, and sugar and cotton could be produced more cheaply in other parts of the Empire after slavery had been made far more difficult. Slavery fuelled the transition to the new forms of imperialism. It is the foundation upon which modern wealth was built, making the culpability for repaying the debt as clear as the need to do so.

¹⁴³ James, C.L.R. (2001) *Black Jacobins*, London: Penguin.

¹⁴⁴ Dadzie, S. (2020) *A Kick in the Belly: Women, Slavery and Resistance*, London: Verso.



IT SHOULD DISGUST
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In terms of immediate concrete policy proposals, the low-hanging fruit is the reparations payments to the slave owners. Researchers at University College London¹⁴⁵ have tracked the almost 50,000 people and institutions that received payments. This includes former British prime minister David Cameron, and his wife's family, as well as the founders of brewing company Greene King,¹⁴⁶ which made a high-profile yet empty apology for its links to slavery in the heady days of the Black Lives Matter summer. It would not be difficult to levy a specific tax on any company or descendant who benefited from slave owner reparations. It should disgust us all that every descendant of enslaved people who paid tax to Britain between 1833 and 2014 compensated enslavers and their beneficiaries.

The very basic start would be to compensate each and every one of us for our own personal contribution plus that of our relatives. This is the only direct payment we should seek for reparations.

145 Hall, C., Draper, N., McClelland, K., Donnington, K. and Lang, R. (2014) *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The lesson from reparations is that the wealth and poverty created were systemic. Individual payments may remove the knife a little but can never heal the wound. A reparatory justice fund should be created, funded by the government, along with a levy on companies that did specific harms that can be used for the collective good of Black communities. In the Caribbean and Africa, this would have to be administered by governments but should be treated separately to debates about cancelling debt (those impositions are their own unique harm) and to the aid budget.

In the UK the fund should be delivered by an independent group decided by a coalition of Black organisations. I should stress that this would not, in and of itself, heal the wound. To be free, we need to build a better world that we design ourselves. Significant reparatory payments can only ever be fuel for this work, and can never be mistaken for the solution.

146 Rawlinson, K. (2020) 'Lloyd's of London and Greene King to make slave trade reparations', *Guardian*, 18 June, www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/18/lloyds-of-london-and-greene-king-to-make-slave-trade-reparations.

10

PLURIVERSAL REPARATIONS: A MANIFESTO

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¹⁴⁷ Seeding Reparations is a new collective working to advance reparative justice in the UK and internationally, particularly in food and agriculture. We centre justice that involves directly challenging colonial legacies and continuities, while upholding diverse lived and rooted ways of being with land. Through our work, we seek to dismantle concentrations of power and privilege associated with white supremacy, patriarchal control, military violence and corporate domination, which damage diverse ways of being and knowing around the world. Organisational affiliations: Andre (Seeding Reparations CIC), Elsa (University of Nottingham), Hana (independent), Javier (Anne Matthews Trust), Jéssica (Somos Semillas), Josephina Kwando-Yaa (Rice and Beans/Garden of Afriika), Samson (Miknaf Ha'aretz), Saurabh (University of Sussex), Tatiana (Seeding Reparations CIC) and Tom (Seeding Reparations CIC).

Since the sixteenth century, Europe's enslavement of peoples and associated processes of colonialism have inflicted extreme violence, cultural oppression, extensive plunder, and other traumas and injustices around the world. Many injustices are exacerbated today by colonial legacies, by continuities enacted in settler-colonies, and by colonial constitutions of modernising development and progress worldwide. We consider these legacies, continuities and constitutions to also lie behind climate and other environmental injustices.

To address such injustices and enable societies, communities and individuals to heal from colonial traumas, multiple calls for reparations have been made – and some local reparations attempted.¹⁴⁸ So far, the focus has been on apologies, debt cancellation, financial compensation, non-repetition of harms, rehabilitation of victims and survivors, and restoring/ensuring their rights to land.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Safransky, S., Noterman, E. and Lewis, M. (2025) 'Land reparations are possible – and over 225 US communities are already working to make amends for slavery and colonization', *The Conversation*, 1 April, <https://theconversation.com/land-reparations-are-possible-and-over-225-us-communities-are-already-working-to-make-amends-for-slavery-and-colonization-246106>.

¹⁴⁹ See for example CARICOM (no date) 'CARICOM ten point plan for reparatory justice', <https://caricom.org/caricom-ten-point-plan-for-reparatory-justice>; African

Union (2025) '38th African Union Summit to focus on reparatory justice and racial healing under the theme: 'Justice for Africans and people of African descent through reparations'', Press release, 28 January, <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20250128/38th-african-union-summit-focus-reparatory-justice-and-racial-healing-under>; Sanford-Xosei, E. (2020) 'Reparations and the fight for life', *The Ecologist*, 31 July, <https://theecologist.org/2020/July/31/reparations-and-fight-life>; Táíwò, O. (2022) *Reconsidering Reparations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Existing efforts thus centre flows of words, money and resources within and between modern nation states, to ensure victims' and survivors' health and wellbeing. Complementing those efforts and learning from them, we demand reparations for diverse worlds that have been violated through histories, continuities and legacies of enslavement and colonialism. Focusing on worlds (Box 1) means acknowledging that humans are always interconnected with non-human ecologies. For humans to heal from colonial traumas through reparative justice, connected ecologies and climates must heal too.

