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### “Black Americans Don’t Want Reparations”

Ta-Nehisi Coates has received well-deserved applause for his article “The Case for Reparations,” which was published in the May 21, 2014 issue of *The Atlantic*. In the article, he argues vigorously for reparations due to the injustices that Black Americans have endured from slavery to the current period. In subsequent media interviews about the article, he reaffirms his intent to see Congressman John Conyers, Jr.’s (Dem.-Michigan) proposed legislation on reparations approved by the US Congress (House Resolution (HR) – 40, Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act). The proposed legislation would commission a one-year, \$8 million study by a panel of seven experts who would be appointed by the President and Congressional Leadership. Rep. Conyers has proposed this legislation each year since 1989.

The last point is illuminating. Why has this legislation failed for 25 years? It can’t be because of the request for an appropriation; \$8 million constitutes 0.0002% of the 2014 US Federal Government outlays (\$3.6 trillion) as presented in President Obama’s 2015 Budget. It may be because many members of Congress don’t want to open the reparations can of worms. But, given that we live in a democracy, Congressional decisions concerning which proposed legislation it entertains must be responsive to citizens/voters pressure. Given that Black Americans have not applied sufficient pressure to the Congress in the form of a petition with a large (several million) number of signatures, I am led to believe that Black Americans don’t really want reparations.

For many years now, technology has made possible the development of an appropriate Internet petition that can be signed by Black Americans all over the country. Therefore, there is no excuse for insufficient pressure on the Congress. A check of the Internet shows that a few reparations petitions are posted, but not one has over a few hundred signatures. Why not?

Can’t Cong. Conyers get members of his staff to organize an Internet petition on his behalf to obtain signatures that will motivate Congress to act? Is he just going through the motions? Given his stature in the Congress and his reputation across the nation, why can’t Cong. Conyers convince Black-owned media and key Black organizations, such as the NAACP, the Urban League, fraternities, sororities, and major church denominations, to support him in this effort? Is it that those controlling these media operations and organizations are also in opposition to opening the reparations can of worms?

If, by chance, the \$8 million appropriation is the stumbling block, then why doesn’t Cong. Conyers ask Congress to approve a check-off on income tax returns that will allow Black and White Americans to donate a portion of their tax refunds to a reparation funds. When sufficient funds are raised through this method, then the study could be commissioned by the Congress.

If, on the other hand, Congress simply refuses to hear the cry of Black America for a reparations study, or we are unsuccessful in bringing a case to the Supreme Court to force Congress to act on the issue, then Black Americans have another path to pursue. Why can't Cong. Conyers or the Congressional Black Caucus organize a Reparations Fund, and request that Black Americans contribute directly to the fund, which can be used to conduct the study outlined in HR-40? Given a 42 million plus Black population, the \$8 million required for the study amounts to a donation of only 20 cents for every Black man, woman, and child.

Black Americans have been, and continue to be, subject to endless injustices in the United States, but we now constitute the 16<sup>th</sup> largest nation in the world with a combined income of about \$1 trillion a year. Surely we are not helpless children who cannot raise \$8 million dollars to conduct a study that could result in certain injustices being partly righted through reparations.

Given all of these alternatives for implementing HR-40, the fact that the bill has gone unimplemented for 25 years is a clear statement, in my opinion, that Black Americans really don't want reparations.

If we wanted reparations, then we would follow one of the paths suggested above to implement HR-40. Implementation of HR-40 will force the issue—pushing it toward resolution.

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