

## Letter to Committee from HRC

Hello AARAC Members!

As we have discussed over the past few months, the HRC worked with Dr. Rachel Brahinsky's class at the University of San Francisco to conduct a series of focus groups with Black San Franciscans identified through the Reparations survey. The class has submitted their materials— primarily the raw transcripts from the focus groups, as well as individual letters from each student summarizing what they've discovered throughout the process.

This project came out of a desire from the community and the Committee to see more personal narrative voice throughout the report. My initial hope for this partnership was to engage an academic partner to conduct in-depth conversations with stakeholders in order to capture candid thoughts about the desired outcomes for a Reparations proposal, gather input on the Draft Reparations Plan, and to provide an opportunity for deeper engagement and discourse for everyone involved. The transcripts reveal another layer beneath the conversations that have happened at AARAC meetings throughout the past two years and add additional depth to the recommendations.

The complete Dropbox folder containing all of the materials from the students can be found [at this link](#). I encourage you to take a look at everything; however, there are quite a few documents, so I have included some of the highlights below. Each section also has a link next to it that will take you directly to the folder's complete context. Please let me know if you have any questions or suggestions.

Thanks!

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## Student Findings and Letters [\[Link\]](#)

### Highlights

“I believe there should be more research done on the following ideas: cultural centers and financial literacy courses. Based on the focus groups I partook in, it seems that the position on Black cultural centers in San Francisco has been split. While these centers provide meaningful services to the community it seems as though most participants either expect more from the centers or expect efforts to be placed in other initiatives”

**“Participants repeatedly mentioned the need for accessible and relevant resources, especially quality health care.** Community members communicated wanting more essential resources within their communities, like **accessible schools, health clinics, affordable dentists, grocery stores, and art centers. Additionally, participants conveyed the need for culturally relevant healthcare.** Participants expressed distrust of the health care system due to mistreatment and oversight from non-Black health care providers. Also, participants talked about their concerns about the **lack of Black assisted living facilities** for their elderly family members.”

**“Monetary compensation was a popular topic of discussion among the focus groups.** Community members articulated that receiving cash payments would help improve their lives and their family's livelihood by providing financial stability. **Participants felt that monetary compensation would support them in gaining assets like homeownership and opportunities for entrepreneurship.** Furthermore, many participants explained that cash payments would allow them to establish generational wealth for their families. Community members also stated that the money would allow them to pay for everyday expenses and alleviate debt.”

**“I deeply encourage the reparations committee to invest in working with other communities of color to achieve solidarity and gain support for reparations.** In my own Filipino culture, we have a saying *Isang Bagsak*, meaning “one down.” It was used during the United Farmworkers Movement between the Mexican and Filipino workers to show solidarity with one another. *Isang Bagsak* eludes to the idea that if one person falls, the whole community falls, and in turn, if one community is successful, others be successful as well. **The cross-cultural term opposes the us-or-them mentality and instead emphasizes a collective effort in order to achieve justice.**”

“In review, we have found a variety of feedback with the underlying message of **desire for belonging, a desire for autonomy, education and job training services for all ages, and Black health centers such as elderly homes**. Alongside education and job training, I have heard multiple participants voice a desire for **job training services for local, large industries such as finance, tech, and data analytics**. Not only will this create more diversity in the tech industry, but it will also keep young Black individuals and families here in San Francisco. As a participant suggested, possibly setting up a career pathway program from local school districts to tech mega-companies like Salesforce Inc., for example. Overall, this is just a glimpse into our findings, and I believe we have great information and feedback from our focus group attendees.”

“**Overwhelmingly, participants are interested in having AUTONOMY in how they would use a cash payment**. There were many varying thoughts and emotions on what people didn’t want the SF reparations report to address, but when it came to what people did want, many participants agreed they wanted the choice to be theirs. **The emphasis from community members on autonomy was reflected in many areas – choice in housing, choice in education, choice in healthcare.**”

“**Another lever that was mentioned was taxes, and how could tax breaks or incentives be used as a pathway to reparations, for example not paying income tax or using the marijuana sales tax to fund reparations**. Redevelopment was mentioned frequently as an aspect of participant’s family stories and part of what they were looking to remedy via reparations. **A few participants I heard from were grandchildren or children of business owners who lost their business by eminent domain during the redevelopment period in San Francisco**, particularly in the Fillmore. Redevelopment is definitely an area for further exploration.”

