

Submitter: Ana Lee

On Behalf
Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Veterans, Emergency Management, Federal
and World Affairs

Measure: SB776

Why reparations in Oregon?

If you don't already know the answer, you don't know your history.

Oregon was birthed as a whites-only state from the very beginning. On June 18, 1844, the baby state of Oregon passed our first Black exclusion laws allows white settlers to publicly whip Black people 39 times every six months until they left the state. We reinforced this law again on September 21, 1849 with another exclusion law that prohibited "...negro or mulatto to enter into, or reside within the limits of this Territory." The very next year we passed laws to give free land to white people. We tripled down on November 9, 1857, banned both free and enslaved Black people from residing in Oregon, owning real estate, making contracts, voting or using the legal system in any way. Although the laws were repealed a very long time ago, the racist language in Oregon's constitution wasn't removed by voters until 2002.

Walidah Imarisha, Portland-based activist and scholar, reminds us that just 18 years ago — 30% of voters elected to keep the racist clause in the constitution. When we truly look our history square in the face, it becomes very clear why Lane County only has 1.1% Black residents, compared to the 13% national average. Oregon is 87% white for a reason. It was build and designed that way from the foundation up, and will continue to operate on those foundations until we stand up and make a change. With this task force, we have the opportunity to begin to make things right for our community members. Just as I have benefitted from the centuries of laws uplifting my people, Black community members have been harmed by centuries of laws excluding them, centuries of violence, centuries of futures interrupted and lost. Nothing could ever truly soothe the wound that has been caused from our country's history of enslavement, genocide and exclusion, but reparations is one place we can start to rip apart that old foundation and build anew.

Please stand on the right side of history and move this bill forward. Just like Germany after the Nazi era, we have an incredible opportunity to make amends for the harm we've caused and bring real community back to our people. Please join me in supporting this bill today.