



WHY I DON'T WANT AND DON'T DESERVE REPARATIONS

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My great-great-grandfather, Silas Burgess, came to America shackled in the belly of a slave ship. He was sold on an auction block in Charleston, South Carolina, to the Burgess Plantation.

Orphaned by age 8, he was, fortunately, surrounded by elder slaves who, though physically chained, mentally envisioned themselves as free men. They escaped, taking young Silas with them, making their way to West Texas.

Silas worked hard and saved his money. Eventually, he became the owner of 102 acres of farmland, which he cultivated and paid off within two years. I proudly carry the name of my first American ancestor—who, like millions of others drawn or brought to our country, struggled past overwhelming obstacles to live the American Dream.

Silas founded the first black church, the first black elementary school in his town. He was a Republican, a Christian, and a pillar of his community. He was proud and industrious and taught his children to be the same.

Now, because great-great-grandpa Silas was once a slave, so-called “progressives” want to give me money.

Never mind that, like him, I am an entrepreneur who received an excellent education, built businesses, raised a remarkable family and, unlike most white Americans, earned a Super Bowl ring.

Because of work I've never done, stripes I've never had, under a whip I've never known, these progressives want to give me money I've never earned. The fact that this money will be forcibly taken from others who also dreamed, worked and sacrificed for it, I'm told is not my concern.

But it is.

At the core of the reparations movement is a distorted and demeaning view of blacks and whites. It grants superiority to the white race, treating them as an oppressive people too powerful for black Americans to overcome. It brands blacks as hapless victims, devoid of the ability which every other culture possesses to assimilate and to progress.

The reparations movement conveniently forgets the 150 years of legal, social, and economic progress obtained by millions of American minorities. It also minimizes the sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of white Americans and a Republican president who gave their lives to eradicate slavery.

I think Grandpa Silas would have seen this loss of American lives as payment in full. Every grateful black American, then and now, would feel the same.

The reparations movement also reinforces a view of racial relationships that undermines America's Judeo-Christian foundation. It defies the ideals of forgiveness and second chances and scorns individual accountability.

Proponents of reparations believe that black Americans are incapable of carrying their own burdens, while white Americans must bear the sins of those who came before them. Proponents do not take into account the majority of white Americans who never owned slaves, who fought to end slavery, or who came to America long after it was ended.

This divisive message marks the black race as forever broken, a people whose healing can only come through the guilt, pity, and benevolence of whites. Tragically, we now see this playing out on our college campuses. As young white Americans acknowledge their skin color as a "privilege," young black Americans—with no apparent shame—accept their skin color as one that automatically confers victim status.

In doing so, they seem unaware that this perception of blacks was shared by the 1960s Southern white supremacists of my youth. Those who seek reparations have accepted the theory that skin color alone is capable of making one race superior to the other—that with no additional effort, values, or personal initiative, white Americans will succeed, while black Americans will fail. At its very core, this represents the condescending evil of racism. It certainly does not represent black America's potential.

40% of black households today live the middle-class American Dream. There are thousands of black Americans among our nation's top 1% of income earners—doctors, lawyers, engineers and professors; not to mention music, TV, film and sports stars. Many of our society's most revered and celebrated citizens are black.

The journeys of these Americans to wealth and prominence vary, like those of their white counterparts, but many benefited from having ancestors like Grandpa Silas, who embraced the opportunities their country provided and who left behind a legacy of proud, productive, patriotic, and successful families. Why should white Americans—my neighbors, friends, and fellow citizens—owe me *anything*?

If Grandpa Silas were here, I'm certain his message to everyone, whether black or white, would simply be this:

Good character cannot be bought by bribery.

I'm Burgess Owens for Prager University.