

# SYLLABUS

## Class #1: The Case for Reparations

### Assigned Materials:

1) Article: Ta-Nehisi Coates' "The Case for Reparations," *Atlantic* (2014)

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>)

2) Video: "Segregated by Design," based on Richard Rothstein's book *The Color of Law*, about U.S. federal, state, and local housing segregation policy (17 minutes) <https://www.segregatedbydesign.com>

3) Text of Bill HR 40. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/40/text>

4) YouTube: Ta-Nehisi Coates: "Arguments over Reparations before a Congressional Committee about HR 40." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcCnQ3iRkys> (5 minutes)

OPTIONAL: Longer video with Richard Rothstein and Ta-Nehisi Coates on housing segregation.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Pb6y9rNKmo> (80 minutes)

### Guiding Questions:

#### HR 40

- 1.) Was there anything in HR 40 that surprised you or added to your knowledge?
- 2.) To what extent do the authors of HR 40 convince you that the idea is workable or not workable?

#### Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations"

- 1.) Was there anything in the essay that you learned that was new to you?
- 2.) Coates makes an impassioned argument for the need for reparations for African Americans. What is your response to Coates' rationale?
- 3.) Why, in his view, is reparations frightening to some people?
- 4.) Coates responds to the argument of Whites that "We never owned slaves or we are generations from the slave-owning era." What are your thoughts about his response?

## Class #2: The Case for Reparations

### Assigned Materials:

1) Article: Nikole Hannah-Jones, "What is Owed." *New York Times Magazine* (June 2020)  
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/24/magazine/reparations-slavery.html>

and/or

2) Audio podcast: Terry Gross interviews Nicole Hannah-Jones of the *New York Times* 1619 Project on the topic of reparations. Fresh Air, June 2020 (42 minutes)  
<https://www.npr.org/2020/06/24/882773218/a-call-for-reparations-how-america-might-narrow-the-racial-wealth-gap>

3) An opposing view on reparations: Video of Coleman Hughes and Katherine Franke interview, [Colemanhughes.org](http://Colemanhughes.org), June 4, 2020 (about 34 minutes from minute 31 to the end)  
<https://colemanhughes.org/should-america-pay-reparations-for-slavery-katherine-franke-ep-3/>

4) Video of Coleman Hughes testifying to Congress opposing HR 40 (June 19, 2019)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ls6g8ej21jU> (5 minutes)

### Guiding Questions:

- 1.) What is your response to Nikole Hannah-Jones' assertion that this is a unique moment of protest?
- 2.) What is your reaction to Hannah-Jones' description of the defining feature of Black life since slavery?
- 3.) How does Coates' statement, "racism is the child of economic profiteering, not the father" affect your thinking about the roots of slavery and the way Hannah Jones uses that statement to make the case for reparations?
- 4.) In the Terry Gross interview with Nicole Hannah-Jones, Terry Gross asks something like: "What about reparations for Blacks is so anathema to Whites?" How would you respond to this question?
- 5) What is your response to the Coleman Hughes and Katherine Franke interview? What is your response to Coleman Hughes' testimony before Congress opposing reparations?

## **Class #3: Historical Examples of Reparations**

### **Assigned Materials:**

1) Book chapter: Chapter 8, “Rights and Reparations,” from *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil*, by Susan Neiman (see Appendix)

and/or

2) Video: Talk by Susan Neiman about her book, *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emyY97ToZZc>

3) Article: Allen Davis, “An Historical Timeline of Reparations Payments Made from 1783 through 2021 by the United States Governments, States, Cities, Religious Institutions, Universities, Corporations, and Communities” <https://guides.library.umass.edu/reparations>

OPTIONAL: “Reparations for Slavery in the United States” (Wikipedia)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reparations\\_for\\_slavery\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reparations_for_slavery_in_the_United_States)

### **Guiding Questions:**

- 1.) Was there something you learned in the Susan Neiman reading that surprised you or added to your knowledge?
- 2.) Susan Neiman states, “There are important lessons that can be learned from the Germans and their process of dealing with the past that would help us in the United States regarding our history of racial injustice against African Americans from slavery.” What do you think about this assertion? How do you imagine these lessons being helpful to us?
- 3.) Are there some important differences between these two situations that make the argument for reparations more complex? If so, what are those differences?
- 4.) As Allen Davis’ chronology aptly demonstrates, the idea of paying reparations for various injustices committed by state or federal government is, in fact, a longstanding precedent. Why then do you think this is so challenging an issue when it comes to reparations for Black Americans?

## **Class #4: Models of /Proposals for U.S. Reparations for Descendants of Enslaved Africans in the US: Federal, Municipal and Local Efforts**

Please note: We will focus the discussion primarily on the federal reparation ideas. In the interest of time the municipal models will be covered only briefly but are provided for your interest.

