

Reparations...

On January 16, 1865, General William Sherman issued Special Field Order #15, setting aside parcels of land of up to 40 acres for each freed slave family. At the time, “40 acres and a mule” was considered adequate for self-sufficiency. President Andrew Johnson later rescinded the order. 139 years later, some are insisting that the U.S government is morally obligated to deliver on that promise—or a modern equivalent. But will that solve the real problem?

...or Reconciliation?

by Doug Trouten

Spike Lee wants his 40 acres and a mule. The controversial movie director's film company is named "40 Acres & A Mule Filmworks" in memory of a perceived promise of restitution for slavery made after the Civil War—but never kept.

Lee is not alone. The slavery reparations movement—an effort to demand payment for generations of forced labor by Africans—is gaining ground.

Reparations Pro and Con

For some, reparations represent a solution to economic problems that continue to plague America's black community. Robin Brown, co-chair of the National Reparations Convention Committee, says, "Black people are still behind in almost every social and economic category in this country. The catch-up has not happened and will not happen without reparations."

For others, it's a simple question of fairness—acknowledging financial value received from forced labor. Dr. Steven Mintz, associate dean of the College of Humanities, Fine Arts and Communication at the University of Houston, says, "Our society has increasingly come to subscribe to a notion of corrective justice that recognizes a legal duty to remedy past wrongs. All Americans are beneficiaries of the past, especially of our country's prosperity and freedom. But if we are to reap the benefits of the past, then we must assume responsibilities for past evils that made our freedom and prosperity possible."

Lawyers representing descendants of slaves have filed class-action lawsuits against businesses that may have profited from slavery. While courts have ruled that the federal government is immune from such suits, corporations have no such protection. FleetBoston Financial Group, Aetna insurance and railroad giant CSX are among the companies targeted by reparations activists.

Chicago passed an ordinance in 2003 requiring companies bidding

on city contracts to disclose whether they profited from slavery in the past, and to reveal the names of slaves and slaveholders connected with their business dealings. Los Angeles has a similar law, and Cleveland, Detroit and New York may soon follow.

Support from the White House and Congress remains weak, although Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) has filed a bill seeking a study of the case for reparations each session since 1989, so far without success. He notes, "Even a dozen years ago this was a marginalized issue. I see a great change going on. Now people are beginning to say, 'Yes, Congressman Conyers, this does deserve to be taken out and considered and resolved.'"

Of course, not everyone agrees. Critics of the reparations movement say that while the idea may have a certain appeal, it is fatally flawed from a legal standpoint. While reparations have been paid to survivors of the Nazi Holocaust and of U.S. Japanese Internment camps, Africans who were enslaved in America are long dead, as are the slaveowners who oppressed them. People who are bringing reparations lawsuits are generations removed from slavery, as are those they would name as defendants.

Critics of the reparations movement note that slavery in the U.S. as an institution was legal, making legal claims after the fact problematic. Slaves were not U.S. citizens, which raises questions of legal standing. And slavery was allowed under state—not federal—law, making the federal government's obligation questionable.

While some opposition to the reparations movement comes from whites, some black intellectuals have joined the fray, including Walter Williams and Thomas Sowell.

Sowell says the idea of a national apology "betrays a gross ignorance of history. Slavery existed all over the planet, among people of every color, religion and nationality. Why then a national apology for a



worldwide evil? Is a national apology for murder next?" He adds, "Does anyone seriously suggest that blacks in America today would be better off if they were in Africa? If not, then what is the compensation for?"

Williams, chairman of the Department of Economics at George Mason University, says that 150 years after the Civil War "slave owners cannot be punished and slaves cannot be rewarded."

Christian Silence

While the pros and cons of reparations are debated in the community at large, the issue has mostly been ignored in the Christian community. White evangelicals who are happy to talk about racial reconciliation rarely have anything to say about the other "R-word": Reparations.

