

Reparations

Concept: Reparations

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Description The term reparations means to make amends and/or offer compensation for some type of wrong. Since World War II, many nations have provided reparations to those they harmed in the past, usually as a consequence of political movements for reparations.

Reparations generally encompass three processes: acknowledgement of a wrong; apology for the wrong; and compensation for the wrong. Through acknowledgement, the offending party can set the facts — who did what and to whom — straight on the public and historical record. An apology might show that the victims' suffering is taken seriously and attempt to foster reconciliation. Compensation, whether symbolic or material, may complete the reparations process. The United Nations asserts that states guilty of international human rights violations should also offer as reparations restitution, rehabilitation, and guarantees of non-repetition. Reparations, however, may not always include all three of these processes.

The most well-known instance of reparations is arguably that of German reparations to the Jewish victims of the Nazi Holocaust. The Canadian and American governments offered reparations to persons of Japanese descent who were interned during World War II. More recently, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission outlined reparations for victims of Apartheid, and there is increasing agitation for reparations to African-Americans for slavery, and to continental Africans for slavery, colonialism, and more contemporary harms. Reparations movements are very rarely straightforward, and most instances of reparations are a result of many years of activism.

Suggested Reading: **Barkan, Elazar.** 2003. Restitution and amending historical injustices in international morality. In *Politics and the past: On repairing historical injustices*. ed. John Torpey, 91-102. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Bassiouni, M. Cherif. 2000. *The right to restitution, compensation and rehabilitation for victims of gross violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms*. Geneva: United Nations, Economic and Social Council, Commission on Human Rights.

Brooks, Roy L. 2003. Reflections on reparations. In *Politics and the past: On repairing historical injustices*. ed. John Torpey, 103-14. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Torpey, John. 2001. "Making whole what has been smashed": Reflections on reparations. *Journal of Modern History* 73 (June): 333-358.

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