

If I were God (or Black American)

As a freshman in university college (now called Science Faculty of Addis Ababa University) I was imbued with high spirits of freedom, liberalism and bold initiative to think deep. So, when our English teacher invited us to choose a topic to write essay, I chose the topic "If I were God".

I do not remember now what I wrote about what I would have done then; but I clearly remember the fall-out. The teacher singled out my paper from among seventy others and read it aloud with venous anger. "This guy thinks himself better than God" he commented sarcastically every now and then. I wished the Earth swallowed me down. Many students coming from Evangelical schools and others too looked at me like I was the devil-incarnate! What I did not know was that the teacher himself was a devout Jesuit by religion. The intent of the assignment was to gauge our fluency in English. Since we were gathered there from different schools across the country, he said, he needed to work out a plan to bring us up to the same level. So I did not give any thought to the content of the writing. But what I wrote turned up to be a blasphemy in his eyes. He did not take it as an exercise in liberal free thinking of wide-eyed youth. My High School teachers, by comparison, were more liberal and accommodating than this college instructor. But then I did not know better.

Today, I am writing on the topic "If I were a Black American". I did not sit back to forecast what type of guy is the one who will eventually come to read this paper and judge it. So I may yet end up saying "I did not know better". Of course, I would not if I did not write to find out. So here I go again!

Nowadays we do not say "Black Americans"; but "African Americans". But the issue here is primarily about the color of the skin. Now, Egyptian Americans and Moroccan Americans are also African Americans. But they are not subjected to racism to the same degree as Black Americans.

The history of Black Americans starts with slavery. Unlike the European settlers, the Africans did not choose to come of their own free will. They were brought and sold into slavery. I was once in Annapolis where I read a museum newspaper announcing the arrival of the slave ship and inviting people to come and buy their choice.

The suffering and torture they underwent on the plantations have been researched and compiled in various books and documents. It must be noted (but is often overlooked) that this state of affairs did not begin with the country called The United States. It was in practice even when American Colonies were under the rule of the British Empire. The slave ships started out their journey from England with their cargo of manufactured goods, (including toys, sweets, drinks and trinkets). They set sail for West Africa where they traded their commodity in exchange for slaves. Then they sailed off to America where they sold the slaves; then headed back home to England with a cargo of cotton, tobacco or sugar harvested with slave labor.

When the time came for American Colonies to revolt and seek independence from their colonial masters, the British did not take it graciously—they fought back to keep their colonies.

Let me digress a bit to add a footnote to this narrative: -In 1775, i.e., a year before Independence, Lord Dunmore was the governor of Virginia. He decided to recruit soldiers locally to raise an army to fight the rebels (or patriots as they called themselves). He thus shrewdly offered freedom to all slaves in the region and to arm them if they were willing to come and join him in the fight. On hearing that, hundreds of slaves escaped from their masters and joined his army. They were named “The Ethiopian Regiment”. I do not know why they were named so; but I suppose the country Ethiopia was in high esteem for its independence and glory even in those days long before the victory of Adwa over Mussolini’s Fascism in 1896.

The slaves in those days lived in crowded shanty villages and made to work 16 hours/day 6days/week. They were severely punished for all sorts of reasons. It is blood-curdling to read some of the punishments meted out for what the slave owners and their overseers considered were insubordination or just minor infraction. It could be simply for eating sugar cane. In general, the punishments consisted of whipping, beating, burning or imprisonment. Harsher measures include shackling, branding and even hanging. The beating sometimes resulted in bone-breaking which then needed amputation. That was what slaves underwent in those days.

In the 1950s, slaves started fleeing north towards Canada to escape torture. Especially when the Erie Canal was dug to connect New York to Lake Erie and on to Canada, travel got easier. That was when Negroes fled in large numbers. Around 30,000 slaves are estimated to have fled to Canada. The slave owners attempted to frighten them by telling stories of smugglers being cannibals who engaged in fattening negroes and then boiling the flesh to eat! It sure did scare back many slaves from attempting to escape. But the likes of Harriet Tubman (a former slave herself) took great risks at organizing the escapade.

