

Ten Reasons Why Reparations for Slavery is a Bad Idea — and Racist Too.

By David Horowitz

I THERE IS NO SINGLE GROUP RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CRIME OF SLAVERY.

While white Europeans conducted the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Arabs and black Africans were responsible for enslaving the ancestors of African Americans. There were 3,000 black slave-owners in the ante-bellum United States. Are reparations to be paid by *their* descendants too? There were white slaves in colonial America. Are their descendants going to receive payments?

II THERE IS NO SINGLE GROUP THAT BENEFITED EXCLUSIVELY FROM SLAVERY.

The claim for reparations is premised on the false assumption that only whites have benefited from slavery. If slave labor has created wealth for Americans, then obviously it has created wealth for black Americans as well, including the descendants of slaves. The GNP of black America makes the African-American community the 10th most prosperous "nation" in the world. American blacks *on average* enjoy per capita incomes in the range of twenty to fifty *times* that of blacks living in any of the African nations from which they were kidnapped.

III ONLY A MINORITY OF WHITE AMERICANS OWNED SLAVES, WHILE OTHERS GAVE THEIR LIVES TO FREE THEM.

Only a tiny minority of Americans ever owned slaves. This is true even for those who lived in the ante-bellum South where only one white in five was a slaveholder. Why should *their* descendants owe a debt? What about the descendants of the 350,000 Union soldiers who died to free the slaves? They gave their lives. What morality would ask their descendants to pay again? If paying reparations on the basis of skin color is not racism, *what is?*

IV MOST LIVING AMERICANS HAVE NO CONNECTION (DIRECT OR INDIRECT) TO SLAVERY.

The two great waves of American immigration occurred after 1880 and then after 1960. What logic would require Vietnamese boat people, Russian refuseniks, Iranian refugees, Armenian victims of the Turkish persecution, Jews, Mexicans, Greeks, or Polish, Hungarian, Cambodian and Korean victims of Communism, to pay reparations to American blacks?

V THE HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS USED TO JUSTIFY THE REPARATIONS CLAIM DO NOT APPLY, AND THE CLAIM ITSELF IS BASED ON RACE NOT INJURY.

The historical precedents generally invoked to justify the reparations claim are payments to Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, Japanese-Americans and African-American victims of racial experiments in Tuskegee, or racial outrages in Rosewood and Oklahoma City. But in each case, the recipients of reparations were the direct victims of the injustice or their immediate families. This would be the only case of reparations to people who were not immediately affected and whose sole qualification to receive reparations would be racial. During the slavery era, many blacks were free men or slave-owners themselves, yet the reparations claimants make no attempt to take this fact into account. If this is not racism, what is?

VI THE REPARATIONS ARGUMENT IS BASED ON THE UNSUBSTANTIATED CLAIM THAT ALL AFRICAN AMERICANS SUFFER FROM THE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF SLAVERY AND DISCRIMINATION.

No scientific attempt has been made to prove that living individuals have been adversely affected by a slave system that was ended nearly 150 years ago. But there is plenty of evidence that the hardships of slavery were hardships that individuals could and did overcome. The black middle-class in America is a prosperous community that is now larger in absolute terms than the black underclass. Its existence suggests that present economic adversity is the result of failures of individual character rather than the lingering after-effects of racial discrimination or a slave system that ceased to exist well over a century ago. West Indian blacks in America are also descended from slaves but their average incomes are equivalent to the average incomes of whites (and nearly 25% higher than the average incomes of American-born blacks). How is it that slavery adversely affected one large group of descendants but not the other? How can government be expected to decide an issue that is so subjective?

VII THE REPARATIONS CLAIM IS ONE MORE ATTEMPT TO TURN AFRICAN AMERICANS INTO VICTIMS. IT SENDS A DAMAGING MESSAGE TO THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY AND TO OTHERS.

The renewed sense of grievance—which is what the claim for reparations will inevitably create—is not a constructive or helpful message for black leaders to send to their communities and to others. To focus the social passions of African Americans on what some other Americans may have done to their ancestors fifty or a hundred-and-fifty years ago is to burden them with a crippling sense of victim-hood. How are the millions of non-black refugees from tyranny and genocide who are now living in America going to receive these claims, moreover, except as demands for special treatment—an extravagant new handout that is only necessary because some blacks can't seem to locate the ladder of opportunity within reach of others, many of whom are less privileged than themselves?

VIII REPARATIONS TO AFRICAN AMERICANS HAVE ALREADY BEEN PAID.

Since the passage of the Civil Rights Acts and the advent of the Great Society in 1965, trillions of dollars in transfer payments have been made to African-Americans in the form of welfare benefits and racial preferences (in contracts, job placements and educational admissions)—all under the rationale of redressing historic racial grievances. It is said that reparations are necessary to achieve a healing between African Americans and other Americans. If trillion-dollar restitutions and a wholesale rewriting of American law (in order to accommodate racial preferences) is not enough to achieve a "healing," *what is?*

IX WHAT ABOUT THE DEBT BLACKS OWE TO AMERICA?

Slavery existed for thousands of years before the Atlantic slave trade, and in all societies. But in the thousand years of slavery's existence, there never was an anti-slavery movement until white Anglo-Saxon Christians created one. If not for the anti-slavery beliefs and military power of white Englishmen and Americans, the slave trade would not have been brought to an end. If not for the sacrifices of white soldiers and a white American president who gave his life to sign the Emancipation Proclamation, blacks in America would *still* be slaves. If not for the dedication of Americans of all ethnicities and colors to a society based on the principle that all men are created equal, blacks in America would not enjoy the highest standard of living of blacks anywhere in the world, and indeed one of the highest standards of living of any people in the world. They would not enjoy the greatest freedoms and the most thoroughly protected individual rights anywhere. Where is the acknowledgment of black America and its leaders for *those* gifts?

X THE REPARATIONS CLAIM IS A SEPARATIST IDEA THAT SETS AFRICAN-AMERICANS AGAINST THE NATION THAT GAVE THEM FREEDOM.

Blacks were here before the Mayflower. Who is more American than the descendants of African slaves? For the African-American community to isolate itself from America is to embark on a course whose implications are troubling. Yet the African-American community has had a long-running flirtation with separatists, nationalists and the political left, who want African-Americans to be no part of America's social contract. African Americans should reject this temptation.

For all America's faults, African Americans have an enormous stake in this country and its heritage. It is this heritage that is really under attack by the reparations movement. The reparations claim is one more assault on America, conducted by racial separatists and the political left. It is an attack not only on white Americans, but on all Americans—especially African Americans.

America's African-American citizens are the richest and most privileged black people alive, a bounty that is a direct result of the heritage that is under assault. The American idea needs the support of its African-American citizens. But African Americans also need the support of the American idea. For it is the American idea that led to the principles and created the institutions that have set African Americans—and all of us—free.

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