

REPARATIONS AND A NEW GLOBAL ORDER: A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

by Chinweizu

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A paper read at the second Plenary Session of the First Pan-African Conference on Reparations, Abuja, Nigeria, April 27, 1993.

Contemplating the condition of the Black World is vexatious to the spirit: that is probably the strongest feeling which has brought us all here today.

For many centuries, and especially in the last five, the black skin has been a badge of contempt. For instance, it used to be said in Brazil that if you are white and running down the street, you are an athlete; but if you are black and running down the street, you are a thief! And in most parts of the world today, if you are a poor white man, your doors fly open as you approach; but if you are black and rich, you are under suspicion, and hand cuffs and guard dogs stand ready to take you away.

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A PAPER PRESENTED

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PROFESSOR CHINWEIZU

We are gathered here today, thinkers and activists who want to change Black People's condition in the world. What things do we need to change, both in the world and in ourselves, if we are to accomplish the mission of reparations? What changes must we make in structures, in psychology, in historical consciousness and much else?

We might begin by noting that Blacks are not the only people in the world who are seeking, or who have sought, reparations. In fact, by only now pressing our claim for reparations, we are latecomers to a varied company of peoples in the Americas, in Asia, and in Europe. Here is a partial catalogue of reparations, paid and pending, which are 20th century precedents for reparations to the Black World.

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Yes, the black skin is still the badge of contempt in the world today, as it has been for nearly 2,000 years. To make sure it does not remain so in the 21st century is perhaps the overall purpose of our search for reparations.

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In the Americas, from Southern Chile to the Arctic north of Canada, reparations are being sought and being made. The Mapuche, an aboriginal people of Southern Chile, are pressing for the return of their lands, some 30 million hectares of which were, bit by bit, taken away and given to European immigrants since 1540. The Inuit of Arctic Canada, more commonly known as the Eskimo, were in 1992 offered restitution of some 850,000 sq. miles of their ancestral lands, their home range for millennia before European invaders arrived there.

In the USA, claims by the Sioux to the Black Lands of South Dakota are now in the courts. And the US Government is attempting to give some 400,000 acres of grazing land to the Navaho, and some other lands to the Hopi in the south-west of the USA.

In 1988, the US Government admitted wrongdoing in interning some 120,000 Japanese-Americans under Executive Order 9066 of 1942, during WWII, and awarded each internee \$20,000.

Earlier on, and further afield, under the Thompson-Urrutia Treaty of 1921, the USA paid Colombia reparations, including the sum of \$25 million, for excising the territory of Panama from Colombia for the purpose of building the Panama Canal.

In Asia, following WWII, Japan paid reparations, mostly to the Asian countries it had occupied. By May 1949, \$39 million had been paid from Japanese assets in Japan, and another unspecified amount had been paid from Japanese assets held outside Japan. And Japan was obliged to sign treaties of reparations with Burma (1954), the Philippines (1956), and Indonesia (1958). More recently, the Emperor of Japan has apologized to Korea for atrocities committed there by the Japanese, and North Korea is asking for \$5 billion in reparations for damages sustained during 35 years of Japanese colonization.

In Europe, after WWII, the victors demanded reparations from Germany for all damages to civilians and their dependents, for losses caused by the maltreatment of prisoners of war, and for all non-military property that was destroyed in the war. In 1921, Germany's reparations liability was fixed at 132 billion gold

marks. After WWII, the victorious Allies filed reparations claims against Germany for \$320 billion. Reparations were also levied on Italy and Finland. The items for which these claims were made included bodily loss, loss of liberty, loss of property, injury to professional careers, dislocation and forced emigration, time spent in concentration camps because of racial, religious and political persecution. Others were the social cost of war, as represented by the burden from loss of life, social disorder, and institutional disorder; and the economic cost of war, as represented by the capital destroyed and the value of civilian goods and services foregone to make war goods. Payments were made in cash and kind -- goods, services, capital equipment, land, farm and forest products; and penalties were added for late deliveries.

Perhaps the most famous case of reparations was that paid by Germany to the Jews. These were paid by West Germany to Israel for crimes against Jews in territories controlled by Hitler's Germany, and to individuals to indemnify them for persecution. In the initial phase, these included \$2 billion to make amends to victims of Nazi persecution; \$952 million in personal indemnities; \$35.70 per month per inmate of concentration camps; pensions for the survivors of victims; \$820 million to Israel to resettle 50,000 Jewish emigrants from lands formerly controlled by Hitler. All that was just the beginning. Other, and largely undisclosed, payments followed. And even in 1992, the World Jewish Congress in New York announced that the newly unified Germany would pay compensation, totalling \$63 million for 1993, to 50,000 Jews who suffered Nazi persecution but had not been paid reparations because they lived in East Germany.

