

# A Child-Centric Cross-Disciplinary Framework to Black Reparations

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## BACKGROUND

In 2022, among households with at least one resident child under age 18, the typical white household had \$166,000 more wealth than the typical black household. A confluence of factors contributes to the black-white racial wealth difference, including a legacy of economic hardship due to slavery, Jim Crow segregation and violence, and exclusionary education, housing, employment, and related public policies and discriminatory practices. Reparations offer restitution and redress for these enduring harms. For black children, a child-centric reparations-based policy response can work in concert with other types of economic policies, such as access to credit, home and land ownership, and social and human capital investments that can collectively improve black wealth and intergenerational economic mobility for black Americans.

This trio of research briefs offers a framework for children as a focus of any reparation effort. Each of these three briefs showcases an element of a longer paper; for full text and references see Gennetian, L., Gibson-Davis, C., Darity Jr, W. “[A Framework and Policy Case for Black Reparations to Support Child Well-Being in the United States](#)” in *Nature Human Behavior* and [OSF Preprints](#) | [Black Reparations and Child Well-Being: A Framework and Policy Considerations](#).

## Overview

A child-centric cross-disciplinary framework offers a fuller, more expansive view of how black reparations may impact children’s development and well-being. An ecological model is used to illustrate an intergenerational framework that also provides an overview of the various forces and feedback loops.

The model combines economic theory, which focuses on family time and money investments in children’s human capital development, with human development, which focuses on children’s developmental milestones and growth over the lifespan (see center two boxes, Figure 1). Notably, family financial investments in one generation of children foster ongoing investments in the subsequent generation.

More than family financial investment is transmitted across generations, however, and children’s development is affected by broader systems and structures. Theories and perspectives from multiple disciplines inform the ecological model of the potential impact of black reparations on children’s development. Racism and discrimination contribute to internalized trauma in black families (see contributing factors in left center box, Figure 1) that, in turn, increase family stress, which can affect parenting and the emotional, physical, and mental health of black children.



For full text and references, see: Gennetian, L., Gibson-Davis, C., Darity Jr, W. (2025) *A Framework and Policy Case for Black Reparations to Support Child Well-Being in the United States*. *Nature Human Behavior*. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-025-02189-3>

Gennetian, L., Gibson-Davis, C., Darity Jr, W. (2024) *Black Reparations and Child Well-Being: A Framework and Policy Considerations*. OSF Preprints. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/6q2dk>

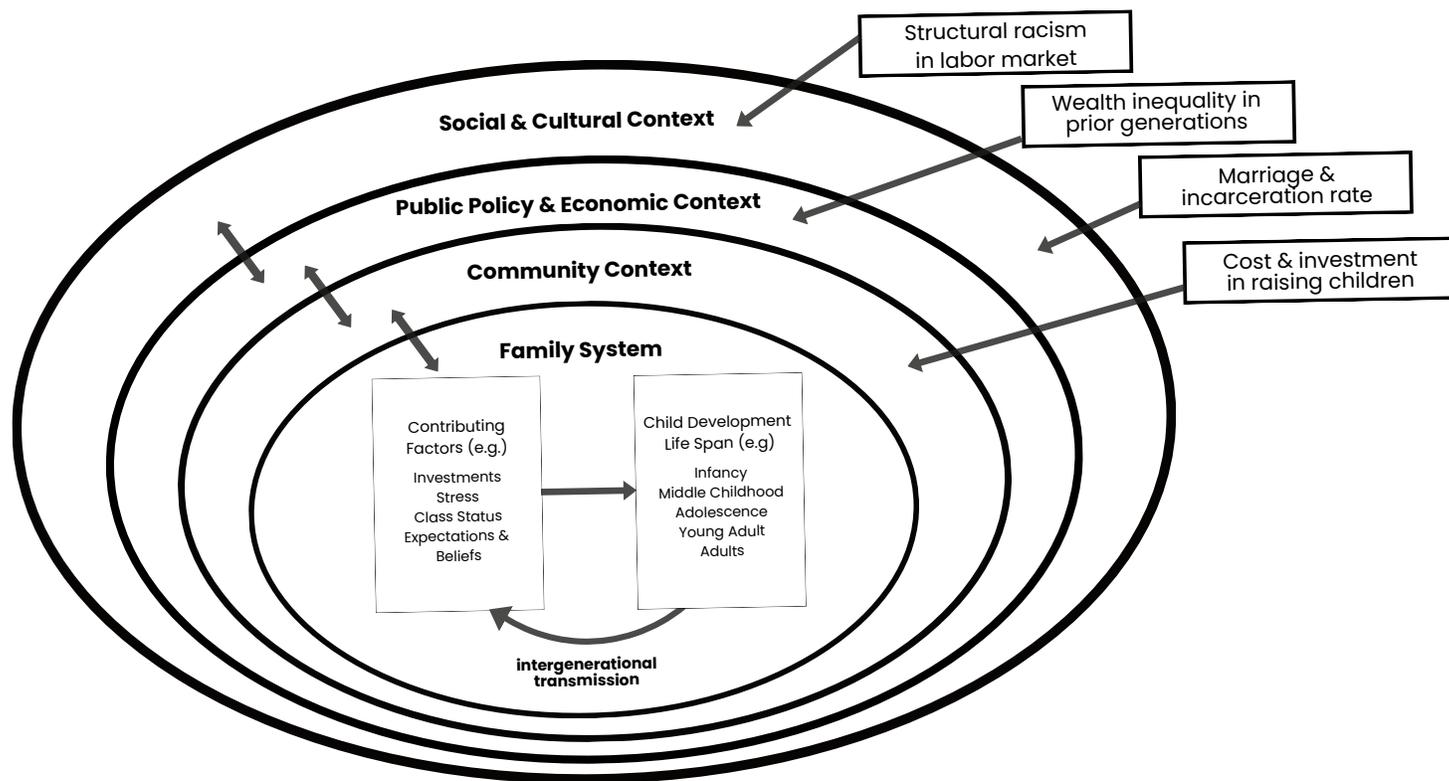
<sup>1</sup> Gibson-Davis, C. (2024). Survey of Consumer Finances [Unpublished raw data]. Duke University.



