

Gaslit Nation Transcript

28 February 2024

“The Stolen Wealth of Slavery: A Case for Reparations”

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[[opening clip](#)]

Jack Posobiec (00:00:46):

Alright, welcome. Welcome. I just wanted to say, welcome to the end of democracy [laughs]. We are here to overthrow it completely. We didn't get all the way there on January 6th, but we will endeavor to get rid of it and replace it with this, right here. We'll replace it with this right here.

CPAC Host:

Alright, amen. [audience applauds]

Jack Posobiec (00:01:03):

That's right, because all glory is not to government, all glory to God.

[opening theme music up and under]

Andrea Chalupa (00:01:16):

Welcome to *Gaslit Nation*. I am your host, Andrea Chalupa, a journalist and filmmaker and the writer and producer of the journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones*, about Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine; the film the Kremlin doesn't want you to see, so be sure to watch it. As a special surprise for our *Gaslit Nation* Patreon community that keeps the show going, you can join me and the tenacious ladies of the *KremlinFile* podcast, Olga Lautman and Monique Camarra, for a live virtual hangout on Wednesday, February 28 at 12 pm Eastern. To our Patreon supporters, look for a link to that in the show notes for this week's episode. Olga and Monique organized this. They're going to be doing it for their *KremlinFile* supporters as well. I said, “Yeah, sure, let's hang out.” So come join that. Sorry for the last minute notice. We'll give you more notice ahead of time next time. This is... I blame the *KremlinFile*, alright? This is all their doing. So we'll see you Wednesday at noon for those who can make it. Look out for a link on Patreon. Thank you to our community there. We love you.

Andrea Chalupa (00:02:24):

Our opening clip was Jack Posobiec this week at the Klan rally known as CPAC, which took place in Maryland this year—poor Maryland—and featured infamous Nazis in a January 6th pinball machine. Yes, a January 6th pinball machine. They make coup merch. If Merrick Garland had acted with any urgency in 2021, punishing and holding accountable not just the militias, but the masterminds of Trump's violent coup attempt, maybe Trump, Bannon and the other coup plotters would be in prison by now instead of out in the open, continuing with their coup; literally trying to overthrow our democracy inciting more political violence. Instead, here's Bannon at CPAC, whose speech this year was straight up Goebbels.

[begin audio clip]

Steve Bannon:

Media, I want you to suck on this. I want the White House to suck on this: You lost in 2020. Donald Trump is the legitimate president of the United States! [audience cheers and applauds] Trump won! Trump won! [audience joins in and continues to chant, "Trump won!"]

[end audio clip]

Andrea Chalupa (00:03:40):

Meanwhile, here's Trump in a recent *Fox News* town hall.

[begin audio clip]

Donald Trump:

We're gonna have a very powerful Krem— And you're gonna be proud of it again!

[end audio clip]

Andrea Chalupa (00:03:48):

Now, crime-in-chief Trump is pretty much the Republican nominee for president and could win the electoral college, a monument to slavery built by our founding fathers to ensure that the elites with their inherited wealth would run our country. And now that slave monument is empowering a religious extremist movement supporting Trump and set on dismantling our democracy; determined to take control of our very bodies, as we saw with Alabama's Supreme Court using the Bible to justify criminalizing IVF, which helps people start and grow their families, achieving long-held dreams. We are in a time of extreme crisis in America, but this should not stop us from envisioning and building the world we want; a sustainable future for ourselves and our loved ones. And we can do it by dreaming big and planting seeds of change in our very communities.

Andrea Chalupa (00:04:47):

That's what this week's discussion on reparations is all about—reminding ourselves that another world is possible, because it is. Take Citibank. Citigroup, the parent company of Citibank—a bank built from the institution of slavery—received around \$500 billion (that's half a trillion dollars from taxpayer money) from the taxpayer-funded bailout in the 2008 Wall Street crash, which Wall Street caused. But don't call that socialism. Socialism is when the people, not the banks, ask for a bailout. If Citigroup, which owns Citibank—the bank that slavery built—can top the list of banks that received federal aid, then surely they must see the wisdom in finally paying reparations. It only seems right. It only seems fair. Do the right thing, Citibank. Do the right thing.

