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The Case for Reparations: Breathing New Life into an Old Idea

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The Case for Reparations: Breathing New Life into an Old Idea

Discussions of reparations for African slavery in the Americas are as old as the founding of our nation (Morgan, 2014, p. 408). In the United States, many former slaves have attempted, usually unsuccessfully, to gain some sort of redress for their lives, labor, and livelihood. From the petition of Belinda’s Royal in 1783 to the work of organizations like National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N’COBRA), the topic of reparations, and its subsequent movement, has been a constant in the lives and minds of the descendants of African slaves in America (Allen, 1998, p. 20). It is in the modern era (since 1980) that the idea of reparations has gained significant traction in the public and political discourse. The goal of this chapter is to briefly detail the history of the reparations movement, a literature review on scholarly interpretations of reparations, and to provide a high school lesson on reparations that brings the past to the present. Utilizing the recent work of Ta-Nehisi Coates, this Inquiry Design Model (IDM) lesson challenges students to not only understand and demonstrate knowledge of reparations but to also investigate the complexities surrounding making reparations a possibility in their lifetime.

A Brief History of the Reparations Movement

Former enslaved persons seeking some sort of redress for their lost labor and livelihood mark the early period (up to the Civil War) of the reparations movement. The most famous of these is the case of Belinda (Sutton) Royall who in February 1783 petitioned the Massachusetts General Court for a pension for her and her daughter. Belinda won her case and the Court agreed to a payment of 15 pounds and 12 shillings from the Royall estate to be paid annually, however only one payment was made. She would petition four more times (1785, 1787, 1788, and 1793) over the course of her life. In each instance, the Court ruled in Belinda’s favor yet the
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Royall family refused payment (Morgan, 2014, p. 409). It is thought that Belinda’s petition and others like it influenced early Black abolitionists writings like David Walker’s *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (1829) and Hosea Easton’s *Treatise on the Intellectual Character, and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People* (1837) as well as White sympathizers of reparations like Yale University president, Timothy Dwight (Finkenbine, 2007, p. 104).

During the Reconstruction Era, the reparations movement gained significant momentum and changed from an individual enterprise to a collective one. General William Tecumseh Sherman’s Special Field Order #15, commonly referred to as “Forty Acres and a Mule,” in January 1865 served as the first attempt by federal authorities to offer reparations to the formerly enslaved. Sherman’s radical plan for land redistribution in the southeastern coastal region (from Charleston, SC to the St. Mary’s River on the border of Georgia and Florida) was only temporary and did not permanently give African Americans of the region their sought-after reparations in the form of land (Biondi, 2003, p. 6). Other important pieces of legislation during the Reconstruction period – the Second Confiscation Act (1862), the Freedmen’s Bureau Act (1865), and the Southern Homestead Act (1866) – provided the necessary tools to potentially develop reparations via land redistribution for the formerly enslaved. Thaddeus Stevens’ House Resolution 29 (1867) explicitly called for just that – 40 acres for each head of household and a $50 payment to each homestead was to be taken from Confederates and given to African Americans. However, Stevens’ bill would have created a free labor system in the South and the political will of the Radical Republicans was strong but not that strong to remake American society (Biondi, 2003, p. 6). As Reconstruction faded and the nadir of race relations began (Logan, 1965), the reparations movement became a two-fold grassroots effort either fighting for slave pensions or arguing for repatriation as reparations. The National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief,
Bounty and Pension Association spearheaded by Callie House sought the passage of federal legislation which would pay former slaves, and their descendants, a pension as form of reparations (Berry, 2005). Arguing in 1893 that repatriation to Africa was the only route for African Americans, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church sought $40 million from the federal government to establish a new country for the formerly enslaved. Both House and Turner would go on to inspire other advocates for reparations like Marcus Garvey of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and Audley (Queen Mother) Moore (Berry, 2005, p. 235-237).

After World War II, African American efforts for reparations increased. For example, Moore’s (1955) *Why Reparations?* continued her work on reparations that she had begun first in the UNIA and later the Communist Party. She, and other important Black freedom movement figures like Paul Robeson, William Patterson, and Malcolm X, petitioned the United Nations to recognize reparations for African Americans in 1957. On the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1962, Moore would present President Kennedy with a petition calling for reparations that contained a million signatures (Aiyetoro & Davis, 2010, p. 707). As the 1960s progressed, both the Nation of Islam and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense advocated for reparations. It wasn’t until the late 1960s that the reparations movement would become more vocal and divisive (Aiyetoro & Davis, 2010, p. 691).

