Break Out Session 1
How to Make Amends: A Lesson on Reparations

PURPOSE:

The following details a list of real people who have experiences with the process or question of reparations. Each member of your breakout group will assume a character listed below and share their stories. Subsequently, the group will go through a list of questions provided at the end of this document. The goal of this exercise is to place people in the space of the emotional and material implications of reparations. This lesson demonstrates possibilities, limitations, what has and hasn’t been achieved through reparations. In part, this exercise can help us discern what a model of reparations might look like that addresses the lingering emotional, social, spiritual and material wounds in the wake historical anti-black racist harms the Episcopal Diocese of Washington has been complicit in.

PROCEDURE:

Attached to this guide are a set of character stories, detailing real people’s lives.

1. Distribute one story to each participant.
2. Tell each group member to read their sheet to themselves, doing their best to imagine themselves in their character’s place. (3 min.)
3. Then have each member put the sheet down in front of them, and share their character’s story with the group, in first person, as if it were their own story. Remind them to share not only the facts, but also their character’s thoughts and feelings about those facts. This is not a test, breakout group members are welcome to refer back to their sheets while telling their story, if they need to. Each member of the group will have about 3 minutes to tell their story. (15 min.)
4. After everyone has shared their story, invite the group to answer the following questions. Present all the questions at the beginning, and then open up to the group. Each breakout group member will have about 2 minutes to share their answers. (10 min.)

QUESTIONS:

1. What did you learn that was new or surprised you?

2. Which models of reparations impressed you? Which models of reparations left you dissatisfied? Why?

3. How do you know if an apology is genuine or hollow? Did it include an action to address the wrong? Or was it just a verbal offering?

4. What questions were you left with?
CHARACTERS:

Albert Julkes Jr.

In 1997, President Bill Clinton apologized to my father (and 400 other African American men and their families) on behalf of the U.S. government for the Tuskegee syphilis experiment. The “experiment,” carried out from the 1930s to the 1970s, was actually a trick. The government told African American men they were receiving free medical care, when its actual purpose was to study the long-term effects of untreated syphilis (which causes terrible, painful blisters in the mouth and genitals) on human beings. None of the men were told that they had syphilis, and none were given penicillin even after the antibiotic proved to successfully treat the disease. As I told The New York Times, “You get treated like lepers. It was one of the worst atrocities ever reaped on people by the government. You don’t treat dogs that way.” After being sued in the 1970s, the government was ordered to pay lifetime health care costs to my family and the other Tuskegee families. I am not sure which is more important — the money or the apology. Both matter, but neither make up for what was done to my father.

Jiji Jally

I live in Washington state, but I am originally from the Marshall Islands. During the first couple of decades of the Cold War, the United States used our islands, located in the Pacific, to test its nuclear weapons. The U.S. military tested so many bombs on our islands it was equivalent to detonating 1.6 Hiroshima bombs every single day for 12 years. The Marshallese people have been living with the health and environmental impacts of radiation ever since. Cancer rates are dozens of times higher for our people compared to those in the United States. Everyone has a family member who has died of cancer — my brother left behind two small children; my cousin was only 30. I grew up there not knowing the history of what happened to my people. There is a lot of trauma in our community from this. I know that the U.S. has paid out a bunch of money to the government of the Marshall Islands — $150 million — to repair some of the damage to our islands and people. But where is the apology? Why aren’t students learning about these tests and their effects in school? The United States still has military installations on our islands. How can we be sure something like this won’t happen again?

Judith Jaegermann

I was born in Karlsbad, Czechoslovakia, in the late 1920s. In 1937, our neighbors threw stones at my parents’ kosher restaurant. I asked my father why they would do that. He answered, “Because we are Jews.” That was only the beginning of our torment. We were sent to Auschwitz, the largest Nazi death camp, where German soldiers subjected us to horrific evils. My father was killed, but my mother and I survived. I moved to Palestine (as it was called then), where I have lived ever since. In the 1950s, the state of Israel, along with Jewish organizations from the United States and elsewhere, negotiated an agreement with the German government to pay reparations for the “...unspeakable crimes [that] have been committed in the name of the German people.” Under the agreement, the state of Israel received hundreds of millions of deutschmarks to pay for the costs of resettling so many Jewish refugees. Later,
in the 1980s, Germany paid another $125 million to individual survivors like me. I will receive a monthly check of $290 for the rest of my life. Of course, this money does not make up for my suffering. But it’s something.

