

## CHAPTER 1:

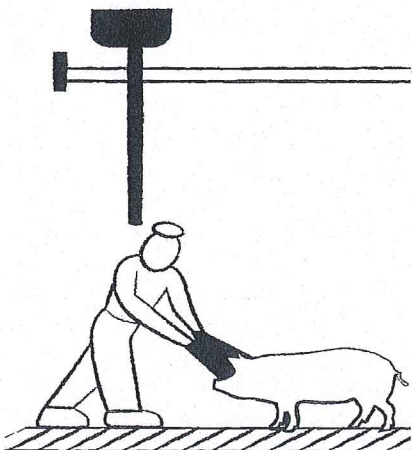
# Amos's Prophecy

By Terron Ferguson

I write to you deep in sorrow, my niggas. They slaughtering us in our streetz. I wonder, amid the recurring protests, are we finna finally, foreal, do something about what's going on? Are we going to get, and use, some power?

We steady trying to convince these white folk that we're human instead of showing and proving. For nearly three hundred years of Slavery, underneath all of its permutations, Black folk, for so fucking damn long, struggle to be seen, heard, and respected as people. Citizens. Still, we continue to ask, to petition, and to demand even. We asked them not to enslave us. Then, we asked them not to separate us if the conditions were going to be unequal. Now, we're asking them, with our hands raised at ten and two, in the burning city streets, not to shoot; to give us quality education and a sensitized experience in their schools; and to quit robbing us of our votes with felony disenfranchisement, rigged redistribution, and dumb ass voter ID laws.

I'm tired of asking them to see us, to free us, and, or, to help us be



STUNNING

us! Tired.

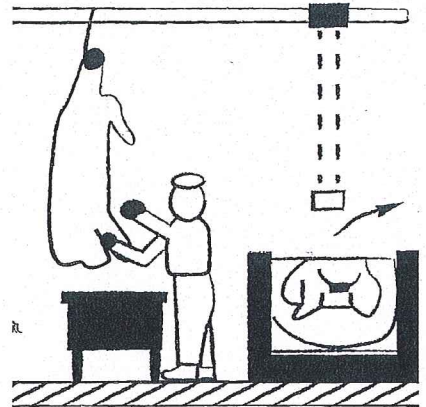
Our Black skin is good enough to yield America profits, but not good enough to compel its protection. This cycle continues cuz we ain't got no schools to educate and provide us with the tools, passports out of the slums. This cycle continues cuz we can't vote for new government officials, folk who look like us, are from our neighborhoods, and who will create policies and opportunities that enable us to escape. To pile it on, this cycle continues cuz, without fruitful jobs, ones with dignity, we can't feed ourselves or our families, and we make choices or commit what they call "crimes of economic necessity." Mass incarceration, the house that all of these police killings live under, is but a symptom, an outgrowth of this economic bondage.

Never forget. Slavery was about the money. Dr. King was killed when he put the money on the table. Won't we realize that the key to our trouble, the item that unlocks the coffers of American dignity, the quan you need to get the white man outta yo shit, to prevent the slaughter, is money?

We've gotta do just like they do. A white man doesn't ask, wish, or say, "I hope to go to college someday." He says, "I'm going to college and then I'm going to medical school and then I'm gonna be a doctor." He self determines. Because this is his country. Self-determination, freedom, is his God-given, American birthright. In the "Appeal to the Conscience of the Black Race to See Itself," Marcus Garvey told us, "It is the industrial and commercial progress of America that causes Europe and the rest of the world to think appreciatively of the Anglo-American race." Garvey continues, "Progress of and among any people will advance them in the respect and appreciation of the rest of their fellows. It is such a progress that the Negro must attach to himself if he is to rise

about the prejudice of the world."

Let's stop asking for citizenship. Because this is our country too dammit! We're just Slaughter-House Citezins instead of citi-



BLEEDING & SCALDING

zens. So, first we've gotta get the money, then we get the power, and then we get the respect. We must self-determine.

We did something very, very unique with American Slavery. American Slavery was more than a phenomenon initiated by, or an atrocity committed by, morally depraved bigots in the South. American Slavery was a massive ritual of connected ceremonies, an ecosystem of institutions, a psychology, a narrative, which became our country. One big ole slaughterhouse. Those "bigots," and all others complicit, participated, led, and built the institutions, communities, which formed our American society and culture, our air. The Civil War, which had Slavery as its crucible, was not only fought over economic reasons. The Civil War was also fought over the fundamental political formation of our country. Federalism, the choice between a strong central government or a union of states with common interests and politics, remains one of the War's unresolved disputes and, consequently, the civil-rights challenge of our time.

