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“Book Review: *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*”

Coauthors William A. Darity, Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen performed yeoman’s labor in compiling a compelling *ourstorical* work that leads to gripping conclusions that must be addressed by the US. Black Americans cannot thank the coauthors enough for chronicling in one place the dastardly deeds that have been, and are being, wrought by White Americans against Black Americans, which now more than warrant reparatory justice in the form of a payment.

No doubt, we benefited greatly from the book’s first 255 pages that were spent delineating *ourstory* of the sheer pain, suffering, and abuse that Black American slaves and their descendants endured and with which the US Government was, and is, complicit. In addition, we appreciate very much the exceptional scholarly documentation of *ourstory* in over 100 pages of substantiating footnotes. Clearly, the book constitutes a go-to volume for the long-awaited US Congressional Study on Reparations—should it ever materialize.

However, we did not read the book for its *ourstorical* narrative. At least the high points, if not all of the details, are known well by those who have studied Black America’s past. Rather we wanted to learn what the coauthors had to say about the most pressing issue of the day, which is found in the book’s final chapter entitled “A Program of Black Reparations.” Favorably, the coauthors use this chapter to provide a rather exhaustive list of estimation methods that have been used to arrive at a final figure for the reparations bill. In addition, they describe an interesting set of procedures that might be employed to govern the dissemination of reparations payments. Most importantly, the entire requirement to resolve reparations is rightly placed at the feet of the U.S. Government.

This crucial chapter, however, is absent certain essential points that should be considered when discussing reparations. The following bullets highlight areas where the book may position Black Americans’ reparations to come up short of their intended outcomes:

- The chapter only highlights reparations in the form of cash payments; although there is a reference to “less-liquid assets.”
- There is no reference to reparations in the form of land, which is the foundational principle on which the argument for reparations was first born (“40 acres”).¹

¹ Relatedly, we were surprised to find that the book’s *ourstorical* narrative does not include a reference to President Abraham Lincoln’s efforts to convince Blacks to form their own nation on lands that now comprise part of Central

- While the coauthors cite a wide range of reparations estimates, they have anchored the reparations conversation in the public domain at \$12-to-\$14 trillion. This is not an optimal strategy when you are headed to the negotiating table. The wise strategy is to anchor high and then negotiate down.
- No rationale is given, and more clarity should be provided, for the two (joint) criteria for receipt of reparations payments: (1) Proof of descendance from a Black American slave; and (2) register as a Black American for at least 12 years before reparations arrive. It should not be surprising that many Black Americans have limited knowledge of their past and may encounter great difficulty or incur substantial expense to prove their eligibility under the first criterion—despite today’s wealth of genealogical-related technology. We should not forget, as the book points out, that around 500 thousand of the 4.5 million Blacks in the US at the time of the Civil War were free.
- There is a misplaced sense of finality with which the coauthors voice the details of the mechanism by which reparation payments “will be” managed. To our knowledge, Black Americans generally have not yet consented formally to a reparations program plan.

The most disappointing aspect of the final chapter of the book, however, is the coauthors’ emphasis that reparations should close the Black-White wealth gap without actually proposing a strategy that will achieve this outcome. The authors advocate a first-round strategy of a cash transfer. But, as we all know, currency is not tangible wealth.²

More specifically, if the US Government provides cash reparation payments, and if Black Americans are constrained to expend those funds mainly in the US, then the ultimate effect will be to largely inflate the cost of the goods, services, and assets that will be acquired by Black Americans. Most importantly, because Black Americans produce few goods and services and own few assets in the US, White Americans will be the ultimate beneficiaries of reparations in the form of cash payments because Whites are the producers of the goods and services and owners of the assets that will be acquired by Blacks. Whites will use this windfall to raise their wealth to a higher level so that in the second round of the strategic game, there will again be Black-White wealth inequality.

We are not averse to cash reparations payments. However, we advocate the use of the transfer to acquire land and materiel that can be used to create a Black American nation—Shabazzland.^{3,4}

In the end, given White America’s unyielding unwillingness to truly atone for the sins of slavery, Jim Crow, and structural racism since the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, the only way for Black Americans to become equal to White Americans in many respects is to leave the US for Shabazzland. That is how Black Americans can use reparations to move *From Here to Equality*.

America—the so-called Chiriqui Plan. Beyond this effort, Lincoln was the impetus for a failed expedition by Blacks to establish an independent community on an island (Île à Vache) in the Caribbean.

² We take note of the authors’ persistence that cash payments be adjusted for inflation. However, this does not invalidate the claims that we make here about the inflationary effects of cash transfers once transmitted, and who will be the ultimate beneficiaries of the reparations transfers.

³ Shabazzland is the name that we have assigned to a Black American homeland that is to be carved out of US territory.

⁴ Notably, a strategy to establish Shabazzland should not hinge solely on reparations transfers. See our essay “More than a Conqueror: One Black American Strategy.” (<https://www.BlackEconomics.org/BEFuture/mtac.pdf>.)

B.B. Robinson
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