

Dan Gediman: This is the Reckoning, I'm Dan Gediman.

Firefighter Andrea Hall recites the first half of the Pledge of Allegiance at Biden inauguration (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1CIISxQmA4>)

Dan Gediman: 2020 was a year we came face to face with the deep cracks in American democracy.

Second half of the Pledge of Allegiance

Dan Gediman: But can we really say “with liberty and justice for all” after the events of 2020? If anything, the past year has shown us just how stark the differences are among many Americans, not the least of which in how we look at our shared history around race. As with so much else in our country, at the base of this disagreement is a fundamental misunderstanding of our past, especially about slavery. The reality of slavery in this country was very different than what generations of Americans learned in school. It was brutal, deadly, and soul-crushing for the enslaved. It affected just about all aspects of the country’s economy, politics, and culture. And it was the main reason we fought a bloody Civil War. But because of how we’ve been taught to misunderstand our past, it’s hard for most of us to connect the dots to what we see in the present. The fact is, that even though we no longer have slavery or Jim Crow in this country, the legacy of those institutions is embedded in our everyday life. Here’s a great analogy from Sadiqa Reynolds, President of the Louisville Urban League.

Sadiqa Reynolds: If you think about a game of Monopoly, imagine that people have been playing Monopoly for 400 years.

Dan Gediman: Many of us have played Monopoly before. It’s been one of the most popular board games for decades. Players are given a chunk of money to start, and as

they travel around the board they use that money to buy property and put up buildings. The winner is the one who has the most money and land at the end of the game.

Sadiqa Reynolds: Imagine not being allowed to play that game at all, not even being allowed really to observe the game, and then being allowed to enter the game. 400 years later, this game's been going on, people have acquired wealth, they have acquired land, they have access to everything, and they've had access to all of the rules. So how does that player start that player who is just getting in that Monopoly game 400 years later? What happens? How do you allow them really, to be a player? Because how can you be, when so much has been acquired, and the game's been playing for so long?

Dan Gediman: In Sadiqa Reynolds' Monopoly analogy, white Americans have been able to build wealth over many generations, while African Americans have been blocked from even playing the game. And that has consequences for almost every aspect of life. In this program, we'll show how the health and wealth of African Americans today was shaped by policies and practices that go back centuries, and how society, and our government, perpetuates those inequities to this day. This is the Reckoning.

Dan Gediman: For the past several years as I've worked on The Reckoning I've been in constant conversation with my editor, Loretta Williams. For this program, we're going to take you on a journey we went on together to understand just how this country's past connects to the present. Hi Loretta.

Loretta Williams: Hi Dan.

Dan Gediman: Working on this project has been eye-opening to say the least, and one big question that kept popping up for me -- why don't we know this history?

Loretta Williams: I would also ask -- why don't we know how the legacy of enslaving people still shapes our society today.

Ricky Jones: Well, America is built on a certain narrative.

Loretta Williams: That's Ricky Jones, chairman of the Pan African Studies Department at the University of Louisville. He's also a podcaster and a newspaper columnist.

Ricky Jones: And in that narrative, European-descended people have been seen as the heroes, they've been seen as the people who have created everything that we know is noble, just and true in the country. And to preserve that narrative, the story, the true story of slavery has been either radically altered or omitted altogether. So the simple answer to that question is it's benefited the ruling class of the country, it's benefited the dominant race of the country, to not have that story told. Because if that story is told, a complete reexamination of what America is, and how it came into being, will have to be undertaken, and that can be incredibly painful.

Loretta Williams: That painful part is really hard to get our heads around. Even grappling with truthful language is hard. For instance, I've seen some white friends wince at the phrase "white supremacy."

Dan Gediman: I agree, it's a term that can immediately turn off many white people from even talking about race. It can make them feel really defensive and just shut down the conversation.

Loretta Williams: Yes for many people white supremacy is connected to the Ku Klux Klan or to other extremists but Ricky Jones thinks we need to see white supremacy as a bigger force in American society.

