

# African American Voices Lesson Plans

**Lesson Plan:** The Reparations Debate

**Subject:** United States History, American Government

**Grade:** 11 & 12

**NGSSS-SS:** **SS.912.A.1.5-** Use research and inquiry skills to analyze American history using primary and secondary sources.



**Description/  
Abstract of Lesson:** The students will understand differing positions concerning granting Africans in America reparations for slavery.

**Objective(s):** The students will accomplish the following:

- Two column “pros and cons” diagram.
- Sensitivity for various perspectives on a topic.
- Understanding historical documents.
- Developing “Cause and Effect” perspectives on historical events.

**Materials:**

- Historical Document: “REPARATIONS BILL FOR THE AFRICAN SLAVES IN THE UNITED STATES” (provided with this lesson; web version: <http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/122/recon/stevens.htm> )
- Newspaper or Internet articles expressing various perspectives on the current state of Black America

**Duration:** 1-2 class periods

**Lesson Lead In/  
Opening:** The teacher will ask the class what they would think if their teacher, who has been working very hard to prepare lessons and teach his/her classes, has not received a pay check as of yet in the whole school year. He/She is, in fact, being told to wait patiently; that he/she will eventually receive a paycheck. The teacher will engage in a brief discussion about the students’ opinions.

**Activity 1:**

1. The teacher will tie the students’ varying perspectives on the teacher “not getting paid for his/her work” with the varying perspectives on the idea that Africans in America (and their descendants) were and have been in need of reparations for their unpaid labor.
2. The teacher will hand out a print version and/or show a transparency version of the “REPARATIONS BILL FOR THE AFRICAN SLAVES IN THE UNITED STATES” written by Thaddeus Stevens.
3. The class will read the historical document together and will discuss/debate the issue of reparations. (The teacher will emphasize that while the bill never passed in Congress, the concept has been

immortalized in the catch phrase: “40 Acres and a Mule.”) – The teacher will ask questions: “Are reparations still a relevant issue, if so how?” “If the government does decide to grant reparations, in what way should it be administered?”

4. The teacher will divide the class into cooperative learning groups.

5. The teacher will hand out several articles from newspapers, magazines and on-line resources expressing different perspectives on the reparations debate.

6. The students are to read and discuss the articles within their respected groups.

7. After reading and discussing the articles, each group is to develop a two column “pros and cons” chart outlining what they believe are the pros and cons of Africans in America receiving reparations today.

- Possible “pros” could include “unresolved issues of poverty since slavery ended, insufficient educational aid, long history of discrimination after slavery was abolished, etc.”
- Possible “cons” could be “slavery taking place so long ago, too much diversity today in Black populations in the United States (including immigration from the Caribbean and Africa), etc.

On the bottom of the chart (or on the back of the sheet), each group is to answer the question “If the government were to decide to grant Africans in America reparations, what would be the best way it could be administered?”

8. After completing the activity, have the groups share their answers as a class and engage in discussion if needed.

**Assessment:**

- Consider giving cooperation and creativity grades.
- Teacher observation and evaluation of group charts. Check for historical accuracy as an indicator of comprehension.

**Higher Order**

**Thinking Questions:**

1. Are reparations still a relevant issue? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. If the government does decide to grant reparations, in what way should it be administered?
3. If we are only talking about reparations for Africans who went through slavery in the United States, what problem would we experience when including other Black populations that have migrated to the United States since slavery was abolished (i.e. from Africa and the Caribbean)?
4. What are problems with just giving money away?
5. Would developing more social services or access to resources suffice as a solution?

**Suggested Books  
In Lesson:**

Brophy, A. L. (2006) Reparations: Pro and Con, Oxford University Press

**Web Resources:**

<http://www.nationalcenter.org/Reparations.html>

[http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/columnist/wickham/2004-03-15-wickham\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/columnist/wickham/2004-03-15-wickham_x.htm)

REPARATIONS BILL FOR THE AFRICAN SLAVES IN THE UNITED STATES

THE FIRST SESSION FORTIETH CONGRESS

March 11, 1867

Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania

H.R. 29

Whereas it is due to justice, as an example to future times, that some future punishment should be inflicted on the people who constituted the "confederate States of America." both because they, declaring on unjust war against the United States for the purpose of destroying republican liberty and permanently establishing slavery, as well as, for the cruel and barbarous manner in which they conducted said war, in violation of all the laws of civilized warfare, and also to compel them to make some compensation for the damages and expenditures caused by the said war: Therefore,

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled. That all the public lands belonging to the ten States that formed the government of the so-called ..confederate States of America shall be forfeited by said States and become forthwith vested in the United States.

SEC. 2. And be it further enacted. That the President shall forthwith proceed to cause the seizure of such of the property belonging to the belligerent enemy as is deemed forfeited by the act of July 17, A. D. 1862, and hold and appropriate the same as enemy's property, and to proceed to condemnation with that already seized.

SEC. 3. And be it further enacted, That in lieu of the proceeding to condemn the property thus seized enemy's property. as is provided by the act of July A. D. 1862, two commissions or more, as by him may be deemed necessary. shall be appointed by the President for each of the said "confederate States,"to consist of three persons each, one of whom shall be an officer of the late or present Army, and two shall be civilians, neither of whom shall be citizens of the State for which he shall be appointed; that the said commissions shall proceed adjudicate and Condemn the property foresaid, under such forms and proceedings is shall be prescribed by the Attorney General of the United States, whereupon the title to said property shall become vested in the United States.

SEC. 4. And be it further enacted. That out of the lands thus seized and confiscated the slaves who have been liberated by the operations of the war and the amendment to the constitution or otherwise, who resided in said "confederate States" on the 4th day of March, A. D. 1861, or since, shall have distributed to them as follows, namely: to each male person who is the head of a family, forty acres; to each adult male, whether the head of a family or not, forty acres, to each widow who is the head of a family, forty acres-to be held by them in fee-simple, but to be inalienable for the next ten years after they become seized thereof. For the purpose

of distributing and allotting said land the Secretary of War shall appoint as many commissions in each State as he shall deem necessary, to consist of three members each, two of whom at least shall not be citizens of the State for which he is appointed. Each of said commissioners shall receive a salary of \$3,000 annually and all his necessary expenses. Each commission shall be allowed one clerk, whose salary shall be \$2,000 per annum. The title to the homestead aforesaid shall be vested in trustees for the use of the liberated persons aforesaid. Trustees shall be appointed by the Secretary of War, and shall receive such salary as he shall direct, not exceeding \$3,000 per annum. At the end of ten years the, absolute title to said homesteads shall be conveyed to said owners or to the heirs of such as are then dead.

SEC. 5. And be it further enacted, That out of the balance of the property thus seized and confiscated there shall be raised, in the manner hereinafter provided, a sum equal to fifty dollars, for each homestead, to be applied by the trustees hereinafter mentioned toward the erection of buildings on the said homesteads for the use of said slaves; and the further sum of \$500,000,000, which shall be appropriated as follows, to wit: \$200,000,000 shall be invested in United States six per cent, securities; and the interest thereof shall be semi-annually added to the pensions allowed by law to pensioners who have become so by reason of the late war; \$300,000,000, or so much thereof as may Be need, shall be appropriated to pay damages done to loyal citizens by the civil or military Operations of the government lately called the "confederate States of America."