

PRRAC

Poverty & Race Research Action Council

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COMPILATION OF PRRAC RESOURCES ON REPARATIONS

FEBRUARY 2009

On Slavery: A Miscellany

• Rep. Tony Hall's (D-OH) June 1997 H. Con. Res. 96 — "*Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That this Congress apologizes to African-Americans whose ancestors suffered as slaves under the Constitution and laws of the United States until 1865*" — co-sponsored originally by 6 Republican & 6 Democrat fellow Members of Congress (now up to 21), is not dead. Pres. Clinton initially gave it some warm words, but then he put the issue aside in favor of his Race Initiative. No committee hearings have been held. While it's been criticized by right and left (the former feeling it's unnecessary and irrelevant, the latter feeling that by itself it's meaningless — somewhat true if that's all there is, but also, in this editor's view, a possible first step toward significant actions), Hall plans to re-introduce it in the 106th Congress. His address: 1432 Longworth, Wash., DC 20515, 202/225-6465 (Robert Zachritz is his staffer for this issue).

• We'll send a set of newspaper articles on the apology proposal with a SASE (55c): "For Americans, Nothing is Simple About Making an Apology for Slavery," by Michael Fletcher (*Wash. Post*, 8/11/97); "Too Busy Apologizing to be Sorry," by Deborah Sontag, *NY Times* (6/29/97); "So Sorry? An Apology for Slavery Says Too Much & Too Little," by Charles Krauthammer, *Wash. Post* (6/27/97); "An Apology Won't Settle This Debt," by Courtland Milloy, *Wash. Post* (6/22/97); "Better Late Than Never," by Frank Rich, *NY Times* (6/22/97); "Before We Apologize, We Should Learn What Slavery Means," by Ira Berlin + Rep. Hall's House speech introducing and providing his rationale for his resolution (*Wash. Post*, 6/29/97); "Speaker [Newt Gingrich] Scoffs at Proposal for Apology on Slavery," *NY Times* (6/14/97).

• Meanwhile, our northern neighbors once again (as in such areas as housing and health care) can show us the way: Early this year, the Canadian government promulgated a formal apology for its treatment of Aboriginal people (First Nations, Inuit & Métis). "Our purpose," begins its Statement of Reconciliation, "is not to rewrite history but, rather, to learn from our past and to find ways to deal with the negative impacts that certain historical decisions continue to have in our society today." It's a no-holds-barred statement, applicable in its details more to our country's Native American population than to African Americans (it covers such issues as suppression of Aboriginal culture and values, with special attention to the damage done by the Residential School system), but represents a remarkable official government act. Beyond apology and recounting of historical injustices, the Statement looks to the future: "We need to work together on a healing strategy to assist individuals and communities in dealing with the consequences of this sad era of our history." Included therefore is a 36-page document, "Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan," dealing concretely with

such issues as strengthening Aboriginal governance, developing a new fiscal relationship and supporting community economic development. For a (free) set of materials, contact Jane Stewart, Minister of Indian Affairs & Northern Dev., Ottawa, Canada (that should be a sufficient address); or try Press Sec. John Embruy, 613/996-2007. (At the other end of the spectrum and world, we have the Australians, who, as headlined in a June 6, 1997, *NY Times* story — which we can send with a SASE — "Resist Facing Up to Legacy of Parting Aborigines From Families.")

• Other recent formal apologies:

+ The Episcopal Church has signed "the New Jamestown Covenant," asking American Indians for forgiveness for its treatment of them following the settlement of Jamestown and the charter that allowed English businessmen to colonize Virginia and spread Christianity among the "savages." "It's never too late to apologize. Our mistreatment of Native Americans began as soon as we got here, and we have much to repent for," noted Bishop Frank Vest of the Diocese of So. Virginia. We'll send a copy of the Covenant with a SASE.

+ The South Africa Dutch Reformed Church apologized, before the country's Truth & Reconciliation Commission, for its teaching that the bible justified apartheid. (*Wash. Post*, 11/20/97)

+ In 1987, the Bishops & Denominational Executives from churches in the US Pacific Northwest offered an Apology to the Northwest Native American People. A 10th anniversary reaffirmation document was signed last November. We'll send an article on this from *The Source* (the good monthly newsletter of the Church Council of Gtr. Seattle) with a SASE.

+ The Southern Baptist Convention, at its 1995 Atlanta meeting, passed a "Resolution on Racial Reconciliation...." acknowledging "the role that slavery played in the formation of the... Convention," the role their forebears played in the slavery system, and that "we continue to reap a bitter harvest" from slavery — an oblique reference to the reparations issue. We'll send a copy with a SASE.

+ Last Spring, as readers know, Pres. Clinton formally apologized, on behalf of the federal government, for the "Tuskegee experiments," in which some 400 black men were denied treatment for syphilis for 40 years (from 1932 to 1972), in order to study how the disease spread and how it killed. (Since 1973, a year after the study was made public, the federal government has paid \$10 million in reparations to victims and their heirs.)

• Cardinal Bevilacqua of Philadelphia recently issued a Pastoral Letter, "Healing Racism Through Faith and Truth." "Racism and Christian life are incompatible" are his words. We'll send a copy of the Letter with a SASE (55c).

• *Slavery in Washington* is a short film on the rampant abuse of foreign women who come to the DC area to work as domestic servants for officials with internat. agencies, the subject of Martha Honey's lead article in the Nov./Dec. *P&R*. Contact her at IPS, 733 15th St. NW, #1020, Wash., DC 20005, 202/234-9383, x232 for information; send us a SASE for a copy of her article, in case you missed it..

• "The Long Shadow of Slavery" is a 9-page special section of the Dec 8, 1997, *Newsweek*. We'll send a copy with a SASE (55¢).

• "How the Cradle of Liberty Became a Slave-Ownning Nation," by Susan DeFord, is a long feature from the "Horizon Learning Section" of the Dec. 10, 1998, *Wash. Post* (along with a shorter article by Michael Richman, "Uncle Tom's Montgomery County Cabin," about Josiah Henson, a slave who lived for 30 years on a 500-acre plantation in what is now Bethesda, and who was the model for Uncle Tom). It is available (single copies free with a 9x12" SASE [78¢]) from Horizons, Wash. Post, Wash., DC 20071.

• On the issue of slavery conditions elsewhere in the world: Nat Hentoff's column from the Dec. 27, 1997, *Wash. Post*,

"Averting Our Eyes from Slavery [in Sudan & Mauritania]" and letters commenting on the column from representatives of the Council on American-Islamic Relations and the American Anti-Slavery Group; "What Modern Slavery Is, and Isn't," by Barbara Crossette, from the July 27, 1997, *NY Times*; "On [historic] Slavery, Africans Say the Guilt is Theirs, Too," by Howard French, from the Dec. 27, 1994, *NY Times*. We can send you this batch with a SASE.

• Finally, some nice quotes:

+ From Philip Morrison's recent *NY Times Book Review* review of James Hershberg's biography of Harvard President James B. Conant: "Our country, he [Conant] said [in 1961], suffers from a disabling 'congenital defect — Negro slavery.' It is 'a curse from which we are not yet free.'"

+ "We live with the consequences of the slave trade, one of which is the science fiction of race. For a group of people to feel responsible for the sins of the past is not a bad thing, especially if another group is carrying around the burden of the doctrine of inferiority." Theodore Rosengarten (author of *All God's Children: The Life of Nate Shaw*), in his review of Hugh Thomas' *The Slave Trade*, from *Wash. Book World*, 1/18/98). □

On Feb. 11, the Advisory Board to the President's Race Initiative held one of its all-day hearings/meetings in San Jose. PRRAC Board member José Padilla, head of California Rural Legal Assistance, was one of the panelists.

We asked him for his impressions of the event. The Advisory Board's next public meeting is March 24-25 in Denver. Phone them (202/395-1010) for details and inf. on other future sessions.

Report from San Jose

by José Padilla

San Jose presented an ideal setting for the subject of poverty and race. This is a community where the wealth of technology represented by Silicon Valley contrasts with a diverse minority population of 42% represented by Latinos (21%), Asians (17%) and African-Americans (4%). But "minority" children, with a 53% majority, indicate the direction of demographic change. If the intent was to present a microcosm of the debate and dynamics of the race-poverty intersection, it was captured quickly if not confusingly.

In keeping with its charge to be about dialogue and diversity, the forum presented the opportunity for the full range of public opinion to be articulated, from local views to studied

opinions. Local community views ranged from white fear to minority frustration. The minority perceptions ranged from the African-American parent who sees racism as the public treatment of her son as a "black problem" to the Latino elected official who sees Latino children treated as raw material for low-wage labor and not college material. The European American view was both on the literature table and expressed publicly. The anti-immigrant message was presented as a current immigration policy that imports poverty from the Third World, causing the white community to fear becoming a minority within an America that belongs to them, just as Mexico belongs to Mexicans. But the public expression is much broader than

these anecdotes express.

The academic and activist panels reflected how poverty impacts on every major racial-ethnic group in the country — blacks, Latinos, Asians and Native Americans. If the seriousness of the subject is reflected by academic study, the right people presented, with views from Douglas Massey, William Julius Wilson, Matthew Snipp (on Native Americans), Raquel Rivera Pinderhughes (on the Latino underclass) and Harry Hum (on Asian and Latino immigrant economies). The academic panels clearly presented the complexity of the poverty-race intersection and the divergence of views regarding cause. Their views, as expected, reflected the contrasting cau-

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law enforcement, notably by police and courts. For example, the widespread police harassment of racially-defined minorities, for the crime known as D.W.B. — Driving While Black — must be ended. The federal government could play a big role in training our often beleaguered and bewildered police to respect all citizens regardless of race. Our police have a tough job to do, but they still must do it fairly. The same is often true of judges and juries.

"Fourth, I will dedicate the rest of my second term to developing programs to foster massive investment in urban infrastructure (in the style of a new WPA). A brief visit to the ghettos and barrios of our nation quickly reveals the price of neglect, a price that will be paid by our nation's youth and by future generations in the form of more crime, higher taxes and a less open society. The investment we make now, both public and private, could restore our cities to their past comfort, safety, efficiency and economic viability. It will pay off tremendously all across this country. There is certainly plenty of work to be done: schools and facilities need rebuilding; public transport, roads and sewer systems do, too. Where such need exists, how can we permit, how can we justify, endemic unemployment in our impoverished urban neighborhoods? Once the efforts begin to rebuild our cities, private investment and job creation in the inner cities will start to grow again as well. This is the lesson of my great Democratic predecessor, Franklin Roosevelt: to provide useful work to those in poverty is a sacred duty of government.

"Fifth, I dedicate myself to a renewed commitment to enforcing the civil rights laws, both through the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and other civil rights agencies. Those who experience discrimination in employment, housing, education or voting rights must be assured that the federal government will actively intervene to investigate and remedy racial injustice. I also announce my intention to foster racial equality

through judicial appointments: I will seek to appoint judges who have demonstrated their interest in and commitment to civil rights and equal opportunity. I will also direct the Justice Department actively to defend existing policies and programs, such as voting rights, against attempts to nullify or weaken them.

"Finally, I want to let you know, my fellow Americans, of my ongoing commitment to affirmative action. Far from being the evil its opponents label it, affirmative action policy is one of the most valuable tools we have in our effort to combat racism. In government and in the corporate world, it has many supporters, but it needs one more supporter very strongly: the President of the United States. In many areas, but particularly in education and employment, affirmative action works, not only to overcome the habits of discrimination developed in the past, but also to forestall discrimination in the present. Research demonstrates over and over again that affirmative action policies do not discriminate 'in reverse.' Affirmative action programs do not need to be used (and are indeed rarely used)

as quotas. Rather, they offer one of the only avenues through which racial minorities can advance through the minefields, unfortunately still very much present, of discrimination and inequality. We cannot dispense with them while substantial racial injustice still exists.

"My fellow citizens, we must recognize that race remains, and probably will remain for a long time, a prominent dimension of our social structure and culture. We must accept that although we have made progress in fighting racism, systematic social inequality continues along racial lines. Once we comprehend this, we can stand together as a people and a government for the ideals we most deeply cherish: that all men and women are created equal. And we can do this not only in principle, but in practice."