In May 1969, James Forman delivered *The Black Manifesto*, which called for reparations from White Christian churches (and later Jewish synagogues) in the sum of $500 million for their participation in and benefiting from slavery, racism, and colonialism. It was “the first systematic, fully elaborated plan for reparations to emerge from the Black freedom movement” (Kelley, 2002, p. 120). *The Black Manifesto* seeks to transform America from establishing of a
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southern land bank and creating cooperative businesses in Africa to building infrastructure in the Black community and a national Black university. While not realized, *The Black Manifesto* brought Black nationalism to the fore in the reparations movement while connecting this struggle into the “lexicon of liberation struggle” in Africa and elsewhere (Dye, 2009, p. 83) and providing the “tools for a cultural revolution in black thinking” (Browne, 1969, p. 76).

Picking up where Forman left off was the Republic of New Afrika (RNA), a Black Nationalist group founded by Gaidi and Imari Obadele (Milton and Richard Henry), friends and associates of Malcolm X, in 1968. The RNA was heavily influenced by the work of Queen Mother Moore, who would later join the RNA, and her (and the Communist Party’s) work around the Black Belt Thesis and the creation of a Black state (Williams, 2015, p. 180). They argued that Mississippi, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Louisiana were “subjugated territory.” Their 1972 reparations program called for this territory to be ceded to them along with $400 billion from the federal government and a plebiscite that would allow African Americans to become citizens of the new republic. Seeking both land as wealth and land as space for Black people, at the core of the RNA’s radical vision of reparations was the birth of a new society (Kelley, 2002, p. 125-126).

While the Black freedom movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s brought much needed discussions about reparations to the forefront, it is in the modern context (since 1980) that the reparations movement has experienced, albeit limited, successes. After the repressive FBI’s Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) targeted its leaders on conspiracy, assault, and sedition charges, the RNA transitioned their struggle for reparations into the grassroots organization, the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N’COBRA), in 1987. Continuing the RNA’s Black nationalism bent, N’COBRA has sought to bring together various
organizations’ (and individual) fights for reparations – the RNA, Nation of Islam, National Black United Front, and the National Association of Black Social Workers - under the same banner to make the call for reparations a mainstream movement. Along with Harvard Law School professor, Charles J. Ogletree, N’COBRA has pursued legal and legislative efforts in their fight for reparations, especially after the passage of the Civil Liberties Act (1988) which granted reparations to Japanese Americans interned during World War II (Aiyetoro and Davis, 2010, p. 730). This legislative lobbying led to the drafting of H.R. 40 (Commission to Study and Develop Reparations for African American Act) which was first introduced in 1989 and has been introduced by Conyers every congressional session since (Nelson, 2016, p. 118).

Pursuing a slightly different, yet related, path is the work of lawyer and activist Randall Robinson, founder of the TransAfrica Forum, a policy group that focuses on U.S. and African diasporic relations, formed the Reparations Coordinating Committee in the fight for reparations. With the successes of other reparations lobbying and litigation efforts – the 1993 Congressional apology of the U.S. conquest of Hawaii and the 1994 Florida case to pay $1.5 million in reparations for the 1923 Rosewood Massacre – Robinson sought reparations redress in the courts (Torpey & Burkett, 2010, p. 454). Enlisting the help of Ogletree and N’COBRA, Robinson wanted to put together a group of high-profile African American attorneys to pursue litigation for reparations. Their first case was to fight for the survivors and descendants of the 1921 Tulsa (OK) Race Riot. Citing a statute of limitations defense when brought to federal court in 2003, Ogletree, Robinson, & others associated with N’COBRA efforts to win reparations fell short in this case. Other efforts especially the 2002 class action lawsuit against several corporations (Aetna, CSX Railroad, Fleet Boston, and others) continue to put discussions of reparations, and the continuing reparations movement, into the public forum for debate and discussion.
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Generally falling along the lines of race and/or the question of Black integration into White society, the critics of reparations are just as varied as proposed solutions to the reparation question. Arguments against reparations center around three main ideas: 1) that current citizens had nothing to do with the injustices of slavery, Jim Crow, etc. (i.e. no moral or legal liability), 2) compensation has already been made in the form of affirmative action and other Great Society programs, and 3) that compensation for reparations is either impracticable, not politically possible, and/or divisive in nature and focuses on the past, not the future (Brophy, 2006, p. 75-94). More recently, conservative Black voices, namely Ward Connelly, Armstrong Williams, and Shelby Steele, have led the critiques of the reparations movement. However, the advertisement, “Ten Reasons Why Reparations for Blacks is a Bad Idea for Blacks - and Racist Too,” in some 50 U.S. college newspapers placed by David Horowitz in 2001 offers the most resounding (and ahistorical) set of arguments against reparations (Cha-Jua, 2001). Inherit in Horowitz’s and other anti-reparation arguments is the unwillingness of White America to reflect, reconcile, and change systemic racism (Feagin, 2010, p. 294-300).

