

Reconstructions

Freedom in a Carceral State

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What Is Reconstructions?

Reconstructions rises out of the ashes of damage and neglect. Through the lens of this project, Reconstructions refers to rewriting personal and historical narratives and reimagining the built environment. It seeks to reclaim and hold a complex identity that encompasses past and present, and self and other as they are (re)built, (re)worked, and (re)written.

As a group of collaborators, we are a mad and beautiful mess of artists, activists, organizers, peacemakers, agitators, educators, moms, dads, and granddads, many hued with ancestral ties to various lands and languages. Some of us began as strangers, while others were connected through one of the dozen networks we embody. Together, we have identified our mission to focus on the urgencies of mass incarceration and displacement, and the threats to community they present.

The “Carceral State” is a physical, mental, and systemic process exercised by a government where groups are deliberately excluded, disenfranchised, and alienated from fair and equal power—be that political, economic, or otherwise. Many sources show the disproportionate number of African Americans incarcerated in US penal institutions. However, as we define the Carceral State we recognize that we are all incarcerated: our communities are occupied by the police, our homelands are being gentrified, and through the education system

our children continue to be fed a colonizing narrative. We acknowledge the systematic and destructive aims of the Carceral State, the prison industrial complex, and the school-to-prison pipeline, but more importantly, we acknowledge the power of individual lives to reclaim the past and proclaim the future. By arming ourselves with knowledge of the self as well as the system, and by listening to our ancestral echo, we can achieve principled transformation and uncover deep historical memory that affects a change in our destinies.

We address social change with a dual approach, one that is both internal and external, seeing them as inseparable as we are transforming/examining/challenging self and system, self and environment, self and other. Through teach-ins, collective study, and dialogue, we seek to make visible the substrata of the city and its systems, while illuminating the resilience and resistance we see in our communities and in ourselves. We view events in time on a continuum, more circular or spherical than linear, past as prologue. This is not a fatalistic view in the sense that we are hopeful our actions in the present can create a better future for all. As the built environment is reimagined, the cultural substratum erupts, creating moments to make room for re-formed histories and re-awakened selves.

To connect with the historical grace of our ancestors, we set out to do the following:

- ✿ Study the historical conditions, events, triumphs, and tragedies of resilient communities.
- ✿ Examine the ways in which our own systems of belief, attitudes, and behaviors have impacted (or have been impacted) by these issues.
- ✿ Explore ways to create empathy, self-transformation, and healing.
- ✿ Help the community develop creative ways to express/represent/make visible their realities and possibilities.
- ✿ Build networks to develop action steps that disrupt the status quo and help to support and sustain each other and our communities.

At times we are anguished through misunderstandings, missed dead-lines, and missed steps. At other times we are comforted and encouraged by heart-to-heart dialogues complete with laughter and tears.

One Reconstructions meeting was especially poignant, painful, and ultimately healing. At this meeting, everyone arrived hurt, mad, and confused about several police shootings that occurred that week. We came together to vent, to cry, to find a reason not to give up, to hug. We all left that meeting in a better place, grounded in one another and our work.

Together, we envisioned ways to build bridges (for knowledge, people, and support) to this “light” in Tioga that is Reconstruction Incorporated and the work of the Alumni Ex-Offenders Association.

In this work, it is not lost on us that the word Tioga, borrowed from Native American peoples, is a name that means “entering place,” a “place between two forks,” or “at the forks.” In the words of William Goldsby, founder and director of Reconstruction Inc., “We are all, each one of us, three-dimensional contradictions of past and future and we must learn to harness, share, and amplify the resources that are in this tension of opposites.”

Freedom in a Carceral State

The following text is adapted from two separate conversations between collaborators Denise Valentine and William Goldsby, one with interviewer Elisabeth Perez-Luna and the other with Reconstruction Inc. member Hakim Ali.



Photos: Timothy Tiebout, Philadelphia Museum of Art



Photo: Timothy Tiebout, Philadelphia Museum of Art

Denise Valentine is a storyteller of forgotten and neglected African and African American histories. Working closely with Reconstruction Inc., she has helped formerly incarcerated men build storytelling skills grounded in concepts from African and African American storytelling traditions in order to provide a cultural context for navigating new or difficult knowledge in the midst of reentry. Valentine's storytelling performances illustrate the power of story to transcend differences between people, transform negativity, and inspire hope. She is a proud member of Keepers of the Culture, Inc. and the National Association of Black Storytellers, Inc. She is also a historical performer and has portrayed Sojourner Truth and Phillis Wheatley. She is a lifelong resident of Philadelphia and a longtime activist for peace and social justice. In 2013, she founded the Philadelphia Middle Passage Ceremony and Port Marker Project and Ancestral Remembrance Day to raise awareness of Pennsylvania's role in the slave trade and to advocate for a historical marker at Penn's Landing in honor of the African ancestors who disembarked there.

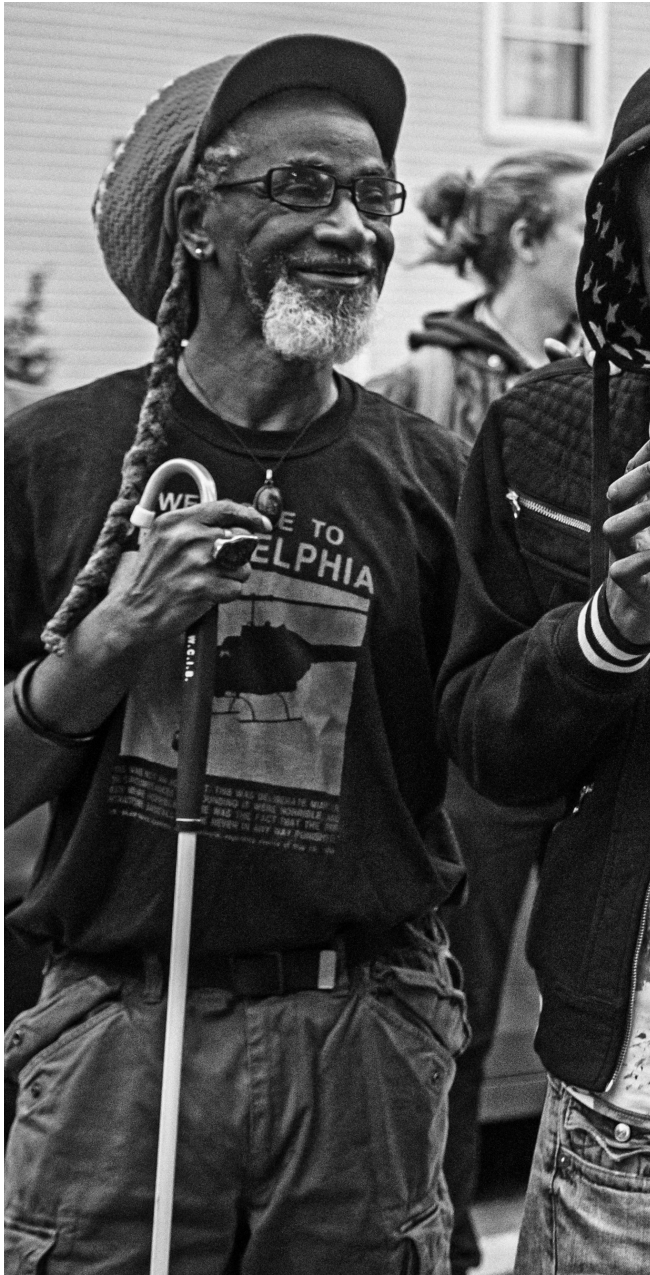


Photo: Timothy Tiebout, Philadelphia Museum of Art

William Goldsby was born and raised in Selma, Alabama. He is the founder and current chair of Reconstruction Inc., a 27-year-old community capacity-building grassroots organization. He is a survivor of the Jim Crow era and incarceration resulting from two violent offenses, one while in the military. Goldsby graduated from Western Washington University with a BA in education and served in the Peace Corps in Central America. In the 1990s, he traveled to South Africa to interview members of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee. He was the architect of the History and Reconstruction Project, funded by Pew Charitable Trust, exploring post-traumatic slave syndrome as a reality that influences the behavior of all, and more specifically African Americans. In 2012, he co-authored the book *Reconstructing Rage: Transformative Reentry in the Era of Mass Incarceration* with Professor Townsend Price-Spratlen.

