

**Writings From
Political Science**



The Meaning and Limits of Rights



**Faculty: Lucy Cane
Summer 2017**

Prison + Neighborhood Arts Project

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Common Sense Theory

By Ahmad Poole

Common sense

1. A sense believed to unite the sensations of all senses in a general sensation or perception.
2. Good sound ordinary sense, good judgment or prudence in estimating or managing affairs, esp. free from emotional bias or intellectual subtlety or not dependent on special or technical knowledge.
3. Something that is evident by the natural light of reason and hence common to all men: the intuition common to all mankind; the capacity for such intuitions; the unreflective opinions of ordinary men; the ideas and conceptions natural to a man untrained in technical philosophy.

Above, as you can see, is the definition of common sense, which gives an understanding of the perspective I strive to convey. Whatever race, color or creed, young or old, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Atheist, whatever ideology or concept – we were all born, raised and groomed with some form of common sense of what's right, wrong, good, bad, from the laws of nature/society. Common sense can even derive from an emotion that has been stirred in some way in regards to circumstances and situations.

There have been many readings from different authors, with different perspectives on how they would like for things to be for the betterment of themselves, their select people, and for all people. Despite these different perspectives, I believe each author spoke from a place where they specifically felt that their vision of the way things should be is just/right. Whether it be policy/law or religion/doctrine or both, I believe that whatever religion, concept or ideology was formed to give instructions, principles, build character and integrity on how to conduct ourselves as human beings, to not just benefit a select group, but for this select group to do the things that's right by nature, society, humanity. Based upon the common sense theory the forefathers who we celebrate and hold in high

regards, who formed these United States, all were religious people. These individuals came together as a collective and put forth the foundation on which we still rely to this day with the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776. In turn, these individuals who declared their independence from Britain put a specific group of people through slavery and oppression and injustices of the worst kind. These actions totally go against the laws of nature of which God entitles. Equality, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, based upon my common sense, are just wordplay. How did these religious people live with themselves, or society unless, based on their common sense as well as their peers, they felt these acts were just/right?

However, history and common sense has shown that the foundation on which these United States were formed is not applicable to everyone. Frederick Douglass on the fourth of July 1852 in his speech "What to a Slave is the Fourth of July?" spoke from his personal experiences as an ex-slave about the struggle and oppression that people of his kind were living/experiencing. From his perspective, how could one celebrate such a day, rejoice and be glad in it and feel as if the people have overcome? His common sense was: "This is a travesty and goes against humanity."

Elizabeth Cady Stanton in her speech at the first women's rights convention in 1848 enlightened from a place of passion with the common sense approach that women should be treated equally to men in all endeavors, have a voice in our society and especially in the matters that affect them. But there were ones who opposed Douglass and Stanton's views of life, liberty and equality for all, based upon their common sense! There's a broad view with common sense and my perspective is that it constantly differs: it changes depending on circumstances, situations and environments. What may be common sense to one may not be for another. Race, background, religion, finances, as well as other factors are to be considered, such as learned behavior. How do we as a people tackle/find common ground within the laws of nature, God, life, liberty and equality for all people, pursuit of happiness?!!!

Renewing the Call for Unity and Equality

By Rogelio Orozco

Since the very inception of America, society has evolved from its past into a more decent and moral society. Many of the past struggles, however, such as oppression, poverty, and inequality still remain today. And although there have been many idealist and political figures throughout the world who have attempted to pave the way for equal footing on the social and political spectrum, it appears that the much needed concept of unity and equality has remained evasive up to this point in America.

The birth of America came about by way of the Declaration of Independence in the year 1776. Along with its birth came about the concept and principles of unity and equality, as well as life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These concepts and principles derived from the people's belief and desires to rid themselves of the oppression and inequality they received at the hands of the British. It is true, however, that the promise of equality and natural rights of men, which were instilled in the Constitution, were in the context: for the people for whom the Constitution was crafted, i.e. European Americans. However, the recognition of human rights for slaves has led to a whole evolution in the social classes and race in America. Yet, the division across party lines still remains today.

That said, the enslavement of the African Americans has left open wounds that may very well never heal. As Frederick Douglass once stated in his address to the Citizens of Rochester, New York, on the fourth of July, 1852: "I say it with a sad sense of the disparity between us. I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary! Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us." The visible scars that came about from those deep wounds. Not only do they serve as a reminder of the past, but they also serve as the divisive lines that now have paved the way for inequality, oppression and current struggles that carry-on from the past, today.

It is worth mentioning that, despite these differences, there have been other political figures. Amongst them is Martin Luther King, who made it his objective in life to change the social and political landscape in America. As a charismatic leader, Dr. King made strides by appealing to the masses to come together to love unity and equality and recognize each other's human rights.

