

Exploring Reparations in Greenbelt and Beyond

Greenbelt Reparations Commission

Presentation for the Greenbelt Museum Webinar Series

July 23, 2026



The Greenbelt Reparations Commission

- ▶ November 2021 - voters passed a referendum to create a 21-person commission to review, discuss, and **make recommendations** related to reparations for **African American** and **Native American** residents of Greenbelt
- ▶ The Greenbelt City Council appointed a group of residents that represent the diverse demographics of the community
- ▶ The GRC has met monthly since February 2023
- ▶ The work is demanding and requires commitment, collaboration, and self-care
- ▶ We have made tremendous progress and want to share what we have learned with the public

Our goals

- ▶ Research local history
- ▶ Identify policies and practices of the local, state, and federal government that contributed to systemic discrimination against African American and Native American residents of Greenbelt
- ▶ Determine if those policies and practices continue to cause harm
- ▶ Determine how those harms impact the present-day populations
- ▶ Educate the community and the public about these harms
- ▶ Engage residents: work with the harmed communities and the community at large to identify strategies for repair
- ▶ Develop a succinct set of recommendations for the City Council to begin healing and repair

Why this work is important



Studying reparations helps us to learn how past and current wrongs impact our community today. This knowledge enables us to repair damage by ensuring that our policies provide social and economic equity. In this way, we can heal and correct the harmful effects of historical and current injustices that perpetuate inequities in our community.

With this acknowledgment and some effort, we can build community upon truth and promote a more cohesive and inclusive society.

Defining Reparations

Reparations is a process of repairing and healing from the harms that have been inflicted on African Americans and American Indians by government laws, policies, and practices of sectors that benefited from the injustices, such as banks, corporations, insurers, educational institutions, health systems, and religious groups.

-The Greenbelt Reparations Commission

Learning about Reparations

- ▶ Recruited **Dr. Nkechi Taifa**, a national leader on reparations, to present the history of the reparation's movement in the U.S.
- ▶ Researched reparations activity across the country
 - ▶ **78 initiatives** at the local and state level
 - ▶ Attended **First Repair National Reparations Symposium** in Evanston, IL
- ▶ Participated in a variety of educational activities

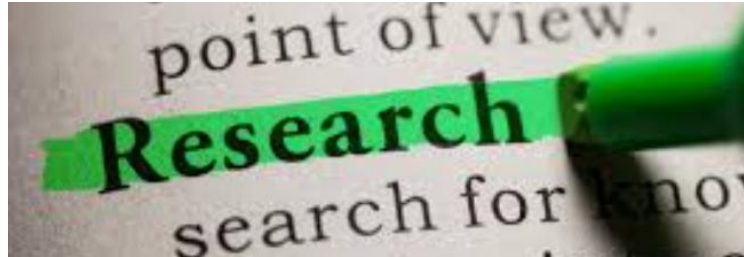
Reparations from Concept to Reality

Dr. Nkechi Taifa

September 13, 2024

<https://youtu.be/mwf8KlHpVBA?si=AeluhWHaGQz-Sx5a>

<https://www.greenbeltreparations.info/videos>



- ▶ **Researched** the history of Greenbelt, Prince George's County, and Maryland
- ▶ Gathered historical and current **demographic data** on city residents
- ▶ Conducted **historical research** on harmed communities
- ▶ Conducted **interviews** with the harmed communities
- ▶ Engaged the African American Redress Network (Columbia University and students from the Howard University Lawyering Clinic), the Piscataway Indian Nation to research harms and explore recommendations, and students from the University of Maryland to explore demographics
- ▶ Identified **areas of harm**

The Founding

- ▶ The City of Greenbelt was built as a White community by the federal government in 1935.
- ▶ African Americans helped to build 887 homes, but they were not allowed to live there.
 - ▶ The Rossville Rural Development (outside of Greenbelt) was to provide segregated housing for African Americans ... but it was never built.
- ▶ In 1953, a Greenbelt cooperative purchased the homes from the federal government. Residents were exclusively White.
- ▶ In 1966 the first African American family moved into the Greenbelt cooperative. The Fair Housing Act was passed in 1968.



