Some Frequently asked Questions and some Answers

(from one Committee member; all might not agree)

1. About the limitation of the Study of Reparations to Black Americans:
    a. Why was the study limited to Black Americans?

    Because there is so much important relevant information on Black Americans, we could not include any other group(s). Native Americans deserve a study solely devoted to them.

    b. Do we need to address how the US has mistreated Native Americans?

    Absolutely, but can't do it now. The case of Native Americans is quite different in specifics from that of Black Americans. Lots of careful research would be needed.

    c. Could the results of this study and a new position be extended to other groups, such as Native Americans?

    That's an interesting question. My instinct says no, except in limited ways. The history is a crucial part of the making of repairs to Black Americans; the different history of (largely) Anglo treatment of Native Americans would, I suspect, require some different repairs. My impression is, for example, that individual states might be required/expected to provide much more in repair because of different responsibilities for what has happened in different states.
    -I guess I would say that it would be up to those who make use of whatever position (if any) is reached (like LAC) to decide what, if anything, in the policy could be applied to another group which has been discriminated against. As you know, League policy is to construct positions general enough to be differently interpreted as needed. That's why the consensus questions are so general.

2. About calling for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (and an apology)
    a. What about calling for a "truth & reconciliation commission" as was done in South Africa? Is this part of this conversation with our members?

    You can certainly discuss it if you wish, and recommend adding it. At certain points in the drafting, it was part of consensus question A-1. I suspect we didn't ultimately include it for fear that it would seem too pointed compared to educational campaigns (which could potentially include truth-speaking.)
    - We didn't include making an apology in Question C because of the argument that there have been too many apologies already, which have led to no resultant action. That certainly could be a repair, though.

3. How to weigh opinion and conjecture when deciding how to answer the consensus questions
    a. How much weight should various polls have for us to decide these questions? In what ways are polls relevant?

*The polls are useful in expressing **national** public opinion, but the big problem in assessing them is that most polls and respondents assume they are responding to what is now the "traditional" view of reparations: federal provision of money to the descendants of the enslaved. Naturally people assume that means their tax money. As far as I know, there are no polls that ask about the broad range of possible reparations given as an option in question C.*

-Also, any position we arrive at would be a STATE position, applicable to the state of Massachusetts and its municipalities. And, as we know, we are not a typical state.

b. It is difficult to process/ get a grip on the myriad opinions you cite about reparations, particularly from Black Americans. Do you have any advice? Should we just go with the factual info and ignore the opinions?

Basically, for different reasons, there are Black Americans who favor reparations (the majority in polls, for what the polls are worth) and those who do not. The Study Committee thought that what is most important is that there are two main views in the Black Communities about the answers to the who, what, how questions, which is why the questions mostly present two choices, the traditional view, and the more recent "comprehensive" view.
-A complicating factor in assessing the negative responses of Black Americans is that those who are not descended from the American enslaved think they would be excluded from reparations, even though they are treated the same way in contemporary society as the descendants of the enslaved. That is true for the traditional type of reparations, but not for the broader definition in Question B.
-Another complication is the limitations of the evidence to be used in proving one is descended from one of the enslaved. Quite a few Black Americans may not be able to prove that status, so they would not receive reparations-- if they are given only to descendants of enslaved Africans.

The Committee assumes you will base your decisions on the Study Report, which presents facts (except for the Against Reparations section).

c. Should we concentrate on "doing the right thing" based on facts or take into consideration the potential fall-out of reparations (which is conjecture)?

The view expressed broadly by Committee members and Board leaders consulted is that the League makes decisions depending on the right thing, even though that might mean a position might not be able to be applied right away. Note LWVUS's adoption of the admittedly one-hundred-year task of eliminating the Electoral College! If the League only took stands based on what was politically acceptable, we wouldn't be true to ourself. (We did that in responding to Black suffragists, and we are paying the price now of the serious challenge of underrepresentation of people of color.)

4. Questions about phrasing of C-1 and C-2, about what reparations should be given

a. C-1 - asks about support for "any of a broad range of possible reparations to Black/African Americans." C-2 asks about reparations in the form of cash payments to descendants of slaves. Why are these questions framed this way? What about any of a broad range of possible reparations to all Black/African Americans? Or cash payments to all Black/African Americans? It seems as if the questions should be: 1) Should the LWVMA support the provision of cash payments only? 2) Should the LWVMA support the provision of any of a broad range of reparations? … with separate questions on who the recipients should be: descendants of slaves or all Black/African Americans.

Is the answer that if we have a more nuanced view than the one presented, we vote no on C-1 and C-2?

The answer is that C-1 and C-2 represent the traditional and the newer views of reparations.