Today, although the same problems continue to persist from the past (i.e. discrimination, inequality, etc.), social issues have evolved as well – to extend to other classes, such as women's rights, gay rights, etc. And they present new questions and issues of oppression and equality that need to be confronted and addressed. However, Dr. King's message, as well as the message of other political figures of the past, has lost their strength and direction in the mainstream with the loss of those figures. And, although many organizations have taken the podium to continue on with the addressing of these issues, they remain divisive up to an extent in their individual and separate movements.

In conclusion, although it is fair to say that society as a whole has made some strides from its past, society and social movements need to learn to work together and renew the call for unity and equality in order to be able to embrace the concept and principles of human rights in its entirety. Many organizations for women's rights, gay rights and Black Lives Matter etc., need to come together to make strides and overcome the barriers of the past. For, in unity there is strength to bring change and equality.

The Great American Masquerade Ball

By Craig B. Harvey

It's after 7pm on a Monday and the building is relatively quiet with the exception of 200 plus guys who in unison, suddenly erupt into laughter. These men aren't attending a live Kevin Hart performance. No, these inmates at Stateville Correctional Center, a maximum-security prison in Illinois, tuned in to VH1's Love and Hip Hop Atlanta. It's the season 6 premiere and the scene is set at a masquerade party. And friends of fellow castmate Kirk have just learned that he cheated on his wife of 17 years with a stripper and may have an illegitimate son. This revelation is so shocking because on the outside looking in Kirk and Rasheeda appear to have what castmates consider a happy loving marriage. Each episode reveals the truth of their marriage: Kirk cheated in the past, and despite his wife's beauty he was not satisfied/happy with her lack of affection and low sex drive. And in his pursuit of sexual happiness he exercised his human right to have consensual sex with another woman. In return, Rasheeda's right not to have her civil marriage violated was infringed upon.

Love and Hip Hop's visual setting and circumstance are the perfect analogy for life in a civil society with a democratic government structure. In his book *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, British author and politician Edmund Burke wrote: "Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human wants – among these 'wants' is to be reckoned the 'want' out of a civil society of a sufficient restraint upon their passions – society requires not only that the passions of individuals should be subjected, but that even in the mass and body, as well as in the individuals, the inclinations of men should frequently be thwarted, their will controlled, and their passions brought into subjection." He further suggests this is the true nature of government and "in this sense the restraints on men, as well as their liberties, are to be reckoned among their rights." In the institution of marriage that is governed by laws of a civil society the "rights" within the marriage placed a

restraint upon Kirk's sexual liberty. In his want to be married came with Rasheeda's want a sufficient restraint upon their passions to be with other people.

In a sense it is almost as if the structure of government and laws coerce people to live behind the mask of what is expected of them as citizens. In contrast they aren't allowed to be themselves as nature intended. (Disclaimer: I don't believe it's every man's nature to be with multiple women.)

A few months ago I posted an essay on the blog site Minutes Before Six titled "Forever Young." In it I shared how there are many guys in prison hiding behind a mask: old timers who have been incarcerated since the 70s, 80s and 90s, who survived a much more hostile environment are finally able to relax and be who they wanted to be but couldn't be back then. During that era the so-called gangs had a large influence over the day-to-day activities. They also had a militarized government structure and a code of conduct that addressed a variety of things from proper personal hygiene to restrictions on gambling, public intoxication, and homosexual activity. The number one restriction in all gangs is being an informant-snitch-rat. However, there is always an exception to who must comply with any rule or law and whom it is enforced upon. Those with social or economic status are usually exempt from compliance.

Most so-called gangs seem to have a democratic structure but function as dictatorships. In Illinois they are extremely political because in the 50s and 60s the federal government recognized them as community organizations opposed to the criminal organizations they're labeled as today. Ironically the federal government funded certain organizations such as the Conservative Vice Lords on the West side of Chicago in the North Lawndale community and also the Black P Stone Rangers through the Woodlawn Organization (T.W.O) on the South side of Chicago.

In large part members of those organizations are predominantly Black and throughout American history the government has masterfully figured out ways to disguise the oppression of Blacks and other poor people. This racist oppression is cloaked in

a mask of capitalism that is left undetected through the process of coding. In Naomi Murakawa's *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America* she suggests: "To code is to disguise racism for political gain." This ugly truth is hidden under the mask of the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution. The Emancipation Proclamation was signed into law by President Lincoln on January 1, 1863, freeing "all slaves in areas still in rebellion." However, in Howard Zinn's *A People's History* he describes Lincoln's decision to sign the Emancipation Proclamation as being politically and economically motivated. Also, it was ambivalent because he was not opposed to slavery. The politics were economically motivated because the South controlled the growth of cotton and secession would hurt the industrial North. Therefore, Lincoln allowed Blacks to believe they were fighting for their freedom. However, the word "emancipation" is coded in its definition.

