

Transactive Discussion Activity

Reparations

Please read the following prompt and quotes. In small groups, discuss the questions below.

Reparations are “making of amends for a wrong one has done, by paying money to or otherwise helping those who have been wronged.”¹ Governments have paid reparations to individuals or countries they have severely harmed. For example, after World War 1 and 2, Germany paid reparations to Allied countries and Jewish citizens (respectively). The U.S. government has paid reparations to different groups such as survivors and descendants of the Japanese Internment Camps in the U.S. during WWII.

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For generations, people have argued the U.S. government should pay reparations to African Americans who are descendants of slaves. Advocates for reparations believe the hardship and turmoil African Americans endured during slavery cannot be ignored and one way to make it better is by giving descendants payments to make up for the generations of free labor. The closest the U.S. government came to providing former slaves reparations was the Special Field Orders No. 15 in which newly freed families in the South would receive up to 40 acres of land and a mule. Incoming president Andrew Jackson overturned this order and the any land that was given out was taken back.² In the time since, the country has still not come to an agreement on how to make amends for the institution of slavery. Most recently, the House of Representatives heard appeals for **H.R. 40 in June 2019**. H.R. 40, if passed, would create a commission to study and develop reparation proposals for African Americans. The quotes below are from a H.R. 40 hearing dealing with the question of reparations to African Americans.



¹ <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/reparation>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/19/us/politics/slavery-reparations-hearing.html>



“I don’t think reparations for something that happened 150 years ago, for whom none of us currently living are responsible, is a good idea. We’ve, you know, 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.”

*-Mitch McConnell, U.S. Senator from Kentucky
June 19th, 2019*



“The typical black family in this country has one-tenth the wealth of the typical white family. Black women die in childbirth at four times the rate of white women... The matter of reparations is one of making amends and direct redress, but it is also a question of citizenship. In H.R. 40, this body has a chance to... say that this nation is both its credits and debits. That if Thomas Jefferson matters, so does Sally Hemings. That if D-Day matters, so does Black Wall Street. That if Valley Forge matters, so does Fort Pillow. Because the question really is not whether we’ll be tied to the somethings of our past, but whether we are courageous enough to be tied to the whole of them.”

-Ta-Nehisi Coates (Author) June 19th, 2019

Discussion Questions

1. Given what you have read, including the quotes above, which perspective on this topic do you align with more, and why?
2. Using answers from Question #1, can you integrate the two perspectives or find a compromise between the two positions?
 - a. If not, why?
 - b. If so, what would the solution look like?