

not just as individuals, but as a people, they have still not been given what it takes to be free. It is not only the right that is required for freedom, but the means. Without forty acres and a mule, without access to federally subsidized loans for homes, farms, and businesses, African Americans found themselves right back under the yoke of white domination.

As Coates puts it, white supremacy is a “force so fundamental to America that it is difficult to imagine the country without it. And so we must imagine a new country.” The design for reparations must not just be for minor repairs on a construction built on a faulty foundation – the foundation of white supremacy – but for a complete re-building project. Moreover, being a full participant in a capitalist enterprise that requires exploitation, inequality, and oppression to funnel profits to the top 1% does not go the distance. The logical conclusion is that to get free requires a radically transformed U.S. social and economic system. The specific form of reparations should be designed within the context of that potential “new country,” a new USA.

If that cannot happen, the other alternative is to literally separate into a “new country.” All over the world, oppressed peoples want to “get free,” and sometimes that requires forming their own nation where they can shape their own destiny. Witness the nation building movements as different as those of Palestinians, Scots, and the Ughurs in China, to name a few. Boundaries are simply political lines reflecting balances of power. The African-American people must build their power to determine their own future, and there is no simple or unified answer as to how black freedom will finally be achieved. But it is looking through the lens of nation building and self-determination that brings into sharper focus what reparations are required: first, to remove the rocks pinning the African American people at the bottom of the pile; and second, to re-construct social and economic structures on new foundations.

“Racial repair” can happen when African Americans have the freedom and the means, as did whites, to build their own house.

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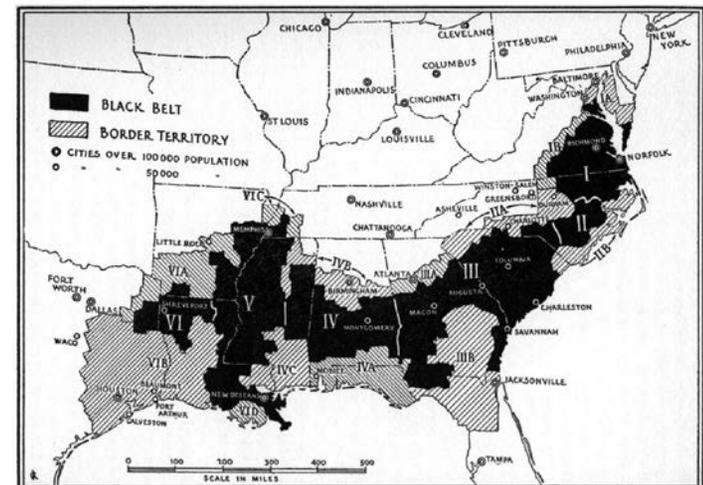
What's the Idea of an African-American Nation Got to Do with It?

by Meizhu Lui

Events in Ferguson and elsewhere have cut through the white noise (yes, white) of “post-racial” blather to

reveal the state of race relations in the US.

Shortly before Ferguson, Ta-Nehisi Coates movingly made the case for reparations to the African American people; that is, being awarded money for being done wrong. He documents the plunder of African Americans from getting no wages for their life times of labor under slavery, to being consciously excluded by the government from Federal Housing Administration mortgages subsidized by all taxpayers, to 21st century racially-targeted predatory lending practices with banks performing the wallet extraction. In every period of history, black subordination has been enforced through violence. Far from the waters of righteousness rolling down since the abolition of the slave system, an avalanche of assaults on their humanity and their economic and physical security have continued to pile insult and injury on African Americans. The cumulative effect of governmental policies and practices are the cause of enduring African American poverty and marginalization, generation after generation. Therefore, “repair” of the relationship between blacks and whites cannot take place without public acknowledgement of the crimes against African Americans over five centuries and counting, and without U.S. governmental action to provide compensation for the brutal injustices committed.



