PRIMARY SOURCE · LIBERTY HALL, NEW YORK · 13 AUGUST 1920

Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World

The Negro World promised a "Constitution of Negro Liberty." The 1920 convention adopted a preamble, 12 complaints and 54 rights. 122 delegates signed it, women among them. Below are selected articles, quoted word for word. Square brackets are the editor's corrections in the Hill edition.

Art. 1 ...whereas all men are created equal and entitled to the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and because of this we, the duly elected representatives of the Negro peoples of the world, invoking the aid of the just and Almighty God, do declare all men, women and children of our blood throughout the world free denizens, and do claim them as free citizens of Africa, the Motherland of all Negroes.

Art. 4 We declare that Negroes, wheresoever they form a community among themselves should be given the right to elect their own representatives to represent them in Legislatures, courts of law, or such institutions as may exercise control over that particular community.

Art. 8 We declare taxation without representation unjust and tyran[n]ous, and there should be no obligation on the part of the Negro to obey the levy of a tax by any law-making body from which he is excluded and denied representation on account of his race and color.

Art. 11 We deprecate the use of the term "nigger" as applied to Negroes, and demand that the word "Negro" be written with a capital "N."

Art. 13 We believe in the freedom of Africa for the Negro people of the world, and by the principle of Europe for the Europeans and Asia for the Asiatics, we also demand Africa for the Africans at home and abroad.

Art. 24 We believe in the doctrine of the freedom of the press, and we therefore emphatically protest against the suppression of Negro newspapers and periodicals in various parts of the world...

Art. 27 We believe in the self-determination of all peoples.

Art. 29 With the help of Almighty God we declare ourselves the sworn protectors of the honor and virtue of our women and children, and pledge our lives for their protection and defense everywhere and under all circumstances from wrongs and outrages.

Art. 30 We demand the right of an unlimited and unprejudiced education for ourselves and our posterity forever[.]

Art. 37 We hereby demand that the governments of the world recognize our leader and his representatives chosen by the race to look after the welfare of our people under such governments.

Art. 39 That the colors, Red, Black and Green, be the colors of the Negro race.

Art. 41 We believe that any limited liberty which deprives one of the complete rights and prerogatives of full citizenship is but a modified form of slavery.

Art. 44 We deplore and protest against the practice of confining juvenile prisoners in prisons with adults, and we recommend that such youthful prisoners be taught gainful trades under human[e] supervision.

Art. 46 We demand of all men to do unto us as we would do unto them, in the name of justice; and we cheerfully accord to all men all the rights we claim herein for ourselves.

Art. 49 We demand that instructions given Negro children in schools include the subject of "Negro History," to their benefit.

Art. 53 We proclaim the 31st day of August of each year to be an international holiday to be observed by all Negroes.

Art. 54 We want all men to know that we shall maintain and contend for the freedom and equality of every man, woman and child of our race, with our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor.

Gold tags mark articles worth arguing with (see the back).

SOURCE: "UNIA DECLARATION OF RIGHTS," NEW YORK, 13 AUG 1920, IN ROBERT A. HILL, ED., *THE MARCUS GARVEY AND UNIVERSAL NEGRO IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION PAPERS*, VOL. II (UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS), PP. 571–78. PRINTED IN THE NEGRO WORLD, 11 SEPT 1920; NOTARIZED 15 AUG 1920. ARTICLE TEXT IS PUBLIC DOMAIN. BLACK STAR ARCHIVE × RADICAL IMAGINATION.

1776 · 1787 · 1920

The Declaration beside the U.S. Constitution

The Declaration of Rights borrows openly from the U.S. **Declaration of Independence** (1776): "all men are created equal," "taxation without representation," "our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor." The U.S. **Constitution** (1787) is a different kind of document: a frame of government. The UNIA's text is a bill of rights and a declaration of nationhood in one.

	U.S. CONSTITUTION, 1787 (AS AMENDED BY 1920)	UNIA DECLARATION OF RIGHTS, 1920
WHO SIGNED	39 delegates, all men.	122 delegates, including Henrietta Vinton Davis and other women.
WHO IS NAMED	"We the People." The original text never uses the word "woman." The 19th Amendment was ratified 18 Aug 1920.	"All men, women and children of our blood" (Art. 1), signed five days before the 19th Amendment was ratified.
CITIZENSHIP	Tied to a territory: born or naturalized in the United States (14th Amendment).	Tied to a people, wherever they live. Rights to travel and migrate (Art. 34–36), against colonial land seizure (7, 13–15).
SLAVERY	Originally protected it: the three-fifths clause (Art. I §2), the slave trade to 1808 (Art. I §9), the fugitive clause (Art. IV §2). Abolished by the 13th Amendment, 1865.	"Any limited liberty… is but a modified form of slavery" (Art. 41). The complaints list lynching without trial (2), no vote for people who are citizens "under the Federal Constitution" (4), and Jim Crow cars (5).
RIGHTS LISTED	Mostly limits on government: speech, press, religion, trial by jury, due process.	Those, plus social and economic rights: education (30), work without boycott (23), Black doctors in public hospitals (42), no lynching (17), juveniles out of adult prisons (44), Negro History in schools (49), against films showing "the Negro as a cannibal" (26).
REACH	One nation.	Self-determination for "all peoples" (27) and the same rights for "all men" (46).
POWER	Checks and balances, built to stop any one person from ruling.	No frame of government. Calls on governments to recognize "our leader" (37); no Negro to fight for an alien race without the leader's consent (47).
GENDER	Silent until the 19th Amendment (1920): the vote can't be denied "on account of sex."	Names women, but as people to be protected: "sworn protectors of the honor and virtue of our women" (29). Mostly "he."

Was it more inclusive?

- **Wider:** it names women and children, puts race, labor, colony and nation in one document, and claims rights the U.S. Constitution still doesn't list: education (30), Negro History in schools (49), Black doctors in public hospitals (42). It also complains of unequal wages (complaint 7).
- **Narrower:** membership is by "blood." Women are protected rather than equal. Power runs toward one leader.
- **A note on words:** "intersectional" is Kimberlé Crenshaw's term, from 1989. Use it as a lens for reading 1920, not as a label the delegates would have used.

No state, no army, no border. Why write a constitution anyway?

Which of the 54 would still be radical if Congress passed it tomorrow?

Art. 37 vs. checks and balances: which is the bigger risk for a movement?

U.S. TEXT: CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES, ART. I §2, ART. I §9, ART. IV §2; AMENDMENTS XIII–XV, XIX (RATIFIED 18 AUG 1920). UNIA TEXT: HILL, GARVEY PAPERS VOL. II, PP. 571–78.