

ORIGINAL ARTICLE IN *THE MONTGOMERY ADVERTISER*
REBUTTAL TO FOLLOW

We all know who 'made this mess'

By Vanzetta McPherson 3:07 p.m. CDT May 30, 2014

"You break it, you own it."

So said Colin Powell. He was referring to our obligation to "fix" Iraq, which America "broke" by attacking that nation in 2003. He was also echoing the Marshall Plan, the post World War II program designed to fix European economy and infrastructure, which we did not break.

But fix it we did, by infusing the continent with more than \$13 billion between 1948 and 1951. By maintaining military bases in Europe, supporting the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, America has continued its ameliorative aid to European nations.

Using Powell and Marshall as context, when you read "The Case For Reparations," the brilliant essay by Ta-Nehisi Coates in this month's *Atlantic Magazine*, it is analytically impossible to reject his passionate and well-founded entreaty for America to fix what it undeniably broke: the spirit, self-determination, and dignity of the millions of Africans transported to this country as slaves. Because of Coates' essay and the human experience, it is also analytically impossible to reject the reality that the descendants of those broken souls still carry the genome of suppressed personhood, and the lives of succeeding generations, including the young adults and children of today, still reflect the wounds inflicted under law since 1619.

Through anecdotes and painstaking research, Coates focuses on the official role of government and business in institutionalizing the toxin of American racism and the continuing erosion of African-American potential. He urges the passage of HB 40, John Conyers' annual failure to convince Congress to consider righting the wrong that still plagues our country. Coates did not ignore, but neither did he choose to explore, the most common reason for dismissing reparations.

Those who denounce reparations — many of whom are still racist and many of whom have never been — most frequently hurl a bifurcated rhetorical missile at its proponents: Today's Americans do not include slaves or slave owners. As if society neatly quarantined the advantages and disadvantages of discrimination, they seriously and unpersuasively argue that the mutual contagion was limited in scope and arrested in time. Neither conclusion is defensible.

Consider Joe Kennedy III, who successfully ran for Congress in 2013; Bill Ford Jr., executive chairman of Ford Motor Co.; and all of today's Rockefellers, Hearsts and Forbeses. When Topsy said, "I s'pect I growed. Don't think nobody never made me," she was not talking about them.

All of them “grewed” from generations of wealth and privilege, including skin color privilege, and today, decades after their ancestors plowed the social and economic ground that yielded their harvest of access, they function primarily as beneficiaries of the harvest, not as its creators. It isn’t necessary to begrudge their wholly derivative access; it is enough to acknowledge it.

On the other hand, consider the contemporary lives of most African-Americans — the descendants of the Constitution’s three-fifths, including those whom Henry Ford (1) initially refused to hire, (2) later hired to subvert unionism, and (3) then paid lower wages than whites. Is it not as likely that their present condition — that is, their access — is as compromised by the burdens their family members carried as John Forbes Kerry’s is advanced by his grandfather’s privilege?

The contemporary children of social and racial privilege, folks like the Waltons and the Romneys, are fond of declaring that they worked hard and created their own wealth and that, beyond one preceding generation, they lay no claim to the benefits of successive wealth. Consequently, using their taxes to uplift less successful Americans is profanely unjust.

If privilege were limited to wealth, their argument might make more sense. If wealth were the only key to the door of opportunity, perhaps HB 40 would be somewhat superfluous. But privilege is more than wealth. The door is more likely to open to a sesame of accumulated advantages of skin color. That is why Oprah, Henry Louis Gates and lately Magic Johnson are still regarded as “less than” in some quarters. Their money and status chart a path to the door, but it does not guarantee entry.

As Providence, the Mother of all nations, looks on, surely she must be asking, “Who made this mess?” As former children, we know all too well what she would say if we gave her a truthful response.

Vanzetta Penn McPherson is a retired U.S. magistrate judge for the Middle District of Alabama. Send email to mcpersonscribe@knology.net.

Rebuttal BY Dr. Ken Scott
'Made this mess' article is its own mess
Submitted to *The Montgomery Advertiser*, 12 June 2014

When I read the convoluted mess in the *Advertiser* titled, We all know who 'made this mess', it caused me confusion, convulsions, and consternation. The writer of the article tended to skew facts and truth to dissuade counter-argument. So, let me state fact and truth before continuing.

This nation has been through many events in its history. We did have slaves and while there are pockets of racism, the nation is not a racist nation. We have made significant progress through the years and for the writer to continually excuse present-day responsibility for past sins, remains inexcusable propaganda. Take the following quote, for example:

"Because of Coates' essay and the human experience, it is also analytically impossible to reject the reality that the descendants of those broken souls still carry the genome of suppressed personhood, and the lives of succeeding generations, including the young adults and children of today, still reflect the wounds inflicted under law since 1619."

This quote presupposes, and would have us believe and accept force-fed nonsense, that because of historical perspective, we are incapable of moving beyond 'what was done to us.' History is a lesson and guide for the future, not its mandate to live in it.

