

**Human Rights Advocacy Introductory Seminar**

**BALTIMORE**

**Unemployment as a Human Rights Issue,  
Reparations as a Human Rights Obligation?**

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## INTRODUCTION

The crusade for human rights began with the Charter of the United Nations in 1945, the first international treaty to center provisions for human rights. Its signatories, including the United States, promised “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights” and “in the dignity and worth of the human person.” The Charter established the UN Commission on Human Rights to hold all parties accountable to this commitment<sup>1</sup>. On December 10, 1948, the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to add specificity to the promises of the Charter. Since then, the concept of human rights has become central to international politics. In 1978, President Jimmy Carter declared, “Human rights is the soul of foreign policy,” adding, “our commitment to them is absolute<sup>2</sup>.” Today, actors and activists appeal to human rights to make their case against injustice, from prosecuting war criminals to legalizing same-sex marriage. The fight for universal human dignity has grown into an international movement.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights made concrete the international commitment to human rights, and this document is at the heart of our analysis. It established “a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations,” a goal toward which all member states promised to strive<sup>3</sup>. And yet, many governments, including the United States, have left human rights by the wayside while pursuing national interests. From war crimes in Iraq to police brutality in New York, America has far from a perfect track record of living up to the promises of the UDHR. These actions go against the purpose of the law, and violate the high standards of morality to which we should hold ourselves. In a democratic society, it is the duty of the people to hold their government accountable when it strays from its civic commitments and to do everything in their power to make it in their representatives’ best interests to advocate for the needs of the constituents. These needs all too often are the result of human rights violations. This idea is the foundation of our campaign.

We too often turn the lens of human rights scrutiny on any place we identify as “not here,” and on rights that are political, rather than economic. Violations in African, Middle Eastern, and Asian countries often galvanize public outcry, while indignities closer to home tend to fly under the radar. An abuse of human rights “here” deserves as much attention as an abuse “there.” Liberal-minded Americans are outraged when we hear of political or physically violent human rights violations: that a person has been subjected to “torture” (Article 5), “arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile” (Article 9), or “persecution for practicing... religion” (Article 18). So, too, should we be outraged when a people has been “arbitrarily deprived of [their] property” (Article 17), “the right to work” (Article 23), and the “economic...rights indispensable for...dignity” (Article 22), even if that deprivation occurs slowly and with no single actor to blame. In 1944, FDR declared in his State of the Union address that “true



individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence.” Following in his footsteps, we argue that people are entitled to every right set forth in the Declaration - including those that deal with economic conditions.

**From the UDHR:<sup>4</sup>**

Article 17:

- (1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.
- (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

Article 22:

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

Article 23:

- (1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.
- (2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
- (3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.
- (4) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

Our goal with this campaign is to argue that systemic unemployment in certain Baltimore neighborhoods is a human rights violation. The state of affairs in Baltimore results from a long history of systemic theft—historical racism, deindustrialization, and the flight of capital to wealthier and whiter precincts—, a history that we plan to make readable and accessible in our campaign. This is a history of the systemic denial of the human right to own one’s property and labor, a right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the denial of which has catastrophic, intergenerational consequences for people and communities. Our audience is suburban, affluent, liberal, predominantly white Maryland residents. We urge these citizens to consider the astronomical levels of joblessness in some Baltimore neighborhoods a crisis of human dignity that warrants statewide outcry and political attention. We urge them to consider reinvestment in Baltimore to correct this historical abuse of the basic human rights of



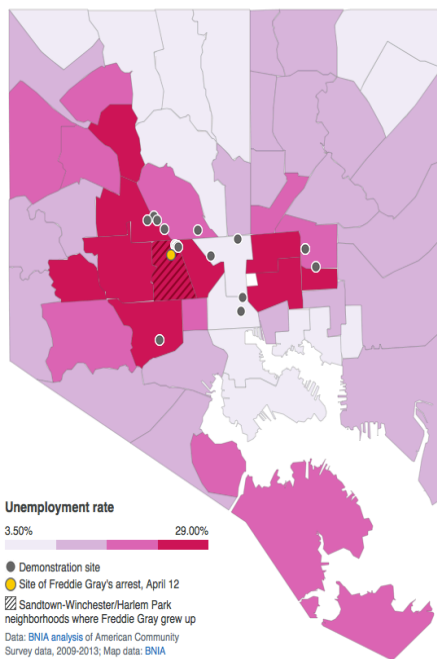
ownership not as an option, but as a responsibility.

