

How to Make Amends: A Lesson on Reparations

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Credit: Kelly Hayes

Chicago Light Brigade Project. NIA. Chicago Torture Justice Memorials demand reparations outside Rahm Emanuel home.

AS HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS OF HISTORY AND government, we teach about reparations at multiple points across the curriculum. Students learn about the reparations imposed upon Germany by the Treaty of Versailles following World War I; students learn about the failure of the U.S. government to enact reparations — 40 acres and a mule — for newly emancipated people during Reconstruction; students learn about the 1988 Civil Liberties Act through which Congress paid 82,000 Japanese American survivors of the U.S. government’s wartime incarceration program \$20,000 each, totaling more than \$1.6 billion. But when we have asked our students to grapple with the possibility of the United States paying reparations today — for slavery and its 20th- and 21st-century legacies of white supremacist violence, disenfranchisement, and exploitation — we find students struggle to unleash their critical imaginations. It’s hard to get dialogue, conversation, a proliferation of ideas bubbling up in the classroom.

Some students hold fast to the “slavery is

long gone” line of thinking. Some students are frozen by the magnitude of the harm: How could any amount of money ever properly address the wickedness of slavery and racism? Other students worry about the practical questions: Who would be eligible to receive payment? What form would payment take? How long would a reparations program last and how much would it cost? These responses are understandable and important; yet, we noticed that students had trouble navigating through their initial positions to engage with a broader scope of possibilities. Students got stuck thinking of reparations only as a onetime compensatory payment intended to right the wrongs of history. We wanted students to consider how a legacy of injustice as deeply rooted and multi-dimensional as anti-Black racism in the United States requires a multifaceted strategy, not a single action.

We developed this lesson to help students find a way into thinking and talking more imaginatively about reparations in general before we ask

them to examine the modern debate over African American reparations specifically. (We have been piloting an African American reparations role play that will be completed and posted later this year.) In this mixer role play, students learn about more than a dozen different examples of reparations — ranging from cash payments to land settlements to state apologies — from a variety of historical moments and places. Students meet those who advocated for reparations, those who received them, and those who did not. They walk away from the activity with a greater understanding of the horizon of possible reparative policies and enough examples to begin to analyze and articulate their own beliefs about the appropriate context, goal, and form of reparations.

Materials Needed

- Mixer roles, cut up, one for every student in the class.
- Blank nametags, enough for every student in the class.
- Copies of Reparations Mixer Questions for every student.

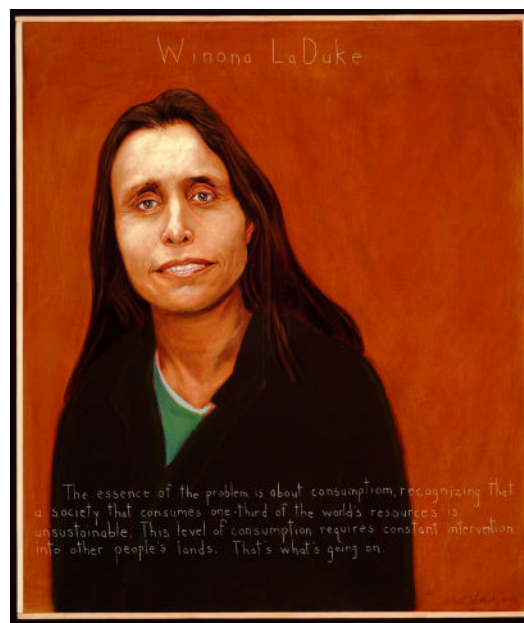
Time Required

- 1–2 90-minute block class periods.

Suggested Procedure

Optional opening: We opened this lesson with narrative writing. We asked students to brainstorm a list of apologies they had received and offered in their lives. We shared a few apologies from our own lives to help them get started. Once each student had at least a few examples, we asked them to choose one to write about. We suggested they address the following questions:

- How did the nature of the harm or misdeed shape the kind of apology that was needed?
- Was the apology you received/offered genuine? Hollow? How do you know the difference? Did it include an action to address the wrong? Or was it just a verbal offering?
- Why are apologies important?



Winona LaDuke, Native American activist and environmentalist. Portrait by Robert Shetterly. © Americans Who Tell The Truth.

1. Show students [this excerpt](#) of activist Winona LaDuke speaking about redemption. Have students discuss their thoughts, questions, reactions. Some possible discussion questions:
 - » What does LaDuke mean when she says that apologies offer the possibility of redemption? Who is redeemed? How?
 - » In the example she explores — the sacred seeds of the Pawnees and what is today Kearney, Nebraska — how was there both an apology and a redemption?
 - » (Optional) Did the apology you wrote about include redemption? Why or why not?
2. Explain to students that they are going to do an activity to continue to explore the question of apologies, making amends, and redemption. Tell students that the role play in which they are about to participate is about reparations (you may need to define this term with them).
3. Distribute one mixer role to each student in the class. There are 31, so in most classes, every student will be assigned a unique

character. For smaller classes, you'll want to include at least one representative of each unique instance of reparations before doubling up. There are multiple roles addressing reparations for the Holocaust, "comfort women," forced sterilization in North Carolina, the Tuskegee Syphilis experiment, slavery in the United States, imperialism in Hawai'i, nuclear testing on the Marshall Islands, apartheid in South Africa, and Japanese incarceration. If you only have 27 students, for example, you might eliminate two of the four characters who address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, one of the three characters who talk about Japanese incarceration, and one of the two spokespeople for "comfort women." Of course, it's helpful to read through all the roles to decide which roles will work best with your curriculum.