Curtiss DeYoung, associate professor of reconciliation studies at Bethel College in St. Paul, sees a clear biblical model for reparations. "I believe there needs to be repair work done when there has been damage or violation," he says. "Jesus' death on the cross repaired

our relationship with God, and theologically we see a sense of reparations in that. I have a hard time divorcing reconciliation and reparations because if we're really serious about racial healing then we have to address the wounds. That is where reparations becomes an important conversation. That's where evangelicals are falling short—we're not even in the conversation."

"Black people have consistently talked about it," says John Perkins, founder of the Christian Community Development Association. "Nobody would hear it. If white people still reject affirmative action and even reject civil rights, you can see where reparations would be a very explosive issue. White America can't even come to grips in Congress with the idea of an apology for slavery. People said if you open that door, it leads to reparations, so let's not even go there."

Ferrell Winfree, Tennessee representative for Caucasians United for Reparations and Emancipation, believes white Christians have a unique responsibility in this area. "The Christian Church, as an insti-

tution, itself kept and owned slaves, and today, the church is the last segregated institution in this country," she writes. "Both yesterday and today we Caucasian Christians are guilty."

For some white evangelicals, rejection of reparations may be driven by shame, rather than hostility. "There's shame about our past," says Dr. Glen Stassen, who is Lewis Smedes Professor of Christian Ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary. "Evangelicals, not all of us but most of us, were very slow to support the civil rights movement. We have shame coming from that and from the racism that has been in so many of us. Shame is where you try to avoid the topic, like Adam and Eve hiding in the bushes. But we strongly emphasize the cross and forgiveness and repentance, and so it should be a natural thing for us."

Who Is To Blame?

Most Christians will agree that working for justice is a good thing. But defining justice isn't so straightforward. In the case of reparations,

(continued on page 10)

A Short History of Slavery

2575 B.C. Egypt sends expeditions down the Nile to capture slaves.

1550 B.C. Israel taken captive by Egypt, forced into slavery.

500 B.C. The Greek city-state of Athens uses up to 30,000 slaves in silver mines.

120 A.D. Slaves are taken by the thousands in Rome's military cam-

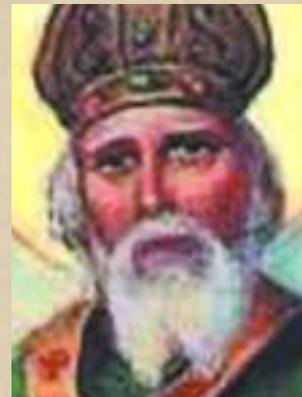


EGYPTIAN SLAVES

paigns. Some estimates put Rome's slave population at over half the city.

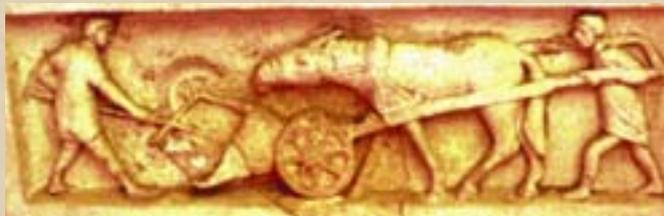
435: (estimate) St. Patrick of Ireland—himself a former Roman slave—is one of the first writers to call for the abolition of slavery.

500: In England, native Britons are enslaved after invasion by Anglo-Saxons.



ST. PATRICK

Prince Henry with a small amount of gold dust and 12 black Africans as exhibits. The captives included an Arabic-speaking local chief who promised to provide black slaves in exchange for his



ROMAN SLAVES

1441: Portuguese ship captains Antam Gonclaves and Nuno Tristao sail to Cape Bianco on the western coast of Africa. They return to Portugal's

release.

1442: Gonclaves returns to Cape Bianco, returning with more gold dust and 10 black Africans.