The slave owners did not easily give up. They employed professional slavecatchers to track, catch and return the fugitives. Captured slaves were amputated, mutilated in some form or even hanged to serve as a lesson to other slaves not to attempt to flee. Moreover, the Law of the land supported their cause. In 1850 Congress passed “The Fugitive slave Act” which allowed slave-owners to pursue and reclaim escapees anywhere. In around 1856 Supreme Court reinforced the rule by denying Blacks citizenship of USA. This of course invalidated “The Declaration of Independence” which was meant to apply for all living in the country.

Eventually Emancipation Proclamation was signed in 1862 by President Abraham Lincoln. Now slavery is abolished.

But the suffering of the Black people did not end there. Since there was no education available to them, there were no jobs. There was no economic stimulus and no provision for reparation. So they were left in the cold.

Racial discrimination intensified. Southern States decreed laws to segregate Blacks. These laws are what we call Jim Crow laws and lasted approximately from 1919 to 1969. Blacks got together and tried to organize themselves to defend the community from repeated occurrences of vicious attacks by Whites. But apparently this exacerbated the situation, and the Whites knew better how to organize! The result of what followed is very sad. I will take up one particular case to demonstrate the point: -

In fact, a centennial Commemoration of the so-called 'Tulsa Race Massacre' is being observed this June 1, 2021. That was the time, 100years ago, when Whites in their hundreds descended on a Black Community and erased it to the ground. Men, women, children and elders were indiscriminately massacred in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

The call to action sounded by a siren at 5.08 a.m. Thereupon, 10,000 or so armed and organized gangs came out and descended on the 'Black belt' area called Greenwood. First, they pillaged whatever they could lay their hands on, and piled them into vans. Then followed 'firemen', who doused the buildings with kerosene and lighted matches to them. Hundreds of people died but a few managed to run out and flee—some naked, others with skimpy pants etc. The White mob went from home to home, church to church, Business to Business and raided and torched. Groceries, hotels, hospital, library were all demolished and turned into ash. They used machine guns and even biplanes from nearby Oil Company to rain bullets on them and drop incendiaries.

One recalled a scene as follows: -

"cattle trucks heavily laden with bloody, dead, black bodies. Some were naked, some dressed only in pants.....They looked like they had been thrown upon the truck beds haphazardly for arms and legs were sticking out through the slats....On the 2nd truck, lying spread-eagled atop the high pile of corpses, I saw the body of a little black boy, barefooted. Suddenly the truck hit a manhole in the street. His head rolled over, facing me, staring as though he had been frightened to death." (copied from page 41, Smithsonian magazine, April 2021). Imagine what a cruel hand it was that pulled the trigger on that innocent child!

All this mayhem started when a Black shoeshine boy was accused of trying to kiss a White girl in an elevator. He was dragged to court to be sentenced. Upon hearing of that, the local Black community flocked to the court to rally behind the boy. That evening, in retaliation of this action, the Whites plotted to get out early in the morning and resolve the problem for good.

Thus Jim Crow laws got increasingly and unbearably discriminatory. Lynching was an open practice and Black boys got hanged from gallows and poles for merely romancing with White women even if the affair was by mutual consent. Many have been killed or mutilated just for speaking inappropriately to White women. I will cite some specific examples: -

A Black man, rushing to catch a bus, unknowingly bumps into a White woman. That was insult to a White man's respect. The poor guy was dragged and lynched!

Again, a veteran Black man calls a colleague (who was White) by his name in public, when he should have addressed him 'mister'. That is disrespect for the White race. He was sprayed with 400 bullets! to his body, and lynched!

In general, recorded evidence shows that, between 1877—1950 alone, there were nearly 4000 lynchings.

Now towards the 1950s, Blacks started thinking about it seriously and determined to organize methodically to challenge this intolerable situation.

History records that, one day (December 1, 1955) a girl named Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in favor of a White man. It wasn't even in the White Section' of the bus. But the law obliges Blacks to vacate their seats in the Black Section if the White's section filled up. Rosa Parks refused to budge. She was promptly arrested. This triggered the Movement whereby all Blacks in town started boycotting bus rides. That went on for about a year. It was at this juncture that Martin Luther King appeared. He was until then, a simple youthful minister of the church (Baptist) preaching at his father's pulpit in Ebenezer church in Atlanta. He was recruited and asked to lead the Movement and he agreed. He preached love and brotherhood in Biblical manner and he fought for equality and human dignity. He led parades at numerous cities finally culminating in the famous "March on Washington" in August 1963. It was here that he delivered his famous "I have a dream" address.

