Q: What is the relationship between the apology made by the local officials in Abbeville, Alabama to the use of apologies by public officials internationally?

A: The apology made by local officials in Abbeville, Alabama differs from most apologies made internationally because it was “quasi-official.” By that I mean it was offered by two elected officials, the current mayor of Abbeville and an Alabama state representative. The only reason that the apology was reported on at all was because these two persons are public officials. Yet, they presented the apologies as “personal,” and not official. That is, the apologies were not made on behalf of the city or the state.

Q: Why are public apologies in situations such as this so important? And, in this case, should the apology be deemed a sufficient remedy for the harm Recy Taylor suffered?

A: Public apologies are important because they often shed light on an injustice or harm that was previously ignored, denied, or minimized. An apology not only acknowledges an harm but renders a moral judgment about it. It was wrong. I do not think that the apology should be considered a sufficient remedy, in this case. The only sufficient remedy would be prosecution of the still living offenders, and perhaps, some sort of material compensation for her pain and suffering, due to the egregious miscarriage of justice. Regarding an apology, I think that an official apology from the city council or state assembly is still in order.

Q: What kinds of apologies are most effective as a means of redressing past harms?

A: The most effective apologies are those that lead to tangible outcomes, moving forward. So, for example, the Canadian government apologized twice (in 1998 and 2008) for its residential school policy for indigenous children. Indigenous children were often sexually abused at these schools. The government’s 2008 apology was accompanied by monetary payments to all eligible claimants. I should clarify that the desired outcomes need not be only direct payments to victims. They may also include increased public and targeted expenditures to assist victim communities.

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