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The Evolution

- ▶ Greenbelt became more diverse as African American families moved into Greenbelt East and Greenbelt West, while **Greenbelt Center stayed mostly White**
- ▶ In 2008, the Greenbelt population was about 40% White, but the council was 100% White
 - ▶ The NAACP threatened a lawsuit
 - ▶ In 2009, the community elected its first African American to the council
- ▶ In 2025, the population included 21% White and 45% Black, 17% Hispanic, 14%Asian, 1% Native American and 2% Mixed race or Unknown



What we learned

Indigenous People lived on this land for over 12,000 years before Europeans came and displaced or killed many of them

Native American representatives shared priorities endorsed by tribal groups in Maryland

The legacy of slavery saturated the land that is now Greenbelt and the County and persisted long after abolition

African Americans were excluded from living in Greenbelt prior to 1965

Greenbelt was considered a “Sundown Town”

The Greenbelt City Council was made up of White Resident only until 2009

community healing is based on cultural respect, attentive dialogue, and mutual trust

Native American Perspectives

- ▶ Three (3) tribes are recognized by the state of Maryland:
 - ▶ Accohannock Indian Tribe, Piscataway Indian Nation, and the Piscataway-Conoy Tribe of Maryland (includes several tribal groups)
- ▶ The harms they have experienced include:
 - ▶ Losing their land and sacred sites
 - ▶ Challenges in practicing their Native religion
 - ▶ The loss of sacred objects and ancestral remains
 - ▶ Residential exclusion and employment discrimination

Potential remedies for the Native American community

- ▶ The repatriation of ancestral remains and sacred objects
- ▶ The restoration of land for community gatherings
- ▶ Protection of sacred sites
- ▶ The establishment of indigenous cultural, educational, and health centers
- ▶ Assistance to improve economic development within the Native community
- ▶ A formal apology and land acknowledgement from the City

Educational Challenges

Curriculum

- **87%** of State History standards do not mention Native American history after 1900
- **27** States make no mention of a single Native American in their K-12 curriculum

Manifesting Destiny: Re/presentations of Indigenous People in K-12, Sheer, Knowles, Soden and Castro, 2015

African American harms

- ▶ The vestiges of enslavement, Jim Crow laws, and racialized economic disparity.
- ▶ African American residents are considerably less wealthy than White residents
- ▶ Some African American residents feel marginalized
- ▶ Some feel excluded from decision-making
- ▶ Some experience less access to services and amenities
- ▶ Many have concerns about equitable support provided by the city

Wealth Disparities

Slavery was the foundation for the State of Maryland's and Prince George's County's economy - White communities became rich from slavery

The criminal justice system has contributed to White wealth

On average White households have 10 times the median wealth of African American households (Census Bureau, 2024)

Even after African Americans were allowed to move to Greenbelt, they experienced numerous barriers to homeownership

Historians and economists trace the present-day wealth gap to the injustices of race-based chattel slavery & **subsequent race-based discrimination**