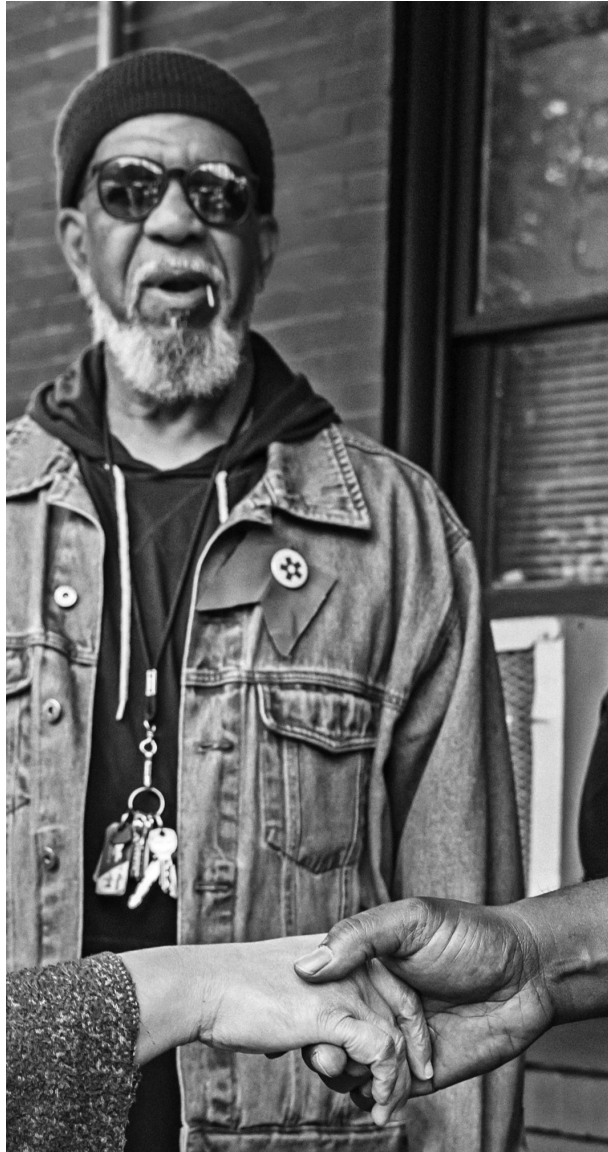


Photo: Timothy Tiebout, Philadelphia Museum of Art

Hakim Ali is the PR and Outreach Coordinator as well as Board Secretary for Reconstruction Inc. Having served nearly forty years in Federal and State institutions, he is a returning citizen currently involved with several community organizations that address prison-related issues including The Coalition to Abolish Death by Incarceration (C.A.D.B.I.) and Theater of Witness, where he has performed in two productions. Hakim has a BS in Mental Health and Child Care from Morgan State University. He is also a practicing Muslim and has held the position of Imam in both Federal and State institutions.



Photo: Edelman Fossil Park of Rowan University

Elizabeth Perez-Luna is WHYY's Executive Producer of Audio Content. From a journalistic background (her mother was a writer in Paris), Perez-Luna first came to the United States to attend Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, where she graduated in 1973. Perez-Luna has developed, produced and edited the weekly news magazine programs Crossroads and Artbeat, which aired on almost 200 other public radio stations, including WHYY. Perez-Luna has produced award-winning series from her own state-of-the-art studio in West Chester, PA. She is the recipient of three Corporation for Public Broadcasting awards, the Columbia University Major Armstrong award and one from the Philadelphia Society for Professional Journalists, and others.

Elizabeth Perez-Luna (EP): What does freedom mean to you?

Denise Valentine (DV): Freedom to me is the ability to tell our own story, as an individual and as a community. There is an African proverb that says, "As long as the hunter tells the story, he will always win." For so long we have accepted someone else's version of our stories and what they chose to omit, what they chose to distort. My life's work has been an effort to not only reclaim those stories, but also rewrite them, and to empower other people with the skills and the techniques to hold the stories of the community. I like to create "story-holders"—sharing what I have learned and helping other people become the holders and the tellers of those stories as well.

William Goldsby (WG): Freedom to me is the ability to think without restriction, refinement, or hesitation and channel our thinking in a way that releases how we have been colonized by those who have controlled the narrative. We are conditioned by the colonization of Africa (twice); we are conditioned by the names of the calendar year; freedom means being able to rise above that condition and began to redefine and rethink who we are as humans, and not perpetuate the narrative that has been more oppressive than liberated. That's the broader sense of freedom in my thinking.

I am blessed in a way that, for me, suffering has equipped me with the ability to be free. I found myself able to be free, and to be a human of the globe rather than buckled down by any belief system. Losing my vision was a blessing. Coming up the way I came up was a blessing. When you look at it from afar you might tend to say, "Oh, you poor thing," but I didn't feel that coming up. When my mom was killed she left six children. We were plucked out of the litter by certain people, but for the most part, we were ostracized from the biological family. My grandma made a pact with her daughters, my aunts, and her sons (my uncles), in her words: "You will not have anything to do with those bastards."

Not being able to be part of, or embraced by, my biological family has afforded me the ability to be the spook beside the door in a lot of situations. In terms of education, not being able to go to school when I was six, not being conditioned by the public education system, has also been, quite obviously, a blessing to me, not having bought into mental colonization. Freedom also comes with an incredible amount of responsibility.

Hakim Ali (HA): That sounds like self-directed healing, what you just described about suffering, how you looked at it, and why you won't be trapped into a single way of looking at things. You defined how you responded to that and what good it did for you. You can say how you lived through that and what you accomplished as a result of that. It's a healing mechanism that you have employed and you're using it now. It opened up some doors for you that probably another dynamic wouldn't have. Do you agree with that?

WG: I agree with you, Hakim, and it's also the premise of Reconstruction Inc. in terms of serving people and not putting people out. We've been so conditioned that this behavior will put you out, or that certain behaviors are unacceptable, or this sexual preference is not included, or this race should be not acceptable. We create a process by which we help people access their own brilliance and their own internal freedom in order to self-heal.

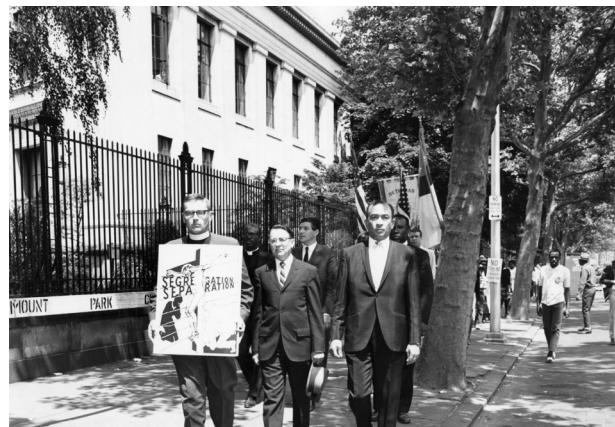


Photo: John W. Mosley Photograph Collection, Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection, Temple University Libraries.

Civil rights leaders lead a picket at Girard College in protest of the school's segregationist admissions policy.

DV: I heard so much in there. I heard self-determination; I heard historical memory. I really believe that this space, this physical plane that we reside on called Philadelphia has its own mythology to the world. It symbolizes a place of independence, liberty, and freedom. It is the personification of those ideas. But I also feel outside of that. I didn't experience what you did as far as a family, but I did have that same feeling of not belonging. I knew that I belonged, but I didn't feel as though my city embraced me and other people of color—our history, our stories—as though we belonged. I realized that when I was going to high school in Philadelphia shortly after desegregation.

I was one of very few African Americans in my high school. I was told, essentially, that my people did not have any history, or at least not any more than could be talked about in a couple of days in February. And I knew that could not be true. I set out on a journey to educate myself and learn the true story of African Americans, the founding of this nation, and the making of this city and nation into what they are today. I realized we have a long and strong and proud history here and I wanted people to know that.