Min Yasui

I was the first Japanese American to receive a law degree from the University of Oregon. Today, my picture hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., not far from the portrait of President Barack Obama. I was born in Hood River, Oregon, in 1916. My parents were immigrants from Japan, who were fruit farmers and entrepreneurs. After Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the U.S. government closed our family store, branded my father an “alien enemy,” and incarcerated my whole family. I attempted to use my law education to challenge the racist targeting of Japanese Americans. I purposefully violated a curfew law in downtown Portland with the intent of getting arrested. I wanted to challenge the constitutionality of the actions being taken against us. Though my case went all the way to the Supreme Court, I lost and was put in solitary confinement. I never returned to Hood River. My father committed suicide in 1957; I am convinced his unhappiness had to do with his experiences of internment. I spent much of my career fighting for reparations and acknowledgement of what the United States did to my family and other Japanese Americans. In 1988, the U.S. government admitted the “grave injustice” motivated by “race prejudice” against Americans of Japanese descent during World War II and offered reparations to those of us who had been interned, $20,000 per survivor. But it was too late for me. I died in 1986.

Annemarie Cuccia

I am a freshman at Georgetown University, a Jesuit college in Washington, D.C. In 1838, the Jesuits in charge of the university sold 272 enslaved women and men to bolster its finances. In 2017, Georgetown issued a formal apology to the descendants of those they enslaved and acknowledged that profits from those plantations were an essential part of university funding. But the university has yet to adequately address its sale of human beings and the legacy of inequality slavery helped create. In 2019, I was one of more than 2,500 students who voted by a 2-to-1 margin to raise student fees by an affordable and symbolic figure of $27.20 per semester (in honor of the 272 enslaved and sold African American human beings) in order to create a reconciliation fund that will result in more than $400,000 a year to “be allocated for charitable purposes directly benefiting the descendants of the GU 272 and other persons once enslaved by the Maryland Jesuits.” Students opposing the referendum have said that the 1838 sale happened a long time ago, that they had nothing to do with it, and if reparations are to be made, the Jesuits should foot the bill. I disagree. Instead this vote shows that the student body takes the issue of restorative justice seriously. It is a first step in holding the administration accountable for the university’s slaveholding past. After all, $27.20 is a small amount to pay for so gross an injustice and its legacy of intergenerational inequality.

Emil Notti
I was born in Koyukuk, Alaska, in 1933 and am of the Indigenous Koyukon Athabaskan people. In 1966, seven years after Alaska became a state, I helped found and served as president of the Alaska Federation of Natives. Our goal was to pressure the U.S. government to return to Alaska’s Indigenous peoples land that was illegally incorporated when Alaska became a territory of the United States. In 1971, we succeeded. Congress passed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, which paid out $962.5 million and set aside 44 million acres of land to Native Alaskans. This sounds like a lot, but it is hard to quantify the destruction wrought on Native Alaskans by centuries of colonialism. And in accepting this deal, we gave up our rights to make any future claims for compensation. Still, it was one of the largest land claims settlements in U.S. history. Most Indigenous Nations have been unable to get any land back from the United States.