WORLDS

A world is not just the earth as a whole but also a specific pattern of foundational relations spanning cultures, ecologies and climates. In this relational sense, there are many worlds existing on earth,¹⁵⁰ as cultures still engage with ecologies in an immense diversity of ways. However, many worlds have been (violently) damaged by colonial relations, as power and privilege have accumulated in the UK and other similarly modern societies.

150 De la Cadena, M. and Blaser, M. (2018) *A World of Many Worlds*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

151 Getachew, A. (2019) *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

152 Escobar, A. (2018) *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

153 Arora, S., Ghosh, B. and Stirling, A. (2025) 'Decolonising innovation in sustainability transitions for pluriversal justice', in *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions* (forthcoming).

154 Krenak, A. (2024) *Ancestral Future*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

155 Gotkowitz, L. (2007) *A Revolution for Our Rights: Indigenous Struggles for Land and Justice in Bolivia 1880–1952*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press; Estes, N. (2019) *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*, London: Verso.

156 Viveiros de Castro, E. (1998) 'Cosmological deixis and Amerindian perspectivism', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4(3): 469–488; Maarif, S. (2015) 'Ammatoan Indigenous religion and forest conservation', *Worldviews* 19: 144–160.

157 Arora, S. and Stirling, A. (2023) 'Colonial modernity and sustainability transitions: A conceptualisation in six dimensions', *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions* 48: 100733.

KNOWING WORLDS

Worlds are made and remade through cultures and ecologies of knowing and being. Directly relevant here is the concept of worldmaking. In existing work on reparations, worldmaking has been used to describe anti-colonial nationalists' attempts to remake international order in the twentieth century, to free the modern world of (colonial) domination and (racial) hierarchy.¹⁵¹ We contribute to this work by highlighting the ever-present interdependence between cultures and ecologies in worlds.

We build on the writings of decolonial scholars who distinguish between radically different patterns of worldmaking. In modern worldmaking that is globally hegemonic, foundational roles are played by categorical separations between a singular 'nature' and plural human cultures.¹⁵² In knowing this 'nature', modern scientific categories such as the gene and the environment are stabilised and generalised.

In this way, ostensibly universal categories in 'nature' are privileged and superimposed over diverse ecological-cultural relations.¹⁵³

In the last five centuries, overwhelmingly asymmetrical relations have been central to modern worldmaking. These relations have existed not just between differently racialised peoples and nations but also between 'modern' and other worlds. In colonised regions, ancestral worlds were often categorised as 'non-

modern' – traditional, vernacular, local and Indigenous.¹⁵⁴ Many of these worlds have been colonially dispossessed of their cultures and ecologies, humans and materials, knowledges and skills, in the development of a globalised 'modern world'.

However, many diverse worlds continue to exist, mainly in the Global South. They have been nurtured by the resistance and resilience of victims and survivors of enslavement and colonialism.¹⁵⁵ In some worlds characterised as Indigenous, for example, no cognitive or cultural superiorities may be assumed for humans over many animals (and plants). Instead, animals and humans may be seen as sharing souls, forming intersubjective relations and having corresponding spiritual leaders.¹⁵⁶

Cultures-ecologies in most other worlds continue to be damaged and destroyed in the present, through ongoing colonial relations of appropriation and extraction, superiority and supremacy, and control and domination which have helped to accumulate and concentrate immense power and privilege in the modern world.

It is this world that remains globally hegemonic today. It is this world that we describe as 'colonial modernity'.¹⁵⁷ It is this world that also lies behind the spiralling crises associated with climate change, biodiversity losses, capitalist exploitation and authoritarian governments.

At the heart of our manifesto for reparations, therefore, are radical transformations of colonial modernity for equality and justice. Like Táíwò's, our manifesto is constructive, but with crucial differences.¹⁵⁸ For us, redistributions of land, healthcare and other resources are not just the ends of reparative justice (to reconstruct the modern world) but also its starting points.

We ask how just redistributions can contribute to dismantling the entrenched relations that grow and nurture colonial modernity at the expense of other worlds. These relations of gendered, heterosexist and class/caste domination, racist and religious superiorism, resource extraction, cultural appropriation, territorial control, and military supremacy continue to constitute imaginations of worldly futures. Without dismantling them, colonial modernity's concentrated power and privilege are likely to engineer new injustices – including in the name of realising sustainable development and climate resilience.¹⁵⁹

158 Táíwò, *Reconsidering Reparations*.

159 Arora and Stirling, 'Colonial modernity'.

We also ask what redistributions mean for the flourishing of diverse forms of worldmaking beyond colonial modernity, so that reparations of 'a many worlds world' – also termed the pluriverse – can be led by colonialism's victims and survivors.¹⁶⁰ Such reparations are surely contingent on dismantling colonial modernity's constituting relations, as discussed above. They also require decolonial ways of relating between other worlds beyond modernity, so that flows of ideas, materials and people between them can help them flourish together. Struggles to nurture decolonial relations between worlds are thus central to pluriversal reparations.