Merriam-Webster's *Collegiate Dictionary* defines emancipation as: "to free from restraint, control or the power of another, to free from bondage." However, the English translation is derived from the Latin "emancipatus," meaning "to transfer ownership. The Emancipation Proclamation simply transferred the ownership of slaves from private property to state property by way of the 13th Amendment, which reads: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

Two of the most influential critics of capitalism Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote in their *Communist Manifesto*: "Political power, property so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another." This oppression is the face behind capitalism. Marx and Engels define capital as being "a collective product – only by the united action of all members of society can it be set in motion." In other words the masses unwittingly help perpetuate our own oppression. How? Minimum wage! Marx and Engels suggest: "The average price of wage-labor is the minimum wage – it merely suffices to prolong and reproduce a bare existence

– under which the laborer lives merely to increase capital, and is allowed to live only in so far as the interest of the ruling class requires it.”

Peeling back the mask of the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th Amendment reveals mass incarceration. Upon closer inspection mass incarceration reveals capitalism and racism. Industry is the lifeblood of capitalism. Mass incarceration annually places 7 million Americans under correctional control, that is: probation, parole, court supervision, bail bond or incarceration. Therefore mass incarceration gave birth to the Prison Industrial Complex (P.I.C.)

Most prisoners are Black and from the inner city and most prisons are located in rural areas populated by poor whites. In return according to the 13th Amendment poor minimum wage working Blacks, upon their incarceration are subjected to involuntary servitude. At the same time poor whites are elevated to the middle class as a result of a career in corrections. Involuntary servitude wears many masks, such as bail bonds, court fees, lawyer fees, court fines, parking tickets, community service, etc...

In conclusion, most of us will go through this life of a masquerade ball thinking or pretending to be something we're not because we are institutionalized to do so. Looking back at Kirk and Rasheeda ask yourself: what does the law have to do with whether or not a spouse cheats? Capitalism! A divorce takes place in court and it costs money any time you enter a courtroom. Even looking at those community organizations known as gangs, they began as a grass-roots movement for the people by the people. Then the government got involved, then not recognizing the snake beneath that mask of government aid, community organizations became gangs that ultimately helped perpetuate the oppression of their people. Does the government really want the killings in poor minority neighborhoods to cease? Read this again then answer. America is so beautiful but the truth that lies beneath her mask is so ugly.

“Yea Rights”: How Human Rights Fail to Express the Human Heart

By Carlvosier Smith

The Declaration of Independence (1776), the French Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789), the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and the Civil Rights Bill (1964), among other governmental versions of human rights, with great confidence and consideration crafted the assumed components of human autonomy. During the 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, mainly well-intentioned men and some women (See Declaration of Sentiment, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 1848) embarked upon the task of providing definition to the ambiguous ideal of human rights. Nevertheless, how could these brazen men and women accurately capture the essences of human autonomy in the view of an ever-evolving society and global diversity of cultures?

Consequently, I resolve and seek to understand human rights as fluid, not concrete. Nor are they defined exclusively or exhaustively by any one governing body or social movement. At best, the aforementioned declarations or legislations are buffers (however well intended) to the human expression and discovery of autonomy. Essentially, institutionalized human rights assign for humanity titles, aspirations, and conventions potentially foreign to one’s own cognitive individuality.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness – that to secure these rights Governments are instituted among men.” (Declaration of Independence 1776 by Thomas Jefferson.)

Thomas Jefferson with the approval of the American Colonies’ representatives commissioned the drafting and adoption of a document informing the British Crown of their secession from British authority. Contained in Jefferson’s writing are the acknowledgment of human rights and their assertions. First, Jefferson states human

rights are a derivative of the [“their”] Creator, therefore assigning human rights to a divine conception, not a human afterthought. Second, Jefferson lists three vastly ambiguous examples of human rights – “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” – designating them as indispensable elements of human autonomy. Intuitively (I imagine) Jefferson discerned human rights’ endowments are fluid and diversified, compelling him to pronounce after “certain unalienable Rights” the phrase “among these”... In “among these” [unalienable rights] lies the Pandora’s box in human rights designation. The “among these” in the Declaration of Independence not only connotes the plurality of rights; it also signifies the manifold or multi-dimensional observation of the human experience (even if Jefferson coined the phrase unaware of its total implications.)

Human beings possess a depth of conscience, consciousness, emotion, and cognitive and spiritual resolve. Similarly, human rights must uphold analogous principles in fluctuation, adaptation, and purposeful fortitude to holistically personify autonomy. The danger arises, arguably, whenever a termed human right fails to identify or arbitrarily omits the convictions inside the human heart. Lynn Hunt in *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (2007) contends human rights require three interlocking qualities. First, rights must be natural. Second, rights must be equal. And third, rights must be universal. Ms Hunt respectively catalogs three qualities of human rights without including the personhood the right was intended to represent. Furthermore, Hunt’s only attempt at personalization concerning human rights is her prerequisite of human origin. Subsequently, Thomas Jefferson and Lynn Hunt fail to explore the autonomy of the human heart.