A Literature Review of Reparations

Scholarship on reparations and its subsequent movement has blossomed over the last 20 years and has included a diversity of fields including history, psychology, economics, political science, philosophy, sociology, law, communications, Black studies and mainstream media. This diversity highlights and speaks to the significance of the reparations debate and its importance in our current political and social environment in the United States.

Historic treatments of reparations are few and far between. Generally, only overviews of either the Black Power movement (Joseph, 2006; Williams, 2015), histories of the Black left (Kelley, 2002; Dawson, 2013), or Black Studies specific journals (Allen, 1998; Franklin, 2012)
have given researchers ample background on the history of the reparations movement. There
are, of course, exceptions to that in the work on Callie House (Berry, 2005), the Black Manifesto
(Dye, 2009), and the first overview of the reparations movement by a historian (Biondi, 2003).
Other works on reparations which compare the African American context to that of Japanese
Americans (Yamamoto, 1998; Howard-Hassman, 2004), the Jewish and Japanese contexts
(Laremont, 2001), and the reconciliation mandate after the fall of apartheid in South Africa
(Walters, 2008) certainly broaden our perspectives. Recently, the work on reparations from a
special edition of The Journal of African American History has started to fill the void (Morgan,
2014) and the award-winning work on race and the genome (Nelson, 2016) is taking the debate
over reparations into new and unchartered territory. A new comparative study (Araujo, 2017)
offers a transnational narrative history of reparations for the Atlantic Slave Trade. Certainly,
other fields, especially law, have provided adequate background on the reparations movement.
However, these efforts outside of history are usually focused on a particular aspect of reparations
(i.e. as a movement or the logistics of making reparations a reality) and not on the history of the
movement, individuals, or organizations. To this point, there has been little to no scholarly work
done solely devoted to key ingredients, like Queen Mother Moore and the Republic of New
Afrika, in the story of the reparations movement.

Many pieces focus on the real world logistical issues surrounding reparations – what do
we mean by reparations, how would it work from a practical standpoint, and how would it solve
problems centered around race in the United States. From scholarly work that centers around the
psychological damage done by slavery, Jim Crow and colonialism and, thus argues the need for
reparations (Azibo, 2008; Carroll & Jamison, 2011; and Prager, 2017) to the economic
explanations and rationale of reparations (Browne, 1972; Darity, 2008; Darity, Lahiri, & Frank,
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2010), these works broaden our notions of why and how reparations might look, if implemented. Other works (Corlett, 2003; Brooks, 2004; Brophy, 2006; and Corlett, 2010) mainly philosophical in manner, seek to broaden our perspectives of what we mean by reparations and why they are necessary for our country to “move forward” from addressing issues of systemic and institutionalized racism that have plagued our nation since its beginnings. DeWolf and Morgan (2012) explains how two individuals, using genealogical records and a healing model, can serve as an example of how reparations can bring unity between Blacks and Whites.

The legal justification of and the political will for reparations is where the bulk of scholarship on the issue lies. From the groundbreaking work that outlined the legal theory for reparations (Bittker, 1973) to the work of an activist scholar deeply embedded in the reparations movement (Robinson, 2001), lawyers have played a central - if not the central – role in the fight for reparations. To those in the field of educational research, this should be of no surprise as Critical Race Theory (CRT), which comes from Critical Legal Studies (CLS), is a central methodology for looking at issues of race. By utilizing CLS (Matsuda, 1987) and CRT (Magee, 1993), these legal scholars have led the way in the development of nuanced arguments for reparations. Certainly, recent legal overviews of reparations (Laney, 2008; Torpey & Burkett, 2010) have kept scholars and legislators current but legal scholarship that has focused reparation litigation as a force for change (Notes, 2002), the impact of reparations on human rights and the War on Terror (Yamamoto, Serrano & Rodriguez, 2003), and detailed the intimate work of N’COBRA on reparations (Aiyetoro & Davis, 2010) have decisively revealed the complexities of legal work in this arena. While there is considerable overlap with the politics of reparations, and its subsequent movement, in scholarly work previously mentioned, several works in the field of politics stand out. By concisely detailing the anti-reparations arguments (Cha-Jua, 2001),
providing the bridge between policy making and public opinion surrounding reparations (Michelson, 2002), or highlighting the political rationale behind reparations (Henry, 2003; Henry, 2007), political notions of reparations are intertwined with the work of legal, philosophical, and historical researchers.

