

**McCormick Theological Seminary**  
**Redemption's Call : Race, Reparations and The Church**  
**Course Syllabus – Summer 2021**  
**Iva E. Carruthers, PhD**

*“While no amount of gold could provide adequate compensation for the exploitation of the Negro American down through the centuries, a price could be place on unpaid wages.”*  
- Dr. Martin L. King (Why We Can't Wait, 1968)

## **Introduction**

And decades before that in 1894 the Mother of the Reparations Movement, Ms. Callie House, and Rev. Isiah H. Dickerson founded the National Ex Slave and Mutual Relief Bounty and Pension Association.

Through centuries, the demands for and resistance to reparations have persisted. To be sure, the evidence is overwhelming- the Euro – Western global slave trade across the Atlantic Ocean was a crime against humanity by any definition. Its transgenerational impact and consequences are evident by every measurement of quality of life on the continent and throughout the Diaspora. And now, in the shadow of Dr. King's prophetic witness, reparations for people of African descent in the United States has hit its highest mark of potential realization.

*“Reparations is a process to remember, repair, restore, rejoin, replenish, set right, make amends and reconcile. And always, true reparations is a matter of justice.” (Carruthers)* Reparations can never be reduced just to monetary terms. To do so makes a mockery of the real significance of reparations as an end in a process of justice, human atonement and redemption. And if there is one watchtower from which the case for reparations ought to be seen and heard, it is from the vantage point of the Church. Of its own soul and vital force, the Church is called to raise up and repair the breach – to be a restorer of justice. The perspective and actions of “the Church” are consequential.

There are at least three major reasons why the Church and its believers must interrogate themselves in the discourse on reparations: (1) The Church has blood on its hands by its protracted legitimation, culpability and participation in the trading of human cargo. (2) The Church purports to represent the voice of God in the human community. (3) The consequences of the Church's continued silence in the moment of Kairos – God's time and opportunity – contributes to the undoing of itself.

This course will examine the historical trajectory outlining the case for and demand of reparations and the role of religious institutions, the church and voices of moral agency in its evolution. In everything, there is a season, including a due season, and in the U.S., we now see

cities, states, institutions of higher education and denominations publicly entertaining processes of reparatory justice.

### **Course Outcomes**

With both a national and global lens, upon completion of the course students will be able to think critically, engage and convey to others reflections on:

What are basic tenets/principles/constructs that frame reparatory justice/reparations in a socio-political-economic sense?

What are basic theological tenets/principles/constructs that frame reparatory justice/reparations from both an OT and NT perspective?

What has been the concrete histories of reparations, with a focus on the U.S?

Why does this issue as it relates to people of African descent, especially those in the Diaspora, get such resistance in Euro-American centers of powers?

What compels and commands people of African descent to continue to demand reparatory justice and reparations in both theological and sociological contexts?

What are we learning from the current active moves of stakeholders and case studies of actual on-the-ground initiatives?

### **Pedagogical Learning Framework**

Please consider the course and your participation as an opportunity to engage in a learning community with the goals of learning as inquiry and learning as knowledge creation.

All students should commit to being present for scheduled class days unless otherwise notified. Peer-to-peer learning and engagement is a part of the inquiry process and completion of group assignments.

The course reading portal will house some of the required articles/chapters to be read as well as other ancillary materials.

The learning pillars are framed by the following outline:

Redemption's Call to the Church: What are reparations? The Case For and Against

- I The Harm Done: Undoing Myths – Facts vs Fiction (Doctrine of Discovery, Papal Bulls, Global Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade System)
- II Theological Accounting (Text, Interpretation and Praxis)
- III Sociological Consequences (Transgenerationally mapping the Harm and Trauma -e.g. Family structures, Gender-based Violence, Black Codes, Lynching's, Land Theft, Wealth

and Income Degradation, Health Disparities, Environmental Ecosystem Injustice, Debts of African States)

#### IV Mapping the Demands of the Reparations Movement, legally and sociologically, and Models of Remedy – Real and Envisioned with Theological Imagination

##### **Key Activities/Assignments**

As a learning community engaged in knowledge creation, using processes of shared inquiry, discovery and story-telling, we will collectively identify and graph the history of U.S. reparations and class subsidies with these questions guiding our excavation of each case study: Reparations given to whom? For what? What was the nature of acknowledgement/apology? We will also collectively share information on the role of the church/religious institutional expression of harm done to people of African descent and indigenous communities.

