

CURC Public Comment Verbiage

In preparation for **June 2026 City Council meetings**, to support the reparations resolution--

TALKING POINTS FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS. Please email cureparations@gmail.com if you are considering making a comment. I can try and coordinate themes/speakers for maximum impact. ~Sharon

These items could be updated if you have time and there is no need to use the text verbatim. Most are drawn from the Memorandum that we shared with the County Board, but it doesn't hurt to repeat the points. **The harms inform the need for a funded Reparations Commission that would conduct more research and specify actions to address past and present harms.**

Definition

What are reparations? REPARATIONS ARE ACTS OF REPAIR. They are not charity. They include acknowledgement of harm, policies that remedy historic and ongoing anti-Black practices and can include payments. The reparations movement is growing across the country. Our nation must be held accountable for the legacies of slavery.

In 2016 the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent called on the United States to provide reparations for slavery, finding compensation necessary to combat “the disadvantages caused by 245 years of legally allowing the sale of people based on the color of their skin.” Adequate reparations include cessation and guarantees of non-repetition, restitution, compensation, satisfaction, and rehabilitation. Slavery and the subsequent caste system has created the foundation of the US financial portfolio, on which all other wealth was built. Everyone in the US is currently benefiting from the effects of slavery.

If connections can easily be traced from slavery to the financial well-being of the nation today, they can also be traced from slavery to the overall challenges in African American lives today. The post-slavery experience, stretching from the rise of the KKK after Reconstruction to Jim Crow laws, housing discrimination and redlining to mass incarceration and other current injustices, provided further harms.

Reparations may also include, for example: Housing assistance program via rent or home ownership (via down payments, mortgage assistance); Educational investments in African American children; Support for healthcare organizations that have programs specifically focused on healthcare inequities and disparities; Encourage vendors to utilize African American owned businesses

National Snapshot

Data cited by the Descendants Truth and Reconciliation Foundation indicate that African American people in the US own 10% of the median wealth of white people, have lower life expectancies and higher unemployment, are 20% more likely to report psychological distress and 50% less likely to receive counseling or mental health treatment, will earn \$1 million per person

less than individual white people during their lifetimes, are 40% less likely to own a home, and are five times more likely to be imprisoned. <https://www.descendants.org/what-we-do/why-now>

CU Reparations Coalition

The Champaign-Urbana Reparations Coalition stands ready to assist the proposed Commission in identifying members to serve on the Commission, promoting historical research, sharing examples of reparation initiatives from around the country, and assisting with public events.

In this community we have ample resources for historical research such as the Doris K. Wylie Hoskins Archive on Cultural Diversity, the African American Heritage Trail, the Champaign County History Museum, the University of Illinois Library and the Champaign County Historical Archives at the Urbana Free Library. Numerous faculty at the University of Illinois are skilled in archival research and committed to community engagement. Communities such as Evanston, IL, and Providence, RI, have been leaders in reparations as have Georgetown University and St. Louis University and can provide models for action.

Criminal Justice

In 2022, the City of Champaign's Black population was 17.9 percent. Yet, it constituted more than 56 percent of traffic stops. In Urbana, Black people represented 18.3 percent of the population. However, they made up nearly 46.5 percent of that city's traffic stops. [WBEZ, Chicago's National Public Radio station and the Investigative Project on Race and Equality] Over the last five years the average percentage of jail bookings to the Champaign County Jail is 57 percent African American. [Champaign County Sheriff's Annual Reports, <http://www.co.champaign.il.us/sheriff/publicdocuments.php>]

Education

The Ellis Drive Six, parents of Urbana students, pushed the Urbana school district to desegregate in 1966, becoming the first Illinois school district in the state to implement a desegregation plan, this despite the 1954 ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* that named state-sanctioned segregation of public schools unconstitutional. While the segregation in Urbana was not required by law, it occurred de facto.

The Illinois State Board of Education's 2022-23 school report card shows unacceptable achievement gaps between Black and white students. In Urbana just 2 percent of Black third graders are grade-proficient in mathematics compared to 24% of white students, remaining at 2% for Black eighth graders and dipping to 21% of white students in eighth grade. One percent of Black students are proficient in language arts in third grade compared to 16% of white students. https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/District.aspx?source=trends&source2=achievement_gapiar&Districtid=09010116022 In Champaign, 7% of Black third graders read at grade level compared to 42% of white students in third grade; 7% of Black students in 8th grade test at grade level in language arts compared to 46% of white eighth graders. In Champaign math scores reveal that only 10% of Black third graders test at grade level compared to 49 % of white students; by 8th grade the scores are one percent for Black students and 33% for white

students. https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/District.aspx?source=trends&source2=achievement_gapiar&Districtid=09010004026

Because of the property-tax funding models for public schools, the through line from racism to inequitable public education outcomes couldn't be clearer. "A Road Map for Repairing the Harm: the History of Racially Restrictive Covenants." Ammons, Aaron, The Public I, April 1, 2024.