Noting that there is little to no educational scholarship on reparations (or the reparations movement) itself which is surprising, some of the most important and useful scholarship comes from a series of readers that mash together the multitude of disciplines that contribute to the body of reparations scholarship. By detailing the roots of racism in America with a focus on antiracist strategies to win reparations (Feagin, 2010) and comprehensively collecting both pro and con arguments and documentation surrounding reparations (Winbush, 2003), these readers provide useful if not necessary tools to delve into the case for reparations in the classroom. Further work that provides an annotated bibliography of the field (Zulu, 2016), a college level reader that was birthed from a course on reparations at Metropolitan State University (MN) (Salzberger & Turck, 2004), and edited volume that highlights nearly every example of reparations in human history thus far (Brooks, 1999), all showcase potential for use particularly in social studies classrooms. Lastly, the most important and useful reparations reader which has pushed and expanded the boundaries of what the fight for reparations can become in redressing the historic injustices in our country provides many examples of how to use academic scholarship on reparations in high school or even middle school classrooms (Martin & Yaquinto, 2007).

**Lesson Plan on “The Case for Reparations”**

**Lesson Introduction**

In an effort to educate students about reparations, the first two authors (Molly Pozel and Greg Simmons) have been involved in teaching an African American block class - African
American Literature and African American Studies combined together - which has an unit on slavery, its legacies and reparations. Our unit focuses on slavery as the focal point within the Black experience in America. The goal is to explore how intergenerational trauma and systemic and institutional racism affect us today.

For this unit, we use the following texts: the novel *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi, Kwame Nkrumah’s 1957 Independence Speech, “We Should All Be Feminists” a TED Talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the 2016 *The Atlantic* article by Tiffany Stanley’s “The Disappearance of a Distinctively Black Way to Mourn,” and *The Atlantic* article from 2014 by Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations.” Our lesson plan explains how to use a reparations argument, Coates’ in particular, to address our essential question for the unit: What are some of the lasting impacts of slavery in American society?

This lesson plan is part of a larger effort to provide more critical Black History education to students (King, 2017; King & Woodson, 2017). Our lesson responds to current discussions of slavery and reparations in both mainstream and academic circles. It is important for our students to understand, borrowing a phrase from Jacquelyn Dowd Hall (2005), the “long” history of slavery and its lingering effects. The debate over reparations is certainly not going away anytime soon, especially as Araujo points out that “in this new context, in which public memory of slavery is increasingly institutionalized, demands for financial and material reparations for slavery and the Atlantic Slave Trade are again resurfacing” (p. 1). Now more than ever, it’s within our current period of American history that the legacies of slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and racial terrorism are both past and present at the same time. We seek to help our students navigate this historically laden terrain by highlighting the systems of oppression that have been a part of the American story from the beginning. This is a lesson that focuses on helping students
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grapple with the historical legacies of slavery and reparations that continue to play out in the media, by the (in)action of politicians, and the forgotten collective memory of White America.

