

## Document A

William Gilpin, *Mission of the North American People, Geographical, Social and Political* (1873)

America leads the host of nations as they ascend to this new order of civilization. [...]

Human society is, then, upon the brink of a new order of arrangement, inspired by the universal instincts of peace, and is about to assume the grandest  
5 dimensions.

Fascinated by this vision, which I have seen appear and assume the solid form of a reality in less than half a generation, I discern in it a new power, the People occupied in the wilderness engaged at once in extracting from its recesses the omnipotent element of gold coin, and disbursing it immediately for the  
10 industrial conquest of the world.

There has been a radical misapprehension in the popular mind as to the true character of the Great Plains of America as complete as that which pervaded Europe respecting the Atlantic Ocean during the whole historic period prior to Columbus. These Plains are not deserts, but the opposite, and are the cardinal  
15 basis of the future empire of commerce and industry now erecting itself upon the North American Continent. They are calcareous, and form the Pastoral Garden of the world. [...]

Nascent powers, herculean from the hour of their birth, unveil their forms and demand their rights. States for the pioneers; self-government for the pioneers; untrammelled way for the imperial energies of the forces of the Rocky Mountains  
20 and the Pacific Sea, may not long be withheld by covetous, arbitrary, and arrogant jealousy and injustice!

In the conflict for freedom, it is not numbers or cunning that conquers; but rather daring, discipline, and judgment, combined and tempered by the condensed  
25 fire of faith and intrepid valor. [...]

It is not for me, in this season of gathering splendor, to speak tamely upon a subject of such intense and engrossing novelty and interest. I may properly here quote the concluding sentences of a report which I was required to make on the 2<sup>d</sup> of March, 1840, to the United States Senate, at that time brimful of illustrious

30 statesmen. What I said then and there, in the first dawning twilight of our glory,  
I will now repeat:

"The calm, wise man sets himself to study aright and understand clearly the  
deep designs of Providence — to scan the great volume of nature — to fathom, if  
possible, the will of the Creator, and to receive with respect what may be revealed  
35 to him.

"Two centuries have rolled over our race upon this continent. From nothing  
we have become 20,000,000. From nothing we are grown to be in agriculture, in  
commerce, in civilization, and in natural strength, the first among nations existing  
or in history. So much is our destiny — so far, up to this time — transacted,  
40 accomplished, certain, and not to be disputed. From this threshold we read the  
future.

"The intransacted destiny of the American people is to subdue the continent  
— to rush over this vast field to the Pacific Ocean — to animate the many hundred  
millions of its people, and to cheer them upward — to set the principle of self-  
45 government at work — to agitate these herculean masses — to establish a new  
order in human affairs — to set free the enslaved — to regenerate superannuated  
nations — to change darkness into light — to stir up the sleep of a hundred  
centuries — to teach old nations a new civilization — to confirm the destiny of the  
human race — to carry the career of mankind to its culminating point — to cause  
50 stagnant people to be re-born — to perfect science — to emblazon history with the  
conquest of peace — to shed a new and resplendent glory upon mankind — to unite  
the world in one social family — to dissolve the spell of tyranny and exalt charity  
— to absolve the curse that weighs down humanity, and to shed blessings round  
the world !

55 "Divine task! immortal mission! Let us tread fast and joyfully the open trail  
before us! Let every American heart open wide for patriotism to glow undimmed,  
and confide with religious faith in the sublime and prodigious destiny of his well-  
loved country."

**Document B**

George Malley, interviewed in Chicago's Northwest Side (a blue collar neighborhood) [ca late 1970s], in Studs Terkel, *American Dreams: Lost and Found*, 1980.

I feel lonely. I am afraid. I don't see hope when I look at people. I used to think the world was such a wonderful place. I used to think that ultimately man would surmount everything. What disillusioned me is man's tremendous capacity to be selfish. He is no unwilling to compromise. He refuses to give, you understand? I do  
5 not see a bright American Dream. It is a dream without lustre. I'm listening to the media. What else do we have no access to, outside of our own families and the small circle of friends? They try to deliver a package, but they leave you on the fence. You understand what I mean? I don't accept what I hear. I'm left to my own resources. Then I stop to think: Can I trust myself? My intellect is limited, We're  
10 absorbing so much knowledge that there is less and less and less time to understand what the knowledge is all about, see? And time is running out. Over a long period of time, man has been disappointed. He almost expects disappointment as a way of life. He doesn't expect anything else. I don't think he can conceive of a world run the way it should be run. I don't talk to my neighbors about it because  
15 my neighbors don't want to hear anything. They brush you off. Football, they'll talk to me. Horse racing, they'll talk to me. Their jobs. But don't try to take them outside themselves. You're in trouble if you do. During the sixties, I used to talk to my boys a lot. At the time, they took issue with me. I thought they were trying to turn the world I knew upside down. Now, strangely enough, I see a hell of a lot of  
20 what they had to say come about. I lived to see the change. But now, my boys have taken the opposite stance. Now they're for law and order at any price. They're for hit 'em over the head if there's no other way. I guess they've become adults. In our society, when you become an adult, you stake your claim. They have property now. They both have homes. They're doing fine. Once my sons called me bigoted, narrow-  
25 minded. I said: "Fifteen years from now, you're going to be a different person." I was right. But I am the one that changed most dramatically. Twelve years ago, I didn't understand things in light of what I see today. I'm surprised at myself. I feel I could live with black people now. Yes, I still worry about violence. But I'm sure