Howard Winant is Professor of Sociology at Temple University (713 Gladfelter Hall, Phila., PA 19122). He is the author of Racial Formation in the United States and Racial Conditions: Politics, Theory, Comparisons. □

Apology for Slavery

Incredibly, the US government — whose Constitution and laws upheld slavery — has never formally, and on behalf of the America people, issued an apology for this hideous wrong. Now Congressmen Tony Hall (D-OH) and Dave Weldon (R-FL), along with 15 co-sponsors (as of mid-June), have introduced a Concurrent Resolution (H. Con. Res. 96): "Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That the Congress apologizes to African-Americans whose ancestors suffered as slaves under the Constitution and laws of the United States until 1865." It's an important symbolic gesture, not unrelated to the issue of reparations, about which we have written extensively in *P&R*. (The press release from Reps. Hall

and Weldon accompanying release of the Resolution notes, "No one alive today is responsible for slavery; but all Americans share this shameful part of our heritage [and the white population as a whole reaps enormous benefits from it - ed.] and we all suffer from the consequences of a divided nation." House Speaker Newt Gingrich, once again showing his sharp grasp of historic analogy, derided the move: "Any American, I hope, feels badly about slavery. I also feel badly about genocide in Rwanda.")

For further information about the Resolution, and to get your own Representative to add his/her name, contact Deborah DeYoung in Rep. Hall's office, 1424 LHOB, Wash., DC 20515, 202/225-6465.

Reparations for Slavery: Round 4

In three previous issues of P&R (July/August, September/October and November/December 1994), we presented a symposium on the complex and controversial issue of reparations for slavery (if you missed it, send us a SASE and \$1.01 postage for a copy). Last July 10, Ray Suarez' first-rate National Public Radio interview show was devoted to the subject; he invited as guests three of our symposium's contributors: Temple University sociologist Howard Winant; Kalonji Olusegun, Co-Chair of N'COBRA, the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America; and Sharon Parker, Director of the Union Institute's Social Responsibility Programs. We offer here an edited transcript of the show (kindly made available to us by NPR), partly to reiterate some of the important moral and material arguments, partly to highlight some of the concerns and problems John/Jane Q. Public—at least the NPR listeners' version thereof—raise about the concept.

With the supremely revelatory O.J. Simpson trial outcome being widely interpreted (and justified) as a "payback to whites for centuries of injustices suffered by blacks" (a statement with which 27% of whites and 16% of blacks agree, as reported in a Washington Post survey in their October 8 edition), it is perhaps not unimportant to keep some attention on the full meaning of the concept of reparations.

Howard Winant: I think there are two parts to the issue: there has to be a very substantial redistribution of resources to address the real subsidy slavery provided. It is important to recognize that reverse reparations have been paid for centuries by black people to white people in this country, not only in slavery times but right up until the present. Black people subsidize white people's employment by absorbing higher levels of unemployment. They subsidize white people's wages by accepting, reluctantly, very much lower wages for the doing same kind of work, and so on.

So on a material level, the question is, how do you reverse some of those kinds of subsidies, how do you equalize them in the future? I think that means some kind of massive redistribution of wealth and income towards low-income communities, in particular black communities and urban communities.

The practical problem is that we have to do this while not at the same time exacerbating very real racial conflicts and racial tensions which we're attempting to resolve. And that means looking at who pays, looking at the way this redistribution would be financed. That's on the material level.

On the moral level, this country absolutely as a nation owes African Americans an apology for one of the most serious violations of human rights that has existed in recorded history, in fact in all history, recorded and unrecorded.

Sharon Parker: Reparations is a

topic that needs to come out. We need to use it as a vehicle for dealing with the issue race and racism today. It's important that this country acknowledge the horrendous wrong that was committed. But my position is also that racism affects all of us. It's not something that simply affects African Americans. We have not come to terms with racism yet in this country. In fact, today we're at a place where people would like to see race disappear, where it's a non-

Until overcoming racial inequality benefits white folks not only economically, but also morally and spiritually, reparations will be a losing cause.

issue. Young high school students right here in Montgomery County, upon graduating, have very little idea about the history of slavery and its impact on our nation. So how can we deal with issues of racism if people are unaware, if they're not educated, if they're not in tune to what this means as a people?

Kalonji Olusegun: N'COBRA has never come out with a statement as to the amount or the form reparations should take. Because it's something that requires a dialogue. It's something that requires this country facing up to the strong denial of racism in this country.

SP: That goes to the issue of today. What is the legacy of racism we're living with? We can look around us and see it in budget cuts, we can see it in school systems that aren't functioning properly, we can see it in health care that operates on a crisis basis to deal with drug abuse overdose, gunshot victims, workers who are illiterate. These are the things that are the legacy. Putting a price on it to me is very difficult, so I look at in terms that this is the time to have a national discussion, a national dialogue about what racial justice really means and why it is important for people to recognize how it impacts all of our institutions, from religious to personal.

KO: And to our international position as well. You don't take a position against a people and let it stop at your doorstep. You take it out of your yard as well, you take it around your neighborhood. And that's what has happened to this country.

Listener (Jim, from Grand Rapids): As you know, in this present political climate with one political group apparently resolved to stake its political fortunes on the public's perception of how well they attack any legislation or programs that tend to favor African Americans, the demand to provide reparations to African Americans for slavery as a whole is ludicrous. I submit to you that the very mention of the subject in the national political forum will only serve as additional ammunition for the Far Right to use to further

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polarize the society—which is a society we all relish and would not like to see eliminated or overturned.

I suggest that we, as African Americans, can use the power that we alone have and can use with validity. We have to take the moral high ground and not only forgive this wretched act, but use our grace and forgiveness as a people to make this society what it should be in the first place. From what I can see, there's no other possible way to solve this. There's no power greater than the power of us as moral people to forgive this act. That takes all the courage and all the seriousness that we have and can provide.

KO: I agree with you. I think one problem with your statement is that before you accept an apology, you first have to have the apology. Otherwise, what you're saying in essence is that you didn't wrong me, it doesn't matter, it didn't happen, that this part of our history was never a part of this country. You can't simply ignore something that has created a situation that exists today.

HW: I'd like to address this issue of whether it will fuel the position of the Far Right, especially given that there's been such a racial backlash in this country over the last few years, over the last few decades since the 60s. There is some real threat of that, and it's something that advocates of reparations—and I'd count myself as one in a qualified way—have to address.

The way to address it is to ask, how would we actually finance the kind of redistribution I'm talking about? If we just did it as a straight payment for social programs or perhaps paying individuals, there would be tremendous resentment, tremendous reaction, opposition and exacerbation of racial conflict. But suppose it were framed

differently. Suppose it were framed in terms of a system of finance which the wealthy paid and was not simply drawn from general tax revenues. Say, a wealth tax, based on the fact that black labor has created so much of the capital, so much of the wealth in this country. For example, a very high, loophole-free tax on the transfer of wealth above a certain level at the point of death, above one million dollars or something like that. Or a tax on excess profits.

Ray Suarez: And that wouldn't create resentment?

Many folks were not directly involved in slavery, but they have profited from white skin privilege.

HW: There might be resentment, there's certainly a tremendous anti-tax feeling in this country. But the kind of educational work we could do around that might lead us as a nation to an understanding that black people and white people have some interests in common in this kind of redistribution. That redistributing wealth from the very wealthy to the less wealthy and the very poor, in some cases the urban poor, would have a lot of positive consequences for this nation as a whole, not just for black people, and it wouldn't be coming out of the hide of working white people.

KQ: N'COBRA looks upon our demand being made by this government for its complicity, its part in the slave trade and the legalized discrimination. So we try to take it away from the tax base or where folks feel that individuals are paying for this. This country manages to find sufficient

money any time it wants to for whatever it wants to find money for. And yet we don't holler, "Our tax money, it's coming out of my pocket!"

SP: This discussion brings us to a point where we can take back the dialogue. One of the callers mentioned that it's divisive, it helps polarize people. Another perspective is that it allows us to take the initiative and to take charge of the dialogue and talk about what are some of the ways that we as a nation can have input into making change.

I mentioned earlier racial justice, seeking to transform decision-making. A concrete example would be civil rights laws. In this country we didn't think in terms of civil rights laws, whether it's fair employment, fair housing, fair wages, etc., until enactment of those laws in the mid-1960s, until the civil rights movement, and now our whole body of law has been transformed. We can't think about law without thinking about civil rights.

We don't know yet how we will transform the dialogue, but we need to take it back and not let it be shaped by the neo-conservatives or the right wing. One of the ways they've done that is to oppose race with merit, the ongoing argument about affirmative action. Well, they don't have to be opposed. We need to look at the structure of why we're in this situation. Our society is built on a hierarchy that defines people as white and defines people as black regardless of what racial/ethnic groups they fall in.

HW: It's an uphill battle, but every time this proposal has come up in the past and has been resisted or rejected, the cost has gone up. In other words, the consequences for society have gotten much worse. If the 40 acres and a mule had happened—and it didn't happen only because it was vetoed by Andrew Johnson in 1866, it was passed by Congress—that would have been much more effective—not only effective but a morally justified effort to transform the situation in the country.

Then the reparations issue was brought up again by James Foreman in 1969. He was talking at that point about 500 million dollars. I believe he was calculating that on the basis of 15

And Now For Something Completely Different . . .

"If America as a nation owes blacks as a group reparations for slavery, what do blacks as a group owe America for the abolition of slavery?"

Dinesh D'Souza, *The End of Racism*

Put on a Happy Face

At the movies these days, questions about racial injustice have been amicably resolved. [Some three dozen recent films are cited, including *Pulp Fiction*, *White Men Can't Jump*, *A Little Princess*, *Die Hard With Vengeance*, *Forrest Gump*, *Driving Miss Daisy*, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, *Cool Runnings*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, etc., etc.] [The] common fund of sweet content [that this popular culture offers] eliminat[es] the constraints of objective reality and redistributing resources, status, and capabilities. That cleansing social force supersedes political and economic fact or policy.... Through these same images and messages the comfortable majority tells itself a fatuous truth.... Thus we shift the problem away from politics—from black experience and the history of slavery.... Solving the problem asks no more of us than that we work on ourselves, scrubbing off the dirt of ill will.... The approach miniaturizes, personalizes, and moralizes; it removes the large and complex dilemmas of race from the public sphere. It tempts audiences to see history as irrelevant and to regard feelings as decisive—to believe that the fate of black Americans is shaped mainly by events occurring in the hearts and minds of the privileged.... People forget the theoretically unforgettable—the caste history of American blacks, the connection between no schools for longer than a century and bad school performance now, between hateful social attitudes and zero employment opportunities, between minority anguish and majority fear.... The condition of American

blacks need not be read as the fixed, unchanging consequence of generations of bottom-caste existence.... [W]e need not see ourselves and our fellows as uncaring accomplices in the acts of social injustice....

During the last two decades, the entertainment industry has conducted a siege on the pertinent past, systematically excising knowledge of the consequences of historical exploitation of African Americans. [*Roots* and the PBS documentary *The Civil War* are so criticized.] Factitious renderings of the American past blur the outlines of black-white conflict, redefine the ground of black grievances for the purpose of diminishing the grievances, re-stage black life in accordance with the illusory conventions of American success mythology, and present the operative influences on race history as the same as those implied to be pivotal in *White Men Can't Jump* or a BellSouth advertisement.

...A consciousness that ingests either a part or the whole of this revisionism loses touch with the two fundamental truths of race in America; namely, that because of what happened in the past, blacks and whites cannot yet be the same; and that because what happened in the past was no mere matter of ill will or insult but the outcome of an established caste structure that has only very recently begun to be dismantled, it is not reparable by one-on-one goodwill. The word "slavery" comes to induce stock responses with no vital sense of a grinding devastation of mind visited upon generation after generation. Hoodwinked by the orthodoxy of friendship, the

nation either ignores the past, summons for it a detached, correct "compassion," or gazes at it as though it were a set of aesthetic conventions, like twisted trees and fragmented rocks in nineteenth-century picturesque painting—lifeless phenomena without bearing on the present. The chance of striking through the mask of corporate-underwritten, feel-good, ahistorical racism grows daily more remote. The trade-off—whites promise friendship, blacks accept the status quo—begins to seem like a good deal.

Cosseted by Hollywood's magic lantern and soothed by press releases from Washington and the American Enterprise Institute, we should never forget what we see and hear for ourselves. Broken out by race, the results of every social tabulation from unemployment to life expectancy add up to a chronicle of atrocity. The history of black America fully explains—to anyone who approaches it honestly—how the disaster happened and why neither guilt money nor lectures on personal responsibility can, in and of themselves, repair the damage. The vision of friendship and sympathy placing blacks and whites "all in the same boat," rendering them equally able to do each other favors, "to give rides to one another," is a smiling but a monstrous lie.

Excerpted from Benjamin DeMott, "Put on a Happy Face: Masking the Differences Between Blacks & Whites," Harpers, Sept. 1995. Send a SASE (78¢ postage) to PRRAC for a copy of the full 8-page article.

dollars per black person in the United States, not to be given to an individual but to be used for social programs. Again, that was sneered at because people can't deal with that.

