

**The Archives of the Episcopal Church
Research Report
Episcopal Church Discussion of Reparations
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The Episcopal Church's exposure to the issue of reparations for slavery and exploitation of the African American community was first introduced in open forum at the 1969 Special General Convention. The demand for reparations made there, and the Church's response, occurred within the context of a movement in the Church to use its financial resources to redress social and economic injustice in America's urban centers.

The backdrop for the reparations discussions of 1969 was the General Convention Special Program (GCSP), inaugurated following the 1967 General Convention. The GCSP was a dramatic re-alignment of the Church's funding and spending priorities toward domestic social issues and racial disparity. There was significant lobbying by black and white advocates within the Church (e.g. ESCRU, the Union of Black Clergy and Laity) for attention to racism and poverty in the African American community. The GCSP was the first effort to focus significant resources on organizations outside the Church in an attempt to repair in a materially significant way the fabric of race relations.

Earlier difficult discussions about race and equality reached a flash point in 1967 with the establishment of the General Convention Special Program at the call of Bishop Hines and a growing urgency about the plight of Black Americans, especially in urban centers where the Episcopal Church was most visible. Progressive Church advocates of the program, lay and clerical, created a convincing argument that the General Convention must respond forcefully, which it did by adopting a budget for the 1967-1970 triennium that allocated two million dollars annually, a considerable sum in that day, for programs directly related to the urban crisis and racial injustice, including \$500,000 in community grants. In addition, the Women of the Church responded to the moment with an impressive allocation of \$2,265,917.47 of the 1965-1967 United Thank Offering to fund the Crisis in American Life program. Formal grant application guidelines were entirely based on community self-determination and development needs.

On May 1, 1969, the *Black Manifesto* was delivered to two bishops who were members of Bishop Hines' staff at the Episcopal Church Center. It was brought forward by its author James Forman and 26 others representing the National Black Economic Development Conference (BEDC), which had met on April 26, 1969 to approve the Manifesto. The *Manifesto* demanded that the Episcopal Church contribute \$60 million (and 60% percent of the income from all assets per year) as its share of a \$500 million reparations payment by white churches and synagogues to the National Black Economic Development Conference. They requested a meeting with Bishop Hines (who was not in office on May 1), which took place on May 13 (no information is available on who else may have attended the meeting aside from Hines and Forman). Hines shared with Forman the ways in which the Church's program was already directed toward efforts to address issues named in the *Manifesto*. The Episcopal Church's "General Convention Special Program," a radical change in the Church's program and budget priorities that designated an unprecedented amount of funds for use in Black communities, was initiated by the General Convention in 1967, nearly two years before the *Manifesto* was written.

The tone of the initial meeting on May 1 was described by Bishop Hines as a "confrontation." Bishop Hines did not commit to any action except to bring the *Manifesto* to Executive Council for its response. Their [response](#) occurred on May 21 (see [ENS press release](#) for coverage of these events). The Council

also authorized Hines' appointment of a committee (the "Coburn Committee") to organize a discussion of the *Manifest* at General Convention, which occurred in August 1969. The Coburn Committee presented their report to the 1969 General Convention and recommended that, "the Episcopal Church is to support and expand the operation and budget of the General Convention Special Program." The committee responded specifically to the *Manifesto's* reparations demand with the following:

Resolved, That this Church, without concurring in all of the ideology of the "Black Manifesto", recognize that the Black Economic Development Conference is a movement which, at this moment, shows promise of being an expression of self-determination for the organizing of the black community in America.

Reaction there to James Forman's demands was dramatic. The Union of Black Clergy and Laity wrestled the microphone from a speaker at the first joint session of Convention and introduced Muhammed Kenyatta, a member of the BEDC who demanded the Convention address the issue of racism and reparations. In an immediate gesture of concern, however, the Convention voted to raise \$200,000 for the National Committee of Black Churchmen "to be used for Black community development" provide that the Committee met the original criteria established by the General Convention in 1967 (see attachment).

Of the eight resolutions proposed by the Coburn Committee, all were passed except those directly relating to the Black *Manifesto* (i.e., the reparations clause). The concurred resolutions spoke to the intention of funding economic and social programs in the African American or minority communities. The General Convention minutes are ambiguous as to precisely how the reparations clause was dropped from the concurred resolutions, suggesting conference committee amendments. Convention did, however, attempt to implement the spirit of the *Manifesto*, which was summarized in their statement that, "we recognize the continuing poverty and injustice in our society to which it speaks, but do not accept the *Manifesto* as it is presented."