Frederick Douglass in his sobering address in Rochester, N.Y. on the fourth of July 1852 vehemently declared, “Your [white Americans] high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us.” (‘What to the slave is the fourth of July?’) Douglass entertaining an invitation to speak before a patriotic assembly during an Independence Day celebration unapologetically reminded his audience how their [white Americans] commemoration of the Declaration of Independence was not shared by African

Americans. Douglass furthered his assertion, stating “The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence bequeathed by your fathers is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought life and healing to you has brought stripes and death to me.” Frederick Douglass, born a slave and now a free man, articulated the disparity of realities concerning America’s founding liberation legislation. African Americans did not experience the “blessed liberty” secured by the Declaration of Independence. On the contrary, the document proclaiming American liberty exacerbated the horrendous subjugation of African Americans. Essentially, Douglass underscored the fundamental shortcoming of human rights – human hegemonic subjectivity.

At the heart of human rights is human continuity and personal sovereignty. Women throughout the centuries did not share directly from the advantages human rights initially supposed. Women (just as African Americans) were relegated to regents, deriving privilege by proxy, not human autonomy. Though the documents of liberty were crafted in heated debates, ratified in incendiary wars, and etched in unchangeable steel (see the Liberty Bell), women were chilled by the winds of indifference and frozen in the shadows of their arranged representation. Clearly the interest in interpreting human rights legislation fell woefully short of capturing the human heart (which includes the heart of a woman, duh!) and the earnestness for equal autonomy.

Frederick Douglass speaking for women’s suffrage before the International Council of Women in Washington D.C. April 1888 artfully concluded “when a great truth once gets abroad in the world, no power on earth can imprison it, or prescribe its limits, or suppress it. It is bound to go on till it becomes the thought of the world. Such a truth is women’s right to equal liberty with man. She was born with it. It was hers before she comprehended it. It is inscribed upon all the powers and faculties of her soul, and no custom, law or usage can ever destroy it.” (‘Women’s Suffrage’ April 14, 1888.)

Undeniably revolutionary. Douglass characterized the development of human rights (women’s rights in particular) from inception to global observance. During the period of Douglass’

address, women were unable to vote while their male contemporaries enjoyed vested governmental participation. The inequality of suffrage was a plight intimately familiar to Douglass, a former slave who fought to secure suffrage for African Americans. Intriguing is Douglass' foundation equating "great truth" to women's rights and human rights resolve "the inscribed soul." Additionally Douglass assigned no boundaries to this great truth, not even recognition by the protected party: "it was hers before she comprehended it." Douglass acknowledged that above human cognition is the fluidity of human rights (what a concept.)

In conclusion, human beings, as well as their experiences, are vast and multi-dimensional. Whenever a protected human right fails to address the depth of human expression, the so-called human right becomes a human appointment void of personal will. Sound, truly reflective human rights are discovered and continue to evolve within a person inexhaustively. As Thomas Jefferson coined "among these..." in the Declaration of Independence, refusing (intentionally or arbitrarily) to adjourn forever the human rights conversation, subsequently providing language for African Americans and women's rights (among others.) We do well as contemporary human rights assessors to approach the ideal of human rights with humility and open-ended compassion. We do better in our legislation when we reject the period, for the comma, understanding our legacy is the launching pad for the next generation.

Blood, Money and Lies

By Robert Bunch

Blood, money and lies are the primary things that are used for evil in America, but they are also things that can be used to gain things as well. Blood does not represent the blood that was shed, but it represents the blood that will be shed. Money does not represent success, but it represents money that would be lost or taken. Lies are the ideals and man-made beliefs that are used to brainwash and oppress people. Blood, money and lies are the tools that were used from day one. Slavery is all about blood, money and lies. Slavery was a method to practically get free labor, which enabled America to be a thriving economy (money.) Mutilation, castration, lynching, rape, and a lot of other methods were used to enforce the slave trade (blood.) People were told that blacks were animals, savages, barbaric etc. (lies.) These things were used to justify the ill treatment of black people. When it comes to the preamble, Declaration of Independence and anything pertaining to the progress of mankind, it shall never be forgotten that those ideals were not for us, lies!! As I read anything that our forefathers have written, I see how easy it is to be distracted by the hopefulness in our future. But how can a disenfranchised group believe a person that's a slave-owner, oppressor and master manipulator? How should a person today believe that those things that were written were for our progress and benefit?

In 1852 Frederick Douglass addressed the citizens of Rochester, New York and he spoke very aggressively about the current state of America, the fact that he was expected to celebrate or speak highly of "their" holiday reflected the kind of vicious manipulation that they were willing to use to oppress and brainwash African Americans. In America today, the same issues still exist and harm blacks and women. And we are still expected to celebrate and rejoice in "their" holidays, which were not intended for our people. But like Frederick Douglass said: "The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence bequeathed by your fathers

is shared by you, not me. Secondly, I cannot continue this essay without addressing the deprivations of black women.

