

Reconstructing Judaism Resolution on Reparations

1. Whereas Indigenous people populated North America for many thousands of years prior to the arrival of Europeans in the 15th and 16th centuries; and, as European powers conquered and colonized North America, they displaced, enslaved and slaughtered the Native populations; and from its inception, the United States, like so many countries built on a foundation of European colonization, continued to tyrannize and exterminate Native peoples as it sought to expand its territory across the continent;

2. Whereas chattel slavery, involving the theft and forced migration of African people to and around the Americas where they and their descendants were sold as property, was practiced in all thirteen of the British colonies that formed the basis of the United States; and that practice, with its inherent cruelty and brutality, continued through and beyond the founding of this nation, expanding to other states, until 1865, with the status and wealth of the nation thereby inextricably tied to the lives and labor of many millions of enslaved people; and, moreover, despite the abolition of slavery in 1865 by the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, that Amendment preserved the institution of slavery as punishment for crime;

3. Whereas the United States was built on stolen Native land using in large measure the forced labor of enslaved African people, these two genocidal atrocities being foundational and based on a belief in white supremacy that has pervaded this nation from its inception; and in so doing, and through hundreds of years of continuous policy decisions that have perpetuated systems of white supremacy to this day, the United States has consistently denied the most basic rights and opportunities to Native and Black populations, as well as other groups deemed non-white, causing myriad and incalculable harms;

4. Whereas those considered white in the United States – including, in recent years, many Jews – have benefitted from certain rights and privileges with respect to health, safety, property, education, employment, wealth-creation, and social and political participation, which were made possible as a direct result of policies and systems that oppressed Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) populations, whether or not those considered white directly participated in or approved of this oppression;

5. Whereas BIPOC communities in the United States have called for a national reckoning which acknowledges the need to create social equity, ensuring fair access to the benefits and opportunities of a prosperous society, by addressing the myriad of harms caused by the oppressive and discriminatory laws, policies and practices of the nation's government and other civic and private institutions throughout the history of the United States;

6. Whereas healing and reconciliation cannot begin without confronting the truth of the United States' history, and it is long past time to acknowledge and address the multiple and incalculable harms perpetrated against BIPOC communities through colonization, slavery, oppression, and white supremacist policies and practices;

7. Whereas the National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC) has defined reparations to be “a process of repairing, healing and restoring a people injured because of their group identity and in violation of their fundamental human rights” by governments and other institutions, and goes on to assert that “those groups that have been injured have the right to obtain” from the institutions responsible for the injuries “that which they need to repair and heal themselves” and that reparations “in addition to being a demand for justice, [are] a principle of international human rights law”;

8. Whereas the pervasiveness of white supremacy and the generational trauma it has inflicted on BIPOC communities over hundreds of years mean that there is no redress sufficient to fully repair the foundational harms caused by colonialism, slavery, and the ongoing manifestations of these systems; such harms, which have resulted in the current power and prosperity of the United States – among other nations – still require repair, as articulated by the growing national movement for reparations;

9. Whereas Jewish tradition holds that repair for harm done be completed through a process of *teshuvah*, ceasing ongoing harm and making amends for that already done, and that we all have a collective responsibility for the damages caused;

10. Whereas our sacred texts command us to pursue justice (Deuteronomy 16:20) and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves (Leviticus 19:18), and we are also specifically commanded to make restitution as when the foundation of a house is built with a stolen beam (Talmud Gittin 55a), we acknowledge that the stolen land, resources and labor of people forced to work without compensation necessitates restitution; and, while it is not incumbent upon us to complete the task [of perfecting the world], neither are we at liberty to desist from it (Pirkei Avot 2:21);

11. Whereas in our commitment not to desist from this work, Reconstructing Judaism and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association already have taken some initial steps:

The Joint Tikkun Olam Commission, following study and discussion, voted in January 2020 that its primary focus would be to develop resources and programs, in partnership with all appropriate stakeholders, to support movement-wide engagement on the issue of racial justice and the impact of racist attitudes and policies on BIPOC communities;

In early 2021, Reconstructing Judaism added a Director of Racial Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and took additional steps to diversify its senior leadership;

In February 2021, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association passed a “Resolution on Reparations for Slavery, Indigenous Genocide and Systemic Racism in North America/Turtle Island”;

In March 2021, the board of governors of Reconstructing Judaism unanimously adopted a five-year strategic plan, which identified as one of five key organizational goals to “join

and lead Jewish efforts to dismantle systemic racism, and to advance racial diversity, equity, and inclusion within the Reconstructionist movement”;

Reconstructing Judaism formed the Jews of Color and Allies Advisory Group in April 2020, and that Advisory Group drafted a set of recommendations which were adopted by the Reconstructing Judaism board of governors in June 2021, as a set of eleven commitments to racial justice, which will guide the policies, activities and programming of the movement for years to come; and

12. Whereas the Reconstructionist movement is an international movement, which recognizes that the countries represented within the movement have unique histories and that many of them participated in, benefitted from or were affected by colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade; and while this document focuses principally on the United States, the framework employed herein can nevertheless serve as a starting point for non-U.S. congregations and affiliated groups to engage in similar learning, reflection, partnership with oppressed groups, and repair, as set forth below;

Now, therefore, be it resolved as follows:

13. Resolved, that in our commitment to work for a national reckoning in the United States through reparations, we collectively acknowledge the harm that has been done to BIPOC communities and the ways that current American prosperity is largely the result of a system built on oppression and white supremacy;

14. Resolved, that we strive to join with BIPOC-led efforts in the United States and to pursue policies and decisions that seek to have our country confront its history squarely and honestly, and to redress the many harms, particularly the persistent racial wealth gap, caused by disparate access to opportunities and resources;

15. Resolved, that we are committed to supporting and advocating for institutional, local, and federal legislation and policies that specifically address the need for reparations, including but not limited to H.R. 40, the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act, first introduced by the late U.S. Representative John Conyers in 1989;

16. Resolved, that we encourage all Reconstructionist movement congregations and affiliated groups to engage in ongoing learning about systems of oppression and structural racism, and about how these systems have caused, and continue to cause, harm in our communities;

17. Resolved, that informed by and working in solidarity with impacted communities, we call for all Reconstructionist movement congregations and affiliated groups to engage in deep reflection on the ways in which we have participated in or benefitted from racial injustices in our communities and to answer the call of Torah to pursue justice and practice *teshuvah* by taking concrete steps to repair the harm; and

The resolution was approved by the Tikkun Olam Commission on April 29, 2022, for consideration by the Board of Governors of Reconstructing Judaism, the Plenum, and theRRA.

18. Resolved, that this document should not be, and shall not be, the last communal self-assessment, reflection, or call to pursue reparations for the injustices and structural inequities resulting from European colonialism and white supremacy.

ADOPTED, upon the recommendation of the Joint Tikkun Olam Commission, by the Reconstructionist Plenum on the ____ day of ____, ____ [year], and by the Reconstructing Judaism board of governors on the ____ day of ____, ____ [year].