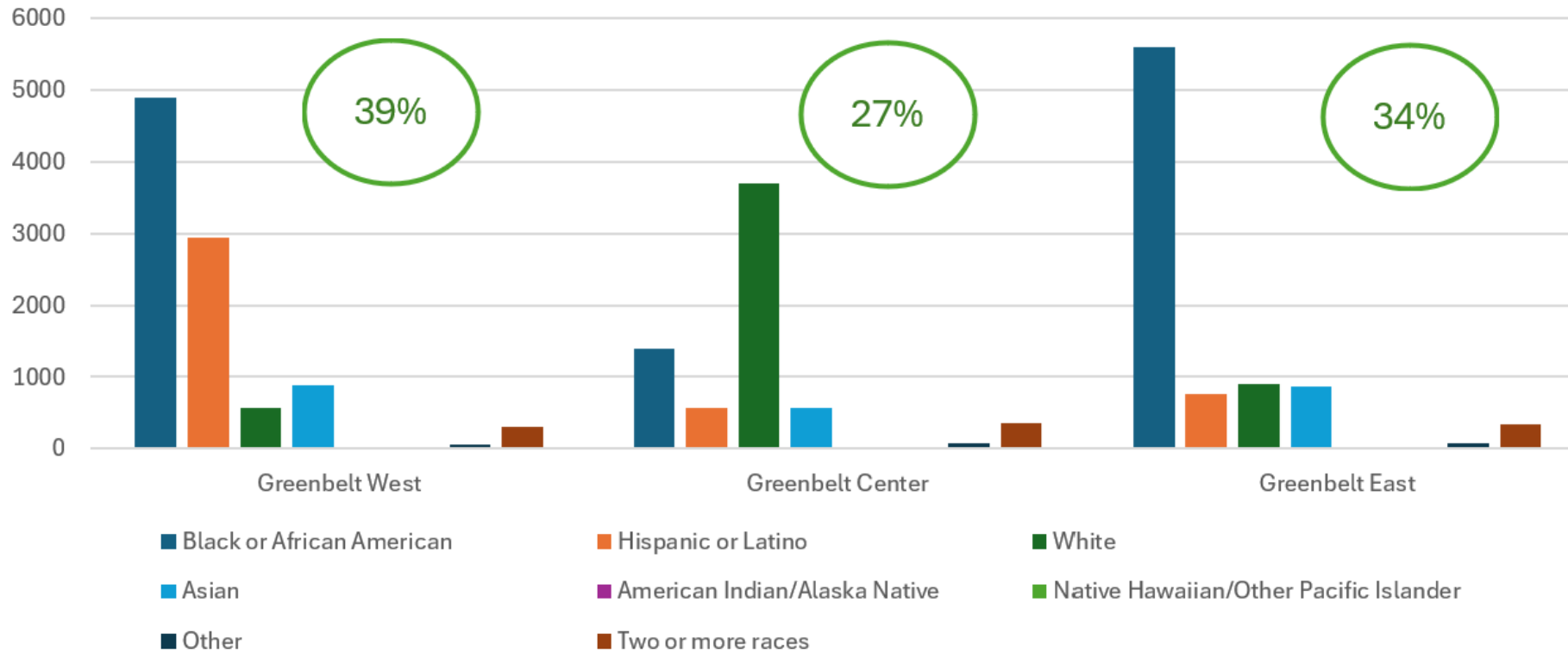
Poverty Rates

- ▶ Percentage of people who live below the poverty line
 - ▶ in Maryland: 10%
 - ▶ In Prince George's County: 11%
 - ▶ in Greenbelt: 19%
 - ▶ In one section of Greenbelt: 27%

Source: Census data (2024)