So now we're up to a situation that

we haven't had in this country since the 1920s, where we see wholesale racial reaction in the lies of the white supremacy movement coming back into play. Sure, it's an uphill battle, but unless we open this dialogue about the

meaning of race in the United States and the continuing existence of white supremacy and racism, the cost continues to escalate. It's not enough to say, it's so hard, we can't deal with it.

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We have to in some way deal with it. That's the great thing, that N'COBRA and other groups are talking about it.

Listener: About the issue of an apology: I think there was a big apology when over 200,000 European Americans died trying to free and overthrow the issue of slavery in this country. It really shows a disrespect for all of those people who fought against slavery in the United States, most of them European Americans trying to set something right that was terribly wrong, that was brought over from Europe, that was brought over from Africa. The issues of slavery have been in Africa for thousands of years. What about the Jewish people being enslaved in Northern Egypt? That's still part of Africa. You could go back thousands of years and find slavery. All I can tell you is when over 200,000 European Americans died to overthrow slavery in the United States, it's wrong to think there wasn't an apology. That was the biggest apology; people were dying to make this thing right.

KO: I think in order to really continue what they had done, to really recognize the tremendous sacrifice they had made, this country has to make the apology. Just the act of their doing it was not apology enough. We had many Africans who were told they would be freed by joining the Europeans in the Civil War and indeed were given a 30-mile strip of land from Charleston down to Jacksonville and had started a government there, which operated for 2 years before the next administration came in and said, that's it buddy, we're through with that.

RS: I don't think the issue is so much whether there continued to be slavery in Mali or Mauritania or Ethiopia or the Sudan or anywhere else, but the day the fighting finally stopped and the guns went silent everywhere between

"America, we must clean our house of racism."

President Clinton, University
Texas-Austin, October 16, 1995

Further Readings

- William Darity, Jr., "Reparations" (13 pp., incl. bibliography, Sept. 1995; unpub. ms., to appear in forthcoming volume of conf. papers for Oct. 1994 Roy Wilkins Forum meetings); avail. from Prof. Darity, Univ. of North Carolina, Econ. Dept., Chapel Hill, NC 27599.
- "The Racial Reparations Movement," pp. 188-90 of *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality*, by Melvin Oliver & Thomas Shapiro (Routledge, 1995); available from PRRAC with a self-addressed stamped envelope.
- "Reparations," 5-page essay by Edward Herman from his book *Triumph of the Market* (South End Press, 1995); available from PRRAC with a SASE.

Washington DC and Brownsville, Texas, you had an opportunity to start a new kind of country, and instead those people who were now technically free—they were freed by the stroke of the pen of various legal authorities in this country—had no land, no farm animals, no capital, no seed, no money, no bank account, no legal standing in the counties where they lived in the states in the old South, and from there it was very hard to turn this thing around. You're absolutely right, it was a terrible war, and we are still 130 years getting over it, but that opportunity was squandered.

Why not a wealth tax, based on the fact that black labor has created so much of the capital and wealth in this country?

Listener (Jorge, from Miami): It seems to me that it's very difficult to ask people who came to this country or who are descendants of people who came to this country after slavery was abolished to pay for reparations for an act they did not commit. As you know, most of the people who live in Dade County were not around the United States when there was slavery, and it's very difficult to ask them to contribute monetarily or otherwise to make these kind of reparations. Also, the issue of defining who gets reparations is in itself very difficult. Who is really black or

who is white? Does someone who is darker get more reparations than someone who is light? Does someone who can prove that all of their ancestors were slaves get more than someone who cannot prove that?

KO: Let me share something with you that I think is important. Let's go to the fact that some folks came here after slavery. If I or you entered the home or the terrain of the pirates, and lived lusciously as a result of being entertained or being a part of their home after they had done all of the piracy and everything else, would you not think that you have benefitted from the fact that you are now there with them, as opposed to those folks they had exploited or terrorized or from whom they had robbed the wealth and the loot they presently have? Sure, many folks were not directly involved in slavery, but they have come to a country which is based upon the privilege of having white skin, the privilege of being a European, and therefore they have profited from that privilege, so they have something to say about that.

As we talk about this, I am reminded that I don't understand why folks are so hurt about the HR891 [the Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act, introduced by Rep. John Conyers of Michigan, since 1989], because it asks for a few simple things. It asks to examine slavery between 1619 to 1865, examine *de jure* and *de facto* discrimination from the end of the Civil War to the present, including economic political and social

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(REPARATIONS: Continued from page 8)

discrimination. It asks to examine the lingering effects on living African Americans. It asks to recommend appropriate ways to educate the public about these findings, and to recommend appropriate remedies. And it provides for submitting those results to Congress. There is nothing in that bill that says you have to give me something that has to come out of your tax money. It says let's take a look at it, an honest look, an official look, a look at what we have done in this nation, and after we take that look, let's make some decisions about how we are going to rectify the problem.

RS: I think where we run into some very rough water ahead is if we try to convince the descendants of people who came through the big waiting hall in Ellis Island that they have been unalloyed recipients of white skin privi-

lege when they were walking around with sagging bellies and cardboard in their shoes and getting beat up by the thugs of anti-union bosses in the 1930s, or getting their butt shot off in Europe or the Pacific during the Second World War or in Vietnam 20 years later, or being downsized when plants closed. They're looking at themselves in the mirror and saying, "White skin privilege—give me a break." It's going to be very tough to get not just money—let's not reduce everything to money—but even human fellow feeling out of somebody who you are accusing of being complicit.

HW: It's really important that we understand reparations or any attempt to deal with the systematic racism and white supremacy that has structured our society and our political economic and cultural order, that we understand it also as a significant class issue, that there's a significant class dimension to

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it. Until you can finance this kind of program in a way that does not punish one group of relatively low-income people to aid another, until you can make the point really clearly that efforts to overcome racial inequality will in fact benefit white folks not only economically, but also morally and spiritually, reparations will be a losing cause. □

PRRAC Update

Board News: Helen Hershkoff, Associate Legal Director of the ACLU since 1987, has left to join the New York University School of Law faculty.

Phyllis Holmen, PRRAC's treasured Treasurer, was married last April, in a merger of two major poverty law figures—Phyllis is Executive Director of the Georgia Legal Services Program, her husband, Jonathan Hewett, is an attorney with the Atlanta Legal Aid Society. Congrats!

"Superbarrio" Talk: On October 5, PRRAC sponsored a discussion with Marco Rascon, leader of Mexico's Asamblea de Barrios, a member of Mexico's Federal Congress and the "manager" of "Superbarrio (Defender of the Poor and Oppressed)," a popular national figure in Mexico.

Library Subscriptions: P&R has a new policy of requiring libraries to pay a subscription fee to receive our newsletter, a move we initiated out of

financial necessity. (We hope to be able to continue our policy of free distribution to individuals—with voluntary contributions strongly encouraged.) We recently sent out a complimentary issue of P&R and a subscription solicitation letter to some 5,000 selected

libraries. Please encourage your own institutional library to subscribe, or provide us with a name and address and we'll send out our promotional letter. We've kept the subscription price quite reasonable. □

Another Way to Contribute: Bequests/Donating Stock to PRRAC

If you are in the process of writing or amending your will, you might think about leaving a set sum or percentage to PRRAC. Wills can be a significant way of assuring the work you support and believe in today will be around for decades to come. And because PRRAC is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization, including us in your will can help lower or eliminate estate taxes. Please contact us for further infor-

mation.

Another way of supporting PRRAC, and creating a win-win situation tax-wise, is through donations of stock. Appreciated gifts of stock no longer are subject to the Alternative Minimum Tax. When you donate appreciated stock to PRRAC, you avoid paying the capital gains tax, and since we're tax-exempt, we don't pay it either. Call us for more information.

Reparations: A Symposium

Our July/August issue had, as the lead article, an interview with economist Richard America, who has written about and advocated widely for reparations to the Black community for the historical injustice and long-term disadvantaging effects of slavery. A supportive commentary by Congressman John Conyers (whose bill, H.R. 40, calls for a study of slavery's legacy and recommendation of remedies) and a "friendly dissent" by Temple Univ. sociologist Howard Winant accompanied the interview.

We asked a number of social scientists and activists to comment on the issues raised in these contributions, and also indicated we would consider unsolicited responses from readers. Seven such commentaries appear below. We hope to print a second round of this symposium in the November/December issue of P&R. If you are receiving P&R for the first time and want a copy of the reparations articles from the July/August issue, send us a SASE.

Let Us Not Accept Either Victimology or Blaming-the-Victimology

by Wilson Riles, Jr.

As has happened so often in the past, when it comes to real money and assets folks get squeamish: it's no longer about "doing the right thing," it's about "you can't be serious." H.R. 40 does not ask for money. It asks for an acknowledgment of "the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity of slavery in the United States and the 13 American colonies between 1619 and 1865." It establishes a commission to examine the institution of slavery, subsequent *de jure* and *de facto* racial and economic discrimination against African-Americans, and the impact of these forces on living African-Americans. The commission will make recommendations to the Congress on appropriate remedies. That is all: a consideration of the appropriateness of a formal U.S. government apology for governmental involvement in the institution of slavery and discrimination, and the undertaking of a reasoned analysis of the value of what was stolen from African-Americans. Any proposed reparations would flow from that analysis as a recommendation to Congress.

Too many Americans of all hues still look at the condition of the African-American community and do not see the legacy of slavery and discrimination presently manifesting itself. The deficit of resources (institutional and capital) that are more available to European-Americans is not a result of differences in the gene pool. No one wants to talk about the fact that this deficit results from what was immorally and viciously stolen from African-Americans and that many bene-

fits from that theft still flow disproportionately to European-Americans.

Even some African-Americans do not want to talk about racism any more—as if they might be asked to struggle for something bigger than their own individual pay checks. Jewish people refuse to let the world forget anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. In spite of responses of irritation and antagonism, they persist in reminding us all what was done to Jews. They have no problem talking about the material aspects of that tragedy. Their persistence has resulted in the creation of the State of Israel.

Although it may be unpleasant, America still needs to discuss slavery, discrimination, racism, and the aftermath and consequences. As Richard America points out, the whole country's "competitiveness and productivity at a macro level" is being damaged by the avoidance of this problem. Our ability to compete economically as a nation is being hampered by the energy and resources being dedicated to keeping racial conflicts under "control."

Let us not indirectly address it or avoid the discussion by hiding under an effort to create a "Marshall Plan for the Cities." That Plan is needed and may be more politically palatable than reparations. However, if what was stolen from African-Americans is not directly spoken of in the Plan, a likely result would include propelling low-income African-Americans out of the urban core. Cities would be successfully rehabilitated, but the conditions of the African-American community would not change. It has

happened before.

Americans respond to forthrightness. Unfortunately, many of our more recent warriors against racism have lacked passion, boldness, and clarity; they have been mealy-mouthed. Yes, there is much that the African-American community can and should do without outside help, but that does not absolve anyone (past or present) or any institution of their participation in the crime. Neither is there any reason that a precise "weighing" of the material consequences of slavery and discrimination would cause hostility from other racially defined minorities nor strengthen any assumption about the necessity of white aid to bring about prosperity in the African-American community. What we need to do is one thing; what happened and is happening to our community is another thing. Let us not accept either victimology or blaming-the-victimology.

The fact that an analysis of reparations owed will establish "a benchmark for the achievement of equality" adds materially to a discussion that has been principally limited to the moral plane. Speaking in such precise terms will not increase racial polarization and antagonism above the level they are at already.

Wilson Riles, Jr., a former Oakland, California, City Councillor, is Pacific Mountain Regional Director for the American Friends Service Committee (1611 Telegraph Ave., #1501, Oakland, CA 94612). While the AFSC has taken a position supporting H.R. 40 in principle, Mr. Riles' views are his own. □

Reparations for Catastrophic Human Waste

by Joe R. Feagin and Hernan Vera

Reparations for African Americans is an idea whose time has come. Not long ago, the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA) was organized to work aggressively for monetary compensation for slavery and other racial oppression. Several black plaintiffs in Oakland, California, have filed suit in federal court asking for nearly \$400 million in reparations for themselves and for black communities. Other individuals are considering similar court suits. Richard America's \$3-5 trillion estimate of the reparations cost seems reasonable, given the huge amount of labor stolen from African Americans over 375 years. The logical payer is the U.S. government.