## Focus Group Questions

Link:

[https://www.dropbox.com/sh/wgmqcih3ld8p23q/AADxv6e4Wc6k0eknb3-U2hTya?dl=0&preview=\\*Reparations+Focus+Groups+Interview+Questions.pdf](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/wgmqcih3ld8p23q/AADxv6e4Wc6k0eknb3-U2hTya?dl=0&preview=*Reparations+Focus+Groups+Interview+Questions.pdf)

## Selected Responses from Focus Group Participants

### April 11 - USF Campus [\[Link\]](#)

**“Interviewer:** Are there policies that have created unnecessary barriers for you in San Francisco?”

**Interviewee:** When I think back to raising my kids and where I've lived throughout the city, even though it's not a policy that is on paper, they call it the war on drugs, but it was, from where I sat then and both now, it was a concerted effort to continue to break up Black families and to, I guess in essence, steal back communities from Black families to now, see what we have, where the Fillmore district is completely gentrified. I walk down Fillmore, I live on Post Street on the backside of Hamilton. My kids grew up cheerleading there, playing sports there. I don't recognize it.”

*“Justin Herman was hell-bent on eradicating black people like they were rodents. In essence that was the treatment. When you think about, okay, he did this in Hawaii, that makes perfect sense because when you go to Hawaii now, the natives are rarely there. It is all built up for tourists and everybody else, but natives are not thought about. Black people were good for San Francisco to come and work shipyards and things like that, that was okay.”*

*“The hope that I have for the future of Black San Francisco, and what gives me hope, is that we continue as Black people to realize and understand that every time somebody throws us away or thinks they're throwing us away, they're planting another tree. They're planting another sunflower. They're planting another entrepreneur. They're planting another homeowner. They're planting another fighter, another revolutionary. The hope is for our realization and that's what gives me hope also.”*

*“The African-American community has suffered losses, whether it's educationally, financially, in almost every way that you can imagine. It's a past-due balance. We're owed something.”*

*“Again, this committee and the people who do this, you're going to have to be strong. You got to keep your eye on the prize and on the true outcome of the goal, which is an uplifting of a community. It's not going to happen overnight. These problems started practically overnight, but they persisted so long that this problem has been with America since its founding. It is just as old as this country, and so it's going to take some time to get the African-American community up there. Frankly, we're worth the time, and we're owed the time.”*

*“Black people are Americans just like everybody else. We're capitalists, we want to make money, build money, have money for our kids, you know what I'm saying? It's just that no matter how hard we try because of the institutional things that have been baked into our society at every level, even the city level, it's been really damn difficult to be able to maintain and hold on to wealth. It's hard to do that when you're going paycheck to paycheck. Giving people money so they don't have to live paycheck to paycheck.”*

*“[San Francisco is] a world renowned city. It's a nationally recognized city. It's the cultural and probably financial capital of the state of California, which is the fifth-largest economy in the world. It's a very important city. Yes, I think focusing on this and taking on this issue is what gives me hope. Again, first time ever, this is something the national government can't even get out of committee, now this is tangible.”*

*“San Francisco has a heartbeat of its own. People come here and they thrive here, and they want to live here. I'm just hoping that African Americans will be able to take part and participate in that.”*

*“Redlining is [...] something I've heard about in the past that happened around my neighborhood. I live right at the bottom of Anza Vista, right off of Geary, which is the Western Addition between Japantown and Hayes Valley. I just heard a lot of people were stripped of home ownership there. I do think there should be a concept of tracking down those people and their ancestors and their kids, maybe kids below the kids and paying them back straight up with money. Whether it's a lump sum or ongoing payments or some form of home ownership, I don't know. I do think there should be a form of payment for people in that specific situation.”*

*“That money should go towards revitalizing some of these schools. Some of them exist in the Bayview. I think that also helps, that people want their kids to be educated. They want them to have a good education. If they're going to make that huge leap and huge sacrifice of paying the rents or the high mortgages that San Francisco entails, they want something out of it. Whether it's a cultural center, it's a place for the kids to play, it's a good education for their kids and opportunities for themselves. Do they have work opportunities that will pay them enough to live here?”*