4. Ask students to fill out their nametags, using the name of the individual they are assigned. All the people in this activity are real people, some of them still alive today. Alert students that many of the stories they will learn about and share are upsetting; they include instances of sexual assault, child abuse, violence. Tell students that although you are asking them to take on the "role" of the character they have been assigned, this is not an acting class. Students should speak in their own voices (no accents) and refer to the information in their role sheet as the basis for their conversations with others.
5. Ask students to read their role several times, to memorize as much of the information as possible, and circle words that are unfamiliar to them. Walk around and clarify words or concepts as students read. Next, ask students to turn over their role and list three or four facts about their character. This helps students internalize the information they will share in the mixer.
6. Distribute a copy of "Reparations Mixer Questions" to every student. Read the questions aloud with the class and ask students to mark the questions their character can answer for other members of the class. Give them a few minutes to prepare.
7. Explain their assignment: Students should circulate through the classroom, meeting other individuals, all of whom have different experiences and knowledge of reparations. They should use the questions on the sheet as a guide to talk with others. They must use a different individual to answer each of the questions. Tell them that it's not a race; the aim is for students to spend time hearing each other's stories, not just filling in boxes or scribbling hurried answers. We also alerted students that we'd be discussing more after the mixer. We said, "As you listen to the different examples of apologies and reparations, think about which ones seem healing and genuine and which don't and why."
8. Ask students to begin to circulate throughout the class to meet one another and to fill out responses on the "Reparations Mixer Questions" worksheet. Encourage students to stick to one-on-one conversations rather than grouping up. We usually play a role so that if we see a student without a partner, we can hop in. It also can allow the teacher to take the temperature of the activity, to see when it's ready to wind down. Otherwise, we rotate throughout the room, eavesdropping on conversations, and occasionally coaxing kids to keep moving and meeting. In most classes, students are able to complete this whole portion of the lesson (steps 1–8) in one 90-minute class period.
9. Next class, ask students to retrieve their Reparations Mixer Questions and prepare to discuss the activity from last class. We find it works best to give students some quiet time to write answers to the questions before discussing. Some possible initial discussion/writing questions:
 - a. Who is someone you met who intrigued you or who taught you something interesting? Explain.



Ta-Nehisi Coates

- b. What did you learn that surprised you?
 - c. Which models of reparations impressed you? Which models of reparations left you dissatisfied?
 - d. What questions were you left with?
10. There are a number of ways to follow up this discussion. We used it as a springboard for a role play on reparations (a lesson that is forthcoming from the Zinn Education Project) for African Americans and a close reading of H.R. 40, a proposal in Congress to establish a commission that would study reparations proposals and consider a national apology for the institution of slavery.
11. This mixer would also work before [teaching the Hawai'i Apology Resolution](#), reparations for Japanese American incarcerations during World War II, or in conjunction with Linda Christensen's [lesson](#) on the Tulsa Massacre.

As we finish the field-testing of this lesson in early weeks of the summer of 2019, Congress is holding its first hearings in more than a decade on reparations for African Americans. Every Democratic presidential candidate has been asked to state their position on reparations. Republicans too are responding to the increased discussion, with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell declaring, "I don't think reparations for something

that happened 150 years ago for whom none of us currently living are responsible is a good idea." This mixer makes it clear that reparations are not new, either as an idea or as policy. They have been called for before; they have been designed and implemented before. This lesson seeks to develop our historical fluency around reparations as we and our students engage in this increasingly energetic national discourse.

When we taught this activity, we were heartened to witness the development of just that sort of fluency in the class discussions that followed the mixer. As we debriefed, one student expressed dismay that the Sioux people did not accept a cash settlement with the United States for the theft of the Black Hills: "Don't they need that \$106 million?" Another student answered, "But the money isn't what they want. They want the land." Still another student chimed in: "And you can't say, 'I am sorry we stole your land, here's some money.'" We followed up: "Why not? Why does that feel like an inadequate form of reparation?" She answered, "It's like what we talked about before with apologies — an apology doesn't work if you don't specifically recognize what you did wrong. The same is true with reparations; they need to match the crime." We asked the class: "Did you come across any reparations that matched the crime?" One student brought up the Tuskegee example, arguing that was a positive example since the harm was to the victim's health and the remedy involved

free health care for life. But other students didn't buy it. "Free health care is the bare minimum those men deserve. How do you make up for the fact that their own government treated them like lab animals?" We asked the class: "Yes, so how do you make up for that? What would be a fair set of reparations?" Students had a range of answers. Some said money; some said a lot of money. One student said, "I think if it were me, I would just want people to know about what happened to me. I have never heard about this experiment before now. There was that one case in Chicago where part of the apology was that it had to be taught in school."

As students discussed more than a dozen examples of reparations, they compared and contrasted, weighed merits and drawbacks of different

models, and walked away with a broad frame of reference for grappling with how societies and governments can remedy historical injustices. Our students will be bringing this knowledge to bear as they react to — and perhaps even shape — the reparations proposals of 2020 presidential candidates. But this is not only a national question. As the mixer teaches, there are numerous examples of states and cities taking up the mantle of repair — for example, [Chicago's Burge reparations](#) or [North Carolina's reparations](#) for forced sterilization. Students may discover opportunities in their own towns, cities, and schools to uncover the truth about past injustices and invent new ways of repairing our broken world. ❖

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Reparations Mixer Questions

1. Find someone who received a formal apology from a government for wrongdoing against them. Who are they? What is their story?
2. Find someone who received compensation from a government for wrongdoing against them. Who are they? What is their story?
3. Find someone who knows about reparations related to sexual violence or medical wrongdoing. Who are they? What is their story?
4. Find someone who knows about reparations related to land. Who are they? What is their story?
5. Find someone who knows about reparations related to racism. Who are they? What is their story?
6. Find someone who did not receive reparations or is critical of the reparations they did receive. Who are they? What is their story?
7. Find someone who fought for or is fighting for reparations. Who are they? What do they want?
8. Find someone who knows about a case of reparations that does not involve the United States. Who are they? What is the case?

