

*The following letter was written by Writing Fellow Ariel Ducey in response to a batch of papers from Prof. James Jervis' Fall 2002 course, "African Americans in the Political System" (BLS 342). Instead of responding to each essay, Ducey uses the letter to respond to more general issues and suggest directions for revision.*

October 23, 2002

Dear Students of Prof. Jervis's class,

Over the weekend I read your papers on reparations. The papers were often creative, usually well-written, and overall, good first drafts. As an observer of the class, a graduate student, and a "Writing Fellow" here at Lehman, here is what I saw in these papers:

Some of the papers proposed very unrealistic ideas for reparations. Now the definition of realistic and unrealistic is not always clear, but my feeling is that Professor Jervis wants the papers to show an understanding of how government and politics work. Can you bring more of what you understand about government and politics into your discussions of this problem? Would it be useful to discuss what potential problems you think your reparation strategies will face (in terms of getting passed, being implemented, or being funded)? Doing so would show that you have thought through the pros and cons of your argument. I think that as you revise your essays, you should try to develop proposals for reparations that might be approved in Congress, which also means they would have to be acceptable to most Americans.

Also, keep in mind Prof. Jervis's questions in class: Who will pay and how? How will your proposed reparations affect American politics, culture, or society? How would your proposals gain approval in Congress?

For those of you who write *against* reparations, the issues are slightly different.

But for all of you, try to imagine what people with a different opinion or the people that you want to persuade to do things your way might say. Include their reservations or arguments in your essay and find ways to respond to these arguments. In general, I think this is a good way to proceed in all papers.

My experience is that writing doesn't improve unless you revise. Some of you revise while you're sitting at the computer, some of you perhaps don't always have time to revise. But I think you'll find that when you go back to something you've written, you often have lots of new insights and ideas that will make the essay better.

Sincerely,

Ariel Ducey, Writing Fellow