

Reparations – Going All the Way / by Fred Foldvary, Ph.D.

Some African-Americans are calling for reparations to compensate for past slavery. Clearly there was massive theft of their labor and liberty during slavery, and if a debt is owed to the slaves, then it is not unreasonable for that compensation to be inherited.

But if one group is morally owed reparations, this principle generalizes to all groups. If we are to do reparations right, all the heirs of all those who have suffered losses in the past are owed reparations, not just of one group.

Starting with the Native American Indians, most tribes are owed reparations for the loss of their lands, culture, and violations of their treaties. But going back further, some Indian nations lost their lands and lost lives due to conquest by other Indians, so some tribes and nations owe reparations to others.

Many non-Black northerners were drafted to fight in the US Civil War, and the heirs of those who lost their lives and fortunes to fight in a war that was, in part, over slavery, are owed some compensation by the heirs of slaves. Hawaiians too lost their land and independence, and are owed reparations from other Americans.

More recent immigrants should not have to pay as much reparations as the heirs of those who were present in the US during slavery and the destruction of Indian nations. There is

also massive theft that has taken place since independence in 1776, as government in the USA has stolen the wages of all workers, which diminished the wealth of our ancestors, and reduced our inheritances, so we are owed compensation from the government and from the heirs of past landowners who benefitted from land grants as well as the rent that resulted from financing public works from wages rather than rent.

Native American Indians in all the Americas are owed huge reparations for the mass destruction, enslavement, and loss of independence and land by the Spanish, Portuguese, French, English, and Dutch. Black Africans are owed reparations from Europeans and Arabs for centuries of enslavement, deportation, and conquest. Europeans owe conquered Asians reparations as well. Turks owe reparations to conquered Arabs and Europeans.

In Europe, the heirs of the Romans owe compensation to Greeks and the Celtic peoples for conquering their lands. The English owe the Celts in the UK for dispossessing them, and the Germans owe huge reparations for conquests up to World War II. The Russians owe those in Central and Eastern Europe for conquests and destruction both before and during the Soviet era.

All kinds of reparations are owed to Jewish people: Iraqis owe for the Babylonian conquest, Egyptians (and Africans in general) for enslaving the Israelites, Greeks owe reparations for the Hellenic era, Romans owe big time for destroying ancient Israel (especially Jerusalem and the temple), and Europeans (especially the Spanish, Germans, and Russians) all owe Jews

settlements for centuries of death, expulsions, and oppression. Gypsies are owed reparations by almost all countries as well.

Homosexuals are owed reparations by heterosexuals for centuries of persecution, and atheists are due reparations from Christians and other theists for the same. Many countries in eastern Asia are owed reparations by the Japanese for conquest and deaths in this century until the end of World War II. European Australians owe the aborigines, and both Americans and the Spanish owe the people of the Philippines for past conquest.

Europeans owe the Chinese for taking control of land during the 1800s, and the Chinese owe reparations for conquests in Tibet and the Muslim areas of western China. The Mongolians need to repay Asians and Europeans for past Mongol conquests. All communists and socialists owe reparations for everyone else for having helped impose a destructive economic system on one third of the world.

All statists owe reparations to libertarians for imposing taxes and restrictions against their will and philosophy. Heirs of all soldiers who were morally opposed to war are owed compensation.

If we are going to pay reparations, it is fair that all who are owed get their share, and this implies an international conference in which all claims are presented, counter claims are netted out, and net payments are made to the deserving heirs.

Where would the money come from? Who can judge who is a deserving heir? How can we arrive at just amounts? Can anybody know?

The alternative is to acknowledge massive injustice from everybody to everybody in a past that cannot be fully rationally corrected, and to seek to establish justice here and now, so that there will be no more such claims in the future.

Economic justice can be established by recognizing that the benefit from natural resources, including spatial land, belongs to all in equal portions. Moreover, since much the value of past conquests and subsidies were based on land value, the equalization of land-value benefits goes a long way to rectify past injustice. Equal benefits from land would be the most feasible and beneficial reparation.