

Literacy: a basic civil right.

By Katie Caliva

Yes, we can.

Barack Obama made this simple affirmation famous during the 2008 presidential race. Thanks to his campaign, we saw this slogan on posters, heard it in songs and witnessed college students chanting it in stadiums.

Putting all political biases aside, it really is a powerful idea. When you stop to think about it, however, it's also terrifying. Embedded in this dream for a brighter tomorrow is a very real call to action.

Yes, we can achieve justice.

Yes, we can repair society.

Yes, we can do just about anything. But we have to do something first. Before the shining future that we are audacious enough to hope for arrives, we must stand up and act.

On June 13, literacy advocates and community leaders convened at the Right to Literacy Convention in Buffalo, where they boldly stated low literacy is more than a tragedy -- it is a fundamental injustice. They crafted the Declaration of Literacy and Justice for All, which puts forth specific commitments to improving literacy nationwide.

The Declaration goes beyond stating a desire to see more people reading to include resolutions that target the underlying issues and specific problems with our educational and social systems. Delegates made commitments to do the things necessary to end the literacy crisis plaguing America and foster the high literacy levels necessary for citizens to redeem their rights.

As a literacy advocacy intern, I am deeply inspired by all that took place at the convention. The closing remarks delivered by David Harvey, CEO of ProLiteracy, infused convention delegates and literacy advocates from all over with the passion needed for the struggle ahead:

"We are here to bear witness, to bear witness to our rightful claim to literacy and education, a fundamental civil right that goes to the core of addressing inequality in America and around the globe. To bear witness to the history of this moment. To the formation of a Declaration of Sentiments, as well as resolutions that proclaim that we are loud and clear and our resolve strong. We are proud, we won't back down, we will not sit at the back of a bus, we will not be relegated to second-class citizens, we will not stand for inequality.

"What will we do with today's resolutions? Build public awareness, deliver them to the White House, initiate anti-stigma campaigns, support ProLiteracy's Statement of Adult Learner Rights, call for the creation of a White House task force to develop a national plan, call for more money and reform of the system, with a call to serve 20 million by 2020."

Yes, we can achieve justice by raising literacy levels nationwide. Yes, we can repair society so that it fosters lifelong learning and de-stigmatizes low literacy. Yes, we can do just about anything that we set our minds to. But more importantly, when it comes to literacy, yes, we will.

Show your support! Endorse the Declaration of Literacy and Justice for All that will be sent to President Obama: Go to <http://literacypowerline.com>.

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