Andrea Chalupa (00:05:55):

According to a *Reuters* investigation, many of our ruling elite come from families that owned slaves. This includes five recent presidents, two Supreme Court justices (because of course), 11 governors, and around 100 legislators. Many of the names are of course not surprising, including; proud insurrectionist Mo Brooks, a congressman from Alabama who spoke at Trump's pre-coup tailgate party on January 6th,

wearing body armor in preparation for their attempt to violently overthrow our democracy; pliant Trump lackey Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina; Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas, who called for a military dictatorship in the *New York Times* (the newspaper of power) with an infamous op-ed with the headline, “Send in the Troops”, arguing for “an overwhelming show of force” to squash protests during the George Floyd movement.

Andrea Chalupa (00:07:01):

That's what they do in authoritarian regimes. So do you see a connection, a direct link between the authoritarianism that built this country for centuries (the institution of slavery), with the current authoritarians trying to end all progress and turn this very country back into a prison, enslave all of us now? Some of the political elite have evolved from their slave-owning families. Many have not, which is why we must help build the grassroots movement for reparations, demanding greater investment in our collective good and healing. Reparations help everybody, as the research shows, as we will discuss in this week's episode with David Montero, the author of *The Stolen Wealth of Slavery: A Case for Reparations*. At a time of growing income inequality in America, surpassing even the Gilded Age, economic instability like this endangers our democracy by entrenching it into an oligarchy where might makes right and laws are only enforced to protect and strengthen the super rich.

Andrea Chalupa (00:08:14):

It's a mafia state in the hands of sadistic oligarchs like Elon Musk, who casually canceled a company order of pies to celebrate Black History Month from a local baker, costing her \$16,000 in losses. The community around her rose up to make up for those losses. Elon Musk promised he would too, but all he did was add insult to injury by offering her a tour of Tesla because that's how egotistical he is. So, if you don't want to be beholden to the whims of sadistic, narcissistic, ego-driven oligarchs who made their wealth on stolen bodies—like Elon Musk's family in apartheid South Africa and like many of our white ruling elite—then we need to fight like hell for a freer, fairer country. And part of that national movement of self-defense includes normalizing and expanding reparations, something already happening in cities like Boston and New York. The movement for reparations has started. It's up to us to demand greater dialogue around reparations wherever we live with our local officials as a matter of accountability, community protection, and healing.

[transition music]

Andrea Chalupa (00:09:40):

David Monteiro, an Emmy Award-nominated journalist and author of the new must-read book, *The Stolen Wealth of Slavery: A Case for Reparations*. This is a book you absolutely have to read. It holds your hand and takes you on a walking tour of New York City, a walking tour unlike any that you've ever been on before, where you can wander the streets of our beautiful city and see all the monuments made with the blood money of centuries of slavery and all of... I'll save it. I'll just stop right now. I don't wanna give all these things away, but welcome to *Gaslit Nation*, David. It is such an honor to have you here and thank you so much for your extraordinary book.

David Montero (00:10:24):

Oh, thank you so much. It's such a pleasure to be here.

Andrea Chalupa (00:10:27):

So, talk us through... Name names. Let's out some people. Who are the corporations today, the dynastic wealth today, among us today, normalized, their names on institutions, all of this stolen wealth built by slavery, who are they?

David Montero (00:10:48):

The biggest name is Citibank. You know, it started off as the Citibank of New York. Now, it's a global behemoth, of course, worth billions of dollars, tens of billions of dollars. But the way Citibank got its start—and I focus on them a lot in the book because they epitomize the way that Wall Street banks had their origins in Black people's exploited labor. The bank was formed in 1812. Many of its directors were enslavers. Many of its directors made their money, became rich, and enriched the bank in turn by financing plantations in the South, shipping the goods that enslaved people made around the world. And that's how they built this bank into a huge brand and a huge name. It wasn't just Citibank. There are other banks that still exist, like Brown Brothers Harriman. And it's also a multi-billion dollar investment bank with a skyscraper suite in Manhattan as of today. And then, you know, there were offshoots of many of the banks that started on Wall Street, like Bank of America. JPMorgan is built from banks that made money from enslavement, like the Manhattan Trust, that it acquired over years. The list just goes on and on.