C-2 is the traditional view, that a number of African Americans still hold, as does the public at large. It is why many in polls are opposed to Reparations: they think it would mean their taxes supporting billions of dollars going to African Americans. For some of the descendants of the enslaved, it is the proper reparation for the unpaid labor and the suffering of the enslavement of their ancestors. Some Black members of the State Committee hold it. This idea is probably best expounded these days in the book already mentioned, by William A. Darity Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen: From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the twenty-first century.

C-1 is the newer view, espoused by leading organizations of Black Americans including NAARC, N'COBRA, and NAACP. The ACLU also supports it. After discovering this "comprehensive reparations" position, and its broad support among Black Americans, the Committee thought we needed to give it equal attention. For some of us, it stands a better chance of accomplishing something.

There is no view that all Black Americans should receive cash payments. All Black Americans include people and their descendants who came to the US after enslavement ended. The descendants of the enslaved are, as far as I can tell, totally opposed to giving cash payments to every Black American. So although cash payments could well be included in a "broad range," the Committee chose not to spell that out.

The questions ask League members to choose between the traditional view and the newer view. You could in your comments indicate what phrasing you would prefer, and choose either none or what you think the better, or less inadequate, of the two choices. Amherst supported both options, noting that the language of the study guide, which is to be preferred to the language of the power point presentation when the language differs), omits "any of." Amherst felt that "any" could be interpreted in different ways. You certainly could rephrase it as you suggest, and let the State Committee decide about that.

4. Questions about what body or bodies should provide reparations (D-1 through D-6)

a. What is the intent of the different questions in D? D-1 asks if the federal government should provide the bulk of funding for reparations. D-2 – D-6 talk about "participation" to redress

harms. I assume the wording is intentional. How about some explanation of the study group's thinking on these questions?

Yes, the wording is definitely intentional. D-1 expresses (in a slightly modified form) one of the current views about reparations: that it is the responsibility of the federal government—and only the federal government --to pay reparations. D-2 through D-6 reflect a different view: that many share responsibility and should be encouraged to participate in making reparations.

Throughout consensus questions B, C and D, one choice reflects the view of reparations perhaps best associated today with From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the twenty-first century by William A. Darity Jr and A. Kirsten Mullen. In many ways it's the traditional understanding. In brief: reparations are owed solely to the descendants of those enslaved from the first days of enslavement of Africans in the colonies, in what would become the USA. Reparations should originally have been in land; in a no-longer agrarian society, they should be in cash (or, I think, investments) equivalent to their losses over the centuries. These should be paid by the federal government. No other type of reparation or source of repair could provide a proper repayment and repair. This would involve billions of dollars; there are a number of the bulk," with which Darity would not agree. He would say "all."

b. Questions D-2 through D-6 ask: Should the following levels of government and other organizations participate in efforts to redress the harms caused to whichever group is identified in Question B as the rightful recipients?

Questions D-2 through D-6 reflect the broader view of the provision of reparations associated with "comprehensive reparations." All the different types of organizations listed have over the centuries in various ways supported enslavement and the discrimination that has persisted since the abolition of slavery. In the past decades, for example, we have witnessed individual churches, academic institutions and businesses acknowledge their involvement and seek to make some repairs.

a. Question A-1: The League normally educates on issues/positions it supports, particularly when it is taking a public stand. Does A-1 refer to ongoing educational programming around systemic racism as a stand-alone project? Is this itself a reparation for early treatment of black suffragettes? If so wouldn't it fall under D-6?

That's an interesting interpretation, which I like and plan to remember. But A-1 was intended, frankly, as a last ditch. If the State League does not support E-1, we hoped it would be able to support A-1, so that we might a) be able to support a state version of HR40, like the one introduced in the last session and b) continue to educate our membership –and the general public--about the status of Blacks in today's society.

5. About the order of the questions: Does each question stand alone or does it require approval of another question?

- That is, might a League approve ONLY question A-1 on educational campaign and not approve E-1, or vice versa?
- Or might a League approve only question E-1 and not how they should be provided or to whom?
- Or...should we start with E-1, and if the League approves reparations, the next questions are to whom and how, etc.

The questions can stand alone if you would like them to do so. And you can certainly discuss them in any order you prefer. We did not start with E-1 because it seemed to the Study Committee that what a local League decides about B and C and D might determine whether or not members support reparations.

It would certainly be possible to support E-1 without defining who, what, or how, but leaving those to the Legislature or local governments to define for themselves. And that might be the way to go. But people need to understand that reparations can mean more than the traditional approach: a lot of money from the federal government to the descendants of the enslaved, only. That's the view that polltakers discover alienates many people. That's the reason B, C, and D are worth attention.