In American political discourse, "states' rights" refers to the po-



litical powers reserved for the many U.S. state governments, rather than the federal government. Now, think about this: every right that Black folk've been denied—freedom, quality education, the vote—is left to the discretion of the states instead of being federally protected rights of the people.

This is what makes change so difficult. This is why asking, or even demanding, won't work.

In 1869, four years after the dusk of Slavery, the Louisiana legislature purportedly turned New Orleans's meat-production industry into a corrupt monopoly. The law mandated a central slaughterhouse, under the exclusive control of a state-chartered corporation. Seventeen butchers were given the exclusive control, the right, to run the slaughterhouse, and every other butcher in the city, for a fee, had to use the facility to slaughter their animals. White Southern Democrats claimed that the passage of the legislation was an insider deal, only benefitting the folk who could cheaply buy cattle from Texas and then sell them for a shitton of profits. But, from the perspective of Radical Republicans, the new law was a good thing. New Orleans didn't have a public sewer system, and the humidity and swampy, wet climate made the living conditions horrible. Before the law, butchers in New Orleans routinely herded steers, sheep, and pigs through the streets and, after they killed and gutted them, dumped the waste, the blood, guts, and dung, in the Mississippi—just upriver from the intake pipe that supplied the city's drinking water. Doctors branded the NOLA the dirtiest and most unhealthiest city in the country. (New York, San Francisco, Boston, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia all had similar laws meant to confine butchers to areas that kept the water supply uncontaminated.) The air stank, and the wa-

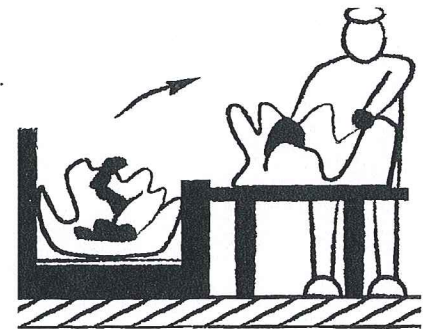
ter was almost poisonous.

Local white folk, however, were outraged. I'm thinking it was because that same year, under federal protection, a statewide convention created a new constitution for Louisiana. This convention was the first integrated major elective body in southern history. Thirty-five of the hundred and one members of the House were Black. Seven of the thirty-six members of the senate were Black. This integrated legislature crafted a charter full of Reconstruction goals. It had provisions for universal, desegregated education and a prohibition of racial discrimination in public places. As you can imagine, the new legislature was considered controversial as hell. It amounted to a re-organization of "the way things were" in Louisiana.

Capitalizing on this ire, the butchers who were excluded from the central slaughterhouse held protest meeting after protest meeting. At one, a bunch of butchers, stock dealers, judges, politicians, and other sympathizers rolled through. Despite their disparate individual interests, they united in their opposition to all the changes afoot: the "monopoly," the new environmental provision, and the new legislature. Frankly, white Southern Democrats saw an opportunity to successfully roll back all the gains Blacks experienced in the wake of emancipation and Reconstruction. One newspaper reported that the group raised \$40,000 for lawyers (which would amount to like an insane amount of money today; think gofundme amounts for Zimmerman). With that money, they appointed a committee of thirteen leaders to devise a strategy to defeat the monopoly and mount a legal assault against a policy aimed at public health, altruism, justice, or greed and corruption (depending on who tells the story). Their strategy leveraged the collision of

economics and politics, and the salience of race, in order to force a new narrative, advocate for different laws, and organize boots on the ground.

This story is economic. This story is political. This story is environmental, moral, and racial. Mostly, though, it's ours. This is how the story of a slaughterhouse became a story about citizenship