As an alternate form of struggle, Malcolm X argued that Blacks should regain their freedom by all means available. That obviously included force. He said Blacks have waited so long to get it and cannot wait any longer. He himself changed his name from Malcolm Little to Malcolm X thus rejecting White man's name in search of his ancestral African name which for now could not be traced.

But this alternative approach would obviously lead to bloodshed and unwelcome by Whites. It was not long before he was assassinated by a member of his own following "The Nation of Islam". But so was the pacifist Martin Luther King too by "White Supremacist" group --The KKK (Ku Klux Klan). The struggle continued though under the direction of the NAACP and other brotherly parties.

At long last, the "Civil Rights Act of 1964" was signed by President Lyndon Johnson. This more or less helped level the ground for all to participate in all fields of the economy, politics and social life on equal terms.

But it now appears that that is easier said than done. To this day, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Rev. Al Sharpton and scores of others have dedicated themselves to fighting for racial equality in all respects. The culmination of this struggle appeared to be the inauguration of Barrack Obama as president. The problem, we thought, is at last behind us—relegated to History. Unfortunately, there are still some extremists round the dark corners, which so far kept their heads low and

their activities under the radar. These are White Supremacists, Proud Boys, Oath-keepers (militia extremists) and other far-right extremists and terrorists.

Recently, these groups found Donald Trump welcoming their beliefs and incorporating it in his Make-America-Great-Again (MAGA) slogan and various public utterances. These coupled with some conservative church ministries banded together to derail the Clinton-Obama progressive agenda and help Trump to win the presidency. From thereon, all the progress patiently cultivated by Civil Rights activists over so long a time started getting unraveled.

So how bad is it today?

Statistics reveals that the police alone have shot dead 1252 Black people in the last six years up to the end of 2020. Some of these deaths have been caught on mobile phones by onlookers. For example, George Floyd was seen getting pulled out of his car, taken wayside and forced to the ground whereupon a policeman knelt down on his neck for up to 9 minutes. Floyd was famously quoted as appealing that he could not breathe. But the police kept applying the pressure until the poor man succumbed to death. This happened in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020. Another one, Trayvon Martin, was merely walking home on the cold evening of February 26, 2012. He wore a hooded coat for the cold weather; but a volunteer patrol caught up behind him against the orders of his command post and shot him dead. The killer, (George Zimmerman) is now living in a classy neighborhood in Florida. The supremacists and right-wing adherents raised funds to hire lawyers to defend him in court and further provide him with protection and wellbeing.

Many of the rest of Black victims were shot dead while fleeing from police, pleading for their lives, just lying prostrated on the ground or in police custody. The police behave unscrupulously when they feel nobody is watching their acts. It appeared that, to the police force, Black lives can be dispensed without much ado—like just get rid of as many as possible if circumstances warrant. Legally, there are justice systems like over-sight committee, appeal, review etc, in place—and all getting paid by the government for their services. But no significant action is taken to reign in the intransigence or brutality of the police.

In reaction to this, the Black Community started a Movement called BLM (Black Lives Matter) in 2013. It was the free acquittal of Zimmermann that was the straw that broke the camel's back. Demonstrations were held in various cities across the country to expose the glaring injustice, police brutality and racism general. This is the 3rd phase after the era of slavery which ended by the Emancipation Proclamation, followed by the 2nd era-- Segregation, that was ended by 'The Civil Rights Act (1964). Now it is a struggle to attain genuine political, social and economic equality as citizens of the country. Thus are lives lost!

Short of killing, the Black people suffer humiliation and beating by the police. I have witnessed Blacks hand-cuffed and ordered to lie face-down alongside busy traffic for no worse reason than jaywalking. That does not happen to White pedestrians.

Looking at the other side of the coin is grim too. There are no good jobs available to Blacks. To start with, their education is below par. So, that cannot afford them good competitive jobs. Their lack of good education can be ascribed to several factors:- their schools are ill-equipped in teachers, laboratories and teaching materials. Also their parents are negligent of their progress at school. It is said that 70% of Blacks are born out-of-wedlock or are living with one parent. There comes lack of stern supervision. There is also lack of idol to follow. Success of Black people is conspicuous in fields of basketball, boxing, football, athletics, tennis etc. But not everyone gets to shine in these fields. Only a few talented ones do. The rest find themselves in the cold. So they go stealing, robbing, drug-trafficking or other criminal acts. Finally, they end up crowding the jails.

