Reparations

In 2001, Durban, South Africa, was host to the United Nations World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. At that conference, the United Nations declared that the transatlantic slave trade and slavery were crimes against humanity. Whenever there is a crime against any one or any group of people, those people have the right to ask for reparations. The word “reparations” means repair; amends for a wrong that was done; atonement.

The issue of reparations for the transatlantic slave trade and slavery is necessarily an international one that heavily involves the United States of America, various European nations, South and Central America, and the islands of the Caribbean. For example, African Americans seeking reparations for the era of enslavement cannot cleanly separate their struggle from that African people in the Caribbean. For more than 140 years, slavery in Colonial America was legalized and regulated by the British government. The British were also governing slavery on the Caribbean islands of Barbados, Jamaica, and St. Kitts, among others. In fact, the first enslaved African brought to colonial America came not from Africa but from the Caribbean. This example illustrates the complex international nature of reparations.

Dr. Conrad Worrill, national chairman emeritus of the National Black United Front (NBUF) and director/professor at the Carruthers Center for Inner City Studies, served as an oral historian for this lesson. He explained that reparations indeed has two essential components: internal reparations and external reparations. Below are examples of both:

- **Internal reparations** are all actions taken by victims of the system of slavery and their descendants to grant themselves in any way a greater sense of humanity than that which was/is offered to them by an unjust system. For example, Thomas Conway, the director of the Bureau of Free Labor in the Gulf States during the Civil War, thought that five or ten thousand orphans would be thrown upon the hands of the government at the end of the war. Conway noted that caring for so many children would be an overwhelming expense. At war’s end, however, he was very surprised to find African American families, though themselves not wealthy, gladly taking in the orphaned children of their friends and neighbors. Those families were enacting internal reparations. Similarly, in today’s context, whenever African Americans organize community action groups
to address issues such as community cleanup, urban farming, or healthy
breakfast clubs for children, they are also practicing internal reparations.

- **External reparations** are redress that people seek from governments or
corporations through processes that range from armed struggle to filing lawsuits
against corporations and governments that profited from the enslavement of
African people. See appendix for a timeline of the external struggle for
reparations in the United States of America.

The transatlantic slave trade and slavery are broad headings that contain several
elements that can all be classified as “crimes against humanity.” The list below explores
the specific losses or pain and sufferings that African people sustained and for which
they are seeking reparations.

- The European acquisition of enslaved Africans, which is incorrectly called a
“trade,” was based on an extreme amount of manipulation and deception of the
part of European slave traders. Exotic European goods (brocades and silks),
guns, and the addictive substance alcohol were used to initiate trade
relationships between African kingdoms and Europeans. Once those
relationships were firmly in place, European traders manipulated long-held
rivalries between ethnic groups by arming one side of the conflict. The opposing
side would then rush to get guns for their own protection. European traders
would demand enslaved persons as payment for those guns. Historian Candice
Goucher and colleagues document that during the 1700s as many as 60,000
guns were imported into the Congo kingdom in exchange for 30,000 enslaved
persons!

One of the clearest examples of how alcohol facilitated this “trade” is revealed in
an anecdote shared by Professor Craig Wilder. He tells how Reverend Ezra
Stiles, one of the future presidents of Yale University, put a hogshead (container)
of alcohol on a slave ship leaving Rhode Island with instructions that the alcohol
should be traded for a black child from the Guinea Coast. Reverend Stiles’s
command reflects his confidence that surely there would be someone in Guinea
who was so blinded by alcohol addiction that he or she would be willing to do the
unthinkable. Furthermore, the deceptive trade with Europeans weakened or
altogether eliminated the centuries-old trade routes that existed between African
kingdoms. All of the inter-African trade was diverted toward the coast, profoundly
destabilizing West and Central African economies and making them dependent
upon Europe. Calling the slave “trade” a trade has for generations misled and
desensitized African Americans and others to the plight of Africa and Africans
during this era. The word “trade” suggests that honest and straightforward
agreements were made. The word itself is deceptive and hides what Professor
Hunter Adams calls “the greatest criminal labor extraction scheme in
history.” For this, we seek reparations.
An estimated 42 million African people were captured and enslaved between the years of 1441 and 1888. Of that number, 40 percent died on the long march to the coast or in the hulls of slave ships, committed suicide, or were murdered. For the African continent, losing that number of people also meant the loss of the skills necessary to run a nation and led to “developmental lags” and “technological stagnation” that would last for generations. For this, we seek reparations.

