

FREEDOM is a constant STRUGGLE

THIS IS A HISTORY BOOK ABOUT US. IT TELLS US THINGS ABOUT OUR PAST THAT WHITE PEOPLE WITH POWER HAVE KEPT US FROM KNOWING. THEY DON'T WANT US TO KNOW THE IMPORTANT THINGS WE HAVE DONE FOR OURSELVES AND FOR OUR COUNTRY. WHY? FOR THE SAME REASONS THEY DON'T WANT US TO VOTE OR HAVE THE THINGS WE WANT AND NEED.

AS WE READ THIS BOOK ABOUT US, WE SHOULD REMEMBER THAT WE ARE WRITING ANOTHER CHAPTER OF IT RIGHT NOW. WHAT WE DO WITH OUR LIVES IS IMPORTANT TO TODAY AND TOMORROW.



WE CAME ACROSS THE SEA

The first Negroes who came to America were not slaves. They came across the sea from Europe with men who wanted to explore the New World. When Columbus discovered America in 1492, a Negro man sailed one of his ships. Negroes were with DeSoto when he explored Mississippi. They also helped the Spanish set up the first city in America, which is St. Augustine, Florida. A Negro man grew the first wheat crop in the New World. So the first Negroes to come to America were free men who did a lot to get the country ready to live in.



The first slaves brought to America were white people. Rich white people in Europe bought poor white people and prisoners and sold them to the early settlers. White people didn't make very good slaves. They knew about how to get their freedom through the courts. They were hard to find when they ran away. It was hard to get enough of them.

So the big landowners tried to make slaves of the Indians. They didn't make very good slaves either because they got sick easy and often ran away.

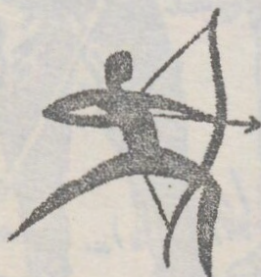
The landowners found out Negro people made the best slaves. Negroes could be brought from Africa by the thousands. If they ran away, it was easier to find them. Also white people could treat Negroes as badly as they wanted to because whites said Africans weren't Christians and weren't human beings.

Landowners needed more and more labor to work the land, so they made slavery legal. Then they began buying slaves from Africa by the thousands. Slave ships would go to Africa and buy or capture free black people and sell them in America. The owners of the ships made an awful lot of money.



Things were so bad on the slave ships that many of the captured people died before they reached the shores of America. They slaves were chained together and crowded into the bottom part of the ship. They didn't have enough food, water or fresh air. Some of the black people decided they would rather die than be slaves in a strange country, and jumped off the ship and drowned.

