

JULY 2023

THE VISION FOR DRUG WAR REPARATIONS



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Cover photo: Rapper Fendi Frost performs at EAT's Drug War Reparations Concert. Photo Credit: The Times.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I am writing to provide an executive summary in support of the Vision for Drug War Reparations in Illinois, highlighting the importance, rationale, and potential benefits of actualizing reparations for survivors of the War on Drugs. The following summary outlines the key points and arguments for consideration:

- 1 Background:** The War on Drugs has had profound and lasting effects on individuals, families, and communities disproportionately affected by aggressive drug enforcement policies. These policies have resulted in mass incarceration, economic disparities, social marginalization, and a cycle of violence and criminality in many Black communities throughout Illinois.
- 2 Injustice and Discrimination:** Drug enforcement policies have disproportionately targeted Black communities in Illinois, leading to stark racial disparities in arrests, convictions, and sentences. Drug War enforcement policies established relentless attacks on Black parents through the Illinois child welfare system, which led to a sustainable increase in child removal proceedings and foster care placement throughout the State. This systemic bias perpetuates inequality and infringes upon fundamental principles of fairness and justice.
- 3 Historical Precedents:** Reparations have been successfully implemented in various contexts to address historical injustices and promote reconciliation. Examples include reparations for survivors of John Burge's torture here in IL, the Holocaust, Japanese internment, and other systemic human rights violations. Drug War reparations would similarly acknowledge the harm inflicted and provide rehabilitation, restitution, compensation, guarantees of non-repetition, and ultimately, satisfaction for affected communities.
- 4 Socioeconomic Impact:** The consequences of the Drug War extend beyond individual liberty and community cohesion. High incarceration rates disrupt families, perpetuate cycles of poverty, limit educational opportunities, and hinder economic development. Drug War reparations can contribute to breaking these cycles and promote social and economic mobility.
- 5 Restorative Justice:** Drug War reparations align with the principles of restorative justice by acknowledging the harm caused, supporting affected communities, and working toward healing and reconciliation. By addressing the root causes and consequences of the Drug War, reparations can help restore trust, foster community resilience, and promote social integration.

Equity and Transformation (EAT) presents a Vision for Drug War Reparations, formed through the lens of formerly incarcerated Black Chicagoans. Many of them were imprisoned in the Illinois Department of Corrections for drug offenses in the 90s, yet in 2023, they still wear the mark of a criminal record. For them, simply acknowledging the harm isn't enough; reparations is the only pathway forward.

Drug War Reparations offer a unique opportunity to rectify the historical injustices and address the deep-rooted impacts of aggressive drug enforcement policies. By acknowledging the disproportionate harm inflicted on marginalized communities, implementing comprehensive reparations can foster healing, promote social equity, and contribute to a more just and inclusive society.



Richard Wallace
Founder & Executive Director



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DEMANDS

The Illinois Reparations Coalition is committed to winning **comprehensive reparations for Survivors of the War on Drugs** based on the five conditions of full reparations outlined by the United Nations. The following are our demands:

SATISFACTION

is the verification of facts and full public disclosure of the truth—an official declaration or judicial decision restoring the dignity, reputation, and rights of the victim.

- Acknowledge and apologize for the state's role in fueling the WOD.
- Launch a statewide campaign to develop solutions for the impact of the WOD.
- Incorporate the WOD into the public school curriculum.

COMPENSATION

should be provided for physical, mental, economic, moral, and social harms. This includes lost opportunities from loss of employment, education, and social benefits.

- Provide regular, direct cash payments for Survivors of the WOD.
- Provide education, housing, and healthcare as compensation.
- Reimburse for legal, medical, psychological, and social services.

RESTITUTION

includes measures taken that restore the victims to their original state before the violations of their human rights, including restoration of liberty, enjoyment of human rights, identity, family life, and citizenship.

- Expunge all cannabis-related offenses, not only “standalone” cases.
- Restore licenses, citizenship status, and other legal rights removed from the WOD.

REHABILITATION

includes medical and psychological care and legal and social services.

- Give free medical and mental health care access from trauma-informed, non-punitive practitioners from diverse backgrounds.
- Provide free tuition, vocational training, and small business development education.
- Develop parks, recreational centers and community spaces, and public housing.

GUARANTEES OF NON-REPETITION

are structural measures and institutional reforms taken within policy to prevent the harms from reoccurring.

