

400 Years of Inequality: Creating the Call to Observance

March 16, 2018

WOLLMAN HALL, THE NEW SCHOOL, NEW YORK

**Hosted by the 400 Years of Inequality Organizing Committee
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We call on everyone to prepare to observe the 400th Anniversary of the arrival in 1619 at Jamestown of the first Africans to be sold into bondage. This group of people and the hundreds of thousands that followed as slaves worked on plantations established on land stolen from the indigenous peoples of the continent.

To prevent Native Americans, African Americans, and poor whites from uniting to protest their working conditions, the occupation of lands, and practices of oppression and terror, plantation owners codified inequality into law and custom. This use of inequality to divide and weaken people would be absolutely contradicted by the principles of equality written into the Declaration. Inequality has a home in the Constitution, however, which asserts that slaves counted as only 3/5's of a person.

This accounting of inequality constrains our life chances and limits everyone's ability to build diverse, caring, joyful, and free communities. We need desperately to be able to link arms in radical equality if we are to meet the challenges of climate change, decaying physical infrastructure, rapidly evolving jobs, underperforming schools, uneven access to health care, and lack of affordable housing, among many other concerns. Starting now, we can renew and strengthen the long struggle for full emancipation and justice rooted in equality by coming together to remember the events at Jamestown and the pernicious and persistent devaluing of persons.

For these reasons we call on everyone to prepare to observe this 400th Anniversary of Inequality and committing to ending the systems of oppression it represents. We do this by deepening our understanding of our history, building and sustaining dialogues with others regarding this history and the transformative equality we all need and deserve, and then founding or expanding coalitions to work across divides in order to define and realize our aspirations beginning with the rights to which we are entitled because our fundamental and shared equality.

400 YEARS OF INEQUALITY: THREE INITIATIVES

Anniversaries are opportunities to gather, remember, and renew. While national anniversaries are generally used to affirm the status quo they are also occasions to disrupt complacency and return dreams not yet realized and promises unfulfilled.

We call for widespread observance of the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first Africans at Jamestown both to acknowledge that the unyielding legacy of slavery continues to tear at our society and to strengthen the ongoing struggle for full emancipation and equality.

To prepare for observances the week of October 12-18, 2019, we are undertaking three initiatives:

1. Understanding the Problem and Identifying the Solution

The New School's 400 Years of Inequality Organizing Committee, composed of faculty, staff, and students, was joined by Roisin Davis and Anthony Arrove of the Voices of a People's History Foundation, who turned our attention to the eponymous documentary history. Together, we developed the concept of readings of *Voices of a People's History* all across the nation, as people prepare for 2019 anniversary celebrations. We have identified two other books we believe are crucial to fighting inequality: Ernest Thompson and Mindy Thompson Fullilove's *Homeboy Came to Orange: A Story of People's Power*, which describes Thompson's use of coalition to build people's power in Orange, NJ; and Reverend William Barber's *Third Reconstruction: Moral Mondays, Fusion Politics*, and the Rose of a New Justice Movement, which describes the building of a fusion coalition in North Carolina, and extending to a national movement for justice.

2. Remembering Jamestown

We have designated October 12-18, 2019, as Remember Jamestown week. During that week, we envision that schools, religious organizations, civic groups, parks and monuments and museums will hold exhibitions, assemblies, marches, installations, and performances and many other kinds of observances. This thorough examination of the story of inequality will enable us to move forward on more solid ground, toward equality and wholeness. Our partner organization, the University of Orange, will prepare materials to help organizations consider their local history and plan an observance.

3. Writing a People's Platform

ONE DC, another project partner, will help groups that participate in Remembering Jamestown observances articulate a "People's Platform" for justice and equality. We view this platform as one of the key outcomes of this project. It is a tool for the continuing work to dismantle the systems that reproduce and generate new forms of inequality and replace them with resources and practices that are truly uphold the rights of all in a society rooted in equality.

Creating the Call to Observance

March 16, 2018

Wollman Hall, The New School

New York, NY

AGENDA

9:30 Arrival and Refreshments

10:00 Welcome

10:15 Gathering: I Remember 20 Generations of History

PART A: I am in the Ecology of Inequality.