Ricky Jones: The way I like to talk about white supremacy, is it being the belief that we run into in so many quarters, whether it's stated, conscious or unconscious, and tacit, that there's one dominant race, that is white people in this case in this country, who have the almost exclusive right, to know, to think, and to decide over almost every area of our lives. So that's not about a Ku Klux Klanner, or somebody in Storm Front or the Proud Boys.// And so when you explore it like that, when you examine it like that, I think you're dealing with a much more rich and realistic idea of how white supremacy has and continues to impact us all. secs

Loretta Williams: So let's say I do wrap my head around Ricky Jones' definition of white supremacy--where does that take us?

Dan Gediman: Well, it might make it possible to see why some of the things we thought were relegated to the past still exist. Look 2020 was a rough year for everyone, (Loretta: Yup) but there's been report after report about how the impacts of the pandemic and the economic downturn were amplified in Black communities.

Loretta Williams: And several Black people were killed by police.

Dan Gediman: Absolutely. There's a throughline to all this that historians like Kidada Williams at Wayne State University are beginning to connect. She's looked at the testimony of African Americans who started to build their lives after the Civil War only to be met with mob violence. I started our conversation by asking her how this historical violence connects to the wealth gap we see today.

Kidada Williams: I think that the violence unleashed on African Americans after slavery was abolished, was largely designed to deny them access to the

possibilities of acquiring wealth and land that would allow them to rise because we know that a large number of people who were attacked were people who had already started to surpass their histories of enslavement, or they were attacked just before that was about to happen. And what we see is that land owners, business owners, etc, they go from having their own small farms, or their small plantations to having to participate in the wage labor economy. So they lose everything in this process. And then that forces them into a position that the former slaveocracy actually wanted that served their needs.

Now, the interesting thing is that, as much as some former slave holders may have lamented the loss of the economic wealth that they had been acquiring during slavery, they didn't really miss that much of a beat in the transition from slavery to freedom, they're eventually going to establish a larger system that is going to keep the vast, vast, vast majority of African Americans in this subservient position, where they are low wage earners, we're going to see them in sharecropping. They're going to experience debt peonage, they're going to be exposed to the carceral system, all of those things are going to play a role in keeping the vast majority of African Americans in this sort of unskilled labor force that satisfies the needs of what we would today call the 1%. Today that manifests itself in different ways. So you've got large segments of Black people living in these poor conditions, in underprivileged communities that are heavily policed. And a lot of that is linked back to these larger histories of controlling the population, limiting their access to opportunity, so they can be exploited.

Dan Gediman: What about how do I describe this, things that don't quite rise to the level of violence, but are clearly intended to be intimidation, so I'm going to give you an example, a family, a mixed race couple with biracial children live in a very nice neighborhood here in Louisville. Over the course of a month, three different times, someone in their neighborhood, spray painted overt, racist

messages on their driveway, basically saying, you know, leave, this is a whites only neighborhood. Leave. And they repeatedly went to the police, like the first time it happened and they said, this is what happened. And they're like, what can we do? Second time it happened, they say again, what can we do? Third time it happened, they put it out, like a video of it, put it on Facebook, finally got the attention of the authorities. And they're basically saying we don't feel safe in this neighborhood. But we don't want to leave this neighborhood.

Kidada Williams: Well, I think that what I would say is that we need to rethink our definitions of violence, or we need to be really explicit when we're talking about physical violence and other manifestations of violence, the psychological violence, the cultural violence, the economic violence, because part of how whiteness works, is through terror. So whiteness, and a commitment to white supremacy is always violent, I should be very explicit about that. But the manifestations are different. It doesn't always rise to the level of a physical attack. But the possibilities in the minds of Black people or in the minds of non white people, the possibilities of a physical attack, they know it's possible. They also know that the state and the larger white population plays a role in enabling this kind of non physical violence. So what happens is that African Americans talk about or they give examples of these menacing encounters, these acts of terror. And what they are told by the larger white population is, and I'll sort of use my own sort of use the vernacular, the white population plays to okeydoke. Oh, it couldn't have been this, it couldn't have been that. It must have been something else, you're misreading the situation. And those are the same responses that a lot of white Americans had made to African Americans' reports and complaints and anxieties about police violence. It took watching eight minutes and 46 seconds of George Floyd being killed on camera for other people to actually say, Well, you know, maybe they're actually right. And that it took that, that it took seeing a man having the life extinguished out of him for eight minutes and 46 seconds is a testament to how comfortable so many white Americans are with the system of whiteness that protects their interests at all costs. And it unleashes

different types of violence on Black people in order to maintain that fantasy, in order to maintain the privileges that white people are able to largely enjoy.