HA: What you're sharing in terms of your history in school, what they tried to impart in your brain about our history not existing, and eventually you getting where you are now, is that a part of what freedom means to you, to be able to do that?

DV: Yes. That is self-determination. That is telling my own story, becoming a story holder, and helping other people to do that.

EP: What historical events—national, international, or personal—have impacted your life and the trajectory of your work?

DV: This is a question that I also asked members of the Alumni Ex-Offenders Association (AEA) during a project that William and I worked on previously called History and Reconstruction. History and Reconstruction was a way to get people to tie in their own personal narratives with the larger historical timeline,

to choose significant events—in this case around criminalization of people of color, slavery, emancipation, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, all the way up to Black Lives Matter—and place ourselves on that timeline. I did my own timeline where I plotted historical events that were significant or had a significant impact on my life, the work I do today, and the person I became. I was born in 1959, but for these purposes I started my timeline at 1954 with Brown v. Board of Education and desegregation. The lynching of Emmett Till had a very profound impact on my life from the time I was very young.

WG: In terms of your work with mass incarceration and those two events, how did they affect your life?

DV: The Emmett Till lynching was an image that was burned into my psyche. I remember seeing that image in Jet magazine. I remember the women in my family, especially the women, just crying about this. I remember that outrage. That's something that I can't really explain. It's my earliest memory.

WG: Did you tie that into police brutality or prison? Did you have a connection on that level or was it just the emotions that you got from your family?



A huge crowd marches at City Hall following the siege on MOVE in 1978.

Photo: Courtesy of Temple University Archives.

DV: At a young age I don't think I ever really separated police, from being a Black person, to lynching. All of that to me was part of the Black experience, or at least my Black experience. Brown vs. Board of Education affected me because of public school desegregation. I was at first bussed out to all-white schools, and then my family actually moved from North Philly and Germantown out to Northeast Philly, where I lived in an all-white neighborhood. I had to demand to be taught something about my history.

Other events stay with me, like the Little Rock Nine, the church bombing in Alabama in 1963, the Columbia Avenue Riot right here in Philadelphia in 1964—I don't have a memory of this, but my mother has always told me this story of me being crouched down in the back seat of our car, while my father was caught out there in the riot. The Osage Avenue bombing of 1985, that incident caused me to become what would be considered "militant." I believed African peoples in America had a right to resist and that we have a right to defend ourselves. I think that it was responsible for me dedicating my life to first being an activist and then a storyteller. Mumia Abu-Jamal, too—all of that was very significant to me. In 1989 I began anti-apartheid activism and I met Nelson Mandela in 1993 when he came to Philadelphia to receive the Liberty Medal. I ended up visiting South Africa as a storytelling ambassador in 2004 with a program called People to People Ambassadors. I went with the National Storytelling Network to study folklore traditions and the impact of politics on folktale traditions. So it was almost like I came full circle with that experience—starting out as an activist inspired by Nelson Mandela, finally getting to meet him when he came here in Philadelphia, and then being able to travel to South Africa after I pledged to be a storyteller for peace and justice. So that is my personal timeline. Those are the incidents that come to the very top of my mind when I think about how my society feels about me, and that let me know without a doubt that Black lives do not matter in this country. I love this country, I love the place of my birth, but it does not love me back.

What those incidents let me know was that I had to fight for myself and for other people that I felt were oppressed.

The more I learned, the angrier I got, but the angrier I got, the more it tore me apart. I encountered two things that help me deal with this in a way that also healed my spirit. When I started to practice Buddhism and when I encountered storytelling, those two things helped me. I stayed in the fight, but I was coming from a place of love instead of anger. Now I do this because I love people, I love all people, and especially my people. Especially people who are oppressed. But now I do it in a way that I can remain whole, and I can remain loving.

WG: History and Reconstruction also relate to the foundation of the Reconstruction Inc. curriculum. Our pedagogy is to look at history, to look at the situation we are in now, and figure out how we move forward. We want to be able to educate the community on the Carceral State. We tend to separate ourselves from those men and women who are in jail. They are incarcerated, but we live in a Carceral State.

The media, the pharmaceutical companies, Wall Street—all of these things keep us away from political and economic and educational power. We have a caste system and it's almost impossible to penetrate the caste. But we have the potential to put a crack in it. We don't have to continue to buy into that historical narrative that we own everything. We don't have to go through any mediator to God to get to that access. That's a historical perspective that puts us into mass incarceration.

So few people understand how humanity existed hundreds and thousands of years before the last 3,000. Within the last 2,500 to 3,000 years, especially with the organizing of the Christian religion, we are (for the most part) reliving their narrative. We are perpetuating the trauma that the Spanish Inquisition bestowed upon humanity. Christians terrorized the world for 500 years under the cloak of monks.

Throughout history, people who are non-white have been demonized through the process of white supremacy. Slavery has always existed but not on the level that it existed in this country: Africa was colonized

twice by Europe and colonized right after that, then you got the mid-Atlantic slave trade. In all that, the world has been colonized by white supremacy.



Photo: MOVE Family today, ONAMOVE Conference 2017

DV: So much of our history has been covering up the truth or denying the truth or twisting the truth. Part of taking responsibility, for me at least, is allowing yourself to see what the situation is. And claiming the right to speak the truth.

That's why a deep historical knowledge is important. We know that it was papal edicts that gave these nations so-called permission to go into other nations and raid and pillage. It also helps me see that the same rhetoric is being used today to dehumanize and criminalize certain elements of the population. The very same justifications are being used now that were being used during the Nixon and Reagan administrations, just as far back as the Black codes that were enacted after slavery. The same justifications are being used today. All I see is a continuum.

What I'd like to do now is tie this into some of the research or some of the things I learned on this journey.

This book is my most recent find. It is called *The Life and Adventures of a Haunted Convict*. I bought it just based on the cover. When I got home and read the paragraph on the back—

get this—"the first known prison memoir by an African American author and a gripping first-person account of an antebellum northern life lived outside slavery, that nonetheless bore in its day-to-day details un settling resemblances to that very institution." This is the perfect example of the things I find that illustrate the continuity of this situation we're facing.

EP: William, can you give us some dates and times in your life when significant things took place impacting where you are today?

WG: I don't know where we get this word 'baby boomer.' I guess it's people coming home from the Second World War. Although my dad didn't go, I came out of that. I was born in 1949 and I believe that we responded to everything prior to then—physically, spiritually, and emotionally. [When the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed], I remember walking in the neighborhood and people were crying and laughing. I don't know how that impacted me other than the fact that when I was voting age, I voted. I remember when Wallace was elected in Alabama and that he was a Klansmen, and how that affected me.

I've always been a dancer and as I came of age I would go to the juke joint to dance. All of us used to dance on Friday for money and go down and dance. We would look for one house that was playing whatever we wanted to dance to, but we knew we had to get home by a certain time because on Friday night, Saturday night, and Sunday night, the Klan was going to start their horns. There was never a connection between the Klansmen and the prison, no more than there was a connection to the Klansmen and us getting killed. We knew one of us is gonna get it. So that was an ongoing event, that Saturday morning or Sunday morning, when we heard the boat in the Alabama River out there looking for a body. They take the boat and they're circling and circling and then the body pops up. Being on the outside looking in, there was times that I knew the Klan was turning the block, and I—the last one not too far from the house—would dive into a blackberry bush just to hide until they passed by. When you look at mass incarceration, it's another way of colonizing us from looking at white supremacy and how it has terrorized not just Blacks but itself.

