

## **REPARATIONS AND RESTITUTION**

### ***Broadening the Discussion, Self Transformation And Compensation***

*By Wautella ibn Yusuf*

How do we, the victims of human history's most diabolic tragedy, shape the discussion about Black Reparations and Restitution in a way that captures the hearts and minds of African peoples at home and abroad? First and foremost there must be an understanding and acceptance that our demand for Reparations is a sacred and moral issue, and the African Holocaust of Enslavement was a crime against Africans, humanity and God. Many sacred texts teach us that the human person is sacred, therefore to injure or murder one human being is a violation of the sacred. We should not forget, nor should we let others forget that ten to one hundred million innocent souls were tortured and destroyed during the Trans-Atlantic enslavement of Africans. Our quest to gain Reparations must be viewed as a duty, placed upon us by the Creator, our Ancestors, our children and ourselves, to repair, heal and restore our People (minds, culture, history, families, communities, nationhood, etc.).

Our approach to the issue of "Reparations" should never be viewed as something "White folks" must "do" for us, or "approve" for us. Rather, it is our demand for justice, and what is rightfully ours, and a necessary step to acquire the resources necessary to heal, repair and restore us as a people. Ultimately Reparations is a process that only "Black folks" can and must do for ourselves. Only we can address the spiritual and psychological effects of 300 years of slavery, 100 years of lynching and segregation, and more than 35 years of racism and discrimination that is clearly evident in our families and communities.

As activists and liberation theorists speaking on behalf of our people's needs, we must struggle to use language and a system of logic that enables us to reach all our people in a manner that encourages their involvement in the healing and repair process whether they acknowledge it or not. If we can help our people to see that the crimes that we've suffered and the duration of those crimes are unlike any experiences of other peoples, then they will understand our approach to the issue of Reparations must also be different from those of other peoples. The way that "reparations" is understood in national and international law does not and cannot carry the same weight for us. Malcolm X. taught us that the language and logic of the oppressor cannot be the language and logic of the oppressed. Lawyers, politicians, and international representatives may feel obligated to use the definitions that are commonly accepted in the arenas in which they fight, but the Reparations activists must never be confined to those narrow parameters. It is our job to name and define our reality and cause others to accept our definitions. This is an expression of power and self-determination.

The Reparations Movement has the potential to address all our problems, if we define it as a movement to develop and liberate African people, rather than a quest to receive a paycheck. Today the issue of restitution (compensation) raises the most questions for African descendants and European descendants (the perpetrators). However, considering the scope of the damages, perhaps the issue of reparations should receive more of our attention rather than restitution at this time. African People must first clearly define the injury, and then understand and accept that there is a need for healing, repairing and restoring our people before getting bogged down in discussions about who should pay (individuals, companies, churches, or governments); what we want (money, land, healthcare, education, political power, repatriation, etc); how much and how long various forms of compensation should be provided; who should receive it (individuals, organizations or governments acting in our behalf), and how the compensation should be used. This is required for at least two reasons: a) we can't change (repair) our

condition if we don't understand the cause (injury) and b) if our people don't fully comprehend the full extent of the injuries they can be tricked into settling for token reparations.

### SEVEN BENEFITS OF THE STRUGGLE FOR REPARATIONS

1. It creates a path for self, family and community development and liberation, i.e. self-determination;
2. It provides a cause strong enough to unite Black People across socio-economic, and education barriers;
3. It provides an opportunity to educate the victim (the oppressed) and expose the perpetrator/oppressor's role in the Holocaust and their responsibility in creating our past and current social, political and economic conditions;
4. It will result in massive restitution/compensation for Black People locally, nationally and internationally. Restitution will only assist in our recovery and building process. Ultimately, it is our collective responsibility to achieve social, economic, and cultural parity and liberation;
5. It recognizes and assists with restoring the dignity of over 100 million Africans lost and sacrificed during the Holocaust of Enslavement, and over one hundred years of lynching and Jim Crow that followed;
6. It positively engages and transforms our youth (especially students), who are vital to our struggles for freedom and justice.
7. It increases dialog amongst African peoples locally, nationally and internationally, enabling a thorough examination of our collective oppression (and mistakes), and exposure of our oppressors' global criminal behavior, to the world.

Every Black person is a potential member of the growing International African Reparations Movement. We must create and sustain a mass Reparations Movement that enable the worldwide struggles of African peoples to be linked in ways not witnessed since the era of the Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association.

### STRATEGIES FOR WINNING REPARATIONS

1. **Grassroots and Popular Support Front:** *Methods* – creating and distributing brochures, flyers, and books; public forums e.g. town hall meetings, conference and conventions; accessing popular media with our message; marches, demonstrations and boycotts. *Rationale* – Winning the hearts and minds of the people is most important and makes the other three fronts possible. There is cross-fertilization between all four, but educating the people to support the movement is the corner stone of the movement.
2. **Legislative Front:** *Methods* – lobbying and passing Reparations proclamations, resolutions, bills and laws on all levels (organizations, city, county, state, US Congress, etc.). *Rationale* – legislative actions elevate the discussion and create a national dialog that educates African descendants (and others) about their injury and rights to redress, and broadens the discussion and support base. When all is said and done, it will be the US Government (US Congress) and other European governments that will pass laws to support an equitable Reparation remedy.