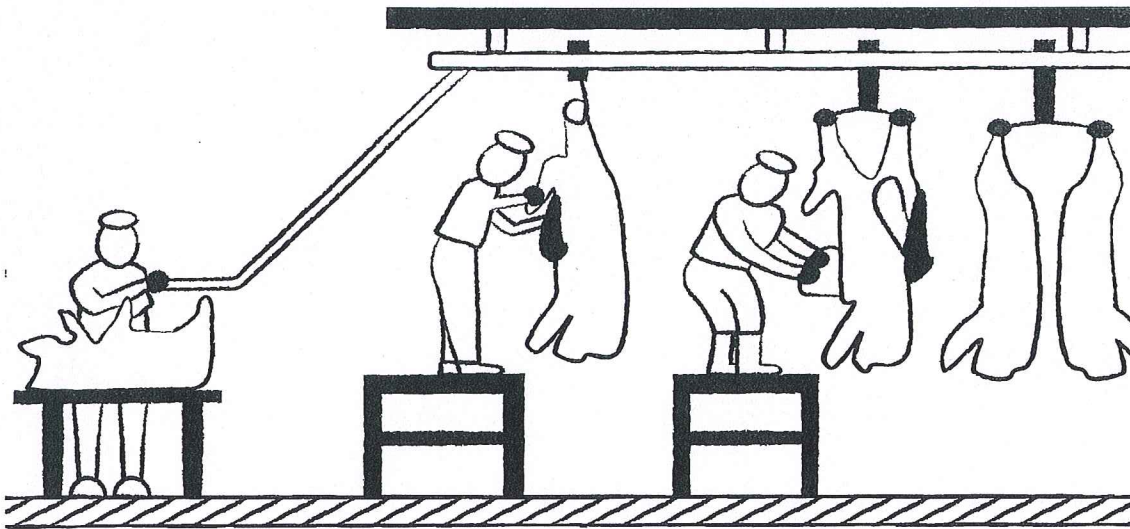
DEHAIRING & SCRAPING

Now, let's insert some people into this mix. They say John Archibald Campbell represented the independent butchers. Campbell, born in Georgia, was first admitted to practice law in Florida at the tender age of nineteen. I couldn't even imagine: being admitted to practice law at nineteen, hallelujah! In 1830, Campbell got admitted to practice law in Alabama as well, and then, he settled in Mobile, practicing until 1853.

Campbell later became an Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1857, dude was part of the six-justice majority in Dred Scott. (Yep, you're correct: the majority that concluded that Black people could never become American citizens and, therefore, could not file suit in a federal court.)

When the Civil War broke out, Campbell resigned and became the Confederacy's assistant secretary of war. He was loyal to the South, but he opposed secession. After the war, he went to the NOLA to resume the practice of





GAMBRELING, EVISERATION & SPLITTING

law. Jive that with another legend, which has it that, nursing a deep resentment of Reconstruction, and an even deeper loathing for niggaz, Campbell spazzed, writing with incredulity: “We have Africans in place all around us ... They are jurors, post office clerks, custom house officers and day by day they barter away their obligations and duties.”

Before the Supreme Court, Campbell based his arguments in the Slaughterhouse Cases on the common law, and the first two Reconstruction Amendments. [The 13th Amendment was meant to rid America of Slavery and all its vestiges. (To give freedom.) The 14th Amendment was meant to establish citizenship as the right to self-determine. (To grant rights equally.) And the 15th Amendment was meant to provide insurance that that freedom and citizenship would stick. (To expand the right to vote.)] Campbell used anti-Slavery rhetoric to fuse, and conflate, monopolies with slavery, arguing that monopolies stood against American “genius.”

The slaughterhouse law violated the butchers’ “right to exercise their trade” which, Campbell asserted, was a form of involuntary servitude banned by the 13th Amendment, and an abridgement

of the “privileges and immunities” of citizenship protected by the 14th Amendment. Campbell was arguing that freedom to earn a decent living was a privilege and immunity of American citizenship. According to Campbell, for a government to deny people that right was to put these butchers in Slavery. Campbell’s tactics presented the Supreme Court with a twisted task. For the first time ever, the Court would have to interpret the Reconstruction Amendments, define freedom, and—effectively—figure out the meaning of first-class citizenship.

Enter Samuel Miller. The Court decided the slaughterhouse case in April of 1873. Justice Miller wrote the majority opinion. He sustained a key point that had been asserted in support of the Louisiana law throughout the earlier litigation: the act determined the places where livestock was supposed to be slaughtered; it did not prevent any butcher from plying his trade. If a butcher wanted to slaughter animals, all he had to do was pay a fee at the slaughterhouse.

Justice Miller seems to have understood the Reconstruction Amendments as a package of reforms: three laws that, when read together, and understood for their spirit, were meant to to-

tally change how Black folk were viewed and treated in this country. Miller didn’t buy Campbell’s argument that the Slaughterhouse Act put some white butchers in a “servitude” that violated the 13th Amendment. Miller countered that all involved in crafting the amendment had understood that, in

the American context, involuntary servitude was virtually identical to Slavery. Just as the quest for freedom linked American slaves to the 13th Amendment, Miller also argued, our treatment after abolition linked us to the 14th Amendment.

Miller said that the “main purpose” of Section I of the 14th Amendment “was to establish the citizenship of the Negro.” Miller must not’ve believed, however, that the project of Reconstruction was meant to fundamentally upend, and change, our broken nation. He must not’ve believed that the 14th Amendment, with its citizenship, privileges and immunities, due process, and equal protection clauses, was meant to change the citizenship landscape of our country. Making us into a truly functional democracy. No more states’ rights. The individual, the American, Black or white, would be protected foremost—no matter where they resided—in our new union.