The reduction of African people to property, particularly within the United States, where they were legally classified as three-fifths of a human being, has had devastating effects on Africans from that era and on their living descendants today. Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence and the third president of the United States, was one of the first prominent figures of his day to assert that he suspected the Negro was inferior in body and mind to Europeans. When he called upon scientists to look into this matter, Samuel Morton carried out extensive skull measuring experiments he claimed confirmed the Negro’s inferiority. Morton’s prodigies Josiah Nott and Louis Agassiz of Harvard University would write an exhaustive seven-hundred-page book entitled *Types of Mankind*. The book detailed the ways in which blacks and whites were of differing species. Medical doctors diagnosed African people who resisted such categorizations and ran away from abusive slave masters as having *draptomania*, a disease that causes Negroes to run away. When African people rebelled and fought their captors, they were described with the medical label of *dysthesia aethiopica*, a mental disorder particular to Africans. These events gave birth to racism that was taught by intellectual authorities and confirmed by the government, and that has been responsible for the destruction of millions of lives. For this we seek reparations.

Unspeakable acts of terror and torture were unleashed on African people in the Americas. These include beatings and whippings; lynchings; burnings; brandings; cuttings and mutilations; and raping of women, children, and men. Historian Thomas Fosters finds that during the slave era African men were sexually abused repeatedly by European men and women. Those who resisted the advances of their holders were further subjected to tortures such as locked iron masks that prevented them from speaking or eating. In addition, “[o]ne of the cruellest, though rare, forms of torture consisted of placing the slave into a large barrel or cask. Nails were driven into the barrel from the outside so their tips protruded on the inside of the barrel. The barrel was then rolled down hill with the [en]slaved inside.” For these and other atrocities, we seek reparations.

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The destruction of African families was an everyday part of the slave era in the Western hemisphere. This includes forcibly removing millions of people from their land, language, and culture in Africa; separating people of the same language groups on slave ships; dividing parents from their children; dividing spouses from each other; denying the African man the right to defend his wife and children from abuses; and denying African people the right to publicly practice the worldview and religion that had sustained them for thousands of years. For this we seek reparations.

One of the most pernicious actions of the American government during the slavery era was to allow states to legalize severe whipping and torturing of African people who attempted to maintain their African name, speak an African language, play the African drums, practice African religious rites, or even meet in private to console one another. These actions were taken to relieve the fears of insurrection in slaveholding families and to destabilize the African family so that servanthood would be accepted by them as a natural state. The forceful and violent removal of culture from African people disoriented that population in an intergenerational manner. Furthermore, keeping African people illiterate left them with no way to refute the negative images and information propagated about them by the slaveholding class. Consequently, those in control of the information systems of America were able to introduce African people to the American population as a people who were generally unsophisticated, a people who were prone to violence, a people who lacked a strong moral or intellectual core, and as a childlike people who were in need of Europeans to govern their affairs. For these deliberate historical distortions and savage acts of collective memory erasing, we seek reparations.

The goal of reparations is not to enrich a population of people. Reparations are a token given in effort to repair damage done to another’s humanity. It is an admission that illegal and criminal acts were committed and that people endured pain and suffering because of those actions. Reparations are significant because they warn all future perpetuators of crimes against humanity that such behavior will not be tolerated in a civilized world. Reparations would also help redress some of the persistent inequalities produced by the institution of slavery even 150 years after its official end.

**Activity One — Interdisciplinary**

March 6 has been declared National Reparations Day by the Compton-based National Reparations Day Committee. This day was chosen because it commemorates the Supreme Court decision in *Dred Scott vs. Stanford*. Students should begin planning at the beginning of the year for how Reparations Day will be commemorated by their school. Below are some interdisciplinary ideas.

- Have students research, read and write about the significance of the Dred Scott decision.
• Students should plan to hold an in-school Reparations Rally on March 6 or as close to that day as possible. Students should use this forum to inform all students about why reparations are necessary.

• Several Caribbean nations forming a group called Caricom are now also asking European nations for reparations. Students should research the reparations efforts of Caricom. Then they should total the population of African people in the participating Caribbean nations. Using bar graphs and maps, students should show the number of people for which reparations are being sought and in what nations.

Activity Two — Civic

H.R. 40 is a bill introduced into Congress by Representative John Conyers Jr. in 1999. The bill calls for a committee to study the effects of slavery and discrimination in the thirteen colonies and the United States from 1619 to present. That committee is responsible for making a recommendation to Congress for appropriate remedies for slavery and discrimination.

• Students should read and discuss for full understanding the meaning of H.R. 40. Background information can be found at http://conyers.house.gov/index.cfm/reparations.

