Toward a Culture of Repair

By: Aria Florant

Have you seen the Oscar nominated documentary, *The Perfect Neighbor?* It chronicles the murder of of Ajike "AJ" Owens, a Black mother shot and killed by her white neighbor through a closed door in Ocala, Florida, in June 2023. It's heartbreaking to watch an entire community experience harm so directly, especially because we know this story is one that repeats itself, over and over again. The powerful film leaves us with a question that's essential for the future of our country: When people and systems cause immense harm, what does it look like to repair?

This is the question that animates the organization I co-founded and run: Liberation Ventures (LV), a field catalyst accelerating the reparations movement and building a culture of repair for all people in the United States.

What Reparations and Repair Actually Mean

Our work is focused on catalyzing the conversation about truth, justice, and repair across the country because we know reparations for Black people unlocks true belonging for us all and enables a just multiracial democracy. This American dream – a dream in our name – is not only achievable, but necessary for our society to survive and thrive.

At Liberation Ventures, we define reparations as the process of the state making amends for harm. While most people think of reparations simply as compensation, a wider variety of material, systemic, and symbolic repair for victims, their families, and broader society is involved. Liberation Ventures developed a framework to define comprehensive reparations: It applies the UN reparations definition to the human rights violations of chattel slavery and its legacies in the United States – including racial violence, Jim Crow, redlining and segregation, inequitable veterans benefits, the war on drugs, and more. The framework includes four parts, in an iterative cycle:

- **Reckoning**: Understanding or grappling with the what, who, how, and why of actions that have contributed to harm.
- **Acknowledgment**: Public admission that harm has been done
- **Accountability**: Ownership and commitment to take action, cease and repair harm.
- **Redress**: Acts of restitution, financial compensation, and rehabilitation, proactive steps taken to embed racial justice into systems and "heal the wound"

At LV, we believe that reparations for Black Americans would enable a broader culture of repair for everyone – where any time harm is caused in our society, individuals and institutions have the skill and will to repair it.

Poll: Do you think comprehensive reparations are possible?

It Has Been Done Before

There is a common misconception that reparations are impractical or that reparations have never been done before. Neither is true.

In 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act, which paid $20,000 to each of the more than 80,000 Japanese Americans who were unjustly interned during World War II. A Republican president signed it. Congress passed it. In 1994, the Florida legislature itself — the same state where AJ Owens was killed — passed a reparations package for the Rosewood Massacre. In 1923, a white mob burned a thriving Black town to the ground, killing at least six people while government officials looked the other way. Seven decades later, Florida paid $150,000 to each of the nine surviving victims. It was an acknowledgment that the state had failed and that repair was required.

More recently, in 2021, Evanston, Illinois became the first U.S. city to issue reparations to Black residents in the form of $25,000 housing grants for families harmed by discriminatory housing policies. In 2024, the city of Palm Springs reached a $27M reparations settlement with former residents of Section 14, a neighborhood that was destroyed in the 1960s.

What Repair Looks Like After AJ Owens

Communities that have been harmed by Stand Your Ground laws deserve repair. Stand Your Ground Laws are just one chapter in a very long story about who America has decided deserves protection, and who it has decided must be controlled. That story starts with chattel slavery, where Black people were treated as property to be surveilled, captured, and killed if they stepped out of line. After emancipation, the tools changed but the logic did not. Slave patrols evolved into police forces. Black Codes allowed Southern states to imprison Black people for trivial offenses. Lynching terrorized entire communities into submission, and almost no one was ever prosecuted for it. In each case, the law either sanctioned anti-Black violence directly or looked the other way when it happened.

Stand Your Ground laws follow that same pattern. They are written in race-neutral language, but they function in a racially unequal way — giving legal cover to the fear of Black bodies that this country has cultivated and codified for centuries. When a white person claims they felt threatened by a Black neighbor, a Black teenager, a Black man walking down the street, and the law validates that fear as sufficient grounds to use deadly