Mixer Roles

Judith Jaegermann

I was born in Karlsbad, Czechoslovakia, in the late 1920s. In 1937, our neighbors threw stones at my parents' kosher restaurant. I asked my father why they would do that. He answered, "Because we are Jews." That was only the beginning of our torment. We were sent to Auschwitz, the largest Nazi death camp, where German soldiers subjected us to horrific evils. My father was killed, but my mother and I survived. I moved to Palestine (as it was called then), where I have lived ever since. In the 1950s, the state of Israel, along with Jewish organizations from the United States and elsewhere, negotiated an agreement with the German government to pay reparations for the ". . . unspeakable crimes [that] have been committed in the name of the German people." Under the agreement, the state of Israel received hundreds of millions of deutschmarks to pay for the costs of resettling so many Jewish refugees. Later, in the 1980s, Germany paid another \$125 million to individual survivors like me. I will receive a monthly check of \$290 for the rest of my life. Of course, this money does not make up for my suffering. But it's something.

Konrad Adenauer

I was born in Cologne, Prussia, in 1876. As a critic of the Nazi Party, I was arrested multiple times, and spent the war years constantly moving to stay below the radar of government officials. When the war was over, I became the mayor of Cologne, then the first chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1949 to 1963. As the leader of West Germany, I had to address how my country would account for the harm done by the Nazi regime. I opposed the policy of denazification that sought to strip power from anyone who had collaborated with the Nazi government. Though I sympathized with the desire to rid the country of the scourge of Nazism, it was simply impractical to investigate and hold every supporter of Nazism accountable. But I did believe Germany had a responsibility to reckon with the actions of the government. In a speech I gave in 1951, I said, ". . . unspeakable crimes have been committed in the name of the German people, calling for moral and material indemnity." Indemnity means compensation — I was saying that my government should pay for the crimes of the Nazi regime. My government negotiated the first German Compensation Plan that, in the decades since the war, has distributed \$100 billion to the state of Israel and individual survivors of the Holocaust. I believed there was no moving forward toward a new Germany without redressing the evils of the Nazi era.

Hubert Kim

I am a law student who wrote an article called “German Reparations: Institutionalized Insufficiency.” Germany’s redress program — the money paid to victims of the Holocaust and the state of Israel for crimes committed by the Nazi regime — is often held up as a model for other countries seeking to come to terms with histories of injustice. But the program did not go nearly far enough. It is true that Germany has paid nearly \$100 billion in reparations since the 1950s. But the German government did not pay the Roma (Gypsies), homosexuals, and forced laborers, all of whom were also victims of Nazi atrocities. Even Jewish survivors who have proved eligible receive only a pittance — at best, a couple hundred dollars a month. I wonder if Germany has truly atoned for its past sins. In fact, I wonder if atonement is even possible. I end my article by quoting survivor Sam Solnik: “They can never in my lifetime pay off 6 million [people]. They will never pay off what we lost. I lost my father. I lost my mother. I worked for them [the Nazis] for nothing.”

Maria Rosa Henson

I was only 14 years old when the Japanese invaded the Philippines during World War II. The Japanese arrested me and forced me to become a “comfort woman” for the Japanese soldiers. “Comfort women” were women and girls forced into sexual slavery by the Imperial Japanese Army before and during the war. It was painful and traumatic. The Japanese soldiers raped me daily. I could not say no as they would have killed me. The other women and I couldn’t even talk to each other, because we were from many different countries — the Philippines, Korea, China, and others — and spoke different languages. In 1992, I decided to come out and tell my story, the first Filipina to share the comfort women’s wartime horror. In 1996, I was one of the first recipients of the Asian Women’s Fund (AWF), a fund set up by the Japanese government to financially compensate comfort women from South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, the Netherlands, and Indonesia. I received about \$16,000 and a signed apology from the prime minister: “As Prime Minister of Japan, I thus extend anew my most sincere apologies and remorse to all the women who underwent immeasurable and painful experiences and suffered incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women.”

Lee Ok-seon

I was 14 years old and running an errand for my parents when I was seized by Japanese soldiers in Busan, Korea, where I lived. This was during World War II, when Japan invaded and occupied my country. I was taken to a “comfort station,” which was a brothel for Japanese soldiers, and forced to become a sex slave. I didn’t realize it at the time, but I was one of tens of thousands of Korean, Filipina, Chinese, Taiwanese, and Indonesian “comfort women” brutalized during the war. Between the repeated rapes, the bleak conditions, the physical pain, the pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases, these “comfort stations” were not fit for humans. They treated us worse than animals. For most of my life, the Japanese government denied these brothels even existed. Then they admitted they existed, but said the government had nothing to do with it. Finally, in the 1990s, the government of Japan acknowledged the atrocities, apologized, and agreed to pay reparations. That was a step in the right direction. But even today, the government of South Korea, my government, insists that Japan has not taken enough responsibility for what happened. Japan has been forced into every apology and concession. Is a forced apology a true apology?