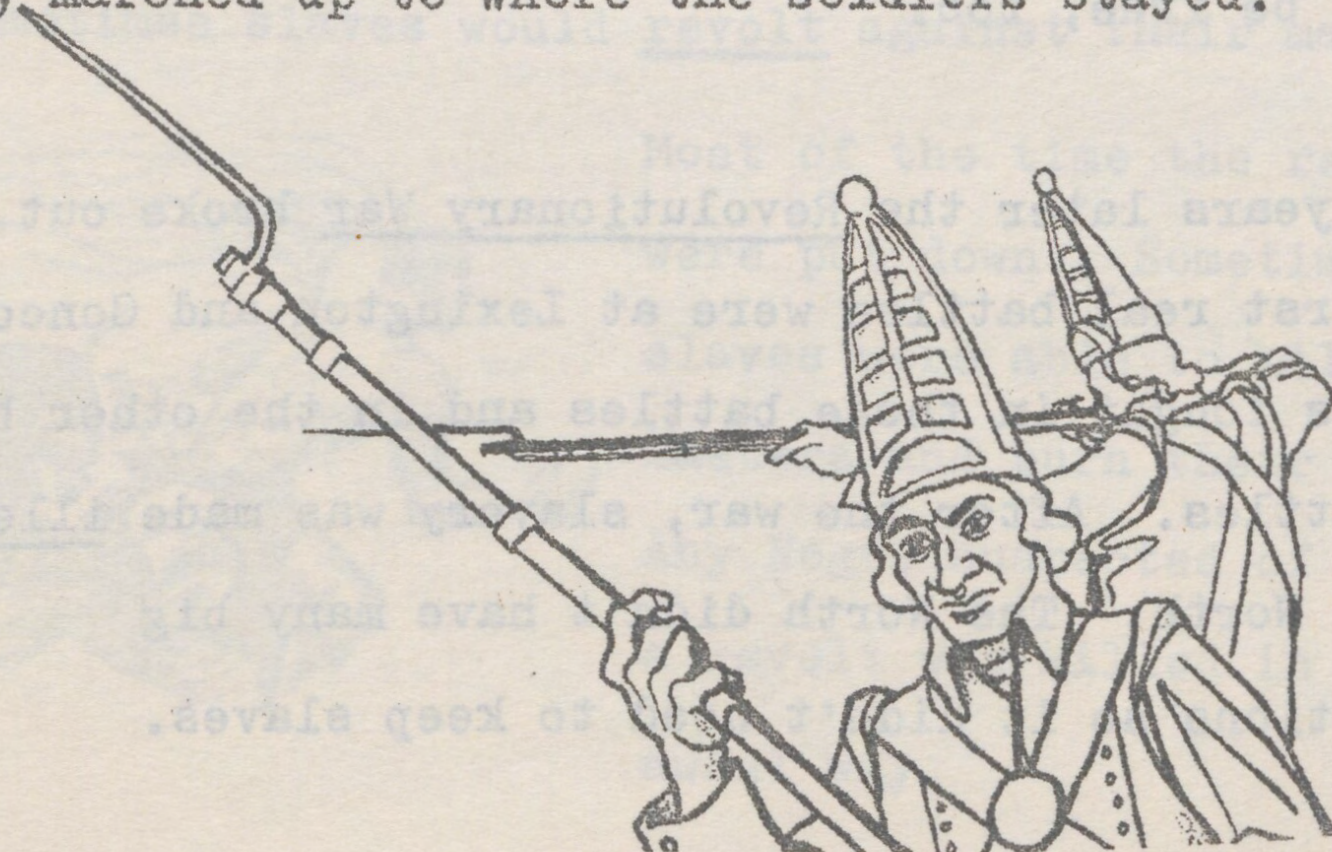
Most of the slaves brought to America could not read or write. They didn't have to know how in their life in Africa. Some were very well educated but that didn't matter to the slave owner. He needed the slaves to do the hard work in the fields and make him rich. He said Negroes were not really human so he wouldn't have to feel bad inside about keeping slaves. Pretty soon he began to believe all the bad things he said about Negroes. And some Negroes began to believe him, too.



WE FOUGHT IN THE FIRST WAR

At one time, America was owned by the King of England. He made the laws for this country and made the people pay taxes. This made Americans angry. They decided they wanted to be free. They wrote the Declaration of Independence which said, "All men are created equal." They knew this would make the king mad, but they were ready to fight for their freedom.

The king's soldiers stayed in the towns before the war. The people and the soldiers hated each other. One day there was a fist fight between some soldiers and the people. A little boy got hit over the head by a soldier. This made the people even angrier, and they marched up to where the soldiers stayed.



The leader of the people was a tall, strong Negro named Crispus Attucks. He was a runaway slave who became a sailor. He told the people the soldiers wouldn't dare shoot. A soldier shot into the air to scare the people away. The people threw rocks at the soldiers and they began shooting at the people. One of the bullets killed Crispus Attucks. That made the people so angry that they attacked the soldiers with rocks and sticks. Finally the soldiers backed off and the fighting stopped.

The soldiers had killed four Americans. Crispus Attucks, a black man, was the first person to die for American freedom. This made some people think Negroes should be free, too.

A few years later the Revolutionary War broke out. The first real battles were at Lexington and Concord. Negroes fought in these battles and in the other big war battles. After the war, slavery was made illegal in the North. The North didn't have many big plantations so it didn't need to keep slaves.

For awhile it looked like slavery would end in the South, too. But then the cotton gin was invented and the people in the South decided to keep their slaves to grow cotton. Making money was more important to them than freedom for all men.