The 14th Amendment’s privileges-and-immunities clause is meant to require the states to do what they should have done all along: grant everyone freedom, allow everyone to pursue quality education, to participate politically, to earn a living, to build homes and families, to become Americans. Citizens. Federal en-



forcement of a citizen's privileges and immunities, of such rights, is a revolutionary act. It sends a strong message that the country will protect all people, not just the powerful, and certainly not just the folk who are lucky enough to live in progressive states. The 14th Amendment's privileges-and-immunities clause helps us hold our federal government accountable for making sure we ain't slaughtered.

**W**hy is the Slaughterhouse case at all relevant to LaQuan McDonald being shot sixteen times in an Illinois street? Or to Jonathan Butler's hunger strike at a Missouri state school? Or to fifty-six-year-old Army veteran Carl Ellis's inability to register to vote in Wisconsin?

I believe this case, the progenitor of our country's hypocritical "states' rights" doctrine, has authorized state governments to trample over our civil rights and to deny us American citizenship by stripping us of our privileges and immunities without due process or equal protection under the law. States can kill us, marginalize us, and silence us with impunity. On account of states' rights doctrine, we are Slaughterhouse Citezins: Black Americans who have been excluded from, and are unprotected by, the United States Constitution. Save for the fortunate few of us who can earn enough money to rise above the slaughter.

What can be done of a mistake made a hundred and forty-two years ago, though? Just as *Plessy v. Ferguson*, our country's hypocritical "separate, but equal" doctrine, was fought and defeated by myriad attacks, we now need a coordinated offense that forces the collapse of the states' rights doctrine. If we target the Slaughterhouse decision, and the states' rights doctrine, we can take down mass incarceration. We take down mass incarceration. And just like emancipation begat

Reconstruction, and the end of Jim Crow begat the Civil Rights movement, we can open the floodgates for quality education, unassailable voting rights, and many other gains we need.

In order to do this, we need to do like they do. We need to build more strategic capacity. We need to get, and use, some power. We need to organize. We need to build whips. All our whips need to embody the mentality that we are Slaughterhouse Citezins. All our whips need to advance the messaging that #BlackLivesMatter. All our whips need to do like them white butchers did and use money, the only tool that determines outcomes in America, to combine grassroots mobilization and political advocacy to defeat the states' rights doctrine and secure our privileges and immunities.

We don't need to convince them. We need to self-determine. Moral appeals ain't what change things in America. Money talks and bullshit walks. Money is what will converge this country's interest with that of Black folk. Money is what will force this country's hand to seriously address the plight of Black folk. After all, in our beloved capitalism, one can never divorce economics from politics, or from culture, or from love even—it's what gets us outta bed in the morning! Imagine every industry you see Black folk succeeding in, or over-represented in, as an opportunity to fuse the issue of full and equal citizenship with an economic interest, so that a necessary political powder keg is created, in the same way that it went down in the Slaughterhouse cases. Imagine that the Hip Hop community, the Sports and Entertainment community, the private and charter schools, the prison-industrial complex are all spaces that represent tools—masses upon masses of Black folk, purchasing power, influence—to be wielded in the fight for our reparations. Look around and find the many more! Us Slaughterhouse Citezins know it's

money, power, and then respect. Will we heaux up or grow up? Or will our citizenship continue to cost us a pound of flesh? Until next time...

<sup>1</sup>Hear this word that the Lord hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying,

<sup>2</sup>You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

<sup>3</sup>Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

<sup>4</sup>Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing?

<sup>5</sup>Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no gin is for him? shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have taken nothing at all?

<sup>6</sup>Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?

<sup>7</sup>Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.

<sup>8</sup>The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?

<sup>9</sup>Publish in the palaces at Ashdod, and in the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say, Assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Samaria, and behold the great tumults in the midst thereof, and the oppressed in the midst thereof.

<sup>10</sup>For they know not to do right, saith the Lord, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces.

<sup>11</sup>Therefore thus saith the Lord God; An adversary there shall be even round about the land; and he shall bring down thy strength from thee, and thy palaces shall be spoiled.

<sup>12</sup>Thus saith the Lord; As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear; so shall the children of Israel be taken out that dwell in Samaria in the corner of a bed, and in Damascus in a couch.

<sup>13</sup>Hear ye, and testify in the house of Jacob, saith the Lord God, the God of hosts,

<sup>14</sup>That in the day that I shall visit the transgressions of Israel upon him I will also visit the altars of Bethel: and the horns of the altar shall be cut off, and fall to the ground.

<sup>15</sup>And I will smite the winter house with the summer house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith the Lord.