Willis Lynch

I was born poor in North Carolina during the 1930s. North Carolina was one of many states that forcibly sterilized populations it deemed “unfit.” These populations were the developmentally disabled, unwed mothers, poor, Black, and immigrant. I was 14 when they operated on me. I didn’t know what was happening. All I knew was that I was at a special school and I wouldn’t be sent home to my family unless I had the operation. It wasn’t until many years later that I found out I would never be able to have children. I am in my 80s now, and finally, after all these years, the state is admitting what they did was wrong. The state legislature passed a landmark \$10 million compensation plan to pay victims like me. I am one of 177 eligible recipients and will receive up to \$56,500. I am not sure how I feel about the money. As I told one reporter, “Too bad it couldn’t come out earlier, but I suppose it will help a little bit.”

Dr. Laura Gerald

I work for the state of North Carolina. In 2013, state lawmakers passed a first-of-its-kind law to compensate victims of the state’s forced sterilization program. Along with 30 other states, North Carolina had a eugenic sterilization program that tried to stop “undesirable” populations from having children. “Eugenics” was a phony science that claimed to help make better humans by getting rid of the genes of people the eugenicists thought were inferior people. These populations included the developmentally disabled, unwed mothers, poor, Black, and immigrant. An estimated 7,600 people in our state — including children as young as 10 — were deemed mentally deficient by public health officials and forcibly sterilized. The program ran from 1929 until 1974. The state has allocated \$10 million for compensation to the victims, but fewer than half are thought to be alive today. So far, state officials like me have been able to verify the identities of only 177. Though other states have offered official apologies for their sterilization programs, we are the only state to actually deliver financial compensation to victims. It doesn’t erase the harm that was done, but it signals we are doing more than just paying lip service to our regret and remorse for what happened.

Albert Julkes Jr.

In 1997, President Bill Clinton apologized to my father (and 400 other African American men and their families) on behalf of the U.S. government for the Tuskegee syphilis experiment. The “experiment,” carried out from the 1930s to the 1970s, was actually a trick. The government told African American men they were receiving free medical care, when its actual purpose was to study the long-term effects of untreated syphilis (which causes terrible, painful blisters in the mouth and genitals) on human beings. None of the men were told that they had syphilis, and none were given penicillin even after the antibiotic proved to successfully treat the disease. As I told *The New York Times*, “You get treated like lepers. It was one of the worst atrocities ever reaped on people by the government. You don’t treat dogs that way.” After being sued in the 1970s, the government was ordered to pay lifetime health care costs to my family and the other Tuskegee families. I am not sure which is more important — the money or the apology. Both matter, but neither make up for what was done to my father.

Dr. Vanessa Northington Gamble

I am a professor of history of medicine and family medicine at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, and I was chairwoman of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study Legacy Committee. The Tuskegee Syphilis study was an awful and shameful example of scientific racism. Beginning in the 1930s, and lasting into the 1970s, 400 African American men were told they were receiving free medical care; in actuality, the government was studying the long-term effects of untreated syphilis. None of the men were told that they had the painful disease, and none were treated with antibiotics. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [the NAACP] sued the U.S. government in the 1970s, which resulted in the victims and their families receiving lifetime health care. But our committee was after more than compensation. Our goal was twofold: 1) to persuade President Clinton to apologize on behalf of the government for the atrocities of the study, and 2) to address the damages the study inflicted on the African American community's trust in the ethical behavior of government-led research. In 1997, we achieved our first goal — President Clinton did offer an apology. Our second goal, reestablishing trust in the government? I am not sure that can ever be fully achieved.

Lyman Red Cloud

I am a member of the Oglala Lakota tribal council. In 1880, the U.S. Supreme Court awarded my people — the Sioux nation — \$106 million for territory the U.S. government stole in the late 19th century. But we rejected the money. What we wanted was the land back, especially the Black Hills (located in modern South Dakota and Wyoming), which are sacred to our people. The Indian Claims Commission, which was established after World War II, is supposed to address the grievances of Native nations, but Congress limited the commission's power. It can only offer *monetary* compensation — not actual land — for territory stolen when the government broke its treaties with us. Once a tribe accepts the government's monetary offer, we give up the right to raise a claim again in the future. So if we accept the money, we lose our claim to the Black Hills. In 2010, President Obama apologized “on behalf of the people of the United States to all Native peoples for the many instances of violence, maltreatment, and neglect inflicted on Native peoples by citizens of the United States.” But that apology rings hollow without the return of our sacred lands.

Emil Notti

I was born in Koyukuk, Alaska, in 1933 and am of the Indigenous Koyukon Athabaskan people. In 1966, seven years after Alaska became a state, I helped found and served as president of the Alaska Federation of Natives. Our goal was to pressure the U.S. government to return to Alaska's Indigenous peoples land that was illegally incorporated when Alaska became a territory of the United States. In 1971, we succeeded. Congress passed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, which paid out \$962.5 million and set aside 44 million acres of land to Native Alaskans. This sounds like a lot, but it is hard to quantify the destruction wrought on Native Alaskans by centuries of colonialism. And in accepting this deal, we gave up our rights to make any future claims for compensation. Still, it was one of the largest land claims settlements in U.S. history. Most Indigenous Nations have been unable to get any land back from the United States.