With the bombing of the four young girls in Birmingham, again, it was the same. It was coming from adults talking in the midst of a juke joint. I think I know that I'm on the outside of most things, sometimes internalizing things, and sometimes stuff doesn't stick. Those dates are there and I was somewhere in that, but I don't think I got a sense of who I was until later. Of course, going into the military in 1967, and prior to that, getting into fights—both of my cases were fighting police officers, but these fights were not in any kind of reaction to what I had heard. I was coming home from a nightclub and running through a white woman's yard and next thing I know I'm surrounded by five men with guns. And I fought and got arrested. The next time, I was trying to be a white-man-obeying Negro to make the military my career, and my security clearance got sabotaged so I ended up fighting four officers and going to jail. I got bopped around by all of these events and found myself still not being politically conscious. I think the jail time and the military gave me an indication of what Dr. King was talking about, and what Malcolm was talking about, in terms of my skin color. It still didn't hit me that I was different. It was like, society's gonna make me feel different. I'm not going to get away from that.

The picture of Emmett Till, it just scared me. I think what hit me most profoundly was the MOVE bombing. That picture haunted me. It haunts me today. I was in Seattle taking a break from the Peace Corps in Guatemala. In the midst of knowing I was coming back to the United States, I was leaving the best job I ever loved, the toughest job I ever loved. I was intrigued with Philadelphia because of the MOVE bombing, so I came here. There was a memorial for the MOVE bombing, for which I challenged some organizations to meet me halfway to design what is now called Reconstruction Inc. During that time I was involved in the New African Voices Alliance and we did political study for 10 years, reading Mao's *On Practice and Contradiction*. That was the first time I was able to put some political analysis to myself as a person, to Black people as a group, and to humanity. That was an event for me. The political learning came out of that and the rage that MOVE was addressing regarding the system. On top of that, I had two violent offenses against me.

I challenge the AFSC [American Friends Services Committee] to deal with the rage of Black men. Our rage is an asset, it's not something to run from, it's something to behold. In doing the political study, my whole spirit got forwarded towards this idea—do not run from it. Do not run from that rage. As a result of that, Reconstruction [Inc.]'s whole philosophy is around dealing with what you would normally run away from. Let's get right to the center of it.

The next thing, in terms of events, was the book, *Reconstructing Rage*. I had known Townsend for many years. He had asked me to publish a book in the mid-1990s and I declined. Once he became sober in 2010–11 and asked me again, I decided to publish it. *Reconstructing Rage* is definitely a historical account. When you read the book, it's pretty heavy and dense. That book documents something that I'm not going to take responsibility for, but it documents this age of mass incarceration and plans to address this oppression.

EP: Is there a next step to the timeline?

DV: The other timeline that I wanted to firmly establish is this timeline of when Africans in this country, or other people of color, were dehumanized and criminalized and that certainly continues today. There is an article that William referred to us called "Why Reconstruction Matters" from the *New York Times*, from March 28, 2015.

It explains that issues that agitate American politics today—access to citizenship and voting, the relative powers of national and state governments, the relationship between political and economic democracy, and the proper response to terrorism—all of these are related to the historical Reconstruction and they are all things that are misunderstood today. We are grounding ourselves in the historical legacy of this time period or this historical movement called Reconstruction and the verbal implications of misunderstanding historical reconstructions of what's happening today.

HA: Since this is something happening here in Philadelphia, this base for so-called freedom and independence, this is in direct contradiction with these issues.

DV: Yes. There's a book called *Slavery in Philadelphia: A History of Resistance, Denial and Wealth*. by my friend and historian Phillip Seitz. That was very significant to me because he helped me on my research journey, pointing me to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. I sat with him during this research and I had in my hand a letter that was written by Benjamin Chew's overseer. Chew was the chief justice of provincial Pennsylvania during the time of the American Revolution. It was discovered that the Chew family owned 400 Africans over seven generations on nine different plantations in Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia. Chew had his estate in Germantown, which is now lauded as the site of the Battle of Germantown. Visitors come to Philadelphia from all over to visit this historic site, but never talk about the fact that the Chews were a major slave owning family. But these documents were discovered in the basement of this building and donated to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. And this letter that I held in my hand from Chew's overseer—it was the original document.

He was asking Chew to send someone to Delaware to "handle the Negroes because they had just beat [me] within an inch of [my] life." He had to hide out for a week before he felt safe enough to come out and write this letter. Well, it took Chew six months to send someone to give the Negroes a whooping, but it was not the only incident. What it showed me is that we did resist and rebel at every turn.

WG: Would you put some words to your understanding of class and race being a social construct?



Martin Luther King and Cecil B. Moore address demonstrators at Girard College in 1965.

Photo: John W. Mosley Photograph Collection,
Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection,
Temple University Libraries.

DV: What I would like to say is that it is a social construct, but the reason behind that social construct is economic. It doesn't matter if you like me. How you feel about me or how you feel about my color, my sex, my class, my race can influence the decisions over my life, that is a very different thing from whether you like me or not. I think race is a smoke-screen. For one thing it keeps the classes of people apart. If they are made to feel a certain way about each other they're not going to unite. I should be able to have pride about my ethnicity, while at the same time acknowledging my connection, my sameness, with every other human being on the planet. It doesn't mean that I have to look the same or be the same.

The two colonizations of Africa were a class movement. It was the British that saw Blacks as nonhuman. It was an economic raid on the continent for the sake of making money. Their reason for going other places was to get gold. That was the same with the colonization of most things—gaining material wealth. The fact that you look different became a secondary thing. In this country I think history shows, and this is my subjective analysis, that Dr. King and Malcolm were killed primarily because they saw the movement not only of race, but also of class. Dr. King, when he

went into that school in Kentucky or Tennessee, and he saw poor whites and poor blacks—that's when he shifted and saw it as a class movement. The thing that the system did not want those two men to bring to their movement was the same thing that they saw in Tupac and Biggie. Could you imagine what they could have done with Black men if they had not been killed off? Tupac was already politicized. Biggie was, to a certain degree, [also politicized] but not anywhere near [Tupac] I think it is deliberate that we tend not to see class first, but instead to see race as a divisive way. As W.E.B. Du Bois pointed out in the checkerboard effect of the United States, they keep us colonized and separated because it benefits them on the class level. Even today we tend to use race as a way to keep us divided. We don't see the connection between race and class. They use that as a way of building the prison. Nixon portrayed young Black men selling drugs every evening during his election—that got the white voters to vote for him, to shift from being Democrat to a Republican. He used, in terms of class, poor white folks. In terms of race, he used Black men and that's what he declared with the "War on Drugs." That's why today we've got more than 2.9 million people incarcerated...because of that manipulation.

WG: If we were to put this discussion in the framework of the Reconstruction curriculum and look at mass incarceration, we recognize that we have been looked at as less than human, criminalized and even called predators. We recognize that from history, we recognize that from the slavery period. We recognize that in terms of slavery by another name, convict leasing and Jim Crow. I think in the situation right now, we are forced because of the political atmosphere to have some intense conversations. Some of us have been doing it anyway and some of us are doing it anew, now. The Reconstruction curriculum was designed to deal with the rage of Black men, but nowhere in the curriculum do you see the word rage. That's the situation we're in now, because we're using the words left and right, black and white. In moving toward the future, how do we teach people about the past, recognize now, and create a language that does not perpetuate the kind of issues we're trying to resolve? How do we create a new language? Because I feel like we keep using words that perpetuate the past.

If we are the ones who have had the luxury to recognize our spirituality and understanding of who we are as humans, we have to rumble with how much of this we perpetuate. In terms of trajectory, we now have a program that has been at SCI Muncy looking at gender in terms of Reconstruction. We, as men, want to fancy ourselves as being inclusive, but how can we be inclusive? We cannot design things for women; it's a contradiction within its own.

Reconstruction Inc. got a little grant and decided to bite the bullet, regardless of the space and time required to get to Muncy. In order for women there—lifers and long-timers—to learn the capacity-building curriculum and teach it to the women who are returning home, we have to be intentional and deliberate in whatever we do, and we have to recognize our personal responsibility to make sure stuff is not perpetuated.

We've been conditioned to indict on every plane. I need to recognize when I'm indicting, and how that indictment is, in essence, what we're fighting against. Search and frisk is indictment on a brother, his color, his age. He goes to jail because of one little bit of marijuana. If we see white teachers, do we indict them because they have bought into the same matrix? What is our responsibility? All of that comes as a result of this country and its contradictions.

