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AGENDA ITEM 7

DISCUSSION ITEM:
COMMUNITY OF ELIGIBILITY

Member of the Reparations Task Force

I want to thank each of you for your dedication to serving on this important committee. The work you are doing will have a profound impact on all Californians and this nation. As we know the national debate concerning reparations has been going on for forty years without clear resolution and improvement. Some cities have taken upon themselves to begin the discussion and provide some compensation for many who have been adversely effected by slavery and its economic devastation in African American communities resulting in an enormous wealth gap that will take decades to close if no aggressive intervention occurs.

The passage of AB3121 was a major milestone for California and this nation. California is the largest state, fifth largest economy in the world and one of the farthest state from what one would consider the deep south - the heart of Dixie. However, the information you have discovered shows that even being as far away from Dixie as California may have been, the impact of slavery was felt just as strong. This

shows how pervasive slavery was in every aspect of this nation and continues to impact economic, social and our political reality.

In authoring AD 3121, I realized that many of the issues this bill will raise were unresolved. It would have taken a lifetime to answer all the questions. Thus some issues, such as eligibility remain partially answered in the bill.

So, let me share with you my conversations and thinking during this time.

Slavery surely had an economic impact on the African. Being denied access to ones economic worth - the ability to work and make money - kept generations of Africans in dire poverty. IF you listen to the voices of former slaves recorded in the 1930s by the Smithsonian, the depravity is stark and alarming. Voices of former slaves let us all know that when legal slavery ended, they had “nothing” but the rags on their backs. - Few had skills other than farming and thus sharecropping became the new form of slavery. Most sharecropping at the

end of the season owe the owner more than they made. The battle at weigh stations were common and the Black worker never won the argument. (Thus my dad's situation which caused him to flee the south to save his life - August 1951.)

Additionally, the end of slavery increased the brutality to blacks. During slavery, the African had economic worth - he was owned by someone. Therefore if someone injured him, they had to pay his master for that harm. After slavery, there was no one to pay and so, brutal actions - lynching, maiming, etc. were common place which created untold fear and increased servile behavior. Exercising ones constitutional rights to vote, appear in court, fight back was tantamount to signing a death sentence.

I could go on with a recounting of economic and social indignities that were upheld and supported by the courts in the land. These become the basis for the discussion of who deserves reparations. Slavery was more than a physical condition. The psychological impact it had on the aspirations of Africans was promoted through open violence

without protection of the law. Lynchings and burnings to keep Africans in their place caused generations to place limitations of ones ability to strive for excellence. My grandfather was in Arkansas during the Elaine Arkansas riots. The killings lasted for weeks as black men were hunted in the fields because they had the audacity to attempt to organize and collectively bargain for fairness as sharecroppers. The fear my grandfather felt was palatable and and crippled his family's ability to dream beyond the cotton fields.

President Barack Obama was not a product of slavery. He may have suffered some racial incidents, but his psyche was influenced by his Kenyan father and white mother. He did not have limitations and fear drilled in his psyche and thus aspired to become President.

Reparations is designed to repair and heal the damage done to Africans for 400 years of slavery and Jim Crow. Recent immigrants do not share our common oppression at the same level. They can trace their ancestors. My son in law is a Kenyan and he can trace his ancestors hundreds of years back and when in Kenya we visit their

grave sites and viewed proud pictures. Things that I have limited knowledge and access beyond the 1870s.

Reparations is for those who are the decedents of slaves first because of the devastation they suffered from hundreds years of no wages and no ability to own land and accrue wealth. Their ties were permanently severed from their homeland and their ability to return to Africa is almost impossible. They are truly Americans . I am a living witness to that fact after dozens of trips to the continent. My return each time reinforces that I have some cultural tendencies, but I am truly an American.

Free blacks who lived during slavery and might have been severely hindered by the system should be allow to make their case for reparations because of their direct contact with the slave system that treated them like slaves - limited mobility, fear of enslavement, lack of justice in the system and inability to acquire wealth.

African immigrants who freely came the United States in search of a better life would not be eligible. Whether they found a better life or not, they could always immigrate back to their homeland and re-establish themselves with their indigenous family.

The debate may continue but there is one thing very clear - Those who are decendents of slaves had and have the impact of that system living in them and either driving or altering their aspirations and reality.