



# THE GREENSBORO DECLARATION

SEPTEMBER 12, 2012



Photo by Tim Gwyn: Beloved Community Center of Greensboro, Inc.

PICTURED ABOVE ARE SEVERAL MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF ELDERS DURING ITS FOUNDING CONFERENCE, JULY 30-AUGUST 1, 2012. THEY ARE STANDING AT THE BASE OF A STATUE ERECTED IN HONOR OF THE FOUR NORTH CAROLINA A&T STATE UNIVERSITY FRESHMEN WHO SAT-IN AT THE WOOLWORTH LUNCH COUNTER IN GREENSBORO, NC, ON FEBRUARY 1, 1960. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT ARE: Father Paul Mayer, Mr. Lewis Brandon, Dr. Gloria Aneb House, Rev. Mel White, Rev. Nelson Johnson, Mr. Ron Scott, Rev. John Fife, Rev. Baldemar Velasquez, Rev. Phillip Lawson, Ms. Suzanne Pharr, Father Louie Vitale, Mrs. Joyce Hobson Johnson, Rabbi Arthur Waskow, Mr. Michael Simmons, Dr. Vincent Harding, Dr. Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons, Rev. James Lawson, Ms. Dolores Huerta, Mr. Reginald Swilley, Rev. Charles Sherrod, Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon, Mr. Frank Joyce, Mr. Eugene Gus Newport, Ms. Aljosie Aldrich Knight, Ms. Dorothy Cotton, Rev. Carol Been, and Mrs. Shirley Sherrod.

## FOUNDING MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF ELDERS

Rabbi Leonard Beerman, Los Angeles, CA  
 Mr. Harry Belafonte, New York, NY  
 Father Daniel Berrigan, New York, NY  
 Dr. Grace Lee Boggs, Detroit, MI  
 Mr. Julian Bond, Washington, DC  
 Mr. Lewis A. Brandon, III, Greensboro, NC  
 Rev. Joan Brown Campbell, Chautauqua, NY  
 Sr. Joan Chittister, Erie, PA  
 \*Ms. Dorothy Cotton, Ithaca, NY  
 \*Mrs. Marian Wright Edelman, Washington, DC  
 Rev. John Fife, Tucson, AZ  
 Rev. James Forbes, New York, NY  
 Mr. Danny Glover, Oakland, CA  
 Dr. Vincent Harding, Denver, CO  
 Dr. Gloria House, Detroit, MI

Ms. Sharon Shea Howell, Detroit, MI  
 Ms. Dolores Huerta, Bakersfield, CA  
 Mrs. Joyce Hobson Johnson, Greensboro, NC  
 Rev. Nelson Johnson, Greensboro, NC  
 Ambassador James Joseph, Chapel Hill, NC  
 Mr. Frank Joyce, Detroit, MI  
 Ms. Aljosie Aldrich Knight, Atlanta, GA  
 Rev. James Lawson, Los Angeles, CA  
 Rev. Phillip Lawson, Hercules, CA  
 \*Atty. Chokwe Lumumba, Jackson, MI  
 Sr. Elizabeth McAlister, Baltimore, MD  
 Dr. John D. Maguire, Claremont, CA  
 Fr. Paul Mayer, East Orange, NJ  
 Mr. Eugene Gus Newport, Berkeley, CA  
 Ms. Suzanne Pharr, Knoxville, TN

Imam Al-hajj Talib Abdur Rashid, New York, NY  
 Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon, Washington, DC  
 Ms. Kathy Sanchez, San Ildefonso Pueblo, NM  
 Mr. Ronald Scott, Detroit, MI  
 Rev. Charles Sherrod, Albany, GA  
 Mrs. Shirley Sherrod, Albany, GA  
 Dr. Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons, Gainesville, FL  
 Dr. Gloria Steinem, New York, NY  
 \*Dr. George Tink Tinker, Denver, CO  
 Rev. Baldemar Velasquez, Toledo, OH  
 Fr. Louis Vitale, Berkeley, CA  
 \*Ms. Alice Walker, Mendocino, CA  
 Rabbi Arthur Waskow, Philadelphia, PA  
 Rev. Mel White, Long Beach, CA

\*Denotes: endorsement of "Greensboro Declaration" not received by press time.