Loretta Williams: Kidada Williams is the author of the book “They Left Great Marks On Me”

Dan Gediman: 2020 was also the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. You’d think that a virus would strike everyone more or less equally -- but this is where the lopsided nature of American society plays a big role in health outcomes.

Loretta Williams: In fact there’s a term for this that we learned from Anita Fernander. She’s an associate professor in the College of Medicine at the University of Kentucky. She says public health practitioners use the term “Social Determinants of Health”. One to unpack that she says -- is to understand that zip code is more important than genetic code.

Dan Gediman: She and I talked about the way that events and ideas from the past have had an impact on how COVID-19 has affected the African American community. One of things we talked about was the widespread belief, going all the way back to Colonial times, that Black people were physically different than white people -- that they could tolerate pain more, they were affected differently by disease. I ask her if these ideas have contributed to the way African Americans have been treated through the years.

Anita Fernander: Absolutely. They needed to justify the enslavement of human beings. And so how do you do that? You dehumanize a certain segment of the population that you're enslaving. And you come up with explanations that are pseudo scientific to indicate that this segment of the population are not in fact human. So, you start conducting medical experimentations on black bodies and

comparing them to whites and saying brain structures are different, their skeletal makeup is different. They don't have the capacity to intellectualize and critically examine information. So society at least U.S. society has needed a reason to continually dehumanize the black body to continue to stifle their progress. And medical science has significantly contributed to the reification of racist biology.

Dan Gediman: And so, how does that legacy continue to affect things all the way up to today? You know, I've seen in some recent newspaper interviews, that people in the medical community suggest that there's a genetic reason behind some of the health issues in the African American community, specifically the disparity and COVID infections and mortality. But you and other public health experts say there's more at work than genetics, or perhaps something completely different than genetics. What is that?

Anita Fernander: Yes. So it's really unfortunate...that even though we understand and we are told, and we're provided with information that tells us that race is a social construct that there is no biology, nothing documented that can physiologically separate a black person from a white person, it's still embedded in our minds that race is biology and that there are physiological differences between races when that is not the case. What we've been able to demonstrate as science is that up to 80% of our health, risk and health status is due to social determinants of health. What do I mean by social determinants of health? Social Determinants broadly describes the environments and situations and circumstances where we all live, work, play, pray, worship. So our neighborhoods, our socio economic status, those factors account for up to 80% of our health risk, whereas individual behaviors, genetic pre susceptibility to disease account for the rest 20%.

Dan Gediman: So let's let me take a second here and separate out race from poverty, which is difficult to do when they are so commonly superimposed.

Anita Fernander: Absolutely.

Dan Gediman: Okay. So, how does this, let's just talk about hypertension as an example, similarly affect poor white people and poor black people, what is the same and what is different there?

Anita Fernander: So we know that there is an inverse relationship between income or socio economic status and health. And we do know that African Americans are disproportionately impacted by poverty in this country. However, even if you were to isolate or account for levels of poverty, income, wealth, race still matters when it comes to health disparities in the African American community. So I believe that individuals in poverty are going to experience higher rates of morbidity and mortality across the board. But the African American community as a whole on top of that, has the racialized stressors, those microaggressions and those macro aggressions that occur on a daily basis that they're confronted with when they go about their day. And we're actually starting to see that it's not the African American poor, that are most disadvantaged. What data is also starting to show is that middle income and high income African Americans, that they are actually suffering more negative health outcomes than those who are poor. Why is that? I believe it's because middle income and high income African Americans are in places where they are the minority and where they are isolated. So they're more closely interacting within infrastructures and structures that are primarily white, where they're having to be confronted with these racialized stressors and macro aggressions much more frequently.