10:30 Steps 1 and 2

[Break: 11:30 - 11:40]

11:40 Step 3

12:30 Lunch

PART B: I Don't Want to Live in the House of White Supremacy.

1:15 Steps 1, 2 and 3

[Break and Refreshments: 3:40 - 4:00]

4:00 Issuing the Call to Observance

5:00 Going home

PART C: I will do something.

Voices of a People's History, Howard Zinn and Anthony Arnove

I wanted my readers to experience how at key moments in history some of the bravest and most effective political acts were the sounds of the human voice itself. – Howard Zinn

Zinn and Arnove gather speeches, letters, poems, and songs authored by the unrecognized and underappreciated protagonists of history, including women, people of color, and members of social movements. These voices are a testament to the stubborn optimism of ordinary people and the courageous acts of disobedience and dissent used to demand and manifest justice. Among the voices are those of Frederick Douglass, Chief Joseph, Sacco and Vanzetti, Patti Smith, Cesar Chavez, June Jordan, Malcolm X, Naomi Klein, and members of Dream Defenders and the day laborers movement.

Homeboy Came to Orange: A Story of People's Power, Ernest Thompson and Mindy Thompson Fullilove

We have no more time for war, or exploitation, or poisoning the earth. We must learn to live together now. – Ernest Thompson

Struggles for equality and freedom are always place-based, for to make them real they must be experienced, rooted, evident, and active, and shared by all friends and community members. The life of Ernest Thompson is inseparable from the story of Orange, New Jersey, where he and subsequent generations of his family have organized, first to desegregate the local schools by building strong coalitions and political power for the black community that ultimately served all the people of Orange, and now to foster community initiatives dedicated to realizing Orange as a just and beautiful city.

Third Reconstruction: Moral Mondays, Fusion Politics, and the Rise of a New Justice Movement, Reverend William Barber

Within the framework of a Third Reconstruction, we see how all of our movements are flowing together, recognizing that our intersectionality creates the opportunity to fundamentally redirect America.” – The Reverend Dr. William J. Barber III

Rev. Barber recounts how progressive Christians, union members, immigration-rights activists, and many others built the largest state government-focused civil disobedience campaign in American history. This fusion, guided by a shared understanding of historical and contemporary systems of race-based inequality, is reclaiming the possibility of grass-roots democratic alliances.

READING VOICES OF A PEOPLE'S HISTORY

We have adopted *Voices from a People's History* as the text to guide the first phase of our preparations to Remember Jamestown. We invite you to read *Voices* to yourself and with others using the approaches below or some of your own devising:

Read and post

Select a short passage and record yourself reading it. Post it to social media with the hashtag #400yearsofinequality.

Read with friends, family and colleagues

Bring the book to a family or group meeting. Invite people to select a short passage that they would like to read aloud. Ask why they picked that passage. After the readings, facilitate a discussion about what participants experienced while reading and listening.

Use with a class

The Voices of a People's History Foundation has lots of educational materials to help teachers use the book with students at all levels: <https://peopleshistory.us>

Organize a performance

Lots of organizations have given performances using readings from the book. Visit the Voices of a People's History site to see examples of this!

Get a copy of the book

Thanks to the publisher, Seven Stories Press, you can use this link to get a copy at 50% off!

https://www.sevenstories.com/books/3837-voices-of-a-people-s-history-of-the-united-states/?discount_code=azxhdt

I AM IN THE ECOLOGY OF INEQUALITY

Inequality has been used to justify chattel slavery, the dispossession of Native American lands and resources, exploitation of workers, and the subordination of women. Employed strategically, inequality has dismantled coalitions and frustrated collective action. Inequality is entrenched in the nation's founding documents. These have served as blueprints for economic, political, cultural, and social formations meaning that inequality, in one form or another, is manifest in the social institutions that support and direct our lives. Inequality forms networks and flows of experiences and resources that shape our identities, social practices, and institutions. We do not get to stand outside of this ecology, this life world colored by inequality.

Protocol for Exploring the Ecology of Inequality

Step 1: Reflection

The Great Law of the Haudenosaunee, the founding document of the Iroquois Confederacy, calls on us to consider the impact our actions will have seven generations into the future. That is, as we move to act we must imagine standing before our descendants and explaining our decisions to them.