# THE GREENSBORO DECLARATION

SEPTEMBER 12, 2012

*We are the National Council of Elders.* We are veterans of the Civil Rights, Women's, Peace, Environmental, LGBTQ<sup>1</sup>, Immigrant Justice, Labor Rights and other movements of the last 60 years. We have come together in Greensboro, the birthplace of the Sit-In Movement in 1960, to birth a movement that can share the torch of freedom, justice, peace, and non-violent action with those who have risen anew in the 21st century.

We are moved by a shared sense of national and global crisis and the resultant suffering being inflicted on millions of people in our nation and around the world. As this declaration will attest, our country is gripped by an interlocking, multi-layered economic, educational, social, political, and moral crisis. This is part of a worldwide crisis that reflects the end of the industrial era.

The lack of certainty about what the future holds, the dysfunctionality of many of our structures and systems, combined with narrow-minded, manipulative leadership, breeds confusion, fear, and destructive reactions. As a new era dawns, we are challenged, therefore, to not only hold political and social leaders accountable, but we—the people— must strive, *with love at the forefront*, to forge more democratic, just and creative structures and ways of living that are consistent with the emerging era that affirms the dignity, worth and unrealized potential of all the people of our country.

We speak, in this time of crisis, out of our commitment to justice and non-violence and to add our collective voices to the unfolding conversation of this historic moment. We speak out of thousands of years of combined experiences of working for the betterment of this nation and our world. It is with compassion, the scars of yesterday's struggles, and a deep commitment to advancing the well being of our nation and all humanity that we call upon the people of our nation, including our national leaders to live out the highest ideals of our humanity and national calling by struggling to make the radical revolution of values, not only against racism, but against materialism and militarism that Dr. King advocated in his historic April 4, 1967 "Breaking the Silence" speech ([www.mlkonline.net/speeches.html](http://www.mlkonline.net/speeches.html)).

We affirm our deeply held conviction that the Creator has granted every resident of our country a place on this earth as part of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." That place ought to be respected by our nation. In our experience, it is the people who must move forward, developing 21<sup>st</sup> century leaders in the process of making this non-violent revolution of values. For that reason, we are grateful for the newly emerging movements of young people. We applaud, support, and join them in our mutual struggle for justice and human rights.

Voting is an important tool of democracy, which must be more fully utilized and further developed. We strongly urge all citizens to vote in the coming elections and to intervene where necessary to ensure that all eligible voters are able to exercise their rights in the face of concrete efforts to suppress the votes of people of color, youth, the elderly, and the poor.

As we move towards the November election, we see that the deepest needs and aspirations of the great majority of our 300 million U.S. citizens are largely ignored in the Presidential and Congressional campaigns. Therefore, we call the following critical concerns to the attention of both our fellow citizens and all of our nation's leaders, who we hope will search for just and viable solutions:

---

<sup>1</sup>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer

- **The well-being and potential achievements of our children are being jeopardized by the destruction of our public schools system and the essential health and welfare services necessary for their development.**
- **The hundreds of thousands of our young adults who must try to establish their lives with limited employment prospects and a staggering weight of debt from student loans. This burden must be eliminated or greatly reduced.**
- **The “Citizens United” Supreme Court Decision, to which we profoundly object, that administers the final blow to our already faltering electoral campaign system by making corporate money practically the ultimate determinant of who wins and loses and, thereby, puts money and greed in charge of critical life or death decisions for many people.**
- **The scandalously lawless practices of bankers and other lending agencies have led to home foreclosures and homelessness, impacting African Americans and other people of color inordinately. Such practices grow out of greed but also a deeply flawed financial/monetary system. We call on the U.S. government to monitor and ensure the implementation of programs to rectify this economic disaster and to bring restitution to citizens who have been victimized. We call for a moratorium on foreclosures where unfair lending practices are involved.**
- **We call for full employment of the U.S. workforce. It is not true, as some politicians claim, that Americans do not wish to earn a living. History affirms a strong legacy of productivity and industriousness among American workers.**
- **We support ending the marginalization of the poor, ensuring greater work opportunities and a higher standard of living for them, as well as for the middle class.**
- **We celebrate the recent legislation of the current administration which extends medical care to greater numbers of citizens, but we continue to urge the implementation of a health care system that will ensure equal access and adequate health and medical care for all our citizens.**
- **We affirm the value of our Social Security and Medicare systems. Over several generations, these programs have been absolutely essential lifelines for millions. We oppose all efforts to restrict or diminish them in any way.**
- **We speak out against the virulent racism that continues to fracture our society. This bigotry is manifest in many arenas of our national life. One telling example of this is the manner in which President Obama has been disrespected and demonized, without public outcry at this unprecedented disregard for the Office of the Presidency.**
- **We lift our voices against all of the attacks against the full humanity of women, including physical and mental abuse, economic inequality, and the freedom of conscience and choice.**
- **Although, there are legitimate criticisms of both the Democratic and Republican Parties, we are stunned by the publicly professed determination of the Republicans in Congress to create a congressional “gridlock,” blocking legislation that would provide for the people’s needs, fueled by the singular, deliberate intention of sabotaging the Obama Presidency.**
- **We are outraged by the continuation of the U.S. “justice” system’s policies that have led to the incarceration of 2.5 million U.S. citizens, two-thirds of whom are African American or Hispanic, constituting what writer Michelle Alexander calls the “New Jim Crow.”**

