

2024

Social Justice Autobiography

Dewitt Faulkner

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Recommended Citation

Faulkner, Dewitt, "Social Justice Autobiography" (2024). *Writing Beyond the Prison*. 68.
<https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/writingbeyondtheprison/68>

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Dewitt Faulkner

On June 13th, 1980, my parents would name me Dewitt Antoine Faulkner after my father's friend. On December 7th, 2004, I became inmate 398508. In Wisconsin's prison system, many captives would be addressed over the years as inmates, prisoners, offenders, and now "person in our care." PIOC's. I guess the D.O.C., Department of Corrections, wanted to make us feel more like humans, though this "decency" is questionable. In Wisconsin this is the only state that still holds "Truth in sentence." This is an act and bill passed by conservative leaders that says if you're sentenced to 150 years, whether that crime deserves that much time or not, you are expected to do every day of your sentence. The only way around that is if you die in prison by some natural death, die by a virus such as COVID-19 or sickness, or some miracle occurs by something divine. Depending on where you are in Wisconsin's country, town, section, and community, the law seems to be applied differently. For example, if a young Black person of color decides to sell drugs in their community, such as marijuana less than 500 grams, he will become a felon, sentenced from 6 months to one year with extended supervision. This happens even if all of it is for reasons of making a little extra money to feed his or her children. As a person of color his sentence will be harsh. There are no programs or anything to help them better themselves. On the other hand, a young white person of same age can get arrested, possessing other contraband, and it's a high chance that he will never see the inside of a courtroom jail. Or, if he is sentenced with a term it will be light, consisting of concessions after concessions, programs, treatment, or assigned community services no longer than 72 hours.

I'm writing this essay on "social justice," and what it means to me. Equality, justice, social community, fairness, and rightness. It also means impartial dialogue of the classes, acceptance,

and freedom. It does not mean bias against a person's skin color, religion, belief, or gender. Social justice is not oppression, murder, nor derogatory.

Rodney King once asked, "Can we all get along?" In 1991, on March 3rd, Rodney King, a felon, led police on a high-speed chase in the streets of Los Angeles. King, allegedly intoxicated and uncooperative, was brutally beaten by L.A.P.D. officers Laurence Powell, Theodore Briseno, and Timothy Wind. A concerned citizen, who felt disturbed by the police brutality, who heard King scream and beg officers for his life, recorded the horrific sight. That video was released after the police beat King with batons, humiliated him, spit on him, and kicked him. Rodney King eventually was released, and the so-called charge of resistance was dropped. The officers involved with the vicious beating, along with sergeant Stacey Koon, were indicted by a grand jury. I remember the uproar in Los Angeles surrounding this indictment, and then Judge Stanley Weisberg granted a change of venue, moving the trial out of LA county to Simi Valley, a Ventura County. In April 1992, the jury found these nasty officers "not guilty on all counts except on one assault charge on Officer Powell." The assault charge on Officer Powell ended up with a hung jury. The acquittals pissed off most, if not all, of the Blacks in my community.

In 1992, I lived in Hawthorne, CA, an area of Los Angeles County. I remember LA going up in flames. Blacks rioted all over, and not just on Normandie and Florence Boulevard, where Reginald Denny, a white truck driver, was beaten with a brick upside his head in retaliation. I can admit I was afraid for my safety and my family's safety from those who partook in destroying our community.

I once read on the walls: "Fallen Angels, the good die young." There were many names on the walls. What was crazy to me is none of these young people of color made it to see twenty-one years old. The Bible says God kicked out of heaven a number of "Fallen Angels." I always

took these angels to be the Lost Angels of Los Angeles. Seeing what was happening everywhere in LA, my cousin told me you either stand and fight, you either ride or get rode on. At 12 years old, I chose to ride.

One day, while me and my homeboy was walking down Rosecrans and Doty Avenue during the four-days of rioting, we saw another one of my homeboys getting jumped by some Mexican gang members. More pulled up on me and my homeboy Buddha, with bats, brass knuckles, and a gun. Taught by my peers (gang member friends) to not run from a challenge but attack first, we just started rushing these guys with fists and kicks. We were able to get the other guys off our homeboy. Other Blacks began to participate in this fight. After it was over, I'll always think about Black folks attacking anyone not Black no matter if you were Korean, Mexican, or white.