In the course of my duty, I have met various nationalities coming to Las Vegas. Chinese tourists and more generally, Far-Easterners are very polite people—a few notches even above White men. Blacks are several notches below White men. Many are rude, showy (like wearing baggy pants to draw attention) and readily spit on walkways. That attitude, I interpret, as an attempt to coverup inferiority complex. Because they have been regarded as, and accepted that they are inferior to the Whites, now therefore they want to affirm that they are equal and so can do anything they like.

This situation is not unique to America. I first witnessed it as a freshman college student in Ethiopia. There was a scholarship grant that brought in students from various neighboring countries that won their independence from the colonial powers. These students acted differently from us. For instance, they parted their hair like the White men do. White men have the need to part their hair because it is not strong enough to stand erect. Black men have kinky hair. It coils in place and does not lend itself to laying over the head. All it needs is combing up. Yet, they take all the trouble to grease it and brush it savagely down the side of the head. Where it does not part neatly, they shave it along the parting line. That was a puzzle to us who simply combed ours up. We were not White men, and did not need to look like them.

In South Africa today, I am told, Blacks still submit to White's superiority and trend of life. They still avoid going to places where they were banned before independence.

In Kenya and Tanzania, I have witnessed caste system of Whites at the top, Indians in the middle (shop keepers etc.) and Blacks at the bottom rung (laborers & porters). It is that feeling that remained inculcated in their minds and still affects them.

But this is psychological problem that can be remedied. That is history and we have to admit it. Now we have to work with zeal to overcome hurdles and to prove ourselves. We have to take it on ourselves to learn and to study and struggle to climb the ladder of success.

In the Eastern Hemisphere things are different. They do not have problems of racial divide. But they still have to maintain the standard of education at a high level. So the teachers are stern and so are the parents on the children. Students have a duty to learn either by stick or carrot. It is the government that assigns jobs and benefits since it is the one and only one employer. So

students are held down to their limit to work and show results. That is so, I witnessed, in Russia, China & N. Korea.

The stern supervision of students by their parents is remarkably clear even here in USA. The Chinese students excel in achievement over others. Berkley University is, I hear, majority Chinese (or Oriental) in the high grade levels. Parents sternly supervise their children to apply themselves to get high grades. There could be physical punishment to follow if it came to defiance.

Now this is in stark contrast to the Black American Community. The parents are too distracted by their own life challenges that they forget the children. Single-parenthood and hard physical work sapping their energy, their living environment all add up to abrogation of responsibility. But it is not the fault of the parents and the schools entirely. The students take a big share of the blame. They do not see the need to exert themselves to the limit. Their future is not dark even if they do not study. They know they can find jobs and they can find love. They could even shine, hopefully, in some sort of sport, gaming, music or the like. “Don’t you see Mr. so & so flunked 10th grade, but owns two private jets? Mr. So So owns a yacht costing .. ?million dollars?” they retort.

I suppose I would have envied their position when I was of that age. If I failed my exams at any level of elementary or Secondary school or likely even college, I wouldn’t have been able to find a job. I had nothing to fall back on except going back to my village to herd the cattle and grow up to become a farmer. I didn’t even have the physique for that either. Nor did I have relatives or friends to help me out any. True, my father was a lawyer. But I didn’t have his natural talent or aura. So I had to make it on my own. I needed to study my ass off or else I will be damned. So I exerted myself to no end. That was how I got to graduate from college and earn UN scholarship to UK.

Black students do not face this prospect. So they do not exert themselves to achieve higher goals. Why miss the sleep? Why miss out on the field activity and the night life?

That is why we end up with Chinese students turning out to become engineers, surgeons, scientists and professors of every kind, whereas Black students—poor as they are bound to be—are seen wandering around the streets in sagging pants and large tattoos looking for attention or for some illicit money-making. The former make their living in well-to-do suburbs whereas the latter are found in slums and run-down shanty communes.

The solution to this problem is fairly straight. Learn your lessons and exert yourself to bring out your talent and excel in your chosen field of activity.

