

Reparations? Not a Chance!

By **Matthew Roberts**

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A recent visit to Jamaica by David Cameron began somewhat awkwardly for the Prime Minister as the old chestnut of reparations for slavery once again was put on the agenda. Portia Simpson Miller, the Jamaican leader, raised the issue of reparations in a formal meeting with Cameron, suggesting that Britain acknowledge its role in the Jamaican slave trade and set about making amends by making a significant financial contribution to Jamaica.

The case put forward for reparations by Jamaica and various other Caribbean and African countries is that irreparable damage has been done to the social and economic development of these countries and that psychological scars of slavery are passed on from generation to generation so that today's African and Caribbean populations are as traumatised by the trade as were those directly affected by it.

If many of those who subscribe to an Afrocentric worldview are to be believed, Africa and the Caribbean would be technologically and economically advanced civilisations had their social and economic trajectory not been interrupted by the experience of slavery. They argue that their populations would be psychologically healthy and creative peoples with high collective self-esteem; the creators of magnificent civilisations.

I do not believe that any western nation should even contemplate paying reparations for slavery, and here I outline some of the reasons why.

Firstly, the idea that British people alive today, who have never been involved in the slave trade, should pay reparations to Jamaicans who have never been slaves is morally unjustifiable. British people alive today are not culpable in any way for the slave trade and the overwhelming majority of contemporary Britons have no ancestral links to the slave trade either. The British people today have therefore no obligation to offer even an apology, as they have nothing to apologise for.

Secondly, the claim for reparations is based on the argument that only whites have benefitted from this institution; this is demonstrably false. If the exploitation of slaves created wealth for Britain then it has obviously created wealth for black Britons also, that is, those who are the descendants of slaves. Britain is one of the richest countries in the world and contemporary black British share in that prosperity as well.

Thirdly, only a tiny minority of the British population were involved in the slave trade; these were the economic elites who, whilst investing in the trade, also ruthlessly exploited the working class in Britain, to the extent that Karl Marx referred to the British workers as 'wage slaves'. Friedrich Engels wrote about the poverty of the British working class and the appalling conditions in the factories that men, women and children were subjected to. If anyone benefited from slavery it certainly was not the working people of Britain!

The historical precedents used to justify reparations are the claims made by Jewish survivors of the Holocaust and by Japanese-American victims of racial experiments in Tuskegee, but in each case the recipients of reparations were the direct victims of the injustices or their immediate families.

It is also the case that no evidence-based attempt has been made to prove that living individuals have been adversely affected by a slave system that ended over 150 years ago. The black middle class in Britain is growing and is a prosperous community that will soon outnumber the black underclass. How is it that slavery adversely affected one group of descendants but not the other?

The blame game played by many reparations advocates is hypocritical to say the least; this is because Africans themselves were as much involved in the slave trade as Europeans. For example, how did the slaves make it to the coastal forts from the interior of Africa? The historian John Thornton and Linda Heywood of Boston University estimate that 90% of those shipped to the New World were enslaved by Africans and then sold to European traders. Africans themselves captured the slaves, brought them to the coasts and handed them to the African elites who had established

trading relations with the European merchants. Without the complicity of Africans, the trade simply could not have developed in the way it did. This is a far cry from the revisionist version of the trade presented in films like *Roots* where the villains are only evil white men who kidnap docile blacks and take them to America to pick cotton.

In 1999 President Mathieu Kerekou of Benin made a public declaration on a visit to America in which he begged African Americans for forgiveness for the role Benin played in the slave trade. Other African leaders have also apologised, including Jerry Rawlings of Ghana. Rawlings had good reason to offer this apology. Slaves were the main export of the kingdom of the Asante Empire in Ghana who exported slaves and used the profits to import gold.

It is a little-known fact within the African-Caribbean community that many African elites involved in the slave trade visited Europe in that era, and they did so on slave ships, so they knew about the brutality of the trade. This did not stop them from organising internal raiding parties to enslave more of their fellow Africans so that they could be sold to European traders. Many of the African chiefs involved in the trade sent their sons and daughters to European countries to be educated; these sons and daughters then returned to Africa to play leading roles in the organisation of the trade.

It is interesting to note that in any discussion of reparations it is always Europeans who are asked to cough up. There is never any reference to the Islamic trans-Saharan trade, in which millions of young African boys were kidnapped and then castrated so that they could be sold as eunuchs to work in the homes of wealthy Arabs as domestic slaves, or more commonly in the harems to serve the needs of concubines, who in turn were systematically raped by their Arab masters. Thousands of very young African boys bled to death as a result of this barbaric mutilation, in which both the scrotum and the penis were removed. It is estimated that for every ten boys castrated only one survived.

It may come as a surprise to some readers that far more Africans were enslaved by Arabs than by the Europeans. It is estimated that over the centuries during which the slave trade took place 11 million people were shipped across the Atlantic as slaves. However, some 14 million were taken to the Islamic nations of the Middle East and North Africa. The Islamic slave trade lasted far longer than the transatlantic trade and saw more people sold into slavery. The mortality rate amongst slaves during the Atlantic crossing was 10% whilst for the trans-Saharan and East African trade it was 80%! Those females who were fortunate to survive ended up as sexual slaves for their Arab masters.

Where is the outcry over this? Where are the calls for reparations? Why are Jamaicans and Africans not taught this in our schools? Why are our children not taught this? The answer is that this would prevent our young people from feeling guilty for the so-called sins of their ancestors. Promoting white guilt is all about silencing opposition to multiculturalism and diversity; it's all about eliminating resistance to the loss of our cultural identity and country through mass immigration. It's all about perpetuating a sense of grievance within the black community; a constant victim mentality which creates resentment and hostility to whites and a white society. Poor us, look what the white man did to us; they owe us!

Blacks and Africans are hypocrites and hold whites up to a different moral standard compared to other ethnic groups because they know that they can play on white guilt and extract further privileges from gullible white liberals. The Arabs/Muslims would not put up with any of this nonsense.

I am sick to death of the constant whining [for reparations].

Further Reading (all available at amazon.co.uk):

Martin A. Klein, 'The Slave Trade in the Western Sudan During the Nineteenth Century', in *The Human Commodity*, edited by Elizabeth Savage, Frank Cass Publishers, 1992

Suzanne Myers and Igor Kopytoff, *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 1977

Thomas Sowell, *Conquests and Cultures: An International History*, Basic Books, 1998

John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, Second Edition, Cambridge University Press, 1998