## I: A Snapshot of Baltimore Today

Baltimore is a divided city. Its median household income is \$42,266, its unemployment rate is 8.4% as of 2015, and its high school dropout rate is over 40%<sup>5</sup>. Though worse than the national average, these figures only tell part of the story. Conversely, in some areas, including surrounding suburbs, close to 97% of residents are employed while more urban neighborhoods, such as Sandtown-Winchester, where residents face inadequate housing, aggressive policing, unemployment rates over 30%, and a median income less than \$25,000<sup>6</sup>. If one includes in these statistics incarcerated individuals, of which there are many, the numbers are worse.

It is evident that these discrepancies are created on a racial basis. Just over 63% of Baltimore residents are black, but Sandtown-Winchester is 96.6% African American<sup>7</sup>. For black men 20-24 in Baltimore as of 2013, joblessness is 37%, compared to 10% for white men the same age in the same city<sup>8</sup>. On every metric, African Americans in Baltimore face

**Income and employment**



the effects of unemployment and capital drain at far higher rates than white people. The campaign focuses on the black and white binary dynamic because it is the dominant trend in the analysis of the contrast in quality of life between Baltimore neighborhoods. Overall, the current state of Baltimore illustrates a lack of educational resources, economic opportunities and political agency that disproportionately affect communities of color, particularly Black communities. Below is a quick snapshot of the effects of subtle minority targeted policies in Baltimore:

- Just over 63% of Baltimore's residents are black<sup>9</sup>
- Approx. 24% of Baltimore's

- population lives below the poverty line<sup>10</sup>
- Less than 60% of high school students graduate<sup>11</sup>



## Impetus for Change: Post Freddie Gray Riots

Given the current state of Baltimore the need for action is dire. In fact the need for a response was so long overdue that the built up tension mounted to a turning point in April 2015. Baltimore residents took to the streets to protest after the murder of Freddie Gray which quickly turned to riots as the anger and frustration ~ which run far deeper than a single instance of police brutality ~ boiled over<sup>12</sup>. It is important to realize that

these riots were not spurred from senseless anger but from the powerlessness that Baltimore residents face when confronted with the resource disparities and opportunity gaps in their daily lives. Therefore, the onset of the riots indicates that the underlying policy issues could no longer be ignored and that the time for this campaign is now. The community response to its disparities is a symptom of the underlying issues of education inequality, housing

segregation and unemployment, which is the focus of this campaign. We hope to participate in the effort to harness the momentum of the Baltimore riots to attack the underlying causes.

From a perspective of human rights, the state of Baltimore today is unacceptable. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights promises “the right to work” and “protection against unemployment.” For thousands in Baltimore, these promises have not been realized. The UDHR also declared that everyone is entitled, “through national effort,” to “economic rights” that are “indispensable for his dignity.” Though not a legally binding document, the UDHR obligates the


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Since 1935, nearly every so-called race riot in the United States...has been sparked by a police incident...but the underlying causes run much deeper. Police, because they interact in black communities every day, are often seen as the face of larger systems of inequality in the justice system, employment,

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education, and housing.

~Hannah-Jones



United States government to act positively when the rights of its citizens are not realized.

## II. How Did Baltimore Get Here?

Some potential factors that have contributed to the current state of Baltimore 's include past segregating housing legislation and the steady trend of unemployment. Since 1970, the poverty rate in the city of Baltimore has only increased. Areas such as the Rosemont neighborhood in West Baltimore have seen huge spikes in poverty since, from 15% in 1970 to 42% in 2010 (Ellison). This stagnant trend will be a point of investigations for the historians we commission during the campaign.

In the case of housing, the residual legislative effects of today began during the implementation of the New Deal. At that time there was a systematic effort to segregate Black Americans from white Americans to appease the segregationist Southern Democrats. This was the start of the racially disproportionate housing appropriations in America, a lot of which affected Baltimore.

In Nixon's first term George Romney, the father of the recent presidential candidate, served as the secretary of housing and urban development. He remarked that the "federal government has created a white noose around African-American communities in urban areas, and it was the federal government's obligation to untie that noose." Romney denied federal funds to Baltimore County because it refused to desegregate. Eventually, he was forced out of his position in housing and urban development and there have been no such aggressive housing policies since in that area.