Toby Obed

When I was 3 years old, government officials knocked on my door and told my parents they were taking me, my brother, and two sisters to a residential school 200 kilometers away from my home in the north-west region of Canada. We were taken to a boarding school. They tore Indigenous children from their culture and families with the goal of “assimilating” us into white Canadian culture. By the time I was 6, I had already been sexually abused. And that was only the beginning. As I told one journalist, “Having to live with white people, you get beat, you get strapped, you get punished. You do what you're told, and don't speak back. If you say anything, you go to your room, you don't have no supper. It was constant.” We were stolen from our families, deprived of our ancestral languages, and subjected to physical and sexual abuse. So we survivors sued the government for the harm these schools inflicted upon us. We won. Part of the settlement is monetary (\$50 million). But it also requires a formal apology from the prime minister on behalf of the Canadian government. I have been selected to represent survivors and receive the prime minister's apology. But honestly, I am not sure I want to. I told one journalist, “If I don't like his words, no, I'm sorry, I'm not taking the apology.”

Tony Hall

I am a former Democratic representative from Ohio. In 1997, I proposed a resolution in Congress that apologized for slavery in the United States. It was very simple. It read, “Resolved by the House of Representatives that the Congress apologizes to African Americans whose ancestors suffered as slaves under the Constitution and the laws of the United States until 1865.” I have never received more hate mail in my life. Even President Clinton, a fellow Democrat, did not support the apology. He feared that it would open up the government to pressure for reparations. My resolution went nowhere. But 10 years later, Congress did pass a different apology resolution. It reads, “The Congress . . . apologizes to African Americans on behalf of the people of the United States, for the wrongs committed against them and their ancestors who suffered under slavery and Jim Crow laws.” But this resolution made a point of including a clause that stated that the apology could not be used as grounds for the payment of reparations.

Callie House

I was born in about 1861 near Nashville, Tennessee. I was enslaved until the end of the Civil War. I grew up in a community of formerly enslaved people who worked hard, but were poor, and found it difficult to make ends meet. In the late 1890s, I heard about a bill being debated in Congress called the Freedmen’s Pension Bill. The introduction to the bill read, “Where laws have been made and slavery endorsed for over a hundred years, and where the results of negro labor have been enjoyed without giving compensation . . .” It went on to call for formerly enslaved people to be compensated in the form of a lump sum and modest monthly payments based on age. Once I learned about it, I did everything I could to see the bill passed. I helped found an organization called the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty, and Pension Association and traveled around the country gathering tens of thousands of signatures in support of the bill. The government didn’t like what I was doing and accused me — with no supporting evidence — of committing mail fraud. I was eventually jailed. The bill never passed and enslaved people received no compensation whatsoever for their stolen labor.

Queen Mother Moore

I was born in 1898 in Louisiana, the descendent of enslaved people. I was still school-aged when both my parents died and I had to drop out to make a living. I continued to educate myself though. I moved to Harlem in 1922 and was involved with a number of civil rights organizations. In 1962, to mark the 100-year anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, I created the Reparations Committee for the Descendants of American Slaves, through which I became the nation’s most outspoken advocate of reparations. I had read about Germany paying Jewish people for the horrors of the Holocaust. Why not compensate Black people for slavery and the violence and discrimination that followed? I published a short book called *Why Reparations? Reparations Is the Battle Cry for the Economic and Social Freedom of More than 25 Million Descendants of American Slaves*. I wrote, “The unpaid labor of African slaves laid the foundation for the accumulation of the wealth that ultimately made the U.S.A. the richest country in the world.” I was simply asking that centuries of unpaid wages be paid back. I died in 1997, never seeing a single dime in reparations.

Sheila Jackson Lee

I have been serving in the House of Representatives since 1995. I am a Democrat from Texas. I am the child of Jamaican immigrants. I am currently the sponsor of H.R. 40, also known as the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act. A version of this bill has been introduced to Congress during every session since 1987, but has never made it out of committee. It's a long bill, but here's the gist, from the introduction: "To address the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity of slavery in the United States and the 13 American colonies between 1619 and 1865 and to establish a commission to study and consider a national apology and proposal for reparations for the institution of slavery, its subsequent de jure and de facto racial and economic discrimination against African Americans, and the impact of these forces on living African Americans, to make recommendations to the Congress on appropriate remedies, and for other purposes." It is amazing to me that a bill that merely calls for a commission to study the *idea* of reparations for racist institutions and policies cannot get considered in Congress. Why is that so controversial?

William "Sandy" Darity

I am an economist, researcher, and a professor of public policy at Duke University. Right now, I am probably the best-known scholar working on the issue of reparations for African Americans. Ironically, for most of my career, I did not support the idea of reparations. My skepticism was due to all the thorny practical questions: Who would be eligible? How much would be paid out? In what form would payments be made? But the more I read about reparations — elsewhere in the world as well as here in the United States — the more I felt that though difficult to design and implement, they are simply the right thing to do. I believe that a reparations program should accomplish three ends. One is acknowledgement. A second is restitution. And the third is closure. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT. Acknowledgement means the beneficiaries of the social injustice affirm that a wrong was committed and that there must be some form of repair offered to the victims of that injustice. RESTITUTION. Restitution refers to the actual program that's enacted to undertake that repair. CLOSURE. Closure means the victimized community has received satisfactory compensation from the victimizers, and that they have no reason to request anything that's specifically for their group in the future (unless there's a new wave of injustices). I hope to be part of an ongoing national conversation about reparations. They are long, long overdue.