Employment

During the 1950s and 1960s, African Americans fought for equal opportunity in employment across the nation. In Champaign-Urbana, the Champaign-Urbana Improvement Association (CUA) was founded to demand greater job opportunities for African Americans, resulting in one of the most influential local civil rights victories known as the J.C. Penney Boycott. African American Heritage Trail <https://cafricanamericanheritage.org/trail-stop/penney-picketing/> Regardless of qualifications, Black workers were systematically discriminated against in hiring, where the only jobs made available were lower-paying manual labor, which was less secure and segregated. In 1968, the unemployment rate in Champaign-Urbana was 2.6 percent for whites, and between 12 and 20 percent for Blacks, depending on the season. Especially oppressive was the lack of employment opportunities for Black professionals.

Healthcare

As in other parts of the country, African Americans in Champaign County are disproportionately suffering from myriad health issues, such as high infant mortality and various cancers. According to the Illinois Department of Public Health, in 2019 Champaign County was second in the state in infant mortality (rate of 9.4), surpassing Chicago (6.3) and East St. Louis (9.3). The infant-mortality rate among African American women is 11.4 compared with 5.5 for Caucasian women. <https://dph.illinois.gov/data-statistics/vital-statistics/infant-mortality-statistics.html>

Housing

The discriminatory housing practices of redlining in Champaign County negatively affected Black families in a multitude of ways. When looking at a map of Champaign-Urbana overlaid with a mapping of race, the effects of these practices are apparent, resulting in segregation, lower housing values, and inadequate infrastructure, for example. The Champaign County Clerk's office has uncovered 18 local subdivisions that deployed restrictive covenants to keep Blacks out of certain neighborhoods. Examples of the suffering resulting from this discrimination include the presence of predatory lenders, food deserts and higher crime rates in segregated predominantly Black neighborhoods.

"In the mid-20th century in contrast to the mostly White residents in neighborhoods south of University Avenue, banks would not lend, realtors would not sell, and landlords would not rent to African American people. African American households were forced to live in the North Side, at the time unincorporated Urbana, in substandard homes. Without bank lending for new construction or improvements, homes were often little more than shacks, lacking basic heating,

kitchen facilities, and plumbing. These areas were intentionally outside of municipal boundaries, making utilities and public investment inaccessible..... It must be emphasized that local segregation was not produced by accident, but through persistent discrimination at every level, including banks, developers, realtors, neighborhood associations, landlords, and cities. Today, zoning ordinances perpetuate segregated housing.” <https://urbana.ccgisc.org/portalurbana/apps/storymaps/collections/60fa01f4adad4f7d9c72cec7a3ae5a93?item=5>

African Americans were admitted to the University of Illinois from the beginning in the late 1800's but were not permitted to live on campus until a token integration of two women in 1945. Housing discrimination at the University of Illinois continued to exist without much abatement into the early 1960's. Community members generously provided rooms to African American students and Black fraternities and sororities also provided some housing. Bethel AME and other churches offered a positive environment and opportunities for students. <https://www.champaigncountyhistory.org/single-post/2018/02/24/african-american-student-housing-at-the-university-of-illinois> See also “A Home of Their Own”, produced by the Office of the Chancellor, UIUC, 2017. 15 minute video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGcwWMFQL8o>

Neighborhood Amenities and Safety

During World War II (1943), two rooms in the basement of Lawhead School were used as a Servicemen's Club, organized by community members for African American soldiers who were not welcomed in the USO at Chanute Field. The creation of the Douglass Center (DC), partially funded by the neighborhood, was related to this failure of other institutions to provide adequate recreational facilities for African American residents. Then, as Michael Burns reported, “Despite the efforts of the DC Steering Committee and its advocates, in September of 1974 the park board approved a plan that did not comply with any of the plans developed by the Community Design Center, and the old DC was slated to be demolished in April 1975. In fact, “compromises were made and the plan that would have satisfied all 36 program needs was dropped in favor of a plan that included only 15. Michael S. Burns. (2013) “The Rhetorics of Community Space: Critical Events in Champaign-Urbana's Black Freedom Movement.” PhD dissertation, University of Illinois

African Americans going to the movies were required to sit in the balconies. Many restaurants would not serve African Americans until the 1960's and services such as haircuts were restricted. “In 1953, All-American halfback J.C. Caroline was illegally denied a haircut in a campus barbershop because of his race—despite the fact that his photo is on display in the shop's front window.” Being Black at Illinois <https://uiaa.org/2023/04/17/being-black-at-illinois/>

Again, the text above can be used to **prepare for public comment at the city council meetings.**

Where: **Urbana City Council meeting, 400 S. Vine St, Urbana**

When: **Monday, June 15, 7pm** at beginning of meeting

Where: **Champaign City Council meeting, 102 N. Neil St, Champaign**

When: **Tuesday, June 16, 7pm** at end of meeting