### **Baltimore City Housing 1910 Ordinance**

Baltimore manifested a segregated housing culture in the early 20th century with the Baltimore City Housing Ordinance of 1910. The terms of which included:

- That no Negro can move into a block in which more than half of the residents are white
- That no white person can move into a block in which more than half the residents are colored
- That a violator of the law is punishable by a fine of not more than 100\$ or imprisonment of 30 days, a year 1 year or both
- That Existing conditions shall not be disturbed. No white person will be compelled to move away from his house because the block in which he lives has more negroes than whites, and no negro can be forced to move from his house if his block has more whites



than negroes

- That no section of the city is exempted from the conditions of the ordinance. It applies to every house
- Prohibits negroes from using residences on white blocks as a place of public assemble and vice versa<sup>13</sup>

This ordinance put major limitations on the opportunities and resources available to black families. Black Baltimore residents could not move out of spaces where there were no jobs because of these housing boundaries. They were forced to be stagnant and powerless to change their circumstance and were essentially robbed of the right to work because they were stripped of their freedom to move. This also denied Black Baltimoreans the ability to reap the benefits of equity appreciation like their white counterparts who were able to profit from their property and pass that wealth on to their posterity. This too will be further investigated by the commissioned historians during the full campaign process.

### III. Goal: Creating Advocates for Reparations


The aforementioned historical trends outline a trend of theft from the black community in America. Even though there have been changes to the egregious segregation tactics by the state, there has been an increase in the subtle legal manipulations that have perpetuated

disproportionately communities. In robbed of the the inverse of slave effects, a dialogue plausibly be something similar Commission to Proposals for proposed by

“ A heavy account lies against us as a civil society for oppressions committed against people who did not injure us, and that if the particular case of many individuals were fairly stated, it would appear that there was  
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 considerable due to them.  
 -Quaker John Woolman in 1769

oppressive trends that affect black the context of being right to work, almost labor with the same about reparations can considered. We want to the HR 40, the Study Reparation African Americans Act Detroit Congressman

John Conyers Jr., to be considered by local state administrators in a more focused fashion<sup>14</sup>. Ultimately, what we hope to achieve through this campaign is to create advocates for and start a conversation about considering the case of reparations. Discussion would include the idea that potential reparations could go into a fund to create job insurance



programs in areas of Baltimore with concentrated populations of black residents and unemployed residents. Another point to consider would be that the local government should acknowledge the problem of mass unemployment in Baltimore city and be an active part of dialogue, rather than only grassroots organizers.

Our campaign focuses on black and white people and their intertwined histories. We understand the black/white binary to be a useful framework of analysis in dichotomized Baltimore and in a campaign for reparations: the majority of Baltimore residents are and have historically been white and black, and the history of blackness in the United States involves a long history of theft of capital, labor, and resources. But we also recognize that there may be a gap in our analysis, because there are no major studies that include statistics on other racial patterns in Baltimore. Since we plan to commission sociological and historical reports, we hope these will address the diversity of Baltimore more thoroughly.


#### **IV. Creating a Campaign**

As Stanford student we hope to make use of campus resources to facilitate the campaign including professors, databases, and funding. The goal is to act as liaisons between the Stanford staff on campus and Baltimore organizers to maintain the connections across country and to oversee collaboration. Our three-pronged campaign is designed to inform and empower constituents of local government officials (particularly those in Maryland suburbs) to become advocates for the consideration of reparations. First, we will commission a report on the history of poverty, unemployment, and housing discrimination in the city of Baltimore. We will also assist community organizations in orchestrating a series to be published in the Washington Post entitled “In Their Own Words”. Finally, we will design a social media campaign to weave together different media to reach a younger audience to consider reparations.

##### *The Report*

In order to do justice to the history, we will commission a report by historians who have past experience with Baltimore and systemic racism. The report will investigate instances of theft, when the African-American community was “arbitrarily deprived” of its labor, property and access to capital. The historical report will be a joint project by professors from Stanford University and a historian specializing in the history of Baltimore. The report will be researched and written in a four month timeframe and will include one implementation plan for reparations for historical analysis. When it is finished, the two historians will lend publicity to it by appearing on local news programs





such as FOX5 and WUSA9.

Historical research is a form of knowledge that professionals take seriously. We do not want academic work to take the place of community voice; we want the two to work together. A solid historical grounding, presented in a language and format that predominantly white professionals are likely to recognize and respect, will buttress the stories and advocacy coming from Baltimore residents.