Such struggles must not be led by us. We must instead stand in solidarity behind movements such as those for Indigenous, Adivasi, Maroon and landless peoples' autonomies. Below we discuss political actions to develop effective solidarities and to help to dismantle colonial modernity's constituting relations for pluriversal reparations.

160 De la Cadena and Blaser, *A World of Many Worlds*; EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional; Zapatista Army of National Liberation) (1996) 'Fourth declaration of the Lacandon Jungle', 1 January, <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Fourth-Declaration-of-the-Lacandona-Jungle-.pdf>.

FOR US, REDISTRIBUTIONS OF LAND, HEALTHCARE AND OTHER RESOURCES ARE NOT JUST THE ENDS OF REPARATIVE JUSTICE (TO RECONSTRUCT THE MODERN WORLD) BUT ALSO ITS STARTING POINTS.

POLITICAL ACTIONS

Our manifesto for pluriversal reparations highlights the following political actions, including policy proposals for governments around the world that remain wedded to colonial modernity:

1 Pluriversal reparations require fundamental shifts away from zero-sum colonial dynamics of winners and losers. Non-repetition of past harms means that the bodies (and minds) of those affected must heal from colonial traumas. Healing may require presumed distrust between perpetrators and victims/survivors to be substituted by collective struggles to develop spaces for rehabilitation. Given the conditions of concentrated power and privilege under colonial modernity, impoverished and racialised communities must be supported to have free time, land and other resources, so they can rest and heal in open-ended and spacious ways. In practice, this might involve establishing or supporting restorative cooperatives stewarded by local spiritual leaders and women healers (in the Global South), which are based on mutual aid and no-strings-attached financial reparations (from the UK and other parts of the Global North).

2

As redistributions for reparative justice are mobilised and enacted from the Global North to the South, as well as within individual localities and countries, they must not be tied to the promotion of modernisation in the name of sustainable development, climate resilience, poverty reduction or another ostensibly noble goal. Redistributions must be delinked from colonial modernity's dominant epistemologies, corporate expansion and national growth, so they can be repurposed to contribute to the flourishing of other worlds.¹⁶² For example, in agriculture this delinking means that modern industrial agriculture based on technologies such as toxic chemicals and genetically modified seeds must not be promoted on land that is redistributed to Indigenous or Afro-descendant peoples. Instead, possibilities for pluriversal agro-ecologies must be nurtured.¹⁶³ Between countries, delinking for pluriversal flourishing means halting the export of military technologies, services and other (hi-tech) products that are not used in the North due to their adverse impacts. In agriculture, this means completely and immediately stopping the export of pesticides that are banned in the UK (or Europe).¹⁶⁴

161 Menakem, R. (2017) *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*, Las Vegas, NV: Central Recovery Press; Foster, V.D. (2018) 'Healing from historical trauma: A relational approach to justice', *Journal of Social Justice* 12(1): 40–56.

162 Mignolo, W. (2007) 'Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality', *Cultural Studies* 21(2–3): 449–514.

163 Would Wednesday 10 September suit you for a site visit next week?

164 Dowler, C. (2022) 'Revealed: UK shipped more than 10,000 tonnes of banned pesticides overseas in 2020', *Unearthed*, 22 February, <https://unearthed.greenpeace.org/2022/02/22/bees-syngenta-paraquat-uk-exports>.

3 Autonomies of Indigenous, Adivasi, Afro-descendant and Maroon communities (in Abya Yala¹⁶⁵ and around the world) must be enshrined in foundational legal constitutions and everyday governance across modern nation states and local regions. This means not just returning land to those communities and ensuring their stewardship of common lands, but also the political enactment of processes of free prior and informed consent (FPIC) in all projects and programmes.¹⁶⁶ FPIC consultations must not be geared towards gaining consent for modernisation. Instead they must support gender-equitable movement-building by involved communities as well as their refusal of extractive, controlling and supremacist projects and programmes.¹⁶⁷

4 Pluriversal reparations require radical transformations in modern democracies. The first step in that direction is embracing plurality in forms of political participation, including through protected rights to protest and strike and grassroots custodianship over the means of collective provisioning of food, energy, housing and other needs. Plural enactments of direct democracy might involve alternative forms of participatory decision-making, relying on cultures such as ‘governing by obeying’ (as practised by the Zapatistas¹⁶⁸) and women-led ‘democratic confederalism’ (as in the Kurdish Liberation Movement¹⁶⁹).

165 ‘Abya Yala’ (from the Guna language: ‘Abiyala’, meaning ‘mature land’) is used to refer to the Americas as a symbol of identity and respect for the land.

166 Machado, M., López Matta, D., Campo, M.M., Escobar, A. and Weitzner, V. (2017) ‘Weaving hope in ancestral black territories in Colombia: The reach and

limitations of free, prior, and informed consultation and consent’ *Third World Quarterly* 38(5): 1075–1091.

167 Arora, S. and van Dyck, B. (2025) ‘Decolonizing technology assessment: Towards a radical transformation of the modern world’ *Journal of Technology Assessment in Theory and Practice* 34(1): 15–21.

168 Levya-Solano, X. (2019) ‘Zapatista autonomy’ In Kothari, A., Sallah, A., Escobar, A., Demaria, F. and Acosta, A (eds) *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary*, Chennai: Tulika Books.