Anita Fernander: I can share with you an experience that I had with my husband a few years ago. I'm married to an African American man who at the time was in his early 50s. Mind you, he has been a vegan for over 40 years, was at one time, a professional bodybuilder. So someone who exercised on a daily basis started experiencing chest pains as he described them. So he went to the ER. Without collecting any type of social history, because they saw an African American man, they immediately decided that they were going to do a catheterization procedure. So they took them into the room, put him under. The

surgeon did the procedure and came out, walked out, surprised that he did not find anything. Now if they'd questioned him and did an appropriate clinical interview, they may have arrived or concluded that my husband may have been suffering from a bit of anxiety as the cause for his chest pain. And let me tell you, too, when that surgeon came into the room, he looked at me without introducing himself, looked at my husband because my husband is about 18 years older than I am. And he said to me, Medicaid, right? So that's just one anecdotal experience, where clinicians come with their biases and act upon them without checking themselves.

Loretta Williams: Whoa, whoa. Dan, Let's stop for a minute. That story she just told was quite something.

Dan Gediman: Yeah, I was pretty stunned when I heard it. I mean I know racial discrimination is real, but it's still shocking to hear some of the forms it can take. And there is a connection. One of the final things we talked about is how this pandemic highlights all the ways that historical discrimination has made Black communities more vulnerable.

Anita Fernander: So when we think about residential segregation, we know that African American communities, those areas where there are high populations of African Americans, they're more likely to live in close knit settings, more likely to live in households that are multi generational. So the spread and exposure to communicable diseases is greater in those types of communities. We also know and this has also been demonstrated through the COVID-19 pandemic, that African Americans are disproportionately represented in some of the essential services. They are working in areas where they're not able to social distance or physically distance, I believe is the most appropriate term. They're not able to stay home from work. So, all of these factors put them at higher risk of exposure to communicable diseases. And getting those diseases. There's a

common refrain known among African American communities: “when white America gets a cold, black America gets pneumonia”. And that's what we are seeing across the nation. We're seeing that the impacts of COVID-19 not only on exposure and COVID-19 incidents, but death rates due to COVID-19 [music starts] is higher, disproportionately high among African Americans as well as other marginalized communities.

Loretta Williams: Anita Fernander teaches at the College of Medicine at the University of Kentucky. Coming up, startling numbers about the differences in wealth between black and white americans. We'll be back in a minute.

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Dan Gediman: Welcome back to the Reckoning, I'm Dan Gediman.

Loretta Williams: And I'm Loretta Williams. The ongoing pandemic, and the protests of the last year, highlighted the differences in health and safety, between Black and White Americans.

Dan Gediman: The pandemic in particular turned out to be a double whammy for us all -- a public health crisis *and* an economic crisis.

Loretta Williams: And that too deepened another big inequity -- the differences in wealth. At Duke University, there's an economist who has spent his career looking at that wealth gap.

Sandy Darity: I'm William Darity, Jr, better known as Sandy. And I am the Samuel Dubois Cooke Professor of Public Policy, African and African American Studies and economics at Duke.

Dan Gediman: For several decades Sandy Darity has looked into economic inequities between white and Black Americans, trying to understand the causes, and what could be done to close it. Along the way he developed some specific suggestions regarding national reparations — policies that would compensate African Americans for previous inequities. As a starting point, I asked him to describe this wealth gap that exists in this country and where it came from.

Sandy Darity: In 2016, the Federal Reserve Board survey of consumer finances indicated that if you look at the middle black family, and the middle white family, the middle black family has about 10 cents to the dollar of net worth of the middle white family. So, another way to think about this is, black Americans constitute somewhere between 13 to 14% of the nation's population, but in fact, only own about 2.6% of the nation's wealth. And if we are to do a rough estimate of the shortfall that exists, between the 2.6% share and the closer to 13% share, we're talking about a shortfall of 10 to \$12 trillion dollars. And so that's how vast the racial wealth gap is in the United States.

Frequently, people say, there's a number of things that black people can do autonomously to significantly change the racial wealth differential in the United States. And in fact, there's virtually no autonomous action that can be taken by black Americans, that would effectively close the racial wealth gap. In fact, when black folks do what we might call the right thing, it doesn't really have a

significant impact on this staggering difference in wealth across across the racial lines.

So one example or one illustration is an argument that people make that if Black levels of education were higher, the racial wealth gap would essentially evaporate. The piece of evidence that runs contrary to that is the fact that blacks with a college degree have two thirds of the net worth of white heads of households who never finished high school.

Another argument that people frequently make is that the racial wealth gap is something that's a consequence of black family structure -- that blacks have too many single parent families. But if we look carefully at the data, we find that white single parent families have more than two times the wealth of black two parent families. So changing family structure, not going to be sufficient to turn the trick either.

