

REPARATIONS

presented by Anne Ferber

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America's creation, the Constitution, a means for structuring a new country, was an experiment. We know it was an experiment because, as we have heard so often, especially lately, Benjamin Franklin, when asked "What have you given us?" stated ; **"A Republic, if you can keep it."**

The document was flawed, and written in such a way that interpretation of its clauses and articles has been in question to this day.

One of the greatest blemishes of this American Constitution was the inequality embedded in the original First Article regarding State representation and taxes based on numbers of Free people and "other" people. Full count for Free (white) people and 3/5 count for the "others". Who were these "others" who were each counted as 3/5 of a person? Africans ensnared and captured; brought to this place in chains to work the land and serve white folks, owned as property, bought and sold like animals or a piece of furniture, without the slightest concern for their own sense of culture, well being and agency.

America has become the greatest, powerful nation over the last two hundred forty years, built on the backs of these "others". And now, there is much conversation within the government and among U.S. citizens, recognizing the debt that is owed to African Americans and the role they have played in American history. Of all ethnicities, cultures, and sub-populations in this land, none have been so disregarded, insulted, humiliated, taken for granted, even murdered, as the African American population. **What, as a society, do we owe each other?** What especially do we owe our Black brethren? Reparations for years of unpaid work and misguided treatment as a race, has been brought up to Congress over the years, but with no serious thought to implementation. Apologies have been offered by states and institutions, but no material payback. Small gestures, like Georgetown University raising tuition to provide scholarships for descendents of slaves has been implemented. The greatest missed opportunity in American history was the recanting of Gen. Sherman's offer of 40 Acres and a Mule to black freemen after the Civil War. Think of what a different society we might have today, if that promise was kept.

There is now **H.R. 40—Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-American Act**, a serious proposal to study the concerns of those who do believe that some kind of reparation program is in order. There have been hearings in Congress recently and much public conversation about what we owe African Americans whose forbears have built this country and have never been officially acknowledged and remunerated. We have appropriated their music, their dance, their style, their fashion, even their morality. So it's time to recognize and make amends. In the current political climate, it seems most policy questions on race are fraught with emotion, and thus we are going to respect all points of view and arguments rationally presented.

The readings referenced below begin with a Wikipedia summary of the history of reparations debate throughout the years.

You may have your own favorite arguments over just how this could be accomplished, or if it is even feasible. Presented are: Ta-Nehisi Coates, who wrote [A Case for Reparations](#) in the Atlantic Magazine 2014. He tells the story of how the African American community has been short-changed by the government over the decades, ensuring that they are unable to partake in wealth accumulation or

advantage. Also in the Atlantic is David Frum's argument on the [Impossibility of Reparations](#). Coleman Hughes, holds a more conservative point of view, and questions Coates directly. Other articles present moral arguments (Nikole Hannah Jones) and possible scenarios as guidelines in 2019. (Patricia Cohen). Any other articles you would like to share would be welcome.

Also, there are YouTube videos of Ta-Nehisi Coates and Colman Hughes and others presenting their arguments before the Congressional Committee on HR 40.

Questions to consider:

What would be the purpose of reparations?

Reparations have been compared to the Truth and Reconciliation Hearings in South Africa. Is that a viable solution for the America?

If reparations are paid to victims, what about African Americans who do not see themselves as victims?

How do we convince African Americans of a desire to make reparations with the current political climate, especially between black youth, police and our system of incarceration?

Do reparations present an opportunity for closure?

Is affirmative action a form of reparations?

What are the possible unintended consequences of reparations?

Who should take responsibility for reparations?

What makes a cohesive society?

The following articles will provide plenty of information to participate in the Topical Seminar on Reparations March 20, 2020.

Nikole Hannah Jones: American wasn't a democracy until Black Americans made it one
<https://nyti.ms/2Phz92T>

Wikipedia on Reparations Debate;
https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reparations_for_slavery_debate_in_the_United_States

Ta-Nehisi Coates
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

NYTimes: What Reparations for Slavery Might Look Like in 2019
What Reparations for Slavery Might Look Like in 2019 <https://nyti.ms/2ErI7VP>

Coleman Hughes

<https://quillette.com/2019/03/17/reparations-and-ta-nehisi-coates-pyrrhic-victory/>

David Frum

<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/06/the-impossibility-of-reparations/372041/>

Reparations were tried before. This is how it went

<https://nyti.ms/2XYtrW4>

Youtube Coates & Hughes @ HR40 hearings, 24 minute VIDEO:

<https://youtu.be/F5AQyWAWHU4>

Attachments area

[Preview YouTube video Coleman Hughes VS Ta-Nehisi Coates](#)



If you are unable to access any of these articles because of a paywall, there is plenty of information offered on wikipedia (see reference section of above) to inspire conversation.