1. Come to the first class prepared with a commentary on Remembrance – Towards Righteousness and Reparations (Carruthers, *The Ecumenical Journal*, World Council of Churches, 2020) 2pp
2. Come to the first class having selected an OT AND NT scripture related to what you believe speaks to the process of reparatory justice and redemption, with a written exegesis and eisegesis 2 pp
3. Come to the first class having viewed the uploaded videos on the Elaine AK Massacre, the Tulsa Massacre and Destruction of Black Wall Street and the lecture by Sir Hillary Beckles, economist, Chancellor University of West Indies and chair of CARICOM Reparations Commission, Dr. Iva Carruthers at UN/WCC Forum on Afrophobia

Over the course of the class, each student is expected to complete the following additional assignments:

- 1) A personal narrative of a family genealogy on how, when and where you entered the US and how you characterize your family's journey as one of individual/collective harm and/or beneficial gain. 2pp [states are now banning teaching of "critical race theory" and have attempted to mandate educational text book publishers convey that people of African descent are identified as "immigrants for agricultural work."]
- 2) Submit for the communal learning circle wall a briefly abstracted bibliography of 5-7 entries at the intersection of Reparations, Christianity/Church/Religious Histories (articles, books, videos websites)
- 3) Final paper/project – An Apologia on Reparations (For or Against) that includes:  
a theological reflection;  
a transgenerational sociological analysis of the consequences of the global Manifest Destiny Proclamations and the TransAtlantic Slave Trade System upon the development of "institutional life, systems and the soul of America;"  
a forward looking envisioning of how to effect processes of reparatory justice and reparations towards the dismantling of systems of white racism and hegemony. 8-10pp  
*Additionally*, support your Apologia with 3-5 social media infographics, Instagram posts, memes to convey your point of view.

Consider other activities:

Identify elements of, or actually design, a social media/educational campaign in the context of a particular event/issue that supports or argues against the reparatory justice and reparations movement for people of African descent.

Review SDPC's Truth Telling Commission on Elaine, AK and consider how does the process and content model or exemplify Liberation and Womanist Theologies in the life and mission of the Black Church? How can the process support the role of the Church at large in reparatory justice?

### **Evaluation Process**

**The evaluation guidelines are as follows:**

- 1. Pre-class assignments' completion (15%)**
- 2. Participation in small group learning circles (15%)**
- 3. Final Paper (30%)**
- 4. Evidence of off-line engagement with readings as assigned, and reflected by class participation and other written assignments (30%)**
- 5. Self-evaluation Submission (10%) (See form)**

### **REQUIRED READINGS:**

**My Face is Black is True: Callie House and the Struggle for Ex-Slave Reparations, Mary Berry**

Chapter 4 Voices of Ex Slaves pp 93-121

Chapter 8 Jailed for Justice pp 188 – 211

**Decolonizing Wealth: Indigenous Wisdom to Heal Divides and Restore Balance, Edgar Villanueva**

Chapter 1 Stolen and sold, pp 17-35

Chapter 7 and Conclusion Repair and Conclusion, pp 159-181

**Should America Pay? Slavery and the Raging Debate on Reparations, Raymond Winbush**

Chapter 1 The African American Warrant for Reparations – The Crime of European Enslavement of Africans and Its Consequences Molefi Kete Asante pp 3-13

**The Debt What America Owes to Blacks, Randall Robinson**

Chapter 7 The Cost of Ignoring the Race Problem in America pp 161 – 178 CHPT 7

**The Atlantic, June 2014 Ta-Nehisi Coates The Case for Reparations,**

**Reconciliation and Reparation: Preaching Economic Justice, Joseph Evans 2018**

Chapter 4 The Word of Reconciliation Reconsidered: Matthew 5-7, 2 Corinthians 5: 16-20, and Crating a New Consciousness (63-79)

Chapter 5 Passover, Our Collective Liberation Narrative Exodus 12, Luke 19: 1-10, and Shaping a Claim for Justice (91-110)

Chapter 6 Fallible Humanity: The Double Consciousness of Thomas Jefferson (111-134)

**Britain's Black Debt, Hilary McD. Beckles 2013**

Chapter 8 Dividends from the Devil: Church of England Chattels in Barbados pp109-120 (11)

Chapter 6 Prostituting Enslaved Caribbean Women 76-81 (5)

Chapter 11 Twenty Million Pounds: Slave Owners' Reparations 143 – 162 (19)

Chapter 12 The Case for Reparations 163- 171 (8)

**Epigenetics: The Controversial Science Behind Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities, Janell Ross, March 20, 14, National Journal, (7)**

**Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism, Allan Boesak and Curtiss DeYoung, 2012 (Total 36pp)**

Chapter 7 When Prophets Are Silenced, Injustice Prevails 115-130 (15)

**Additional Pre-reading**

Accra Confession (3)

Belhar Confession (5)

What Does the Lord Require? World Alliances of Reformed Churches (19)

Council of World Missions Confession 2020

The Church & Reparations: African American Perspectives, Carruthers, Durban 2001

***REDEMPTION'S CALL: RACE, REPARATIONS AND THE CHURCH  
STUDENT SELF-EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE \****

1. Which of these readings did you find most helpful and why?
2. Are you able to apply what you learned in this class? How and where?
3. Was this time and coursework feasible for you? If not, what would have supported your engagement better?
4. What other suggestions would you make for format, speakers, lectures, panels, etc.?
5. Were there any questions raised that apply to your situation? What are they?
6. Other issues you would like to see addressed in the future?

\*In collaboration with Dr. Itihari Toure