DV: I have so many mixed feelings about that. I really do agree with you about indicting each other, but I struggle with it. I believe you have to be able to recognize, even if it's not an intentional threat to your well being, yourself, and your community, you have to be able to see it and name it in order to protect yourself or create a different reality.

WG: But on a political, systemic level, you have institutions, and I'm talking about groups that call themselves progressive institutions—the Quakers, the Mennonites, the Unitarian Church—who will not take a position. They won't make a decision to abolish life sentences. The people who keep that law in place, they're not family members of murder victims. These are people who have inherited this psychology and look at this as a black and white thing.

The Quakers are saying “No” to abolishing life without parole because they want to have an alternative to capital punishment. The state of New Jersey is the same. When you have an institution like Society of Friends taking a position against capital punishment or life without parole, the Constitution is going to change, and they know that. On systemic and personal levels, you have people indicting. What we feel personally is reflected in our policy-making.

With the sentencing guidelines that came out in the 1960s, throughout the country, there were no Black men and very few women that got sentencing throughout the state. From 1994 to 1997, that’s when they decided that a child would be adjudicated to the adult system without due process. A child. That means that if this child was hungry, and they were standing as a lookout person because they needed to bring food, or this child was mentally challenged, the judge could not consider those mitigating circumstances because the sentencing guidelines said that someone in the commission of this crime lost that life. This child, be him 9-years-old or older, would go to the adult system. That decision was made by white men based on their personal feelings. The same with “three strikes, you’re out.” We are a society of indicters, and don’t recognize how that reflects on everything that we do.

DV: How do you state the truth of the matter as you perceive it without indicting another individual?

WG: We have four skill sets that I’m still learning how to use. The first one is being emotionally intelligent. As we all know, we play on each other’s emotions. The media plays on our emotions. The politician plays on our emotions. The second is being an active listener. That means listening to the point of agony because often times we might hear stuff we really want to say, and it hurts to listen. But active listening is a skill set where you let the words in. Let the words reach your soul and resonate. The third is relinquishing one’s position. The fourth is accessing the necessary resources that you have at your disposal to manage a situation.

DV: Do you relinquish your position even if objectively it’s true, but the truth is not serving you?

WG: Relinquishing your position is actually letting go and understanding what another person is saying. If you were to listen to some of the white women that you and I both have an issue with, we might find some grounds of unity. But because of our position, we won’t know that.

We can speak about where we’ve been, the suffering, the pain, the incarceration, and we can speak about where we are now and what we want. We asked the questions: Where do we go? How do you show the transformation? How do you show the blooming of this? I’m finding this to be the case in a lot of conversations, and I think it gets to how limited we are with our collective and individual definitions of freedom. If we don’t think about the future, but are only talking about the oppression, then we’re repeating it.

DV: I think that freedom is a birthright. We are born free. I guess this is what freedom is not, but there are forces that can impinge on your birthright, the right that you were born with. But just like you were saying earlier, no one can truly take that away from you. Even if they incarcerate you, even if they take away your right or your ability to work for yourself or provide for yourself, true freedom is a state of mind.

WG: I would echo exactly that. It’s a state of mind. It reminds me of when I was in the hole like seven times when I was in prison. There were a couple times that I would just refuse to surrender and they beat me blue. When you’re in the hole and you got this limited movement space, you have to find some way to escape. What I do today and what I did—and I got this practice from that—you see this little formation of holes in the cement like you do with clouds. In your mind you make whatever that cloud looks like. It may look like an angel, may look like a dog. Being in the hole I did the same thing. Freedom to me is being to be able to transcend whenever and however, mentally and spiritually, you choose. Freedom means acknowledging the humanity of others with their freedom, or lack thereof. Freedom is not just about my mindset or your mindset but the connection with other humanity.

DV: We can never take for granted that freedom is a static state. Our people have to have the skills, the tools, and the knowledge to be able to depend on ourselves and build our own future. One of the things I love about *Philadelphia Assembled* is that we're helping people to imagine that they are the co-creators of this community. Whenever I see the community coming together to do things like clean their own block, it is taking responsibility for our own stuff but it's also setting a precedent, it's showing the younger generation that this is what we do to keep our community clean. North Philly is home to me. It just breaks my heart to see what we've allowed to happen to this community. Certain factors will almost ensure a community will deteriorate so it can be redeveloped into places we can no longer afford to live in, but we can refuse to participate in that. We don't have to let that happen to our communities. This memorial that we're building together is allowing the community to talk about and express the trauma of mass incarceration, and how our communities are affected by it, but also to make declarations about how we are going to fight this, how we're going to resist this, and how we're going to build the resources in our own community from post-trauma, or stress, to post-traumatic growth.

WG: Well, you know, conditioning goes deep. We're conditioned by external forces and internal forces. And that kind of conditioning, we can undo that. We can undo that by beginning to recognize the strength in each other, and to begin to help each other amplify that strength and begin to grow. It's ongoing work. It really is. We have to figure it out in our own spirit and amongst each other. We have to be a part of something. We can't do things by ourselves. And we have to be spiritually and physically healthy to do that. We are each other's healers.



Photos: Timothy Tiebout, Philadelphia Museum of Art



"Lighting of the Bridges" procession, May 2017.



On Freedom: Individual Statements

Kwame Ajamu

"Freedom as we know it – the unrestricted movement of body, mind and soul – is something that I've wrestled with for the last forty years. Not so much because of my incarceration, or the fact that I was wrongfully incarcerated, or the fact that I was incarcerated as a young man-child of seventeen and put on death row, or the fact that I had successfully been exonerated from that situation and made it out into society. The fact is that freedom, and especially with regards to myself, comes at an unexpendable price. I don't deem freedom as being something that is of pleasure and of measure. Yet it is the one thing that cultivates all of us as human beings in this life-- the ability to move about. Not with carefree whims, but the ability to move about. So freedom in the sense of having been exonerated comes at a price. As a black man, as a man of African descent, as a young child who was dark-skinned and kidnapped and put into prison, freedom means so much to me. Everything that I have ever lived for and everything I've ever lost has been taken from me, has been destroyed. I have no freedoms in that sense. So freedom is a great word that has a multitude of mobilities behind that word in its meanings. But my freedom comes every five minutes that I'm alive."

—Kwame Ajamu

Kwame Ajamu is a board member of Witness to Innocence, an organization created by and for exonerees to fight to end the death penalty and educate the public about wrongful convictions. He was exonerated in 2014 after spending 27 years on death row.

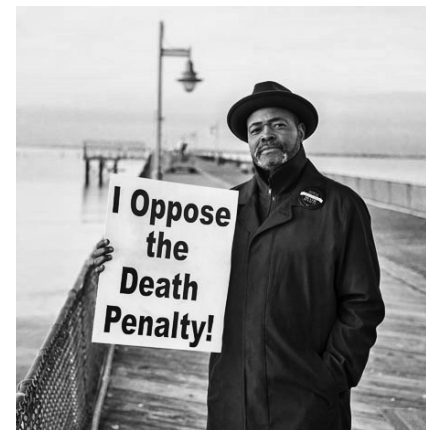


Photo: Scott Langley / deathpenaltyphoto.org

Joshua Glenn

"I truly think that we can't be free until we rise up against oppression and racism and win equality. So I found freedom within my own mind and it helps me to be a stronger activist. Mass incarceration has given my life purpose. Mass incarceration gives my life purpose because it employs me as a mentor and activist in my community. Learning about our racist, fascist system helped me become a better person because of the injustice that the system put me through. It outrages me to see that our elected officials see the impact it has on our community and they still aren't doing anything to end mass incarceration."

