

*Editorial Observer; The Slave Reparations Movement Adopts the Rhetoric of Victimhood*, by Brent Staples

1 Slavery is nearer to us in time than most Americans understand. My eldest uncle, who  
2 turns 84 this year, has often recalled meeting former slaves when he was a boy at [my great-  
3 grandfather] John Wesley [Staples]'s farm in Troutville, Va....

4 Black Americans often suppressed slave memories out of horror and shame. But the  
5 Staples family embraced its story out of pride in how well John Wesley and his wife, Eliza,  
6 managed to fare in the aggressively racist environment of the South in the late 19th century and  
7 early 20th century. My great-grandparents had the benefit of a strong extended family, allowing  
8 them to pool resources, including manpower. The Staples family protected the farm and John  
9 Wesley's wholesaling business with shotguns and pistols that were evident even at the dinner  
10 table. With no school available for black children, John Wesley and Eliza joined with their  
11 neighbors and built one in a field at the intersection of their three properties....

12 When John Wesley died in 1940, he left behind a literate family, a thriving farm and  
13 \$40,000 in cash -- a small fortune by standards of the time. This achievement paved the way for  
14 my father's generation and mine, which included the first college-bound members of the Staples  
15 family line.

16 Black Americans made spectacular progress beginning in the decades after slavery,  
17 moving from cotton fields to the boardroom in just over a century. But the recent debate about  
18 reparations for slavery has introduced a different narrative in which black people are cast as a  
19 victim class seeking compensation for the suffering of ancestors. The most popular version of the  
20 reparations proposal is found in "The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks," by the Africa  
21 analyst Randall Robinson. The book has gained surprising credibility on the political left while  
22 generating a considerable backlash among moderate and conservative black intellectuals.

23 Targeted compensation is legal and morally just. The state of Florida made the right  
24 gesture in 1994 when it gave college scholarships to descendants from the black community of  
25 Rosewood, which was destroyed by whites in 1923 while the state did nothing. The federal  
26 government has rightly compensated modern-day Native Americans for lands taken from them in  
27 the last century. Supporters of reparations have at least a moral case when they argue that  
28 companies that enriched themselves in slavery should attempt restitution when documents are  
29 specific enough to permit it.

30 But the sweeping notion that individual black Americans are owed a "debt" for slavery is  
31 a bridge too far. Black families have made and lost fortunes just as white families have. There is  
32 in addition no provable connection between 19th-century bondage and specific cases of 21st-  
33 century destitution. For these reasons, a publicly financed reparations program based on ancestry  
34 is not sustainable politically.

35 Such a program would logically be open to millions of people who have lived as "white"  
36 for generations but are descended from enslaved black people. The program would also be  
37 available to the descendants of black slave owners, who were far more common than many  
38 people like to admit. Black masters in South Carolina, for example, were confined to the margins  
39 of society but held many of the same attitudes about race as whites. Black masters continued to  
40 hold slaves even as the Union Army prepared for its terrible march through South Carolina.

41 The reparations debate is part of a burgeoning discussion about the role of slavery in  
42 American history. But by blaming history alone for modern-day social ills like poverty, illiteracy  
43 and unemployment, reparations advocates are unwittingly saying that these problems are so  
44 deeply rooted as to be unsolvable. They are also subverting the true story of black people in the

45 United States. This story is one of extraordinary achievement in the face of gargantuan obstacles.  
46 It begins in the waning hours of slavery and continues to this very day.

1. The development pattern in the reading selection can best be described as  
**I subjective historical experience followed by objective general description**

II historical account followed by modern comparison

III legal analysis followed by personal experiences

a. I only

**b. II only**

c. I and II only

d. I and III only

e. I, II, and III

ANS: B

*Rationale: This passage is developed through the presentation of the author's connection to the historical context of slavery in the United States, followed by more general examples about the involvement of blacks in slavery, both as slaves and as masters.*

2. It can be inferred from the description of John Wesley's legacy (lines 12-15) that which of the following qualities are valued by the author?

a. wealth

b. land holdings

c. experience as black slave masters

d. pride in surviving a difficult time in history

e. literacy and education

ANS: E

*Rationale: It can be inferred from the description of John Wesley's legacy (lines 12-15) that the author values education. He "John Wesley... left behind a literate family," and his achievements "paved the way for my father's generation and mine, which included the first college-bound members of the Staples family line."*

3. In the sentence that begins, "The most popular version of the reparations proposal is found..." (line 19), the author makes a connection to his audience through an expression of

**a. authority and expertise**

b. common struggle

c. shared experience

d. gratitude and appreciation

e. sympathy and pity

ANS: A

*Rationale: In the sentence that begins, "The most popular version of the reparations proposal is found..." (line 19), the author makes a connection to his audience through an expression of authority and expertise. Staples cites the work of Africa analyst Randall Robinson, who makes an important contribution to the debate about reparations.*

4. Identify the relationship of the first sentence in the fifth paragraph to the passage as a whole.

a. The sentence challenges a common assumption in the debate about reparations

- b. The sentence provides a summary of the author’s argument.
- c. The sentence acknowledges an opposing viewpoint.
- d. The sentence is a partial concession to one side of the argument.**
- e. The sentence defines a key concept.

ANS: D

*Rationale: The passage primarily reflects on the complexities involved in the issue of reparations for descendants of American slavery. The first sentence of the fifth paragraph concedes that while “targeted compensation is legal and morally just” (line 23), the idea that individual black Americans are owed a “debt” for slavery is a bridge too far” (lines 30-31).*

5. The fifth paragraph of the passage includes which of the following development strategies?
- a. quotation and commentary
  - b. exemplification**
  - c. argument and counterargument
  - d. narrative
  - e. comparison

ANS: B

*Rationale: This paragraph is developed in part through exemplification of targeted reparations to victims of historical abuses. The other development strategies mentioned above are not present in this paragraph.*

6. Name the rhetorical strategy or device used in lines 30-31: the... notion that individual black Americans are owed a "debt" for slavery is a bridge too far.
- a. colloquial diction
  - b. euphemism
  - c. irony
  - d. parable
  - e. idiom**

ANS: E

*Rationale: The idiom "a bridge too far" stands for a target that is too ambitious, the pursuit of which will result in dire consequences. The phrase is based on the title of a book and a movie about a failed attempt by Allied forces to break through German lines in World War II.*

7. The author exemplifies “modern-day social ills like poverty, illiteracy and unemployment,” (lines 42-43) in order to
- a. explain why some people feel compelled to seek reparations
  - b. correct a common misconception about the role of poverty in the reparations debate
  - c. advocate for a return to the old ways of dealing with social problems
  - d. provide a context for African Americans’ extraordinary achievements**
  - e. explain the nature of the challenges faced by descendants of slaves

ANS: D

*Rationale: The author exemplifies “modern-day social ills like poverty, illiteracy and unemployment,” (lines 42-43) in order to point out that the nation’s history of slavery is not the only cause of social ills. What’s more, some descendants of slaves, including members of the author’s own family, have overcome obstacles to achieve success.*

8. In line 44, the word “gargantuan” can best be defined as

- a. common
- b. insignificant
- c. enormous**
- d. irrelevant
- e. insurmountable

ANS C

*Rationale: In this context, the adjective “gargantuan” can be best understood to mean “enormous.”*

HEATHER  
SEEVERSON  
WRITING  
SAMPLE