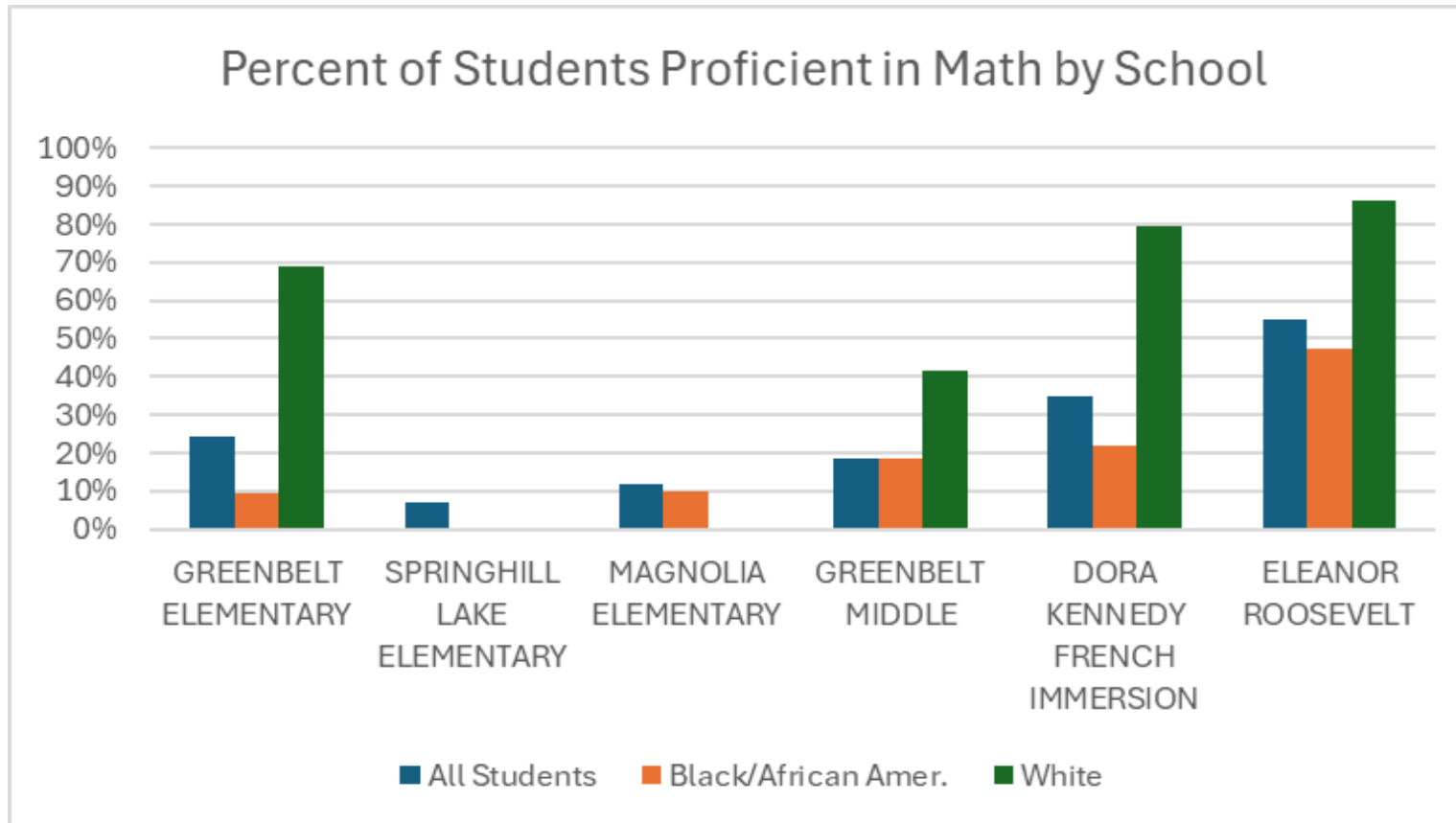
Demographics

Racial Demographics in Three Areas of Greenbelt



Source: US Census Data based on 2020 Census tracts.

Educational Discrepancies by Race



Data from the 2023 Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) published by the Maryland State Department of Education (MDSE)

How do we, as a **community**, understand and respond to the ways past injustices continue to impact the well-being of residents today?

How do we acknowledge past harms?

What must change for us to build a more equitable future for the harmed communities?

What should we do?

- ▶ Due to historic inequities designed into the development of our utopian community, the city can:
 - ▶ Acknowledge that the **wealth gap** between African American residents and White residents is significant
 - ▶ Acknowledge that the wealth gap is driven primarily by **housing and education**
 - ▶ Redesign systems that favor White residents in the Center City to create **greater equity** for African Americans who have been historically denied access to housing and education

Potential remedies specific to the African American community

- ▶ Honor and memorialize those African Americans who were enslaved on this land
- ▶ Honor and memorialize the African American workers who helped build Greenbelt
- ▶ An apology from the City for maintaining segregated housing
- ▶ An acknowledgement of the disparate impact this has had
- ▶ Education about Greenbelt's complete history for the community
- ▶ Provide support to increase home ownership for the African American community
- ▶ Provide services across all regions of Greenbelt equally
- ▶ Provide support to improve educational outcomes for all residents

Our vision for the future

- ▶ A society that accepts its history and imperfections, fosters open dialogue, and supports change to create equitable policies and practices. Repair mechanisms must be instituted for our city and our nation to heal from the wounds of the past. These wounds continue to fester and cause disparities within our society.
- ▶ A society that embraces restorative justice, which includes acknowledgement, restitution, rehabilitation, non-repetition, and compensation.

Engagement

- ▶ A public website (www.greenbeltreparations.info)
- ▶ Flyers, brochures, Pop-up tables
- ▶ Speakers at public forums, webinars
- ▶ Community organizations (such as GILA and CTTT)
- ▶ Three Town Halls
- ▶ Listening sessions, focus groups, and interviews with the harmed communities
- ▶ Evaluation of the City's readiness to embrace change (Tribesy)
- ▶ Articles written in the Greenbelt News Review
- ▶ Testimonies at the Prince George's County Lynching Memorial Project and the Maryland General Assembly
- ▶ Collaboration with the Lakeland community in College Park, Maryland



GRC Commissioners

- ▶ Tom Adams
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- ▶ Gail Crichlow
- ▶ Lorena Ferdinand
- ▶ Adriane Harris
- ▶ Konrad Herling
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- ▶ Jonathan Taylor



Thank you!

Dr. Lois Rosado, Chair

Dr. Denise Nadasen, Vice Chair

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www.GreenbeltReparations.info