—Josh Glenn

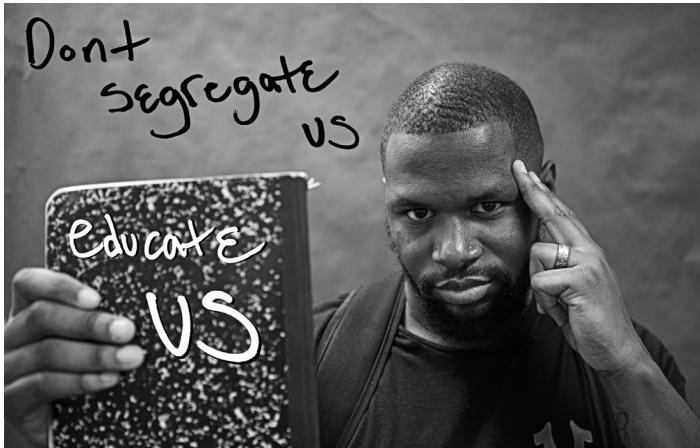


Photo: Reentry Think Tank

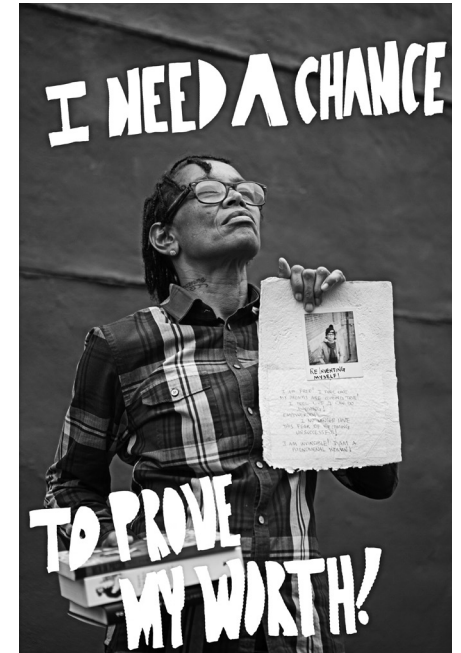
Joshua Glenn is a poet, mentor, and co-founder of the Youth Art & Self-Empowerment Project (YASP). Josh started working with YASP in 2005, when at the age of 16, he was locked up and charged as an adult. Josh was released from the county jail in 2007 and became a YASP youth organizer. Josh has led dozens of

workshops in Philadelphia public schools about youth adjudication and the school-to-prison pipeline. He is deeply involved in YASP's work with the #No215Jail Coalition to end cash bail in Philadelphia. Josh has been a fellow of the Philadelphia Reentry Think Tank since the fall of 2016.

Faith Bartley

"Women are the queen bees...They support so many people in our community. When you lock anyone up it affects so many others, this is especially true with women. As women come home, their ability to support those around them is hampered by their record. Having a record is like a prison without walls. Even when you're free, your record locks you out from so much."

—Faith Bartley



Faith Bartley is the lead fellow of the People's Paper Co-op, a women-led, women-focused art and advocacy project at the Village of Arts and Humanities. The PPC works with women in reentry to co-run a creative business (helping develop job readiness skills), and create public advocacy projects to support people in reentry, including a resource guide for women in Philly's halfway houses, treatment centers, and prisons.

Photo: People's Paper Co-op

Lois

"I was only six or eight weeks pregnant when he got locked up. It's really embarrassing. A lot of people try to tell me you shouldn't be embarrassed because you didn't commit the crime. I was like, I have to do this sentence along with him. He's not there by himself. I have to put the money on my phone, I gotta pay for the visits, I gotta send the pictures. I've spent about \$5 to \$10 a week on pictures alone since she was born so he won't miss anything. It's depressing knowing he's got to sit in there. But at the same time, at least I know he's alive."

—Lois

Lois is a single working mom and a part of the Women on the Outside project. She and her baby Jade go upstate once a month to visit Jade's father in prison. Women on the Outside is an ongoing project about the impact of mass incarceration on women who financially and emotionally support loved ones behind bars. It is produced by Zara Katz and Lisa Riordan Seville, the creators of the @everydayIncarceration Instagram feed, in collaboration with both professional photographers and families.



Photo: Zora Murff for the Women on the Outside Project

Dawud Lee

"I unfortunately have spent the last 27 years in prison for a crime I did not commit. Over 25 of those years have been dedicated to educating myself and others, to utilizing my education in an effort to fight for my release from captivity, and toward creating a truly liberated social arrangement here in the United States. The fight for freedom, collective empowerment, and justice are what keeps me going in my darkest hours. I grew up in an impoverished North Philadelphia community, and spent much of my time on the outside running the streets without any purpose or direction. It was not until after my capture that I began to study the political arrangement of this empire and started connecting the exploitative and political dots. My political, historical, and other related studies have taught me many important lessons about my former underdevelopment and the general underdevelopment of the masses in this social arrangement."

—Dawud Lee

David "Dawud" Lee is an incarcerated writer and human rights advocate, who is serving a death by incarceration (or life without parole) sentence in Pennsylvania.

Dawud is a member of LifeLines: Voices Against the Other Death Penalty, a media and cultural project intended to transform the nature of public discussions and understanding of death by incarceration (DBI). Pennsylvania prisons currently hold over 5,000 people with DBI sentences. The LifeLines Project, whose members are located both inside and outside prison walls, was developed to support an emerging statewide campaign to end the practice of sentencing people to die in prison. This excerpt was taken from the LifeLines publication *Fighting for the Light of Day* (2016).

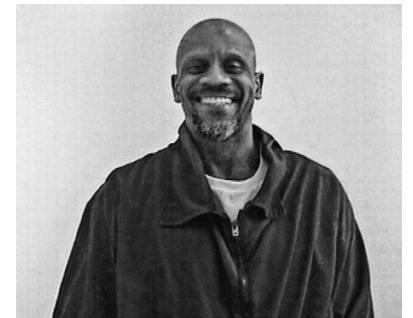


Photo: LifeLines Project

A Voice from the New Sanctuary Movement

"I am from Mexico and have been a member of New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia for one year now. I work with NSM because I feel protected and hopeful. Right now a lot of people feel oppressed and persecuted, and for me, NSM is a door for us to enter where we can talk, think, and express our feelings, our frustrations. I am involved with Sanctuary in the Streets Raid Response and with the local campaign to stop the towing of immigrant cars. It is so important to be fighting, to be organizing right now, because we can win. Our campaigns have gotten more visibility, which is important for people who have immigration cases and for others to see the type of cases we are working with. Organizing works—we have won campaigns and have stopped deportations. We need to remember that right now. With the Trump administration, Sanctuary in the Streets Raid Response is the fight, the struggle, and it's so important that we are fighting right now. We can't get stuck, and with NSM we are moving with more strength. We have to keep moving right now, and NSM gives us more power, more motivation, to continue forward together."

—Anonymous



New Sanctuary Movement works to end injustices against immigrants, regardless of immigration status, to express radical welcome for all, and

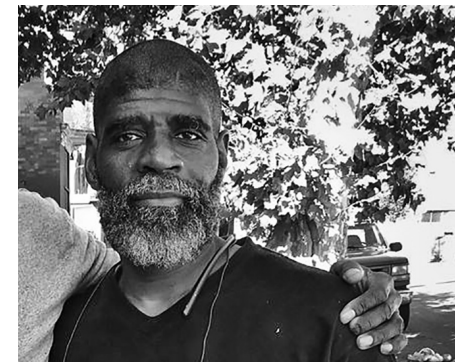
to ensure that values of dignity, justice, and hospitality are lived out in practice and upheld in policy.

Hakeem Fulton

"In life (no matter where) we have to work together if we are to accomplish great feats, or to learn on a scale that will be beneficial to civilization and human dignity. In the past . . . I held incorrect and negative ideas, thoughts, imagery, and emotions that justified in my mind why I should take money instead of working for it. I chose a life of crime (armed robbery) because I thought this was the best way to acquire money. Unbeknownst to myself at that time, that lifestyle was only a temporary solution to a long-term precarious predicament of incarceration. During the full 10 years that I was at Graterford [State Correctional Institution] I came to my senses and decided to make a radical change...I began my journey to transformation by first taking all of the classes that Graterford had to offer. Then I became a lover of books and interacted with those lifers that had already transformed themselves. By being in the company of these men I received an image of what all men should be: disciplined, studious, truthful, compassionate, cordial, and with a depth of love for all humanity and not just their respective clan."