Frequently, people think of wealth as being generated primarily out of deliberate acts of personal savings. But, the primary determinant of the level of wealth is really the transfer of resources from previous generations, and what it means is that what you have is, is largely dictated by what your parents and your grandparents had in the way of wealth.

And I would add, that that differential finds its origins in the failure to provide the formerly enslaved with an initial endowment of wealth in American society. But it's been compounded by various forms of denial and wealth stripping, that has continued to take place subsequently. So for example, the process of excluding blacks from home ownership, or from acquisition of significant amounts of equity in owning a home, begins with the presence of restrictive covenants. Restrictive covenants are declared illegal. And that's followed by a national program of redlining, which involved a collaboration between the federal government and the private banking sector to prevent black Americans from having access to the type

of credit that would have permitted them to purchase homes in such a way in which they could have built equity.

Dan Gediman: So please take us through a quick history of any efforts that have happened up to this point, historically, going as far back as you know, the end of the Civil War, to the present, and anything that has actually succeeded, if anything.

Sandy Darity: At the end of the Civil War, an effort was made to actually provide 40 acre land grants to the formerly enslaved. And I think that that was the first major attempt at implementing a reparations program, and perhaps the only major attempt at implementing a reparations program on behalf of folks who had formerly been enslaved. When General Sherman completed his march through Georgia, he met with a group of black leaders who were primarily individuals who were ministers. And this group of black leaders were asked what is it they would want in the aftermath of the war. And one of the cornerstone dimensions of what they asked for, in addition to the opportunity to protect and educate their children, was access to land. The third thing they asked for was to be left alone after they were given access to the land. And subsequent to that meeting, Grant issued what is now known as Special Order Number 15, that established the provision of 40 acre land grants, ranging from South Carolina into northern Florida, that was to be allotted to the formerly enslaved. And that was supposed to be the beginning of the compensation program. And indeed, I think approximately 400,000 people were settled on 40,000 acres of land during the period immediately following the issuing of Special Orders Number 15. But tragically, Andrew Johnson, Abraham Lincoln's successor, decided to reverse that policy and prevent it from being extended further.

Dan Gediman: Let me back up. There was one thing that you didn't mention in your chronology. And that was efforts to use the courts for some kind of remedy. I'm thinking in particular about efforts in, I believe it was the early 2000s,

maybe the late 1990s, where several lawyers tried to bring tort cases against banks, insurance companies, transportation companies that had historically profited from slavery. Can you talk about that effort, and any other efforts that you know of, in any kind of major way, in the 20th or 21st century to use the courts for any kind of remedy?

Sandy Darity: I think that most of the efforts to try to do this, through the court system have run into a major barrier, which is the doctrine of sovereign immunity. Essentially sovereign immunity says you can't actually sue the government. But in addition to that, one of the central problems I see with going the judicial route, is that the courts do not actually have the capacity to directly implement any of these kinds of programs, even if they said that these programs are something that are judicially mandated. So I'm absolutely convinced personally, that this is something that has to be accomplished by congressional legislation. And it is a project that must be completed by congressional supervision and congressional action. And I will say in the present moment, there actually is a rather startling national conversation that is taking place about reparations, perhaps the most active national conversation since the Reconstruction Era. And perhaps it lays a foundation for some degree of optimism that that reparations will be taken seriously, and possibly, actually translated into national legislation.

Dan Gediman: In one of the articles that you wrote, you talk about the three parts of any effective reparations effort: acknowledgement, redress, and closure. Can you talk about all three of those and why they're integral to your concept of effective reparations?

Sandy Darity: By acknowledgement, we mean, in part, an apology, but we mean something more. We mean that the culpable party recognizes and acknowledges not only the harms that have been done, but it acknowledges what the beneficial effects were to the culpable party in perpetrating the atrocity. And

then the second objective of a reparations program is redress, which is restitution for the harms that have been done. And here is where we start talking in a concrete way about material compensation -- payments to the victims and the like. And then the third aim is closure, which is a declaration on the part of the victimized party that the debt has been paid, that there will be no further claims made for this array of atrocities by the victimized party, unless there's a new wave of atrocities that come into play. But essentially, closure means that the account is settled.