1443: Portuguese explorers return from Africa with nearly 30 slaves; in the following decade thousands

“40 Acres and a Mule” The Real Story



As the American Civil War drew to a close, and Union General William T. Sherman concluded his march to the sea, he met with 20 black community leaders of Savannah, Georgia to discuss how to deal with tens of thousands of displaced freed slaves who had followed his forces to the coast. Based in part on their input, Sherman issued Special Field Order #15 in January of 1865, setting aside the barrier islands and a tract of land extending 30 miles inland along portions of the coasts of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida—largely consisting of abandoned plantations—for the exclusive settlement of freed black slaves. Each family could receive up to 40 acres of arable land. Yet the order differed in several ways from today’s popular urban legend that all slaves were promised “40 acres and a mule.”

- It was a military order, not a promise or agreement with freed slaves.
- There was no mention of mules or draft animals in the order.
- The parcels of land were to be given to each freed slave *family*—not each individual.
- The parcels of land were to be no *larger* than 40 acres—but they could also be smaller.
- The order apparently covered those blacks who were following Sherman’s army—not all blacks.
- The order was subject to confirmation by Congress.

The military was directed to remain in the area to help the blacks settle the land. The blacks were permitted to establish their own governances (subject to U.S. sovereignty). Some forty thousand freed slaves resettled in the area, under the supervision of the Freedmen’s Bureau. But President Lincoln’s successor, Andrew Johnson, sought to reunify South and North. In the spring of 1865 he issued a pardon to the Confederates—the terms of which he later expanded to include the return of confiscated property. Accordingly, Sherman’s order was rescinded—after less than a year—and the former plantation owners returned to reclaim their land. Most blacks had no alternative but to work for the returning owners. For the chance to put in their own crops, black farmers were often required to raise twenty or more acres of cotton or rice for the landowner. This system came to be known as *sharecropping*, a practice not restricted to any one race. —*the editors*



PORTUGUESE EXPLORERS

more would be transported. It is thought, however, that the majority of African slaves remained in Africa, serving in the regions in which they were captured.

1470: Despite papal opposition, Spanish merchants begin a large slave trade.

1492: Christopher Columbus sights land in the Bahamas.

1562: John Hawkins, the first English slave trader, captures 300 slaves in Sierra Leone.

1619: First Africans sold in Jamestown, Virginia.

1672: Royal African Company is

established to control the British slave trade.

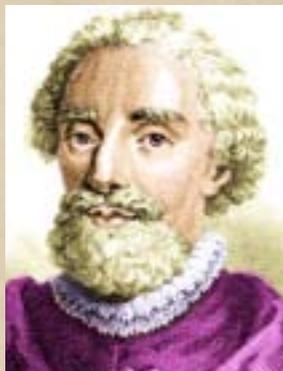
1680-1686: The Royal African Company transports an average of 5,000 slaves per year.

1698: Private traders who agreed to pay a 10 percent duty on English goods exported to Africa were given parliamentary approval to participate in the slave trade.

1713: Treaty of Utrecht granted

England a monopoly on Spanish slave trade for 30 years. England promised to provide at least 144,000 slaves.

1772: In the "Somerset Ruling," Lord Mansfield



COLUMBUS



HAWKINS

makes it illegal to remove any person forcibly from England.

1790: First Census lists 697,897 slaves in the United States.

1803: Denmark becomes the first European nation

to abolish slavery.

1804: A slave revolt frees a French colony, which is renamed Haiti.

1807: Trans-Atlantic slave trade is abolished in the British Empire; and in the United States.

1811-1867: The British Navy's Anti-Slavery Squadron liberates 160,000 slaves in operations on Africa's Atlantic coast.

1827: Britain defines slave trading as piracy, punishable by death.