David Montero (00:11:55):

But basically, we could say that many of the corporations, insurance corporations (New York Life Insurance, Aetna Insurance), many of the institutions that started out on Wall Street, this is how they made their money. This is how they got their start.

Andrea Chalupa (00:12:09):

What's so important about your book is how it gives us an important understanding of how America became an oligarchy. George Washington, our founding father, took his oath of office on Wall Street.

David Montero (00:12:27):

That's right, yes, in the 1790s. I mean, New York was the capital of the young republic at the time. And there was a building called Federal Hall, not far from Wall Street, where, yes, George Washington was inaugurated as the first president of the United States. And the people around him were all very wealthy merchants on Wall Street. They stood to gain so much from what the country's main business was, which was enslaving Black people, shipping the products that they made, and financing the institution that was then on the rise of keeping them enslaved and stealing the wealth of their labor.

Andrea Chalupa (00:13:03):

And what about Gracie Mansion? Gracie Mansion is where the mayor of New York City and their family live. There's a lot of events in Gracie Mansion. What is the dark history of Gracie Mansion? Tell everyone.

David Montero (00:13:17):

Yeah, and I find it fascinating that, you know... I'll just quickly mention that I read not long ago that former Mayor de Blasio and his wife themselves did not know the history of Gracie Mansion for years until years after they had lived there. It just shows you how so much of this history is still so buried. So there was a merchant on Wall Street. He was very... He epitomized this dynamic that I'm talking about. He owned a ship and he at first started shipping tobacco around the world that enslaved people made. That made him rich. He bought more ships. He shipped more tobacco. With the wealth that he started to build, he also bought his way into corporations; some of the first insurance corporations in America. He got himself a directorship at Bank of America. He became an incredibly powerful and important person. And then with that wealth and privilege, he then started shipping cotton. He started going to the South, sending his ships to plantations, shipping the cotton that enslaved people were then beginning to make in huge volumes.

David Montero (00:14:19):

And with his money, you know, Archibald Gracie, like a lot of New Yorkers, he wanted to live a life of privilege. He bought real estate. He bought several acres of land on the east side of Manhattan. And he built a mansion. He had the most famous builder in the country build him a beautiful mansion. And there he celebrated and entertained all of his guests. New York was a very small place at the time. So, his guests included the crème de la crème of New York, the Blue Blood, including many of our founding fathers, you know, and the famous writer Washington Irving. So that became Gracie Mansion. And Gracie not only used money that he made from enslavement, from the exploited labor of Black people, he used that money to enslave five Black people himself, including a child. And they worked at Gracie Mansion, presumably entertaining and serving the people who were Gracie's guests. But, this is the origins of the so-called People's House, the Mayor's House in New York City.

Andrea Chalupa (00:15:16):

Child labor, child enslavement.

David Montero:

Yes.

Andrea Chalupa:

Your book brilliantly shows the long history of two New York cities which persist today. So we have a New York city that today is on the front lines of demanding progress; some really important marches, for instance, to end the genocide in Gaza have taken place in New York City. A lot of resistance to Trumpism took place in New York city. And then of course we have the NYPD, which is a terror force with their union endorsing Trump, a white supremacist terrorist. So there's two New York cities. And that's always existed because New York city also was on the front lines of abolition and the underground railroad. So there's a lot of extremely important progress being made. But at the same time, as your book points out, there are these institutions that were built and propped up by slavery. And it wasn't as simple, the Civil War wasn't as simple as North versus South; the evil South versus the abolitionists of the North that were so morally high-standing. It was a lot more complicated then, as it is today, because we still have the same dynamic persisting today.

David Montero (00:16:30):

Yeah, one of the things I really hope this book can do at a fundamental level is change the narrative we have about slavery, which is that slavery was something that took place in the South and it enriched the South and the Civil War came and, you know, the North was totally against slavery, it fought for abolition. And then when slavery was destroyed, the wealth disappeared. What I point out in my book is that the leading white nationalists, white supremacists of the day, in our country who supported slavery were all on Wall Street. And that's not a coincidence. Slavery was their bread and butter. They were terrified by abolition. They hated the abolitionist movement. They wanted to destroy it. And as people do who have money, they not only thought these things, they invested their money into destroying abolition, into protecting slavery. And again, it's not a coincidence that if you look at who these outspoken white men were; they were the directors of Citibank, they were the directors of Bank of America, Bank of New York because they knew that if slavery was destroyed So much of their business—the financing of plantations the shipping of cotton, the insurance—would also be destroyed and/or they would have to take a totally different tact, which is what they did eventually.