My grandfather had a working-farm in rural Georgia. I worked every crop imaginable from the age of 7 until 11, with animals the size of elephants. My race gave me no privilege or advantage during those years of hard labor as I gladly worked alongside African Americans on a daily basis—and that still remains true today. However, that intensive, unforgiving labor was my past, not my future. Farmers live by the rule of hard labor.

I decided that education was a way to learn a new skill and profession. To use the quote presented by this writer's messy logic, my future is bleak because of my past. Rubbish! There are opportunities for every person in this nation, as dictated by protective laws and programs. To move forward, you must take responsibility for your actions and 'get busy' with education, community service, and responsible citizenship. When unjust obstacles arise, you deal with them one obstacle at a time—not create a holistic excuse for why you are entitled to stop-out, drop-out, crime-out, or drug-out. Race is not the root cause of these outcomes; it is attitude, persistence, intent, and personal responsibility.

The second point of rebuttal for the 'who created this mess' writer is that this nation was built by many—slave, free, and immigrant. I am a fifth-generation Cherokee, or thereabouts, and reparations must begin with those who were 'first offendees.' The writer, being a former judge, should be fully cognizant of this precedent. Those of whom I speak are the Native Americans, the original owners of this great land, we now refer to as The United States of America.

When 'we' came to this land, it was not ours. No manner of justification, under any banner of verbiage (e.g., Manifest Destiny, Eminent Domain, etc.), gave 'us' the right to take what belonged to others and move them to reservations, did it? To this very day, 'we' still have reservations for these Native Americans, with some of the poorest people on the face of the Earth. Casinos do not fit the bill of reparations for the slaughter, relocation, and wholesale stripping away of land, language, countless lives, and culture!

Yet, if you visit their reservations, you find a people who persevere in the midst of their historical past. Native Americans are the prima facie, rightful first recipients of "the descendants of those broken souls [that] still carry the genome of suppressed personhood", yet they flourish in spite of this nebulous stipulation. How many Americans of other races, religions, and so forth, remain on 'forced reservations?'

Let me take this one step further. Slavery was a horrible thing for this nation. It was recently reported that there are presently an estimated 29.8 million people still living in slavery (*The Washington Post*). This is a global travesty. While not excusing this tragedy, the United States has worked to remove this blight from our society.

While there are those who still cling to racism—and these include all races, so don't obfuscate that fact—this nation has gone to extremes to eradicate hatred and bigotry. What is now needed in this nation is responsibility for our personal actions. If a person is guilty, it is that person, not a nation. Correlation from one-to-many is idiocy on its best day and inexcusable on its worst.

Accusing race as a privilege is a ploy to move the peg in favor of bigoted imbalance. That imbalance will result in a nation divided against itself as surely as the sun rose while working on this article. And as the Bible has noted, "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

We are at a crossroads; we can continue to live in the past, or we can use the past as a beacon to move our nation forward as The *United* States of America.

Ken Scott writes from Montgomery.

***** See below for the article printed in The Montgomery Advertiser. *****

Our past doesn't determine our future

By Ken Scott 2:55 p.m. CDT June 19, 2014

When I read the convoluted mess in the *Advertiser* headlined "We all know who 'made this mess,'" it caused me confusion, convulsions and consternation.

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I decided that education was a way to learn a new skill and profession. To use this writer's messy logic, my future is bleak because of my past. Rubbish. There are opportunities for every person in this nation, as dictated by protective laws and programs.

To move forward, you must take responsibility for your actions and get busy with education, community service, and responsible citizenship. When unjust obstacles arise, you deal with them one obstacle at a time, not create a holistic excuse for why you are entitled to stop-out, drop-out, crime-out or drug-out. Race is not the root cause of these outcomes; it is attitude, persistence, intent and personal responsibility.

This nation was built by many—slave, free, and immigrant. I am a fifth-generation Cherokee, or thereabouts, and reparations must begin with those who were first offenders. The writer, being a former judge, should be fully cognizant of this precedent.

To this very day, we still have reservations for these Native Americans, with some of the poorest people on the face of the Earth. Casinos do not fit the bill of reparations for the

slaughter, relocation and wholesale stripping away of land, language, countless lives, and culture.

Yet, if you visit their reservations, you find a people who persevere in the midst of their historical past. Native Americans are the prima facie, rightful first recipients of "the descendants of those broken souls [that] still carry the genome of suppressed personhood," yet they flourish in spite of this nebulous stipulation. How many Americans of other races, religions, and so forth, remain on forced reservations?

Slavery was a horrible thing for this nation. It was recently reported that there are presently an estimated 29.8 million people still living in slavery worldwide. This is a global travesty. While not excusing this tragedy, the United States has worked to remove this blight from our society.

While there are those who still cling to racism—and these include all races, so don't obfuscate that fact—this nation has gone to extremes to eradicate hatred and bigotry. What is now needed in this nation is responsibility for our personal actions. If a person is guilty, it is that person, not a nation. Correlation from one to many is idiocy on its best day and inexcusable on its worst.

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