• Students should initiate a telephone campaign or a letter-writing campaign (or both) to get their representative in Congress to push for the passage of H.R. 40. Some students can create a phone tree of all of the congresspersons in Illinois, others can secure a location where phones and computers can be used for the campaign, and others can organize the letter that will be sent out or the statement that will be read over the phone. Finally, all students can be involved in getting the community to support their campaign.
**Additional Resources**

**For Teachers**


Singer, Alan. “Wall Street Was a Slave Market before It Was a Financial Center.” Downloaded from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alan-singer/wall-street-was-a-slave-market_b_1208536.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alan-singer/wall-street-was-a-slave-market_b_1208536.html) on April 15, 2014.


*Slavery and the Making of America* (DVD set)

*500 Years Later* (film), directed by Owen Alik Shahadah

**For Students**


*Slavery and the Making of America* (DVD set)
Chronology of the Reparations Movement of Africans in America  
by Dr. Conrad Worrill  

***This interactive timeline documents how the struggle for reparations began and how it continues today.***

Stage I: Repatriation and Reparations  
1 Jan 1800–1 Jan 1870  
Revolutions and revolts give hope to a people that have been enslaved for hundreds of years.
- 1804: Toussaint L’Ouverture leads the Haitian Revolution.
- 1800–1831: Slave revolts (led by Nat Turner, Denmark Vessey, and Gabriel Prosser) begin to occur in America.
- 1865: General Sherman issues Special Field Order #15, which gives 40 acres of captured land from South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida to 40,000 former slaves. The order is later overturned by President Andrew Johnson, who orders the land returned to Confederate landholders.

Stage II: The National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief Bounty and Pension Association  
1 Jan 1870–1 Jan 1915  
A former slave, Mrs. Callie House, forms an organization that begins the daunting task of demanding payments for slaves’ work.
- 1894: The National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief and Bounty and Pension Association is formed by a former slave, Callie House. This organization challenged the United States of America to pay pensions to former slaves.

Stage III: Repatriation/Reparations: UNIA, Marcus Garvey’s Demand for Land of German Colonies  
1 Jan 1915–1 Jan 1940  
Marcus Mosiah Garvey starts a movement for repatriation to Africa.
- August 1914: The Universal Negro Improvement Association is formed.
- Marcus Garvey demands the land of German colonies in Africa.

Stage IV: Reemergence of Grassroots Organizing around the Demand for Reparations  
1 Jan 1955–1 Jan 1988  
The demands for reparations begin to pick up some steam when other organizations get involved.
- The Nation of Islam demands reparations.
- Queen Mother Moore forms the Reparations Committee of the United States Slaves, Inc., with Dara Abubakari. In 1962 they deliver a communiqué to the United Nations demanding that the US government be forced to pay reparations.
• 1966–1968: Reparations issues emerged in Black Conference discussions; the RNA formally demands reparations.
• 1969: James Forman, former executive director of SNCC, issues the Black Manifesto.
• 1972: In March, the National Black Political Convention Reparations Resolution is adopted by 10,000 people in Gary, Indiana.
• May 1972: African Liberation Day is attended by 60,000 people in Washington, DC.

Stage V: Demands for Reparations Are Elevated under N’COBRA
1 Jan 1988–1 Jan 2000
N’COBRA organizes, and the government starts to finally take notice of the reparations movement.
• 1987: N’Cobra is founded for the sole purpose of obtaining reparations for African descendants in the United States.
• 1989: The John Conyers Study Bill (HR-40) is introduced in Congress.
• 1995: Victims of the Rosewood Massacre in Florida receive a reparations settlement. Also, the California courts rule against a reparations lawsuit (known as the Cato decision).
• 1999: The Tulsa Race Riot Commission is formed.
• 2000: Legal expert Deadria Farmer-Paellmann investigates corporate entities with ties to slavery. She secures an apology from Aetna, Inc., a major insurance company.

Stage VI: United Nations World Conference against Racism, Pan-African Unity
The United Nations finally speak out against the horrors of racism and slavery.
• August–September 2001: The United Nations World Conference against Racism takes place in Durban, South Africa.
• The United Nations declares that slavery and colonialism are a crime against humanity.
• 11 Sept 2001: During a press conference to announce the declaration, the World Trade Center terrorist attack occurs. This effectively shuts down the reparations movement.
• 2002–2003: Lawsuits demanding reparations are filed.
• 2005: All lawsuits demanding reparations are thrown out due to the statute of limitations.
Today: The struggle for reparations continues . . .

