



Letters to the Editor

Is There Another Way?

For any one demographic group of people we may consider, it is entirely normal to harbor preconceived ideas and suppositions about them. Not fair and just, but normal.

We cannot possibly know all the members of any one demographic group of people, so we draw conclusions about the entire group based on those members of the group we observe, and those members of the group with whom we have personal dealings. We assume their actions and behaviors are derived from a common cultural group ethos. Group social cohesion depends upon a common unwritten code of behavior (*lex non scripta*), and politically incorrect upstream swimmers sooner or later wind up being social outcasts from the group. So it should come as no surprise when we judge the many on the basis of only a few.

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American Slaves and Reparations

Keith Richburg was a reporter for the *Washington Post*. As a black American, Richburg traveled to Africa in the early 1990s. He witnessed horrific genocide and other vicious violence on that continent. From that experience, Richburg wrote, “We are told by some supposedly enlightened black leaders that white America owes us something because they brought our ancestors over as slaves. And Africa — Mother Africa — is often held up as a black Valhalla, where the descendants of slaves would be welcomed back and where black men and women can walk in true dignity.” Richburg had been to Africa, and he strenuously objected to this view. He wrote, “Sorry, but I’ve been there.” He continued, “So excuse me if I sound cynical, jaded. I’m beaten down, and I’ll admit it. And it’s Africa that has made me this way.” Richburg concluded, “Thank God my ancestor got out, because, now, I am not one of them” — meaning one of those being eradicated by genocide. With seemingly deep-felt gratitude he wrote, “Thank God that I am an American.” Like boxing champ Muhammad Ali, Richburg was grateful to be an American because he was able to be the architect of his own destiny. Like Ali, Richburg noted this might not have been the case if his ancestor had not been plucked from the homeland and brought to the New World.

Also, many assume black slaves were exclusively owned by whites. Historian Kenneth Stampp writes, “Not all southern slaves were [blacks], and not all southern masters were whites.” He adds that by the year 1830, the number of free blacks who owned slaves exceeded 3,600. In *Black Masters*, authors Michael Johnson and James Roark narrate the life of William Ellison, a free black who owned slaves. They note Ellison owned over 100 slaves in South Carolina for the express purpose of exploiting and profiting from their labor. In today’s discourse regarding reparations, no one has ever considered how the ancestors of these black slave owners ought to pay reparations to the families of the slaves they exploited.

So should blacks have to pay reparations to themselves? It does not make any sense at all, and is similar in reasoning to forcing innocent whites today to pay reparations to non-existent slaves.

Moreover, hundreds of thousands of whites died in the Civil War that secured freedom for enslaved



Written by [Staff](#) on March 19, 2021

Published in the April 5, 2021 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 37, No. 07

blacks, a freedom they were not in the position to secure for themselves, and white indentured servants were also plucked from their lands to work side-by-side with black slaves. To wit, the idea of reparations is an entirely political effort to gain votes and fool Americans.

Black Americans, as Keith Richburg concluded, ought to be grateful their ancestors got on that boat headed for the New World. The freedom and security they enjoy today is a product of that sacrifice. To wit, America remains the “City on a Hill” described by John Winthrop in the 17th century, what President Ronald Reagan later referred to as “A Shining City Upon a Hill.”

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