Taking a broader view, the model embeds children within nested systems that dynamically affect their experiences and shape their development (see concentric circles, Figure 1). Children’s development is impacted by the family context —most immediately by their relationships with their parents, caregivers, and siblings. These relationships are affected by their local environments—where the families live, work, and play—which are, in turn, impacted by broader social, cultural, economic, and policy conditions.

Structural features of children’s environments affect the returns from social policy investments. Structural constraints (see boxes on far right, Figure 1) include the costs of racism borne by black children throughout their development. Reparations are one—but not the only—approach needed to counter headwind forces such as labor market discrimination, disparate incarceration rates, and generational racial wealth disparities.

Figure 1: A cross-disciplinary framework of reparations for black children



### A Three-Pronged Approach to Black Reparations

The child centric cross-disciplinary framework offers a blueprint for a multi-pronged reparations strategy that also draws on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). CRC specifically provides a human rights and legal framework regarding:

- What constitutes current and historic harm to children and the costs of harm.
- Why communities bear collective responsibility for harm to children.
- Principles that should undergird reparations that can be adopted for child descendants of formerly enslaved African Americans.

This cross-disciplinary framework coupled with CRC-based human rights guidelines informs a three-pronged child-reparations approach.



## Three Pronged Approach:

### 1. Restitution of Child Income

*How?* The simplest form of restitution is a one-time lump sum payment per eligible child, in an amount informed by the projected wealth gap. This direct payment, as compensation for historical harm, can be deposited in trust funds for each eligible child to be available upon turning 18.

### 2. Restitution of Family-Level Wealth

*How?* A one-time unconditional wealth transfer to families with any eligible child. The family-level payment can occur in addition to the child-level payment, to ensure that both the individual child and the family ecosystem benefit in synergistic and complementary ways so that child wealth does not crowd out family investments.

### 3. Systemic Redress

*How?* There are many options, including school-level funding for student trips to ports of entry or monuments and museums devoted to the history and legacy of slavery. Another option could include federal funding of scholars and institutions to generate accessible historical accounts and curricula. Whatever the approach(es), steps toward systemic redress should address information and education gaps and help shape norms and beliefs that reinforce the goals of addressing past harms and reducing future ones.

## Takeaways

Many aspects of such a child-centric reparations approach dovetail with the views and beliefs of black parents. When surveyed, black parents of young children report racial discrimination as problematic at individual, school, community, and legal levels, and a vast majority connect their and their children's current position to the legacy of slavery. Black parents report support for direct cash payments as a form of reparation but also support other forms of financial aid.

Crucially, reparations described here motivate the independent and complementary values of other types of anti-poverty programs including income or wealth transfers. In particular, reparations go to all who meet eligibility requirements and do not depend on having one's household income and/or asset fall below a predetermined threshold.



## *Black Reparations for Children*

This research brief is the third of a three-part series highlighting key findings in "A Framework and Policy Considerations for Black Reparations to Support Child Well-Being" published by Nature Perspectives. All three briefs are available online at <https://childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu/news/black-reparations-for-children/>.

The first brief, [Making the Case for Black Reparations for Children](#), details how due to a variety of social, public policy and economic forces, black children are more likely than white children to experience negative outcomes throughout childhood. The second brief, [Racial Wealth Gaps are Larger among Households with Children](#), describes how the black-white wealth gap is widest for households with children.

Taken as a collective, these briefs motivate and describe an approach to black reparations for children.

For more information on the black-white wealth gap and black reparations in the U.S., see [From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century](#), by William A. Darity, Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen. For more context on black reparations, please also see [The Black Reparations Project: A Handbook for Racial Justice](#).

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