David Montero (00:17:45):

But yeah, so ,you know, we like to think that New York was just a bastion of abolition. It most certainly was. But why was New York a bastion of abolition? Because the people that they were fighting against—the power, the money, the bankrolling—was just down the street on Wall Street at the big banks and the big corporations. The corporate directors of corporate America in its founding, in its heyday, were all pro-slavery and fighting to keep slavery alive.

Andrea Chalupa (00:18:16):

And that's partly why we're stuck with this electoral college.

David Montero (00:18:19):

Yeah, exactly. But the point is that these men created an ethos. You know, they not only enriched themselves from slavery, they not only fought against evolution; they created the basis for capitalism as we know it, the basis for profit seeking as we know it, the basis for exploitation as we know it. Their sons literally and figuratively went on to form big business, to run the monopolies that controlled capitalism into the Gilded Age, into the 20th century. And that's the legacy that we're still living with today.

Andrea Chalupa (00:18:50):

Yep, absolutely. Without question. So talk us through... What do reparations look like? What are we talking about? Because, you know, the whole disinformation campaign, the Fox News echo chamber that's going to discredit all this is going to tell moms and dads, families across America that this means, you know, reparations means higher taxes. They're going to try to take money out of your pocketbook from your kids and they're going to allow non-white children to jump in line in front of your white children. It's not gonna be about meritocracy anymore... like it ever was. But, you know, so talk us through, what are we saying when we say reparations now? What do reparations look like? Who is paying for them? I'm all for Citibank paying for them [laughs]. But so just talk us through reparations. What does that mean?

David Montero (00:19:40):

Reparations is going to mean many things, but a couple levels I'll break down. I want to amplify the Black voices who have been saying this for a very long time. Reparations, one, is meant to heal a wound. You cannot ever really heal the wound of centuries of enslavement, exploitation that started in slavery but continued through Jim Crow segregation up until today. But America has an obligation to pay this moral debt, to heal this wound. So on one level, it is healing the wound. And part of that is through monetary payments. One of the things that reparations wants to do is close the astronomical wealth gap between white households and Black households. It's going to take trillions of dollars to do that. And this is where people start to get like, "Oh my God, how is this ever going to happen?" It is an astronomical amount of money that will be required through reparations, through reparative payments specifically, to address this issue. But it's also an astronomical wound. It's an unprecedented wound that we are trying to heal.

David Montero (00:20:43):

William Darity, the very famous scholar at Duke who has looked at this issue quite a bit, has calculated we're talking about \$14 trillion. Now, he's pointed out only the federal government has the capacity and the duty to pay that amount of money. But that's not the only form of payment that reparations needs to take. Yes, it's gonna be the federal government leading the cash payments to Black Americans. But one thing that many people have pointed out, I wanna point out, this doesn't mean \$14 trillion needs to be paid out overnight or over a year. Better minds than those fretting on Fox News about how this is gonna play out are going to figure it out. I wanna say to the people who are aghast about reparations: it is not your job. You will not need to figure it out and just get out of the way. Better minds will figure this out. So on the one level, we're talking about trillions of dollars that the federal government will need to pay. That's sort of at the forefront. But it's going to take repetitive payments from institutions, namely corporations like Citibank.

David Montero (00:21:50):

Another person that I interviewed in the book, Deadria Farmer-Paellmann, who's been a pioneer in the reparations movement for a long time, told me, "I would like to see the CEOs of major banks paying \$20 million each year into a trust fund that is administered by Black communities." And she added, "\$20 million a year is what they pay their CEOs. It's a drop in the bucket, a drop in the ocean." And she is absolutely right. Citibank is a \$22 billion corporation. Its revenue in 2021 was \$22 billion. For it to pay \$20 million a year is nothing. So corporations have, I believe, an outsized role to be playing in reparations, in contributing to these funds, in contributing to investments, and thinking about how money can be allocated and highlighted for Black people and Black communities. But it's also going to take universities, cities, states. My point is, it's not one level of society paying reparations. It's not one avenue of responsibility. It's going to take a lot of players, a lot of institutions at a broad level of society engaged in this.