With such precedents of reparations to non-Black peoples in four continents, it would be sheer racism for the world to discountenance reparations claims from the Black World.

But our own search for reparations must, of necessity, be tailored to our peculiar condition, to our peculiar experience. Some others may need only that their ancestral home range be returned to them; some others that they be compensated for the

indignities of internment and the loss of citizen rights; some others that acts of genocide and other atrocities against their people be atoned for and paid for; some others that lands excised from their territory be paid for. We, however, who have experienced all of the above and more, and experienced them for much longer than most, and therefore suffer chronically from their effects -- we must take a more comprehensive view of what reparations must mean for us. We must ask not only that reparations be made for specific acts, or that restitution be made of specific properties; we who have been such monumental victims are obliged to also ask: What sorts of system, capitalist as well as pre-capitalist, with their values and world outlook, made this long holocaust possible; and what must be done to transform these systems into some other kind where holocaust could not be inflicted on us? Unless we address and effectively answer that question, our quest for reparations would be flawed and incomplete. We must therefore look into the nature of the old existing global order and see what needs to be done to change it for the better.

The hallmarks of the old global order, which was initiated by the voyage by Columbus may be summarized as a propensity for perpetrating holocaust, a devotion to exploitation, and a passion for necrophobia. It has inflicted holocaust, through genocide and culturecide -- but not only on the Black World; it has visited exploitation, through slavery and colonialism -- but not only on the Black World; but it has reserved for the Black World a special scourge: that virulent strain of racism known as Negrophobia!

That old global order just described is not a thing of the past; it is still very much with us. In different parts of the world today, in 1993, even as we sit here in this hall, Blacks are still being subjected to the holocaust of genocide and culturecide (as in the Sudan); to the exploitations of slavery (as in Mauritania), and of colonialism and neo-colonialism (as in every part of the Black World); and to negrophobia, in all its forms and degrees, throughout the entire globe. To end this dreadful condition and to make all the appropriate repairs, i.e.

reparations, we need to move from this old global order, where holocaust happened to us, to a different global order where holocaust will never happen to us. We need to move from this old global order, which sucks resources out of our veins and piles debt upon our heads, to a different global order in which our enormous resources shall serve our own prosperity. We need to move from this old global order, which is permeated with negrophobia, to a new global order that is cleansed of negrophobia, one where we would live in dignity and equality with all the other races of humanity.

Now, what are we, the Black World, going to contribute to the making of these changes?

Let me begin by noting that reparation is not just about money; it is not even mostly about money; in fact, money is not even one percent of what reparation is about. Reparation is mostly about making repairs, self-made repairs, on ourselves: mental repairs, psychological repairs, cultural repairs, organizational repairs, social repairs, institutional repairs, technological repairs, economic repairs, political repairs, educational repairs, repairs of every type that we need in order to recreate and sustain viable black societies. For the sad truth is that five centuries of holocaust have made our societies brittle and unviable. And as the great Marcus Garvey warned over 50 years ago, if we continue as we are, we are heading for extinction.

More important than any monies to be received; more fundamental than any lands to be recovered, is the opportunity the reparations campaign offers us for the rehabilitation of Black people, by Black people, for Black people; opportunities for the rehabilitation of our minds, our material condition, our collective reputation, our cultures, our memories, our self-respect, our religious, our political traditions and our family institutions; but first and foremost for the rehabilitation of our minds.

Let me repeat that the most important aspect of reparation is not the money the campaign may or may not bring: the most important part of reparation is our self-repair; the change it will bring

about in our understanding of our history, of ourselves, and of our destiny; the change it will bring about in our place in the world.

Now, we who are campaigning for reparations cannot hope to change the world without changing ourselves. We cannot hope to change the world without changing our ways of seeing the world, our ways of thinking about the world, our ways of organizing our world, our ways of working and dreaming in our world. All these, and more, must change for the better. The type of Black Man and Black Woman that was made by the holocaust -- that was made to feel inferior by slavery and then was steeped in colonial attitudes and values -- that type of Black will not be able to bring the post-reparation global order into being without changing profoundly in the process that has begun; that type of Black will not be even appropriate for the post-reparation global order unless thoroughly and suitably reconstructed. So, reparation, like charity, must begin with ourselves, with the making of the new Black person, with the making of a new Black World. How?

We must begin by asking ourselves: What weaknesses on our side made the holocaust possible? Weaknesses of organization? Weaknesses of solidarity? Weaknesses of identity? Weaknesses of mentality? Weaknesses of behaviour? If we do not correct such weaknesses, even if we got billions of billions of dollars in reparations money, even if we got back all our expropriated land, we would fritter it all away yet again, and recycle it all back into alien hands.

