



## Racism is a Socially Contracted Mental Illness

By Dr. Lorne Foster

After four hundred years of British philosophy, there is finally conclusive self-referencing evidence proving the adage of Francis Bacon, in *Ornameta Rationalia*: “An ill man is always ill, but he is worst of all when he pretends to be a saint.”

In the Toronto Sun, Peter Worthington opined - “When it comes to slavery ... Europeans - Whites - have literally nothing to apologize for. On the contrary, Blacks whose ancestors were slaves, should feel enormous gratitude to the British and Europeans who ended the practice of slavery ...”. In the aftermath of the first United Nations World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, Worthington called the issue of reparations for the transatlantic slave trade a “blunt gambit for money by exploiting guilty consciences ...”.

The National Post’s Jeffrey Simpson wrote - “It’s time to put down the guilt tool”. In regard to the issue of reparations for African slavery, he states, the notion that “some definable line can be drawn between a transatlantic practice that died out a century and a half ago and today is historical nonsense.” For Simpson the issue of reparations for slavery and colonialism emanates from a “culture of grievance” which is characterized by wallowing in a bogus “victimology”.

Now before Black folks everywhere feel the urge to breakdown crying and beg Mutt n’ Jeff for forgiveness, consider this. Taken together, these two direct descendants of British philosophy are prototypical examples of ill men pretend to be saints.

Racism is a socially contracted mental illness that is not always direct or blatant, but rather, can be insinuating and subtle. It can be concealed by the manipulation of language used to dissimulate and deceive. Here, the use of words is to disseminate self-serving lies under the guise of an appearance of distributing facts and analysis. In this pretext, words are used to misinform rather than inform, to delude rather than enlighten, to purvey falsehoods rather than truth, to profess sainthood rather than contrition. Here, language is used to rationalize the debilitating dehumanization of others that has paved the way for its users to sit in the “cat-bird” seat of history - atop society’s instruments of communication, overseeing its social, political and economic institutions, trumpeting against interlopers and infidels with versions of distributive social justice.

The fact of the matter is, if the September 11th terrorist attack on New York’s World Trade Centre and the Pentagon can (according to U.S. President Bush) “send shock waves” reverberating to the core of United States and Canada and beyond - then consider the magnitude of the historical shock waves unleashed by four hundred years of sanctioned terrorism and subjugation. If there are shock waves from the murderous and sporadic acts of alienated Third World youth waging a war of terror on humanity that can require special economic assistance packages for infrastructure, the airline industry, and extended unemployment insurance - then what would prevent someone from grasping the gravity of the lingering legacy of devastation

wrought by transatlantic slavery and colonialism on the Black world? Moreover, what would prevent someone from thinking that redress was appropriate?

The issue is not unproblematic. Even between people of goodwill and sound judgement everywhere, including Diasporan and Continental Africans, there are still genuine articles of debate and contention besetting the issue of reparations and warranted restitution. At the same time, the entrenched forces of White power and racism have been ignited into covert action in a full press rebuttal, and seek to de-legitimize real public discourse in order to stifle *any* progressive social change.

But there are two things that any thoughtful person can know for sure here. First, the human condition can only be advanced by accepting the challenge of vigorous debate, critical questioning and objective scrutiny. Secondly, only an ill man with disdain for the human condition and pretending to be a saint would suggest that the Black world owes a debt of gratitude to the White world - or - that it is the Black world that is victimizing the White world through a bogus lament.

In this UN international Year of Mobilization against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, the world has been presented with the unprecedented opportunity to improve the human condition through a constructive political dialogue on the ways and means of eliminating racism from the face of the earth. Equally, with greater potential we have witnessed first hand that there is also greater risk of the world become more divisive and dangerous than before, filled with more alienation, hatred and turmoil.

Whether the people of the world can ultimately begin to see themselves as the caretakers of each other in the new millennium, or whether they fail to seize the moment, depends upon the willingness to take charge of our fractured past and pave the way for a coherent