WE CAN'T STAND CHAINS

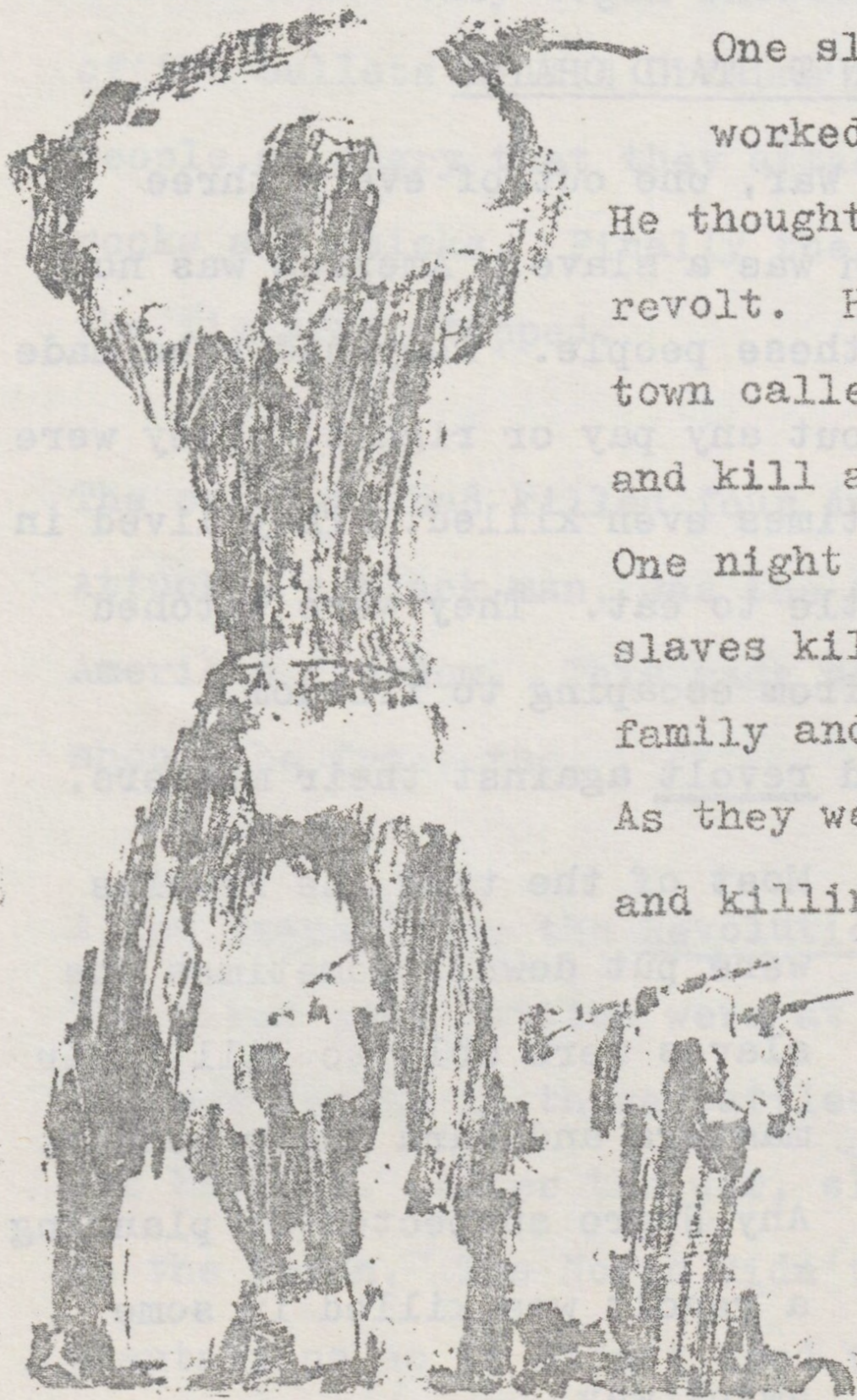
Just before the Civil War, one out of every three Americans in the South was a slave. America was not the promised land to these people. They had been made to come and work without any pay or rights. They were often beaten and sometimes even killed. They lived in huts and had very little to eat. They were watched closely to stop them from escaping to freedom.

Sometimes slaves would revolt against their masters.