Dan Gediman: You have said that it is important that any reparations effort not get ahead of the political will of the American electorate...Can you talk a little bit about the importance of matching the political will of the country, and something that would be let's face it massively different.

Sandy Darity: So I think that any bold, transformative social policy must have a significant amount of grassroots support that would translate into congressional support for it to be enacted, and for it to be implemented effectively...One of my aphorisms is things can always get worse. that's one of the reasons why I've been so focused on the notion that this is a project that has to be a consequence of congressional legislation with widespread public support. Because I think that that's a way in which we avoid the problem of having the program itself trigger additional levels of animosity.

Loretta Williams: You know Dan, Darity seems to think that the best path to reparations--- is a national program, funded and managed by Congress.

Dan Gediman: I'd take it a step further and say that he really thinks it's the only path. Yet, what seems to be gaining steam are reparation efforts at the local and state level. And it's an interesting mix of places and approaches.

Loretta Williams: First stop. Evanston, Illinois. In 2019, the city council created a plan to address economic differences between African American and White residents.¹ Robin Rue Simmons leads the subcommittee on reparations. Here she is talking to Chicago's NBC station.

Robin Rue Simmons: I live in a census tract where the average household of my neighbors is near \$46,000 less than that of the average white household. And yet, we still pay the same tax rate.²

Dan Gediman: If I remember correctly Evanston is the only place in the country that has actually funded a reparations program.

Loretta Williams: Yes, starting this year, Evanston will use part of the sales tax on recreational marijuana to fund reparations. They're still talking about how that will be distributed--- but they have a sense of how much money they'll have to work with. Here's Alderwoman Simmons again.

Robin Rue Simmons: So 100% of the fund, up to \$10 million will fund our reparations work, we're looking at an average of \$5-700,000 a year or so.

Dan Gediman: Let's turn now to Providence, Rhode Island. Some listeners may not know this, but Rhode Island was at one time a major hub of the transatlantic slave trade, so there has been a lot of attention paid lately to that part of their history. In fact, other than Evanston, Providence may be the American city that has the most developed plan of action in terms of reparations. Here is a recording from July 2020, with Mayor Jorge Elorza announcing his executive order that kick-started this effort.

¹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/evanstoncityillinois/RHI225219>

² <https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/evanston-to-use-marijuana-sales-tax-proceeds-for-reparations-fund/2185495/>

Mayor Jorge Elorza: So today, in just a few moments, I will be signing an executive order, committing the city to a truth, reconciliation and reparations process. Alright folks, let's make this official, and let's make history.

Dan Gediman: So far, the only part of this plan that has actually been implemented is Phase One, which the Mayor is calling "Truth Telling." Next comes a Reconciliation phase, and then a committee will make recommendations on financial reparations.³ And you've been looking at what's been going on where you live, in California. Right?

Loretta Williams: Right, California is the first state to pass legislation regarding reparations.

Dan Gediman: Some people might ask why California, which wasn't even a slave holding state, should even be in this mix.

Loretta Williams: The keyword here is complicity -- when Assemblywoman Shirley Weber introduced the bill, she said California was a free state in name only. Here she is speaking in front of the California Legislature in May 2020.

Shirley Weber: Until the end of the US Civil War, California city and county law enforcement authorities enforced a contract labor system, allowing slaveholders to effectively hold persons in bondage by another name. In other words, California State county and city authorities actively supported the institution of black slavery both within and beyond California.

Loretta Williams: The California legislature passed the bill and Governor Newsom has signed it; so the next step is to create the task force that will study the issue.

³<https://turnto10.com/news/local/mayor-elorza-launches-truth-telling-phase-in-reparations-plan>

Dan Gediman: I also looked at what's been happening in Asheville, North Carolina. In July of last year, the city council passed a resolution that formally apologized for the city's role in slavery and systemic racism, and allocated 1 million dollars for some kind of reparations plan, to be determined later by a local Commission. Here is city council member Julie Mayfield.

Julie Mayfield: What we have committed to do in this resolution is invest in and create systems and programs and structures that will allow those community members to have the same opportunities for economic mobility to build generational wealth that white people have.⁴

Dan Gediman: In the past six months, several things happened which have slowed the process down. A key staff member resigned, then the city councilman who was behind the reparations effort lost his election. When that happened the Mayor hit the pause button on how to allocate the \$1 million until the new city council could be seated.⁵ On top of that, there was a petition drive asking the council to not just earmark money for African Americans but for "all minority communities." So, from everything I can tell, things remain on hold and no money has actually been spent so far.