Daniel Akaka

I was born in Honolulu and served in the U.S. Senate for more than 20 years as the first Native Hawaiian senator in our country's history. In 1993, I co-sponsored the Apology Resolution, which was passed by Congress and signed by President Clinton. The bill offered a formal apology to Native Hawaiians for U.S. participation in the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893. Although that bill was a step in the right direction, it merely acknowledged the harm that been done, without taking any action to remedy it. I also introduced, but could never pass, legislation seeking to grant Native Hawaiians sovereignty, under the model the United States has adopted with other Indigenous Nations living in the United States. I want Native Hawaiians to have the power and authority to re-establish our national identity that was violently and illegally stolen from us. As the Apology Resolution stated:

. . . the long-range economic and social changes in Hawaii over the 19th and early 20th centuries have been devastating to the population and to the health and well-being of the Hawaiian people;

. . . the Native Hawaiian people are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territory, and their cultural identity in accordance with their own spiritual and traditional beliefs, customs, practices, language, and social institutions;

An apology is only the first step.

Dr. David “Keanu” Sai

I am a political scientist who specializes in Hawaiian constitutionalism and international relations. In 2010, I sued President Obama (as representative of the Executive Branch of the U.S. government) for violation of international law. Under my interpretation of the law and of what happened in the late 1800s between the United States and the independent Kingdom of Hawai'i, I think the United States is illegally occupying the sovereign Kingdom of Hawai'i. Even the U.S. government has admitted what it did was wrong. In 1993, Congress passed, and President Clinton signed, a joint resolution stating:

1. on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the illegal overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai'i on January 17, 1893, acknowledges the historical significance of this event, which resulted in the suppression of the inherent sovereignty of the Native Hawaiian people;

. . .

3. apologizes to Native Hawaiians on behalf of the people of the United States for the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii on January 17, 1893 with the participation of agents and citizens of the United States, and the deprivation of the rights of Native Hawaiians to self-determination;

Although the U.S. government apologized for stealing Hawai'i from the Hawaiian people, we have seen no reparations, no tangible action to make things right. I will continue to bring legal challenges against the United States until Hawai'i's sovereignty is restored.

Tony deBrum

The first thing people in the United States usually ask after I tell them where I am from is: “Where’s that?” So let me start by saying, I am from the Marshall Islands, located in the Pacific Ocean, between Hawai’i and Australia. Our islands used to be territories of the United States. Now we are an independent nation. When I was 9 years old, I watched as the United States detonated a nuclear bomb on my islands. The bomb was 1,000 times more powerful than the one dropped on Hiroshima. The sky turned blood red. Wind and thunder followed. It was one of 67 times the U.S. military tested nuclear bombs on our islands, resettling whole islands of Marshallese people, exposing our nation to deadly radioactive fallout, and condemning future generations of my people to displacement and disease. As an adult, I became active in government. I represented my people in negotiations with the United States. We won a cash settlement of \$150 million. Later, the U.N. said the United States owed our islands another \$2.3 billion in health and property damages, but there was no mechanism to force the United States to pay it. We are still waiting for the United States to formally apologize for bombing our islands, exiling our families, and poisoning our people.

Jiji Jally

I live in Washington state, but I am originally from the Marshall Islands. During the first couple of decades of the Cold War, the United States used our islands, located in the Pacific, to test its nuclear weapons. The U.S. military tested so many bombs on our islands it was equivalent to detonating 1.6 Hiroshima bombs every single day for 12 years. The Marshallese people have been living with the health and environmental impacts of radiation ever since. Cancer rates are dozens of times higher for our people compared to those in the United States. Everyone has a family member who has died of cancer — my brother left behind two small children; my cousin was only 30. I grew up there not knowing the history of what happened to my people. There is a lot of trauma in our community from this. I know that the U.S. has paid out a bunch of money to the government of the Marshall Islands — \$150 million — to repair some of the damage to our islands and people. But where is the apology? Why aren’t students learning about these tests and their effects in school? The United States still has military installations on our islands. How can we be sure something like this won’t happen again?

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

I was born in 1931 and became the first Black African to hold the position of Bishop of Johannesburg and the Archbishop of Cape Town in South Africa. For most of my life, Blacks in my country lived under the thumb of the white apartheid government. Removed from cities and forced to live in townships, we were stripped of political and economic rights, and made to live as strangers in our own country. I spoke out against this oppression and became one of the leaders of an anti-racist revolution. I was asked by the first democratically elected leader, President Nelson Mandela, to chair the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in the 1990s. In the words of the constitution, the TRC was for “understanding but not for vengeance, [the] need for reparation but not for retaliation, [the] need for ubuntu [compassion] but not for victimization.” The TRC had the power to grant amnesty (pardon/forgiveness) to those who committed abuses during apartheid if they confessed to their crimes and made amends to their victims. Critics said our amnesty policy was too forgiving. But what was the alternative? We wanted to transition to a democratic government with as little violence as possible. We did not put people on trial like they did in Germany after the Holocaust, nor did we offer a sweeping amnesty as was offered Confederate leaders after the Civil War. Instead, ours was a compromise between the two. Our goal was to honestly account for the past with a focus on the future.