During Frederick Douglass' speech at the women's rights convention, he said that the universality of man's rule over women is another factor in the resistance to the women's suffrage movement. We are pointed to the fact that men have not only always ruled over women but that they do so rule everywhere. And they easily think that which is done everywhere must be right. Though the fallacy of this reasoning is too transparent to need refutation, my argument is that blood, money and lies were used to oppress people then and that people are still underpaid, underappreciated and abused, "just to keep them in their place." These methods of domination did not occur out of the thin blue sky. These ideals came from the forefathers of this country, which enabled groups to keep trying to restore order to its original place. We cannot truly say that women are equal, especially black women, because they are too far behind in the race. This is not to say that women are not in a better position, but they're still fighting the same battle of yesterday.

Kimberlé Crenshaw says that one should not look at outcomes as a fair measure of merit, since one should recognize that everyone has not been given an equal start. Because it would be apparent that institutions have embraced discriminatory policies in order to produce disparate results, it would be necessary to rely on results to indicate whether these discriminatory policies have been successfully dismantled. Although I agree with Ms Kimberlé, I also think that we will have to look at how women got their results and the journey that was taken that led to success and more opportunities. If a woman's journey involves any sexual favors, ridiculous sacrifices or anything that takes her talents out of the overall talent bracket, or is given anything that can maliciously stunt her personal or career progress, then she has been cheated, regardless of her position. It has always been said that black women have to be twice as smart and work twice as hard just to get equal or less pay than a white person. So any challenge that is placed in her way, that is not a part of protocol, is sexist, racist and not equal. As I wrote earlier, I do acknowledge the progress and status of women in the world

today. But we must not forget that we are still 400 years behind and we are not where we are supposed to be.

America is a capitalistic country and when it comes to capitalism, there must be a rich class and a poor class. Unfortunately, the riches of America come from blood, money and lies. I recognize that all rich people did not kill or oppress people. But I also recognize that they have inherited the treasures and opportunities that come from blood, money and lies. So a lot of “successful” people are inheritors and soldiers of racism. It’s not a coincidence that blacks were underserved; it’s not a coincidence that opportunities for blacks were not available; it’s not a coincidence that a lot of blacks are portrayed in a negative light to mainstream society or that white people have no real experience with blacks, besides music or the negative stigmas that are portrayed on TV. The bottom line of blood, money and lies is that it all boils down to money, but this is not a usual deal and the effects lasted a very long time. I’m also not saying that blood, money and lies did not play a big role in America gaining its financial power. Blood and lies in addition to money only made things that much more vicious. In the world we live in today, we are still told that we are equal, that equal opportunities are still equal and available to everyone. But we are still killed in the streets like animals, we are still the #1 victims of poverty, we are still under-educated, our neighborhoods are still infested with drugs and weapons (which we don’t make), we are still thrown in jail like animals and treated unfairly in the justice system. Until this world understands that blacks have contributed to this country, just as much as anyone else, are human just as everyone else, and understand that our music, art and intelligence are just as important as everyone else’s, the world must never forget that our pain is constant and is justified by the injustice forced upon us. Until this world recognizes the true reasoning of our pain and takes steps to make us equal, then this country will only be a part of blood, money and lies.

The Meaning and Limits of Rights... Are Rights Truly Self-Evident?

By Benny Rios

Three historical documents seem to claim that the rights of people are self-evident: the American Declaration of Independence, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They all have almost the same things in common: that all people are created equal, and that we have rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In *Inventing Human Rights: A History*, Lynn Hunt points out how these declarations rested on claims of self-evidence. She writes, “Despite their differences in language the two eighteenth-century declarations both rested on a claim of self-evidence. Jefferson made this explicit when he wrote, ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident.’ The French declaration stated categorically, ‘ignorance, neglect or contempt of the rights of man are the sole cause of public misfortunes and governmental corruption.’ Not much had changed in this regard by 1948.” Here, Hunt ties in all three historical documents, when she says that not much had changed by 1948, she is referring to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

What does it mean for something to be self-evident? According to the American Heritage Dictionary, self-evident means, “Requiring no proof or explanation.” When these declarations were written, I suppose that the definition pretty much held the same meaning. However, I have to ask the question... Is there such a thing as rights being self-evident? In order to find the answer to that question, we don’t have to search very far, because throughout history our rights that are supposed to be self-evident have been challenged and redefined over and over again. So if our rights as human beings are self-evident, why are there so many paradoxes, contradictions, and different interpretations within our so-called rights? In her introduction, Hunt points out the paradox of self-evidence, and it’s my belief that the answer is clear: our rights are not

self-evident, not when they are defined by judges of courts who impose their beliefs of what our rights should mean.