1833: British Parliament passes an Emancipation Act, creates a five-year

C.S. Lewis Speaks Out on Reparations

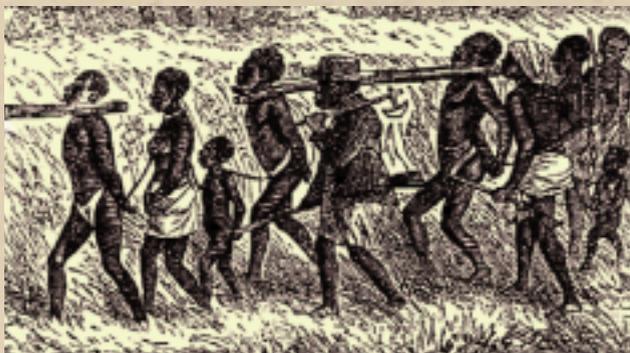
Is the idea of slavery reparations too easy—a way to feel that we’re addressing a problem without having to wrestle with the racism in our own hearts? Christian apologist C.S. Lewis suggested as much in an essay titled “Dangers of National Repentance.” Although he was not writing about slavery reparations, his argument is relevant to that issue.

Men fail so often to repent their real sins that the occasional repentance of an imaginary sin might appear almost desirable. But what actually happens...to the youthful national penitent is a little more complicated than that. England is not a natural agent, but a civil society. When we speak of England’s actions we mean the actions of the British government. The young man who is called upon to repent of England’s foreign policy is really being called upon to repent the acts of his neighbor, for a Foreign Secretary of a Cabinet Minister is certainly a neighbor. And repentance presupposes condemnation. The first and fatal charm of national repentance is, therefore, the encouragement it gives us to turn from the bitter task of repenting our own sins to the congenial one of bewailing—but first, of denouncing—the conduct of others. If it were clear to the young penitent that this is what he is doing, no doubt he would remember the law of charity. Unfortunately, the very terms in which national repentance is recommended to him conceal its true nature. By a dangerous figure of speech, he calls the Government not “they” but “we.” And since, as penitents, we are not encouraged to be charitable to our own sins, nor to give ourselves the benefit of any doubt, a Government which is called “we” is ipso facto placed beyond the sphere of charity or even of justice. You can say anything you please about it. You can indulge in the popular vice of detraction without restraint, and yet feel all the time that you are practicing contrition.

—From “Dangers of National Repentance,” by C. S. Lewis, 1940, collected in *God in the Dock*.

there are a lot of hard questions, and no easy answers.

- How can meaningful restitution be made when both victim and victimizer are long gone?
- Do historically meaningful successor groups exist?
- Would a calculation of the cost take into account the value of Union lives lost in the Civil War—fought, in part, to end slavery?
- Is any American with white skin culpable? How about white Americans whose ancestors arrived after the Civil War?
- What price should be paid by descendants of the black Africans who fed the slave trade, originally capturing and enslaving other Africans for sale to European traders?
- If reparations are owed for wrongs 150 years old, how about wrongs centuries older? (Most groups of people in the world have been oppressed at one time or another—in fact, the word “slave” comes from the name of a European people—Slavs—who were enslaved centuries before the first African was brought to the Western Hemisphere.)



SLAVE TRADE

apprenticeship system and pays nearly \$100 million in reparations to slave owners to compensate them for their losses.

1838: Slavery is abolished in the British Empire.

1846: Sweden abolishes slavery.

1857: In *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that slaves of African ancestry are property and can never be citizens.



LINCOLN

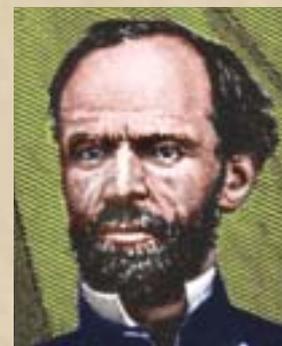
1863: Holland abolishes slavery.

1863: U.S. President Abraham Lincoln issues the *Emancipation Proclamation*, freeing slaves in Confederate-held areas.

1865: General William Sherman issues Special Field Order #15 (with approval of the War Department), setting aside land along the Georgia and South Carolina coasts for black settlement. Each family is to receive up to 40 acres, and sometimes the

loan of army mules. This order was later rescinded.