- End all exclusions at the state and local level from housing, employment, public benefits, immigration, child welfare, and education for all drug-related convictions.
- Prohibit police from harassing people for low-level violations, including stop-and-frisks and warrantless searches of vehicles during traffic stops.
- Decriminalize all drugs.



KEY TERMS & PHRASES

WAR ON DRUGS

The War on Drugs (WOD) is a concerted, militarized campaign led by the U.S. government to enforce prohibitions on the importation, manufacture, use, sale, and distribution of substances deemed to be illegal, advancing a punitive rather than a public health approach to drug use. It is characterized by racial profiling, racially targeted policing and prosecutorial practices, long mandatory prison sentences on conviction of drug-related offenses, and a host of collateral consequences, which have wrought devastation in the lives of millions of people in the United States and beyond. It has served as one of the driving forces of skyrocketing rates of mass incarceration in the United States.

SURVIVOR OF THE WAR ON DRUGS

Survivors are those who have been harmed by the War on Drugs. The War on Drugs had devastating effects on generations of Black and Brown communities and has impacted almost every facet of their lives, including food, housing, employment, income, education, family dynamics, and more.

JUST SAY NO

In 1984, Nancy Reagan spearheaded the War on Drugs by launching her “Just Say No” campaign, a privately funded effort to educate millions of school children on the dangers of drug use.

DOG WHISTLE POLITICS

“Dog-Whistle Politics” is the practice of sending out coded political messages or subtle signals designed to be understood by a narrow target audience. Dog-Whistle Politics was an explicit tool to generate support for the War on Drugs by using coded racial appeals to further criminalize Black and Brown communities.



Graphic design by EAT to promote the Drug War Reparations Concert in August 2022.

RACIST TROPES

The language used in the War on Drugs has been permeated with racist tropes that have criminalized and demonized Black and Brown communities.

- *Welfare queens* - a term used to describe Black women accused of abusing the welfare system and using their benefits to support drug use.
- *Super-predators* - a term used to describe young Black men accused of being violent, drug-addicted criminals with no regard for human life.
- *Inner-city crime* - a term used to describe crime in predominantly Black neighborhoods, often associated with drug addiction and trafficking.
- *Crack babies* - a term used to describe babies born to mothers who used crack cocaine during pregnancy, which was often used to perpetuate the myth that drug addiction was a moral failing that could be passed onto future generations.

MASS INCARCERATION

A network of policing, prosecution, incarceration, surveillance, debt, and social control that is rooted in and reproduces economic and racial inequality and oppression. This term is used to describe the disproportionate number of incarcerated people in the United States due to harsh sentencing laws and policies from the War on Drugs.

SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

The school-to-prison pipeline is a systemic pattern of policies and practices within the education and justice systems that push Black and Brown students out of schools and into the criminal justice system. This pipeline is fueled by discriminatory practices, such as zero-tolerance policies, harsh disciplinary measures, and police presence in schools.



EAT Organizing Director Alonzo Waheed organizes a protest in downtown Chicago.

MANDATORY MINIMUMS

Mandatory minimum sentences are fixed sentences that courts are obligated to impose upon conviction of a specific crime without regard for the unique factors of the offender or the offense. During the WOD, mandatory minimums were used to impose harsh penalties for drug-related offenses.

ANTI-DRUG ABUSE ACT

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act was a federal law passed in 1986 to combat drug use in the US. It established mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses and created sentencing disparities between crack and powder cocaine offenses. The law was used extensively during the War on Drugs and resulted in the disproportionate incarceration of Black and Brown individuals.



August 2022 - EAT hosts the first Drug War Reparations concert featuring Twista, Shawna, Do or Die, and Crucial Conflict.



September 2022 - Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity (BOLD) trains EAT members and volunteers on how to organize powerfully for the Big Payback.



March 2023 - EAT hosts the first Big Payback forum to discuss the need for Drug War reparations with our community.



June 2023 - Taking It To the Streets! EAT throws weekly street BBQs on Chicago's West and South Sides to feed the community and spread the word about the Big Payback.

Security



SURVIVORS OF THE WOD

What Does it Mean to be a "Survivor?"

The term "survivor," as the SAKI Institute explains, "often refers to an individual who has gone through the recovery process." The War on Drugs devastated Black and Brown communities. Generations of African Americans and Hispanics continue to live with the trauma that the criminal justice system has lodged into the hearts of their families and communities. The WOD affected millions by restricting access to education and employment opportunities, increasing housing instability, exacerbating food inflation, and tearing families apart through mass incarceration. These Americans continue to live with the consequences as they navigate life without support from the United States government.