Loretta Williams: I heard about the messiness in Asheville and I don't know about you, but I expect that will be the case anywhere that reparations for African Americans are discussed. We've both talked to people who think there's a hearts and minds component that needs to be addressed first. But in the meantime, Black communities are really hurting, and that fueled the protests that began this past summer.

[Audio from Louisville protest after grand jury ruling on Breonna Taylor case](#)

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=couiaFKqGSw>

⁵ https://www.thecentersquare.com/north_carolina/asheville-slavery-reparations-effort-stalls-4-months-after-city-approval/article_47ead0fc-2525-11eb-9ed0-af9721c15668.html

Dan Gediman: Here in Louisville, where I live, we had many months of nightly marches in 2020 triggered by the killing of Breonna Taylor by Louisville Police. Not long after the protests began, several Black leaders put together a blueprint for local reparations that they called “A Path Forward.”

Loretta Williams: Sadiqa Reynolds, the head of the local Urban League chapter, is the spokesperson for this plan. Dan and I talked to her recently and asked whether there have been any significant changes in Louisville since the protests began.

Sadiqa Reynolds: One of the things that I'm proud of in Louisville is that no knock warrants have been banned. That took a lot of work. There has been the creation of a civilian review board that would in fact, look into police shootings, right when they're happening. So we see some movement. I think people were convicted, I think, first of all, with the pandemic, the idea that again, in the wealthiest country in the world, your zip code, your race, whatever, could predict, first of all your life expectancy, but then you add the pandemic on and you realize, okay, everybody, anybody could be sick. But this thing is more lethal in certain groups of people. And so the disparities between us, really, again, was highlighted. And then what we had was we had our sort of, we've had our Emmett Till moment. We had our Emmet Till moment in George Floyd.

Loretta Williams: That's an interesting way of putting it and I hadn't heard that before the Emmett Till a moment. Yes, I get that.

Sadiqa Reynolds: Yeah. Yeah. Because there there were all of these white people who said to me, I, I just didn't know. And then there were the few who said, I have to be honest with you. Sadiqa, I've always thought you all had done something, you know, when they would see the police shootings. And so to watch George Floyd be killed so quietly, so easily. To have to watch that. I mean, it was traumatic, I think for every reasonable person who, who viewed it. And suddenly there, people were convicted, their hearts were pierced. And I think it

changed the dynamic. And it changed, who decided to be an ally, and who decided to be silent, and who realized that they could not afford silence that something was happening, that they would not be able to stand by, and just watch any longer. And so, from my perspective, please this is this is what I think is so important about this moment. We are already in a pandemic, we're finding out that it is hurting and killing black people more than other communities. And then we have not George Floyd but Ahmaud Arbury. And then we have here in Louisville, Breonna Taylor. And we're struggling there. And then, and then the 911 tape is released in the Breonna Taylor case. And we hear Kenneth Walker, her boyfriend crying on the 911 tape saying somebody shot Breonna. And our hearts are broken, and it is too much and the dams are open. And so this is our time. And the question becomes, are we willing to sit with the truth? Are we willing to sit with the pain for long enough to make changes? Or will the people with power and privilege and the ability to just turn the channel -- Will they walk away from it and miss this opportunity to really change our country into what it can be?

Dan Gediman: What are the challenges for someone in your position in keeping the momentum going for enacting the kind of changes you're proposing? When so many people are struggling just to stay well, and make ends meet? Are you seeing white allies getting burnt out? After six months of you know, marches? And all the conversations that have been going on? Is it hard to keep the fire going?

Sadiqa Reynolds: Yeah, there is that fatigue. There is this idea that, you know, when are black people going to be satisfied? And, you know, my answer to that is when we have equity, when we have equality, when we have justice, when I can be assured that God forbid, you know, something happened to my child, there will be consequences, just like if something were to happen to your child. I mean, that's the thing that we really have to push for and strive for. It's this idea that my life matters, that the life that I can produce in my body, that it will matter

that, you know, that's the thing. And so when we have that, that's when people will stop protesting.