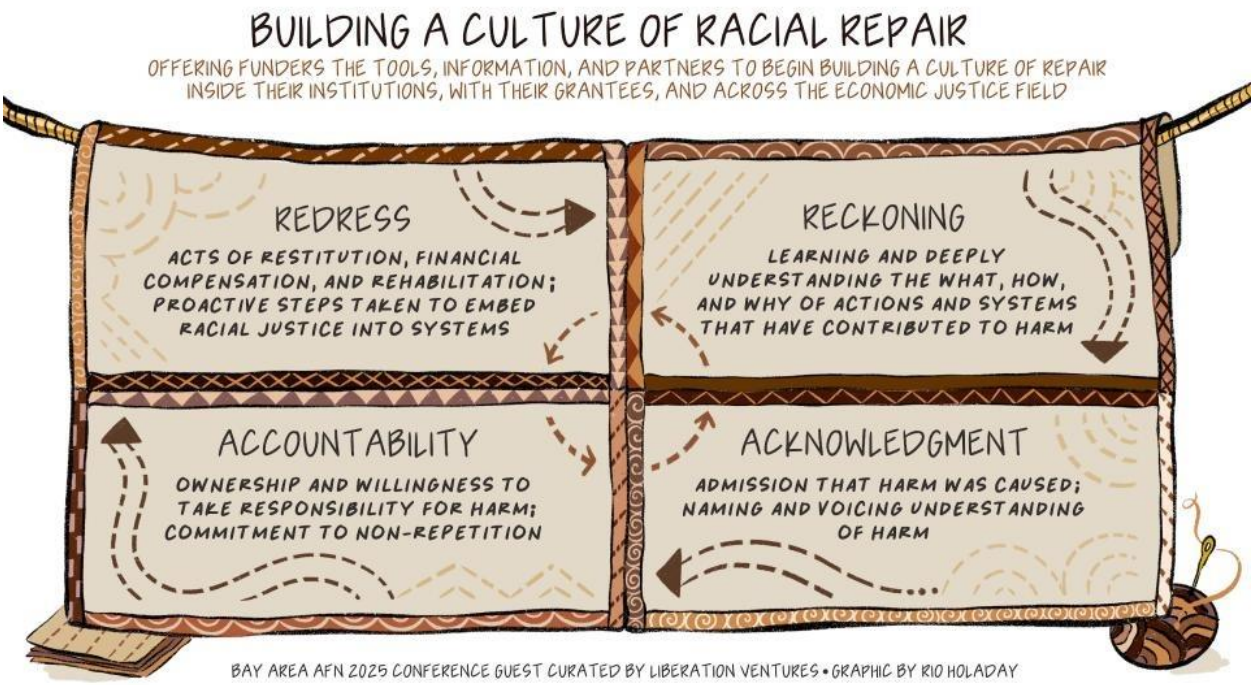
force without consequence, that is not a coincidence. It is a continuation. We cannot repair what AJ Owens' family lost, or what Trayvon Martin's family lost, or what so many other families have lost, without being honest about the deep roots of the system that keeps failing them.

A Perfect Neighbor begins the work of repair by enabling the audience to reckon directly with what happened. The film's use of body camera footage needs no explanation; all who watch can see clearly. Continued repair could also take many additional forms; official acknowledgement from public officials in the state of Florida, accountability that stops this kind of harm from repeating by repealing Stand Your Ground laws, redress for AJ Owens' family, and more. Nothing can bring AJ back, but real changes can be made to ensure what happened never happens again.

What's next for each of us? A Culture of Repair.

Imagine a world where, no matter who you are, if you are harmed you can expect that harm to be repaired. This powerful vision for our future drives me every day.

The repair process - reckoning, acknowledgement, accountability and redress – can be applied to all kinds of harm, interpersonal or systemic. As funders, philanthropists, donors or racial justice supporters, it is up to each of us to get comfortable with repairing harm when we see it, or even harder, repairing harm when we cause it. It's not enough to ideologically support good causes – it's up to us to practice those values. Last year, my team and I worked with the AFN Network to develop some key things funders can do to practice repair alongside their support of the reparations movement. We hope you will join us in doing the work to ensure a better future for us all.



Aria Florant is Co-Founder and CEO of Liberation Ventures (LV), a field catalyst accelerating the reparations movement and building a culture of repair for all people in the United States. Throughout her career, Aria has been a strategist, researcher, management consultant, organizer, teacher, and nonprofit practitioner. She is committed to taking courageous, honest action on racial repair in America, and all of her work drives toward a singular mission: building a world where all people's whole selves belong. Aria is rooted in a Black feminist ethos, down to build multiracial coalitions, loves a bold Cabernet, believes that transformation is limitless, and calls Colorado, East Palo Alto, Brooklyn, and the wilderness home.