Who They Are

- Incarcerated individuals
- People who have incarcerated loved ones - children, family, partners, etc.
- People who lost their children, even if reunification happened
- People who were separated from their families or placed in foster care systems
- People who lost public housing
- People who lost their licenses
- People who lost access to business, financial, or educational loans
- People who lost SSI, SSD, welfare, and other benefits
- People who were deported or dealt with immigration issues
- People who struggle with any substance use
- Students who attended public schools in a Disproportionately Impacted Area (DIA)
- People who live in DIAs & struggle with mental health issues
- People who experienced public housing/mental health facility closures in DIAs
- People who are engaged in the informal economy - legacy cannabis entrepreneurs, sex workers.



HISTORY OF THE WOD

The Civil Rights Movement gained major momentum in 1950-1960s, resulting in significant political and social changes. However, the Movement also triggered backlash, leading to the Southern Strategy in politics.

Controlled Substances Act passes, classifying marijuana as a Schedule 1 drug. The CSA increases federal punishment for marijuana possession.

The Shafer Commission presents a report on the misunderstanding of marijuana to Congress and proposes decriminalization. The White House ignores the report and its findings.

Ronald Reagan wins presidential election.

Reagan signs Anti-Drug Abuse Act into law. Reagan allocates over \$1B to fuel the WOD.

Bill Clinton wins presidential election.

1968

Richard Nixon wins presidential election with a "tough on crime" agenda.

1970

1971

Nixon declares the War on Drugs, naming drug abuse as "public enemy number one."

1973

Drug Enforcement Agency created by Nixon.

1981

Nancy Reagan launches "Just Say No" campaign, which focused on abstinence-only messages to stigmatize and prevent drug use.

1984

George H.W. Bush wins presidential election. The Democratic Party adopts Republican approach and embraces a "War on Crime."

1988

1994

Crime Bill passes, enacting stricter sentencing laws, increasing law enforcement funding, and expanding the federal death penalty. NAFTA is signed.

The prison population increased from **50,000** in 1980 to over **400,000** by 1997.

Prison Population, 1980



Prison Population, 1997



1 icon = 10,000 people



The Louisiana State Penitentiary (known as Angola Prison), modern day chattel slavery. Gerald Herbert / AP

When NAFTA was signed by the Clinton administration, it opened the door for US workers to compete in a global arena. The industry began to outsource labor to other countries, and there was a dramatic drop in Black participation and opportunities to acquire labor. At that moment, participating in the drug trade became a way to obtain basic necessities such as food, water, shelter, and income. The lack of employment opportunities created by deindustrialization led to a rise of informal work as a means of survival.



CONSEQUENCES OF THE WOD

The WOD is one of many manifestations of the intense hatred and fears held by most Americans that have killed Black people for centuries. The WOD was designed to incorporate devastating and ongoing racialized consequences.

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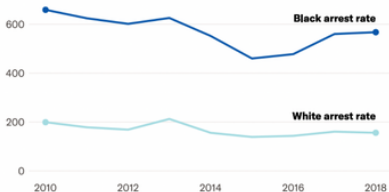
The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the anti-war left and Black people... We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course, we did.

-John Ehrlichman

Legal Counsel to President Nixon, in a 1994 interview

Sentencing and Arrest Discrepancies

Rates of Black and White Marijuana Possession Arrests per 100k People



Source: FBI/Uniform Crime Reporting Program Data
 Note: Florida and Washington, D.C. did not provide data.

Actors from both parties and institutions at all levels of government have, for decades, perpetuated these racist ideologies, and its consequences extend far beyond any specific individual's involvement with the American legal system. Some of the many consequences, which we must address and begin rectifying, are touched on below.

The WOD led to significant sentencing and arrest discrepancies between Black and white communities. The sentencing disparity between crack cocaine and powder cocaine is one of the most significant examples of this injustice, with possession of just five grams of crack cocaine resulting in a mandatory minimum sentence of five years, while the possession of 500 grams of powder cocaine is required for the same sentence. Similarly, despite similar rates of marijuana use, Black individuals are nearly four times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than white individuals.

Police Harassment

The WOD led to an increase in police harassment for minor offenses. Stop-and-frisk policies have been used to target Black and Brown communities for wrongful searches, leading to tens of thousands of unconstitutional stops. Despite the legalization of adult-use cannabis in Illinois, there have been continued reports of wrongful traffic stops and sidewalk stops due to the alleged odor of marijuana.