We must therefore find out what deficiencies in our sense of identity, what quirks in our mentality, what faults in our feelings of solidarity made it possible for some of us to sell some of us into bondage; still make it possible for us to succumb to the divide and conquer tactics of our exploiters; make it possible for all too many of us to be afflicted with Negro necrophobia -- our counterpart of the self-hating disease of the anti-semitic Semite. Twenty years ago, when I was writing The West and the Rest of Us, I gave it a subtitle: "White Predators, Black Slavers and the African Elite". That was to serve notice that we cannot overlook

our complicity, as Black Slavers and as the African Elite, in what happened, and is still happening to us. We must, therefore, change ourselves in order to end our criminal complicity in perpetuating our lamentable condition.

Beyond all that, we must discover where we now are in our history. We must recognize that in 36 years of independence, reckoning from Ghana's in 1957 (just four years short of the 40 years the Israelites spent in the wilderness!), we have been blundering about in the neo-colonial wilderness. And we must ask: Why did Moses lead his people into the wilderness and keep them wandering about for two generations? I do not believe that he, a learned man raised in the pharaoh's court, did not know the direct route to his people's Promised Land. I believe it was a dilatory sojourn whose tribulations were calculated to cure his people of the legacy of slavery. You can't make a free people out of slaves without first putting them through experiences that would purge them of the slave mentality. We, in our own wilderness years, need to take conscious steps to purge ourselves of the legacy of a 500-year holocaust of slavery and colonialism. In that way, when we finally arrive at our own Promised Land -- a Black World cured of the holocaust legacy -- we would be ready for the new liberated phase of our long adventure on this Earth.

To help us get our bearings in this wilderness phase, I would suggest four main measures:

1. The creation of Holocaust Monuments in all parts of the Black World, as reminders of what we have been through and are determined never again to go through. Efforts already being made in this area should continue and be added to. I am thinking, for instance, of the Goree Island Project in Senegal, and the Slave Route Project in Benin Republic. But let me recommend a major monument here in Abuja, this new capital rising in a zone that, in the past, witnessed intensive slave raiding for the trans-Sahara slave trade. We should erect here a monument complex that portrays scenes from the Black Holocaust, scenes taken from all parts of the world; a great Black Holocaust Monument that shall serve as the Black

World's counterpart of the Wailing Wall of the Jews in Jerusalem.

2. The institution of a Holocaust Memorial Day, to be observed each year throughout the Black World, as a day of mourning and remembrance, with solemn ceremonies at local holocaust monuments. Perhaps this date, April 27, on which we have assembled here, should be designated the Holocaust Memorial Day of the Black World.

3. The creation of a Black Heritage Education Curriculum, to teach us our true history, and thereby restore our self-worth as descendants of the pioneers of world civilization, and supply us with the antidote to the White Supremacist Ideology and its damaging effects. This would produce a post-holocaust Black personality, one cured of the debilities inflicted by the holocaust experience.

4. The creation of a Black World League of Nations, with its complex of institutions, to take care of our collective security, to foster solidarity and prosperity among us, and to prevent the infliction of any future damage on any part of the Black World.

These measures, and others like them, would teach us who we are, what we have been and ought to become, and would promote and concretize Black World solidarity. Having made such internal changes in ourselves and in our world, we would be better able to foster in the entire global order two key changes:

- a. A different view of global history, particularly of the last 500 years, and of the millennia before 525 BC -- that calamitous year when Black Egypt fell permanently to white invaders, leaving all of Africa open for incursions from West Eurasia; and
- b. structural changes that would block the possibility of future damage of the sorts for which we now seek reparations.

To conclude, let me note that, for us, no global order would be truly new without apologies for ancient wrongs, without an end to continuing wrongs, without reparations, without restitutions, without the creation of systems and mechanisms that would ensure that the holocaust we have been through never happens again. Our crusade for reparations would be completed only when we achieve a global order without necrophobia, without alien hegemony over any

part of the Black World, and without the possibility of holocaust. From our perspective, a global order which failed to meet such conditions would not really be new or adequate; it would be an order serving us the same old bitter wine in some new bottle.

From here today, I foresee a day when we too shall get back our expropriated lands; I foresee a day when we too shall get compensation for our losses and our pains; I foresee a day when negrophobia and the conditions which foster it shall have vanished from the earth. But between now and that day, much work waits to be done. The most serious part of that work is the work of self-rehabilitation. And so I say: "Black Soul, Heal Thyself, and all shall be restored to you".

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I thank you all.

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