

The Debt Has Not Been Paid, the Accounts Have Not Been Settled

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First of all, I want to thank the students and those who are responsible for giving me the chance to participate in these "streets of intellect." Listening to George Lamming alone is worth the trip. I hope you will agree with me on that.

I will begin with a quotation that could have come from Walter Rodney himself. Actually it is a quotation from George Lamming. It goes like this:

There is a perennial debt to be paid to black people for continuing of enslavement and degradation. There are those who believe that the matter is over. They are completely wrong. Actually, there are those among us who believe that the demand and struggle for justice and restoration to full dignity would take a generation to win a crusade for reparations. In unison under concerted strategy....

There are other words of inspiration along the same lines, for instance Kwame Nkrumah has said: "We can no longer afford the luxury of delay"; and as I have stated elsewhere, "The debt has not been paid; the accounts have not been settled."

The purpose of this address is first of all to sensitize all progressive thinkers on the issue of reparations. Secondly, it is to bring you up to date on what the Organization of African Unity has done and to assist you in working out strategies for carrying out the mandate of the Group of Eminent Persons, that I would refer to later.

Once you accept that the mass kidnap and enslavement of Africans was the most wicked criminal enterprise in recorded human history; and that no compensation has been paid to any of the sufferers by the perpetrators, and that the consequences continue to be massive both in terms of the enrichment of the descendants of the perpetrators and in terms of the impoverishment of the Africans, then the justice for claim for reparation is established beyond any reasonable doubt. Our claim, which is still outstanding, is supported in law and exemplified by several precedents. The law of unjust enrichment provides the basis on international law for claim against those who have gained by the unlawful oppression of another.

First, the best known case which can stand as a precedent arose out of the well known, hideous and despicable persecution of the Jews by the Nazis in the last great war. Hitler exterminated approximately 6 million Jews in the dreaded Holocaust, marking one of the grimmest pages of human history. The Jews have not hidden their suffering by putting it under the carpet in shame, like many of our people do when we speak about slavery. They say, "this is

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<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v2/v2i4a4.pdf>

a long-time story; why talk about it again? Why are you opening again those wounds which are healed?"

Those wounds have never been healed. And there is no time expiry nor Statute of Limitations to prevent challenging such a crime of genocide and murder. The Jews have done a great service to the world by exposing genocide simply as a crime against humanity, so that never again should it be repeated. They did even more. They organized themselves and challenged their oppressors and brought them before the tribunals of the world and received not only acknowledgment of their guilt, but also approximately \$60 billion so far and running, in reparation for resettlement of the descendants of those who suffered. There are other cases, which I shall bring to your attention later.

As I mentioned earlier, the allies also claimed some \$33 billion from Germany after World War II. Japanese Americans received an apology from the United States for unjust racial discriminatory treatment during World War II when most of them were interned in concentration camps in the West coast. They also received \$1.2 million from the US government as reparation for the 120,000 Japanese Americans who had been interned. Native American Indians as a result of their claim reparations received \$1.3 billion and large areas of reserve from the US government.

Poland demanded \$284 million plus lands and concessions from Germany for using Poles as slave labor. The Eskimos received from the Canadian government \$1.5 billion and very large areas of land. The Aborigines received large areas of bauxite land from the Australian government and a large sum of money. Last year, the Maoris received \$160 million and a large expanse of territory.

There are many cases outstanding. For instance there is the claim of sexual slavery by Korean women against the Japanese, and the case against Iraq during the recent Gulf war. Some of these are still to be ruled upon. So far, we descendants of Africans, the black people, have made no such claim. *The accounts have not been settled; the books have not been closed.*

A charge of the Nuremberg tribunal in addressing the Nazi genocide, and I quote: "It is crime against humanity, it is murder, extermination, deportation and other inhuman acts committed against any civilian population. The tribunal found them guilty of acts so reprehensible as to offend the conscious of mankind, as amounts to crime against humanity and against International law."