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<tr>
<th>Inquiry Design Model (IDM) Blueprint™</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Compelling Question</strong></td>
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| **Standards and Practices** | **CCSS ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7** (Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g. visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question of solve a problem.)  
**C3 FRAMEWORK, D2.Eco.13.9-12** (Explain why advancements in technology and investments in capital goods and human capital increase economic growth and standards of living)  
**C3 FRAMEWORK, D2.Soc.17.9-12** (Analyze why the distribution of power and inequalities can result in conflict)  
**C3 FRAMEWORK, D2.Soc.18.9-12** (Propose and evaluate alternative responses to inequality) |
| **Staging the Question** | Students will read Ta-Nehisi Coates' 2014 piece “The Case for Reparations,” discuss centuries of institutional racism in America, and analyze the nuances and obstacles of enacting a nationwide system of redress for the Black community. |
| **Supporting Question 1** | What are reparations? Why might people argue to receive them and why? (Definition, Eligibility, & Rationale) |
| **Supporting Question 2** | What historic injustices do reparations seek to repair? Can reparations repair these problems? Why or why not? (Gaining Historical Perspective & Applying Knowledge) |
| **Supporting Question 3** | What options concerning reparations have already been proposed and are they viable? How so? (Viability & Evidence-based Argument) |
| **Formative Performance Task** | Read Coates’ article and explore redlining maps  
Discussion of institutional racism in American society & create a master list of its impact on African Americans  
Student brainstorm, gathering evidence & production of reparations plan |
| **Featured Sources** | Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations” (2014)  
Mapping Inequality website  
Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations” (2014)  
Mapping Inequality website  
UNIA “Declaration of the Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World” (1920)  
Civil Rights Congress “We Charge Genocide” (1951)  
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<th>Summative Performance Task</th>
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<td><strong>Argument</strong></td>
<td>Construct a written argument that details a plan for reparations which addresses the social, historic, economic, and political needs of African Americans. This argument should answer the compelling question by developing claims and using specific evidence from both primary and secondary sources. It should also address and/or acknowledge arguments against reparations.</td>
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<td><strong>Extension</strong></td>
<td>Create a multimedia presentation that assesses and addresses the need(s) for reparations. This presentation should address the needs of the Black community as well as answer the primary strategies and the strengths &amp; weaknesses used in this campaign for redress.</td>
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<th>Taking Informed Action</th>
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<td>Understand – Research the financial &amp; societal costs of guaranteeing reparations. Assess – Examine the advantages &amp; disadvantages of the federal government paying reparations. Act – Write a letter to their congressperson supporting the proposed Conyers Bill (HR 40).</td>
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**Standards for Lesson Plan**

**Common Core State Standards**

1. **CCSS ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7**
   - Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g. visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question of solve a problem.

2. **CCSS ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.9**
   - Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**C3 Framework**

1. **C3 FRAMEWORK, D2.Eco.13.9-12**
   - Explain why advancements in technology and investments in capital goods and human capital increase economic growth and standards of living.

2. **C3 FRAMEWORK, D2.Soc.17.9-12**
   - Analyze why the distribution of power and inequalities can result in conflict.

3. **C3 FRAMEWORK, D2.Soc.18.9-12**
   - Propose and evaluate alternative responses to inequality.

**NCSS Curriculum Standards for Social Studies**

VI. Power, Authority & Governance

   Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance, so that the learner can:

   D. recognize how groups and organizations encourage unity and deal with diversity to maintain order and security;

   H. recognize and give examples of the tensions between the wants and needs of individuals and groups, and concepts such as fairness, equity and justice.
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Compelling Question:
In what ways would reparations address the lasting impacts of slavery in America?

Staging the Question:

   Students will read Ta-Nehisi Coates’ 2014 piece “The Case for Reparations”, discuss centuries of institutional racism in America, and analyze the nuances and obstacles of enacting a nationwide system of redress for the Black community. Students will encounter and investigate a variety of reparations proposals from credit forgiveness to historical monuments. This will serve as a starting point for students to develop their own argumentative stance on reparations.

Supporting Questions:
1. What are reparations? Why might people argue to receive them and why?
2. What historic injustices do reparations seek to repair? Can reparations repair these problems? Why or why not?
3. What options concerning reparations have already been proposed and are they viable? How so?

Formative Performance Tasks:
- Read Coates (story of Clyde Ross) and explore redlining maps in urban areas
- Overview/discussion of institutional racism in American society and creation of master list effects on African Americans
- Small group brainstorm and evidence gathering from multiple sources

Lesson Narrative

   From slavery to Jim Crow to mass incarceration, students learn the institutional oppressions inflicted on the Black community over centuries in America. By grappling with reparations, students stop viewing these racist structures as finite eras composed of racist events and instead must explore the ways in which history informs the present, the generational impacts of oppression on an individual, and the relationship between America’s morality and the Black community’s humanity. Students will enter this historic and ongoing conversation first through the narrative of Clyde Ross as told in Ta-Nehisi Coates’ 2014 piece in *The Atlantic*, “The Case for Reparations”. Through Ross’ story, students encounter the structures that justify arguments
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for reparations including Jim Crow, seizure of Black-owned land, lynchings, unfair creditor practices, and redlining. Beginning with Ross’ story in this lesson serves the same purpose that is does in Coates’ exhaustive argument, to humanize what often begins as an economic discussion. Students will note the effects of institutional racism within generations of one family, its geographical movement effects from Mississippi to Chicago, and its prevailing detriment in one Chicago neighborhood. This inquiry process develops student-skills in research, analyzing argument structure, map reading, and rhetorical strategies. Following this lesson, students will continue to read Coates’ case before developing their own argumentative stance on reparations, including how their proposal may be logistically implemented individually, in their community, or nationally. Our aim is that students enter the conversation on reparations rather than view it from afar.