We will reach out to members of Stanford faculty to act as mentors and form the core of the team, and then reach out to other academics who work specifically on Baltimore. From Stanford, we will try to connect with Allyson Hobbs, Michele Elam, Ana Raquel Minian, and Clayborne Carson. Non-Stanford historians to reach out to include Marisela Gomez, Antero Pietila, Kenneth Durr, Douglas Massey, Nancy Denton, Thomas Vicino, Patricia Fernández-Kelly, Alexandra Magill, and Richard Rothstein. We plan to assemble a team of four.

#### *“In Their Own Words”*

The next step in our campaign will be to direct eyes from the historical causes of unemployment in Baltimore to its human effects today. This will consist of a month long story series in the Washington post that spotlights a variety of Baltimore resident testimonies of their current employment conditions and its effect on their daily lives. This component of the campaign will be spearheaded by the community organizations who already have relationships and experience with residents.

#### *Social Media Campaign*

Our social media campaign will target the young adult demographic in order to spread awareness about the issue of unemployment as a human rights issue. We will create a website in order to make the report as well as the “In Their Own Words” series accessible. This will allow us to establish and maintain a social media presence. Additionally, we will create a hashtag ~ in conjunction with community organizations and the publicity team and share it through Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

The second step our campaign is to develop an accessible archive of resources on the state of Baltimore today. Included information will come from interviewing Baltimore residents, working with community organizations, gathering statistics on job availability and unemployment, and consolidating research that has already been done on these issues. We will make a concerted effort to employ Baltimore residents to work on this campaign and will rely on support from Stanford professors; Clayton Hurd, Judith Ned, and Arnetta Ball who specialize in Community-Based Research. We hope




<sup>14</sup>to collaborate with Johns Hopkins University, because of its proximity to the Baltimore metropolitan area and the extensive research on Baltimore that has come out of the institution. All of the issues and statistics will be presented through a framework of human rights.

The final step will be to disseminate campaign materials., We will meet with news organizations and publish op-eds. We will create stickers and posters with a catchy logo. We hope to use a human rights framework to bring publicity and increased legitimacy to the activism that is happening.

#### **A word on community organizations**

There are many community organizations already working to combat unemployment in Baltimore. We believe that we can contribute to their project; we bring resources (\$50,000), access to institutional power (the Stanford name, alumni network, faculty), and a powerful framework that defines unemployment as a human rights issue. Our communication with grassroots organizations will serve two purposes. First, along with team members from Baltimore, they will act as our liaisons to Baltimore residents. Second, the perspectives of local organizers who know the city intimately will be critical to the development of our campaign.

Organizations that we will reach out to include Baltimore Racial Justice Action, People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, ACLU of Maryland, Greater Baltimore Leadership Association, NAACP - Baltimore, Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle - Baltimore, Baltimore Bloc, Baltimore Algebra Project, Baltimore United for Change, and Youth Dreamers. Our relationship with organizers must be unpredictable and



flexible; we must be in communication to ensure respect for their capacity. We hope to work closely with these community organizations without pulling their attention away from the work they are already doing.

**Timeline:**

April 27, 2016: 1-year anniversary of the Freddie Gray riots

Announcement of Campaign



Late July 2016: reports are released, authors begin to do local press to publicize reports



August-September 2016: "In Their Own Words" series organized by community organizations, compiled, published



October 2016: social media campaign pushes to keep material relevant, present in dialogue



**Budget:**

\$15,000	compensation for two historians working on the report (\$5,000 each), additional compensation for interview circuit (\$2,500 each)
\$15,000	compensation for two historians working on sociological report (\$5,000 each), additional compensation for interview circuit (\$2,500 each)
\$15,000	compensation for two community-based organizations working on the “In Their Own Words” series (\$2,000 each)
\$5,000	discretionary funds for social media campaign
<b>Total: \$50,000*</b>	*does not include expected donations



## Citations

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- <sup>5</sup> Charles Ellison, “Baltimore’s Slow Burn of Poverty and Hopelessness,” *The Root* (4/29/2015). [http://www.theroot.com/articles/politics/2015/04/the\\_numbers\\_behind\\_the\\_poverty\\_and\\_despair\\_in\\_baltimore.html](http://www.theroot.com/articles/politics/2015/04/the_numbers_behind_the_poverty_and_despair_in_baltimore.html) ;  
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