In 1948, the US congress passed the Civil Liberties Act, granting reparations to individuals or groups within the US whose rights have been violated. Thus the Japanese Americans and Native American Indians received large entitlements, that I referred hitherto. The blacks, as a group have not yet made their claim. The books have not been closed; the accounts have not been settled.

I shall illustrate by five examples, cases to show how construction of white developed countries have tried to distort the history taught to us as black people; having robbed us of our own history. In the surgical operation which we call the Atlantic Slave Trade, they cut-off not only a person's language, religion, family support and everything else that used to mean anything to him, and put him away in a foreign land--the land of Babylon. They blotted out his past.

Forged in a foreign setting over several centuries, they made him forget his own history in an entirely complete sense. And what did they put in its place? They put a myth: I will try to prove that there is nothing of the past which has already been settled.

The first is what has been brought forward by the previous speaker. Statements such as that of a Cambridge Professor (Hugh Trevor-Ropper) who said that the blackman has no history, before the whiteman came; Africa was total confusion and confusion, he says, is not history. Now, that is not just a simple statement from the heart of ignorance!

But the average child in the West Indies, anyway, is taught in history (in fact it begins that way) that history begins with the abolition of slavery, the abolition of slavery by the whiteman. This is quite wrong! It is a very different approach to a child's mind, teaching him that he had no past until whites gave him something. That you are just an unwanted descendant of the slave; you do not carry your birth certificate in the further past. It is very different for the teacher to say, "... oh no, slavery didn't begin your history, it interrupted your history, a history which started long before that. It interrupted your history, you did not descend from slavery, you ascended over a system of slavery, which interrupted your history!" It is entirely a different approach to a child because he begins to look and find out what happened to him and to learn the truths. Such is the myth they have tried to teach you that they have settled the whole affair by giving you a civilization and something to hold on to.

The second example is, and I will quote two cases, established cases that they have paid their dues.

The first is known as the Sommerset case of 1772. It is that of an Englishman who took his servant, his slave to England. Nancy was her name. Nancy went before the great Lord Mansfield who having listened to the advocacy of the abolitionist lawyer said, "The black must be set free. Let the black be set free."

What he has been trying to show there is the validity of British justice settling the scores of slavery. It didn't settle anything. It didn't set slaves free. Slavery went on for many, many, many years after that. What he meant was set her free, because the free white atmosphere of Britain could not stand this act of slavery. That is what he said.

The second case is that of the well known Le Amistad, the case in which the black slaves fought and took over the slave ship, and told the navigator who was saved from death to take them back to Africa. He steered by night and landed in the US. That epic shows the great trial in the courts of Connecticut where the great white lawyer John Quincy Adams set them free. As if it settled the whole affair. *The debt has not been paid; the accounts have not been settled.*

Another draconian example of the distortion of history is the Emancipation Act of 1838. The Emancipation Act is not a human relation's idea; it has nothing to do with morality or human rights. The Emancipation Act was a commercial transaction, a commercial transaction in which reparation was paid; I think sterling pounds 200 million to the slave master as reparation for losing his property --your ancestors. It had nothing to do with closing the books; nothing to do with settling the accounts. In all those cases, what happened to those who had gone before? What happened to those people who worked in the tobacco fields and made cotton "king" of the powerful US? And the cane field plantations? What about those lynched? No, the accounts have not been settled.

Then from Emancipation came colonialism in Africa and the Caribbean. You are free according to them. You don't tell a person he is free any more than you tell a dog he is a cat and this makes him a cat. But there you are, emancipated; you are free, or, in fact, nearly so. You move from there to colonialism, the stepson of slavery. Now, what happened under colonialism isn't well known, at least in this part of the world. I know that in the colonies you had the statement, "lower the horizon and the hopes of the black people". Children were taught you are now free, you can move just so far, but you can't get any further because the colonial officers are your new masters and they call the shots!