—Hakeem Fulton

Hakeem Fulton is chair of the Alumni Ex-Offenders Association, a domain of Reconstruction Inc. that addresses former offenders as they come back into the community after being incarcerated. This program creates an atmosphere that is principled and encourages the members to lead productive lives.



Memorial to Loss: Freedom in a Carceral State

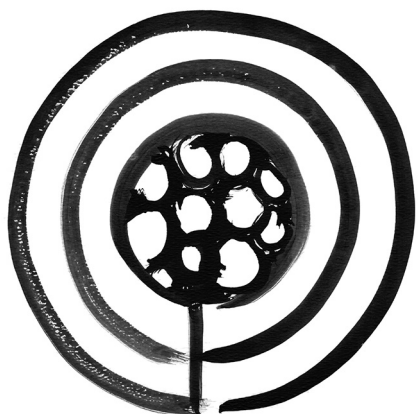


Illustration: Jared Wood

The Tioga-Nicotown neighborhood has experienced deep, extensive, and sustained loss as a result of mass incarceration. In the face of this challenge, community members have enacted countless acts of resilience and reciprocity. We dedicate the *Memorial to Loss: Freedom in a Carceral State* in honor of these experiences and actions.

Ultimately, the memorial is a garden in the form of a labyrinth, created from conversation and a community workshop that involved letter writing to family and

friends lost to incarceration and/or the “War on Drugs” as well as an expungement workshop with Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity. We take these symbols of incarceration and expunged records as symbols of resilience, transforming these letters into seeded paper that will be a catalyst for growing the memorial garden beyond our days. On the morning of July 8, 2017, the Reconstructions collaborators joined to dedicate and plant the garden, memorializing our loss and commitment to re-growth of the self and of the community.



Photo: Sheldon Abba

Dedication of the Memorial to Loss: Freedom in a Carceral State, July 2017.



Photos: Marcel van der Meijs

A Timeline of Reconstructions

1639–81

Dutch and Swedish settlers in the Delaware Valley hold enslaved Africans who work primarily in fur trapping. In 1664, Delaware settlers contract the West India Company “to transport hither a lot of Negroes for agricultural purposes.”

1682

William Penn writes his *Frame of Government for Pennsylvania*, calling for a prison in every county. Philadelphia’s first jail opens at Second and High (Market) Streets.

1684

The slave ship *Isabella* of Bristol brings 150 enslaved Africans to Philadelphia, making it the largest import to the city to date.

1687

Penn writes that he prefers Negroes to white indentured servants, “for then a man has them while they live.”



Overseer Badge, South Carolina, 1858.

Courtesy of Lest We Forget Slavery Museum

1704

Pattyrollers are established as the first slave patrol in South Carolina; they later become a state-sponsored police force.

1726

An Act for the Better Regulation of Negroes, passes in Pennsylvania, punishing Blacks more harshly than whites for the same crime.

1739

In South Carolina, a runaway group seizes a general store and massacres whites before being caught and executed. The event becomes known as the Stono Rebellion.

1780

The Pennsylvania Gradual Abolition Act is one of the first written protests against slavery, yet people remain enslaved in Pennsylvania until 1840.

1787

The Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons (later known as the Pennsylvania Prison Society) is founded to advocate for human and salutary treatment of prisoners.

1787

The US Constitution is written in Philadelphia, but not all Americans are granted the liberties it promises. Free Africans in Philadelphia form new institutions to support one another, such as the Free African Society, a benevolent society involving Richard Allen and Absalom Jones.

1793

The Fugitive Slave Act is signed by President George Washington while in office in Philadelphia. The law requires authorities in free states to recapture and return escaped Africans to their masters, increasing the prevalence of slave patrols.

1794

Allen and Jones distribute a pamphlet written by black community leaders in Philadelphia in response to the yellow fever outbreak of 1793.

1794

Oney Judge, one of nine Africans enslaved by George Washington, escapes to New Hampshire.

1800

Gabriel Prosser, an enslaved blacksmith, plans a large slave rebellion in Richmond, Virginia. The rebellion is anticipated by authorities before its execution, but Prosser and 25 others are hanged.

1826

Philadelphian Francis “Frank” Johnson publishes “Recognition March of the Independence of Hayti,” inspired by the self-governing country of Africans that gained independence from France in 1803.

1829

Eastern State Penitentiary becomes one of the first prisons to practice solitary confinement on a large scale. The practice is initially viewed as restorative but would later become punitive.

1831

The First Annual Convention of the People of Colour is held in Philadelphia.

1831

Nat Turner’s Rebellion in Virginia—the deadliest uprising of enslaved Africans in the Southern United States to date—is followed by a wave of fear and retribution.

1832

James Forten, William Whipper, and Robert Purvis present a petition to the Pennsylvania Senate and House of Representatives in response to a pending ban on Black emigration to the state.

1839

The Pennsylvania Abolition Hall is burned within four days of opening. City officials justify their failure to protect the hall from arson, claiming that the riot was provoked by the “promiscuous intermingling indoors and out of blacks and whites.”

1842

The Lombard Street Riot erupts after an angry mob of white people attack a parade celebrating Jamaican Emancipation Day.

1842

In *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*, the US Supreme Court overturns the conviction of formerly enslaved Edward Prigg and rules that states are not required to aid in the hunting or recapture of slaves, greatly weakening the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793. Meanwhile, several hundred slaves a year successfully escape to the North.

1855

Following in the footsteps of New York and other major cities, Philadelphia establishes a unified police force. This also marks a transition from the idea of a community volunteer "night watch", to police officers as full-time employees with fixed procedures.

1857

In *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, the US Supreme Court rules that "a Negro could not be an American citizen and therefore had no standing to sue in federal court."

1857

The largest sale of human beings in the history in the United States, known as the "Weeping Time", takes place at a racetrack in Savannah, Georgia.

1859

Abolitionist John Brown leads a raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry in Virginia, gathering arms for a slave rebellion.

1861-65

American Civil War.

1865

The 13th Amendment abolishes slavery except in the case of punishment for a crime.

1865

Octavius Catto protests the segregated trolley system by refusing to leave a trolley car.

1867

Pennsylvania prohibits segregation on state transit systems due to efforts led by Octavius Catto and Caroline LeCount.

1868

The 14th Amendment promises equal protection to all US citizens, forbidding states to restrict basic rights.

1870

15th Amendment grants male citizens of all races the right to vote.

1871

Octavius Catto is assassinated in South Philadelphia during an election riot.

1883

The US Supreme Court rules the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional, ultimately undermining the 14th amendment, authorizing discrimination in public spaces, and paving the way for Jim Crow laws and lynchings.

1896

Plessy v. Ferguson upholds state racial segregation laws for public facilities under the doctrine of "separate but equal."

1905

The Pennsylvania State Police is the first state police agency established in response to private police forces used by mine and mill owners to stop worker strikes.

1910-20

Philadelphia's Black population more than doubles over the course of the "Great Migration," reaching 134,000 by 1920.

1914

The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) is founded by Marcus Garvey.

1915-40

The Second Ku Klux Klan spreads across the US, inspired by D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, which romanticizes the Klan as "heroes, self-styled redeemers who restored white supremacy to the South."

1922

Marcus Garvey is targeted by the FBI for "mail fraud" and is later deported to Jamaica.

1928

Negro Achievement Week is held at the YWCA in Germantown. Alain Locke, James Weldon Johnson, and W.E.B. Du Bois attend.

1931

Nine Black youths are pulled off a train and arrested in Scottsboro, Alabama, where they are wrongly found guilty by an all-white jury of raping two white women. Eight are sentenced to death, but are ultimately exonerated through the work of Civil Rights activists.

1955

Fourteen-year-old Emmett Till is kidnapped and lynched in Mississippi. His death shocks the nation and helps push forward the Civil Rights Act of 1957, which allows the US Department of Justice to investigate in local matters.