I once drove taxi to supplement my retirement benefit. Here were typical answers I used to get When I courteously reminded my passengers that they forgot to leave me tips: -

Chinese

"I am sorry; How much? We don't have it in my country. So I don't know".

"I am sorry, Sir! I forgot. How much do you want? Is this OK? Sure?"

"Oh! I am sorry. How much is the rule?"

Indian

An Indian will likely respond: -

"I don't pay tips."

"I pay the exact amount. Why pay more?"

Or he will quietly walk away.

Black American

A Black American, many a time, will respond: -

"Drive carefully. That is my tip."

"You make more money than me, man!"

What hurts more is when one says, 'next time'.

Tips are 10% to 20%.

White men will consistently pay the tips or courteously apologize if they are short of cash. Some go so far as saying "we have to share what we have" and I have even been handed \$100 for a \$10 ride!

The Chinese are not frugal; It is just that it is not in their culture to tip. But they are ready to comply with other culture's norms.

The Blacks, mostly, do not have money enough; but then they don't hold back on snarling at you or mocking at you for asking. That, of course is not to say all Black Americans are the same. Very many are really generous with their tips. But unfortunately, quite a number of them are just a problem left and right.

Again the men don't always take responsibility arising from family life.

I once picked up five ladies as passengers in my cab. We got conversing about this shining city and how enjoyable it is to visitors. Thereupon I asked “where are your guys? You beautiful ladies are cruel for leaving them behind”.

“We don’t have boyfriends” they said. When I didn’t believe it and got puzzled as to how that could happen, it was explained to me as follows: -

“Our men are always running after White women. We here are educated. We graduated from college. But the boys don’t measure up to well-behaved relationship; and the few that do, as we said, look to Whites. Now, we have enough money for ourselves, and so we come out and enjoy the best we can”. I couldn’t agree more.

I once read an abridged form of a book written by an ex-slave under the title: - “The interesting narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano”. This book was translated into Dutch, Russian and German, and served a great deal to elicit sympathy for the suffering and persecution of slaves. It even moved the British parliament to sympathize with their slaves as fellow humans, and thus paved the way to abolish slavery in the empire.

After getting sold and resold several times, Equiano was able to scrape together enough money (70 pounds) to buy himself freedom. Once free, he set out to help others free themselves and settle down. He himself was able to own plantation and cultivate it. He went on to attain wealth and get married to an English woman, finally ending up a dignitary in British society. That pattern of struggle and success is seen repeated by many well-known Black people and even I have witnessed that. True, this rags-to-riches story has not all started with slavery per se, but has helped them grow to be millionaires and billionaires. It takes hard work plus talent of course. Some who beat the odds and excelled are: -

In basketball..... Michael Jordan

In music Michael Jackson

In talk show..... Oprah Winfrey

In tennis Serena Williams

In boxing..... Mohammed Ali

In cinema..... Denzel Washington

In Civil Rights.... Jessie Jackson

In politics..... Barak Obama.

These and many others are towering personalities that shine as icons. The thing to note is that if one is talented and worked hard and in good faith, the road to success can open up more often than not.

The problem for most of Black men is the lack of education. As mentioned earlier, there are not enough good schools for the Black Community; and the environment Black children find themselves in is not conducive to studying for academic excellence.

Now when the dropouts get loose on the streets, they grow into rogues and criminals. This is disturbing to the neighborhoods; and the police are confronted with the responsibility to secure peace and order for the community. But the police are not angels either. They reach their limit of tolerance, and now cross the “red line”. They over-react.

The point here is that in present-day confrontations between the police and the Black community, the blame is shared between them, though not to the same extent. This is only to say that no single party alone is blameless.

Let me go into some details on this. Because, unless we air the problems and discuss them frankly (i.e. confront them) we cannot find solutions for them.

About a week or so after I arrived in Las Vegas, I saw a group of people sitting around a burning fire with some candles and flowers. I thought they were squatters. On closer look, they did not appear so. That was when I got closer and asked what it is about. “It is in memory of Tupac” someone said. Looking at my bewilderment, they explained “he was murdered at this juncture”. That was the corner of Flamingo road and Koval street. He was sitting in a car and stopped by the traffic light. A guy just pulled up alongside him and fired! He then drove off into the night. He (or they) never got identified and apprehended. People suspected it must be the leader of the rival East-Coast gang, a guy called ‘Biggie’ (Christopher Wallace) Because Tupac was of West Coast gangs. The police, however, laid their finger on another suspect—Orlando Anderson from the Chicago gangs. Soon after, this latter guy too was shot and killed in the same manner. A year or so later, ‘Biggie’ himself was found in the West Coast where he was shot and killed in the same manner. No one since has been apprehended.