Ntsiki Biko

I am the widow of Steve Biko. My husband was the leader of a grassroots movement to end apartheid in South Africa in the 1960s and 1970s. Apartheid was a system of legalized racial segregation, violence, and oppression that condemned Black South Africans to second-class status under white rulers. But my husband was a man of moral conviction, driven to help justice and democracy take root. In 1977, South African security personnel beat him to death; he was only 30 years old. Fortunately, my husband’s message did not die with his body; the movement against apartheid grew, and a new, democratic government came to power in the 1990s. To help heal the country, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was created. The TRC’s job was to bear witness to, record, and in some cases grant amnesty (pardons) to the perpetrators of human rights violations, as well as offering reparation and rehabilitation to the victims. I know that forgiveness is a necessary step that we must take to heal and move forward, but when my husband’s killers applied for amnesty I spoke out. To get a pardon, his killers had to come before the TRC and tell the truth about what they had done. They were required to show remorse, but who got to determine this? Their victims didn’t get to decide. For me, justice is the prerequisite for reconciliation, not the other way around. Public hearings are not justice. We need to be given back what was stolen from us for so many years — in terms of dignity, rights, land, and wealth — before reconciliation is possible.

Mzoxolo Sogiba

I was only 12 years old when I was fatally shot by the South African police in Nyanga, in Cape Town. It was October 1976 when South Africa, my country, was still ruled under apartheid, a system of legalized racial segregation, violence, and oppression that condemned Black South Africans to second-class status under white rulers. I was standing with my friends watching a garage burn in Nyanga East. The police cornered me and took me away in their van. They told my mother they found a lighter in my pocket and accused me of setting fire to the garage. My mother asked the police to show her the lighter, but they couldn't. My mother traveled to the Salt River Mortuary. There she found me with a bullet hole in my chest. Mine is but one account of the millions of people who suffered and sought relief during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), a courtlike body established by the South African government in 1995 to help heal the country and bring about a reconciliation of its people by uncovering the truth about human rights violations that had occurred during apartheid. I am glad my story has been recorded for posterity, but my mother is still poor and landless. The TRC didn't do anything about that.

Gawie Snyders

I am 70 years old and mostly retired now. I still farm a half-acre plot behind my house. I grow pumpkins, onions, green beans, lettuce, grapes, stone fruit, and roses. I am a master farmer, but for most of my life I have been forced to work on other people's farms. My people's land was stolen by the whites here in South Africa after they passed the Native Lands Act in 1913. Whites seized 85 percent of the arable land even though they made up less than 10 percent of the population. In my little town, I and my neighbors lost 12,000 acres of land. The Native Lands Act was the precursor to apartheid, a system of legalized racial segregation, violence, and oppression that condemned Black South Africans to second-class status under white rulers. Apartheid destroyed traditional farming, forcing us into overcrowded townships, and into jobs in mines and on white farms. Now that apartheid is long over, I want my land back. The post-apartheid South African government adopted a policy of land reform called "willing seller, willing buyer," which promised incentives to those (mostly white landowners) willing to sell to the government. The government would then redistribute that land to people like me and my family. But this policy has been slow and ineffective. Only a fraction of the land has changed hands since 1994. Is apartheid really over when 72 percent of land in South Africa is still controlled by white people? I say no. I say it is high time the government seize the land and give it back to those of us who know how to farm it and to whom it originally belonged. That would be real "reparations."

Blanca Katsura

I was 12 in January of 1943 when agents came to our home in northern Peru and took away my father. We were among the 25,000 people of Japanese descent living in Peru at the time. When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, the U.S. government asked Latin American countries, including Peru, to arrest its Japanese residents. They did. My father was among the 2,200 Latin Americans of Japanese descent who were forcibly deported to internment camps in the United States during the war. When we followed him to the United States, my mother and siblings and I were incarcerated too. In 1988, President Ronald Reagan apologized on behalf of the U.S. government for the internment of Japanese Americans and paid reparations to tens of thousands of survivors of the camps, \$20,000 each. But families like mine, Japanese Latin Americans, did not qualify because we had not been U.S. citizens or permanent residents at the time of our internment. We were outraged. U.S. racism and wartime hysteria hurt us as much as anyone else. We sued. Eventually, the U.S. government agreed to pay each of us \$5,000. I absolutely believe we should have been paid the same as Japanese Americans, but the truth is, no amount of money can compensate my family for what we lost.

Masuo Yasui

I was born in a small rural town in Japan in 1886. When I was 16 I left my home to follow my father and brothers to America where they were working as laborers for the Union Pacific Railroad. My dreams were the dreams of many immigrants. I wanted to own a business, raise a family, and make a new home in the United States. After five years of hard labor and saving, my brother, Renichi, and I opened a store, Yasui Brothers, in Hood River, Oregon, a town I fell in love with the first time I saw it. In 1912, I married a teacher, Shidzuyo, and together we raised nine children. On Dec. 7, 1941, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and what had been a paradise for me and my family became a paradise lost. U.S. Treasury agents closed our store and froze our assets along with those every other issei (Japanese immigrants) in the region. Despite being a solid American citizen for 33 years in my adopted Hood River home, I was branded an “alien enemy” and imprisoned until four months after the end of World War II. My family was interned. In 1988, the U.S. government admitted the “grave injustice” motivated by “race prejudice” against Americans of Japanese descent during World War II and offered reparations to those of us who had been interned, \$20,000 per survivor. But it was too late for me. I committed suicide in 1957, my heart broken by America’s “grave, moral injustice.”