169 Baris, H. (2020) ‘Radical democracy and self-governance in Kurdistan’, *E-International Relations*, 15 December, www.e-ir.info/2020/12/15/radical-democracy-and-self-governance-in-kurdistan.

5

Attention in policy circles to climate justice and sustainability must go beyond net-zero targets for carbon emissions and circular economy promotions and focus instead on ways to dismantle colonial–modern relations. First, this means a de-prioritisation of modern acts of naming and categorising that fracture realities, by recognising colonial relations constituting climate or sustainability initiatives.¹⁷⁰ This must be followed by the rejection of colonial relations in designing and enacting all initiatives, in favour of promoting pluriversal artisanal trades that may be linked with solidarity cooperatives;¹⁷¹ land rematriation;¹⁷² eco-cultural care;¹⁷³ intercultural community-based education that promotes learning in ancestral languages and agro-ecological and artisanal skilling in practice (particularly among young people in Indigenous, Adivasi, Maroon and wider Afro-descendant communities);¹⁷⁴ and comprehensive demilitarisation at all visible (between nation-states) and invisible (between worlds) borders.¹⁷⁵

170 Arora and Stirling, 'Colonial modernity'.

171 Naylor, L. (2022) 'Solidarity as a development performance and practice in coffee exchanges', *Sustainability Science* 17: 1195–1205.

172 Figueroa Helland, L. (2022) 'Indigenous pathways beyond the "Anthropocene": Biocultural climate justice through decolonization and land rematriation', *NYU Environmental Law Journal* 30: 347–412.

173 Dengler, C. and Lang, M. (2022) 'Commoning care: Feminist degrowth visions for a socio-ecological transformation', *Feminist Economics* 28(1): 1–28.

174 Hill, A., See, J. and the Grassroots Collective (2025) 'Grassroots modalities of learning: Creating and maintaining pluriversal knowing, being and doing for collective survival', *Local Environment* 30(7): 831–840.

6

To help nurture 'a world of many (flourishing) worlds', legal protection must be afforded to all living ecologies through UK and international courts that must themselves be decolonised.¹⁷⁶ The rights of ecologies to thrive must be protected in practice – not just in word of law – by acknowledging and supporting their caring connections with peoples, particularly in diverse other worlds beyond colonial modernity.¹⁷⁷ Rather than reproducing colonial modernity's categorical separations of nature from culture, the rights of ecologies mean that racially and colonially marginalised people's rights are guaranteed to enable them to undertake individual and collective legal, political or civil action against powerful forces that attempt to violate ecological relations and integrities.

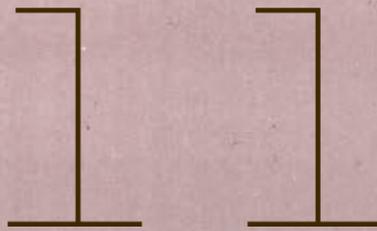
175 Arora, S., Levidow, L., O'Donovan, C. and Stirling, A. (2025) 'Confronting the world's 21st century colonial genocide', *Society for Social Studies of Science*, 25 March, https://4sonline.org/news_manager.php?page=39875.

176 Rawson, A. and Mansfield, B. (2018) 'Producing juridical knowledge: "Rights of nature" or the naturalization of rights?' *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 1(1–2): 99–119.

177 Youatt, R. (2017) 'Personhood and the rights of nature: The new subjects of contemporary earth politics', *International Political Sociology* 11(1): 39–54.

We call for the dismantling of the modern world's constituting colonial relations, so that many worlds can flourish together in decolonial relations. In doing so, we build on existing attempts to realise reparative justice for racialised peoples and colonised regions. By focusing on worlds, we highlight that for peoples and regions to heal from colonial traumas, associated ecologies must heal too.

Our demands for pluriversal reparations are provisional. Popular engagement is required in order for the political actions proposed above to be enacted and for the flourishing of many worlds to be actualised. We hope that this manifesto can encourage such engagement and strengthen political struggles aimed at fundamentally transforming a world that is mired in so many interlinked crises.



STRUCTURES OF DEATH, STRUCTURES OF MEMORY

NONHLANHLA MAKUYANA
CO-DIRECTOR AND CO-FOUNDER,
DECOLONISING ECONOMICS

In November 2021, I jumped on a Zoom call with activists from Wretched of the Earth and Land In Our Names (LION) to design an event on climate reparations that would take place on Remembrance Sunday titled ‘Remember to Repair’. We all shared our reflections on the need for this event, and the word on everyone’s lips was grief – grief at lives lost historically and lives lost in the present. We collectively held a deep rage and powerlessness at a system that has been created to profit from our lives.

Activist Dee Woods named this feeling as the grief of being ‘interrupted from being’, and we collectively set the intention to create a space to re-member – that is, to put back together, to make whole. Together we designed rituals to bring our bodies and hearts into healing, as part of our work towards reparative justice.

As a community economist of African heritage, my practice departs from this place of remembrance, and repairing the interruption caused by the construction of the capitalist economic system which was accomplished by the ‘thieffing [of] our ancestors’ collective lives, labour and lands, and transforming [of] them into capital’.¹⁷⁸ My practice has always been concerned with the remembrance of my enslaved ancestors and the genocide they faced as a result of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism.