Despite the reaction to the ideological approach of the *Manifesto*, there is little doubt that its stark language on reparations and the accompanying call for a substantial financial commitment from African American leaders (e.g. the Rev. Paul Washington) were instrumental in generating support for historic levels of social justice spending from the largely white Episcopal leadership in both Houses. One trade-off of the large funding allocations, however, was the *de facto* agreement to expunge mention or discussion of the *Manifesto* and reparations after 1969. The record shows no official mention of the idea of reparations again until 2003.

Brief, almost passing reference to reparations for slavery was made in late 1970s and 1980s Church discussions, but the concept started to appear regularly in a variety of print contexts, culminating in a popular *Witness* issue in December 2002 dedicated to the theme of reparations and focused on the Indigenous and African American communities. One particularly significant development in the 1990s leading up to this renewed interest in the issue may have been Kairos' 1992 call for reparations and reconciliation, as part of a process of acknowledging and atoning for the sin of oppression. Discussion continued in the 2002-2003 unofficial Church press and church networks. This appears to have been a response to various national movements for reparations for slavery, such as the impact of litigation led by Charles Ogletree and the Chicago City Council's call for federal reparations.

Important side chapters affected the discussion of reparations as a legitimate avenue of social restoration. These included a General Convention's [1979-B058](#) resolution urging compensation for the violation of the rights of indigenous peoples in the Hawaiian islands, a [1985-D064](#) General Convention resolution

supporting “monetary redress” for Japanese Americans who were dispossessed and imprisoned during World War II, and a similar [2000-D032](#) resolution supporting Latin Japanese prisoners compensatory “redress,” and General Convention’s support in [1994-D008](#) for “reparations” to Koreans who were enslaved by the Japanese government in same war. Several of these resolutions were avidly debated. Finally, the Episcopal Church’s Executive Council gave a sizeable gift of \$250,000 to the Anglican Church of Canada in 2004 to assist them in funding due to their legally binding financial obligations to the indigenous peoples for the cultural oppression of church boarding schools.

However threatening to the status quo discussion of racism’s effects, it is safe to say that by the mid-2000s, the idea of reparations was not as radical an idea as it appeared to be in 1969. However, its application to African Americans was not widely discussed and advocated in the Church. A notable absence of the language of reparations was also absent, for example, from resolutions on the indigenous peoples in the US. Despite statements at nearly every Convention rejecting racism toward indigenous peoples and rejection of the Doctrine of Discovery, reparations to indigenous peoples were not mooted in the resolutions: [2009-D035](#), [2012-A128](#), and [2015-A024](#).

The 2003 General Convention brought forward [resolution C003](#) supporting US government reparations for slavery that was defeated in the House of Deputies. It was not until 2006 that the General Convention supported through a floor amendment reparations for enslavement of Africans in America and directly addressed the responsibilities of The Episcopal Church. Resolution [2006-A123](#) both apologized for involvement in slavery and asked Executive Council “to report...on how the Church can be ‘the repairer of the breach’ (Isaiah 58:12), both *materially* and relationally, and achieve the spiritual healing and reconciliation that will lead us to a new life in Christ.” With notable exceptions in the diocese of Maryland and New York, the diocesan response was lackluster at best. The resolution was reaffirmed in [2009-A143](#), however, and some of this diocesan and parish-based work continues today.

The 2006 General Convention also passed [2006-C011](#) (Support Legislation for Reparations for Slavery) that called on Congress “to support legislation initiating study of and dialogue about the history and legacy of slavery in the United States and of proposals for monetary and non-monetary reparations to the descendants of the victims of slavery.” The resolution and debate received press coverage and generated discussion among members as a viable path to resolving persistent traces of harm experienced by African Americans. Following on this resolution, Bishop Tom Shaw of Massachusetts gave important testimony in 2007 on HR 40 on the Legacy of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade to the House Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties. Shaw’s testimony explicitly stated The Episcopal Church’s endorsement of “the proposals for monetary and nonmonetary reparations to the descendants to the victims of slavery.”

The 2015 General Convention took the Church to task on the slow progress of anti-racism and reconciliation efforts. The Diocese of Washington proposed C019 on racial disparities, which formed the basis of several 2018 resolutions that asked that the Church to broaden its perspective on anti-racism with [notable reference](#) to Isaiah and the 2006-A123 resolution on “Repairing the Breach.”