But to get reparations is not the same as “to get free.” A larger question remains: *“How will African Americans AS A PEOPLE be liberated?”*

It has been proven that “race” is a social construct. We know that racial categories were invented by the white capitalist class to keep workers divided according to skin color and to maintain a category of worker that had the same rights as a mule or a plow. But while race is an illusion, national identity is real. Through the history of development of a shared territory, language, consciousness, economic and social life, and from the effects of oppression and a record of resistance, new national identities arise. This is the case for the African American people.

Slavery brought together Africans from many tribes and different parts of West Africa – peoples with very different languages, cultures, and conflicts. Over the 200 years that the “peculiar institution” was perpetuated, a diversity of Africans lived with each other, and separately from whites. They invented practices for their own survival including identifying healers and women who knew how to perform abortions, making new dishes from whatever edible was thrown their way, developing a common language and communication system, melding Christian worship (which was allowed) with their own religious practices (which weren’t), using songs for work, love, and insurrection, out of necessity caring for each other’s children and elders and forming extended definitions of kinship, learning self-defense and offense, organizing themselves and their allies, practicing resistance, and theorizing and strategizing how to win freedom. They were not only farm and manual laborers, but skilled agronomists, cowboys, artisans, carpenters, mechanics, doctors, engineers: they did everything it took to build the physical and economic basis of the South. The African-American identity exists nowhere else in the world, and continues to evolve.

This new national consciousness was born and raised in the Black Belt South, which is therefore the territory of the Black Nation. While there has been dispersion of African Americans across the U.S. from the time of the Great Migration in the early 1900’s, many blacks still own small pieces of land in the South (that have somehow evaded theft by whites, not that they’re still not trying) and have kinfolk there; it is still the homeland of the African-American people.

The concept of a nation of African Americans with a claim to their own

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territory is centuries old. Of course, whites who conceived of an African American nation based their thinking on preserving the U.S. as a country of, by, and for white people. Before the Civil War, anti-slavery whites, including President Lincoln, could not imagine whites and blacks co-existing; they hoped to solve the problem of the immorality of slavery and the repugnance of equality by sending emancipated blacks to some new nation they would construct in Africa. Liberia, first settled in 1821, resulted from that effort. Many African Americans themselves found it hard to imagine ever feeling safe in a white country. Many came to their own conclusion that moving to the opposite side of the world would be a smart idea. In the early 20th Century, Marcus Garvey’s Back to Africa movement became the largest mass political movement in African-American history.

Another strand of the black liberation movement has discussed reparations in the form of a separate black republic within the boundaries of the U.S. As far back as 1852, black abolitionist Martin Delany talked about an African-American “nation within a nation.” In the 1930’s, the Communist Party USA under the leadership of Harry Haywood organized around the idea that blacks constituted a nation in the Black Belt South. African Americans flocked to join: the idea of being a nation and not just an oppressed segment of the U.S. population excited their imagination, giving them pride, hope, and a plan of action. In the 1960’s, black nationalism was revived again; the Black Panthers and others created community “do-it-for-ourselves” programs and mounted militant defenses of black people’s rights. Like the CPUSA, they were not anti-white, they were anti-white supremacy. They put the African American struggle for freedom in the context of the need for a whole new economic and social model based not on individualism and private profit, but social-ism and shared resources.

Even though the issue of nation-building has not been on center stage for several decades, it reverberates as a feeling below the surface of black consciousness today. Te-Nehisi Coates recounts several epiphanies that pushed him to think about the need for reparations. One such moment came when he read that black parents had filed a complaint in NYC charging that admissions testing for elite public schools was biased, because Asian students who studied 24/7 to get high test scores were winning the majority of seats. At first he was horrified at the suit. What’s wrong with kids working hard to get good scores, he thought? *“And then something occurred to me. The reason why a lot of these black parents are upset is..... the feeling (though never explicitly said) that black people deserve special consideration, given our history in this country. The result is that you have black parents basically lobbying for Asian-American kids to be punished because the country at large has never given much remedy for what it did to black people.”*

What is that “feeling” but righteous rage among ordinary black folk that