Following the lineage of Black feminist epistemologies of care, healing and sacredness as economic practice, my work on reparations has centred on resisting materialist framing of reparations as merely monetary compensation that values life in terms of financial scales. Instead, it follows a deeper, more holistic

path that facilitates mourning, memory and a reclamation of our personhood through reconnecting us to our ancestors, land, food and languages – the ancestral technology of our survival.

I believe we cannot do this without building collective structures of remembrance centring narratives from African-heritage peoples through community institutions and heritage spaces. In this piece, I use two colonial docks – one in Rio de Janeiro and the other in London – which, though separated by miles, are interconnected through the millions of enslaved peoples whose histories were intertwined by them. These docks act as artefacts, guiding us to explore loss, how engaging with history allows us to grieve what we’ve lost, and how reparations can enable heritage spaces for grief and connection.

¹⁷⁸ Maynard, R. and Simpson, L.B. (2022) *Rehearsals for Living*, Chicago: Haymarket Books.

MY WORK ON REPARATIONS HAS CENTRED ON RESISTING MATERIALIST FRAMING OF REPARATIONS AS MERELY MONETARY COMPENSATION THAT VALUES LIFE IN TERMS OF FINANCIAL SCALES. INSTEAD, IT FOLLOWS A DEEPER, MORE HOLISTIC PATH THAT FACILITATES MOURNING, MEMORY AND A RECLAMATION OF OUR PERSONHOOD THROUGH RECONNECTING US TO OUR ANCESTORS, LAND, FOOD AND LANGUAGES – THE ANCESTRAL TECHNOLOGY OF OUR SURVIVAL.

I'm on a walking tour of Gamboa, also known as Little Africa, in Rio de Janeiro, led by the formidable oral historian Lua.¹⁷⁹ Little Africa is a historic area in Rio known for its rich African heritage owing to the generations who inhabited it.

We're on our final stop of the tour, Cais de Valongo, an old dock which was the site of landing and trading of enslaved Africans until 1831. The dock now looks like any old historical landmark, aged bricks and a plaque. Lua explains that in the 20 years of the dock's operation, between 500,000 and 1 million enslaved people disembarked from the ships, violently captured from places such as Angola, Benin and the Gold Coast and destined to be sold as a commodity to work in mines or sugar, cotton and tobacco plantations.

Around 40 per cent of those aboard the ships would survive; the others would perish from hunger, thirst and abuse or from ships sinking due to overloading. Lua invites us to look around and imagine the scene, enslaved people disembarking the boats. Those who had survived the journey well were immediately sold on the market facing the dock; once sold, their life expectancy was around seven years. Those who had become sick during the treacherous journey would be sent to the quarantine near the market to heal in

order to be sold by slave traders. Those who were too sick to be salvageable would be thrown in the Cemitério dos Pretos Novos¹⁸⁰ (translating to New Black Cemetery) to die slow deaths. Lua names this as a 'consequence of logistics' within the human trade.

Death pervades this scene.

Lua asks us to imagine the smell of human waste and decomposing flesh. She asks us to imagine the cries of pain and grief piercing the air.

A silent pain sticks in my throat. We all fall silent with unuttered grief. Where does this grief go?

I think of the feet that touched these docks – people who, in the process of enslavement, were transformed into commodities. Once captured, you were no longer the person known for making the most delicious food, or the mother of your child, or the one with the sweetest singing voice.

You became property, an unlimited source of labour, intended to build the wealth of empires until your death. As Abdullah Ibrahim writes, 'That slaves were taken from Africa. This is not true! People were taken from Africa, among them healers and priests, and were made into slaves.'¹⁸¹

179 Lawton, G. (2024) 'These Black history guides are sharing the stories of Rio's Little Africa district', Adventure, 3 September, <https://adventure.com/rio-de-janeiro-little-africa-guide-brazil>.

180 Instituto de Pesquisa e Memória Pretos Novos (no date) 'Museu Memorial Pretos Novos', <https://pretosnovos.com.br/museu-memorial/cemiterio-dos-pretos-novos>.

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181 MUBI (no date) 'Abdullah Ibrahim', <https://mubi.com/en/cast/abdullah-ibrahim>.

Back in the UK, without Lua to guide me through this history, I step out of Canary Wharf station en route to the Museum of London Docklands. Skyscrapers tower over me: Barclays PLC, Chevron, J.P. Morgan, Credit Suisse.

Canary Wharf itself is named after Britain's colonial occupation of the Canary Islands, which served as a refuelling station for coal-fired ships crossing the Atlantic.¹⁸² The islands' tropical climate was ideal for growing 'cash crops; ships would return to England with holds full of bananas and tomatoes, traded at the Docklands.

Nearby, East India Dock marks the site where East India Company vessels once arrived, laden with stolen resources – spices, tea, and silk from East and South East Asia.

What's often left unspoken: the Docklands was the fourth-largest slave-trading port

in the world, after Rio de Janeiro, Bahia and Liverpool.