It seems pretty clear: “All men are created equal.” There really doesn’t seem to be a need for an interpretation to that statement. Unfortunately, that is far from true. Our founding fathers believed in that statement, yet they were slave owners, and they didn’t consider black slaves as fully human. Therefore, “All men are created equal” didn’t apply to blacks and Native Americans in the United States when the Declaration of Independence was written. In fact, it seemed only to apply to white men who owned property. Even white women were deprived of their rights. It took people like Frederick Douglass, a former slave who became an African American social reformer, abolitionist, and orator among other things, to bring light to the fact that, yes indeed, black people were created equal in the eyes of God. Then you had women like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who was an early activist for women’s rights. She worked closely with Lucretia Motts, a well-known abolitionist, and both were women who suffered from oppression of white men that deprived them of their rights. These people worked together in the mid to late 1800s to stand up for their rights as human beings, so that they could have the same equal opportunities as white men. They stood up and spoke against the atrocities of slavery, the oppression of black people, and brought to light how white women were also kept ignorant of their rights as human beings. People like these have helped redefine the meaning of rights and who they applied to. Their victories were great, but they only scratched the surface for the battles yet to come.

In Frederick Douglass’ speech, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”, one line stood out to me: “America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future.” This statement was made in reference to how the leaders from the past, who had trampled on the Constitution and the Bible, and basically have taken what was good in order to promote evil and perpetuate slavery. This man was able to see so far into the future to know that America would always be false to herself, and that the battle for equality, freedom, fairness, and all of our rights

will be ongoing. Since the activists from the past, many more have risen, such as Martin Luther King Jr. with his non-violent movement, Cesar Chavez in his United Farm Workers movement, and the movements of today such as the Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter movements. These movements do not only fight for our rights, but they fight for economic equality and against racial injustices. Through these movements many victories have been achieved, but the opposition does not give up because they create the illusion of victory. That is why the fight always continues for our rights that should be self-evident, yet they are perverted by the people who define them and don't want these rights to apply to everyone.

In Kimberlé Crenshaw's article published in the Harvard Law Review, she writes of Peter Gabel, "Peter Gabel suggests that belief in rights and in the state serves a hegemonic function through willed delusion... hegemony is reinforced through this 'state abstraction' because people believe in and react passively to a mere illusion of political consensus." I take this to mean that politicians are masters of illusion when it comes to making people believe that they have real rights, yet, most rights have paradoxes and contradictions. The illusions created by these legislators only help to further the institution of white supremacy. We're lead to believe that there is no racism or inequalities through the laws that are passed in the name of fairness, when in all actuality, all that is created is a legalized way to continue on with economic inequality and racial injustices. Crenshaw also points out how blacks have been created as a subordinated "other," and formal reform has merely repackaged racism. She also points out how discrimination laws have largely succeeded in eliminating the symbolic manifestation of racial oppression, but have allowed the perpetuation of material subordination of blacks.

This does not only apply to blacks, but to all people of color. Since the days of Frederick Douglass until today, one of the ways to challenge the institution of white supremacy internally is by using its own logic against it. As Crenshaw says, "Such a crisis occurs when powerless people force open and politicize a contradiction between the dominant ideology and their reality." She also says, "The

eradication of barriers has created a new dilemma for those victims of racial oppression who are not in a position to benefit from the move to formal equality. The race neutrality of the legal system creates the illusion that racism is no longer the primary factor responsible for the condition of the black underclass; instead, as we have seen, class disparities appear to be the consequence of individual and group merit within a supposed system of opportunity.” When it comes down to it, as long as race consciousness thrives, people of color will have to depend on rights rhetoric in order to challenge the institution of white supremacy and protect their interests. People of color face an ongoing battle, not only for their rights but also for economic fairness, and against racial injustices.

There’s no doubt that our rights are limited. They are trampled on, restricted, and regulated. Unfortunately, the people most affected are people of color, which is why the fight must continue as long as our rights continue to be limited, redefined and transformed. Yes, politicians do tend to make a perversion of our rights, and they create many illusions, but we as a people have come a very long way in fighting for what is right. As we continue this fight, we will always be able to come up with new ways to overcome racial injustices, economic inequalities, and the deprivation of our rights. The fight has been ongoing for hundreds of years, and in many ways we continue to fight the same fight, just in different forms such as mass incarceration, which is just another form of slavery. The institution of white supremacy continues to carry on, but we can never give up in battling those who oppress us. I end with the words of Martin Luther King Jr., “Somewhere we must come to see that the human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and the persistent work of dedicated individuals who are willing to be co-workers with God. And without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the primitive forces of social stagnation. So we must help time and realize that the time is always ripe to do right.” (“Remaining Awake Through the Great Revolution”)

Squandered Rights

By Bryant Isom

Slavery against black people started in the 1700s and at that time, blacks weren't even afforded the tiniest of rights. Not even the right to life. At the same time the Declaration of Independence was drafted. Unanimously! The first line of that draft reads: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Also in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the preamble, article one states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." Maybe they meant "some." Why is there so much confusion when it comes to blacks, slavery, human beings and rights?

Many people my age and younger have a different outlook on blacks, slavery, human beings and rights. Many of us move about, day to day, as if life begun in the 19th century. I celebrate life, not freedom. Why celebrate something you've known your entire life? Celebration is for achievement. My generation played no part in how the world shaped itself around equality in the past 200 years. We gladly partake in all of the spoils, though. A lot of us don't even know what we are celebrating when it comes to freedom and America, which brings me to this question: Do "some" black people born in the 1970s and up care about American citizenship rights and what it took to have and possess those rights?