Most of the time the revolts were put down. Sometimes the slaves were able to kill their masters and burn their houses. Any Negro suspected of planning a revolt was killed in some awful way.

Denmark Vesey organized one of these revolts. He was a slave who had bought his freedom. He got 9,000 slaves together but two days before the revolt, one house slave who was a Tom told his master about the plans. Denmark and all the leaders of the revolt were hanged.



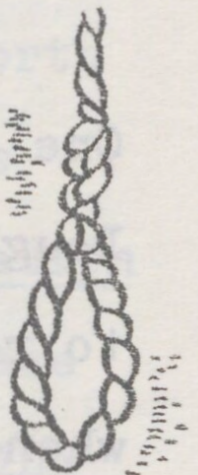
One slave revolt that kind of worked was led by Nat Turner. He thought God wanted him to revolt. He decided to march to a town called Jerusalem in Virginia and kill all the white people. One night Nat and seven other slaves killed their master and his family and burned down the house. As they went along burning houses and killing white people, other slaves joined them. Before they got to town, somebody warned the white people and they killed Nat Turner and his band.

From the time Negroes were made slaves, they had revolts. When there were almost as many slaves as white people, the whites began to be afraid. When somebody said there might be a revolt, white people really got scared. They passed slave codes or black codes to "keep Negroes in line."

The codes said Negroes couldn't be out after dark, leave the plantation, meet other Negroes, or learn to read and write. Some codes even said Negroes couldn't have their own churches. White people passed these codes because they were so afraid.

WE FOUGHT IN OTHER WAYS

Before the Civil War, a lot of slaves and white people began to believe slavery was wrong. These people were known as abolitionists. They wanted to abolish slavery and make the slaves free men. Some white abolitionists even fought with Negroes in the slave revolts. A lot of other white people wanted to keep Negro people slaves.



They were:

1. Slaveholders who wanted people to work for no pay.
2. Northern businessmen who made money by selling things to the slaveholders.
3. White people who were so prejudiced that they thought Negro slaves were not fit to be anything but a slave. (They forgot that most of the skilled craftsmen in the south - such as carpenters and blacksmiths - were Negro slaves.)

One of the most famous abolitionists was Frederick Douglass. He was born a slave, but he taught himself to read and wanted to be free. He escaped to New York when he was 21 years old. He began to tell people in the North how it was to be a slave. He became a famous speaker and editor.

Douglass believed in non-violence at first, but he came to believe you couldn't change a man's heart by just talking to him. You had to get things for yourself.



When the Civil War broke out, it made Douglass happy. He went to visit President Lincoln to tell him to end slavery and to let Negroes fight in the war for their freedom. Lincoln wanted to go slow. He was afraid the border states would join the South if he set Negroes free. But after two years of fighting the war, Lincoln decided the North needed Negroes to fight. So he signed the Emancipation Proclamation freeing all the slaves. Douglass spent the rest of his time during the war helping get Negroes to fight in it.

WE FOUGHT IN THE CIVIL WAR

The Civil War was not started just to free the slaves. The South had a lot of big plantations and the North had big factories. The North and South fought about

laws that would hurt each other. Rich people who owned the plantations and the factories really started the war and they didn't even have to fight in it.

At first the Northern army wouldn't let Negroes join the fight. But after two years, Lincoln decided he needed Negro soldiers to win the war, so he let them join the army. Some 200,000 black men fought in the war. One out of every five of them died. Many officers said Negroes fought harder than white soldiers. Fourteen Negroes received Congressional Medals of Honor for heroism on the battlefield. Many others received other awards for their courage. When the war ended, Negroes had a lot of hope in their hearts about freedom.



WE GOT OUR DREAM - FOR AWHILE

When the war ended, the North didn't know what to do about the South. Before the war, the South was about like it is today. A few rich white people owned all the land and made the decisions about how the South was run. After the war, many Northerners wanted to put the old slaveholders back into power.

Other Northern people wanted to build a new way of life in the South where everybody would make decisions about his own life and have what he needed.

The freed slaves had their own ideas about freedom. They wanted to own their own land. They wanted to go to school. They wanted to settle down and raise their families. They wanted to vote and take part in the government.