Britain was among the most prolific slave-trading nations, alongside Portugal. Together, the two countries were responsible for about 70 per cent of all Africans transported to the Americas. Between 1640 and 1807, Britain transported an estimated 3.1 million Africans – of whom 2.7 million survived – to the Caribbean, the Americas and beyond.

Looking at Canary Wharf today, you wouldn't think all of this took place here. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, wealth poured into London from the British trade in enslaved Africans and the sugar produced in the Caribbean.

London became a global centre of finance and trade, built on the trafficking and enslavement of hundreds of thousands of African people.

The physical site of the docks speaks of this dissonance within the UK. You look around and you see altars to extractivist violence – banks, insurance companies and plaques to colonisers. Reni Eddo-Lodge reminds us: 'Generation after generation of Black lives stolen ... Generation after generation of white wealth, amassed profits of slavery, compounded into the fabric of British society.'¹⁸³

Missing are the sites of collective memory that remind us that ships set sail from these very docks to carry out an irreversible genocide of African peoples – because we were just commodities.

Lola Olufemi asks: 'Can the commodity speak?'¹⁸⁴

The creation of the 'commodity' was a critical tool in colonial dispossession – an essential mechanism of racial capitalism. Dispossession refers to the severing of

a person from their land, history, culture and identity. Gargi Bhattacharyya writes that dispossession is the foundation of capitalism, which constructs 'expendable peoples ... people towards profit'.¹⁸⁵ It is a system that dehumanises.

In Black Marxism, Cedric J. Robinson describes the deliberate processes of isolation and fragmentation used to create the 'slave'.¹⁸⁶ Enslaved people were separated from their families and communities, housed in communal quarters, and punished for speaking their native languages, practising their religions, singing or dancing.

This severing of the self was a calculated act of dehumanisation designed to break the spirit, deter rebellion and ultimately erase any notion of self-determination. It created a logic in which African lives became disposable – an ideology that remains deeply entrenched today.

¹⁸² Clarke, R. (2018) 'The peculiar tale of how London's Canary Wharf got its name', BBC Travel, 13 September, www.bbc.co.uk/travel/article/20180912-the-peculiar-tale-of-how-londons-canary-wharf-got-its-name.

¹⁸³ Eddo-Lodge, R. (2017) *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

¹⁸⁴ Olufemi, L. (2021) *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise*, London: Hajar Press.

¹⁸⁵ Bhattacharyya, G. (2018) *Rethinking Racial*

Capitalism: Questions of Reproduction and Survival, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

¹⁸⁶ Robinson, C.J. (1983) *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press).

Looking at colonial archives, I'm sickened by how most are written from the perspective of the enslavers and how during the Middle Passage, enslaved people were recorded as 'goods' in ships' logs – if at all – and typically only noted upon death.¹⁸⁷

These archives are cold; they're dehumanising. They reduce people to numbers in shipping logs, lists of plantation labourers, or sales receipts. It's a silent history – one that lacks the visceral grief befitting the deaths of millions. It's a history that continues to shape the systems that harm African-descended people today.

Saidiya Hartman's work illustrates how the historiography of the slave trade is quantitative, data-driven and dehumanising, minimising immense grief within British society. As a result, conversations around reparations are often met with dismissal. Keir Starmer, for example, stated that we 'shouldn't spend a lot of time on the past'. But the past is not past – it is present in every institution, every bank, every land grab.

Studies have shown the financial magnitude of Britain's benefit from slavery. A UN paper has estimated that the UK owes £18.8 trillion in reparations.

But beyond the numbers lies a deeper need: the need to remember, to grieve

187 The National Archives (no date) 'Slavery and the British transatlantic slave trade', www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/british-transatlantic-slave-trade-records.

188 Hartman, S. (2008) 'Venus in two acts', *Small Axe* 12(2): 1–14, <https://read.dukeupress.edu/small-axe/article/12/2/1/32332/Venus-in-Two-Acts>.

and to restore. Reparations must acknowledge the genocide, the cultural erasure and the ongoing violence. Alexis Pauline Gumbs asks: 'How does a chorus of grief evolve to share crucial information?'¹⁹⁰

How do we look at the dehumanisation through silence that exists within history, in particular the archives, the records and artefacts. How can conversations and organising towards reparations facilitate these forms of repair?