Many, especially whites, will oppose paying trillions of dollars in governmental reparations as "radical." Yet paying compensation for individual and collective damages is now a well-established principle. We have the principle of reparations for damages done by individual and government action in laws providing for the compensation of victims of crime, including the 1984 Victims of Crime Act. Over the last two decades, the U.S. government has taken action to provide some monetary compensation to Native Americans for the theft of lands by Euro-Americans. The federal government has paid hundreds of millions of dollars in reparations to a number of Native American groups for lands taken in violation of treaties. It should be noted that none of those who stole the lands or who lost the lands are still alive. Given this background, the idea of compensation for black labor stolen and for other damages done to African Americans seems reasonable and in line with recent U.S. government practice.

One barrier is the fact that the magnitude of the oppression of African Americans by white Americans has yet to be understood by whites. Most whites need to be educated to the past and present costs of racism for African Americans, as well as the costs to them-

selves and for society generally. White racist practices represent socially sanctioned ways of dissipating massive amounts of human talent and energy. White Americans must be taught to view racism for what it is: a tremendously wasteful set of practices, legitimated by ancient myths, that deprives its victims, its perpetrators, and U.S. society as a whole of much valuable human talent and energy and many social, economic and political resources. Transforming white opinions and attitudes is no easy matter, but short of revolution no

changes will come until whites give up their ancient prejudices and stereotypes, what Pierre Bourdieu in another context has called the "sincere fictions" around which people organize their lives.

Joe R. Feagin is Graduate Research Professor of Sociology and Hernan Vera is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Florida (Gainesville, FL 32611). Their book amplifying these ideas, White Racism: The Basics, will be published in December 1994 by Routledge. □

H.R. 40 Misses the Point

by Sharon Parker

Racism is embedded in the dominant American culture so deeply, we (some of us) fail to see it. Most important, we fail to see that it continues to affect all of us: every person, male or female; every immigrant, every refugee; every race, every age group; and every religious, social, legal, artistic, business, educational, governmental institution in the country. Many Americans want to believe that racism has been overcome and that White Americans have no responsibility for slavery because it ended 129 years ago. Such an attitude is consistent with American historical perspective: we are short-sighted, unilateral, and vainglorious. As rugged individualists, we are conditioned to believe that we can fix any problem and overcome any challenge that tarnishes the idealist image of America. But we have not yet "fixed" the problem of racism, and we cannot even hope to do so until we, as a nation, are willing to look beyond the utopian image to the root causes. The legacy of slavery is definitely a root cause of the persistence of racism in today's society.

I use the pronoun "we" because, regardless of our race, ethnicity, color or culture, as Americans we are all respon-

sible for this legacy. It is not just the problem of African Americans to raise again and again. It is not just a problem of relations between African Americans and White Americans. Nor is it simply a matter of oppressor vs. oppressed, or perpetrator vs. victim. We have all been victimized by racism; but worse still, we continue to be victimized by it... today! That is why I am so distraught at the notion of a national commission to study "the damage racism did to African Americans."

Rep. John Conyers' advocacy for federal legislation to establish a national commission is troublesome to me because it only looks at one part of the problem. Once again, the root cause may be ignored and an opportunity for real change will be missed. Rep. Conyers says "My contention is that African Americans are still victims of slavery as surely as those who lived under its confinement." I do not deny the truth of that statement, but it is only a partial truth. A national commission that only focuses on part of the issue is like trying to build a national health care program by only focusing on physicians, or deterring crime only by building more prisons.

The cost to all of us is demonstrated in the local, state, and federal budget priorities on funds for security and punishment rather than education and employment; education systems which cannot address their purpose because of overcrowding, understaffing, inadequate facilities and supplies; health care systems responding to the crisis needs of assaults and drug-related accidents rather than disease prevention and treatment; sub-standard services and goods because workers are not literate, are under great stress, or are malnourished and weak. Incalculable is the loss of human dignity and potential.

Slavery is one of the foulest, most despicable eras of our society. Racism, however, is not the result of that terrible history; it was perpetuated by it. It was racism, fueled by the superstitions and ignorance of the Dark Ages and justified by economic greed and power mania of the European monarchies and churches, that allowed Europeans to classify Africans as sub-human and, hence, legitimize slavery. To most slave dealers, this occupation merely involved the exploitation of another resource in a land full of promise but devoid of ready laborers.

So, with the importation of slaves and the sanctioning of the slave trade, raw, stark racism took hold in the colonies. As with everything else that has grown to become uniquely American in the intervening centuries, racism too evolved to suit the unique blend of peoples and activities carried out in the New World. It mutated and survives today.

It survives as such a fundamental part of the fabric of society that we stoutly deny its existence except in individual incidences we call "hate crimes." But those who manage to step outside societal confines and look closely enough see an entire culture predicated upon the oppositional natures of White and Black: a legacy of the times when Africa was considered a dark and mysterious continent and its peoples savages, devoid of soul and culture. In his book *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal*, Andrew Hacker noted that White, like Black, is not a simple reference to a homogenous race of humans. It is a symbol of acceptable/unacceptable status in the societal order developed in the U.S. White privilege is only measured in terms of Black penalty and exploitation. Black people and the

concept of Black identity are essential to maintain the power and authority of Whites. This is both an abstract concept and a daily reality. This reality means that people who are defined as "Black" can never fully become a part of society as a people because of the way society is constructed.

I would happily support a commission to study the impact of slavery, or racism, on Americans today. But if Rep. Conyers' advocacy for reparations for the descendants of African slaves is successful, the best I could hope for would be that such action would have the effect of propelling Americans to thoroughly examine the legacy of slavery and provoke critical awareness. Trying to remove only one piece of the cancer of racism will not result in a healthy people. It will only prolong the suffering.

Sharon Parker is Director of Social Responsibility Programs for the Union Institute (1731 Connecticut Ave. NW, #300, Washington, DC 20009). Prior to that recent appointment, she was Director of Stanford University's Office of Multicultural Development. □

Atonement and Self-Determination

by Kalonji Olusegun

Both Chester Hartman's interview with Richard America and Howard Winant's "Friendly Dissent" lack the essence of the demand for reparations as seen by the grassroot Africans, 88% of whom, during a recent survey circulated by N'COBRA, indicated they believed that the United States should pay Black people reparations today. That essence has to do with changing the relationship between the American government and Africans in America, the relationship between Europe and its former African colonies (mainland or islands), and between Europeans and the non-white World. Reparations is a conceptual framework that offers an African perspective for resolving much more than just the economic inequity and social injustice issues that plague this

country. It represents a shifting of priorities from the money machines' exploitation and immediate gratification to a moral, sane, humane, conservation of this earth's human, animal and mineral resources.

We didn't come here to be part of a New World or a New World Order. We lost a war of enslavement and, unlike those European families who came so willingly to America, members of African families were captured, kidnapped, inhumanly crated in sailing tombs and then the surviving brother and mother dropped in Brazil, a sister and maybe father dropped off in the Caribbean for rum and the remaining family members brought to the high bidding settlers of the U.S. to work until they were just dropped off. Upon manumission, this country

abandoned the freed Africans left destitute on the land of our incarceration, abandoned us without food, clothing, shelter, or the means to get back home. As refugees of a War of Enslavement, we were left defenseless to survive the terror of hostile communities, while those who enslaved and brutally forced us to labor from sun-up to sun-down were paid for the loss of "their chattel property," now freed. We had full employment during enslavement and as "property" never got paid! Why should we settle for just full employment, now, at subhuman wages for the trans-national corporate machine for whom America works, that now terrorizes the world with its "free market" oppression? The real economic question may well be the diverted stream of income

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from the masses of poor people that a "Marshall Plan for the Cities" can remedy, but that deals with this country's concern about *all* of its residents and can never be considered reparations for the enslavement of and discrimination against Africans in America.

Africans have learned that we can't trust this country's moral conscience, honesty or justice when it comes to Africans at home or abroad. The master-slave relationships that are recorded throughout European history and which were imposed on us since 1441, as a consequence of losing the war against their invasion of our homeland, still exist at the very essence of European culture. The darkening clouds of the Haitian persecution, the Cuban blockade, the tragedy of Rwanda, the passage of a criminally conceived anti-crime bill and, last but not least, the refusal to even hold a hearing on H.R. 40, are all seen as repulsive attempts at dehumanizing Africans and covering up America's racist role in causing those disasters.

Why is it that H.R. 40, a bill that would only investigate the effects of slavery, only study the impact of slavery, as is the federal government's moral responsibility, cannot even get out of subcommittee in three sessions of Congress? Is the fear of finally facing the truth of one's past so threatening, are the lies so ingrained, the denial so strong that America can't accept the challenge of a "racist free" society?

Reparations is not simply about "the enslavement of blacks a century ago," but about finally terminating the illegal and oppressive slave-master relationship perpetuated against them and their descendants, us; about recognition of the injury inflicted on generations of Africans in America; about respect and restoration of our basic human rights; about obtaining the complete and unconditional control of our resources, those resources stolen from us, deprived to us; and last but not least, about ending the continuing oppression in the form of political and economic subjugation, illegal taxation and the cold-spirited impending terror of mass imprisonment. Reparations are needed to elevate the

pain, suffering and rage, so that our people won't be dependent on the whims and racism of a hostile, mechanized system. This is not just a demand for money, this is a matter of fairness, justice, human rights, morality, equality, atonement, trust, and the God-given right to pursue their own destiny, unmolested. Reparations can provide some of the resources needed to accomplish the healing and strengthening of our self-determination.

Let me repeat, reparations has to do

with the relationship between America and Africans in America. Reparations is our demand for an *apology*, and the self-determination necessary for us to pursue our *own* destiny, make our *own* contribution to the progress of this planet.

Kalonji Olusegun is Co-Chair of N'COBRA, the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America, a grassroots membership organization formed in 1989 (PO Box 62622, Washington, DC 20029). □

Morally Powerful, But Divisive

by David McReynolds

The issue of reparations is valid, it has its own logic, it has the force of certain moral power—but in the real world within which these matters must be worked out I think it will prove divisive.

If one takes a classic Marxist view that a small minority controls the wealth created by the vast majority, and that a transformative shift in how society is run would lead that majority to having control and power over the resources, then there is some hope of winning support (though thus far the United States has proven immune to the appeal). Yet here one should note that only what I would term "punitive socialists"—a minority within the broader socialist movement—see socialism as a way of distributing the wealth. If we took *all* the wealth held by the 10% of the highest part of society (including the relatively few blacks in this category) and simply passed out their funds evenly to the other 90%, the actual shift of wealth would be relatively minor, and fail of the objective, which is not the punishment of the rich, but rather the empowerment of the majority.

Reparations has, of course, certain logical problems—does the funding go to *all* African-Americans, including those who came here from the West Indies after my own ancestors? And how do you separate out the issue of funding owed to the Chinese who were brought here as virtual slaves to build our railroads and then left on their own? Does the reparations movement separate itself

from the Native American community, which in some serious ways has a prior claim to the whole shebang?

The most serious problem is, I think, that we will see a sharp racist cast to the debate, a "Black vs. White" debate rather than a transformative debate about how we empower the poor, whatever their color (and keeping in mind that more of the poor are white than black).

As long as a capitalist structure remains in place, political power will flow from that structure and "solutions" will always fall upon the lower and middle classes. *If* reparations were voted, the taxation would not begin at the top, where it should.

The result would be something similar to the problems encountered with busing where, years after the event, I am inclined to think this was not the right approach to desegregation. The well-to-do were never involved—their kids went to private schools. The kids were pawns in the game and instead of the logic of neighborhood schools, integrated through a serious program of publicly subsidized housing for low- and moderate-income families, which would have brought racial minorities into the white areas, we have seen the continued flight of whites from the inner cities.

When I see on the campus the voluntary resegregation of the races, I am stunned. Something very clearly went wrong and is still going wrong when we see the campuses *creating* Jim Crow as

a result of pressures from the very groups we had hoped to see liberated from that structure.

The reparations program can easily become popular within the Black community—as I said, it has a moral logic to it. But I see a powerful backlash from whites, at all economic levels. I don't exempt myself from feeling an irritation that the burdens of the dead are suddenly on my shoulders.

In my own case, half the family history goes back to the Mayflower in one form or another, never rich, hardworking, lower to middle class. But one-half of the family came from Ireland at the turn of the century to work as a house servant, married, died soon after her children were born.

The issue of the Japanese is instructive—how little was finally granted after how long a battle—and this for a crime that occurred within living memory. But here there were records, living witnesses. The shame is that Congress took so long to move at all.

When Howard Winant talks of the Marshall Plan for the cities, I think he is pushing something that makes much more sense, which embraces the poor of all colors and backgrounds, and can unite them in a common struggle. The reparations issue will prove divisive, and I do not see it leading us toward the grander and broader coalitions we need to build.