Staging the Question

The staging of our compelling question does not begin with a definition of “reparations,” instead it is designed to provoke student to consider the connotations of words associated with arguments for and against reparations: owe, deserve, vulnerable, and right. Students will be prompted to write independently on a series of questions, What does it mean to deserve something? What does it mean to owe something? What does it mean to be vulnerable? How do you determine if something is right or wrong? We will encourage students to take these broad questions and recall moments in which they felt deserving, owed, vulnerable, and righteous. Volunteers will share answers aloud before we prompt them to apply each term to a scenario in an environment that they are familiar with and that, in many ways, reflects the obstacles, hierarchy, and populations of America: their school. Students will be asked to identify the most vulnerable group at their school. Anticipated answers are special needs students, ESL learners,
illiterate students, impoverished students, and students of color. As a class, students will select one of these groups to apply to our scenario. With a partner or small groups, students will define what makes these students vulnerable specifically within the institution of their school. For example, students within the ESL population may encounter a language barrier when completing an English assignment on figurative language, which earns them a poor grade, denying them grade-based privileges at our school. Finally, students individually or in small groups, will create a chart composed of three columns, each containing a question: What does this vulnerable population deserve during their time at school? What is this vulnerable population owed by our school? What is the right thing for our school to do in regards to this vulnerable population? This exercise will shed light on the similarities and differences between the language used in reparations arguments, which will serve students in their analyses of rhetoric, and it will provide us an opportunity to gauge student opinion. Following the activity, students will be introduced to the definition of reparations and the author of our main text Ta-Nehisi Coates.

Question 1, Formative Task 1, Featured Sources

In order to understand any argument for or against reparations, students must understand the institutional systems that have created centuries of injustice against the Black community. The narrative of Clyde Ross in section I of Coates’ “The Case for Reparations” begins with Ross’ birth in Clarksdale, Mississippi in 1923 and chronicles his life up until his 1968 activism with The Contract Buyers League to fight housing discrimination in Chicago’s North Lawndale neighborhood. As students read this section, titled “So That’s Just One of My Losses”, they will track they systems Ross and his family encountered that left them at a disadvantage over the course of his life. Students will annotate the text for these areas and indicate systems or events that can be defined as racial injustice. While students will likely have an easy time noting the
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institutional racism of the Jim Crow South apparent in this section, the institutional racism of the Federal Housing Administration will be more difficult to grasp. To remedy this confusion and provide the necessary nuance in understanding fully the case for reparations, students will view two additional sources. First, we will watch *The Atlantic*’s supplemental video “Inside the Battle for Fair Housing in 1960s Chicago”, which interviews Ross and other organizers of The Contract Buyers League. The video ends with statistics on present-day North Lawndale including the high unemployment rate of the area, the percentage of residents living below the poverty line (nearly half), and the ratio of vacant to occupied homes (1 in 5). Encourage students to take note of these statistics before introducing the next source.

In order to complement and supplement Ross’s narrative from “The Case for Reparations,” students will also investigate the website, “Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America” (https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/), which is part of the American Panorama project at the Digital Scholarship Lab at the University of Richmond (VA). This website offers a national collection of “security maps” from the federal government program, Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC). With over 150 maps of cities and larger towns across the United States, Mapping Inequality details the role of federal, state, and local agencies that worked together to use the practice of redlining to keep African Americans in certain neighborhood and out of others. When coupled with the narrative of Clyde Ross, this resource will help students to understand the complexities of African American homeownership as well as the forces working against those same individuals seeking their slice of the “American dream.” Students are directed to examine a municipality of their choosing (but are encouraged to first look at Chicago because of the connections with Mr. Ross’s experience) to first understand how to read the map (and to understand its rationale) and, secondly, to make connections between the
information provided and the Coates article to understand how and why African Americans were taken advantage of in real estate dealings. Students will refer to this information as the lesson progresses.