1865: U.S. ratifies 13th amendment, abolishing slavery in the United States. From the beginning of



SHERMAN

the slave trade until its abolition, an estimated 4 million Africans and their descendants were enslaved in the U.S.

1865: The Freedmen’s Bureau was established

by Congress to oversee transition of blacks from slavery to freedom. The bureau controls 850,000 acres of abandoned and confiscated land.

1873: Puerto Rico abolishes slavery.

1886: Cuba abolishes slavery.

Free Resource from PTM

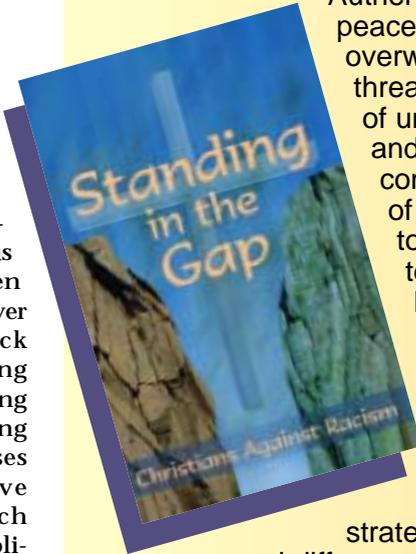
What Have You Done Lately to Promote Racial Harmony?

One reason it may be hard for today's Christians to accept the idea of reparations is that we practice an individual faith—one that emphasizes a personal relationship with God and individual accountability.

David P. Gushee, Graves Professor of Moral Philosophy at Union University and senior fellow with the Center for Christian Leadership, notes, "Individualism is very deeply embedded in our white evangelical tradition, making it hard for us to think collectively at all. When we think about race, we say, 'I never did anything wrong to a black person, therefore I have nothing to apologize for, and I resent being asked to apologize for something I didn't do.' But there are senses in which we have a collective identity—as a nation, a church and even a family. There is a biblical dimension, where one person messes up and the whole family pays the price. We are parts of collectives—we do not solely function as individuals."

DeYoung agrees, saying, "As members of the church we need to

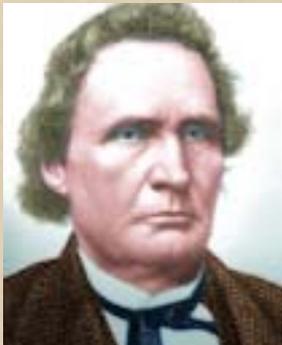
Authentic Christianity and racism can never peacefully coexist. Yet the world is facing an overwhelming tide of racial prejudice that threatens to make the 21st century a time of unprecedented ethnic hatred, violence and terrorism. We can't afford to be complacent. As never before, Christians of all races and cultures urgently need to mobilize—to challenge racism—to tear down the walls that divide us—to build bridges—to focus on healing and reconciliation.



How can you do that? This exciting booklet from Plain Truth Ministries, *Standing in the Gap—Christians Against Racism*, is filled with inspiring stories, practical ideas and strategies that will motivate you to make a real difference. You can be part of the growing number of Christians of all ethnicities who are standing in the gap against racism!

Just call 1-800-309-4466 and ask for item K110*—visit our website at www.ptm.org—write to us at Plain Truth Ministries, Pasadena, California 91129.

**Free of charge (in the U.S. and Canada) while supplies last.*



STEVENS

1886: U.S. Rep. Thaddeus Stevens introduces reparations bills. Both houses of Congress approve reparations, but President Andrew Johnson vetoes the bills.

1915: Cornelius Jones sues the U.S. government, arguing that it wrongly profited from slave labor through a federal tax on cotton. Jones estimates that slaves were owed \$68 million. He loses his suit.

1919: Treaty of Versailles, which ends World War I, demands reparations payments by Germany to its European neighbors. The resulting economic pressure is seen as a contributing factor to World War II.



