



## RESISTING THE ETHICAL IMPERATIVE OF REPARATIONS: SEEKING ARTIFICIAL REFUGE IN DISHONEST DENIAL

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**T**HE RECENT HEARING IN THE HOUSE OF Representatives on reparations marks an important step on the long struggle for justice for Black people and accountability from the larger society for the horrendous and harrowing history of enslavement, Jim Crowism and racist oppression of varied kinds. However, in the spirit and speech of Amilcar Cabral, we know we must “mask no difficulties, tell no lies and claim no easy victories.” So, we must not mask or minimize the difficulties that still lie ahead of us. Nor should we misread or misrepresent for others or ourselves the signs of the times and the context in which this is taking place. And we must not claim an easy victory or a victory beyond its meaning and measure. But we can, taking all in account, still claim a hard-won victory, however limited and tentative, of having brought this critical issue and discussion to the halls of Congress and the daily and nightly news in an important way.

And for that victory we have to thank all those Africans who after enslavement argued and fought for the moral imperative of reparations and set this righteous struggle for justice for our people in motion. We must also first thank retired Rep. John Conyers who introduced the HR 40 Reparations Bill in 1989 and put it on the American agenda every year until his retirement in 2017 but could not get a vote yea or nay on it. We need also to give due thanks and respect to the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N’COBRA) which has been the major advocate for reparations with admirable consistency and commitment and whose former guiding lights, Dr. Imari Obadele and Queen Mother Moore, stand out with distinction. Likewise, we give praise and thanks to all the other persons and groups, large and small, who have contributed to this effort for justice.

In this regard, Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee has taken up HR 40 and introduced it to address “the fundamental injustice, cruelty,

brutality and inhumanity of slavery,” establish a committee to study the nature and impact of enslavement and racial and economic discrimination on African Americans and make recommendations to Congress. Also, there are expressions of varied support of the study of reparations and steps of redress of various kinds by a list of presidential candidates including Senators Cory Booker, Kamala Harris, Elizabeth Warren and others. But again, the struggle is not over, especially because all that is aimed for at this point is an investigation and recommendations.

The ethical imperative of reparations for the lengthy list of crimes against humanity committed against African Americans, which is one of the greatest Holocausts in human history, should seem obvious and unassailable. The sheer magnitude and morally monstrous character of the genocidal murder, torture, terror, mutilation, mayhem, unrestricted rape of female and male, adult and child, social and cultural death and psychological damage and the continuing vicious and debilitating impact of it, all speak cogently and convincingly for reparations. But there is one major problem with this for those who engage in dishonest denial, devious debate and alternating expressions of fake concern and furious condemnation of its victims and their just and morally compelling claim.

And that is: the victims are Black in a White-dominated society; they are defined and treated as the wrong race in a racist society; and they are daring to condemn and seek accountability and justice from a perpetrator society that cannot rightfully criticize itself, let alone condemn itself for its crimes against humanity. Thus, it is willing to ignore the abundant, question the credentials of the claimant and break the mirror of moral measure to avoid required self-evaluation and resultant accountability.

Therefore, those who willfully attempt to deny the right of reparations and attempt to

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minimize the awesome moral and social meaning of the African Holocaust and the justice of reparations, seek artificial refuge in dishonest denials, diversions and calculated confusion. Indeed, they have an ever-ready-to-unroll map in their minds, replete with various escape routes to avoid the moral responsibility to repair the historical and continuing injuries inflicted on Black people.

Mitch McConnell, Senate majority leader, unrolled such a muddled map, citing two of their favorite but false escape routes. He says he doesn't think reparations was a good idea because it was too long ago, "something that happened 150 years ago for whom none of us currently living are responsible." And tacking up his escape exit sign on the entrance to even the door of dialog, he suggested falsely that "they" had already done a lot to address the Holocaust of enslavement. "We've tried to deal with our original sin of slavery by fighting a civil war, by passing landmark civil rights legislation. We've elected an African American president," he dared to declare.

Of course, it's not too late, for a society passes on and inherits over time the commitments it has made earlier. Alliances, treaties, pensions and payments of varied kinds as well as debts incurred by earlier generations are all honored, if a society is to exist and be respected among the nations of the world. Moreover, often people inherit not only wealth from their parents and foreparents, but also their debts. And again, a society and its governments assume the responsibilities, obligations and debts of its predecessors. McConnell and company's irrational reasoning is similar to legal arguments that claim we have passed the date of the statute of limitations on the crime. But there is no statute of limitations on

murder, let alone mass murder, genocide or Holocaust.

McConnell and company's claim to having "tried to deal with our original sin of slavery" fails in intent and content. The intent is to claim repentance and restitution for which he mistakenly calls America's "original sin." If we accept the word "sin" as a morally and socially reprehensible act, then, America's original sin is against the Native American. But we will not want to let the religious terminology of sin hide the morally monstrous crime against humanity that genocide against Native Americans and Holocaust of enslavement against Africans represent.

Likewise, the claims of having fought a war for us, rings hollow except to those who still believe capitalist and union interest in subduing the South was a moral one rather than an economic and political one, with the fate of Black people as a secondary, tertiary and tangential consideration at best. The claim of having passed civil rights legislation ignores the struggle of Black people to achieve it and claims of electing or even accepting an African American president is only a harsh reminder of the climate created in which lying is a way of life. Black people, other peoples of color and progressive Whites elected Barack Obama president. McConnell and the majority of Whites voted for the other candidate. And McConnell and his cohorts, co-conspirators and crime partners spent most of their time ensuring that even if Obama won and occupied the office of president, he would not successfully exercise it. So, we, of necessity, dismiss such claims of repentance and restitution and remember with Frederick Douglass that "without struggle there's no progress." And therefore, the struggle must and does continue and intensify.

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Dr. Maulana Karenga, Professor and Chair of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach; Executive Director, African American Cultural Center (Us); Creator of Kwanzaa; and author of *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture* and *Introduction to Black Studies*, 4th Edition, [www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org](http://www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org); [www.MaulanaKarenga.org](http://www.MaulanaKarenga.org).