Financial Consequences

The WOD inspired state and federal legislation to increase mandatory minimum jail sentences to decades, which were disproportionately received by Black men and helped destroy their potential to have a successful future. The lack of income earned by Black men's mass incarceration plunged many Black families into poverty for decades, caused the loss of homeownership, and eliminated other opportunities for Black families to build wealth over the long term.

Exclusion from Employment

The 2020 "Never Fully Free" report by the Social Impact Research Center shows that involvement with the criminal justice system can subject individuals to 1,189 "permanent punishment" laws and regulations in Illinois. Notably, 982 of these prevent or hinder access to employment, including background checks and restrictions on the activities of survivors of the WOD during their probation or parole. Similarly, Illinois enacted at least 364 state laws and regulations that restrict occupational licensing for people with a criminal record.

Housing Discrimination

This Social Impact Research Center report also highlights that federal laws restrict people with many criminal records—especially for drug offenses—from living in subsidized housing. Due to the disproportionate prevalence of criminal records among people of color, housing-related permanent punishments exacerbate racialized housing instability and segregation. In addition, these permanent punishments increase the incidence of homelessness among Survivors of the WOD.

Public housing is central in any analysis of the WOD in Chicago, particularly during the demolition of what is commonly known as the State Street Corridor. Originally



EAT hosts a Drug War Reparation Concert at the Metro in Chicago.

developed as temporary housing for Black residents who could not find housing on the South and West sides of the city, the corridor was the primary provider of housing for large families with children who did not have large incomes. At one point in time, over 25,000 people lived on a continuous, four-plus-mile stretch of street. Upon the destruction of over 80 percent of the corridor, Black families were dispersed throughout the South and West Sides, the Western and Southern rim adjacent suburbs, central Illinois, Southern Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota. Given the mass exodus of Black families from the city proper or displacement to other parts of the city, there is a specific meaning for poor/working-class Black people who have remained in the city. Their experiences with displacement, depopulation, and abandonment are real and apparent regarding the shuttering of schools, lack of affordable housing, and violent experiences with law enforcement. Housing (or the lack thereof), coupled with the WOD, has deeply contributed to Chicago's 20-year purge of Black people (amalgamating in the loss of over 260,000 Black people since 2000), setting the stage for conflict for those that remain.

Education

Schools present yet another layer in understanding fallout from the WOD. Similar to housing, the hyper-segregation of Chicago is intensified as Black and Latinx residents are displaced and placed in communities they are unfamiliar with. One of the primary issues with segregation is the idea that if you are isolated from other groupings of people for extended periods of time, the unfamiliarity with the new group you may be in contact with could spark tensions. This becomes an important theme in understanding the WOD as thousands of Black residents have been displaced and forced to relocate to communities that they are unfamiliar with. Schools present yet another layer in understanding fallout from the WOD. Similar to housing, the hyper-segregation of Chicago is intensified as Black and Latinx residents are displaced and placed in communities they are unfamiliar with. One of the primary issues with segregation is the idea that if you are isolated from other groupings of people for extended periods of time, the unfamiliarity with the new group you may be in contact with could spark tensions. This becomes an important theme in understanding the WOD as thousands of Black residents have been displaced and forced to relocate to communities that they are unfamiliar with. Commonly discussed solely as a "gang problem," the idea of hyper-segregation, planned abandonment, and marginalization complicates the notion that Chicago is overrun with gangs. Instead, we need to consider the fact that, in some instances, gang activity in the traditional sense of large conglomerates has splintered over the years. Austin High School is of particular importance in that it was a school that was shuttered in the aftermath of the WOD when students were displaced from their community high school and were sent five and a half miles away to Roberto Clemente High School (Clemente). Through numerous spaces of unfamiliarity, they ran the risk of being in harm's way. When those same set of students arrived at Clemente, tensions were high, resulting in conflict and repressive discipline strategies at the school. As this is one story of closure, it serves as an important flashpoint in considering the decision of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to close 50 schools in one

summer (2013) and to close over 150 since 2004. Furthermore, the WOD strengthened the school-to-prison pipeline by implementing zero-tolerance discipline policies, lack of mental health and counseling services, and increased police presence.