Loretta Williams: So, if you are looking forward in a hopeful way about what might happen in the coming year, you know, or whatever, what do you hope for the most for your community, the country? You know, everybody?

Sadiqa Reynolds: That's a great question. That is a great question. Um, it's I guess if I have to pick a thing. I always say of all the things the Urban League does jobs, justice, education, health and housing, if you have to pick one thing, just focus on justice. Because if you could focus on justice, the rest of it would come. It's the seeing of the humanity in one another, if I could wish anything on us. That's what it would be, it would be that we would, that the black people would be seen as, as human as everyone else. And so you know, gosh, this is a hard question to answer. But that humanity, you know, I always say this, I'm not really interested any longer in changing people's hearts, I just want to change their behavior. And the way to do that, if there is magic to be made, it is in the policy changes, pushing developers to always include affordable housing, it is in pushing pharmaceutical companies to always have affordable drugs to not get rich off of the pain of others, you know, it is to force a closure of the achievement gap, smaller classrooms, you know, make the sacrifices, again, don't miss the value in this crisis. And so those things that we have learned that we were always really capable of doing? Let's keep doing those to work on making this world better. So I am hopeful. I am hopeful because I think there are a lot of people who feel the way that I do. And I am hopeful because I did protest, and I saw all kinds of people around me. So I was it was so unfortunate that we had to protest. But my goodness, it was so inspiring to see the people that were standing with us.

Dan Gediman: Do you think we're having a significantly different conversation than we were before? As a nation? Have we reached any kind of

tipping point where we're now talking about what to do? And how to do it rather than whether to do it? Does it feel different? Or is this just another phase in your mind of the same old, same old?

Sadiqa Reynolds: It's not I don't think it's the same old, same old, I think it does feel different. I think there is a lot of conversation around how to do it. And I appreciate that, and I see things being done. I do fear that there won't be enough soon enough. And I also think that elected officials and others in places of privilege and power should not take for granted how close we could be across the country to erupting again, because people really are tired. And people really were willing to put their lives and their their freedom on the line. And so really one wrong move, and people will be out in the streets again. So yes, there is fatigue. And yes, there is a desire to be together and to come together. But before that we must get to the truth. That's what America never wants to do is tell the truth. And then when we have the truth, we could really get to justice. But but it is just very difficult for us to get the truth. So as you can imagine, just think about being in a relationship and being in love with someone. And they've, they've hurt you. They've been dishonest, they been abusive, and you go to counseling, and they lie. You know, they never admit what they've done. And then you're supposed to somehow figure out how to make it work. That's what that is what black Americans are being asked to do. Just keep moving, just keep moving forward. It's like, but at some point, will we when do we get to the great reckoning? When is it that you say? I was wrong. This is what I did. And this is how I'm going to make up. So I don't believe this time is the same. But I don't believe America is prepared to go far enough.

Dan Gediman: Sadiqa Reynolds is President and CEO of the Louisville Urban League.

Loretta Williams: Looking ahead, 2021 may not be any easier than 2020, but as Sadiqa Reynolds pointed out -- there were many allies out there in the protests and others who couldn't be out there who were supportive in other ways. We clearly have some big divisions in this country, and it's daunting to think how as individuals we might tackle big problems, like police brutality, health disparities and wealth inequity.

Dan Gediman: One thing to keep in mind of course is that these are systemic, institutional issues and they'll need to be addressed at that level.

Loretta Williams: One thing we can all do, is continue to add to our understanding of American history -- especially what the Southern Poverty Law Center calls "hard history". It might be uncomfortable, but it's a step toward being able to imagine a more equitable country for us all.

Dan Gediman: If you are a parent or a grandparent of a school aged child, you could get involved in your local school or maybe school board and encourage them to make sure that the way they address slavery and the Civil War is comprehensive and accurate. You can also encourage them to augment whatever curriculum or textbook they might be using with more up to date material.

Loretta Williams: To that end, we have resources for elementary, middle, and high school educators on our website, at reckoningradio.org. To find them, just click on the Educators link at the top of the page.

Dan Gediman: And while you are on our website, you can click on the Contact link to send us any comments or questions you might have about The Reckoning, that's Reckoningradio (all one word).org, we'd love to hear from you.