Freed Negroes began to see their dreams come true right after the war. They filled up the schools that were opened for them. They joined with poor white people to get political power. For the first time in history

Negroes got elected to Congress and to the state legislatures. Between 1869 and 1901, two Negroes were U.S. Senators and 20 were U.S. Congressmen. They passed good laws about streets and roads, schools and poor people. They became policemen, lawyers and judges.

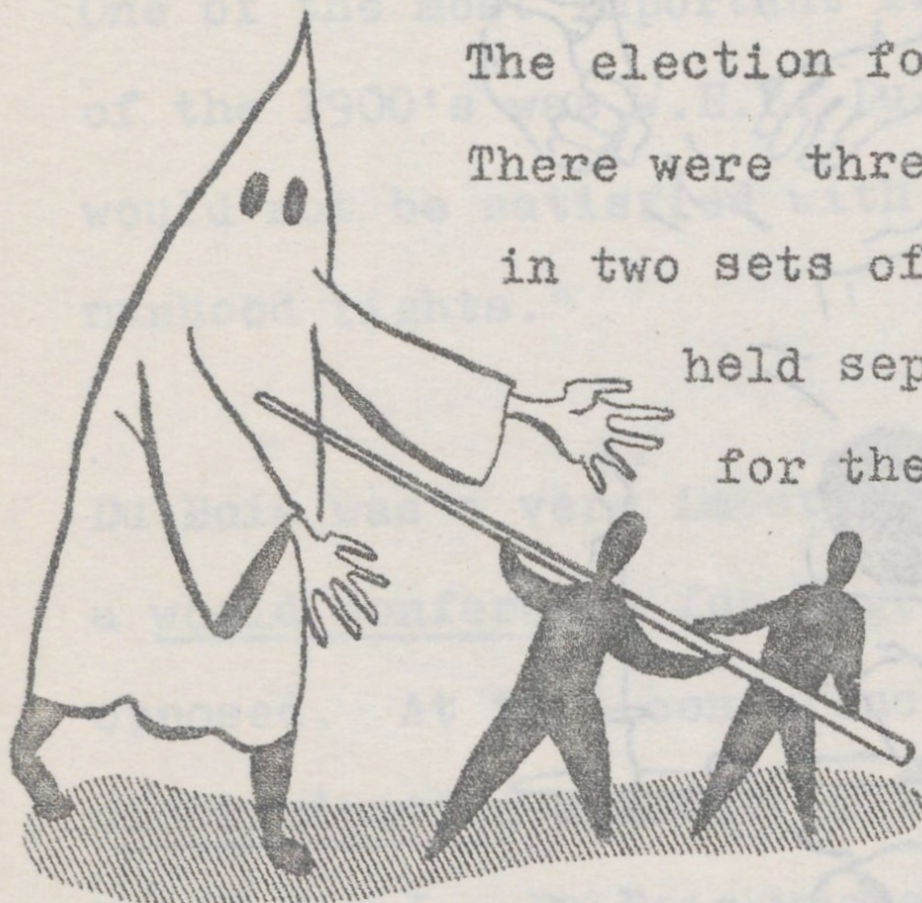
Freedman's Bureaus were set up by the government.

The bureaus helped Negroes get good jobs and go to school. They also helped people find homes and gave food to the hungry.

The old slaveholders wanted to get back in power. They knew they would have to make the poor white people hate Negroes. They started groups like the Ku Klux Klan to frighten poor white people away from black people. At first the KKK couldn't do a very good job because there were federal troops in the South. The poor whites and Negroes defended themselves with guns.

WE WERE SOLD OUT

After the elections in 1876, Negroes lost about everything. They were sold out by a man who became president. This is how it was:



The election for president was very close. There were three Southern states that turned in two sets of votes. The slaveowners had held separate elections and they voted for the Democrat, named Tilden.

Negroes and poor whites voted for Hayes, the Republican.

Hayes wanted to be president real bad. He promised the

slaveowners if they would support him, he would pull the federal troops out of the South. That meant Negroes and poor whites wouldn't have federal protection anymore.

The slaveholders agreed, so president Hayes sold out the hopes of poor whites and Negroes. Without the troops, the KKK was able to make white people afraid of Negroes.