Without exception, we supported the full elimination of the Jim Crow system of racial segregation and abuse. Many of us were on the front lines of that struggle. Today, we are appalled by the extent to which systemic racism taints the interactions of Americans in mundane and unacknowledged ways – in our workplaces, schools, and courts, even in our places of worship. We call on our fellow citizens to bring their moral principles and spiritual insights into our engagement with each other, trusting that through the consistent practice of being mindful of every human being’s dignity, we can begin to rid our society of the poison of racism.

We raise our voices against violence and the ways in which it pervades our national life. The acceptance and propagation of violence has been an essential part of the national culture, from the dispossession of the Native Indians and Mexicans of their land, to the enslavement and exploitation of Africans, Chinese, and others, to the contemporary wide scale police brutality and massive incarceration. Our deeply rooted culture of violence is increasingly taking the form of targeted, as well as random murders; it is entrenched in all our institutions and systems. It characterizes our international engagements, including interventions in Third World countries to seize control of resources and the support of dictators, who support U. S. interests and oppress their own people. The United States Government instigates wars of aggression where there has been no threat to our country, and now uses drones, an even more insidious form of war and the culture of death.

Those in power have abused and exploited the environment, rather than co-existing with it or practicing mindful stewardship. This *will* to exploit, which does not take into account the ways the Earth may be destabilized, has brought us to the environmental crises that we face today, including massive pollution of our air and water resources, global warming resulting in climate chaos, and other threats to the ecosystem of our planet.

Too many citizens have supported these forms of environmental abuses, domestic and international violence and oppression by not speaking out against them. We call on our leaders and our fellow citizens to break with the preference for violence, and to insist that national resources be put to the healing of the natural environment, and to the creation of programs that will bring a higher quality of life for all people, to further insist that funds previously allocated to the buildup of nuclear weaponry and other military programs be diverted to the repair and building up of the national infrastructure, educational system, health and welfare services, all of which will provide much-needed employment for the millions of jobless among us.

We acknowledge that the *reality picture* we have painted is challenging and reflects a period of danger; it can be a cause for despair by many. We urge you, however, to believe with us that inherent in great danger is also great opportunity. Let us seize on the opportunity and in the inspiring words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "to hew out of this mountain of despair" stones of hope. History has given all of us – but especially the young generation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the opportunity to forge non-violent hearts, non-violent lives that will result in a caring, nonviolent society.

We urge you to help make this Declaration a living, growing reality by discussing it among diverse organizations and individuals, including family members, young people, workers, teachers, professors, scholars, community groups, and faith communities. Further we invite you to sign onto this Declaration or to produce your own declaration. For as we declare and live into our "revolution of values," we will also be creating a lively national alternative to the multi-million dollar super PACs that increasingly endanger the entire democratic process.

Finally, as elders, we pledge to our nation and especially to our younger brothers and sisters, that we will be faithful to our own history as human rights workers. We will undertake with you the work we have called for in this statement as fully as our lives allow, doing everything in our power to bring a greater measure of justice, equality, and peace to our country and to the world.

THE NATIONAL



Contact Us:

[www.nationalcouncilofelders.org](http://www.nationalcouncilofelders.org)

Greensboro, NC:  
Philadelphia, PA:

(336) 230-0001  
(215) 844-8494

Detroit, MI  
New York, NY

(313) 399-7345  
(973) 675-2142