Andrea Chalupa (00:23:04):

How is it determined who receives it? It's not just all Black people because there's a lot of recent immigrants to the United States. So how do you determine your right to reparations?

David Montero (00:23:15):

Again, this is something better minds than mine are going to work out. There are 41 million Black Americans today. Many of them, I think the idea is they will be able to trace their lineage to formerly enslaved people. So yes, recently arrived people from Africa, maybe they won't be eligible. I mean, that makes sense. But it will require Black families tracing their roots to formerly enslaved people. It is not an easy task to do, but I think that thousands and hundreds of thousands of families are already doing that. So yeah, I think we're talking about, according to William Darity's calculations, the way he came up with those numbers is by looking at a certain amount of money given to tens of millions of Black families.

Andrea Chalupa (00:23:59):

And then it's not just slavery. There's also redlining that continues to this day. And then you have just the inherited wealth that, like Jared Kushner, buys you a spot at an Ivy League school. And that's what non-white groups that are slipping through the middle class into poverty are competing with today. And all the prep schools that are a pipeline into the Ivy League, that are the pipeline into high-paying guaranteed jobs and so on. So we're really talking about just such a short time since slavery and all of the decades since, which really is not a long time if you think about it, that has really kept non-white people falling behind in home ownership and building wealth that can be passed on to their children and so on. And then being over-policed, not just in the streets but little children that are non-white being over policed by their schools and so on. So the list is long. So couldn't reparations, just in terms of healing the wound, just be about just greater investment in social programs and free schools, free college, free higher education, bringing back some state-level form of affirmative action, despite what the Supreme Court says?

David Montero (00:25:17):

I think that what's been amazing to see, first of all, is how reparations have really, the idea has become a reality and the reality is exploding across the country. We see many more cities now beginning to study the program or outline real ways to start paying reparations or committing to reparations. And the creativity involved in this is astounding. You're mentioning rightly. People are talking about forgiving the debt of Black families. Banks could be forgiving the debt of Black families. Banks could be allocating more money for Black investment. As it is, Black businesses receive half the amount of investment from banks that white businesses do. There are so many creative measures that can close the wealth gap, that can address... As you're pointing out, this is a centuries long system of wealth concentration in white families, income inequality. So there are centuries of this injustice to unroll and, yeah, it's school vouchers, it's loans forgiveness. There's so many interesting things that people are talking about doing in cities across America that can finally actually start to address this.

Andrea Chalupa (00:26:25):

Yeah, and Black History Month could be celebrated with Citibank and other corporations saying, "We're forgiving all these loans and all these debts!" That would be a great way to celebrate it. I just want to point out for people, just... Your book is so courageous and really gives a people's history of the United States, like very much in the spirit of Howard Zinn. And I think any of us who have lived in America and have friends that have very different backgrounds as ours have witnessed racism. I had a friend who was applying for a loan to buy an apartment, her first time ever doing this. And she had amazing credit, a secure job. And the banker called her to finalize the paperwork. And the entire time, the interactions

were so positive and encouraging, like this loan to buy her first apartment was absolutely going to happen. And then when it came time to checking the box on her loan application for race, the banker just assumed she was white, when she's a Black woman. And when she said to my friend, "Okay, so I'm gonna check white," like kind of just running through it. And my friend was like, "Actually, I'm a Black woman. This whole time you've been talking to a Black woman. Does that mean we can't be friends?" Like, it was just so... You know what I mean? I've never had to deal with that. I've never had to think about that. And this is something where like her whole future was spinning on this one moment. So that's just how normalized the persistent institutionalized racism is.

David Montero (00:27:54):

Right, yeah, absolutely. And it stems from what I was trying to unearth in the book is that we in cities like New York and the North, broadly speaking, like to think that, you know, we weren't either involved, complicit, or benefiting from the origins of this systemic racism that we're seeing now. But we were the chief abettors of it. Wall Street and New York, our history as a city, it's all around us. It's literally... I call corporations the modern vessel of the wealth that was stolen from enslaved people's labor. The skyscrapers in New York are monuments to this history of exploitation. And what's amazing is how little we know about it, how little we talk about it. I mentioned the example earlier with Gracie Mansion. How many people actually know, why is Gracie Mansion still named after an enslaver? How many of the streets in New York, the Schermerhorn, Livingston, you go down the list, are named after enslavers, the original, you know, blue blood enslaving families of New York. Why? There are so many more deserving people in American history we could name streets after. So it's all around us. And I feel like we've barely begun to look at this history.