the black man has the identical worry, even more so than I have. So we're sharing  
30 something in common, see? I have learned you better not become too attached to  
anything. You understand what I mean? Don't get so attached to something that  
you can't let go of it. My boys are now reaching the point where they're  
accumulating things. The foremost thought in their mind is to protect it. They have  
to look for someone to protect it from. All right? So God help the first one that gets  
35 in their path. My father was born in Austria. It was the dream of everyone to come  
to this country. If you didn't better yourself, at least you'd eat. He was an iron  
worker, one of the most intelligent men I've ever known. He could neither read nor  
write. His signature was an X. But when he talked, everything that came out of  
his mouth was original. When my father talked, that was my father that was  
40 speaking, not Aristotle or Plato or Socrates or someone else. That was my father,  
and I knew it was him, you know? This is a good feeling. [...]

I wish I lived in a world that didn't know what money was. I wish I lived in a  
world where I didn't gauge the worth of a life by the color or shade of a man's skin.  
I wish I could live to see the day where Washington enacted a law that made man,  
45 once a month, come to a common meeting place and gave him a lesson that forced  
him to think, to exercise his brain. Just to get a man used to it and find out how  
delicious it can be. My sons tell me I'm too soft for this world anymore. And I tell  
'em: "Thank God."

## Document C

*The New York Times*, June 19, 2019 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/19/us/ta-nehisi-coates-reparations.html>)

*Ta-Nehisi Coates, whose 2014 article “The Case for Reparations” in The Atlantic rekindled the debate over reparations for slavery and its legacy, testified on Wednesday before the House Judiciary Committee. Mr. Coates took direct aim at Mitch McConnell, the Senate majority leader, for remarks Mr. McConnell made opposing the reparations idea. Here is a transcript of Mr. Coates’s testimony.*

Yesterday, when I asked about reparations, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell offered a familiar reply. America should not be held liable for something that happened 150 years ago, since none of us currently alive are responsible. This rebuttal proffers a strange theory of governance that American accounts are somehow bound by the lifetime of its generations. But well into the century the United States was still paying out pensions to the heirs of Civil War soldiers. We honor treaties that date back some 200 years despite no one being alive who signed those treaties.

Many of us would love to be taxed for the things we are solely and individually responsible for. But we are American citizens, and thus bound to a collective enterprise that extends beyond our individual and personal reach. It would seem ridiculous to dispute invocations of the founders, or the Greatest Generation, on the basis of a lack of membership in either group. We recognize our lineage as a generational trust, as inheritance and the real dilemma posed by reparations is just that: a dilemma of inheritance. It’s impossible to imagine America without the inheritance of slavery.

As historian Ed Baptist has written, enslavement “shaped every crucial aspect of the economy and politics” of America, so that by 1836 more than \$600 million, almost half of the economic activity in the United States, derived directly or indirectly from the cotton produced by the million-odd slaves. By the time the enslaved were emancipated, they comprised the largest single asset in America: \$3 billion in 1860 dollars, more than all the other assets in the country combined.

The method of cultivating this asset was neither gentle cajoling nor persuasion, but torture, rape, and child trafficking. Enslavement reigned for 250 years on these shores. When it ended, this country could have extended its

hallowed principles — life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness — to all, regardless of color. But America had other principles in mind. And so, for a century after the Civil War, black people were subjected to a relentless campaign of terror, a campaign that extended well into the lifetime of Majority Leader McConnell.

30 It is tempting to divorce this modern campaign of terror, of plunder, from enslavement, but the logic of enslavement, of white supremacy, respects no such borders, and the god of bondage was lustful and begat many heirs. Coup d'états and convict leasing. Vagrancy laws and debt peonage. Redlining and racist G.I. bills. Poll taxes and state-sponsored terrorism.

35 We grant that Mr. McConnell was not alive for Appomattox. But he was alive for the electrocution of George Stinney. He was alive for the blinding of Isaac Woodard. He was alive to witness kleptocracy in his native Alabama and a regime premised on electoral theft. Majority Leader McConnell cited civil rights legislation yesterday, as well he should, because he was alive to witness the  
40 harassment, jailing, and betrayal of those responsible for that legislation by a government sworn to protect them. He was alive for the redlining of Chicago and the looting of black homeowners of some \$4 billion. Victims of that plunder are very much alive today. I am sure they'd love a word with the majority leader.

What they know, what this committee must know, is that while emancipation  
45 deadbolted the door against the bandits of America, Jim Crow wedged the windows wide open. And that is the thing about Senator McConnell's "something": It was 150 years ago. And it was right now.

The typical black family in this country has one-tenth the wealth of the typical white family. Black women die in childbirth at four times the rate of white women.  
50 And there is, of course, the shame of this land of the free boasting the largest prison population on the planet, of which the descendants of the enslaved make up the largest share.

The matter of reparations is one of making amends and direct redress, but it is also a question of citizenship. In H.R. 40, this body has a chance to both make  
55 good on its 2009 apology for enslavement, and reject fair-weather patriotism, to say that this nation is both its credits and debits. That if Thomas Jefferson

matters, so does Sally Hemings. That if D-Day matters, so does Black Wall Street. That if Valley Forge matters, so does Fort Pillow.

60 Because the question really is not whether we'll be tied to the somethings of our past, but whether we are courageous enough to be tied to the whole of them. Thank you.