**Question 2, Formative Task 2, Featured Sources**

Working in small groups (3-5) students will discuss the issues of institutional racism that arose in both the Coates article and their investigation of the Mapping Inequality website. From those discussions, they will create a group list, which will eventually merge into a whole-class list, of issues/items of institutional racism not addressed in either the article or website. Students can/should focus on intersecting issues of institutional racism (outside of the example of housing already investigated) like access to various levels of education or training, prospects for and types of employment opportunities and how that impacts income, access to and availability of credit in developing wealth, access to and the affordability of healthcare and related health issues, the ability to exercise political power locally, statewide, and nationally, and issues surrounding the criminal justice system: (mass) incarceration, police harassment and/or violence. While students do not necessarily need to address every issue connected to institutional racism but the more nuanced their listing, the better.

After identifying these eight major components (education, employment, income, wealth, healthcare, political power, criminal justice, and housing), students will begin to collaborate with other groups as part of a whole-class discussion. Student groups will present their findings to the class and will be interacting and questioning each others reasoning, rationale, and/or evidence. During this discussion, students should be engaged in note taking using a graphic organizer (if applicable and/or available) while keeping their focus on using the discussion to help them to eventually answer the compelling question. Once the discussion is completed, students will
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compile their own personal compilation of initial understandings of the effects of institutional racism on African Americans. This compilation will assist them in developing claims and gathering evidence for those claims during the next formative task.

**Question 3, Formative Task 3, Featured Sources**

Once the second formative task is complete, students will be directed to investigate various previously articulated reparations proposals. Students will select from a number of proposals - nine in all - which discuss varying aspects of reparations. Beginning chronologically, the multiple petitions of Belinda (Sutton) Royall, which is also detailed in the Coates article, from the late 18th Century offers students a glimpse at the first documented case for reparations. The Royall House & Slave Quarters Museum in Medford, MA offers a thorough explanation of the case and links to the original documents held by in the Massachusetts Archives Collection at Harvard University. The “Declaration of the Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World” (1920) by the United Negro Improvement Association addresses the issues surrounding reparations and is the beginning point of activism for life long reparations advocate, Audley (Queen Mother) Moore. Presented to the United Nations in 1951, the Civil Rights Congress document, “We Charge Genocide,” offers a comprehensive tallying of crimes committed against African Americans who sought redress from the United Nations instead of the US government. The brief yet poignant, “What We Want, What We Believe,” party platform of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in 1966 showcases the issue of reparations in the context of the beginnings of the Black Power movement. Another Black Power advocate, the Republic of New Afrika’s 1969 “Declaration of Independence” outlines their program to create a Black nation in the southern United States. James Forman’s famous 1969 speech, “The Black Manifesto,” seeks redress from White Christian churches and Jewish synagogues for the ravages of slavery. A speech from
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Louis Farrakhan in 1990 gives a religious take on the reparations issue. “The Abuja Proclamation” of the Organization of African Unity in 1993 provides an international perspective about reparations. And lastly, N’COBRA’s “The Reparations Campaign” (2000) gives students a current voice in the fight for reparations. While there are a number of additional or different sources that could be used for this lesson, the authors note that these sources reveal the development of arguments for reparations over time which is essential for students’ understanding of the topic.

From these nine primary sources, students will select a minimum of three to investigate in-depthly and to ultimately use in their summative performance task. While we (Molly & Greg) left the choice of the sources up to students, it may be important to either steer students in one direction (or another) or reduce the number of documents used in this activity. Regardless, students will require a certain amount of background information on each source so that they can put it in proper historical perspective. We suggest that the teacher look to our history of the reparations movement (at the beginning of this chapter) and/or consult our references which are loaded with prospective insight in developing this background material. After students have selected their sources, they should engage in combining the sources with their information from Formative Task #2. The goal of students in this process is to be able to begin crafting their own arguments and justifications about reparations.

**Summative Performance Task**

For this culminating task, students will integrate their findings, information from their discussions, and primary and secondary source materials to produce an argumentative essay that addresses the compelling question: In what ways would reparations address the lasting impacts of slavery in America? Students will structure their essay as a plan for reparations which
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dresses the social, economic, political, and/or historic needs of the Black community. As teachers, we (Molly & Greg) see students effectively covering three (of the four) needs in their papers. In each paragraph, students will outline their argument with multiple pieces of evidence that seeks to answer the specific need and, additionally, they will need to (at a minimum) acknowledge the counterargument against reparations for that need. We feel this acknowledgement is important because it helps to ground the work of the student as part of a historical trajectory in the reparations movement (i.e. they weren’t the first ones with this idea) and it also demonstrates a connection to the complexities surrounding the implementation of reparations. Once students have completed a minimum of three needs of the Black community, their conclusion should address the possible challenges, limitations, and scope of their reparations plan. It’s important to recognize and acknowledge the challenges of their reparation plan because one of our goals in this lesson is to get students to think about how do we fix something that should have been fixed a long time ago yet still presents a problem to a large segment of the population today. This assignment helps to get students to see the complex nature of reparations from its arguments to eligibility, from its history to its viability. If students take the issue of reparations seriously and beyond the idea of “getting paid” or “a handout,” they will discover that while the complexities involved in making reparations a reality don’t necessarily outnumber the legitimate and important reasons why reparations for Black America should be front and center in the racial healing process that our country will/should eventually undertake. We see this lesson as both an academic exercise as well as an important step forward in contributing to this process of racial healing. The conclusion will also serve as a linkage point to the Taking Informed Action component of the IDM.