Before long, Negroes lost the right to vote. Their children went to segregated schools if they went to school at all. Jim Crow laws were passed to keep Negroes and whites apart. The rich white man took land away from Negroes. In many ways Negroes were in slavery again. Most of them worked for almost nothing. A lot of them were lynched and nobody was punished.

For a long time it looked like things might never get better. Only a few people cared very much about what happened to Negroes and poor people. They began to organize themselves into various civil rights groups. One of the most important leaders in the first half of the 1900's was W.E.B. Du Bois. He said Negroes would not be satisfied with less than "our full manhood rights."

Du Bois was a very important writer. He also planned a world conference for Negroes which the government opposed. At that conference, Du Bois learned about discrimination against American Negro soldiers in World War I. Du Bois wrote about that and about a lot of other things the government didn't like.

WE FOUGHT WITH NON-VIOLENCE

In 1954 the U.S. Supreme Court said white and Negro schools were not equal and children of all races had to go to the same schools. After that the court made a lot of other rulings to get rid of Jim Crow laws.

Most of the court's rulings were never carried out. Then in 1960 four Negro students started the sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina. These were followed by picketing, marching and other demonstrations all over the country.

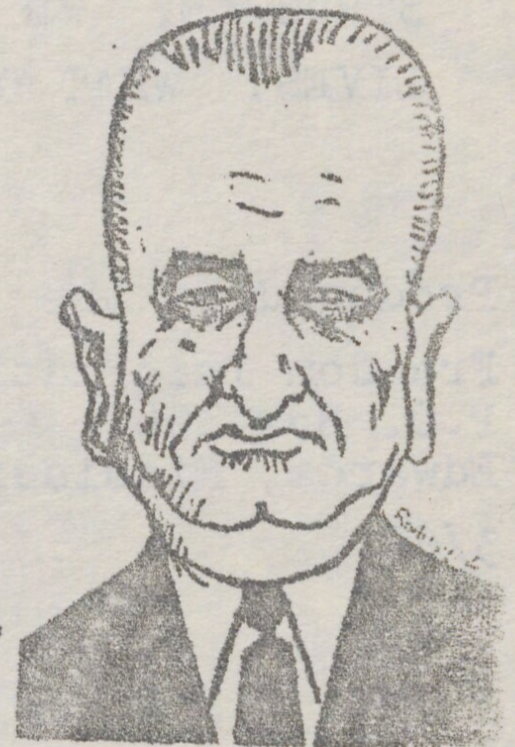
When policemen used dogs and clubs on marchers in Birmingham, the whole world began to know how bad things are for black people. The federal government was afraid to have people know what was happening in America, especially the black people in Africa who had just won their freedom. Congress passed a lot of bills to protect Negroes, like the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. These new laws don't help very much because the government doesn't really want them to work.

The government of Mississippi and the federal government are really run by rich white people who don't want us to have any power.



WE GOT TO THINK AND FIGHT

Now poor Negroes are beginning to tell the world what it's like to be poor. They are making some Americans afraid and ashamed that some people are hungry in a land that is so rich. The federal government has passed the War on Poverty program because it is afraid of what poor people might do and of what other countries might do. It's not really working because it was set up to make people stop complaining, not really to help poor people.



This raises a lot of questions that we got to think about:

Who makes decisions about our lives?

Who makes decisions for the country?

? Who should make these decisions?

■ If everyone gets to vote, will that solve our problems?

Why are we poor?

Who keeps us poor? Why?

Why do we spend billions of dollars each year on bombs and other weapons when people in our own country need food, jobs, homes, schools?

As machines put more and more people out of work, what will these people do?

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OUR HISTORY IN THIS COUNTRY HAS ALWAYS BEEN A STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM. COLORED PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD ARE STILL STRUGGLING FOR THEIR FREEDOM. POOR PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD, BOTH COLORED AND WHITE, ARE STRUGGLING AGAINST THE CHAINS OF POVERTY. WE ARE A PART OF THE STRUGGLE." WE ARE WRITING TOMORROW'S HISTORY WITH OUR LIVES. WHAT DO WE WANT TOMORROW TO BE ?

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