*“I have hope for the future of this city. San Francisco, just the fact that we're having stuff like this, resources [are] already being allocated to these conversations. We're all in three completely different walks of life, but we all seem to have [...] a pretty good head on our shoulders and have a concept of being open to reparations. I think this is a good start. At one point people thought*

*they would never lose their slaves. I think 50 or 100 years from now, I think all of this will be patched up and reparations would be a thing of the past and they would've been already given. I have hope San Francisco will set the stage for that for sure."*

#### **April 15 - Fillmore Western Addition Library [\[Link\]](#)**

*"The way I see reparation should exist is that first and foremost, those who are 60 and over need to be paid whatever they're going to be paid first and foremost. Then after that, you can go to those who are in the range of 40 to 50, and then they should be whoever is in that other last group of folks that are to be considered in reparations. However, since Reverend Brown has indicated that he is concerned about the city's ability to be able to financially support reparations or even for the state to do so, I got another idea. That is since I'm Black and you know I'm Black, don't charge me state tax, don't charge federal tax."*

*"I'd like to see Black Town open up all along Fillmore. I want to see Black merchants, Black businesses, places where I can go and my children can go to talk about those good old times, those old stories we've heard our parents and grandparents tell us."*

*"[I have] Multiple concerns [about the Draft Reparations Plan]. First of all, I don't think that the elders and the elderly were seriously considered because many of our elders are in nursing homes or living with other relatives. At this point in time, if they're in a nursing home or something, why don't you just say you're going to wipe the bill clean for them and take care of everything for them and make sure that they're properly cared for and comfortable in their environments?[1] [2] The issue of being able to prove that you're a descendant of African, I say African but a slave, is revolting for me because first and foremost, it's not just about that experience there, it's about the experience that was here."*

***Interviewer:*** *I feel like you've been here long enough to say that you are a San Franciscan.*

***Interviewee:*** *Yes. Definitely long enough to see changes, because then that links some to generational trauma, because there were people that had families that had children, and their children might have had children too when they were pushed out of their neighborhood. That causes a particular type of trauma for those individuals. I think with situations like that, when you go to more case by case, that does come down to, yes they should be provided the mental health services.*

*They should be provided these things that they should have been provided then when they had to move. When they had to be uprooted. When they had to start over somewhere else and still struggle in that same space as well. When you're starting over, you're still having issues there. Through those situations, people should have been given mental health, because there's that compensation. You can't just move someone and say start over and not help them with starting over. Not just be like, "Oh we're going to give you this shelter and here you go and you're good." No, living is more than shelter."*

*"They all hit on areas that need to be addressed, because all of those are connected, because the conversation of reparation needs to really revolve around quality of life. Quality of living, quality of waking up in the morning and going to bed at night. When people go through extenuating circumstances and hardship, that's traumatizing and that affects your quality of life. That affects the way you follow your dreams. That affects the way you chase your ambitions. That affects the way you raise your kids.*

*All those things do need to be addressed and in an equal amount. Again, I think, because I look at it in a way of a spider web. I think the center of that spider web is the monetary lump sum conversation that will then begin building outwards. You do the lump sum and you start there. Then you begin continuing building that structure and the infrastructure around that with these other aspects that still need to be addressed."*

*"The people who have the Certificates of Preference, they should absolutely have priorities. Some people don't have the certificate anywhere, and there should be a method by which, because the redevelopment conveniently lost that."*

#### **April 18 - Virtual Focus Group via Zoom [\[Link\]](#)**

*"I would say my priority is home ownership, and I think we should actually drop the whole title of housing because in San Francisco, housing is temporary. Right? Housing is associated with housing authority, subsidized housing, rent controlled housing. If and when those things change, then all of a sudden, regardless of your race, you are put in a bind to keep a roof over your head. So we need to stop talking about housing and start talking about ownership, where people are able to permanently live somewhere, and that is not the stress and the strife of their life. Especially for people that are elder and disabled. Majority of our homeless population falls into those categories, over 60."*

*“Reparations is America acknowledging what it has done. It's a start, at least. And I think that if the local, and hopefully someday Federal government, start acknowledging what it has done, then it could start to change the trajectory of where it's going currently, and it just never really has. You know there's always been blockages in communities of color being able to access the same kind of wealth and services and privileges that White people have had for generations.”*