David McReynolds is a staff member of the War Resisters League (339 Lafayette St., New York, NY 10012). The comments are his and not those of the WRL. □



Focus on Self-interest, Not Shame

by Billy J. Tidwell

I want to avoid oversimplifying a matter as complex as the reparations question. Further, I am not inclined to repudiate categorically Dr. America's positions. However, a few brief points should be made, by way of elucidating key areas of agreement and equally important disagreements between our views.

African-Americans are at another strategic juncture in their development. Actions taken now could be as consequential to their well-being in the next century as was the reneged promise of land and mules to their experience in this century. These actions must be based on a judicious assessment of the challenges and prospects facing both the African-American community and the nation as a whole. Both have vital stakes in the outcomes, and neither can afford to be fanciful or facile in pursuing these mutual interests.

Let me begin with the major convergence in thinking, which centers on Dr. America's assertion that "the country will not have a bright future if the problems stemming from past economic injustice and inequity aren't solved." He goes on to emphasize the need to "invest heavily" in those who have been excluded and exploited, suggesting that the nation's economic strength and social stability depend upon it.

Amen! Given the new requirements for economic competitiveness, brought on by dramatic changes in the global marketplace; given the shortsighted domestic policies of recent decades, which have eschewed such investment in human and physical capital as are necessary to maintain a robust, pace-setting economy and high standard of living; given the retrenchments from equal opportunity principles and the related neglect of the inner cities, which have sparked new urban explosions so painfully reminiscent of the 1960s, I could not agree more with Dr. America's assessment.

I disagree with Dr. America, however, in calling for a "reparations" solution.

The efficacy of his proposal hinges on the display of moral rectitude by "massa's" progeny, whereas behavior motivated by enlightened self-interest is more reliable. Further, from a political standpoint, it is more propitious to address self-interest arguments to the larger mass of white Americans rather than to Dr. America's privileged 30 percent.

If African-American progress is contingent upon the conscience-driven relinquishment of "unjust enrichments" by privileged whites, the prospects do not look good at all. People simply don't behave that way. Therefore, to frame remediation appeals in such terms is at best naive and at worst a fruitless diversion of intellectual energy. Effective political mobilization around the question of investment is less likely to be determined by whites who have benefited the most from the exploitation of African Americans than by those who have suffered the most.

The reparations concept is counterproductive in this context. The white masses must be shown how it is in their material interest to combat the residua of racism, not shamed into supporting repayment for past societal injustices over which they had no control.

Use of the reparations concept might also be counterproductive within the African-American community itself. It is important that the present generation of African Americans not become stagnated by the illusion of reparations. Rather, they must more aggressively and creatively strategize, organize, and mobilize their own resourcefulness toward the self-development of the African-American community. And their collective resources are substantial indeed.

Of course, there are limits to what self-development initiatives can accomplish relative to what is needed. However, I am convinced that these limits have not even been approached. Promulgating "reparations" could be a serious

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psychological hindrance to collective action. Unfortunately, few proponents of the concept, including Dr. America, acknowledge this insidious down-side.

The National Urban League's "Marshall Plan" strategy is grounded in the wisdom of mutual interests. It is *not* a reparations proposal. Instead, the strategy is based on the political and economic realities of the 1990s and the uncertainties all Americans face in the

coming decades. Eliminating the persisting disadvantages African Americans experience is a prerequisite for securing the general welfare.

Similarly, the League's promotion of self-development around issues that will decide the future well-being of the African-American community is responsive to today's exigencies. The reparations thesis obfuscates and potentially undermines the individual and group responsibility of African Americans themselves to influence their own destiny. □

Billy Tidwell is Director of Research and Evaluation for the National Urban League (1111 14th St. NW, Washington, DC 20005) and Editor of its annual report, The State of Black America, the current edition of which is devoted to African-American self-development. Dr. Tidwell is also author of two reports that address the subject matter of this commentary, The Price: A Study of the Costs of Racism in America and Playing to Win: A Marshall Plan for America. □

Reparations Versus Economic Integration

by Herbert J. Gans

I agree with Mr. America that the United States is "a large complex multi-racial society that's competing internationally less than optimally," and that to "improve overall performance . . . we need to provide more than palliatives." However, I do not see how reparations will solve these or related problems. I believe that America is now in the process of excluding from, and driving out of, the labor force all of its surplus labor. By subsequently labeling that surplus labor as an underclass—today's word for the undeserving poor—the people so labeled are then declared to be no longer deserving of political or other help.

If reparations were a politically viable way of reversing this process, I would be in Mr. America's corner. However, until he describes how he can sell reparations to whites who are not only themselves scared of losing their jobs, but scared of, and angry at, blacks for a variety of class, racial and racist reasons, I am not persuaded.

In fact, a call for reparations would only divert attention from the fundamental economic and racial issues, and would further polarize blacks and whites on a variety of real and fake political issues. For example, I can already see endless debates on whether all Americans should pay reparations or only the descendants of slave holders—or whether the bill should really be sent to the descendants of the African slave

owners and merchants who sold the ancestors of today's Americans into slavery in the first place. And who will pay reparations to the newest black Americans, the West Indian immigrants who were also once slaves?

Usually, but not always, race-neutral and universalistic policies that benefit as large a number of people, of all colors, as possible do best in the polity. Conversely, the political history of black-only demands and the numerical minority status of blacks would suggest that any proposal that calls for redistribution of income and wealth solely to blacks could not be won. The best financial outcome I could see is a mid-21st century Supreme Court decision approving a token and minuscule payment to blacks, which would, however, trivialize the horrors of slavery and the slave experience in the process.

Reintegrating the present and still growing labor surplus into the economy may no longer be possible. However, it

has to be tried, and the only way to begin is to reorganize the economy to create as many jobs as possible. Raising, promoting, debating, and then pressing for this policy should be undertaken by a coalition of all interested parties, of all skin colors, and even of all classes. A Constitutional amendment to the Bill of Rights to add economic rights would not hurt either!

Herbert J. Gans is the Robert S. Lynd Professor of Sociology at Columbia University (New York, NY 10027). His most recent book is a paperback edition of People, Plans and Policies: Essays on Poverty, Racism and Other National Urban Problems (Columbia University Press, 1994). He has just finished a new book tentatively titled Ending the War Against the Poor: The Underclass, the Undeserving Poor and Antipoverty Policy, which goes further into some of the above points. □

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Reparations: A Symposium (Part 3)

We offer five additional commentaries on the reparations issue. In our July/August issue we published, as our lead article, an interview with economist Richard America, who has written about and advocated widely for reparations to the Black community for the historical injustice and long-term disadvantaging effects of slavery. A supportive commentary by Congressman John Conyers (whose bill, H.R. 40, calls for a study of slavery's legacy and recommendation of remedies) and a "friendly dissent" by Temple University sociologist Howard Winant accompanied the interview. We then, in our September/October issue, published commentaries by Wilson Riles, Jr., of the American Friends Service Committee, Joe Feagin/Hernan Vera of the University of Florida, Sharon Park of the Union Institute, Kalonji Olusegun of N'COBRA, David McReynolds of the War Resisters League, Billy Tidwell of the National Urban League, and Herbert Gans of Columbia University.

Here we are presenting a final set of commentaries, by PRRAC Board members Theodore Shaw of the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund and John Powell of the University of Minnesota Law School, Jeanne Murer of the National Lawyers Guild, John Tateishi, a key player in the successful Japanese-American reparations campaign, and Ronald Trosper of the National Indian Policy Center at George Washington University.

If you are receiving P&R for the first time and want a copy of the earlier reparations articles, send us a SASE (52¢ postage).

One additional item: At an October 17-18 University of Minnesota Humphrey Institute conference on "Race Relations & Civil Rights in the Post Reagan-Bush Era," PRRAC Executive Director Chester Hartman moderated a panel on remedies, at which University of North Carolina economist William Darity presented an eloquent defense of the reparations concept; a copy of the text he read from may be available from Prof. Darity at the Economics Dept., UNC, Chapel Hill, NC 27599.

Apology/Acknowledgement Is Imperative

by Theodore M. Shaw

One hundred and thirty years after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed, the issue of reparations for the descendants of slaves is a subject of discussion in some quarters. Some argue that the United States' failure to compensate African Americans for the wrongs of slavery leaves unfinished business on the national agenda. Others maintain that the issue lacks legitimacy because of the passage of time and the fact that those who were part of the system of slavery are now long dead. Congressman John Conyers of Michigan has introduced a bill that would establish a commission to study the issue of reparations for slavery; the bill did not reach the floor of the House of Representatives. (The October 20, 1994 *New York Times* reported that the IRS received over 20,000 claims from African Americans for tax rebates for reparations. Recently, thousands of African Americans have been encouraged to file for tax refunds as reparations, at the urging of unidentified individuals circulating application forms in black churches and other community organizations, supposedly on behalf of a group calling itself "the Legal Defense Fund." The NAACP Legal Defense and Educa-

tional Fund has warned people not to act in reliance on this information.)

The virtue of the reparations discussion does not have anything to do with the question of whether African-American descendants of slaves ever receive money from the federal government. Following the Civil War, President Andrew Johnson vetoed civil rights legislation that would have facilitated land ownership by former slaves. It was the debate on this proposal that coined the expression "forty acres and a mule."

Compensation for those who had actually been held in bondage and whose labor had been exploited may have made a significant difference in the lives of former slaves. Moreover, property wealth is transferred intergenerationally; the descendants of slaves may have had significant family resources that would have produced a vastly different scenario from the black-white gap in household financial worth that exists today. In other words, the legacy of slavery continues to have present-day effects. Whatever the merits of this matter, however, it is probably unrealistic to think that African American descendants of slaves will be compensated in 1994 for the

wrongs of slavery when former slaves were denied compensation in 1866. Besides, the practical problem of administering such an effort is mind-boggling.

Is the issue of reparations, then, a useless discussion? It is not. Its value may be in the light it sheds on the way we as a nation have dealt with the issue of race, and how we continue to deal with it. When a wrong has been committed, the first step in "righting" it is acknowledgement. Only then can those involved move to heal the effects of the injury. This is no less true for groups than it is for individuals. Thus, after the Holocaust, Germany compensated Jewish survivors. The United States recently compensated Japanese Americans wrongfully interned in prison camps during the Second World War. The money was not significant beyond its symbolic value; mere money could not heal the scars of those experiences. The true value of reparations is in the acknowledgement of the wrong.

The United States government and the state governments that sanctioned the practice of slavery have never formally apologized to African Americans for

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slavery or acknowledged that it was wrong. The Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments were enacted to put black Americans on equal footing with white citizens; however, nowhere do they acknowledge the wrongs of slavery. Nineteenth and Twentieth Century civil rights legislation aimed to enforce the Civil War Amendments and eliminate continuing racial discrimination, but nowhere do these statutes contain an official apology. While individual legislators and government officials have acknowledged the wrongs of the past, there has been no official recognition or apology. Thus, a great psychological wound remains unhealed, haunting our national psyche.

Our history is open to ambiguous interpretation. We had slavery and *de jure* discrimination; we ended it. Currently, a number of books and articles on the black-white I.Q. gap suggest that genetically based intelligence difference should dictate a change in public policies, such as abandonment of affirmative action and early childhood education. In a nation that has never officially apologized for the wrong of slavery and repudiated its philosophical and pseudo-scientific underpinnings, this discourse on black intellectual inferiority has a peculiar resonance.

The reparations discussion is valuable not because of any expectation it creates with respect to monetary compensation. Its real value is that it places America's discourse about race in a different context—one in which affirmative action is a modest remedy and in which the ahistorical disconnection of present-day disparities in black and white achievement, wealth and status from America's undeniable history of racial discrimination will be impossible to maintain.

Theodore (Ted) M. Shaw, a PRRAC Board member, is Associate Director-Counsel for the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund (99 Hudson St., 16th fl., New York, NY 10013). He is on leave from the University of Michigan Law School faculty. □

H.R. 40: If Not Now, When?

by Jeanne Mirer

In 1977, I had to fly to a city in the Midwest. The cab driver who picked me up at the airport got chatty and asked me where I was from. When I said "Detroit," he asked, "which suburb?" I said, "I live in the city." He then said to me, "How do you stand it? There are so many niggers there." Obviously, because I was white, the cab driver believed he had the license to use the "n" word to me. My response was, "Evidently you do not realize that the wealth of this nation was accumulated on the backs of the free labor of black people." He did not know this history.

