

The Idle Contrarian: Racial Reparations



by James Como

Doctors often ask patients to measure their pain from one to ten, but some pain can have no rating, so beyond calculation is it. Such is the case with life as an American slave, especially one who had endured the horrors of the Middle Passage. The question, then, has become: can such pain *now* – like physical pain with, say, ibuprofen – be alleviated, as recurrently demanded by some?

The answer is No. *Because . . .*

1/ Never having held slaves, and not being the scion of slaveholders, I should not be held accountable. But under a reparations regime how would I not be? The grudge, with

attendant demands, would not go away. *And because . . .*

2/ To whom would reparations be paid? No living African American has ever been enslaved, there are few living descendants of slaves, and they have not suffered the depredations of their forbears but have benefited from American achievement. *And because . . .*

3/ "The legacy of slavery" is ill-defined; that is, slaves did not "build this country," as some activists claim, and the depredations of African American culture (the results of which are real and have been measured, for example as income disparity) are, at this late date, not attributable to a dead institution (including Jim Crow, a real legacy of slavery now sixty years in the past). Should the Neo-Plantation mentality fostered by the Welfare State be held to account, along with acquired cultural dysfunctions? *And because . . .*

4/ How would calculations be made? Assume a dollar figure could be established, would some portion of 'equity dollars' already spent on the War on Poverty, for example, be subtracted? Might some African Americans wind up *owing* money? *And because . . .*

5/ For reasons I've already suggested above, my conscience does not need salving, nor am I inclined to be an accessory to a collective con job, the second key word there being "collective." If an *individual* merits restitution, from another individual or entity, let that individual take the case to court, and then, given a favorable decision, collect from that offender, as in, say, a slander or libel case. The American public, including "white America" (let alone Immigrant America), is no such entity. *Therefore . . .*

You, my fellow African American citizens, are not they, the afflicted who suffered woefully – and it is unseemly for you to claim a share of that suffering, a claim of grace both cheap and undignified.

Am I being mischievous (especially in my suggestion that some black people may owe the Republic)? Of course, but no more so than those who – having been socialized to believe their victim status and to identify the beneficiaries of “white privilege” as the victimizers – are making the demand in the first place.