It is strange that men like C.L.R. James, Manley, Rodney and others lived most of their lives as colonials, under those limitations. They did not stop there because they pursued the heritage. The heritage of our own history, which is a heritage of struggles. And so, after the battles of war and colonialism, came independence in the 1960's. New status and independence of the 1960's is the fifth opportunity for them to say that they have settled the deal.

The new status as colonials after emancipation was evidenced everywhere with the continual struggle. Voices were raised all round. The Pan-Africanist movement drew a new resurgence of nationalist agitation. Black leaders began to merge under its banner. People like Nasser, Mclair, L. Hughes and W. Rodney worked to raise the consciousness of black people. Marcus Garvey's prophecies of thousands of black nurses, black engineers, black newspapers like the *Negro World*, the *Crisis*, and various publications. Garvey began telling black people about their own history, and therefore the only thing left for them to do under independence was now to ask for its consequence. These days we are hearing the Pope and others asking black people to forgive these atrocities. Forgive them for they know exactly what they were doing! We say, yes of course we forgive you, but we will not forget. After confession comes atonement. We, therefore, say our claim is still outstanding, supported by the law.

Let me point out that the work has been going on. The OAU during its 1993 Dakar summit named a group of Eminent Persons to pursue the effects of slavery and its consequences; to pursue the modalities by which it can be addressed; to examine it and approve the Abuja Declaration. The Eminent Persons Group included among others the late M.K. Abiola, Ali Mazrui, Professor Ajayi, and I was the rapporteur; I do the work.

The Abuja Declaration, which was passed after the first Pan-African Conference on Reparations stated as follows:

This First Pan-African Conference on Reparations held in Abuja, Nigeria, April 27-29, 1993, sponsored by the OAU Group of Eminent Persons (GEP) for Reparations, and the Federal Government of Nigeria.

Recalling the establishment by the Organization of African Unity of a machinery for appraising the issue of reparations in relation to the damage done to Africa and its Diaspora by enslavement, colonization, and neo-colonialism;

Convinced that the issue of reparations is an important question requiring the united action of Africa and its Diaspora and worthy of the active support of the rest of the international community;

Fully persuaded that the damage sustained by the African peoples is not a "thing of the past" but is painfully manifest in the damaged lives of contemporary Africans from Harlem to

Harare and in the damaged economies of Africa and the Black World from Guinea to Guyana, from Somalia to Surinam;

Aware of historic precedents in reparations, ranging from German payment Of restitution to the Jews, to the question of compensating Japanese-Americans for the injustice of internment by the Roosevelt Administration in the United States during the World War II;

Cognizant of the fact that compensation for injustice need not necessarily be paid only in capital transfer but could include service to the victims or other forms of restitution and readjustment of the relationship agreeable to both parties;

Emphasizing that the admission of guilt is a necessary step to reverse this situation;

Emphatically convinced that what matters is not the guilt but the responsibility of those states and nations whose economic evolution once depended on slave labor and colonialism, and whose forebears participated either in selling and buying Africans, or in owning them, or in colonizing them;

Convinced that the pursuit of reparations by the African peoples in the continent and in the Diaspora will itself be a learning experience in self discovery and in uniting political and psychological experiences;

Calls upon the international community to recognize that there is a unique and unprecedented moral debt owed to the African peoples which has yet to be paid - the debt of compensation to the Africans as the most humiliated and exploited people of the last four centuries of modern history:

Calls upon Heads of States and Governments in Africa and the Diaspora itself (to set up National Committees for the purpose of studying the damaged African experience disseminating information and encouraging educational courses on the impact Of enslavement, colonization and neo-colonialism on present-day Africa and its Diaspora;

Urges the Organization of African Unity to grant observer status to select organizations from the African Diaspora in order to facilitate consultations between Africa and its Diaspora on reparations and related issues;

Further urges the OA U to call for full monetary payment through capital transfer and debt cancellation.

Convinced that numerous looting, theft and larceny have been committed on the African people, calls upon those in possession of their stolen goods, artifacts and other traditional treasures, to restore them to their rightful owners - the African people.