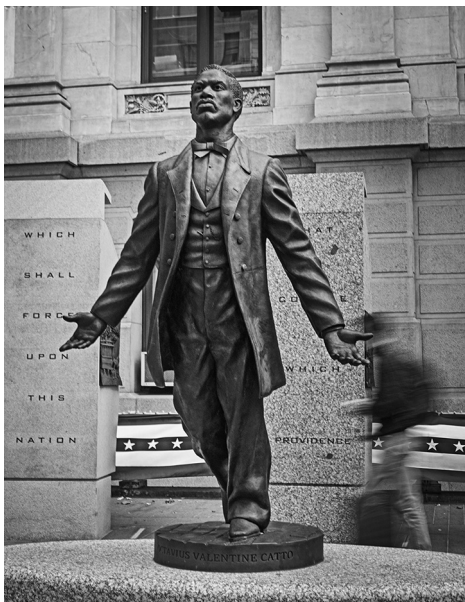


Photo: Dianne Loftis

Erected in 2017, The Octavius Catto statue at City Hall is Philadelphia's first statue honoring a Black individual.

1955-56

The Montgomery Bus Boycott, initiated by Rosa Parks, is a mass protest that endures for thirteen months, ending with the US Supreme Court ruling that segregation on public buses is unconstitutional.

1956

The COINTELPRO secret FBI program officially begins, disrupting labor, anti-war, Civil Rights, and Black power activist groups.

1962

Ardent segregationist George C. Wallace is elected governor of Alabama.

1963

Four Ku Klux Klan members explode dynamite beneath the front steps of 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, killing four young African American girls.

1963

Civil Rights leader Medgar Evers is killed at his home in Jackson, Mississippi.



Demonstrators protest conditions at Eastern State Penitentiary.

Photo: Courtesy of Temple University Archives

1964

The Columbia Avenue Riot occurs in response to police brutality in Philadelphia. Similar demonstrations happen across the US.

1964

The "Stop and Frisk" law is passed in New York, permitting police to search individuals on the grounds of suspicion.

1964

In his presidential nomination speech at the Republican National Convention, Barry Goldwater introduces "law and order" rhetoric that demands a strict criminal justice system.



Martin Luther King and Cecil B. Moore.

Photo: Courtesy of Temple University Archives

1965

Black liberation leader and revolutionary Malcolm X is killed by three gunmen while delivering a speech in New York.

1967

A group of armed Black Panthers, including Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, enter the California state Capitol to protest a gun control bill.

1968

The Law Enforcement Assistance Act directs unprecedented federal funds to local police departments as part of a "War on Crime," prompted, in part, by racial fears.

1968

Fred Hampton, a leader of the Black Panther Party in Chicago, is killed during a police raid while sleeping in his apartment.



Martin Luther King and Cecil B. Moore.

Photo: Courtesy of Temple University Archives

1968

Cecil B. Moore organizes seven months of street demonstrations and ultimately wins a legal battle to admit African American students to Girard College.

1968

Martin Luther King, Jr. is killed at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis.

1968

House of Umoja is established in West Philadelphia to help end gang violence and register gang members to vote.

1970

After a major riot at Holmesburg Prison, officials temporarily transfer about thirty-five inmates to Eastern State Penitentiary. Demonstrators protest conditions at Eastern State as a result; the facility closes permanently as a prison the following year.

1970

Philadelphia police raid the local Black Panther headquarters.

1970

The Black Panther Party holds the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia.

1971

The "War on Drugs" pushes through the Nixon to Reagan presidencies, skyrocketing state and federal prison populations.



Aerial view of the fire in Cobbs Creek after the Philadelphia Police Bombs MOVE Headquarters, killing 11 and destroying 65 homes.

Photo: Associated Press

1971

Frank Rizzo, the tough-on-crime police chief notorious for brutal raids, framings, and racial discrimination, is elected mayor.

1973

Activist Assata Shakur is involved in a shootout on the NJ Turnpike that results in the death of a New Jersey state trooper.

1978

Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing created to promote uniformity and equity in sentencing practices, leading to more severe sentences for serious crimes.

1978

During the eviction of the MOVE collective from their Powelton Village home, a police officer is shot and killed. Nine MOVE members are sentenced to prison.

1982

Journalist, activist, and MOVE member Mumia Abu-Jamal is sentenced to death for the 1981 murder of Philadelphia policeman Daniel Faulkner.

1984

The Corrections Corporation of America takes on its first facility, marking the beginning of the "prison industrial complex."

1985

Philadelphia police drop two bombs on the MOVE home on Osage Avenue in West Philadelphia.

1986

Anti-Drug Abuse Act institutes same minimum sentence for possession of five grams of crack cocaine (mostly used by blacks) or 500 grams of powder cocaine (used mainly by whites).

1987

The Black male prison majority marks a turning point in the demographic makeup of prison populations that leads to dramatic stigmatization.

1988

Vice-President George Bush runs the infamous "Willie Horton" campaign ad in which the Black rapist of a white woman is made to symbolize the US "crime problem."

1992

The Rodney King uprising erupts after four Los Angeles police officers are acquitted of crimes in King's videotaped arrest and beating.

1992

Reconstruction Inc. founded to bring together formerly incarcerated individuals to transform the criminal justice system, communities, and themselves.

1994

Nelson Mandela becomes president of South Africa after being incarcerated for 27 years for his work toward racial equality.

1994

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act channels \$8.8 billion to local law enforcement over six years, leading to the formation of the Office of Community-Oriented Policing Services (COPS), an increased crackdown on gang activity, and the Federal Assault Weapons Ban.

1994

The Gun Free Schools Act propels "zero tolerance" policies in public schools, paving the way for a "school to prison pipeline." In the same year, juvenile violent crime rates reach a record high.

1995

Pennsylvania adopts a "three-strikes law" following several other states, imposing longer prison sentences for certain repeat offenders.

1996

The Clinton administration forms new federal benefits programs that make people with a history of drug offenses ineligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) Program and the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance program. Clinton famously declares, "The rule in public housing should be one strike and you're out."

1998-2000

More than 70 police officers in the Rampart/CRASH (Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums) anti-gang unit in Los Angeles are implicated in planting evidence, framing suspects, stealing and dealing narcotics, bank robbery, perjury, and unprovoked shootings and beatings.

2005

Hurricane Katrina hits New Orleans, particularly devastating Black citizens. Survivors are subject to militant policing and lockdown, vilified by media and government as "looters." Six unarmed civilians are brutally shot by New Orleans police while crossing Danziger Bridge.



Homes are flooded to the roof from Hurricane Katrina.

2010

Arizona's SB-1070 is the first of many anti-immigration laws that task local police with immigration enforcement, formalizing racial profiling by police.

2011

Decarcerate PA forms to resist the expansion of Pennsylvania's prison system.

2014

Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter signs a bill making possession of small amounts of marijuana a civil, not a criminal, offense.

2014

Eric Garner is killed by officer Daniel Pantaleo in Staten Island, New York, after being put in a choke hold.

2014

Michael Brown, an unarmed, 18-year-old black man is shot by white officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri, igniting months-long protests around the country.

2014

Black Lives Matter Philadelphia Chapter is established.

2014

Philly Coalition for R.E.A.L. (Racial, Economic, and Legal) Justice forms.

2016

The average stay in a Philadelphia jail is 95 days, four times the national average. Philadelphia has the highest incarceration rate of any large jurisdiction in the US, with about 810 per 100,000 people in jail.

2016

Philadelphia receives a \$3.5 million grant from the MacArthur Foundation to cut its prison population.

Reconstructions Collaborators

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Kariymah McClary
John McMillin
Staci Moore
Ariel Morales
Deion F. Morrison
Nadiyyah Morrison
Talib Morrison
Michaela Pommells
Naomi Roberson Reid
CR Robinson
Judith Robinson
Raheim Taylor
Holly Trnka
Tieshka Smith
Denise Valentine
Lisa Volta
Mona Washington
Jared Wood

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Philadelphia Assembled is made possible by the William Penn Foundation, The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, The Daniel W. Dietrich II Fund for Contemporary Art, Wyncote Foundation, The Arlin and Neysa Adams Endowment Fund, Nancy M. Berman and Alan Bloch, Lynne and Harold Honickman, Mr. and Mrs. Milton S. Schneider, Constance and Sankey Williams, the Mondriaan Fund, Lyn M. Ross, and The Netherland-America Foundation.