Min Yasui

I was the first Japanese American to receive a law degree from the University of Oregon. Today, my picture hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., not far from the portrait of President Barack Obama. I was born in Hood River, Oregon, in 1916. My parents were immigrants from Japan, who were fruit farmers and entrepreneurs. After Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the U.S. government closed our family store, branded my father an "alien enemy," and incarcerated my whole family. I attempted to use my law education to challenge the racist targeting of Japanese Americans. I purposefully violated a curfew law in downtown Portland with the intent of getting arrested. I wanted to challenge the constitutionality of the actions being taken against us. Though my case went all the way to the Supreme Court, I lost and was put in solitary confinement. I never returned to Hood River. My father committed suicide in 1957; I am convinced his unhappiness had to do with his experiences of internment. I spent much of my career fighting for reparations and acknowledgement of what the United States did to my family and other Japanese Americans. In 1988, the U.S. government admitted the "grave injustice" motivated by "race prejudice" against Americans of Japanese descent during World War II and offered reparations to those of us who had been interned, \$20,000 per survivor. But it was too late for me. I died in 1986.

Lindsey Smith

I was 17 years old, and 13 hours into a terrifying, violent interrogation when I confessed to a murder I did not commit. I was stomped on, pistol-whipped, beaten, and thought I wouldn't live through the night if I didn't do what the police wanted. I was tried as an adult and sent to jail for five years. It turns out that I was one of hundreds of Black and Latino men in Chicago who were tortured into false confessions by Jon Burge, a Chicago police commander, and his officers from 1972 to 1991. Now, more than 40 years after the fact, I am one of 57 living survivors who are receiving reparations. The landmark legislation in the city of Chicago allocated \$5.5 million for victims. I am also eligible for free community college and other social services. But the reparations bill is not just about money. It is also about telling the truth about what happened and educating the next generation. The city has created a community center dedicated to survivors and their families and all Chicago public schools are required to teach curriculum on the torture scandal. I can sleep a whole lot better now that I have received reparations 40 years on, but I wish that night never happened in the first place. I can never get back that time away from my family and the things I could have done. But at least I can afford new shoes now.

Annemarie Cuccia

I am a freshman at Georgetown University, a Jesuit college in Washington, D.C. In 1838, the Jesuits in charge of the university sold 272 enslaved women and men to bolster its finances. In 2017, Georgetown issued a formal apology to the descendants of those they enslaved and acknowledged that profits from those plantations were an essential part of university funding. But the university has yet to adequately address its sale of human beings and the legacy of inequality slavery helped create. In 2019, I was one of more than 2,500 students who voted by a 2-to-1 margin to raise student fees by an affordable and symbolic figure of \$27.20 per semester (in honor of the 272 enslaved and sold African American human beings) in order to create a reconciliation fund that will result in more than \$400,000 a year to “be allocated for charitable purposes directly benefiting the descendants of the GU 272 and other persons once enslaved by the Maryland Jesuits.” Students opposing the referendum have said that the 1838 sale happened a long time ago, that they had nothing to do with it, and if reparations are to be made, the Jesuits should foot the bill. I disagree. Instead this vote shows that the student body takes the issue of restorative justice seriously. It is a first step in holding the administration accountable for the university’s slaveholding past. After all, \$27.20 is a small amount to pay for so gross an injustice and its legacy of intergenerational inequality.

Lorraine Jones

I and my friend, Chris Griffiths, represent the Ngaliwurru and Nungali Aboriginal People from the Northern Territory of Australia, as we continue our families’ legal fight for compensation for stolen land. When the British first arrived on our lands, they declared them *terra nullius* — that Australia was “nobody’s land.” Although we have inhabited Australia for 65,000 years, the British pushed us off our land, separated our families, and practiced cultural genocide. In a landmark 1993 decision, the Australian High Court officially recognized that Australia was not *terra nullius* and that Aboriginal peoples had legal claims to the land. One case centered around the destruction of sacred “dreaming sites” in an area called Timber Creek in the Northern Territory. The government had seized the land from us and built roads and water tanks on it. But in 2019 under the Native Title Act, the Australian High Court ruled in our favor and awarded us \$2.3 million — including \$1.3 million for “cultural loss.” Although this is less than what we asked for, the ruling established an important legal precedent for all Aboriginal people in Australia seeking compensation for cultural loss. One journalist wrote, “If \$1.3 million could be awarded for pain and suffering at Timber Creek, which was a small claim area, much larger figures are now likely to be awarded elsewhere.” There is great hope among my people, and great concern from those who hold wealth and power in Australia, that this decision could pave the way for billions of dollars in reparations to Aboriginal People.

Teach this lesson remotely by copying Zinn Education Project Google Docs with mixer lesson role assignments, and then distributing your copied materials to students.



Role Assignments for Remote Instruction Template

How to Make Amends: A Lesson on Reparations

By Ursula Wolfe-Rocca, Alex Stegner, Chris Buehler,
Angela DiPasquale, and Tom McKenna

Lesson: <https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/lesson-on-reparations/>

Teacher Instructions: Assign your students roles and groups based on the names below in the right-hand column. The template here comes with spaces for 31 roles, but it's entirely up to you how you want to distribute roles to your students. Delete these instructions, delete "for Remote Instruction Template," and share this sheet with your students.

Story Assignments for
How to Make Amends: A Lesson on Reparations
Access the full lesson [HERE](#)

1	Judith Jaegermann
2	Konrad Adenauer
3	Hubert Kim
4	Maria Rosa Henson
5	Lee Ok-seon
6	Willis Lynch
7	Dr. Laura Gerald
8	Albert Julkes Jr.
9	Dr. Vanessa Northington Gamble
10	Lyman Red Cloud
11	Emil Notti
12	Toby Obed
13	Tony Hall
14	Callie House
15	Queen Mother Moore
16	Sheila Jackson Lee
17	William "Sandy" Darity
18	Daniel Akaka
19	Dr. David "Keanu" Sai
20	Tony deBrum

Role Assignments for How to Make Amends: A Lesson on Reparations
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