

California Task Force Votes Lineage Will Decide Eligibility For Reparations

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SACRAMENTO (CBS13/AP) — California's task force on reparations for slavery is no longer at odds.

The first-in-the-nation panel decided Tuesday afternoon that eligibility for reparations will be based on lineage and not race. The panel voted compensation is to be limited to Black people who had descendants in the U.S. during the 19th century.

Members of the task force listened to fiery public comments. The question: Who's been harmed the most?

The vote was split 5-4 with some members begging the commission to move ahead with a clear definition of who would be eligible.

The group said that a compensation and restitution plan based on lineage as opposed to race has the best chance of surviving a legal challenge. They also said that Black immigrants who chose to migrate to the U.S. in the 20th and 21st centuries did not share the trauma of people who were kidnapped and enslaved.

They also opened eligibility to free Black people who migrated to the country in the 19th century, given possible difficulties in documenting genealogy and the risk at the time of becoming enslaved.

Dr. Martin L. Boston, an assistant professor of Ethnic Studies at Sacramento State University explained the different schools of thought regarding eligibility.

There are descendants of enslaved Africans that can be traced to a lineage of an enslaved person in the United States, said Boston.

But some task members supported race-based eligibility – meaning any black person who's experienced discrimination from the nation's founding until the present day may qualify.

Black Lives Matter demonstrations renewed talks as activists confronted racial inequities following George Floyd's death.

Supporters say compensation could go beyond a check and examine quality-of-life issues such as education, healthcare and housing.

But some caution, no compensation can make up for 400 years of maltreatment.

“I think the argument over reparations is a bit of a distraction,” said Michael Tanner, a senior fellow at the think tank CATO Institute located in Washington, D.C. “I can understand that we’ve done so little to apologize for the treatment of African Americans.”

He also believes any discussion should through the federal government.

At the national level, the U.S. House is trying to pass similar legislation to have a commission study reparations. If it does, it’s expected to face a fight in the senate.

In 2019, Tanner wrote an article highlighting how America couldn’t deny systemic racism, however, reparations could further divide the nation while damaging the economy.

“There are very real problems today that need to be addressed from whether we have police reform or housing reform or changes in the education system,” Tanner said. “These are real changes that can have an impact today.”