WILHELM II

1938: Japanese military establishes brothels for Japanese troops. Thousands of Korean and Chinese women are forced into sexual slavery during World War II.

1948: United Nations issues its Declaration on Human Rights. Article 4 provides: "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms."

1952: Germany agrees to pay Holocaust reparations (\$715 million in goods and services to Israel for taking in survivors, \$110 million for relief and resettlement of survivors and direct reparations to selected individuals.



KING

1963: Martin Luther King Jr. writes that while "no amount of gold could provide adequate compensation for the exploitation of the Negro in America down through the centuries," a price could be placed on unpaid wages.

1963: Detroit activist Ray Jenkins founds the modern black reparations movement.

He forms a one-man organization called Slave Labor Annuity Pay, and promotes the idea with leaflets, speeches and a letter-writing campaign.

1964: Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, national origin or religion, and

There will be no reconciliation without repentance, and genuine repentance involves restitution.

take responsibility for the history of the institution. Whether we personally owned slaves or not, portions of the church endorsed the idea of slavery. Ministers and priests owned slaves. We need to tell the truth about that, and we need to clarify that the core of what the Christian faith is about is different than that. To me it's about truth-telling and accepting responsibility."

Who Gets What?

Even if satisfactory answers to questions of culpability can be found, exactly how reparations should be paid remains a point of contention. Estimates for the cost of reparations range from the improbable to the impossible. And while reparations is most often conceived as a lump sum paid by the federal government to

African Americans, most supporters of reparations agree that this wouldn't have the desired effect.

"People think I'm talking about taking the money from the rich and giving it to the poor," says Perkins. "But you could take all the money from the rich and give it to the poor, and the rich would have it again in a few days. The poor would go out and buy Mercedes Benz's from the people who used to be rich. I think 40 acres and a mule would have done it after the Civil War. But we missed our chance."

"Most economists will tell you that the simple transfer of money does not necessarily lead to economic development, either on a personal level or a societal level," agrees Dr. Timothy Essenburg, an economics professor at Bethel College in St. Paul. "If reparations are there to make good on lost wealth, we need to think through how reparations lead to increased possibility for economic self-determination."

Rather than lump payments to individuals, many advocates of

reparations talk in terms of expanded educational opportunities for African Americans, improved public schools in black communities, better college scholarships, and business ownership assistance — programs that could lead to long-term economic development.

"I don't think you can call it reparations now, because that word has been demonized," says Perkins. "But I think we need leadership in the black community at a national conference to create a plan for redevelopment of urban communities, and then come up with a plan of how the evangelical church could strongly participate in missions to bring this about, and to tie it to reconciliation. We need to build business ownership. A slogan we use is out of date — 'teach a man to fish and he eats for a lifetime.' The people who own the pond determine where we can fish. We have to help the community come up with pond ownership."

Not How, But Why

DeYoung believes that talk about the technical details of reparations

prohibits discrimination of places of public access, which later leads to school desegregation.

1969: James Forman, director of international affairs for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, interrupts a service at New York's Riverside Church with the delivery of a "Black Manifesto" demanding \$500 million in reparations from white churches and synagogues.

1980: The African Islamic nation of Mauritania officially abolishes slavery (for the fourth time), although it is widely believed that the institution continues to thrive there.

1988: U.S. President Ronald Reagan signs a bill providing reparations to Japanese-Americans held in internment camps during World



REAGAN

War II. Japanese-Americans directly affected by internment receive \$20,000 each.

1989: U.S. Rep. John Conyers introduces a bill calling for a commission to study slavery and its effect on African Americans in contemporary U.S. society. He has introduced a similar bill in every congressional session since then, but each bill has failed to win a hearing.

1983: Civil war in Sudan pits the Islamic north against the Christian and Animist south. Slavers from the north frequently raid villages in the south, killing men and enslaving women and



CONYERS

children—a practice that continues to this day.