Andrea Chalupa (00:29:08):

So right now in New York City, you have the highest concentration of millionaires on the planet. And you have also half of the population of New York City living in poverty. 25% are children.

David Montero:

Astounding.

Andrea Chalupa:

That is just a heartbreaking statistic. It's *Hunger Games*. How could reparations now... Because a lot of the reason, New York City was ground zero for this once in a century pandemic, and the federal government has phased out the safety net that kept these people out of poverty, and now they're slipping through. And it's a huge, huge shame on our nation. And the way New York City goes, the country goes. So New York is like a canary in the coal mine for the health of our nation. And so with these astronomical levels of income inequality, this massive gap where you have children skipping meals because their family can't afford it, how could reparations now bring urgent fulfillment of needs, just basic needs for New Yorkers right now?

David Montero (00:30:12):

Yeah, I think fundamentally it could change people's lives, the lives of Black families. I mean, cancel people's debt, invest in Black neighborhoods, in businesses, invest in schools. As you pointed out, there

is so much wealth, institutional wealth, family wealth in New York City alone. And a lot of institutions, by the way—and philanthropic institutions—claim to care about bettering New York City, bettering the world. Well, this is a very concrete example of how you could do that. Commit to paying reparative payments, reparations to Black New Yorkers. The amount of change that is possible through cash payments, through investments, through debt forgiveness, through better health care, better health care for mothers, this is the only way that actually this huge gap is going to be closed because the alternative is that New York just continues to become more and more of a divided city with wealth concentrated in more and more white people's hands. And as you pointed out, then if that's the way New York is going, what's the fate of the rest of the country? It's that.

Andrea Chalupa (00:31:16):

What would you say to people who push back on this idea of reparations for one group? Because we're talking about Americans who descended from those who were enslaved and built this nation. And what would you say to those who, you know, “Well, I came from this group that experienced genocide back in the country we all escaped. Where are my reparations? Why is it fair that this group gets reparations and when we suffered so much, where's our reparations?” What would you say to that?

David Montero (00:31:45):

It's it's it's a complicated question because we are talking about what the United States as a country owes to its fellow citizens. So people who experienced genocide in another country, that is terrible, that is horrible... I think that's outside the purview of what reparations is meant to address and that is namely the the sins and the injustice of this country, that this country—namely white people—historically committed against non white people. And that the primary focus of that is Black Americans. But people also say, “Well, if you give reparations to Black Americans, where does it end? What about Native Americans? What about Indigenous communities?” And my rebuttal to that is you're talking about where does reparations end, but what you should be asking is, “Where did this begin?” We have to go back to the beginning of the history of this country. It's the burden that we today as citizens have to deal with; that this country was built on pillars of injustice and exploitative capitalism, shouldn't have built a system of privilege for white people on that basis because now we have to address it hundreds of years later.

David Montero (00:32:51):

And I do feel it is the destiny of this country, of our country, to heal this wound, and we can do it. So yes, maybe we absolutely should be looking at reparations for Black Americans, but also for indigenous communities and for other people who were harmed in the history of this country. There are many communities who have a claim to stake. They should. Let's see what happens. I think that the reparations issue is so easily... Or people attempt to bog it down in logistics. “How is this going to work?” The logistics are logistics to be worked out. If the political will is there, and I think that more and more people now in America are starting—when I say people, I mean white people—are beginning to support reparations, it is a movement. The needle has shifted over the years. The will can be created, and we as a country, we can do this.

