



AFRICAN UNION'S 2025 THEME: JUSTICE FOR AFRICANS AND PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT THROUGH REPARATIONS

AFRICA- US FORUM WEBINAR SUMMARY-
18 JUNE, 2025



Host/Organiser: African Centre for the Study of the United States- University of the Witwatersrand; Center on Communication Leadership and Policy (CCLP) at the University of Southern California; the Center for African Studies at Howard University; the Institute for African Studies at George Washington University, and the Public Diplomacy Council of America.

Speakers

- H.E. Hilda Suka-Mafudze, African Union Ambassador to the United States of America
- Hippolyte Fofack, Research Associate, Harvard University and Parker Fellow with the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Columbia University
- Alieu Bah, Editor in Chief, The New Pan African
- Sungu Oyoo, Writer and Coordinator, Mwanko Africa – Pan African Popular Pedagogy Collective
- Krista Johnson, Professor and Director of the Center for African Studies, Howard University
- Richard America, Emeritus Professor of Practice, Georgetown University

Co-moderators

- Adam Powell, Director of Washington Programs at the Annenberg Center for Communication and Leadership and Policy at the University of Southern California
- Bob Wekesa, Director and co-founder of the African Centre for the Study of the United States, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Introduction

The webinar brought together thought leaders and advocates to unpack the African Union's 2025 theme. The webinar reflected on the enduring legacies of slavery, colonialism, and systemic racism, and how reparations can serve as a vehicle for justice and transformation for Africans and people of African descent globally.

Key Takeaways from the Speakers

H.E. Hilda Suka-Mafudze, African Union Ambassador to the United States

- Positioned the AU's 2025 theme as a landmark moment to confront centuries of harm through a multi-dimensional reparations agenda encompassing restitution, justice, and global structural reform.
- Emphasised that reparations must include climate justice, economic sovereignty, cultural restitution, and investment in Afro-descendant youth and women, particularly in education and technology.
- *"There's no cost to what actually happened to people of African descent. But the issues we face today such as climate injustice, unequal trade, exclusion, can and must be addressed as part of reparations."*

Dr Hippolyte Fofack, Research Associate, Harvard University and Parker Fellow, UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network

- Urged Africa to reject colonial economic structures and called for reparations that go beyond historical redress to confront present-day exploitation through unfair trade, illicit financial flows, and extractive global governance.
- Framed reparations as a foundation for genuine decolonization and the achievement of Agenda 2063, emphasising the need for both material restitution and systemic transformation.
- *“We cannot talk about reparations without confronting the ongoing economic injustices. This is not just about the past, it’s about liberating Africa’s future”*

Mr Alieu Bah, Editor in Chief, The New Pan African

- Stressed a radical critique of the AU and called for reparations to be understood not just as financial redress, but as a broader political project aimed at dismantling institutions that perpetuate capitalism and neo-colonialism. He argued that without this systemic transformation, calls for reparations risk being reduced to hollow slogans.
- *“Reparations must be part of a canon that dismantles capitalism and imperialism. We cannot talk about reparations with an institution (the AU) that is complicit in the same thing that made reparations even a cry in the first place. It’s not only about paying stolen wealth. It’s about dismantling the very system that makes it possible for human beings to steal other human beings’ lives and labour.”*

Mr Sungu Oyoo, Writer and Coordinator, Mwanko Africa – Pan African Popular Pedagogy Collective

- Highlighted the continuity of dispossession from colonialism to the present, arguing that reparations must not only address historical injustices but dismantle the modern systems that perpetuate exclusion, extraction, and racialised poverty. He called for popular education to build critical consciousness and link struggles across the continent and the diaspora.
- *“The legacy of slavery and colonialism didn’t end, it transformed. Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities in Latin America are still excluded, dispossessed, and racialised. Reparations must be about transformation, not just acknowledgement.”*

Prof Christa Johnson, Director, African Studies

- Highlighted the historic and ongoing role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in advancing the reparations movement through scholarship, convening power, legal advocacy, and policy innovation. She emphasised that HBCUs are not only foundational to documenting the historical case for reparations but are actively shaping what redress could look like.
- *“HBCUs have always played a central role, as research hubs, as conveners of activists, policymakers, and communities, and increasingly as architects of what reparative justice might look like. From documenting economic harms to drafting legislative toolkits and confronting AI bias, we are building the intellectual and political infrastructure of reparations.”*

Prof Richard America, Emeritus Professor of Practice, Georgetown University

- Argued that reparations should be approached not as emotional or symbolic redress, but as technocratic economic restitution based on rigorous analysis of unjust enrichment, wealth extraction, and historical abuse of dominance by the West, with a potential to unlock development capital for Africa through institutions like the World Bank and IMF.
- *“By reparations I do not mean some kind of payment for misbehaviour. This is a technocratic issue and a search for realistic solutions to longstanding problems. Restitution means return of stolen wealth.”*

Q&A Session Highlights

Q: How can grassroots communities be mobilised around reparations beyond elite advocacy spaces?

A: Grassroots mobilisation hinges on popular education and storytelling that resonates with lived realities, as Mwamko Africa does. Building political consciousness from below, through community dialogue, cultural expression, and radical pedagogy ensures that reparations are not technocratic impositions but people-led demands grounded in collective memory and struggle.

Q: Should reparations be financial, structural, or both?

A: Reparations must go beyond monetary payments. While financial restitution is necessary, true justice also requires dismantling the systems that sustain underdevelopment, including reforming global financial institutions like IMF and the World Bank, restructuring unfair debt, and addressing the economic architecture that continues to extract from Africa.

Q: How can young people get involved in advancing the reparations agenda?

A: Youth involvement must be rooted in organising, resistance, and reimagining new political futures. Reparations are not about appeasement or token gestures, they are about reclaiming dignity, agency, and power. This requires radical thinking, mobilisation, and a refusal to accept watered-down narratives.

Q: Are there legal frameworks being developed to support reparations efforts?

A: Yes, legal models, toolkits, and policy frameworks are already in development across various institutions. These serve as practical starting points for communities to make structured claims and push for justice at local, national, and international levels.

Q: Who gets to define what reparations should look like?

A: The terms of reparations must be defined by African and Afro-descendant communities themselves. Restitution is not a favour; it is a matter of justice grounded in historical and economic analysis. Those most affected must lead the framing and articulation of what is owed.