

A commission studying slavery and reparations will be besieged with alternatives. It should give any creative, legitimate idea its due. But it must ensure that any recommendations are made with an eye toward balancing the justice that is deserved with the reconciliation that is needed.

What follows is one way to handle reparations.

A commission that has spent so much of its time educating America might consider it appropriate to carry on that theme in three ongoing projects.

The first project would meet the need for broad, symbolic restitution for the 76 years that slavery was legal under the U.S. government.

As an example, what if a national reparations fund—say \$500 billion spread over a decade—was devoted to addressing the shortfall in academic resources and expectations facing black children?

One use of the money could be to build, renovate and repair schools in the nation's neediest school districts. The U.S. General Accounting office said in 1996 that it would cost \$112 billion "just to achieve 'good overall condition'" in the nation's schools. Such a program would benefit minorities primarily, but not exclusively. It would attack the inequality that does the most to turn differences of race into differences of income and opportunity.

Framing a national act of atonement around such a positive agenda would be both spiritually satisfying and pragmatic. It would help poor urban and rural districts do a much better job of preparing young African Americans and other students for work and citizenship; it might help revive urban centers and curb suburban sprawl.

A second project could address the 100 years of unconstitutional discrimination and segregation that followed slavery. It would compensate African American families who could demonstrate, subject to reasonable limits, that they or their ancestors suffered substantial losses because of racial discrimination.

Foremost among these would be the descendants of the almost 5,000 victims of lynchings. But also included could be victims of riots in which whites attacked black communities in places like Wilmington, N.C., in 1898, New Orleans in 1900, Atlanta in 1906, Tulsa in 1921, or dozens of others.

Again, the reparations need not be in the form of individual checks. For example, it could be college tuition credits for a generation of members of that family.

Finally, the nation could begin a third project dedicated to continuing education for everyone. It would include a museum in Washington, equal in stature to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, that would lead an ongoing exploration of issues related to race and ethnicity in America.

Through this project, Americans of all ethnicities could answer the questions that arise often during any reparations discussion: What about us? What about our story, our unhealed wounds?

The point would not be to stage a contest to see who suffered the most. It would be an effort to show the range of experiences—and the similarities. Study them together and maybe America can see more clearly the patterns of hate and discrimination that rise up at certain points in history and damage the nation's soul.

Maybe that knowledge can help the country do right by future immigrants, sparing them some pain and showing that a nation can learn from its mistakes.

A thoughtful study of slavery, discrimination and their aftermath would, no doubt, bring forward other good ideas to handle reparations.

But first, America must accept that it must face this unfinished business. As W.E.B. DuBois wrote,

"We have the somewhat inchoate idea that we are not destined to be harassed with great social questions, and that even if we are, and fail to answer them, the fault is with the question and not with us. . . . Such an attitude is dangerous. . . . The riddle of the Sphinx may be postponed, it may be evasively answered now; sometime it must be fully answered."

President Bush, Congress and the American people can heed Mr. DuBois' wisdom and take up his challenge. The Conyers bill shows how to take the first step.

SOCIAL SECURITY

HON. EARL POMEROY

OF NORTH DAKOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, May 25, 2001

Mr. POMEROY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend to my colleagues a new book written by former Social Security Administration Commissioner Robert Ball.

As we in Congress grapple with the future of Social Security, it makes sense to listen to the words of wisdom offered by someone who has spend a lifetime working with the program. Bob Ball began working in the Social Security Administration in 1939 and ran the program for more than 20 years. Clearly, Mr. Ball is one of the country's foremost experts on Social Security.

A collection of Mr. Ball's essays, "Insuring the Essentials: Bob Ball on Social Security", has recently been published by the Century Foundation Press. These essays not only chronicle the history of the program, but frame past and current Social Security reform proposals in clear, concise terms. I encourage my colleagues in Congress, and all Americans interested in the subject of Social Security, to read this valuable book.

Mr. Speaker, I submit for the RECORD a review of Mr. Ball's book, which appeared in the May 12 edition of National Journal.

[From the National Journal, May 12, 2001]

IT'S NOT JUST A PENSION PLAN (DAMMIT!)

