

Senator Cory A. Booker
Testimony on H.R. 40 and the Path to Restorative Justice
Before the House Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties
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Chairman Nadler, Chairman Cohen, Ranking Member Collins, and Ranking Member Johnson, it's an honor to be here today to testify before the Committee. Thank you very much for holding this historic hearing on H.R. 40, the bill to study and make reparations proposals. Thank you to Representative Sheila Jackson Lee for her leadership in building such tremendous support for this bill, and to this committee's former Chairman, who first introduced this bill in 1989.

It is fitting that we gather today, on Juneteenth, a day purported to celebrate the abolition of slavery, our nation's original sin, and to commemorate our commitment to the freedom and equality of all.

But are we truly free from the historically rooted and hideous legacy of slavery? From the decades of violent terrorism that plagued African-American communities from Reconstruction through Jim Crow? From the state-sponsored and systematic exclusion of generations of African Americans from the promise of economic opportunity and prosperity?

As a nation, we have yet to truly acknowledge and grapple with the racism and white supremacy that tainted this country's founding and continues to cause persistent and deep racial disparities and inequality. In order to do so – we must address these issues head on. And while this conversation starts with the original sin of slavery, we know that its harm persisted in the racialized violence that terrorized African American communities from Reconstruction to this very day. From the more than 4,400 lynchings documented from 1877 to 1950 at my friend Bryan Stevenson's National Memorial for Peace and Justice to the massacre of "black wall street" in Tulsa in 1921. From the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in 1963 to the shooting massacre at the

Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina just four years ago this week.

The stain of slavery was not just inked in blood shed, but in the overt, state-sponsored policies, fueled by white supremacy and racism, that have disadvantaged African-Americans economically for generations. Many of our bedrock domestic policies that have ushered millions of Americans into the middle class, stimulating generational wealth and opportunity, like the GI bill, and Social Security, were intentionally designed to exclude blacks. From school segregation to red-lined neighborhoods to discriminatory mortgage lending...

These are not nameless and faceless harms. My own family, the year I was born, had to get a white family to pose as them in order to purchase the house where I grew up in New Jersey.

And while these may be policies of the past, the damage has endured across generations. The racial wealth gap in this country is unrelenting and widening. The average white household in this country has TEN TIMES the wealth of the average black household. In Boston, a recent study found that the average white family had somewhere around \$240,000 in wealth, while the average black family had just \$8 in wealth. This vast racial wealth gap has been entrenched and exacerbated by federal policies that have intentionally excluded blacks from wealth-building and opportunity.

Health outcomes also vary widely by race. Nationwide, black women are nearly four times as likely to die from pregnancy complications as white women. Access to health care services continues to be segregated by race, which results in disturbing disparities where blacks are 44% more likely to die from a stroke and 25% more likely to die from heart disease.

Our criminal justice system has been destroyed by racial disparities and implicit racial bias. Blacks are almost four times more likely to be

arrested for selling drugs despite the fact that whites are more likely to sell drugs than blacks. There is no difference between blacks and whites in using drugs, yet blacks are nearly three times more likely to be arrested than whites. Federal prosecutors are more likely to charge blacks with offenses that carry harsh mandatory minimums than similarly situated whites.

The list goes on...

And these disparities don't just harm black communities. As the great Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, QUOTE: **“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”**

These injustices and generational harms hurt ALL Americans. Providing equal opportunity and access to the black community ultimately leads to a stronger economy and better opportunity for EVERYONE. Right now, we as a country are all shouldering the tremendous cost of disparity, from homelessness, to mass incarceration – rather than addressing the historical roots of racial inequality.

That's why I'm leading the companion to H.R. 40 in the Senate. It is time that we seriously examine and study our collective history, and advance ideas and proposals for our future as a nation.

This bill would bring together the kinds of experts that you will hear from in the next panel, to study and address head on the painful legacy of slavery and develop solutions that will finally begin to right the economic scales of past harms and make sure we are a country where all dignity and humanity is affirmed. So that ALL Americans can enjoy the promise of equality and opportunity.

I'm grateful and encouraged that the Senate version of this bill has gained the support of 12 of my colleagues – and I will continue to work to ensure that this important conversation continues.

Thank you again for giving me this opportunity to testify.