However, first we look back to learn how our present is shaped by those who have acted before us. Thinking of the approximately 20 generations that have come and gone over the past 400 years ask:

How do my communities and I embody histories of inequality?

What has been done to us and what have we done to others to foster, resist, or survive these histories?

Take 10-15 minutes to contemplate and write or diagram in response to these questions.

Step 2: Memories and Stories

Gather into groups of 3-5 people.

Each member of the group outlines the histories to which they know or imagine they are connected, naming and describing the structures and mechanisms of inequality to which they are connected.

Identify points of commonality and intersection, which may include being connected from extremely different positions.

Step 3: Mapping the Ecology

Ecologies have dimensions, formations, relationships, flows—using any materials you chose, represent the three-dimensional shape of the “ecology” that is emerging from your reflections and stories.

Come together with other groups who have done the same process and share the models of your ecology.

Share with others and listen to their descriptions of the systems and themes that emerged from their conversations.

Note points of commonality and intersection. Ask:

What is an ecology of inequality?

How does it work?

How is it sustained?

How might it be undone and remade?

I DON'T WANT TO LIVE IN THE HOUSE OF WHITE SUPREMACY

White supremacy is at the core of the ecology of inequality. It is an ideology and practice that works in concert with patriarchy, hetero-normativity, and capitalism to exploit difference in order to acquire and maintain economic, political, military, and cultural power. This power is maintained through multiple forms of symbolic and material violence that determines who is fully human and who is less-than-human. Numerous lives have been sacrificed to maintain various forms of supremacy and countless others have suffered as their life possibilities are narrowed and destroyed by terror and exploitation. While those who claim supremacy have access to goods and experiences others do not, their lives are spiritually diminished and damaged. They are cut off from that most essential quality of freedom, the loving encounter with others that is possible only when we meet as equally and fully human in our capacity for joy, suffering, curiosity, creativity, and learning. Equality is never possible in the house of white supremacy.

Take 5-10 minutes to think about where, how, and with who you might organize and hold a people's party.

Share your thoughts with a partner and then with the larger group. The suggestions are placed on a diagram that begins to mark networks and themes, and gathers suggestions, tools, and resources.

Protocol for Remembering Not Repeating: Calling our Communities to Observe the Anniversary of Jamestown and Envision a World Beyond Inequality

Step 1: The Master's House

Ask: How can remembering resist repetition so that we do not rebuild the master's house by creating new forms of inequality?

Take 5-10 minutes to consider this question and note responses.

Discuss the question and your thoughts with a partner.

Share your and your partner's thoughts with the rest of the group.

Record responses and begin to determine strategies and pathways out of or activities to dismantle or transform systems and mechanisms of inequality and supremacy.

Step 2: Planning a People's Party

Ask: How does remembering Jamestown contribute to the struggle for universal equality?

Review and discuss the "Five Habits of Highly Effective People's Parties":

Acknowledge everyone's suffering, including your own: we all have skin in this game!

Find the stories that give you hope and the stories that give you sorrow.

Invite everyone to be on the committee, but especially teenagers. They are the "plug."

Don't be afraid to name the problems, past and present. Don't let the politicians and the bureaucrats insist it look pretty, be pretty, be nice.

Be sure to use this time to remember where we came from and to imagine where we are going. What are we FOR?

Step 3: Preparing the Call

Form groups of 3-5 people each.

Discuss "where, how, and with who" you anticipate observing the 400th anniversary.

How are the communities you envision connected to this history?

Revise the draft call on the cover of this booklet or begin to compose an entirely new call that names:

How is this history relevant to those you have in mind?

Why is it important that you and they remember and observe this history?

Why is it important that your and their experiences, voices, and perspectives contribute to a people's platform?

Notes and Diagrams

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I WILL DO SOMETHING.

Rosa Parks went to the famous Highlander School for organizers in August, 1955. At the end of the course, everyone was asked, "What will you do when you get home?" She replied, "I don't know, but I'm going to do something." In December, 1955, she did something, refusing to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus and precipitating the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

When I get home, I plan to...

1.

2.

3.

