

#2: Consideration and goals for reparations in Asheville (See: June 24, 2021 [EVENT](#))

Speaker: Ray McCOY, Esq.

Title: “Remapping Southside Community” —A Critical Resource for Reparations

Video: <https://youtu.be/PSqbv44Kz-4> — (6’31”)



Thank you, Pricilla. I am honored that you asked me to say a few words about the concept of reparations as you present your new website and the work you and your team have put together for the benefit of Black residents of Asheville. What you and your team have done is to provide a critical resource for Black citizens of Asheville directly harmed by the so-called urban renewal project to be identified, for their descendants to be identified and in doing so focus the work of the soon to be formed Reparations Commission. The work you and your team have completed and the piece you unveil tonight is nothing short of historic. It complements, supports, and has the potential to breathe life into the process and work of the joint city and county reparations commission that will soon be established by Asheville and Buncombe County.

That commission is charged with identifying city and county policies that have caused harm to black citizens of Asheville. To accomplish that goal, the City and County will need facts and to hear the stories and experiences of Black citizens of Asheville. This must be an exciting time for your communities. I am particularly excited because I have long been concerned that reparations should be embraced as the way forward given the inability of our national government to sustain efforts to improve the lives of those directly harmed by slavery, Jim Crow, systemic racism and the impact of the same on their descendants.

Reparations can provide a focused effort to direct resources to those Black people and communities uprooted, directly harmed and disenfranchised. Reparations, therefore, can only be race-based and color conscious. The idea of reparations as opposed to equal rights acknowledges that a specific harm or injustice has been done to identifiable individuals and communities. Therefore, resources to make right those wrongs must be aimed at the people and communities who actually suffered. Reparations is not about appeasing whites or spreading resources across all people in the community in order to quell opposition to the program.

I was born the year the Supreme Court decided *Brown v. Board of Education*. I was ten years old when Congress passed the Civil Rights Act. My life’s chances were significantly improved by the passage of those two laws. By the time I graduated from high school, affirmative action programs put in place just years earlier, made it possible for me to attend college. But those programs were already under attack and being scaled back before I finished high school. It was clear that efforts to take affirmative steps to correct the sorry history of racism could not survive the backlash from whites unwilling to share the wealth and privileges they enjoy, in significant part, as a result of depriving Blacks of due process and equal treatment.

Affirmative action as a race-based program designed to open previously closed doors essentially was placed on the political trash heap once it could not shake the stigma that its’ only result was “reverse discrimination.”

Reparations, as explained in the policy making process of Asheville and Buncombe County holds out hope that a program can be constructed with the specific intent to focus on the harm done to a specific group of black people and provide redress to those specifically and intentionally harmed—those whose life chances were stunted—reparations offers an opportunity to reject the nonsense that colorblindness is something to be sought after and replaces that discredited notion with a most realistic one- one that acknowledges specific action is required to repair and make amends for a wrong done to easily identifiable Black citizens and their descendants.

The work done by Pricilla and her team will without question aid in identifying those who should be the focus of Asheville’s effort to identify those who should be offered resources and aid to create generational wealth.

Asheville and Buncombe County are to be applauded and supported for the bold and historic steps taken to embrace reparations. Pricilla Robinson, you and other residents of the Southside must be excited to engage in this process to share your stories, the facts and the truth in order to support the goal of reparations. I am confident that the work you share tonight will support Black citizens of Asheville in their effort to participate in the process of shaping a reparations program that provides a remedy or redress to the harm done and hopefully provides a model for lawmakers across the country to draw upon.

-Ray McCOY, Esq.

Bio: Arthur “Ray” McCoy is an attorney and educator. He served as dean of students and adjunct professor at two law schools (Hamline University School of Law and the University of St. Thomas Law School). He helped Penn State University carry out a court-ordered desegregation program in the mid-1980’s. He served as an attorney representing plaintiffs pursuing discrimination complaints against employers and represented labor unions during his more than thirty-year career as an attorney. He currently serves as a labor arbitrator.