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Thank you Chairman Cohen, ranking member Johnson, and members of the committee. It's an honor to testify on a topic as important as this one.

Nothing I'm about to say is meant to minimize the horror and brutality of slavery and Jim Crow. Racism is a bloody stain on this country's history. I consider our failure to pay reparations directly to freed slaves after the Civil War to be one of the greatest injustices ever perpetrated by the U.S. government.

But I worry that our desire to fix the past compromises our ability to fix the present. Think about what we're doing today. We're spending our time debating a bill that mentions slavery 25 times but incarceration only once, in an era with zero black slaves but nearly a million black prisoners— a bill that doesn't mention homicide once, at a time when the Center for Disease Control reports homicide as the number one cause of death for young black men. I'm not saying that acknowledging history doesn't matter. It does. I'm saying that there's a difference between acknowledging history and allowing history to distract us from the problems we face today.

In 2008, the House of Representatives formally apologized for slavery and Jim Crow. In 2009, the Senate did the same. I'm not against apologies. But black people don't need another apology. We need a less punitive criminal justice system. We need safer neighborhoods and better schools. We need affordable health care. And none of these things can be achieved through reparations for slavery.

Nearly everyone close to me told me not to come today. They said that even though I've only ever voted for Democrats, I'd be perceived as a Republican and therefore hated by half the country. Other people told me that distancing myself from Republicans would end up alienating the other half of the country. And the sad truth is that they were both right. That's how suspicious we've become of one another. That's how divided we are as a nation.

If we were to pay reparations today, we would only divide the country further, making it harder to build the political coalitions required to solve the problems facing black people today; we would insult many black Americans by putting a price on the suffering of their ancestors; and we would turn the relationship between black Americans and white Americans from a coalition into a transaction—from a union between citizens into a lawsuit between plaintiffs and defendants.

What we should do is pay reparations to black Americans who actually grew up under Jim Crow and were *directly* harmed by racist policies like redlining—people like my Grandparents.

But paying reparations to *all* descendants of slaves is a mistake. Take me for example. I was born three decades after Jim Crow ended into a privileged household in the suburbs. I attend an

Ivy League school. I grew up with programs designed to uplift black people—from Affirmative Action in education to diversity and inclusion programs in the labor market. Yet I'm also descended from slaves who worked on Thomas Jefferson's Monticello plantation. So reparations for slavery would allocate federal resources to *me* and not to an American with the wrong ancestry—even if that person is living paycheck to paycheck and working multiple jobs to support a family. You might call that justice. I call it justice for the dead at the price of justice for the living.

The question is not what America owes *me* by virtue of my ancestry; the question is what all Americans owe each other by virtue of being citizens of the same nation. And the obligation of citizenship is not transactional. It can't be paid off. It's not contingent on your ancestry. And it never expires.

Reparations for slavery would keep us stuck in the past and distracted from the present; it would solve none of the major problems facing black Americans today; it would waste resources on people like me who don't need them, and most importantly, it would make our obligation to our fellow Americans, which should be ongoing and unconditional, into a lawsuit that can be settled once and forgotten forever. For all these reasons, bill H.R. 40 is a moral and political mistake. Thank you.