We cannot address reparations, and H.R. 40, without remembering our history. Our history also includes the Supreme Court's *Dred Scott v. Sandford* decision. In that opinion, Chief Justice Taney said: "It is axiomatic in law and morals that black people have no rights that white people are bound to respect." He relied for this "axiom" on theories of white superiority and black inferiority commonly used to justify slavery. The Court further found support for the theory of black inferiority in the existence of the laws in the North and free states that severely restricted black access to jobs, housing and education. After the Civil War, the Freedmen's Acts provided some form of reparation to newly freed slaves. The Freedmen's Bureau, however, had scarce resources and came to an early end—the promises of reparation broken.

Although the legality of slavery was overruled by the 13th Amendment, the Supreme Court has never issued an opinion *overruling* the theory of racial inferiority contained in *Dred Scott*. In not one opinion, not even *Brown v. Board of Education*, did the Justices *directly* state, "We explicitly overrule the statements of racial inferiority we articulated in *Dred Scott* because that theory is wrong; no race is superior or inferior to any other." Never has there been a formal apology by any government official for slavery or a recognition of the indescribable and despicable horrors

that the institution of slavery visited on the lives of slaves.

We have an uncanny ability in this country when it comes to matters of race to dodge, deny, or just plain lie.

Dodging takes the form of employers saying, "We can't solve the problems created by years of forced segregation. We have to wait for the next generation."

Denial and lying is illustrated in the 1883 *Civil Rights Cases*. In 1883, the Supreme Court struck down the Civil Rights Act of 1875, stating:

When a man has emerged from slavery and by the aid of beneficent legislation has shaken off inseparable commitments of that state, there must be some stage in the process of his elevation when he takes the rank of a mere citizen and ceases to be the special favorite of the laws . . .

In *Plessy v. Ferguson*, when the black plaintiffs argued that forcing them to sit in segregated railroad cars put a "stamp of inferiority" on them, the Court denied it, saying, in essence, "If that is what they thought, it was only their perception."

At some point we have to say enough denial, dodging and lying. It is time to formally apologize (as F.W. De Klerk did for apartheid in South Africa), and officially repudiate at every level of government all notions of racial inferiority and superiority. It is time we recognized that damages were done to a race of people for which there is a need for repair.

The institution of slavery has deformed social and economic relations in the United States for everyone. Until the legacy of slavery is overcome, we will continue to experience these deformations and the social and economic divisions these deformations promote.

The lessons of the Bosnians and Rwandans, and those in other places where ethnic rivalries have turned to genocide and fratricide, should be learned; unless there is a repairing, unless there is a healing, dodging, denial and lying will only make matters worse.

As long as we refuse to face the debt owed, the interest on the debt will grow larger and larger, and it will eventually come due.

Often the reparations debate gets sidetracked on questions of feasibility. Even lawyers, who routinely go to court and seek damages for people injured by the negligence of others, have a blind spot when it comes to seeing how reparation of any sort, whether in damages or equitable remedies, could be made available to the descendants of slaves. We routinely apply for all sorts of

government-sponsored programs. We know how to do it. Administrative agencies handle all sorts of complicated laws and pay out billions of dollars in benefits each year. Somehow, when it comes to addressing how we could implement recommendations coming from a study commission set up pursuant H.R. 40, we become idiots and cannot fathom how to do it. Another artful dodge.

I submit that the question for discussion should not be whether some form of reparations is owed, but how can we

get about the business of determining what form reparations should take, and how they can be most easily administered.

Jeanne Mirer is a civil rights attorney practicing in Detroit, Michigan. She is currently co-chair of the Anti-racism Committee of the National Lawyers Guild and has been working with other groups to develop a national Human Rights/Civil Rights Agenda. She may be contacted at 3310 Cadillac Tower Bldg., Detroit, MI 48226. □

Japanese American Redress

by John Y. Tateishi

The Japanese American redress campaign was predicated on a basic principle that the Constitutional rights of American citizens and legal resident aliens of Japanese ancestry were violated when, at the outbreak of World War II, the United States government forcibly excluded Japanese Americans from their homes and placed them into involuntary detention without the benefit of due process. Some 35 years later, efforts were undertaken to rectify the injustices that stripped Japanese Americans of their properties, their livelihoods, and their dignity as Americans.

It was a singular moment in the Constitutional history of the United States: it was the only instance in which American citizens and legal residents were denied en masse the assumption of innocence and the Constitutional rights of freedom. The basic guarantees of individual protections sanctified by the Bill of Rights were denied to Japanese Americans during WWII, setting the stage for a battle 35 years later to rectify the injustices of the internment.

The strategies for the effort were based on these facts and developed in the early days of the public campaign. It was decided that a legislative campaign would best serve the goals of reparations, primarily because it was felt that the Congress would be more amenable to providing compensatory redress than would the

courts, regardless of the fact of a conservative President in the White House and Republican control of the Senate.

A legislative campaign, it was recognized, could be fought in the media and the public arena, where a carefully designed grassroots effort could be launched across the country. The strategy in the first two years was to mount both a legislative and educational campaign designed to establish a public debate through the media, while gaining legislative support through the network of national civil rights coalitions and by establishing a grassroots effort. This early strategy was critical because Japanese Americans lacked both political clout and numbers. If the campaign could not be fought in the media, there appeared little hope to gain public support and legislative approval.

Rather than attempt compensatory legislation at the outset, the campaign was designed around a two-phased approach. We sought legislation to establish a federal commission whose mandate was to investigate the events surrounding the WWII internment and provide the Congress with its findings and recommendations. The second phase sought compensatory legislation based on the findings and recommendations of the commission. The thinking behind this strategy was that a federal commission would provide an unbiased and

objective fact-finding investigation. Japanese Americans knew that they were the victims of an injustice during WWII, but the majority of Americans were either ignorant about the incident or were convinced that the internment was justified. The commission's responsibility was to make a determination based on facts. It was less than a calculated risk, for we were convinced uncovering the facts could lead to only one conclusion. Just as important, it was clear that public hearings conducted by the commission would draw attention to the WWII internment, furthering both the educational and legislative goals of the campaign.

The findings of the commission were, as expected, unequivocal in its condemnation of the government's actions, which the commission stated were based on race, prejudice, and a lack of political leadership. The commission recommended reparations of \$20,000 per surviving victim, which became the basis for the compensatory legislation introduced in Congress in 1982 and approved by the President in 1988. The stunning success of the campaign in the face of formidable opposition both by the public and in Congress was the result of the efforts of thousands of Japanese Americans who would not relent in their conviction that the injustice committed

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American Indian Reparations

by Ronald L. Trosper

against them was a betrayal of the very principles for which they were fighting. For them, the fight was not for money. Instead, it was to set right an injustice left uncorrected, and it was for their sense of place in America.

The lessons drawn from the Japanese American redress issue are varied and numerous. Whether those lessons can serve African American reparations remains to be seen. The WWII internment was a singular event at a given moment in the history of this nation, and while the victims were traumatized by their dishonoring as Americans, they somehow found the means to put the episode aside and get on with their lives.

One is inevitably left wondering how African American reparations can possibly rectify the inhumanity of slavery and the legacy of injustice left in its wake. For Japanese Americans, the symbolic payment of \$20,000 for the loss of freedom precludes forever any future claims for redressing the wrongs of the internment. The damage done to African Americans over many generations cannot be swept away by a simple clearing of the collective conscience of a nation. Promises are too easily broken, and promises will no longer suffice to address the profundity and lasting effects of slavery.

John Y. Tateishi was born in 1939 in Los Angeles and spent three years at the Manzanar concentration camp in the Owens Valley in California. He served as the National Redress Director for the Japanese American Citizens League and was the chief legislative strategist for the redress campaign. He is currently a public affairs consultant (Tateishi and Associates, 11 Inman Ave., Kentfield, CA 94909). □

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Resources Section.**

The experience of American Indians in obtaining reparations from the federal government should interest those who seek similar actions with respect to Black Americans. American Indians have received three types of reparations: (1) cash payments, through the operation of the Indian Claims Commission and the U.S. Court of Claims; (2) land, through an occasional action of Congress to return control over land to particular tribes; and (3) tribal recognition, by either Congress or the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The first of these has been the least satisfactory, measured by long-term impact on Indian communities. The second was more satisfactory, but has been experienced by very few tribes. The third, which is in process now, has had the best results.

The settlement of claims for lands unjustly taken was a widespread demand of Indians in the 1920s and 1930s. When the federal government began to accept suits—as a sovereign, the federal government must consent to be sued—limitations were placed on the awards. Congress, in the Indian Claims Commission Act of 1946, forbade award of lands. Proof had to be presented to the Indian Claims Commission regarding ownership; litigation that started in the 1950s lasted until 1978. The Supreme Court developed a distinction between aboriginal title and recognized title; interest could not be earned on awards based on aboriginal title. The federal government paid \$5 million in 1975 for lands worth \$5 million in 1865.

The majority of tribes that received payments distributed them on a per capita basis among the members enrolled in the tribe at the time of the award. This dissipation of jointly held capital to one generation of recipients has meant that their descendants' benefits depend solely on the private action of parents to their children and grandchildren. In many cases, people on welfare had their welfare payments suspended until they had used up their per capita share of the tribal

award. Some tribes developed traditions of per capita payments, which continue to inhibit community development.

Some tribes have refused to accept money for land. Other tribes, through extraordinary action, have received land. The Taos Pueblo is the best known example; they acquired U.S. Forest Service land. The Hopi received land; but Navajos were removed. No tribe has received land that required white people to leave their homes.

Recognition of tribal sovereignty and the implementation of self-government have achieved the most significant results. Economic development tends to follow assertion of governing powers. The creation of casinos is the best known example of this phenomenon; but the success of casinos over the long term is not assured. While other tribes have established economic development with other industries, many tribes have not yet been able to assert enough sovereignty to build solid economies.

What are the analogies to tribal self-government among Black Americans? Perhaps the Marshall Plan for cities has an element of political institution-building similar to the reconstruction of tribal governments. The narrow definition of reparations as investment in human and business capital does not. The Native American example would recommend investment in political capital, in institutions of community organization similar to tribal governments. Money cannot buy such institutions, and some kinds of reparation payments undermine them.

Dr. Trosper is Professor of Forest Economics and Director of the Native American Forestry Program at the School of Forestry, Northern Arizona University. During 1994, he has been Acting Director of the National Indian Policy Center, which is located at The George Washington University (2101 F St. NW, Washington, DC 20052). Dr. Trosper's views are his own. □

Who Really Can Claim Innocence?

by john a. powell

Ain't nobody paid for slavery yet, about my forty acres and a mule.

— Oscar Brown, Jr.

The question of whether African Americans should receive reparations, raised a number of times in the past, has been criticized, rejected, or simply ignored. It may be time to raise the issue again.

However, if we are to raise again the question of whether African Americans should be awarded reparations, it is important to reframe the issue of reparations so as not to focus solely on slavery. In discussing reparations, we must also examine the aftermath of slavery and the institutions and distributional structures it created, including an analysis of the numerous ways in which the American government and the larger society have economically subordinated and disenfranchised African Americans.

Reparations, in and of itself, may not produce the forty acres and a mule promised to freed slaves, nor may it compensate for the trillions of dollars African Americans may be owed for their exploited labor and cultural uprooting. Nonetheless, these cannot be reasons not to consider seriously reparations. Nor is the argument that all former slaves are dead and therefore will not themselves receive compensation a reason not to consider reparations. The structure that creates and distributes wealth in the United States continues to be based on a racial hierarchy that was established by the slave system.

Consider that most wealth held by Americans is in the homes they own. However, for the last 50 years in particular, the mortgage lending and real estate markets have been permeated by rampant racism, sponsored by the federal government and its finance branches and by private banking, lending, and real estate interests. The government introduced redlining to the lending industry and explicitly required racially segregated neighborhoods. Only recently have such initiatives as redlining been ferreted out

as industry norms. The federal law ordering segregated neighborhoods to open their borders to African Americans did not pass the Congress until 1968, and almost all experts agree it has been ineffective in altering the segregative housing pattern in our society.

Nonetheless, the wealth distribution by now is well established. Prime rates extended to veterans, for instance, after World War II, coupled with redlining, settled many whites into secure home investments and homogeneous segregated neighborhoods. Playing fair now is not enough to put African Americans in comparable position to accumulate wealth today. Acknowledgement of wrongs such as redlining is also not going to allow African Americans to begin to accumulate wealth in homeownership. The structure is already set, and it is set

Playing fair now is not enough.

decidedly against African Americans and in favor of whites. The wealth structure of this society does not just affect individuals, it affects groups and communities. It rings hollow for opponents of reparations to suggest that after years of excluding African Americans based on their group membership it now is acceptable to claim that any benefits accorded to African Americans cannot be based on their group membership.