The great abolitionist Frederick Douglass said in his second question that he posed to the citizens of Rochester N.Y., "What have I or those I represent to do with your national independence?" Douglass felt bewildered and seemingly amazed that the auditorium filled with people who cannot and will not understand (wholly) what independence means, asked him to partake in the (shared) celebration of it. I've been black my entire life. And as a black man, is it wrong to celebrate the 4th of July? Is it wrong that I don't feel as Frederick Douglass did? Is it uneducation? I say that because, if

you change one word in the heading of Frederick Douglass' speech to say: "What to the Nigga is the 4th of July?" I believe that many in my generation and younger would respond to that same question with informative information, unlike if you keep the word "slave" in the spot.

I've never witnessed blatant racism. I've never personally read a sign: "BLACKS ONLY." I despise black police equally as I do white police. If most in my generation and especially the next observe four white guys walking out way at night and one of them just happens to have a bat or a long stick, I believe that we would be more worried about the two black guys behind them with the hoodies on and hands in their pockets. Our interaction with whites is different from Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King and any other black activist. Our fight and the rights we're fighting for are more specific. "The right to live." Our fight is mainly with the police. No matter the color of their skin. I've been fighting this fight since I was a kid. And the right to walk where I want, eat where I want, drink from a faucet, whistle at a white woman or ride a bus seem so bizarre to me. That's not my fight, so I and those my age (some) forget that fight and the rights that gave us the "right" to fight the police. Crazy.

We cannot fathom the thought of being told what we can't do, what we don't have the right to do. It has nothing to do with fearlessness. I was born with opportunity. I believe that a lot of my peers were born with those same opportunities. Work hard and believe in the process of "the more you know," and put that knowledge to use. Or play sports. Also know that if you choose the other lane, your life and rights can and will be taken from you. By me being born with opportunity as I said, and having rights to those opportunities, there's only one issue standing in the way of achieving that opportunity. It's not the white man. It's not religion. It's not the color of my skin. EDUCATION. I concede that a lot in my generation and most in the next are illiterate to the facts and roads in which rights for all have travelled. Maybe we don't even care. Being afforded the right and opportunity to seek that knowledge is where I find most of my let down with my generation and next. Being born in a time

when being seen equal to the next man or woman but not taking those rights to educate one's self about the struggle for those rights we hold so dearly.

Why do I and some of my peers choose to squander those rights? Why do we challenge society with the wager being our lives? I know through my history that our ancestors gave and risked everything for me to be proud of who I am and the color of my skin. To quote Thomas Paine in his brief *Common Sense*, he says "It is the good fortune of many to live distant from the scene of sorrow; the evil is not sufficiently brought to their doors to make them feel the precariousness with which all American property is possessed."

I cannot relate to my past, I have never been a slave. I will never "fully" understand why they never rose up and fought back. What I do know is I have the opportunity to educate myself on these matters. It's my right.

The Changing Circumstances

By Carl Raphael Williams

There has always been among part of the so-called educated public an assumption that equality is for all of America. The gist of equality, or should I say in my experience, is you as a people who are suffering or poor must think and fight your way out of your present predicament.

There are domineering ideas of error impressed upon us at all times. When I talk of domineering ideas, I'm speaking of strategies used to justify the existence of a law or idea put in place that infringes upon the very equality or equal protections that are supposed to be for all Americans but are clearly not.

In the civil rights era, which is still an ongoing era, they marched and fought for rights that were to be given to every citizen of America: African Americans, Latino Americans, White Americans, Asian Americans, Indian Americans. But in the foundation of equal rights for all were those who carry into execution an immense amount of agony and pain and neglect, which was constantly inflicted upon those who were suffering (people of color).

You have a people who have been through many hundreds of years of suffering and constantly being told that it's getting better. You might as well say: hey you people suffering, well continue but keep fighting the good fight and we will see what we can do about giving you a little more equal protection, not equal rights because the Declaration of Independence for rights was about whites not blacks.

The very idea of marching on the streets and protest is for one to make objection to and speak strongly against, to say "no justice, no peace." You say you want justice, so we march and shout and plead for those who are in power to be just.

The Declaration of Independence reads, "we hold these truths to be self-evident. All men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It is still worth noting

that the Declaration as we know to quote it today still hasn't made its appearance on the historical stage of equal rights and protection for all Americans. We like to quote it but is it a representative foundation for us all? I ask because my conflict is that of Frederick Douglass when he wrote 'What to a Slave is the Fourth of July?' Douglass rejects the domineering ideas of error impressed upon him and other African Americans in his speech. When Douglass thinks of the Declaration of Independence, he thinks the idea is one of righteousness and acceptance for all. But the circumstances of his condition and the conditions of African Americans don't align with that idea. So Frederick Douglass asks in his speech, do the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice embodied in the Declaration of Independence extend to us?