Taking Informed Action
In this component that focuses on “real world” applications of the subject matter, it’s important to note that fight for reparations is very much a work in progress. The work of N’COBRA and other legal and civil rights strategists and organizations is continuing to evolve and is, at a bare minimum, winning recognition of “wrongdoing” from corporations, universities, and local and state governments concerning reparations for slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and other racist actions against African Americans (Morgan, 2014, p. 415-419). By understanding the debates behind the financial and social costs of African American reparations, students know that it’s not just a simple matter that the president or Congress can act upon. It’s a much larger, societal issue that is mired in complexities and racism. In assessing the advantages and disadvantages of the possibility of the role of the federal government in reparations, students grapple with “doing what’s right” or “due” to African Americans versus a dominant White constituency that has/continues to argue that “we should let bygones be bygones” when it comes to the issue of reparations. Students can easily demonstrate their agency by actively getting involved in any number of organizations, for example N’COBRA, that continues to advocate for reparations. Regardless of the direction, students can use this lesson and its readings to move the fight and arguments for reparations forward.

**Tips and Advice**

In thinking about advice to give to teachers who are considering utilizing this (or parts of this) lesson in class, we (Molly & Greg) have broken this section into two parts—one that deals with lesson implementation and another that deals with source material(s) and background knowledge. In regards to lesson implementation, a great deal of consideration and care needs to be taken when asking all students to define a vulnerable population as some students in the room will be a part of that population. Teachers should provide many examples of historic tragedies,
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genocide, or wrongdoing (i.e. Jews and the Holocaust, Japanese Americans during World War II, etc.) and the issue of reparations. By providing the caveat that groups of students can change in vulnerability within a particular context (and/or content) (and in class, we are selecting one for hypothetical purposes) might be the approach that some teachers have to take in the process of engaging in this lesson. In a scenario like this, it’s important to reiterate classroom togetherness on selecting one group for learning purposes. Like most classroom issues dealing with race, teachers need to be both open and vigilant in their approaches to subject matter. While no one is the master of all content, teachers must be careful in their approach to and knowledge about reparations. The discussion of this controversial topic, if not properly framed and thought out by the instructor, could lead to racialized strife in the classroom, which is certainly not the goal of this lesson/chapter. As the ones who know their classroom and school culture best, teachers should feel free to adapt this lesson accordingly to their situation. We are hopeful that teachers will embrace the discomfort that can be associated with discussions of reparations and race in their classrooms.

In regards to sources and background knowledge about reparations, there are many possibilities to consider. There is an audio version of “The Case for Reparations” that is available embedded online at The Atlantic’s website. This version of the Coates text proved useful in class as the article is quite long and by using the audio version (instead of having students read independently) we saw more consistent student engagement during Formative Task #1. More importantly, the edited work by Martin and Yaquinto (2007) provides both historic background and primary documentation in one neat package. If there is any one text that we would recommend for this lesson, it would be Martin and Yaquinto’s comprehensive piece on reparations. Many of the other sources used in the formative tasks are also available online in
various forms. We chose to use documents from *Redress for Historical Injustices in the United States* instead of their online versions because many were edited versions. With classroom time constraints in mind, we thought it best to use many smaller texts than fewer larger ones. Also to this point, Coates’ article is sizable both in length and in his language. We wanted to make the topic of reparations accessible to students while also making sure to not dumb down the rigor and content.
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Sources

Formative Task #1 & 2
https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/  
https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/

Formative Task #3
Sutton, B. (1783). Belinda’s petition to the Massachusetts General Court. Accessed from the Royall House & Slave Quarters Museum website, http://www.royallhouse.org/belinda-suttons-1783-petition-full-text/. A full listing of all documents associated with Belinda’s case can be found as part of the Massachusetts Archives Collection at Harvard University,  
https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/0GMCO


Sources
References