All the writers on reparations seem to recognize that mainstream approaches, such as affirmative action, will not, regardless of how well they are applied, begin to address the underlying inequalities confronting African Americans in our dominant white society. Even so, these plans are being attacked daily as being special treatment for undeserving African Americans, awarded at the cost of so-called "innocent whites." However, who really can claim innocence?

White society may decline to pay for

slavery and its aftermath. My guess is that it probably will. Just raising the claim that African Americans should receive reparations will anger some whites. Even without raising reparations, conservative whites have been able to generate racial hostility and polarization. For the most part, at least on the level of individual operation of daily interactions with African Americans, many whites are not explicitly racially exclusionary or supremacist. They are in a sense "innocent." However, on a deeper level, reliance on this narrow concept of innocence is fraudulent and moves the debate away from analysis of the distributional structure that drives our society. It allows for a debate as to whether individual whites or individual African Americans are morally superior or morally blameworthy. It also creates a disjuncture between seeing how the country has benefitted from slavery and how individuals still benefit from the structure. It allows whites to admit that discrimination is wrong, but in the same breath argue for the continuing benefit of this wrong.

Unfortunately, racism and race as a central organizing and structural principle are not things of the past. This is my point. Even if whites, as individuals and as living today, did not themselves create the structure of slavery—surely a defensible and sensible position, given that slavery was formally abolished over 100 years ago—or descend directly from slave owners, they still benefit from the distributional structure it set up and, I believe, they must acknowledge that they continue to derive substantial benefits and privileges from it, especially in terms of economic and social resource allocation.

This is where reparations can serve a legitimate purpose: it forces whites to acknowledge that the current system of economic and social resource distribution enhances their position and that this distributional system is derived in part, possibly in large part, from the structure of racial superiority and system of slavery and racial exclusion created and devel-

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(REPORTS: Continued from page 10)

application fees). Many on-site managers are not knowledgeable about program requirements and their obligations under the program, may deny they offer low-income units in their building, and are not required to conform to any uniform marketing requirements to fill vacancies. Low-income people often have no way of knowing there is a Low Income Housing Tax Credit building located in their community.

The Coalition has been working with other groups, including area nonprofit housing developers, to secure administrative changes in the project preference system of the LIHTC program. A preliminary report on the research was released, outlining their findings; a press conference was held; and other actions were taken to force changes in the program. This led the Washington State Housing Commission, which oversees administration of the tax credit program and determines what projects will receive these subsidies, to conduct its own study of the program's effectiveness. Ultimately, the Coalition's efforts led to revisions in the Finance Commission's project preference system, enforcement

rules and marketing requirements. Today, a greater share of the state's tax credits are awarded to nonprofit developers serving extremely low-income populations. Nonprofits also generally do a better job of serving people of color. □

(INNOCENCE: Continued from page 7)

opened over the last 400 years in this country.

We should not, then, focus the award of reparations on the harm it exacts on innocent whites, but should use it to expose and acknowledge the distributional and structural advantages enjoyed by whites as a result of slavery and its aftermath. The debate cannot center on an empirical evaluation of whether whites today are individually responsible for the ills suffered by African Americans today. It must center instead on exposing how the wrongs exacted by whites in the past continue to privilege and benefit whites today and how those structures that benefit whites still operate to disadvantage persons of color. When one looks seriously at how racial hierarchy has distributed resources, it becomes apparent

that non-racism (color-blindness) or affirmative action is insufficient to the task of addressing the inequities of post-slavery structure. Instead, we need to be *anti-racist* and structurally oriented.

I have heard the argument that African Americans have by now achieved equality in terms of their place in our present distributional structure. I do not buy that argument. If it happened, I would like to know when. Slavery might have ended in 1865, but it was replaced with an exploitative sharecrop farming system, forced residential segregation and educational segregation, and complete disenfranchisement from the voting process. At some point it may be necessary to forget the past, but not until we have remembered. I believe that far too many have forgotten without ever remembering.

In the meantime, *ain't nobody partying for slavery yet.*

John A. Powell, Secretary of PRRAC Board of Directors, is professor of law at the University of Minnesota Law School (229 19th Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55455); he formerly was National Legal Director for the American Civil Liberties Union.

Resources

SASE = self-addressed stamped envelope (29¢ unless otherwise indicated). Prices include the shipping/handling (s/h) charge when this information is provided to PRRAC. "No price listed" items are often free.

Race/Racism

● **All-White Realty Ads** are the target of Chicago's Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities. The focus is on ads that show, in high school yearbook style, stacked rows of headshot photos of a firm's agents, all of whom usually are white, which communicate a clear message. The campaign is similar to

efforts in other cities to stop home sale display ads that give similar racial steering messages by virtue of who is depicted in the ad. Inf. from John Lukehart of the Council, 53 W. Jackson #557, Chicago, IL 60604, 312/427-4457.

● **"Black Discontent: The Preliminary Report on the 1993-1994 National Black Politics Study,"** by Michael C. Dawson of the Univ. of Chicago (12 pp., + tables, April, 1994), reports on a 45-minute telephone interview of over 1200 randomly selected African Americans. Try writing Dawson at Univ. of Chicago, Chicago, IL 60637 (there's no more specific address on the

copy we have)—if that doesn't work, contact us and we'll arrange to get you a copy.

● **Civil Rights/Liberties Video Histories:** Calif. Newsreel has produced videos on "3 lawyers who changed America": "The Road to Brown," featuring Charles Hamilton Houston, chief counsel to the NAACP, dean of the Howard Law School and the first Black editor of the *Harvard Law Review*; "Doing Justice," on "people's lawyer" Arthur Kinoy; and "Super Chief: The Life & Legacy of Earl Warren." They are 58, 51 and 88 mins., respectively, and each is \$75 to rent, \$195 to buy (\$295 to buy all 3). Contact Calif.

Newsreel, 149 9th St. #420, S. CA 94103, 415/621-6196.

● **"Facing Racial and Cultural Conflict: Tools for Rebuilding Community"** is a newly revised handbook available (\$24) from the Program for Community Problem Solving, 915 15th St. NW #600, Wash., DC 20005, 202/783-2961.

● **"Mount Pleasant: The Rise of a Rebellion"** is a film-in-progress, by Farzin Illich & Martha Sipple, on the 1991 Latino riots in the Adams Morgan/Mt. Pleasant neighborhood of Washington DC. Information from the filmmakers, 202/332-0600.

July/August 1994

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The Reparations Question

How to make white America comprehend and come to grips with the legacy of slavery? Is this a necessary precondition to dealing with, and perhaps ending, current institutionalized racism, segregated housing, school and employment patterns, and the prejudiced attitudes and behavior of individuals?

A deeply felt strand of thought and strategic thinking in at least a portion of the black community, and among some whites as well, holds that a program of systemic and large-scale reparations is an essential threshold step, for which precedents certainly exist in recent US and world history. On the other hand, the philosophical, political and practical problems of remedying past wrongs on the scale attributable to slavery, an institution that was formally and legally ended well over a century ago, are immense.

We decided to raise the reparations issue and its problems in the form of an interview with one of its leading proponents, economist Richard America. Accompanying our interview is a supportive commentary by Rep. John Conyers of Detroit, sponsor of a bill to study the legacy of slavery and propose remedies; and a strong but friendly dissent, with an alternative proposal, by Temple University sociologist Howard Winant.

In the September/October issue of Poverty & Race we will publish a set of additional solicited commentaries by a range of thinkers and activists. We also will consider publishing additional comments by readers, and so encourage you to add your thoughts on this controversial issue — Chester Hartman.

Chester Hartman: Let's start with a definitional question: How exactly would you define the reparations issue? Who is to be compensated, and for what?

Richard America: Reparations isn't the issue. It's a conceptual framework, a way of looking at a set of related issues. The issues are economic, political and social dysfunction and the management of a large complex multiracial society that's competing internationally less than optimally.

Unjust enrichment based on slavery and discrimination causes this dysfunction. The country will not have a bright future if the problems stemming from past economic injustice and inequity aren't solved.

To improve overall performance, by including people who have been excluded and exploited, we need to provide more than palliatives. We need to invest heavily in them. But the rationale for doing that has been unpersuasive.

The real question is, what is the pre-

sent value and distribution of the stream of income that has been coercively and wrongfully diverted from blacks and whites through slavery and discrimination to produce lopsided income and wealth distributions by race, and, in doing so, has robbed too many blacks of skills they need to perform effectively?

The top 20%, disproportionately white, receives 42% of earned income. The bottom 20%, disproportionately black, receives 5% of earned income. Wealth is even more maldistributed. A major reason for this skewed outcome is past injustice—slave labor in agriculture, manufacturing, many services and in infrastructure development—followed by exclusion, discrimination and exploitation. Common resource pools, produced by everyone's labor, were maldistributed, by white decision makers, overwhelmingly to whites, primarily in the form of education and training.

CH: Why are reparations so important?

RA: The country faces a set of complex interconnected problems. We label them as urban, racial, underclass, inner-
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city problems. We talk about affirmative action, reverse discrimination and quotas. Actually we're talking about wealth and income redistribution, but without a sufficient intellectual and analytical basis.

The primary racial social problems are manifested in poor performance and poor quality in employment, education, housing, health, crime, municipal finance, and also in overall deficiencies in our competitiveness and productivity at a macro level.

Chronic racial injustices over generations help to produce these current defects. To remedy the big problems faced by the whole society, we need to correctly define them. But we haven't. That's why the debate is endless and circular. So reparations is actually a concept that's central to getting to consensus and to successful governance and management of long-term economic performance. It's a key public policy concept, so far unrecognized or unacknowledged. And it's also a tool for conflict resolution in circumstances of deep ancestral grievances between groups.

CH: *How much money might be involved, and how might it be disbursed and used?*

RA: Whites owe blacks \$5 to 10 trillion. It should be repaid primarily through investment in human capital—education and training over two to three generations. It should also be repaid through investments in targeted housing, capital formation, and business creation.

CH: *How did you calculate this figure?*

RA: The basis for the estimates are in

work done by James Marketti, at the University of Wisconsin, and in an illustrative estimate done under a program at the University of California, Berkeley. The Berkeley work was based, in turn, on Lester Thurow's model, developed in his 1969 book, *Poverty and Discrimination*. Both were published in my 1990 edited collection, *The Wealth of Races*.

These estimates add up to over \$3 trillion, but they covered limited time series because of data limitations. They don't cover the entire period 1619 through 1994. They were intended to suggest estimating techniques that can be refined and further developed.

The estimates also don't take account of discrimination in investment in human capital in public education, K-12 and college. So \$5 to \$10 trillion would turn out to be an understatement.

CH: *You've elsewhere suggested that the reparations issue is largely an accounting problem. What do you mean by that, and what accounting system do you propose?*

RA: It's an accounting or auditing problem in the sense that the first order of business is to establish the accuracy of the claim. After that, the conversation will lead to practical constructive outcomes. But first a solid, fairly rigorous analytical basis must be built. Until then, the discussion tends to be rhetorical only.

The case must withstand scrutiny from economists and policy analysts. Then it will be adopted by political leaders and opinion makers in the media. The concept will make that step to broad respectability when the research is done and stands up.

It will then lead to useful results when it is embraced, ultimately, by most people as right and fair and practical. It will stand the same tests of debate in a democracy as any other concept or proposal.

CH: *In May, Denny's restaurant chain agreed to a \$54 million settlement with the Justice Department to compensate for and remedy clearly demonstrated patterns of racial discrimination; several thousand victims will receive a hefty cash award. And the State of Florida apparently will be making a large cash payment to a few survivors of racial violence*

against a black town that occurred over 70 years ago. In what ways do you see these recent events as moving us toward a massive reparations scheme of the type you advocate?

RA: The Denny's case and the Florida case have nothing to do with the reparations concept. Those are finite judgments based on specific fact situations with individual, identifiable parties. The broad reparations concept is more amorphous. It involves patterns and practices of 15 generations. These are scrutinized and found wanting by current ethical and moral standards that are applied retroactively.

Society in 1994 will say, we cannot in good conscience accept benefits produced by unjust means that we disapprove of. Some of these acts happened long ago, but they produced benefits that were transferred intergenerationally, compounded and bequeathed to us.

I believe society is ready to take that step. But ultimately it is a moral question: is it moral for the top 30—those earning over roughly \$45,000, as a class—to accept such unjust enrichments? And, if not, how can we remedy the injustice? Systematic, targeted income and wealth redistribution is the answer.

CH: *Is there any contradiction between characterizing it as a moral issue, and the framework you earlier raised in terms of practical, global competitiveness?*

RA: The concept is moral in the sense that even when it's shown convincingly that there is such a "debt," there is no power that can enforce collection, although creative legal theories may emerge. So it will be up to society to reflect on this new information and collectively agree to respond.

