

Agenda Item 7 - Witness Statement - Isabel Wilkerson

(1) **Your expertise:** My areas of expertise are the Great Migration of six million African-Americans who defected the Jim Crow South during the 20th Century; the causes and effects of that internal migration (the country's largest); the conditions endured by the survivors of Jim Crow, into the 1970s; what they confronted outside the South; and, the historic racial hierarchy of our country.

(2) **If you're comfortable, your own family history, and personal experiences of systemic discrimination:** I am the daughter of survivors of Jim Crow. My parents grew up under segregation in the racial caste system of the American South, and my ancestors before them were either born into Jim Crow or into enslavement.

(3) **Why you're giving testimony:** I am testifying because not enough Americans know the true history of our country or the origins of the divisions we have inherited. I believe that knowing our history is the first step toward overcoming the challenges we face as a nation.

(4) **What do you think a reparations plan should entail and how it relates to The Great Migration and could solve lasting problems from that era?:**

When people talk about the harm suffered by African-Americans at the hands of the state, they often refer to slavery and dismiss these as long ago grievances, when, in fact, not only do we currently live with the unaddressed history of slavery, we do not have to go back to slavery to document the exclusion, inequities and brutalities African-Americans have endured. Much of the harm and exclusion of African-Americans happened within the lifespan of people alive today. This is evidenced by the fact that six million Black people sought political asylum in the North and West during the Great Migration, which did not end until the 1970s, and the fact that they were met with hostility and structural barriers upon arrival.

I believe reparations are a natural and necessary part of the country's coming to terms with the consequences of a history that still plagues us as a nation, and which, has frayed the social fabric and harms every citizen whether they realize it or not.

I believe that we need a massive education campaign and an honest and robust Truth and Reconciliation commitment to lay bare the true history of this country so that every citizen can know the ways in which the state has systemically favored some groups and excluded others. We need massive education so that every citizen can know why reparations are a natural and long overdue part of any serious effort to heal our country and to rectify continuing disparities. I believe that if the majority knew the true, full history of what was sacrificed to create this country, they would be calling for reparations themselves.