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## “Time to Search Ourselves”

Do you know who you are? Really? Consider these questions in the context of an unexpected surge in Black American and global interest in Reparations. This analysis considers these questions in light of a new 2023 book edited by Darity, Mullen, and Hubbard, *The Black Reparations Project: A Handbook for Racial Justice*.

BlackEconomics.org applauds the editors for their work. The book is quite useful because it fulfills its purpose as a “handbook.” However, it is not a **strategic plan for securing Black American Reparations**.

Like Darity and Mullen’s 2020 submission, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, the new book is largely historical in nature. And, yes, we need to be reminded often concerning where we have been so that we avoid pitfalls. However, the atmosphere is very ripe now for a work that will be a Reparations analog to the recently released [Long-Term Strategic Plan for Black America](#), which outlines a systematic and strategic roadmap for Black America’s socioeconomic development that can produce highly elevated wellbeing within 100 years or less.

As we assess *The Black Reparations Project*, we see the need to search ourselves. We should scrutinize the book critically for

seeming gaps and blind spots that must be filled if we are to be successful in wresting Reparations from our opposers. The following are selected concerns:

1. The book appears to assume that favorable public opinion will rise to a critical level where Reparations will be dispensed automatically and with certainty. This assumption seems anomalous given that: (i) The magnitude of the Reparations amount (valued at \$10-to-\$20 trillion) has never been encountered in known human history in absolute or relative terms; (ii) the most culpable party (the US Government), backed by support from the nation broadly, has engaged in a long and persistent program of assistance (characterized as aid) to Black Americans that many non-Black and Black Americans may argue should offset the claimed Reparations amount; and (iii) in combination, the population of non-Black and Black hard-core right wingers may be sufficient to thwart efforts to bring the nation to Jesus on this issue.
2. It is interesting that the book recounts in detail many of the egregious and well-known events that should motivate an admission of guilt by non-Blacks for the dastardly deeds done to Blacks in America, but it never asks or answers: Why were Reparations not sought at

earlier points in history in a systematic and vigorous way? For example, during the 1960s when Black Americans independently blew up and out against the larger nation in the most forceful way ever, we called for integration not Reparations. If Black America had initiated Reparations demands at that time, then we would likely be much further down the road to receiving Reparations than we are today. The fact that we are not further down that road signals “errors in leadership and judgement,” and calls into question whether we are missing relevant demands or alternate strategies (potentially somethings in addition to Reparations) today as we call for Reparations.

For example, a question that comes to mind is: Why are Black Americans, other Afrodescendants in the Diaspora, and Afrikans not engaged in a unified demand for Reparations from the non-Black world? The demand should potentially be for Reparations in all the forms required to raise Afrika and all its descendants to a state that is favorable for us and for our planet. This level of Reparations would satisfy the counterfactual: Where would Afrika and Afrikan people (on the continent or in the diaspora) be today without the historical wrongful exploitation, theft, and murder by non-Blacks. In our view, if our honorable ancestor, Marcus Garvey, were alive today, then he would raise such a proposition. A major advantage of such an approach is that all Afrodescendants would be elevated to very similar levels; this would preclude socioeconomic inequalities between us and the problems that they could create as we seek to increase our engagement. As you know, Reparations demands by individual Afrodescendant and Afrikan populations

weaken the blow for justice and shows our willingness to be victimized by the age-old “divide and conquer” schemes.

3. The new book recounts the role of the JACL (Japanese Citizens League), which was successful in securing Reparations through a relatively abbreviated campaign in response to US Government’s actions against them during World War II. The book only mentions one group, the JACL, although several groups engaged in the Japanese Reparations campaign, which is different from the more than 100 groups that are now “fighting” for Black American Reparations. Yet those several groups unified behind the JACL in their thrust for Japanese Reparations. A failure to unify behind one Black American Reparations banner could be the death knell to our successful Reparations campaign.
4. The book is very heavy handed in its persistent call for Reparations in the form of “direct payments” that appears to overlook the widespread absence of favorable experiences by Black Americans with large lumpsum payments. This is very surprising because:
  - a. During the 21<sup>st</sup> century, economists are awake more than ever to the vagaries of financial markets and the losses that they can inflict.
  - b. If Reparations are to be consistent with the original intent (40 acres and a mule), then nonfinancial assets should be at the heart of Reparations.
  - c. Land, natural resources, and other nonfinancial assets are generally the *sine qua non* for most wealth production and preservation.
  - d. The only reason Europeans dominate the global economy today is because they acted, and still act, in unity in