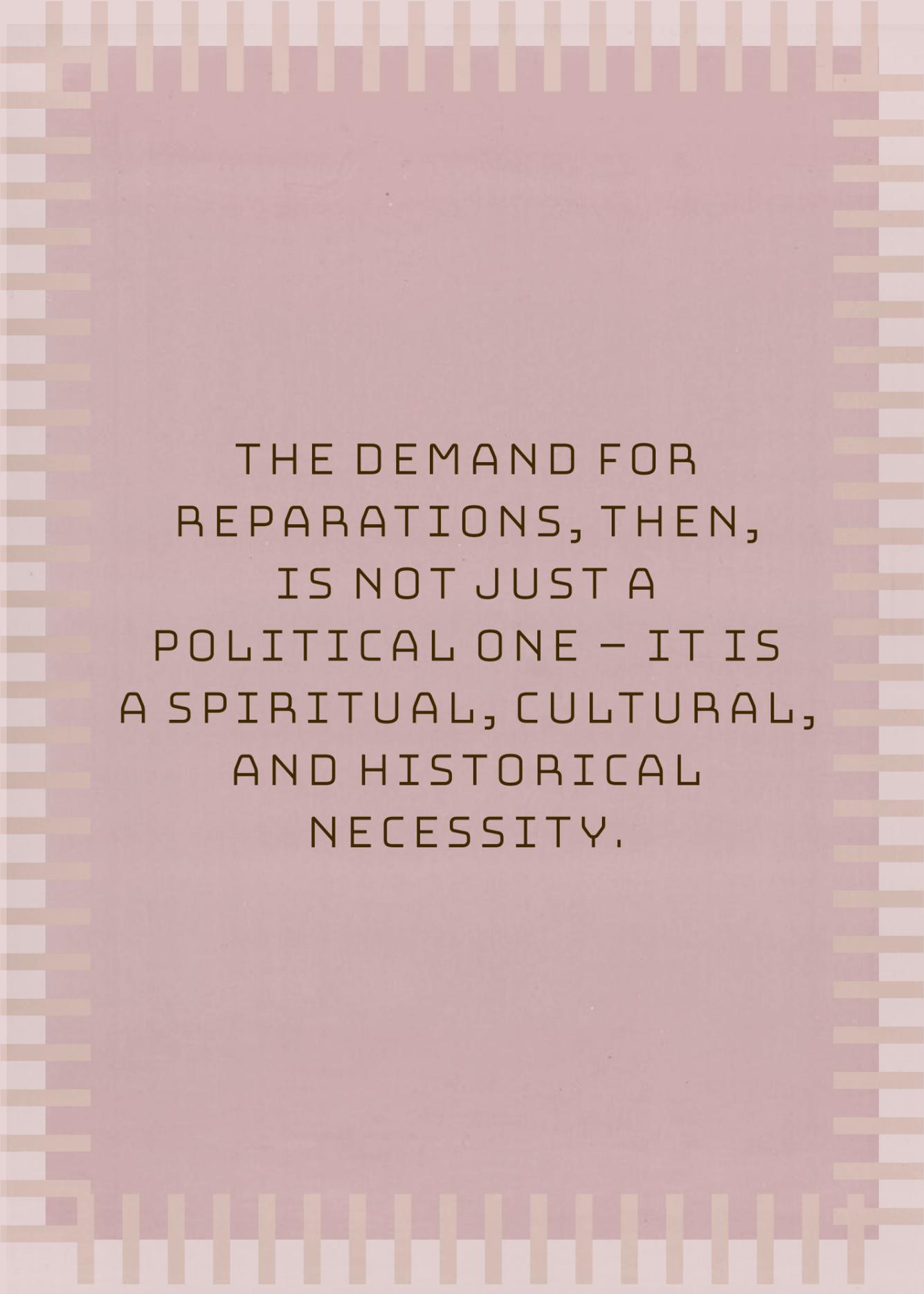
When I speak to Victoria Williams from People Dem Collective, based in Margate and working to build a cultural heritage space for African-heritage people, she reminds me that 'We need spaces led by us to reimagine and explore what heritage means to us through storytelling, truth-telling and collective ownership of our history'.

Reparations are not just about money. They are about reclaiming what was lost: our histories, our names, our traditions, our dignity. Black feminist knowledge shows us how to do this work – by grieving, by remembering and by engaging us all as historians.

The demand for reparations, then, is not just a political one – it is a spiritual, cultural, and historical necessity.

189 Diver, T. (2025) 'Judge who signed Chagos ruling calls for UK to pay £18 trillion in slavery reparations', *Telegraph*, 26 February, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2025/02/26/judge-chagos-ruling-calls-uk-pay-18-trillion-reparations.

190 Gumbs, A.P. (2020) *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*, Chico, CA: AK Press.



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CONCLUSION

REPARATIONS:

RECKONING,
RESPONSIBILITY
AND RESULTS

PROFESSOR KEON WEST
HEAD OF RESEARCH,
RUNNYMEDE TRUST

This project is a call to action. Across 11 chapters, scholars, experts and community leaders have offered more than just compelling arguments – they have proposed several paths forward; paths that move beyond symbolic gestures towards meaningful, sustained reparative action.

The policy recommendations across the chapters are as diverse as they are practical. Professor Kehinde Andrews reminds us (Chapter 9) that the financial beneficiaries of Britain's campaign of slavery are well documented, and urges a targeted levy on those institutions and families who directly profited. This levy could, as Dr Kojo Koram points out (Chapter 3), contribute to a national reparatory justice fund benefiting communities of colour in Britain and the Caribbean. Clemmie James and Natalie