Convinced that the claim for Reparations is well grounded in International Law, urges the OA U to establish a legal Committee on the issue of Reparations.

Also calls upon African and Diaspora groups already working on reparations to communicate with the Organization of African Unity and establish continuing liaison.

Encourages such groups to send this declaration to various countries to obtain their official support for the movement;

Serves notice on all states in Europe and the Americas which had participated in the enslavement and colonization of the African peoples, and which may still be engaged in racism and neo-colonialism, to desist from any further damage and start building bridges of reconciliation and co-operation, through reparation;

Exhorts all African states to grant entrance, as of right, to all persons of African descent, and the right to obtain residence in those African states, if there is no disqualifying element on the African claiming the "right to return" to his or her ancestral home, Africa.

Urges those countries which were enriched by slavery, the slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism to give total relief from Foreign Debt, and allow the debtor countries of the Diaspora to become free for self development and from immediate and direct economic domination.

Calls upon the countries largely characterized as profiteers from the slave trade and colonialism to support proper and reasonable representation of African Peoples in the political and economic areas of the highest decision-making bodies;

Requests the OAU to intensify its efforts in restructuring the international system in pursuit of justice with special reference to permanent African seat on the Security Council of the United Nations.

Let me backup a little. People only think of restitution in terms of how much money, what is going to happen, who is going to get what and what have you. But this is not about money. We are not thinking about black people who have suffered as a result of slavery and its consequences. We are demanding an opportunity, room at the table, to make full contribution to the world, the present day and the coming millennium. It means adjusting to people asking such questions as: why are there so many black people in jail and prisons? Give them education--that is part of it. Why is there in the supposed repository of peace called the United Nations not one black nation represented as a permanent member of the Security Council? Put them there. That is reparation. There is not one black executive officer making final decisions at the IMF or any of the other bodies; put them there; that is reparation. There are many ways in which restitution can be done. Why not study why many more black women die after childbirth than whites? Give them more hospitals and better medical care.

There are many ways reparations can be made. You are not punishing people from guilt, although the thought might have crossed your mind. What you are saying to them is, "This is a claim for your responsibilities. You, who have the profits in the white world, have inherited the responsibility of what your forefathers did to us. For it is the responsibility you have and not the guilt, by which we approach you. We emphasize that the admission of guilt is the necessary step to reverse the situation. First of all, admit the guilt; it is the necessary step, for this is not just another debt."

We call upon the international community to recognize that there is a unique and unprecedented moral debt to the African people which has not yet been paid. The debt of compensation to Africans as the most humiliated and exploited people of the last four centuries of modern history. We urge the OAU to ask for full monetary compensation through capital transfer to Africa or debt cancellation. Something like the Marshall plan; an African Marshall plan would be necessary. Without debt cancellation, we will never be able to repay the amount of money they have lent to us so easily. They don't want to do this; they are prepared to live off the interest which strangles us in the debt trap which they have left us in a state called Independence!

Convinced that numerous looting, theft and larceny have been committed on the African people, we call upon those in possession of stolen goods, artifacts, and other traditional

treasures to restore them to their rightful owners, the African people. Convinced that the claim for restoration was established in the international court of law, we urge the OAU to establish a legal committee to address the issue of reparations.

It exalts all African states to grant as its right to all peoples of African descent a right to obtain residency in those African states, the right to return to the ancestral home, Africa. It calls upon the OAU to intensify its efforts to restructure the international system in pursuit of justice.

I therefore suggest to you that we take this matter seriously. I suggest to you that you owe it to your parents who paid for you. In the words of Churchill, "... you made us rich, you made us great. It is the colonies in our possession that enabled us to win the Napoleonic wars. It was your wealth that made us the greatest nation in the world."

It is our duty to remind them, through your committees, your schools, your governments, your politician's that we the people are saying: *THE DEBT HAS NOT BEEN PAID; THE ACCOUNTS HAVE NOT BEEN SETTLED!*

Thank you.