### **Assigned Materials:**

#### Federal

1) Book Chapters: *From Here to Equality*, by William (aka Sandy) Darity Jr. and Kirsten Mullen (chapters 12 and 13). These chapters may be obtained from purchased or borrowed copies of the book.

and/or

2) TED Talk: Sandy Darity, “A Blueprint for Reparations in the U.S.” (36 minutes)

[https://www.ted.com/talks/william\\_sandy\\_darity\\_a\\_blueprint\\_for\\_reparations\\_in\\_the\\_us#t-3089](https://www.ted.com/talks/william_sandy_darity_a_blueprint_for_reparations_in_the_us#t-3089)

3) Article, “10 Things We Get Wrong About Reparations,” by Darity and Mullen. Portside (June 20, 2021)

<https://portside.org/2021-06-20/10-things-we-get-wrong-about-reparations>

4) Article: “Breaking the Chain,” by Emily Newburger, on the different perspectives of Charles Ogle-tree and Randall Robinson (July 1, 2001)

<https://today.law.harvard.edu/feature/breaking-chain/>

#### Optional: Municipal Models

•Evanston, IL: <https://www.cityofevanston.org/government/city-council/reparations>

•Evanston, IL, video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggMIpt6cutA>

•Evanston, IL: “The country's first municipal reparations program is off to a rocky start”

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/country-s-first-municipal-reparations-program-rocky-start-n1269289>

•Evanston, IL: “Black residents reject reparations program in Evanston, IL”

<https://www.blackenterprise.com/black-residents-reject-reparations-program-in-evanston-il/>

•Evanston, IL: “Why the nation’s first reparations program for Black residents is tied to homeownership”

<https://www.marketplace.org/2021/04/07/why-nations-first-reparations-program-black-residents-is-tied-homeownership/>

•Amherst, MA:

Conversation on Amherst Media with Michelle Miller and Matthew Andrews regarding Amherst reparations committee (September 9, 2020) <https://amherstmedia.org/content/difficult-dialogues-reparations-amherst-massachusetts>

•Amherst, MA: “Amherst council establishes reparations fund” (June 23, 2021)

<https://www.gazettenet.com/Amherst-Town-Council-establishes-reparations-fund-41095651>

•Amherst, MA: “Amherst creates fund to pay reparations to Black residents” (June 24, 2021)

(<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory/amherst-creates-fund-pay-reparations-black-residents-78469215>)

•Link to the Reparations for Amherst petition:

<https://www.thepetitionsite.com/758/640/771/reparations-for-amherst/>

•N’COBRA: National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America, with resources for local efforts, reparation resources to share, and a vision for growing reparation efforts from the bottom up

<https://www.ncobraonline.org>

### **Guiding Questions:**

- 1.) Darity and Mullen importantly distinguish between the need to pay reparations and the need to dismantle the pervasive structures of institutional racism. How would you define the dynamic between these two critical projects?
- 2.) What is your response to Darity and Mullen’s list of the key components of a reparations program?
- 3.) What are your thoughts about Darity and Mullen’s thinking in terms of the form, the source of funding, and the price tag of reparations?
- 4.) From the Emily Newburger piece: How do you respond to Randall Robinson’s definition of reparations and what he sees as the ultimate stumbling block to getting a reparations program established in the U.S.?

### **Class #5: Some Jewish Perspectives on Reparations**

*(Please note: This class will last a half hour longer.)*

## Assigned Materials:

1) YouTube: Rabbi Sharon Brous' Rosh Hashanah sermon about reparations, "Our Country was Built on a Stolen Beam" (32 minutes) (September 22, 2017)

<https://ikar.org/sermons/our-country-was-built-on-a-stolen-beam-the-call-for-a-national-reckoning/>

and/or

2) Articles:

Rabbi Sharon Brous, Rosh Hashanah sermon: "Our Country was Built on a Stolen Beam" (June 22, 2017) (*This is the text of the video sermon listed above.*) <https://ikar.org/sermons/our-country-was-built-on-a-stolen-beam-the-call-for-a-national-reckoning/>

3) Rabbi Devorah Jacobson's JCA *d'var torah* (sermon) on reparations (February 2021)

<https://jcamherst.org/2021/01/23/dvar-torah-1-23-21-bo-rabbi-devorah-jacobson/>

4) Gabriel Greschler, "Atonement: The Jewish Case for Black Reparations," *The Jewish News of Northern California* (October 4, 2019)

<https://www.jweekly.com/2019/10/04/the-jewish-case-for-black-reparations/>

5) Stuart Eizenstat, "What Holocaust Restitution Taught Me about Slavery Reparations," *Politico* (October 27, 2019)

<https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2019/slavery-reparations-holocaust-restitution-229881/>

## Guiding Questions:

- 1.) Which article was most compelling for you and why?
- 2.) Eizenstat makes some cogent arguments for reparations, including arguments against individual cash payments and the problem with payouts to descendants. What were your reactions to his thinking?
- 3.) In Devorah Jacobson's *d'var torah* (sermon) on reparations in the Torah, how are we to understand the Israelite plundering or borrowing of Egyptian wealth?
- 4.) To what extent does the Jewish ethical tradition move you toward supporting reparations?

**Closing: Thoughts and Reflections on the Entire Stolen Beam Series**  
(last half hour of class #5)

What will you take with you from this course?

To what extent did the class motivate you to take actions to support reparations?

To what extent did the class motivate you to join other anti-racism efforts?