3. **Litigation Front: *Methods*** – filing Reparations lawsuits of all types for the African Holocaust of Enslavement and its vestiges, e.g. filing against individuals, families, corporations, US and other governments, etc ***Rationale*** – lawsuits from the bottom up help to create the domino effect that leads to governments’ acknowledging their responsibility and liability for the Holocaust of Enslavement. Also testimonies during court hearings educate the public and build support. The injured party is strengthened by confronting the criminal face to face and forcing him to answer for the crime regardless of the outcome.
  
4. **International Front: *Methods*** – lobbying and petitioning international governing bodies (United Nations, World Court, African Union, etc.) for support and redress; keep the issue on the agenda of international conferences and conventions; create and sustain international boycotts for Reparations; and link up with other African and African descendants Reparations organizations and allies for support ( e.g. the International Front of Afrikans for Reparations [IFAR] formed during the Afrikan and Afrikan Descendants Conference in Barbados) ***Rationale*** – Reparations for Africans is a global issue for Africans and African descendants that must be pursued locally and internationally. During forum such as The World Conference Against Racism which declared the “Trans-Atlantic Slavery Trade” was a crime against humanity. In light of the U.S. dominance over countries around the world, African descendants in America are in a position to give voice and support to the International African Reparations Movement. Therefore African descendants residing in the U.S. must not betray our duty to our ancestors and people.

#### FOUR MAJOR STAGES OF WINNING REPARATIONS FOR AFRICAN DESCENDANTS IN AMERICA

- I. **Reparations Organization:** *Recruit and retain a committed, capable, well informed and disciplined core membership, i.e. N'COBRA and other community based organizations.*
- II. **Mass Black Support:** *If Reparations are due for slavery and present day injustices against Black People, Africans in America, and around the world should first recognize the injustices, the worthiness of our demand for Reparations, and be willing to give our support before expecting others to.*
- III. **Gain Significant National and Global Support:** *America is concerned with maintaining its false, noble international image; we should challenge it, e.g. Civil Rights Movement. We should create and sustain strategic alliances.*
- IV. **Win Reparations!:** *Through the application of massive internal and external pressure, followed by well-planned attacks using litigation, legislation, and international pressure, we will win Reparations.*

*Wautella ibn Yusuf is Co-Chair of Washington Metropolitan Chapter of the National Coalition Of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA); co-author of BLACK REPARATIONS: American Slavery & Its Vestiges; Co Chair of N'COBRA Information & Media Commission; Editor of N'COBRA news publication BLACK REPARATIONS TIMES; Webmaster of www.NCOBRA.org and moderator of “Reparations For Africans” N'COBRA listserv, the largest Reparations discussion group on the internet ([http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Reparations\\_For\\_Africans/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Reparations_For_Africans/)) NOTE: the National Coalition Of Blacks for Reparations in America [N'COBRA] is planning an international forum in Washington, DC in conjunction with its annual convention June 17th-20<sup>th</sup>, 2004 – more information at [www.NCOBRA.org](http://www.NCOBRA.org)).*

# BLACK REPARATIONS & RESTITUTION

In America

## CATEGORIES OF INVOLVEMENT CHART <sup>1</sup>

By Wautella ibn Yusuf

*The following is offered as ammunition against the arguments of those who attempt to shift the blame for the Holocaust of Enslavement to the Victims:*

Categories	Holocaust Period 1551 - 1865	Post Holocaust Period 1865 - present	Entitlement & Responsibility
<b>Victims</b>	Enslaved Africans: 10 to 100 million enslaved, murder, raped, robbed of their homeland, culture, language, family life, labor; endured dehumanizing enslavement for more than 300 years	Enslaved African descendants in the Diaspora: over 3000 lynched, jim crow-segregation, denied education, jobs, equal justice in court, access to housing healthcare, etc	<i>Entitlement:</i> full and complete Reparations and Restitution, i.e. equitable remedy for the injuries suffered in order to heal and repair ourselves
<b>Collaborators</b>	Some Africans amongst the victims, who betrayed and soldout their own people. All groups of people have sellouts and traitors. Africans had (and have) theirs also. Collaboration can be brought on by outside force and/or an immediate concern for one's own survival	Descendants of collaborating African families, ethnic groups & states that were in a position of power during era of enslavement; did not benefit from the enslavement of other Africans, as did Europeans as evidenced by the level of poverty in Africa today compared to the wealth of America and Europe	<i>Responsibility:</i> must amend for betraying their people. However this is a family problem that must be addressed internally by the African Family and not influenced by outsiders
<b>Perpetrators</b>	European enslavers, slave companies, slave ship builders, European governments, the Church, etc. Those who initiated, controlled, sustained and truly benefited from the Trans-Atlantic enslavement of Africans. Those who actually carried out the holocaust.	The enslavers' descendants: individuals, families, companies, US government, Church, etc Those who inherited the wealth and power derived from the holocaust, e.g. Aetna, FleetBoston, CSX, Thomas Jefferson Estate, George Washington Estate, etc	<i>Responsibility:</i> make complete amends and pay full compensation as determined by the victim's descendants. Change the social and economic structure to ensure permanent parity for all Black People.
<b>Beneficiaries</b>	Slavery investors, Europeans, colonial governments & their citizens that allowed and encouraged <i>perpetrators</i> with their tax money and votes.	All people living in the U.S. and benefiting from profits from the holocaust, whether they were born here or not- they access wealth and benefits.	<i>Responsibility:</i> acknowledge the Holocaust of African Enslavement, the benefits received and their obligation to support Restitution.

<sup>1</sup> Wautella, 2-21-02 - The first three (victim, collaborator and perpetrator) are raised by Dr. Maulana Karenga, "The Ethics of Reparations: Engaging the Holocaust of Enslavement"