When I think of the changing circumstances from that era to this era, you can ask that question on behalf of African Americans, transgender people, those who are gay, those who are Muslim, those who are of other religions, those who are of different nationalities.

Frederick Douglass in his address goes on to point out that he "is not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary" and that "this country's high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us." He says, "the sunlight that brought life and healing to you has brought stripes and death to me. You may rejoice, I must mourn." This distance, the stripes, the mourning represent the march, the fight, the demand, the struggle to reveal the truth about the social system that blocks the pursuit and attainment of equality for all. When you look at equality in this nation then and now, we should question whether a system (Declaration) that was intentionally related to a particular set of historical circumstances that prevailed during the 1700s can lay absolute claim in the twenty-first century for all people now.

When you think of the changing circumstances and align it with the Declaration of Independence, is it about decisions you would make or want for all people? When you think of Marx and Engels, capitalist societies rely on an ideology of individual competition and acquisition that justifies the economic system and lulls poor people into believing the system works for them.

In conclusion, inequality is not only a state of economic deprivation, of disorganization or the absence of something. It's also the behaviors and beliefs learned. It is said that justice is a common thing and so is equality in the changing circumstances from the past era to the current era. Still in this time in history we as a society do so many obvious things to destroy ourselves and humanity, from the way we treat each other to the emotion and lack of affection towards one another. We have become robots when it comes to the pursuit of happiness and certain unalienable rights. We created an environment that is not sympathetic to the needs of other lives.

Societies are masquerading people with deceptive ideas and information. And because of this communities and individuals have become secluded. Communities of people from all walks of life become deprived, beaten, starved, partially suffocated, segregated, disenfranchised. In Dorothy Robert's writing "Reproductive Justice, Not Just Rights", she writes that Black Lives Matter are likely allies in the fight for reproductive justice because at their core both insist that American society must begin to value black humanity. African Americans have for centuries used rights rhetoric to mobilize against symbolic oppression through formal equality, whether it was against exclusion from jobs and housing or injustice at the hands of oppressive police.

The demand to be seen as humans in this nation and beyond and combat racial discrimination and address excessive exclusion is at the core of this society and at the foundation of this world. So, as the changing circumstances like a magician has fooled his audience, the Declaration of Independence has deceived the whole world and performed a stupendous and incredible feat never before accomplished for all of Americans.

Modern Day Slavery

By Ed Bell

Modern day slavery. Sanctioned by the United States Government under the 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Greetings to all of the freedom fighters, warriors and honorable supporters like PNAP that are in this struggle to end mass incarceration and prison slavery in America, for convicted felons who have been reduced to a commodity to be exploited for profit.

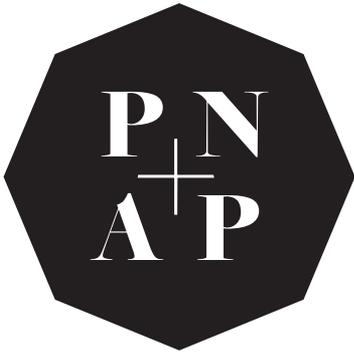
My name is Ed Bell #B-72493 and I am serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole at Stateville Correctional Center. I was 22 years old when I was arrested for my murder and now I am 44 years old and losing my health to bad healthcare but not my dream for freedom.

The new plantation in America is the prison system. Under the 13th Amendment of the Constitution it states the following: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment for a crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist wherein the United States...”

In America rehabilitation has ended in the prison system, because true rehabilitation will put prisons out of the mass incarceration business. I was sentenced to life without the possibility of parole, even though I had no history of violent crimes and facts in my case show the killing to be unintentional. I also showed remorse and my action that caused the man’s death was that of a kid because I only wanted to scare the man like I was going to harm him. I never had an intention to do harm to that man or take his life. However, those facts were not considered because rehabilitation has been removed as a tool of the prison system and now the criminal justice system disproportionately imprisons Blacks and Latinos. Prison is no longer the department of corrections – prison is now the new plantation. Slavery is still alive for the black man in America. Just come to prison and you will see black men outnumber all the other races of people in prison. Blacks outnumber white prisoners at Stateville 5 to 1.

We must come to terms with the reality that modern day slavery exists and is the root of the many problems of mass incarceration. The 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is the gateway our nation has used for centuries. This amendment closed the door for the private citizen to own a slave and use another human for the purpose of profit without compensation, but it opened the door for the politicians (tough on crime) and governments to take over the position of the plantation massa. Until society sees through this illusion for what it is, the impoverished citizens of our state and nation are targets.

Prison + Neighborhood Arts Project (PNAP) is a collective of artists, writers and scholars who organize arts and humanities classes for people at Stateville prison. Each year, scholarly and creative work is developed in the prison that is then exhibited in neighborhood galleries. PNAP understands access to education and art to be fundamental human rights capable of transforming people, systems, and futures.



**Prison +
Neighborhood
Arts
Project**