

New York State Assembly says YES to reparations

written by Stephen Millies
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June 10 news conference at the African Burial Ground in New York City. SLL photo:

Stephen Millies

The New York State Assembly voted 107-43 on June 9 to establish the “New York State Community Commission on Reparations Remedies.” The 43 assembly members who voted against this historic act authored by Assembly Member Charles Barron are nothing but Holocaust deniers.

The legislation sets up a commission that will decide how much is to be paid for over 400 years of slavery, torture and death. An important feature of Assembly Bill A2619A is that the commission won’t just have a small number of hand-picked elected officials.

Two representatives each will be included from three Black community groups that have fought for reparations for decades. They are the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N’COBRA); the Institute of the Black World; and the December 12th Movement.

The December 12th Movement called a noontime news conference and rally the next day, on June 10. It was held on sacred ground: the African Burial Ground in lower Manhattan.

Omowale Clay of D12 welcomed activists. While noting that no amount of money can compensate for centuries of genocide, Clay said the commission can determine how much must be paid.

Omowale Clay said that the December 12th Movement will be holding a Juneteenth Commemoration at Frederick Douglass Square (formerly Nostrand and Jefferson avenues) in Brooklyn. It will start at 12 noon on Saturday, June 19.

Larry Hamm, chair of the People’s Organization for Progress in New Jersey, called the bill’s passing a “great victory.” POP is pushing to pass reparations legislation in the Garden State.

Hamm said that national reparations bill H.R. 40 — named for the 40 acres of land that was promised to every enslaved African family — has been introduced in every session of Congress since 1989. It's time to get it passed.



Fighters for reparations (from left): Larry Hamm, Charles Barron, Viola Plummer, Rev. Herbert Daughtry and Omawale Clay. SLL photo: Stephen Millies

Fighting for the burial ground

That grand old fighter, Rev. Herbert Daughtry, 90 years young, described the struggle to preserve the African Burial Ground, where remains were uncovered during a construction project in 1991. Activists including Rev. Daughtry, the late Sonny Abubadika Carson and the late Elombe Brath put their bodies on the line to prevent its desecration.

Daughtry reminded listeners of the national reparations march that was held in Washington, D.C., on Aug. 17, 2002 — the 115th birthday of the Honorable Marcus Garvey. Herman Ferguson, a co-worker of Malcolm X, who died in 2014, was a main organizer of that event.

Then Charles Barron started the chant: “What do we want? Reparations! When do we want it? Now!”

The former Black Panther, who says that he will always be a Panther, is demanding \$1 trillion as a down payment. He demanded that the New York State Senate pass the bill and Gov. Andrew Cuomo sign it.

“Some people say, ‘Well, I didn’t oppress you, my European ancestors came at the turn of the century. Why should I have to pay?’ I don’t care if you came here last night,” Barron said. “You benefited from the parasitic capitalist system.”

“For those who died in the Middle Passage, 10, 20, 30 millions, this day is for you,” said Barron. The assembly member listed a series of rebellions of enslaved Africans, including those that erupted in New York City. “This day is for you, Haiti.”

Barron told how the late Queen Mother Audley Moore got a million signatures on a reparations petition and forced John F. Kennedy — who was then running for president — to sign it.

New York City Council Member Inez Barron urged the council to pass Resolution 1039 demanding the state set up the reparations commission.

N’COBRA representative Courtland W. Hankins III pointed out that Wall Street was built on slavery.

Roger Wareham of D12 said that “any further delay is unacceptable.” He described how D12 has fought for reparations for 30 years.

As D12 told the 2001 United Nations World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa: “They stole us! They sold us! They owe us!”