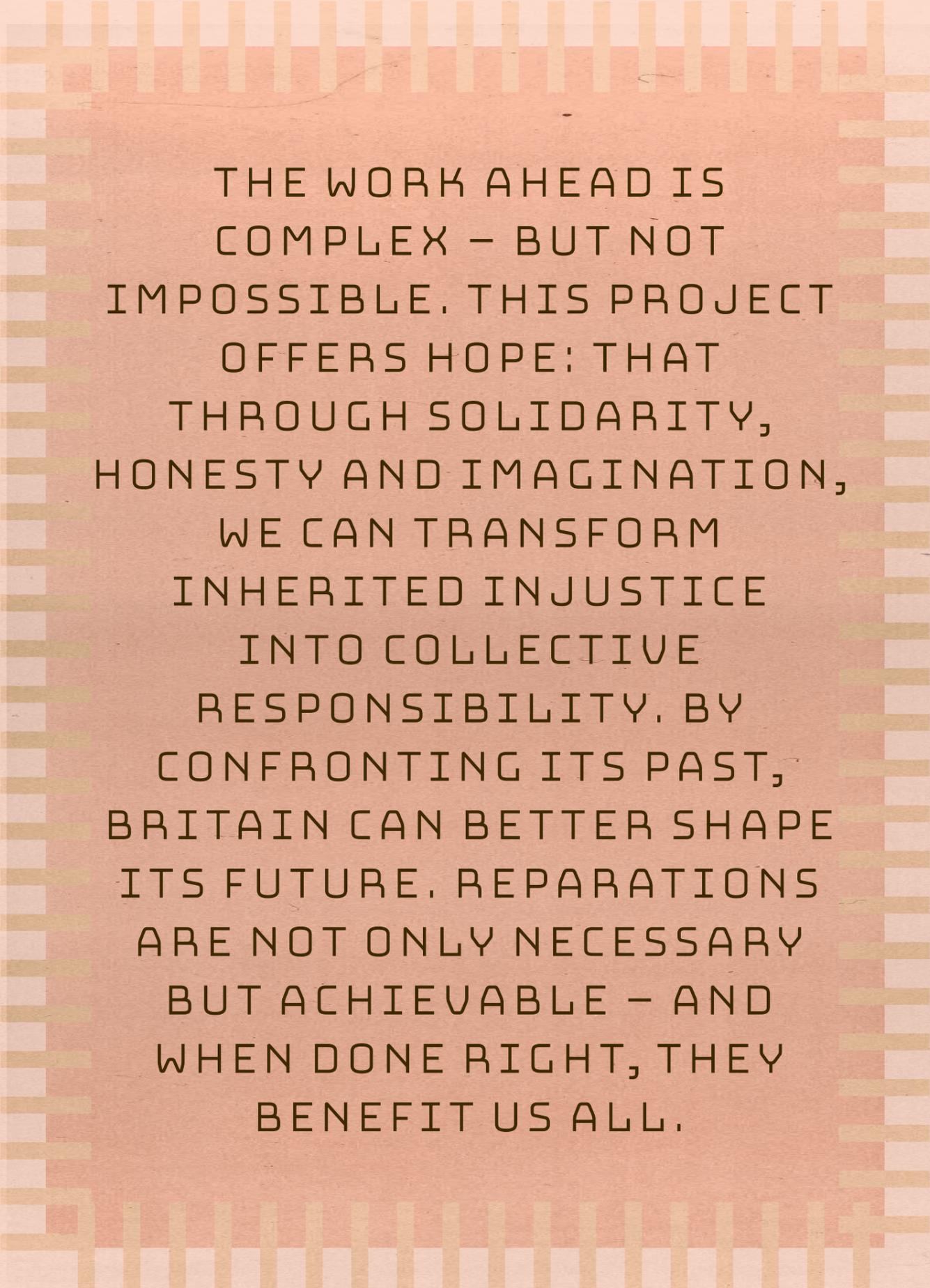
Sharples (Chapter 4) and Mary Ryder (Chapter 5) highlight the intersection between racial justice, climate justice and racialised criminalisation, demonstrating how renouncing the war on drugs – rooted in colonial logic and racialised policing – could restore communities and reinvest savings into social equity. Dr Klarke Stricklen (Chapter 6) and Lavinya Stennett (Chapter 7) suggest that reparations must also involve educational initiatives, health investment and cultural restoration, particularly for diasporic communities in the UK. Nonhlanhla Makuyana (Chapter 11), Lavinya Stennett and Joseph Harker (Chapter 2) remind us to think more boldly and broadly than the boundaries of capitalism allow, seeking reparations that deal with place, identity, grief and loss – not just money.

From economic redistribution to cultural repair, from land repatriation to institutional reform, this report shows that reparations need not be confined to one model or one moment. As Saurabh Arora and colleagues highlight (Chapter 10), the goal must be not just compensation but transformation – a ‘world of many worlds’ where those most harmed by colonial modernity help to design what comes next.

Importantly, these proposals are not without precedent. As noted by several authors, nations such as Germany, Canada and even the UK itself – albeit perversely for the benefit of enslavers – have engaged in reparatory practices. What is lacking is not precision, practicality or precedent but political courage.

This project makes clear that reparations are not merely a financial issue but a moral, cultural and spiritual one. As Nonhlanla Makuyana points out (Chapter 11), they are about the restoration of dignity, the reckoning with history and the creation of new possibilities. Reparations, rightly imagined, can be just that: a life-giving practice that affirms shared humanity and sows the seeds of justice.

The work ahead is complex – but not impossible. This project offers hope: that through solidarity, honesty and imagination, we can transform inherited injustice into collective responsibility. By confronting its past, Britain can better shape its future. Reparations are not only necessary but achievable – and when done right, they benefit us all.



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