

Does America Owe Reparations?

By Walter Williams

Johnny Cochran and a group of successful trial lawyers plan to bring class-action suits against the federal government and some private companies they say profited from slavery. Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., has already introduced HR 40, titled "Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act." HR 40 has 48 co-sponsors and a number of them, such as Jim Traficant, D-Mich., and Jerry Nadler, D-N.Y., are white. Slavery was a gross violation of human rights. Justice would demand that slave owners make compensatory reparation payments to slaves. Since both slaves and slave owners are no longer with us, compensation is beyond our reach.

Absent from the reparations debate is who pays? Don't say the government because the government doesn't have any money that it doesn't first take from some American. So which Americans owe black people what? Reparations advocates don't want that question asked, but let's you and I ask it.

Are the millions of Europeans, Asian and Latin Americans who immigrated to the U.S. in the 20th century responsible for slavery, and should they be forced to cough up reparations money? What about descendants of Northern whites who fought and died in the name of freeing slaves? Should they cough up reparations money for

◆ Black Reparations Times ◆									
Volume 1, Issue 1 March 7, 2003									
<p>On to Dallas Juneteenth 03</p> <p>Save the dates, 19-22 June 2003, Sisters and Brothers. N'COBRA's 14th Annual Convention is heading to the birthplace of Juneteenth—the state of Texas, and the city of Dallas.</p> <p>Relying on the past experiences of other chapters, our very active N'COBRA Dallas chapter, supported by leaders throughout the southwest region, are collectively working out details for this enormous undertaking. Official registration forms and calls for participation were sent out early in 2003. Contact our N'COBRA National Office or DallasNCOBRA@hotmail.com to offer your support and recommendations. <i>Asa</i>.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">REPARATIONS LOBBYISTS ON CAPITOL HILL!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">By Kibibi Tyeimba, Co-Chair, N'COBRA Legislative Commission</p> <p>On January 30, 2003, 250 members of the Philadelphia Reparations Coalition converged on the nation's capitol for the Kickoff of the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA) Year of Black Presence (AYBP) Lobbying initiative. This initiative, spearheaded by Philadelphia NCOBRA member and National AYBP Coordinator, Mr. Milton McGriff, will mobilize Reparations Advocates across the country to actively work toward the passage of Reparations Study Bill, H.R. 40.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">The January 30th kickoff event took place in Room 2237 of the Rayburn Building in the very room where the House Judiciary Committee will eventually determine whether H.R. 40 will be forwarded for</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Continued on page 5)</i></p>								
 <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Ms. Dorothy Lewis, N'COBRA National Co Chair & Congressman John Conyers</i></p>									
<p>N'COBRA'S LITIGATION WORK</p> <p style="text-align: center;">by Adjoa A. Aiyetoro, Chair, Legal Strategies Commission</p> <p>N'COBRA embarked upon a litigation strategy in 1997, when the Board of Directors approved the formation of the Reparations Litigation Committee. This committee is composed of reparations activists, social scientists and lawyers. Of course, some of the social scientists and lawyers are reparations activists. Many N'COBRA members have gotten dismayed because it is now 2003 and N'COBRA has not filed the lawsuit that people have been looking for: one that raises the demand for reparations for slavery and the vestiges of slavery for African descendants in the United States.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Continued on page 2)</i></p>									
<p>Black Reparations Times © 2003</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td><i>Anti-War and Pro-Reparations</i></td> <td style="text-align: right;">2</td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>National Reparations Weekend</i></td> <td style="text-align: right;">7</td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>N'COBRA National Five Year Strategic Plan</i></td> <td style="text-align: right;">16</td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Japanese Americans for Black Reparations</i></td> <td style="text-align: right;">17</td> </tr> </table>		<i>Anti-War and Pro-Reparations</i>	2	<i>National Reparations Weekend</i>	7	<i>N'COBRA National Five Year Strategic Plan</i>	16	<i>Japanese Americans for Black Reparations</i>	17
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black Americans? What about non-slave-owning Southern whites, who are a majority of Southern whites — should they be made to pay reparations?

On black people's side of the ledger, thorny issues also arise. Some blacks purchased other blacks as a means to free family members. But other blacks owned slaves for the same reason whites owned slaves — to work farms or plantations. Are descendants of these blacks eligible and deserving of reparations?

There is no way that Europeans could have captured millions of Africans. They had African and Arab help. Should Conyers haul representatives of Ghana, Ivory Coast, Nigeria and Muslim states before Congress and demand they pay reparations? By the way, is there anyone prepared to make the argument that blacks in America today would be better off if they were in Africa? If blacks wouldn't be better off, then why the reparations?

Reparations advocates make the foolish unchallenged pronouncement that United States became rich on the backs of free black labor. That's utter nonsense. Slavery doesn't have a very good record of producing wealth. Think about it. Slavery was all over the South and outlawed in most of the North. Buying into the reparations nonsense, the antebellum South was rich and the slave-starved North was poor. The truth is just the opposite. In fact, the poorest states and regions of our country were places where slavery flourished: Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia, while the richest states and regions were those where slavery was absent: Pennsylvania, New York and Massachusetts.

The reparations movement would be little more than an amusing side-show were it not for the damage it can do to blacks. It misallocates time and resources that could be more fruitfully spent elsewhere.

There's a growing black-owned and operated private school movement that addresses the fraudulent education of the public school system. Resources of the reparations movement could be used to add more private schools. High-powered reparations lawyers could use their legal skills to make court challenges of numerous state and local monopolistic regulations that stop people from getting into business, such as taxi licensing laws, cosmetology regulations, and restrictions on jitney and limousine operations.

I'd like to see lawyers bring class action suits against public school systems in cities like Philadelphia, Washington, Detroit and New York for producing fraudulent education — certifying youngsters as high school graduates when those youngsters can't perform at seventh- and eighth-grade levels.

There's a reparations issue completely ignored: Blacks as well as whites live on land taken, sometimes brutally, from Indians. Do we blacks owe Indians anything?