*“[I]n San Francisco, specifically, there is a very, very tangible divide between the schools on the west side and the east side. West side schools, you know, coming from much more expensive neighborhoods with much more expensive houses are so much more well funded than the east side schools. So they have money for these kinds of programs, for art, for music, for sports, for better access to mental health services, and things of that nature. So I can't stress enough. Education is part and parcel of what all of our communities need.”*

*“Our students are brilliant. A lot of them go away to school. They're going to attend HBCUs. They're going to attend, you know, universities outside of the State of California, and they need economic support.”*

#### **April 29 - Bayview Library [\[Link\]](#)**

***“Interviewer:** How do you think San Francisco can repay San Franciscans for past harms, and for ongoing harmful actions, or policies like the ones you've mentioned?*

***Interviewee 1:** The number one way is monetarily because that is how this country runs. We had a direct harm happen to us that affected us economically, and without the economics that we were denied we can't do things like-- have access to healthcare, have access to making better choices in your diet, to make choices about where you are going to live. [...] What the City of San Francisco could do is make that correction number one. The proposal that the reparations committee came up with. I read it. I think it's wonderful. I think they did a great job. Part of it that I think people aren't talking about is that for those who may not have the education as far as their own economics, they're offering help with that. You're getting this sum, let's help you with that so you don't do the wrong thing, or have it turnover in the wrong way. That's the number one thing the city can do. The proposal is fine the way it is.*

*Some of debt elimination , those things would make a huge difference in so many people's life. In my life personally, it would allow me to free up the finances that I*



*would've had from birth, from the good decisions that my grandparents made. I was denied that. That would definitely be number one. Number two, as far as programs go, something should be city policy either way so making the reparations seems redundant to me. You shouldn't have hospitals, and grocery stores in certain neighborhoods, and create food deserts."*

*"I'm not against centers and all of that, but that's not going to help us immediately. I want to see my grandmother happy in her last year. She's in her 80s. She deserves that from what we missed out on, what she missed out on. That's what this city can do."*

*"We have all these amazing companies ran in the city, where's the apprenticeships or internships?"*

*"As I said before, the monetary lump sum, debt forgiveness, those are immediate things that will affect people in a positive way that I can't even really express. It will free you up. It will free up as far as health because you can make better decisions on your own. You won't need a community group to do that. You can make those decisions. Generational wealth for your family. What we are owed from the city of San Francisco for the discrimination, those are priorities."*

*"We don't want no more subsidized, nothing. We want permanent home ownership. That should be the bottom line. Section eight, public housing. Go ahead. Get rid of it. Give us the chance for home ownership though, and get rid of that crap, because as we can see, it is not helping. Our economics in this city, it's not doing us no purpose. It's keeping people stuck. People want to move up. People want to move on. How are they going to do it if they're stuck?"*

*"I think the more self-sufficient some of our communities are, the better we will feel about ourselves. San Francisco is real good about having local businesses in all of their communities. We are the type of people that will spend a whole Saturday just walking up and down our own streets, going to shops, going to the parks. Well, we like to do that in our community too without having that investment for people to be able to open and bring diverse type of businesses to our community. We don't get to participate in that."*

*"Now, let's just say, you give me \$2, and the rent is 50 cents. I'll be able to afford that now, wouldn't I? I can do it. I can eat, whatever. Homelessness, I won't say it can be eradicated through this proposal. However, it would be a good start."*

*"Instead of doing that, they have programs right now where they give you immediately the down payment with no strings attached. [1] A direct down*

*payment program where all the appreciation goes back into your power, that's a better program. Giving the money directly to you for a down payment and you pay the rest of the mortgage so that the property values come directly back to you."*

*"My biggest pet peeve is the autonomy, bodily autonomy of African Americans in San Francisco. One of the other policies that have-- I'm not an expert in this. I'm not someone who is justice-involved, but gang injunctions in the city of San Francisco really broke up families and some people who were not really associated with the-- Anything doing anything wrong were not permitted to move freely in the city.[1]*

*That needs to be looked at as to who was involved, what harm they incurred by being told where they could move or not move or see or not see. Let me see. I don't believe San Francisco should allow some of the neighborhood watch groups or the autonomy of people who are keeping their communities safe to allow them to actually be in networks like Nextdoor, Citizen, Green. San Francisco can't allow those people to, for themselves, judge who has the right to walk on the sidewalk."*

*"400 years ago who created what we see in the United States. You're reversing that. Reparations is reversing that creation of a dehumanized class."*