I've always known LA to be separated and segregated. The North is where White people lived, in the downtown area, North Hollywood, South Central. Westside and Eastside was made up of Tongans, Latinos, and African Americans. The eastside is majority Hispanics, and the rule was if you weren't Hispanic stay away, at least after nightfall. Living in Hawthorne, I attended Yukon Intermediate School. I would get into verbal altercations with this gang member about something disrespectful that was said about one another. I really can't recall because it was stupid. The outcome would be me retrieving my father's gun and utility knife and bringing it back to school with me the next day. I told a friend of mine named K.C. who decided it was ok to tell the entire school. An hour or so later cops would enter my classroom and search my bookbag. They found the weapons. I was handcuffed and placed under arrest. This Hispanic guy must've known what I had because he was planning to do some harm to me. He had weapons also and a gang waiting on me after school. We both were placed in the Patty Wagon's police

van and taken to jail. Somehow, I was put on probation until I turned 18. If I got in trouble before then, I would do time in Juvenile detention. Let me add: the gun was a B.B. gun. I had gotten it after my Father decided to take me to live down south.

In Memphis, Tennessee, the environment was very different. No tropical trees, sky blue oceans or heavy traffic and helicopters. I didn't see in 1996 any variety of ethnic groups or races. I saw more white people than I have ever seen in my life. Black folks spoke different and always addressed adults and elderly people as "yes sir" or "no sir." But like in California, we used the word 'cuz or 'blood and even the derogatory "nigga" when interacting with one another. In the South, southern hospitality was extended to visitors, but I never accepted the racist word, "boy" to address folks here. "Boy," seems to come out of the mouths of both races. In my mind "Boy" was worse than calling me a nigger, a word to degrade Black people.

I'm like the sixth generational descendent of a slave and fourth of a sharecropper and field worker. Social equality and economic justice remind me of a story told down to me from my father about my great-great-grandfather Jesse Faulkner. He was the son of a former slave we call "Grandpapi" because we never knew his name. One day after a long period of labor, Mr. Jesse Frank was wrapping things up getting to turn in for the night, but first had to turn in his cotton so he could get paid. My great-great-grandfather knew how to count and knew when he was getting ripped off or cheated. The folks who paid for his share of cotton tried to cheat him, thinking maybe he was ignorant or probably just acting plain "evil." When my great-great-grandfather questioned this white man about the monies which were missing, they got into a heated discussion, and my great-great-grandfather was shot in the head point-blank with a shotgun. The sound scared the horse, its reins wrapped around my great-great-grandfather's neck, and his horse dragged and pulled him, reaching home. His wife and kids witnessed this.

The youngest who saw it was my grandfather. There were no consequences for the action of this white man.

It's written in our Constitution that equality and justice is for **all**. But it's really only for some. Today we fast forward to all of the civil monuments, NAACP, Black Lives Matter, but nothing major has changed. We Blacks in America are still getting hosed down, dog's sic on us, over sentenced, and murdered in cold blood. Today, we see racism, discrimination, and cowardly attacks of immigrants and Asians. Hispanics are being 'stored' in facilities because they chose to seek help, believing in the ways of America, land of opportunity and freedom.

I'm serving a 70-plus sentence for a crime I didn't do. I watch and read about my fellow whites getting less time, slaps on the wrist for far worse crimes than for which I was allegedly "convicted." If I had been white, a female, and older, I wouldn't have ever experienced what I've been through: injustice. Even being incarcerated I still experience harsh treatment, injustice, and bias because of racism and social injustice. We must do better as a society, community, and become anti-racist, have dialogues, and promote justice and social equality. Love first for it's the key to harmony. Finally, Justice for George Floyd. He can rest in peace and until we get justice for all of "Them," wrongful convicted Black men must keep the faith.

Stay strong. All in the dark will come to light. Our time will come.

By, Mr. Dewitt Faulkner

AKA King Doc

Genre:

Social Justice Autobiography

Tags:

LA Riots; Rodney King; Gangs; racial violence; police brutality; criminal justice system;

Wisconsin; Truth-in-Sentencing; Black history; Sharecropping