William “Sandy” Darby

I am an economist, researcher, and a professor of public policy at Duke University. Right now, I am probably the best-known scholar working on the issue of reparations for African Americans. Ironically, for most of my career, I did not support the idea of reparations. My skepticism was due to all the thorny practical questions: Who would be eligible? How much would be paid out? In what form would payments be made? But the more I read about reparations — elsewhere in the world as well as here in the United States — the more I felt that though difficult to design and implement, they are simply the right thing to do. I believe that a reparations program should accomplish three ends. One is acknowledgement. A second is restitution. And the third is closure. ARC. Acknowledgement means the beneficiaries of the social injustice affirm that a wrong was committed and that there must be some form of repair offered to the victims of that injustice. Restitution refers to the actual program that’s enacted to undertake that repair. Closure means the victimized community has received satisfactory compensation from the victimizers, and that they have no reason to request anything that’s specifically for their group in the future (unless there’s a new wave of injustices). I hope to be part of an ongoing national conversation about reparations. They are long, long overdue.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

I was born in 1931 and became the first Black African to hold the position of Bishop of Johannesburg and the Archbishop of Cape Town in South Africa. For most of my life, Blacks in my country lived under the thumb of the white apartheid government. Removed from cities and forced to live in townships, we were stripped of political and economic rights, and made to live as strangers in our own country. I spoke out against this oppression and became one of the leaders of an anti-racist revolution. I was asked by the first democratically elected leader, President Nelson Mandela, to chair the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in the 1990s. In the words of the constitution, the TRC was for “understanding but not for vengeance, [the] need for reparation but not for retaliation, [the] need for ubuntu [compassion] but not for victimization.” The TRC had the power to grant amnesty (pardon/forgiveness) to those who committed abuses during apartheid if they confessed to their crimes and made amends to their victims. Critics said our amnesty policy was too forgiving. But what was the alternative? We wanted to transition to a democratic government with as little violence as possible. We
did not put people on trial like they did in Germany after the Holocaust, nor did we offer a sweeping amnesty as was offered Confederate leaders after the Civil War. Instead, ours was a compromise between the two. Our goal was to honestly account for the past with a focus on the future.

**Konrad Adenauer**

I was born in Cologne, Prussia, in 1876. As a critic of the Nazi Party, I was arrested multiple times, and spent the war years constantly moving to stay below the radar of government officials. When the war was over, I became the mayor of Cologne, then the first chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1949 to 1963. As the leader of West Germany, I had to address how my country would account for the harm done by the Nazi regime. I opposed the policy of denazification that sought to strip power from anyone who had collaborated with the Nazi government. Though I sympathized with the desire to rid the country of the scourge of Nazism, it was simply impractical to investigate and hold every supporter of Nazism accountable. But I did believe Germany had a responsibility to reckon with the actions of the government. In a speech I gave in 1951, I said, “. . . unspeakable crimes have been committed in the name of the German people, calling for moral and material indemnity.” Indemnity means compensation — I was saying that my government should pay for the crimes of the Nazi regime. My government negotiated the first German Compensation Plan that, in the decades since the war, has distributed $100 billion to the state of Israel and individual survivors of the Holocaust. I believed there was no moving forward toward a new Germany without redressing the evils of the Nazi era.

**Lindsey Smith**

I was 17 years old, and 13 hours into a terrifying, violent interrogation when I confessed to a murder I did not commit. I was stomped on, pistol-whipped, beaten, and thought I wouldn’t live through the night if I didn’t do what the police wanted. I was tried as an adult and sent to jail for five years. It turns out that I was one of hundreds of Black and Latino men in Chicago who were tortured into false confessions by Jon Burge, a Chicago police commander, and his officers from 1972 to 1991. Now, more than 40 years after the fact, I am one of 57 living survivors who are receiving reparations. The landmark legislation in the city of Chicago allocated $5.5 million for victims. I am also eligible for free community college and other social services. But the reparations bill is not just about money. It is also about telling the truth about what happened and educating the next generation. The city has created a community center dedicated to survivors and their families and all Chicago public schools are required to teach curriculum on the torture scandal. I can sleep a whole lot better now that I have received reparations 40 years on, but I wish that night never happened in the first place. I can never get back that time away from my family and the things I could have done. But at least I can afford new shoes now.

**Source:** Role Assignments for Remote Instruction Template

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Lesson: https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/lesson-on-reparations/