

2024

Social Justice Autobiography

James Jones

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/writingbeyondtheprison>



Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#), [Africana Studies Commons](#), [Civil Rights and Discrimination Commons](#), [Nonfiction Commons](#), and the [Social Justice Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Jones, James, "Social Justice Autobiography" (2024). *Writing Beyond the Prison*. 34.
<https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/writingbeyondtheprison/34>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by Academic Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Writing Beyond the Prison by an authorized administrator of Academic Commons. For more information, please contact mona.ramonetti@stonybrook.edu, hu.wang.2@stonybrook.edu.

Until the great mass of the people shall be filled with a sense of responsibility for each other's welfare, social justice can never be attained. -Helen Keller

My commitment name is James Jones/CK8648, aka Sundiata Chaka Pollard, my mother's given name to her son.

My introduction to social justice, according to Delores Rene DeWitt, aka Sista' DiDi, my mother, came on July 2, 1997. Let me share:

"Gwen came by last Sunday. Isn't it something, that Gwen and I live in Northridge (kinda where it all started) and that God had already blessed us! It's true—the first school that you ever went to was California State University, Northridge. My goodness, your introduction into the world of how it is going to be.

"At that time, it was a struggle to attain higher learning in a world where that is obviously a threatening proposition to many. It is a known fact, combined with our natural gifts and talents that God creates in us, together with wisdom and knowledge, that there isn't anything they cannot conquer. Especially with one mind and one heart.

"We were detoured, distracted but determined to make it. Well, anyway, to make something, whatever that has turned out to be for each of us—the first twenty-eight students of African descent who attended the university."

My mother was a product of the Civil Rights Movement. Her mother, who was an elementary school dropout, homeschooled my mother and her three younger sisters and later acquired her GED while I was attending school. They were involved in activism through our church, their schools, and community. Delores visited South Africa on several occasions during Apartheid, returning as "DiDi" (Elder Sister). And between all of that, was the youngest at that time to graduate magna cum laude and valedictorian from UCLA.

The opposite of my mother, I was the first to serve a state sentence of life without the possibility of parole, followed by numbers. As of June 2021, I have spent twenty-eight years within the Pennsylvania's Department of Corrections.

Growing up in Pacoima (LA County) and in Philadelphia, social justice was very different. As a child in elementary school, I do not recall social justice. We sang "Lift Every Voice" and studied Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream" speech. Back then, we had under ten TV channels. I learned a lot about the USA, current affairs, and the World, while nothing about local news in other communities.

Public school, for me, changed when I was bused to Arlington Heights Elementary in Los Angeles. Public schools for those like me had few resources—for instance, we had a harpsichord to be played by thirty-two-plus students. The other school had their own music class, in its own room, and assigned each child their own instrument. I was given a kitchen job, and I was fired. I got to build and shoot off a rocket. Mine went the farthest, five city blocks. Chasing after it, which I will never forget, internally I discriminately learned something of 'social' & 'justice' that day,

about me and my environment. The school was beautiful and immaculate. It's all-white staff, students, walls, and clean rooms were a drastic change from my learning environment. That's where I chased my rocket. As I returned home, three blocks out, I sensed the hood. Five blocks out, I smelled, heard, and felt the darkened heaviness of the ghetto. I ran back faster to return than I did for my rocket. I don't know why.

Growing up in Pacoima, around my mother and father's friends and sometimes around the dinner table, I heard talk of social justice. While in Philly, I caught small talk of social justice, I think, either in 'passing the bottle' circles or from white college students teaching black children about Egypt. Saying things like it's not a part of Africa! It's in the Middle East?? Even as they were planning next to "help" the Black struggle.

Under Benjamin and Katherine Crouch (Andre's parents) and family, we went down LA to have Mayor Tom Bradley's back. Because of my church, community, and The Boys Club, my family kept me out of school until California recognized Dr. MLK Jr's birthday as a state holiday. Later, on my own, I registered to vote for Jesse Jackson, encouraging others my age from Germantown (Philly) to do the same. If wanted to advocate doing something for/towards social justice I don't know.

Throughout my incarceration, now with more than ten news stations, I hear a lot about 'social justice' and every time it's brought up it's in the wake of death—James Byrd, Oscar Grant, Sandra Bland, Atatiana Jefferson, Breonna Taylor, Bettie Jones, Tamir Rice, etc. etc. They all complied and died, then were charged with stacked felonious crimes.

In truth, one of the above were killed for economic justice, political justice, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, social, civil rights or committing a felony. Instead, each of them were murdered simply for the color of their skin. While those who murdered them received immunity and their actions were called socially justified—it was actually social injustice for those who look like me.

2021, on the *View* (6/18/21- ABC), Rep. James Clayburn (D-SC), was questioned by the panel of hosts on HR4 being blocked from covering all fifty states. Why is there compromised voting rights and voter suppression- The Civil Rights Movement ensured these rights to you and me, right?!?

My mother was attacked violently for fighting/standing up for social justice. Her mother's community was attacked for meetings and whisperings of social justice. While her siblings and ancestors were attacked for daring to dream to have even a notion of social equality and justice.

From those experiences and stories, I'm not sure what social justice actually is in full democratic practice. From that point of view, I do not believe I have been extended such privilege from the great mass of the people who say they believe in social justice

However, if you really want to know—well, pay attention! I am a Muslim. Growing up and raised in the Church- I witnessed many GRANDMOTHERS carrying into action, from LA to Philly, the very characteristics I read about in scriptures, even with my own Grandmothers. My mother's

mother went far beyond just catering to those whom we knew, those who looked like us, those related to us, or those who lived like we did or where we did. My travels with her led me into places where on my own I would not have gone or wanted to be, amongst people who did not like me. Her home was filled with people of every hue, from every community, and even from every continent. She was a living example of what 'social justice' looks like and is.

What is social justice? Well, for me, today, with all the harsh realities of this cold world, I know what it should be, looks like and feels like. There is no better proof of social justice than the quintessence of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and 'Way of Life' of our aboriginal native Indians, "Try to do unto others as we wish that others should do unto us." No one will be a faithful believer/adherent student of social justice until he/she loves his/her neighbor as he/she loves him/herSELF.

Expect no one to give you social justice while carrying into practice the extending of social justice to others First!

My Grandmother taught my mother how to fight for me. Almost thirty in, now, I'm learning to carry into practice fighting for my mother and her mother, whom both have passed.

Freedom and Social Justice must exist within FIRST! That's why we fight. That's why we never give up the fight.

The last part of herstory/ourstory my mother shared: "So remember, you started out in the struggle and will remain, but that you are a conqueror." Which I, today, share with each and every one of you.

SOCIAL JUSTICE MUST BEGIN FROM WITHIN STOP LOOKING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE OUTSIDE OF YOURSELF!

Genre

Social Justice Essay

Tags

Civil rights; Muslim; social justice; racial hypocrisy; freedom