

# A Declaration OF Civil Rights

This Declaration was approved at a Conference on Civil Rights at Madison Hall, University of Virginia, November 20, 1948, and formally adopted the same day at Monticello, Virginia.

# A Declaration of Civil Rights

We make the following declaration as Americans deeply committed to our form of government and our way of life:

It is useful at any time to re-examine day-to-day practices in the light of professed beliefs. Such an examination seems especially appropriate today, because: Many fellow citizens, especially in our Southern States, are unashamedly advocating ideas of racism and white supremacy contrary to American democracy; Truth and justice are not bounded or divided by parallels of latitude—this is one country and one people, governed under one constitution; A rapidly changing world requires a new analysis of the meaning of equality and freedom adequate for new conditions; Finally, the United States today is bidding for world leadership. Practice at home of what we advocate abroad is the only road to effective leadership.

With these ideas in mind, we, the undersigned citizens of the Southern States and of the United States, have taken a fresh look at our American heritage of freedom and equality for all, and how it works out in actual practice. We present here our findings and conclusions in all sincerity, hopeful that our efforts may stimulate others to undertake a similar discipline.

We *still* believe all men are created equal, and are endowed as men with certain rights which each must respect and guard to the other.

We take these rights to include equality before the law, and freedom from any discrimination bolstered by law; a right to vote; freedom of expression; an unrestricted access to all institutions supported by taxes for the public welfare, schools and hospitals not excepted; equal pay for equal work, and equal opportunity to receive training and to gain employment; and the right of unsegregated transportation, housing and assembly.

For many of our citizens enjoyment of these rights is denied and abridged by laws and conventions contrary to justice, and to the aims and purposes of this republic. We recognize the habitual and cultivated prejudices upon

which such discriminations are sustained; we recognize the need of protections in law, and in the enforcement of law, to these rights, in our day.

While we are gratified at what progress has been made, past achievements should serve as an incentive to greater progress and not as an excuse for our failure to meet present obligations.

This nation was founded with the declaration that all men are created equal and are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights.

We are proud that these words were given to the world by a Southerner, Thomas Jefferson.

Closely associated with the idea of equality and the political democracy built upon it is another concept basic to American culture, the idea of the brotherhood of all mankind. It was given to us many centuries ago in the Hebrew-Christian tradition—"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

We understand the historic conditions that gave rise to our present plight. However, those conditions long ago ceased to exist, although their effects endure.

Discrimination inevitably means lower living standards for those who discriminate as well as for those who are victims of discrimination. Although the South is one of the richest regions in the United States in natural resources, the average citizen in a Southern State has an income forty percent lower than that of a citizen in a non-Southern state.

Today we are bound by economic, political and ethical demands to abolish segregation and discrimination against racial, religious, and national groups.

To bring American ideals and deeds into closer harmony, we offer the following proposals:

**I. For Voluntary Individual Action:** To speak out against discrimination when it is confronted in a particular case; to guard against prejudice in thought, word, and deed; to cultivate the habit of thinking of all persons as individuals, rather than as members of a group.

II. For Voluntary Group Action: (By educational, religious, fraternal, labor, business, professional, civic, and other groups.) To inform and educate their members as to present inequities and injustices, and to secure their consent and approval of changes in constitutions, by-laws and practices needed to establish these rights.

III. For Legislation: (a) Repeal of existing laws in violation of these principles, notably all laws that force public distinction based on color, religion, or national origin. (b) Passage of new legislation at federal, State and local levels to serve as a shield to the civil rights of the citizens, including the rights outlined above.

Adopted at Monticello, Virginia November 20, 1948

The above Declaration was endorsed by 200 citizens of the Southern States, including:

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