1995: Christian Solidarity International, a Swiss charity, begins liberating slaves by purchasing their freedom in Sudan. Some argue that this practice merely creates an additional market for slaves.

1995: In a lawsuit brought by descendants of African slaves, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth

Circuit rules that the Federal Tort Claims Act forbids such suits.

1995: Japan establishes reparations fund for World War II "comfort women," but makes no formal apology; the fund depends largely on private donations.

1997: During a trip to Africa, U.S.

is premature. "There's a lot of conversation about how, but I think the important conversation is why," he explains. "How may become clear when we've addressed why. We've jumped too far ahead by trying to put a monetary figure on it, instead of talking about why we need to do it."

The answer to that question may be very simple: There will be no reconciliation without repentance, and genuine repentance involves restitution.

"I think if we would acknowledge that we have done a terrible wrong, it would begin the possibility of a healing process," says Perkins. "That has happened in South Africa. You have to bring a dispute to an end, and unless you do that you can't get healing—it just lingers on."

Stassen has seen the healing power of reparations. He recently joined other members of the Baptist Peace Fellowship in visiting a church in Alabama where four black girls were killed in a racist bombing during the days of the Civil Rights movement.

At the time the Southern Baptist Convention's executive committee considered issuing a statement deploring the bombing, but ultimately decided not to say anything—then pledged its members to secrecy so it wouldn't be known that the issue had been considered and rejected.

Years later the Baptist Peace Fellowship met nearby and issued its own statement of repentance. A collection was taken up and given to the church during a special worship service.

"It wasn't huge—just \$1,600—but it was a symbol of our confession and responsibility," Stassen recalls. "We read our statement of repentance and gave the money, and they were enormously appreciative.

"They had finally been given the acknowledgement of responsibility that was obviously needed. We experienced a warm reconciliation with the church members." □

Doug Trouten is the Executive Director of the Evangelical Press Association. He and his wife Lis live in Minnesota.

Tell Us What You Think

What do *you* think of the idea of reparations for slavery? Should the U.S. government compensate descendants of black slaves? Is it just? Is it fair? Is it practical? Most importantly, what is the biblical perspective? Is it Christian?

Give us a summary of your thoughts in 50 words or less by May 30th. We will publish selected responses in our July/August issue, and we will print pro and con statistics from our responses at the time of publication. Responses will be edited for length and clarity.

Send your comments via e-mail to managing.editor@ptm.org, or by regular mail to Managing Editor, Plain Truth Magazine, Pasadena, CA 91129.

President Clinton says, "Going back to the time before we were even a nation, European Americans received the fruits of the slave trade and we were wrong in that." This is regarded as the closest thing to an apology for slavery ever issued by the American government.



CLINTON

1997: Clinton apologizes and the U.S. government pays \$10 million to black survivors and family members victimized by syphilis experiments conducted in the 1930s by the U.S. Public Health Service.

1997: Swiss banks admit holding accounts for thousands of people who probably perished in the Holocaust. Payments ranging from \$500 to \$1,200 are sent to more than 100,000

Eastern European Holocaust survivors.

1997: United Nations begins investigating reports of widespread enslavement of people in Burma.

1998: Swiss banks agree to pay \$1.25 billion into a fund for Holocaust survivors.

1998:

The Volkswagen company agrees to pay compensation for 15,000 slave laborers used during World War II.

1999: The African World Reparations and Repatriation Truth

Commission issues the "Accra Declaration," demanding that western nations pay \$777 trillion in reparations



VOLKSWAGEN

for damages inflicted on the continent by slavery.

2001: IRS receives 77,000 tax returns claiming a "slavery reparation" refund or credit—the result of a widespread scam in which con men charge a fee in exchange for helping blacks receive reparations from the government.

2003: Peru's president apologizes for the 70,000 deaths resulting from his nation's 20-year battle with Maoist guerrillas, and promises the government will spend \$800 million in public

works in areas hardest-hit—but no individual reparations will be paid.