It's a moral and practical matter. Practically, paying these reparations will help strengthen the economy and the social fabric. There's no contradiction.

CH: *Another obvious analogy is the reparations payments Congress authorized several years ago to Japanese-Americans interned during World War II. Why was this politically acceptable, and not reparations for slavery?*

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The Proposed Reparations Study Commission

by Rep. John Conyers

The lingering effects of slavery have been a continuing issue within the African American community for many years. All of us are painfully aware of the damage racism did to African Americans as it expressed itself through slavery, racial segregation and discrimination. A national movement has emerged in favor of reparations to the descendants of African American slaves, especially among groups such as the Black Reparations Committee and the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America. I am strongly in favor of investigating all of the alternatives to bring this issue to a resolution.

Approximately 4,000,000 Africans and their descendants were enslaved in the United States (and the colonies which became the United States) from 1619 to 1865. Slavery in our country was Constitutionally and statutorily sanctioned by the government from 1789-1865. Yet our government has never actively studied the effects of that slavery and possible recompense to its victims.

In 1989, I first introduced a bill, The Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act, which is designed to investigate differing options to resolve the issue of the effects of slavery. I reintroduced it this year as House Resolution 40. While this bill would not directly provide for actual compensation, it would establish the first federally chartered commission to study the impact of slavery on African Americans and recommend a range of appropriate remedies.

Opponents of this commission argue that the transgressions of slavery took place 150 years ago and that we owe nothing to its victims' descendants. My contention is that African Americans are still victims of slavery as surely as those who lived under its confinement. Just as white Americans have benefited from education, life experiences, and wealth that was handed down to them by their ancestors, so too have African Americans been harmed by the institution of slavery. The fruits of their labor were stolen from

them; their African culture, heritage, family, language and religion were denied them; their self-identity and self-worth were destroyed by repression and hatred.

There is no question that the federal government has a moral responsibility to investigate the possibility of compensation to those who have been injured by its actions. Reparation payments to Japanese Americans interned by the government during World War II are a similar case. There is no question that African Americans have experienced similarly intense discrimination; the degradation and deprivation which African Americans have suffered did not end with the Emancipation Proclamation or ratification of Constitutional amendments that

followed the Civil War.

Racial tensions are high in this country due in part to a lack of understanding about the low self-esteem, lack of cultural identity and economic dependence that are among slavery's most enduring legacies. America must come to terms with the implications of its history. Fairness and justice for the descendants of slavery, including the question of reparations, need to be dealt with once and for all.

John Conyers is a 15-term Congressman from Detroit who chairs the House Government Operations Committee. A copy of H.R. 40 may be obtained from Rep. Conyers, 2426 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515, 202/225-5126. □

A Friendly Dissent

by Howard Winant

The United States was created out of a group of European colonies located on territory expropriated from native peoples. After 1650 or so, these colonies, north and south, also engaged in widespread enslavement of African people. The distinctions drawn by the end of the 17th Century between Europeans, on the one hand, and Native Americans and Africans, on the other, remain today the hallmarks of the U.S. racial order. Furthermore, the doctrine of natural rights upon which the country was founded in the late 18th Century did not challenge these distinctions. Quite the contrary: they were enshrined in the Constitution. One has to move to relatively recent history—the post-Civil War period—or even to the contemporary era of the civil rights movement, to find serious efforts to challenge the racial injustice that remains constitutive of our social order, of our system of inequality, and of our racist culture.

Let us stipulate all that. Does such a situation support the demand for repar-

ations to be paid by whites to blacks, either on moral or political grounds? My answer to this question is no on both counts. However, I would like to offer a substitute proposal, one that incorporates some but not all the features of the reparations idea.

The Moral Issues

While the enslavement and expropriation of black labor was unquestionably one of the greatest acts of immorality ever carried out, both those who were enslaved and those who enslaved them are dead. There are no people to whom compensation could be paid, and none who can legitimately be called upon or forced to pay, unless we accept the principle that "the sins of the fathers (sic) shall be visited upon the children," which I certainly do not.

There remains the aftermath of slavery, in which a social system based on white

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RA: Likewise, the Japanese case is not analogous. That primarily involved identifiable property owners able to step forward and assert claims to specific property, or to prove wrongs against them as individuals.

CH: *How is it possible to make clear, credible connections between what happened generations ago, and was formally terminated 130 years ago, and present conditions?*

RA: The connection between the past and the present is clear. It's not a connection so much between slavery and current conditions. It's a matter of a continuing process of wrongful, exploitative, coerced, and manipulated income and wealth diversion over 350 years, through various means.

The question is, is it moral to accept benefits produced by means that we now define as wrongful? Society will think it through and reach a consensus that it is not moral. Then a policy of reparations will logically follow.

CH: *In a recent book review, Andrew Hacker wrote, "Whites are weary of being lectured about prejudice, and they resent being told that they are responsible for racial segregation and discrimination." If that's true—and I think there's plenty of evidence it is—why is the white majority going to adopt the moral stance you think they will, simply by comprehending the historical patterns of unjust enrichment?*

RA: Hacker and others will, in time, find it constructive to look at the racial problems they study and write about through the reparations lens.

CH: *Who would receive the reparations? And in what ways do you distinguish between African Americans clearly caught in the intersectional trap of race and poverty—and assuming you can connect their current conditions to previous conditions of servitude—and the Colin Powells, Henry Louis Gatès, Clarence Thomases and Roy Browns, who have been able to succeed wildly in America despite those previous conditions?*

RA: Reparations should be paid primarily in human capital investment, along with some investment in hard

tangible assets and in business capital formation. These are all benefits that would have been distributed more normally, today, but for the intervention of systematically exploitive and exclusionary practices.

Most of the investment should go to those in the bottom 30%. Some should go to institution building. These institutions, including in higher education and in business, would have grown up except they were consciously hindered in order to benefit competing white institutions and businesses.

CH: *Are there ways America can come to grips with its shameful history and the persistent effects of that history other than with cold cash?*

RA: The issue is the wrongful diversion of cash. Why would we look for any other remedies other than explicit income and wealth redistribution?

CH: *How do you think this will fly politically? Will the majority white community ever accept this idea? And how will other racial minorities—perhaps equally disadvantaged or historically maltreated—react? It's silly to play games of who was victimized more than whom, but Native Americans' claims as to unjust historical treatment and current poverty and racial discrimination have to be right up there along with the slavery imposed on African-Americans.*

RA: Political acceptability will come as the concept gains intellectual adherents and demonstrates explanatory power. It helps explain why the economy malfunctions, why productivity and competitiveness suffer. It helps clarify the policy choices for remedying all those defects. We should invest in people what is theirs by right to put them in their "rightful place."

A large portion of the population has been willfully deprived—to the benefit of others—of income and wealth that it ought to have received and would have received in a fairly open and competitive situation. Most Americans will come to acknowledge the debt and agree to practical remedies. Indigenous and quasi-indigenous minorities, that is, Native Americans and African Americans, have a case for reparations.

CH: *In a society that seems to have little understanding of or respect for*

history ("that's history" is a current put-down phrase), how realistic is it to expect Americans to deal profoundly and responsibly with something that happened long, long ago—and that most white Americans legitimately can say had nothing to do with them or even with their relatives, since their ancestors arrived in the US well after slavery was abolished? What do you do with the response that in essence says, what's done is done, we've got to look to the future and not to the past?

RA: The issue is not what happened long ago. The issue is the current unjust enrichment flowing from continuing injustices over many generations. All Americans in the top 30% are part of a class that benefits wrongfully from past practices that were instituted, in part, on behalf of future generations of whites.

CH: *What kind of role do you see mainstream national civil rights groups, such as the NAACP, La Raza, Japanese American Citizens League, Native American Rights Fund and Urban League, playing in this effort?*

RA: The NAACP and the National Urban League should make reparations the central concept in their strategy for the next 40 years. Reparations is about economic development, and civil rights, for the next two generations, should be about economic development.

CH: *How would a reparations program fit into a larger civil rights agenda?*

RA: Civil rights is, or ought to be, about how to make median black income roughly the same as median white income by the Year 2020. The concept of reparations is an inescapable public policy tool for reaching that objective.

Richard America is a Senior Program Manager in the federal government. His books include Developing the Afro-American Economy (Lexington, 1977), the edited volume The Wealth of Races (Greenwood Press, 1990) and Paying the Social Debt: What White America Owes Black America (Praeger, 1993). The views expressed are his own and are not to be taken as representing any institution or organization with which he is affiliated. □

(DISSENT: Continued from page 3)

supremacy fostered a "superexploitation" or "unequal exchange" from which blacks suffered and whites benefited in innumerable ways, not only economically but also politically and culturally. To the (considerable) extent that this system continues in force today, I believe that a moral obligation exists to overcome it. An initiative of this kind should take the form of a "Marshall Plan for the Cities" or something similar, which I discuss below.

Richard America says, "Whites owe blacks \$5 to \$10 trillion." This is obviously some sort of cumulative figure and thus involves the putative obligations of both the living and the dead. But even if applied (presumably in reduced form) only to the living, it raises highly problematic issues of racial stereotyping and treats race and class inequality as if they were interchangeable. It's hard to agree that *all* whites owe *all* blacks, since there are different degrees to which people are implicated in racist practices, either as beneficiaries or as victims. Even such concepts as "white skin privilege" (also problematic for various reasons, though I would not deny its existence) obscure the difference between actual material gain and loss, on the one hand, and symbolic power and powerlessness, on the other. It therefore seems much more morally sound to organize, not "whites" to pay reparations, but rather the state to undertake egalitarian and redistributive policies. Thus we turn from the moral to the political terrain.

The Political Issues

The country has moved significantly to the right in the post-1960s, post-civil rights era. Currently, a strong mainstream consensus exists—Republican neoconservatives on the right, Democratic neoliberals on the left—which plays to the vanilla suburbs and not to the chocolate cities. This consensus is resistant to social spending, to tax increases, to the welfare state, in short, to every form of redistribution known. Richard America claims that "society in 1994 will say, we cannot in good con-

science accept benefits produced by unjust means...." There is no evidence for this.

In fact, applying criteria of political realism to Richard America's strategy on the reparations issue, I can only assume that his idea is to stake out a sort of "pure" position, a benchmark for the achievement of real equality, at least in the economic realm. If we know how much blacks have lost, how much they are "owed" as a result of the whole racist legacy—I impute this logic to him—then we can know how to evaluate the range of social policy options available to us.

Well and good. But the downside to this approach is its potential for racial polarization and antagonism. Richard America is, I believe, wildly optimistic about the reception his proposal would receive, and about the debate that it would generate. My own guess is that it would only create fierce hostility, not only from many whites, but also from many racially defined minorities (Latinos, Asians), and even from a fair number of blacks, for it tends to assume that no mobility, no initiative, no self-empowerment can occur in the black community without a massive infusion of white aid. It is the ultimate in victimology.

An Alternative

As an alternative, we should give up talk of reparations and try to recognize that substantial sympathy for the idea of equality does exist in the United States. This sympathy is at present rather abstract and still fissured by racism. It has also been damaged by the right-wing resurgence which, since 1980, has fought (successfully) to withdraw funding from social programs, from the cities, from what remains of the welfare state. In such a situation, the task is to forge interracial coalitions whose aim is redistribution. In particular, we should argue that the crisis of the chocolate cities now implacably affects the quality of life in the vanilla suburbs. High unemployment holds wages down; crime and endless spending to contain it force other types of social spending down; hence education, infrastructure (jobs again!), health care, and

even entitlements are threatened, neglected, or ignored.

We should push for the kind of program envisioned by various organizations and analysts (Congressional Black Caucus, Urban League, etc.) as a "Marshall Plan for the Cities" [see item, p. 14]. Such a plan could potentially appeal to blacks and other racially defined minorities, as well as to whites (lots of whom still live in cities). It could garner union support, and could attract many corporate interests that are still deeply rooted in urban settings. Education, transportation, health care, housing, and job creation can all be related simultaneously to the need to address racial inequality and the need to rebuild U.S. society so that Galbraith's 1958 label "public squalor amid private opulence" would no longer apply. Such an initiative would obviously be ambitious—we would have to join Henry Gonzalez in his effort to democratize the Federal Reserve Bank, just to name one small problem—but it would, I suggest, define a practical political project that was imaginable and unifying. It would avoid the antagonisms and defeatism inherent in the demand for reparations.

Howard Winant is professor of sociology at Temple University and author of Racial Condition: Politics, Theory, Comparisons (Univ. Minn. Press, 1994) and (with Michael Omi) Racial Formation in the US: From the 1960s to 1990s (Routledge, 1994). □

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