Deportation

The WOD has had a catastrophic impact on the deportation of Black individuals in the United States. The WOD was used as a pretext to target and criminalize Black communities, resulting in disproportionate rates of arrest, conviction, and deportation for drug-related offenses. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 expanded the deportation apparatus and imposed stricter penalties for drug-related offenses. In combination with the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, these policies have had devastating consequences for Black communities, including the separation of families, the loss of livelihoods, and the perpetuation of systemic racism within the criminal justice and immigration systems. As a result, the number of Black immigrants deported from the United States has increased by 476% since 1996. The overrepresentation of Black individuals in drug-related deportations highlights the underlying racial bias and lack of due process within the criminal justice and immigration systems, calling for policies that address these systemic issues.

Family Dynamics and Mental Health

During extended periods of incarceration, families of Black men experienced severe trauma that impacted generations, including losing a vital father figure and his potential wealth. Without loving guidance from their father, many Black children struggled socially and academically and were overwhelmed by challenges encountered during adolescence. Furthermore, the State has used the Family Regulation System to police and traumatize Black families not only through child removal and termination of parental rights but also by subjecting them to constant State surveillance, submission to drug testing, loss of family control, and more. The Family Regulation System, in combination with the exclusion from employment and educational opportunities, has had psychologically devastating impacts on Black families.

Gender-Based Discrimination

The War on Drugs had profound and disparate impacts on women, further perpetuating gender-based discrimination. Black women bore the brunt of these consequences, enduring heightened surveillance, disproportionately high arrest rates, and harsher sentencing for drug offenses compared to women of other races. Moreover, the interconnected criminalization of sex work, frequently intertwined with drug enforcement measures, placed Black women at a greater risk, particularly queer and trans women engaged in sex work. The criminalization of their work pushed them into more dangerous and unregulated environments, leaving them with limited legal protections and vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and violence.

False Narrative of Safety

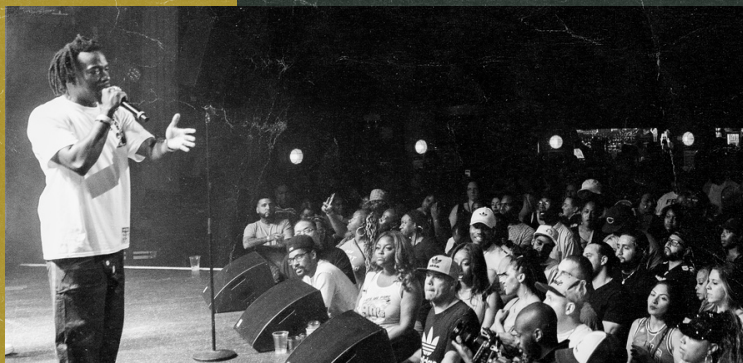
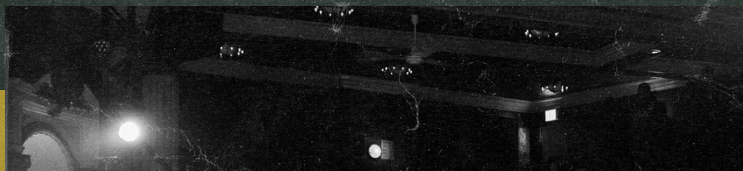
Unfortunately, no facts or evidence document that the WOD significantly improved public safety in Black, White, or any community. Instead, the WOD criminalized a broad range of activities beyond those related to marijuana, given the incorrect yet institutionalized belief that Black people are the primary threat to society.

Despite the billions of dollars spent to prosecute a WOD in Illinois, these resources have not significantly increased public safety, especially in Black communities. Instead, as another ongoing consequence, the WOD diverted funds from crucially-needed investments in education, employment, health, and other public services for residents of the State's Black communities. If Illinois enacted legislation and public policies that actually increased public safety—instead of pandering to the fears of Black people held by most of its residents—billions of dollars could be re-deployed to implement holistic solutions that truly assist individuals in the State's criminal justice system.

As Chicago experiences upticks in violence, much of the purported solutions include “tough-on-crime” legislation that includes law enforcement targeting “high crime” areas or tougher punishments for violent infractions. Where these policies do little to halt crime and result in increased rates of incarceration for Black and Latinx residents of Chicago in communities struggling through chronic disinvestment and destabilization, blame is instantaneously placed on “bad actors.” Systems go unnoticed in popular rhetoric on violence and, in the most extreme cases, homicide. All of this has been intensified by the WOD.



Equity and Transformation paint a banner to protest for Drug War reparations.



GET INVOLVED

Equity and Transformation is committed to winning comprehensive reparations for the War on Drugs in Illinois. If you want to support this work, sign our petition using the QR code below, and follow us on our socials.



scan to sign petition

eatchicago.org



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#TheBigPayback #ReparationsNow

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HEALTH AND WELLBEING