

They stole us, they sold us, they owe us: Reparations must be paid!

written by Stephen Millies
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SLL photo: Stephen Millies

The wealthy and powerful in New York are trying to sideline a state reparations bill. To protest and stop this sabotage, a powerful news conference was held in front of the African Burial Ground in Lower Manhattan on June 5.

Roger Wareham, a December 12th Movement's International Secretariat member, chaired it. Wareham reminded listeners that the late Sonny Abubadika Carson helped save the sacred ground – where 20,000 Black people are buried – from being destroyed.

Activists, including Rev. Herbert Daughtry, Sr., put their bodies on the line against government bulldozers.

“We built this country,” declared New York City Councilperson Charles Barron. Up to the Civil War, the vast majority of U.S. exports were produced by enslaved Africans.

Barron pointed out that New York City was only second to Charleston, South Carolina, in its dependence on enslaved Africans. Wall Street had a slave market.

The very name “Wall Street” was born of slavery, with enslaved Africans building the wall in 1653. In 1711, Wall Street was declared the city's first official slave market for selling and renting enslaved Africans and Indigenous Peoples. Wall Street was the primary New York slave market for the next hundred years.

It was the struggle of Black people that forced New York State to abolish slavery in 1827, said Barron. As a New York State Assembly member, he sponsored a reparations bill that passed with over 100 votes.

The legislation would set up a commission with members of community organizations that have advocated reparations for decades. These groups included the December 12th Movement; N'COBRA (The National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America); and the Institute of Black World.

The bill was, however, held up in the State Senate.

Justice thwarted by ‘petty politics’

Roger Wareham then read from the press statement:

“The current legislative session in Albany ends in three days. An issue of monumental importance – reparations for New York State’s citizens of African Descent – hangs in the balance, reputedly a prisoner to hurt feelings and petty career ambitions.

“One State Senate version, S2416, sponsored by Sen. Brisport, replicates the bill introduced by then-Assemblyman Charles Barron, which was passed by the Assembly in two separate sessions. What makes this version of the Reparations legislation unique from those anywhere else in the United States is the provision for a Commission which has a majority community-selected membership. Three community organizations, of which we are one, will select 6 of the 11 Commission members. The legislature will have the final determination and execution on the Commission’s findings and recommendations.

“Apparently, progress on the Senate bill and even the assignment of a number to the Assembly bill, sponsored by Assemblymember Solages, is being held up for reasons so petty that they won’t survive public discussion.

“Our three organizations each have more than 30 years of demonstrated commitment to the demand for reparations. Our participation on the Commission gives us no material benefit, only an opportunity to bring our experience to help develop a comprehensive program that will improve the quality of life for the state’s Black residents.

“This is a time for real leadership from Assembly leader Carl Heastie and Senate leader Stewart Cousins. They need to cut through the smoke and shepherd the Brisport and Solages bill into passage before the session ends.

“We ask those who support the bill to call the offices of Assemblyman Hastie

(518-455-3791; 718-654-6539; speaker@nyassembly.gov), Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins (518-455-2585; 914-423-4031; scousins@nysenate.gov), as well as their local state representatives.”

Never forget the Buffalo massacre

Kennis Henry, a National Co-Chair of N’COBRA, recalled the murder of 10 people in Buffalo on May 14, 2022, by a white supremacist. “Here are your reparations” was written on his rifle.

“Prove him wrong!” she declared, adding, “I’m so proud to be with you.”

December 12th Movement Chairwoman Viola Plummer declared we are “ready to go to war - not in Ukraine, but here in New York State. We’ve got to let them know that we’re mad as hell!”

The banks control the political system that’s derailing the reparations bill. Plummer denounced JPMorgan Chase CEO Jammie Dimon as a bloodsucker.

The press conference ended with the participants chanting: “They stole us! They sold us! They owe us!”

Reparations now!