- stealing and multiplying their wealth. Yet, the book calls for individual direct payments to Black Americans without consideration of the need for unity and a communal approach to effective utilization and preservation of wealth that could be extended through Reparations. This line of reasoning is consistent with one assuming that all Black Americans will be accepted wholeheartedly inside White America's circle, and that there are no more racial or ethnically motivated strategic games to play after Reparations.
5. We should couple concern 4.d. with the following concern. The book confesses that, while it will be beneficial to receive a direct Reparations payment, the increased wealth may have little-to-no effect on how Black Americans are treated in the US. This takes us immediately to the saying: "One agent pities another agent and cannot respect them; or one agent respects another agent and, therefore, cannot pity them." That is, while issuing an apology to Black descendants of slaves, non-Blacks may retain pity in their hearts and minds, which may have been the impetus for extending the Reparations payment. Therefore, to avoid a pity backlash, it is reasonable for Black Americans to use Reparations (mainly in the form of land, materiel, services, and other assistance) to achieve independence, self-reliance, self-determination, and freedom. This freedom should be marked largely by separate socioeconomic environments for Blacks and non-Blacks. Besides, if Black America cannot use Reparations to improve our physical and mental well-being (including the removal of fear of "(fill in the blank) while Black," then why seek Reparations?
  6. The new book recognizes logically that Black Americans will need to act to form a consensus concerning various aspects of the Reparations process. However, there are no recommendations on how this should be accomplished. As alluded to in concern 3, the absence of such a recommendation is consistent with not suggesting a push to unify our Reparations thrust behind a single banner.
  7. Consistent with concern 6, *The Black Reparations Project* reemphasizes the potential wealth-gap reducing value of "Baby Bonds," and although the authors are undoubtedly aware of the far-reaching favorable effects of anticipated future wealth, the authors are silent on suggesting that Black America moves now to prepare purposely for the receipt of Reparations.
- Therefore, the new book follows logically *From Here to Equality*, but leaves a gap that should be filled by a volume that charts a strategic and systematic path to reparations. Some might argue that the contents of such a book would just be forecasts. True! But economists are adept at forecasting. A forecasted plan for securing Reparations can serve us a roadmap—if adhered to closely—that can ensure that Black America (and potentially Afrikans on the continent and elsewhere) actually obtains Reparations.
- As Black America moves further down the road to Reparations, we should each search ourselves. We should not forget that successful oppressors' greatest power is controlling without lifting a finger or firing a bullet—just controlling the minds of a people. Therefore, we should examine our minds and our motives. Are we oriented toward qualifying/behaving to receive adoration from masters? Are we programmed to mimic the greedy and destructive behavior

of Europeans as reflected in the acquisition and love of “wealth” for wealth’s sake? Is our pursuit of, or drive for, the aforementioned adoration and wealth so powerful that we fail to identify blind spots that may lead Black America to disastrous “errors in judgement.”

According to scientists—who may or may not be informing the public accurately—our Earth is teetering on the brink of climatological disaster. Will we be so distracted by a Reparations game and lust for money and wealth that we fail to use existing resources to prepare to preserve our future? Is Reparations the only thing that Black

America should be requesting of the US and other governments today? Are we imagining that we are meaningful pieces on the chess board of life when we are just pawns? What is of real, intrinsic value that was taken, and is being taken, from us over the past 500 years? Should we not be asking for that rather than colored paper?

Before we go further down this Reparations path, Black Americans should pause to search ourselves asking: Do we know ourselves and what we want? Or maybe more importantly, we should ask: What should we want?

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