

john powell testimony synopsis:

There is not agreement on the scope of reparation. Some think of it limited to individuals while others think of it as it applies to groups. Again, some think of it in terms of a discreet set of events while others think of it as more broadly. There are also some who insist that only the federal government can advance reparation, not states or municipalities. While there are arguments for this position, I think it too narrow. Finally there is a way of thinking about reparation as interventions that place a group where that would have been without the injury. In my comments, I will focus more on the work of structures that are related to the injury and the repair. My testimony will focus on how the structure and ideology of racial hierarchy was and continues to be inscribed in our systems, structures, culture and sense of collective identity rather than understanding race as an individualistic or interpersonal phenomenon. I will emphasize and attempt to show how both race itself (racial identities) and systems that undergird or perpetuate racial inequality have changed and continue to change, processes I describe as “racialization” to underscore their dynamic nature.

I will also attempt to describe how systems of racialization are not simply about Black or Latinx or Asian or even white people, but about deep structures within American society, from our Constitution, our economy, our immigration and naturalization laws to metropolitan fragmentation and municipal governance. Because of this, a serious intervention must look beyond the narrow concern of prejudice and racist intentions to consider how structures interact and some of the intended and unintended outcomes. This analysis suggests why many prior efforts to correct racial disparities have failed: they are insufficiently sensitive to structural conditions and dynamics. Individually focused remedies for structural racial inequality are woefully insufficient. Where appropriate, I will consider these issues as they specially relate to California.