To see the interactive website online, please go the following link: http://www.tiki-toki.com/timeline/entry/257213/Chronology-of-the-Reparations-Movement-of-Africans-in-America/#vars!date=1838-10-20_17:54:24!
## Lesson Plan

### Reparations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level(s)</th>
<th>11–12</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit and Time Frame</strong></td>
<td>Three 60-minute periods</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Common Core State Standards</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- CCSS. ELA-Literacy. CCRA. R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- CCSS. ELA-Literacy. CCRA. R.7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively as well as in words.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- CCSS. ELA-Literacy. CCRA. W.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- CCSS. Math Practice. MP.1: Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lesson Goals</strong></td>
<td>After completing this lesson, students should demonstrate a greater understanding of reparations by doing the following:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Demonstrate knowledge of the complex social, economic, political, and environmental factors that create and perpetuate precariousness.</td>
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<td>- Analyze the ways that processes of inequality and differences in access and power are shaped by complex interactions of local and international dynamics.</td>
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<td>- Recognize how meanings of justice and reconciliation are mediated by identity, historical experience, and future imaginaries.</td>
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<td>- Identify some of the economic and social advantages of being involved with the slave trade.</td>
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<td>- Research the American corporations and institutions that directly or indirectly trace their wealth to the slave trade era.</td>
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<td>- Research the current status of the reparations movement.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Materials/Resources</strong></td>
<td><strong>For Teachers:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- computer</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- smart board/projector</td>
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<tr>
<td>- handouts (attached to lesson plan)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- videos (Traces of the Trade)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- <strong>For Students:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- pen/pencil</td>
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<tr>
<td>- paper</td>
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</table>
### Key Terms and Concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ivy League schools</strong></td>
<td>A group of long-established colleges in the eastern United States having high academic and social prestige.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>emissary</strong> (-ies)</td>
<td>A person sent on a special mission, usually as a diplomatic representative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>endow</strong></td>
<td>To give or bequeath an income or property (to a person or institution).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>indigenous</strong></td>
<td>Originating or occurring naturally in a particular place; native.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>commodity</strong></td>
<td>Something that is bought and sold; something or someone that is useful or valued.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>textile</strong></td>
<td>Any cloth or goods produced by weaving, knitting, or felting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>capitalism</strong></td>
<td>An economic system in which trade, industry and the means of production are controlled by private owners with the goal of making profits in a market economy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>repatriation</strong></td>
<td>The process of returning a person to his or her place of origin or citizenship.</td>
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### Interdisciplinary Connections

- **Geography/History:** Have the students research different ethnic groups and what they receive as reparations and compare/contrast with African Americans.
- **Writing:** Students can write a letter to their local congressman/senator asking for the passage of the bill H.R. 40 (Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act).
- **Math:** Students can use their research to calculate how much the descendants of a slave be should compensated monetarily. They can also research companies that can trace their wealth to the slave era and try to estimate how much money they made from the slave trade.

### 1. Opening

Teacher can use a PowerPoint presentation showing the companies and Ivy League colleges that have benefited from slavery and ask the students: “What do all of these companies and institutions have in common?” Get some responses from the students, then let them know that all of these companies/institutions have directly benefited from slavery.

### 2. Introduction to New Material

Have the students discuss what happens to them when they do something wrong or when someone does something wrong to them. They can talk about how they apologize and whether they have to compensate for the wrong that they committed. Let them discuss whether that is the right way to handle an issue. Teacher can then segue into the concept of reparations.
KEY CONCEPTS:
- Americans made huge amounts of money from the transatlantic slave trade.
- Many of the financial advantages gained from slavery are still evident in America’s social classes and economy today.

3. Discussion:
- Have the students debate whether the descendants of slave should receive reparations. Also, they should discuss what type of reparations would be appropriate and how much they should be disbursed (ex. free education, land, money, or a combination of those items).
- Students can research and discuss the effects of slavery on African Americans today.

4. Critical Reflection Activity: Students can conduct research on their own. Have them interview three to five people to see if they are in favor of reparations. They can come back to class to discuss their findings, or compile their research into a paper.

5. Closing: Have the students do an exit slip or the 3-2-1 activity. (After the lesson, have each student record three things he or she learned from the lesson. Next, have the students record two things that they found interesting and that they’d like to learn more about. Then have students record one question they still have about the material.)

Assessments
| Observation, critical reflection activity, class discussion/participation, writing, geography, and math activities |

Extensions (Homework, Projects)
| Observation, critical reflection activity, class discussion/participation, writing, geography, and math activities |