Andrea Chalupa (00:33:43):

With the rise of unions and strikes, we've seen this pushback against this growing oligarchy that's destroying our democracy in America, as oligarchies do. And if you take, for instance, the writer's strike, the actor's strike, the executives of the corporations that own Hollywood essentially, they were refusing to give an inch. They really saw themselves on the front lines of protecting the 1%, the extreme income inequality in America today. They felt that if they gave the workers these concessions, that it would open up a Pandora's box. And if they ask for an inch, they're gonna take a mile. And they really were... They were being celebrated by their fellow fat cats across industries for really standing strong and being determined to break this strike and to starve people into homelessness. They couldn't pay their mortgage and so on. It was very cruel, these strike-busting tactics that we witnessed in recent months. So what do you have to say to the inevitable pushback that if you give reparations for the centuries of slavery that built the United States of America, you're opening up a Pandora's box and you're going to bankrupt this country and you're going to destroy jobs and you're going to raise my taxes. So what do you have to say to all that?

David Montero (00:35:11):

America is a Pandora's box. The box got opened a long time ago. It is a can of worms. I mean, again, we based a system of democracy and liberty on the exploitation of our fellow citizens. I mean, it's so screwed. So I say, let's open Pandora's box. This is going to be messy. And it's going to make people uncomfortable. People are not uncomfortable enough. That is the problem. The news cycle has sedated us into, We get involved in these issues and then boom, we move on to something else. This is fundamental bedrock history. So this is not going to bankrupt the nation. I mean, even if you look at something like McKinsey, the consulting firm, they've pointed out that closing the white-Black household wealth gap would increase GDP by a trillion dollars. I mean, you know, you can even make economic arguments that reparations will help this country economically. Banks could say—I mean, I don't favor this argument, but people make it—banks could say, “Well, Black Americans who receive reparations and Black households where the wealth gap is closed, good consumers for banks.” You know, that that will help the banking industry, people make that argument.

David Montero (00:36:30):

It's too easy to throw out all kinds of these irrational fears about, “My taxes are gonna go up, my business...” No one is coming to take your business. If you're a white person who is saying, “Well, my family never enslaved anybody, why do I have to pay?” No one's coming to take your business. This is something collectively as a country we need to commit to. And it's not that people are going to be persecuted and run out of town and bankrupted so that Black Americans can be made whole or dressed symbolically and financially for the injustices they've suffered. Yeah, I think there's just so many fears that are thrown into this. The United States, when it wanted to send a man to the moon, it looked at the moon and said, “That's where we need to go. Those are logistics to figure out.” This is the destiny of this country is to figure this out and I believe we will.

Andrea Chalupa (00:37:20):

Yeah, and I think it's a winning issue also for community organizers to run on when they're building campaigns for local office. And I think it's up to all of us listening who are active in our communities across the country to have these conversations about reparations now, to normalize it for the greater

good, because it's investing in our people, it's investing in our communities, it's investing in the very health of our democracy, because you cannot sustain democracy and an oligarchy. It's just a matter of time before the cage bars are there, we're all in prison. One thing I want to point out is that I was having a conversation with someone that is very politically connected in London, and they represented the Tories. It's a Tory, like a Tory official, basically. And I was asking this Tory, "Why hasn't the United Kingdom at that time recognized the Holodomor, Stalin's genocide famine, as a genocide?" And this was before Russia's all out war in Ukraine. And this Tory said to me, "Well, if Great Britain recognized this as a genocide, then the colonies that we used to have might come after us for their accusations of genocide. And then this whole domino effect of... Next thing you know, we're paying reparations." So I think it's important that people understand when we say our collective liberation, we mean our shared collective liberation, because the powers that we're up against, like the deeply entrenched powers, they don't want any accountability because they really think if we get reparations in America, yes, next thing you know, they're going to be knocking on King Charles III's door going, "Where's our reparations?" And then France has to pay up and on and on it goes. And yes, Ukrainians are going to get their money from the Kremlin finally for all the hell that they've gone through for centuries. And that's how it should be because that's how you get true accountability. And that's how you stop future genocides and enslavement.

David Montero (00:39:06):

Yeah, I was gonna point out, and thank you for using that word. I feel like a huge part of reparations for me is about accountability; accountability of this country towards its fellow citizens, accountability also of corporations for their heinous behavior, which as I try to point out in the book began in enslavement. This is where they they they ran the models, they perfected the systems of exploitation—which, by the way, they were never held to account for. There was no reckoning. There was no accountability. They were allowed to do this, and even after the Civil War, kept doing it. So it's about accountability. It's about saying finally, "You need to admit that you did wrong." Also because not a single corporation in America has willingly admitted—even admitted—that its history is steeped in the exploitation of Black people and the theft of their labor. Not one. So we have... There's such basic accountability in the corporate realm, especially, that is missing in this country. And I think it would... Yeah, that is just a huge, huge part of this.

