

National February Debate of the Month

Style: Speed Chess

Similar to a Gavel debate, the pro and con speakers will both stand up and give their speeches simultaneously, but neither can talk over each other. Instead of the speaker tapping their gavel to interrupt the opposing speaker, the speaker that is talking will tap their gavel to indicate that they are finished with their speech and then the opposing speaker will respond.

Debate: Resolved, that the U.S. government should provide reparations to descendants of victims of police brutality during the Civil Rights Movement.

Background: The distribution of reparations, in any form, is a highly contested and controversial topic. There are often debates regarding the dispensation of reparations to descendants of slaves, but more recent proposals inquire the possibility of providing reparations to descendants of victims of police brutality during the Civil Rights Movement. Police brutality has occurred throughout American history, with some of its first documented reports being published in the prohibition era of the 1920s. However, instances of police brutality escalated during the 1950s and 60s, when the Civil Rights Movement began to come into full swing. As protesters took on more confrontational approaches, such as the freedom rides, Greensboro sit ins, and the Selma march, they were met with highly active police responses. The police brutality that occurred during this movement entailed the use of tear gas, police dogs, and fire hoses. Due to such treatment, riots ensued, which were met with more violence from the police. During the tumultuous events of the time, protesters were killed during police intervention, many of them belonging to the Black Panther Party. Some argue that reparations are required in order to rectify the egregious treatment of black Americans by the police. On the other hand, some maintain that the requirements are too vague, making the proposed system to be ineffective. Regardless, the question remains: should the government provide reparations to descendants of victims of police brutality during the Civil Rights Movement?

Black History Month commemorates the many accomplishments of the black community, as well as acknowledges the plights they have suffered. With that being said, the Civil Rights movement is symbolic of the massive steps black activists has taken in order to achieve equality in the United States. This debate is meant to highlight the legacy of injustice against the black community, but more importantly, inspire students to devise solutions and work together to create a more equal and cohesive future.

PRO:

- Presently, there have been multiple lawsuits filed against local and state governments in order to acquire compensation from instances of police brutality, especially if it resulted in the death of an individual. Therefore, the same principles should apply to those affected by police brutality during the Civil Rights movement.
- This debate's focus can be shifted to the moral obligations of the government. Therefore, it can be argued that given the excessive, undue, state-sponsored violence black protesters faced, the government is morally bound to rectify the actions they once sanctioned.

- In order to set a precedent for societal progress, the government must publicly condemn and correct their past actions. Reparations would convey the message that the government is willing to uplift the demographic they so violently repressed during an era of reform.

Link for further research:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/point-taken/should-us-pay-reparations-black-americans/#background>

CON:

- The government is a continuously evolving institution and should not be expected to take responsibility for the ails of a decades-old administration. Thus, providing reparations for events that were not sanctioned by current officials is not justified.
- The distribution of reparations will not solve the persisting problem of police brutality. As opposed to reparations, the system should undergo reforms in order to prevent future instances of police brutality.
- Distributing reparations within a nation poses a variety of political and social issues, such as increased division. Therefore, reparations do not create societal unity, but rather elevate tensions by implying that the body providing the reparations is not obligated to assist black Americans further.

Link for further research: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/19/us/reparations-slavery.html>