That is how killings go. Black men killing fellow Black men. I have seen statistics (reliable or not) that 90% of homicides of Blacks is committed by fellow Blacks. The cause could be girls, drug-money or craving for influence. Mere drunkenness in a nightclub could precipitate gunfight in parking garages or on streets. That often happens in cities like Las Vegas, Chicago or Los Angeles.

Sadly, even Blacks who turned out to become millionaires and billionaires in their field of talent like boxing or basketball come foreword as good idols. Instead of helping fellow Blacks by taking part in NGO Charities, they squander their money on gambling, or lavishing it on private planes, yachts, mansions or adultery.

So when Blacks victims and fellow -sympathizers demonstrate under the slogan ‘Black lives matter’, racists counterargue pointing out that Black-on-Black murder is more of the problem; and they do have a point there. It is obvious that many Black males abrogate their responsibility as fathers, husbands and good citizenship in general.

Political activists once undertook to bring awareness to Black males to feel their responsibilities towards their children's education, their family's support and the general citizen's well-being for the betterment of social life for all of us. There was even what was called 'Million-Man-March' where close to a million people gathered at Washington Mall to impress on them and raise awareness of the problem.

But Black men apparently unaffected, remained 'trigger-happy', lazy, addicted, brawlers and altogether uncaring. The killing still continues and the police still have a problem with them.

So there is only one way to go to deal with this problem. The Blacks need to want success and aim living a decent life. They must take it upon themselves to compete to achieve their goals. Just as they do (and have amply demonstrated) in various sectors of entertainment, they need to do it in the academic world too. That builds character and gains capability to work, thus attaining decent life.

Now let us consider the following scenario: -

Suppose it was Blacks who were the advanced society and the Whites who were backward. The Blacks would have looked down on them and perhaps even sold them as slaves if the opportunity presented itself. Now, the Whites would have regarded the characteristics of Blacks with envy—their hair, their skin color, shape of lips and mannerisms. Advanced societies are tempted to take advantage over backward societies especially if there is a pronounced difference in skin color. The Arabs have traded in African slaves for a long while. Even in the late 20th century, Libyans have sold Blacks (Nigerians etc.) on the open market. I remember it was after the so-called 'Orange Revolution' days after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi.

In my country, my grandfathers, on both sides, had owned slaves. The practice was abolished when Italy invaded Ethiopia during the 2nd World War. Now, all that is relegated to History. The past is past. The future is at hand. The children of those slaves of my grandparents are now my colleagues. We do not bother about the past. Now we must pick ourselves up by the bootstrap and face the challenges of the times. In like manner, all of us must henceforth set out to prove our mettle. That is how we ensure our equality.

To go back to Olaudah Equiano's story, (mentioned above) he writes in his autobiography how he defined White men when he first saw them. He says they (the White men) have "horrible looks, with red faces and long hair". Similarly, the Chinese defined them as "those long faces with bulging eyes". The White men, in turn defined them as "round faces with slits for eyes". The English and French had unflattering words for one another during their years of hostility. When Fascist Italy invaded Ethiopia during the 2nd World War, how the local people, who saw White men for the first time, defined them is just not printable.

This is all to say that one race or tribe customarily looks down on others and ill-treats them if convenient. That all should now be relegated to History and left as bygones.

Now there is a Movement underway to provide Reparation Money for those who suffered under slavery and following that, under Segregation during the period of the Jim Crow laws of 1919 to 1969, continuing to those who are descendants of these victims.

In the days of Segregation, Blacks persevered to move up the social ladder; but the means was denied to them. For example, they were refused access to housing except in areas designated for them. Even in those places, the Banks and other financial institutions declined to lend them money to build residences and Businesses. So they were destined and doomed to remain poor. White men could extricate themselves by starting and running Businesses by borrowing the money from the Banks; but Black men could not.

