

## 21st Century Declaration of Rights for a Better America

We, the People, believe that all human lives--irrespective of race, gender, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation and gender identity -- have intrinsic dignity, worth and value. We all are worthy to take our place at the "public table" free from harassment and persecution, to share equitably in the world's blessings.

We, the People, realize this vision is juxtaposed with the reality of a world that is full of suffering.

This world, and the United States in particular, has seen suffering in many forms. Much of the world's wealth was gained through the slave trade, where dark bodies were beaten, scarred, and treated as property. Indigenous people suffered through the systematic, vicious and brutal genocide committed against them. Though some immigrants were allowed access to prosperity through flexible immigration policies, others were excluded from those same doors of opportunity. **This suffering is a lasting scar on the legacy of the United States.**

This suffering is a part of our present reality, now reflected through video recordings and social media- whether it is the four-hour ordeal of watching the body of Mike Brown bleed on a Ferguson street, or watching a police officer strangle and kill Eric Garner, or Walter Scott, or Sandra Bland, and countless others. While personal sins such as pride, jealousy, envy, greed and wickedness disrupt our personal and social relationships, it is the structural evil of racism, sexism, white supremacy and the love of profit that have disrupted every human institution including our economic, criminal justice and education systems.

This world, this reality, disrupts and destroys. But in all of these circumstances, in all of the tragedy, misery, and sadness, we encounter hope, and choose to have the courage to step forward. We hope because as MLK said, "the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice". We hope because our faith traditions remind us that our weeping may endure a night but joy shall come in the morning. We hope because our painful history, and hurtful present, causes us to weep, confess, repent, reimagine, but ultimately fight.

- We fight for justice because racism, today, is the ultimate evil in the world and America's original sin.
- We fight for justice because structural evils diminish the worth of every human, especially people of color, where dark bodies become tools of profit.
- We fight for justice because the institutions of slavery, Jim Crow and present-day mass incarceration, have had devastating effects on communities of color.
- We fight for justice for the children of America where over 22% live in poverty--this includes cities like Philadelphia where 40% live in poverty..
- We fight for justice for the 150 million Americans, nearly 50% of the United States, who are either low income, near poverty, in poverty or living in deep poverty.
- We fight for justice because our country today, has a higher percentage of children live in poverty than during the Great Depression.

- We fight for justice for children born in this country to undocumented workers who are separated from their families and forced to live in two worlds.
- We fight for justice to repair a broken education system, where teachers are asked to do more with less and where a state like Pennsylvania has most of its county school systems underfunded and understaffed.
- We fight for justice because our criminal justice system is where blacks represent 38% of drug arrests and receive 57% of the drug sentences but yet are only 14% of the drug users.
- We fight for justice because our prison system has more blacks incarcerated today than the number of blacks enslaved in 1850.
- We fight for justice for the 11 million undocumented workers living in the shadows of America and exploited by employers for their labor.
- We fight for justice for those incarcerated in our criminal justice system that are making less than one dollar a day for private corporations that make billions in profit.
- We fight for justice because our prison system houses more prisoners than any other prison system in the world.

We draw on the deep wisdom of Dr. King to guide our actions. In Dr. King's "Beyond Vietnam" speech, Dr King named racism, militarism, and materialism as the deadly triplets afflicting America. Dr. King called for a revolution of values in American society. He spoke of "the fierce urgency of Now". Today the urgency of Now is even fiercer as we face many of the same problems, but even greater challenges which render our most basic democratic institutions under attack.

It is in this atmosphere where many are simply trying to hold ground, We, the People, dare to reimagine a better and greater America, and ultimately, a better world. This atmosphere might cause us to despair but instead we choose to fight for a 21st century revolution of values - a revolution of values that can transform our country into a place of unprecedented prosperity and equality. The 21st Century Declaration of Rights for a Better America is the a beginning point for that revolution. It's on the following principles, rights and values that We, the People, establish our work and are calling on everyone to help us realize this vision.

These are the principles of our 21st Century Declaration of Rights for a Better America:

1. The right to representative democracy which promotes policies that values the humanity of all people equally no matter their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, religion or national origin and preserves and expands their right to vote, freedom of association and communication.
2. The right to be free from all forms of racism: intentional, unintentional, implicit, explicit, institutional, personal, disparate treatment and disparate impact.
3. The right to shared prosperity which includes, but is not limited to full employment, a living wage, a guaranteed income, pay equity for women, and hunger free communities for all.
4. The right to care for our common home, the earth, which include clean energy and water policies that promote the earth's health and well-being.

5. The right to a fairly and fully funded quality public education --for all children.
6. The right to affordable, quality housing for all which includes policies that end gentrification in our cities.
7. The right to health care for all including policies that fully fund Medicare, Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act.
8. The right to equal justice for all from a civilian police force and criminal justice system free from excessive force, racial discrimination, police brutality, mass incarceration and prison for-profit corporations.
9. The right to a pathway to citizenship for all undocumented immigrants.
10. The right to unionize and collectively bargain.

It is our collective belief that these principles - rooted in the sacred texts and practices of our shared faith traditions - we will create a fairer, more just, more prosperous, more diverse and more inclusive society. Now is the time to act!