Andrea Chalupa (00:40:12):

And I think it's important to point out that the Civil War did decimate the economy of the South. It was the defeated power, the Confederacy, and also the South didn't diversify its economic engine. It was all built on stolen bodies; stolen, free, unpaid labor. It was based on slavery. So, of course, the South set itself up for this massive smash that happened with abolition. And that just needed to happen. And the North economically became a powerhouse as it industrialized in response to the war. And it had greater economic resilience that sort of, you know, built up, which goes to show even with the loss of slavery—which the North had profited off of a great deal—it still had a diverse economy that was able to innovate and rebuild and grow. Could you comment on that? Just as a reminder to corporations today, you'll be fine.

David Montero (00:41:10):

Yeah, exactly. I mean, one of the takeaways there is that innovation was what saved the North, too. I mean, as a society, we benefited hugely from enslavement when the directors of Citibank and other banks were investing profits, millions of dollars in profits that they were making from plantations into industry, into railroads. So there is that part of it. But right, the job of a corporation is to evolve. The job of a corporation is to survive. Increasingly, people demand and expect corporations to be more than what they are today. If they want to survive, if they want to evolve, it means evolving into something more ethical, something more conscious. And basically, at some level, as a corporation, you're not going to survive if you don't do this. But that is your destiny, too. That is the chief innovation that a corporation needs to be evolving towards because a reckoning is coming. New York City, for example, has just put together for the first time in its history, by the end of this month, a task force to study the issue of New York's ties to enslavement, how New York benefited from enslavement. That is going to, I hope, result in a reckoning, a reckoning also for corporations. So they need to get with the times. And one of the chief ways to do that is through innovation, and innovation in this sense means innovation along ethical lines.

Andrea Chalupa (00:42:38):

So you touched on this a little bit. Could you speak more about the movement ahead? What is the future of reparations in America? How do we make this a reality? Who's working on this now that we should get behind?

David Montero (00:42:50):

So many cities, states, institutions are beginning to do this. I mean, I live in Boston. Boston has just announced for the first time in its history that it is now commissioning a study to look at how enslavement enriched Boston and outline meaningful repair. So Boston is doing it, New York is doing it. Just today we saw in the news that San Francisco is about to vote to apologize to its Black community for the centuries of injustice that they've faced.

Andrea Chalupa (00:43:20):

They should do the Chinese community if they haven't already.

David Montero (00:43:26):

Right, yeah, and hopefully this can open up the door to that. There are grassroots organizations, there are people like Deadria Farmer-Paellmann who I mentioned in the book, who are doing this at a grassroots level. There are people like William Darity who are studying it at an economic and financial level. I think increasingly in many, many cities and states, there are now organizations doing it who have the backing of task forces connected to the mayor's office. There has never been a better time to get involved in reparations. I think there are in your city, in your state, it's likely that there is a reparations task force or a reparations study group that is looking at the issue. In Evanston, Illinois, they actually have a reparations program where they're hoping to start actually making payments to Black families. So there's never been a better time to get involved in this. It is a reality. You were saying that we should make this a reality and the amazing thing is it is starting to become a reality. It's happening despite the resistance of primarily white people in America who are throwing their hands up about what this will cost and et cetera, but it is already a reality.

Andrea Chalupa (00:44:38):

And let it be a greater reality. So everybody get your local officials who represent you in your state capital on speed dial and tell them that you want to set up a meeting, a community town hall on reparations and steps that your state, your city, your town where you live can have these committees to look at reparations, pass important actions to make reparations a reality now. This is for our shared liberation, our shared collective good. Thank you so very much for your excellent book that everyone should read. That's *The Stolen Wealth of Slavery: A Case for Reparations* by our wonderful guest, David Montero. Be sure to check it out. It is something that we all need to look ahead in building the future, the country that we want for a sustainable future for all.

David Montero (00:45:26):

Thank you so much for having me.

[outro theme music, roll credits]