

ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE AND HISTORY, INC.

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PRESS RELEASE - II

20 June 2011

ASALH EXECUTIVE COUNCIL ENDORSES CALL FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE REPARATIONS SUPERFUND

TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEMS OF VIOLENCE AND HIGH DROPOUT RATES

AMONG BLACK YOUTH.

"Reparations Superfund as Vehicle for Cultural Revitalization for U.S. African Americans in the 21st Century"

The Executive Council of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), at its 9 June 2012 meeting, unanimously endorsed the idea for the establishment of the "Reparations Superfund" as outlined in the Winter-Spring 2012 issue of *The Journal of African American History* (JAAH), recently published by ASALH.

Given the pressing need to combat the violence and murder of black youth, often by other black youth, the Reparations Superfund would identify and provide financial support for effective intervention programs to "Stop the Killing"; and support alternative programs and strategies to allow young people to stay in school and develop the skills needed to improve themselves and the conditions in their local communities.

ASALH endorses the call for a coalition of professional groups and individuals, including the NAACP, National Urban League, the Children's Defense Fund, and others to come together in a national conference to establish the "Reparations Superfund." Representatives of groups and organizations committed to advancing the social welfare and educational services to African American youth are urged to endorse the project and participate in the conference.

The JAAH Special Issue "African Americans and Movements for Reparations: Past, Present, and Future" documents the long movement for African American reparations from the legislation introduced into the U.S. Congress in the 1890s to provide pensions for formerly enslaved African Americans to James Forman's "Black Manifesto" and demand for \$500 million in reparations from U.S. churches and religious institutions in the late 1960s to the more recent reparations lawsuits against businesses and industries that profited from slavery and the slave trade. The Special issue is dedicated to the scholarly legacy of the late Dr. Ronald W. Walters, the long-time political advisor to Jesse Jackson and other African American leaders and organizations, who contributed an important essay to this collection.



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With the call for the establishment of a Reparations Superfund, the aim is to revitalize the reparations movement among African Americans with the goal of increasing the educational and social welfare alternatives for African American youth. With the decrease in the availability of music, visual and performing arts programs in many urban public schools, the Reparations Superfund would seek to support financially the introduction and expansion of arts education for black youth as a vehicle for dropout prevention. In addition, those programs that have proven successful in stemming youth and gang violence, offering employment and volunteer activities for young people as an alternative to crime and illegal drugs would also receive financial support through the Reparations Superfund.

The businesses and corporations targeted for financial contributions to the Superfund would be those that benefit economically from the purchasing power of the African American community. Supporters of the Reparations Superfund will seek donations from corporations and industries that have not traditionally contributed to African American social welfare agencies, but nonetheless depend on support from African American consumers.

At the same time, "closing the achievement gap" as the goal for the education and training of African American youth could be viewed as sinister ploy when one considers the need to "Stop the Killing" and to prepare our children and young people as contributors to their personal and our collective survival and advancement. Our children must understand that vengeful personal or collective violence must be avoided because that historically was the source of our oppression.

Fortunately, our victimization became a source of cultural strength, and as with other oppressed groups inside and outside the United States, the resistance against unjust oppression allowed us to assume the moral high ground in international debates and discourse on social justice for oppressed groups worldwide historically.

That position was challenged in the 1980s by black and white neo-conservatives, and for African Americans economically the situation has moved from bad to worse, and our children and young people are killing themselves and each other at alarming rates. We must keep in mind throughout the eras of enslavement, neo-slavery, racial cleansing, and legal segregation, very few African Americans looked to suicide or avenging violence as a way to deal with oppressive personal circumstances.

Spirituality has been a fundamental element in African American culture and perhaps the spike in suicides is correlated with the increase in the number of our children and young people who are *unchurched*. The cultural revitalization project is needed to allow our children and young people to experience the richness and diversity of African American spirituality – African, Judeo-Christian, Islamic, and many others; and acquire mastery of the literacy and critical thinking skills to understand their personal connections to these world traditions.



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Even before the economic downturn, music and visual and performing arts programs were disappearing from urban public schools thus depriving the students of the knowledge and the participation in an important aspect of their cultural heritage. At the same time, music and visual and performing arts are known for increasing student engagement and can be important vehicles for dropout prevention. There are numerous models of successful music, visual and performing arts programs that could be added to public school programs, or introduced into neighborhoods as music and arts programs through financial support from the Reparations Superfund.

Enslavement, sharecropping, convict leasing, racial cleansing, peonage, exclusion from government-sponsored farming, housing, and credit programs, and legalized discrimination, documented in the JAAH Special Issue "African Americans and Movements for Reparations," help to explain why African Americans need the contributions to the Reparations Superfund to deal with the life-threatening conditions facing our children and young people. In addition, the launching of the Reparation Superfund should serve as the spark for a much-needed "cultural revitalization movement" that would inspire and motivate African American youth in the 21st century.

Those individuals and groups wishing to join with ASALH, the National Council of Black Studies (NCBS), and the Institute for the African American Child (ISAAC), and other professional organizations in the efforts to establish the Reparations Superfund should contact:

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JAAH website: <u>www.jaah.org</u>.

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Those wishing to purchase a copy of the JAAH Special Issue (\$25.00) should contact:

Ms. Karen May, Publications Manager ASALH 2225 Georgia Avenue, Suite 331 Washington, DC, 20059

Or ASALH website: www.asalh.net