

# MillionsforReparations

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## Reparations: A View from the Left

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I am always surprised when people ask me why I am a staunch supporter of reparations for blacks.

When I reply that reparations are a matter of justice and not a "handout," and that they are "as American as apple pie," I am equally surprised that these same opponents of reparations know little of **this nation's history of payment of reparations** for crimes against humanity committed against its own citizens. Some examples include:

1971 -- \$1 billion plus 4 million acres of land for the Alaska Natives Land Settlement

1980 -- \$81 million for the Klamath tribes of Oregon

1985 -- \$105 million for the Lakota people of South Dakota

1988 -- \$1.2 billion for the Civil Liberties act for Japanese Americans interred during World War II

**"But I wasn't alive and had nothing to do slavery."** This is an oft-heard remark made by whites objecting to reparations for blacks.

I wasn't alive during the internment of Japanese Americans in 1942 under Franklin Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066, yet in 1988, part of my tax dollars went (and rightly so) for the \$1.2 billion reparations settlement provided by the United States to the victims and families of this tragedy.

Citizenship, not personal responsibility, is the criterion for determining who pays reparations. When G. K. Chesterton immortalized on bumper stickers, "My country, right or wrong," it seems that many whites forget that this applies not only to flawed foreign policy, but also for national crimes against its own citizens.

**"But why should a present day corporation be held liable for what its predecessors did during slavery?"**

This objection is equally flawed. Companies accused of slave labor during the Nazi era have been successfully sued and have paid compensation to their victims.

The present day wealth of these companies has its foundation on the misery of my ancestors. Current lawsuits filed in Federal Court in Chicago connect the historical dots between the enslavement of blacks, corporate profit and the present-day condition of black people in America.

These are not difficult connections to make, and reading and understanding the hidden history of these multinational corporations is an eye-opening educational experience.

**"But doesn't reparations promote the "victim" status of blacks?"**

No, not in the least. One can be a "victim" of a flood, tornado or hurricane and not seen as helpless.

So, too, in the case of an injustice.

Rosa Parks was a "victim" of white supremacy, yet helped usher in the Civil Rights Movement. So was Martin Luther King, whose birthday we celebrate this month.

The right has co-opted the word "victim" and falsely equated it with "helplessness."

Blacks are no more "reinforcing victimization" by struggling for reparations than they are pressing for unpaid labor from an unjust employer who owes them back wages.

**"How much do you people want?"** is a question that can only be accurately answered after Michigan Congressman John Conyers' HR 40 bill, which calls for a study of the impact of slavery on the United States and has been repeatedly introduced into Congress since 1989, has passed.

Until then, we can only guess.

Scholars such as Richard America, a black economist at Georgetown University, estimates that between \$6 trillion and \$10 trillion are owed to blacks because of 250 years of slavery and 100 years under Jim Crow, where our tax dollars were spent for institutions we could not attend, benefit from, nor use.

A litmus test for any candidate seeking public office is to ask for their stand on the issue of reparations. If they waffle or object to them, they should not receive the vote of blacks. This is in the spirit of American political history that builds political power based on shared group interests.

The United Nations has declared the enslavement of Africans during the Transatlantic Slave Trade as a crime against humanity.

It is now the end of the line, and blacks are coming to collect.

Raymond Winbush is the editor/author of *Should America Pay? Slavery and the Raging Debate on Reparations*, (Amistad/HarperCollins, 2003).