Now to rectify this damage and ill-treatment, several activists (including Rev. Jesse Jackson and Rev. Al Sharpton) supported the idea of paying reparations to the victims or their descendants, specifically to those who suffered from racial discrimination stemming from slavery and the era of Segregation.

To that end, a small town in Illinois (Evanston) has pioneered a move to compensate its present Black residents for having suffered this ill-treatment. The idea is to make funds available for them to build and/or renovate their homes. The official declaration reads as follows: - "The city Council of Evanston has moved to provide reparation for Black residents who suffered from discriminatory housing practices in the city between 1919- 1969."

Now, can this arrangement be considered fair Reparation for the harm done to people in those days or their collective descendants now?

There are problems here: -

- 1) Some of the descendants are now superrich and so do not need reparation money. (The Beyoncé and Michael Jacksons, the Oprah Winfreys and Will Smiths are multimillionaires themselves).
- 2) The victims are dead and so are many of their descendants. So, who entitled the present ones to reap the benefits to erase the blame?
- 3) The limited funds cannot cover all affected descendants; so, who should be left out?

This reminds me of a film on George Bernard Shaw's play about Joan of Arc. Bishops, Cardinals and high priests gather to celebrate the canonization of Joan to sainthood about 500 years after she was burnt at the stake. It is said that her voice was heard from somewhere to say "Can you unburn me?".

So, you can only take a lesson from it; you can't undo it. I think Reparation should be seen the same way. What I am trying to say is that whereas renovation of slums is to be applauded, it should not be classified as Reparation for past misdeeds. Poor neighborhoods should be helped to upgrade their residences; and this should be replicated in towns and cities far and beyond.

That is a worthy task to take up for the benefit of the neighborhood, the society and the country as a whole.

Now, let us see how other measures fared up in similar situations: -

In Australia, the Aborigines were maligned so cruelly that the race was near termination. Now the government has taken it on itself to educate and relocate the children of the race.

In China, the authorities are building planned agricultural communes and inviting people to come down from remote mountain tops and deep inaccessible valleys to come forward and take up their living there. This includes assisting them to resettle smoothly.

Even in USA, the govt. has granted the Red Indian Communities the benefit of owning river boat casinos that fetch millions of dollars annually. This income of course comes from the pockets of voluntary gamblers.

In like manner, Blacks could be granted equal representation in job allocations to get them on a par with all the rest. But this can be practical only if they have gained enough skills to do the jobs. That brings us back to the need for proper education. True, this does not happen by waving a magic wand. It takes effort and money. It also requires us to take smaller initial steps to make progress.

We know free lunch is provided for children coming from low-income families. There is also scholarship funds available for promising students to attend private schools of their choice. These are small but significant steps to take.

In my country, schools in remote areas are hugely disadvantaged compared to inner-city schools. They lack library, laboratory and even worse, they lack good teachers. Senior and experienced teachers get rewarded by being transferred closer and closer to major cities.

But since all students should be provided a level ground to compete at, and this is impossible, the government took the measure to lower the requirement for admission to colleges for the under-privileged students.

True, the best way to solve this problem of inequality is again to furnish all schools with equally high standard facilities. Short of that, and in the interest of diversity, universities (including ivy-league ones) can allow this in some measure.

Fortunately, nowadays, the advance in technology has endowed us with computers and the internet. Learning materials can now be made available for all students near and far.

Now again a new era is at hand. There is often times something to be gained from adversity arising from crisis. The coronavirus epidemic of 2019 (called covid 19) was a pandemic that forced schools across the country to close down forcing over 50 million K-12 students home-bound.

So there had to be devised a way to tackle the problem of school attendance, and of course, of public activity in general. That was how home-schooling or remote learning for all levels of education got a big boost. There appeared to be no urgent need to go to classrooms to teach/learn lessons. Now, it seems, we are reaching the stage where all students—black or white, rich or poor—can follow their lessons from the convenience of their homes. This crisis-born good fortune can jump-start the campaign to provide equal opportunity for all. With a little more effort to complete the remaining needs, it is ready to go! With discipline and determined effort, all can go for their dreams and try to attain their goals. There should be no more excuse to fall behind in the race for good jobs and pays.

One can offer incentives of various forms. To state my own case, I promised my little son 20 birr for cake if his grade at elementary school came up to at least 3rd top in his class. He was incentivized and so worked diligently for the prize. Behold! He won it (to my financial detriment at the time). If Black students are offered such incentives, even their own parents will push them hard to study to be able to bring home the bacon.