(By Robert Ourlian)

You may have heard the one about Alf Landon's ill-fated tirade during the 1936 presidential campaign and how it blew up in his face like a prank cigar, leaving him wide-eyed and blinking. This was the attack on the year-old Social Security Act, which he denounced with every overreaching adjective it was his misfortune to muster. "It is a glaring example of the bungling and waste that have characterized this Administration's attempts to fulfill its benevolent purposes," Landon said with Magoo-like chagrin. He called the act "unjust, unworkable, stupidly drafted and wastefully financed," and "a fraud on the working man."

Bob Ball includes a hearty mention of Landon's little game of Republican roulette in his new book, *Insuring the Essentials: Bob Ball on Social Security*. Ball is not unbiased

on this subject. He has spent a lifetime helping develop an American form of social insurance and defending it against people like Landon. Now 87, Ball began his work at the federal Social Security Administration in 1939, and he ran the program from 1952-73. He has served as a member of or adviser to nearly all of the many, many, many advisory councils on Social Security (the latest was appointed only last week). He has written, testified, consulted, argued, lectured, and exhorted so profusely that he probably deserves the nickname suggested by his Century Foundation editor—Mr. Social Security.

Ball went so far as to make a pro-Al Gore political advertisement last year, heaping scorn on George W. Bush's plans for retirement accounts (Ball considered the ad muted; Gore's people thought it was powerful). Ball counsels Democrats and openly praises labor unions, his allies in many Social Security battles. He expects no calls from the White House these days.

But even as a combatant, Ball engages, it must be said, graciously. In this book, he deftly—almost slyly—appoints out where the partisan fault lines are in the Social Security debate, and who takes which side. For some in the debate, this is good to know. In one essay, he mentions Landon and other early Republican opponents, and in a later one, hints that Eisenhower Republicans were self-destructively slow to warm to Social Security. In other chapters, he dispassionately discusses the proposals—mainly, though not always, Republican ones, through the decades—to downsize, privatize, outsource, and otherwise rip some of the system from its federal moorings—a goal Ball plainly considers undesirable.

Still, Ball knows what we're dealing with here, and, so do we: the deep-rooted struggle over government's role in America. To his Republican, corporate, and conservative adversaries, Ball is saying, in a polite and sometimes roundabout way, "Let's rumble." Ball obviously believes government has a role in promoting such things as justice, fairness, and equality while respecting individuality.

In his preface, he quotes Abraham Lincoln on the government's job to "do for a community of people whatever they need to have done but cannot do at all or cannot do so well for themselves." Ball includes his own 1986 address to a conference on older people, challenging the rugged Reaganism of that decade on the need for long-term care for the elderly. "This issue will be a good test," he says, "of whether Americans are really against the use of government for social purposes . . . or whether they like President Reagan more than they like his philosophy."

In a commencement address delivered at the University of Maryland a year earlier, he lectures: "Greed is not enough if we are to address successfully the great challenges that face the world. If each of us pursues a life dedicated to getting the most we can for ourselves, it will not automatically follow that the community will be better off. There is a law of reciprocal obligation."

Now President Bush has created another Social Security advisory council. So this meandering collection of essays, articles, op-eds, and lectures written by Bob Ball over a stretch of nearly 60 years is nothing if not timely. It takes the reader on an interesting, if sometimes challenging, ride through the development of American social insurance.

It's not a completely smooth ride. Some of Ball's favorite pieces, such as a 1947 journal article, would be difficult reading for those unfamiliar with the jargon of the social science disciplines. Another, a 1942 guide on field interviews, seems to be on the margins of any point the book endeavors to make, and the same goes for a 1949 piece on contribution rates and funding sources. While

these older chapters have been blessedly freshened with recent data, and do give a sense of agency culture through the decades, some seem of limited use today. Yet, I resisted the urge to jump straight to the chapters addressing current concerns, and I was glad to get the insights that were tucked away in many of the others: the guiding principles of Social Security; the ins and

outs of 75-year forecasts; the ways private investment can play a role; the true nature of the challenges ahead.

Granted, Bob Ball has cast his lot in the partisan game. But he speaks loudly in the ongoing debate, and this book will serve as his megaphone—whether he needs one or not.