Now, rich Black millionaires and billionaires can be tapped to chip in money to uplift their poor kinds to break out of poverty through scholarship. I remember The Bill Gates Foundation donated in 1999 1.26 billion dollars to help United Negro College to support academic scholarship program. Now, the uber-rich African Americans can be called upon to help out on this noble act. This will get the issue of finance out of the way.

To give a boost to this campaign to revolutionize Black Scholarship, one can start with a public call like the “Million-Man-March” we have seen earlier; or alternatively, ‘a thousand-man-march’ staged in every major city. This will help to launch broad-based ‘Movement’ and drive it. Success in this venture will settle the question of Reparation “one way or the other”.

The one way is the premise that a learned and conscientious parent will ensure that his/her child will also get the opportunity to learn, thus breaking the cycle of poverty. Now, I want to harp on this point in order to drive the point home. I will start with my own case: -

What drove me out of my home in Ethiopia is my self-imposed obligation to send my children to college. I have myself had the privilege to join college and further to win scholarship for postgraduate studies. Now, I wanted the same for my children.

But the chance of joining college in Ethiopia was slim in those days. There was only one university in the whole country. True, there was a college of Agriculture out in the eastern part of the country (Alemaya); and another one for training Health Officers in the far north (Gondar). Joining the university felt at the time like going through the eye of the needle. So I worried much for the future of the children.

Personally, my life was comfortable. I had resigned on pension from my managerial post and was then serving as a Board Member of an institution to supplement my allowance. It was thus

not easy to get off the couch and head to America to be hosted by my ex-wife. It was a risky, unpredictable, and tricky situation. But I took it on. To make a long story short, I brought all my children and got them admitted to college! The rest was up to them and God.

This is the sort of obligation a parent has to take for the children; and I expect that sort of commitment from fellow Black Americans. They must come out with vengeance and the motivation to launch their children to a brighter future. They must want to succeed for themselves and their children.

I have met several immigrants who told me similar stories. A Latino guy said he did not speak a single word in English when he arrived. It then took him 12 years to get citizenship. But he never rested. He said he studied by day and worked by night. He worked as handyman, laborer, security officer etc. Finally, he was able to get his Ph. D. in medicine! Now he works equally hard to help his relatives achieve a similar goal.

Another one from Indian Subcontinent told me, with tears in his eyes, how his poor mother toiled tooth and nail to keep him at school. Now, he is a stockholder of a couple of million dollars in Silicon Valley. That is how one breaks the cycle of poverty. That is what is needed of Black Americans. Mindful of their history of slavery and then segregation and now racism, they must rise with zeal and determination to prove their mettle.

There are, of course, interim measures that can and should be taken as we move forward.

One among these is the question of being able to get funds to start Business.

Funds should be made available for Blacks to launch Businesses. Now, Black people have a problem of getting lenders to take chances on them. Yes, some of this attitude may be genuine; but most are not.

Blacks, for their part, should try hard and show their mettle to succeed in competitive Businesses. They, in turn, can go out to hire more of the down-trodden fellow Blacks, thus helping them too to dig out of the muck of poverty.

Voting Rights, Diversity in employment, Equal Pay, fair justice etc. etc. all go to mitigate inequality.

Recently, Critical Race Theory (CRT) has been a subject of discussion. It is about teaching in schools the history of racism, segregation, and discrimination in the past. One may argue that teaching this is useful. But I do not see it that way. It is divisive, sowing distrust and profiling people.

We need to forgive and forget that part; and move forward as equals. Here the great equalizer is education. We must all push for universalization of education. It is in the best interest of all of us; and this is the way the problem gets settled.

'The other' way, I mentioned above, as to how the issue gets settled is if an educated parent deprives his/her own child of the opportunity to learn. In this case, there is a big problem with the people involved. The presumption here is that a learned and conscientious parent will ensure that his/her child will also get the opportunity to learn, thus breaking the cycle of poverty. If this did not happen, then the children have only their parents to blame. So the government can close the file of Reparation and oversee Law & Order management.

I have said my piece, as when I wrote the essay "If I were God".

Now I brace for the backlash which again I expect will be harsh.

Amen.