

# Seven Colors of Rights

**Professor Will Harris**  
*University of Pennsylvania*  
Principal Scholar, ICRCM

Try thinking of the colors you would use, and how you would arrange them, to paint a faithful portrait displaying our best image of the human being properly situated in a well-ordered community – assuming that the proper medium for such a depiction is the rights that pertain to these subjects. To begin with, you should seriously consider that this may be the most revealing set-up for a project to construct the model of such a personality or character as the key to building a decent world. And you would need to determine what colors refer to what sorts of rights.

NEW SERIES CONTINUES

## THINKING IN COLOR

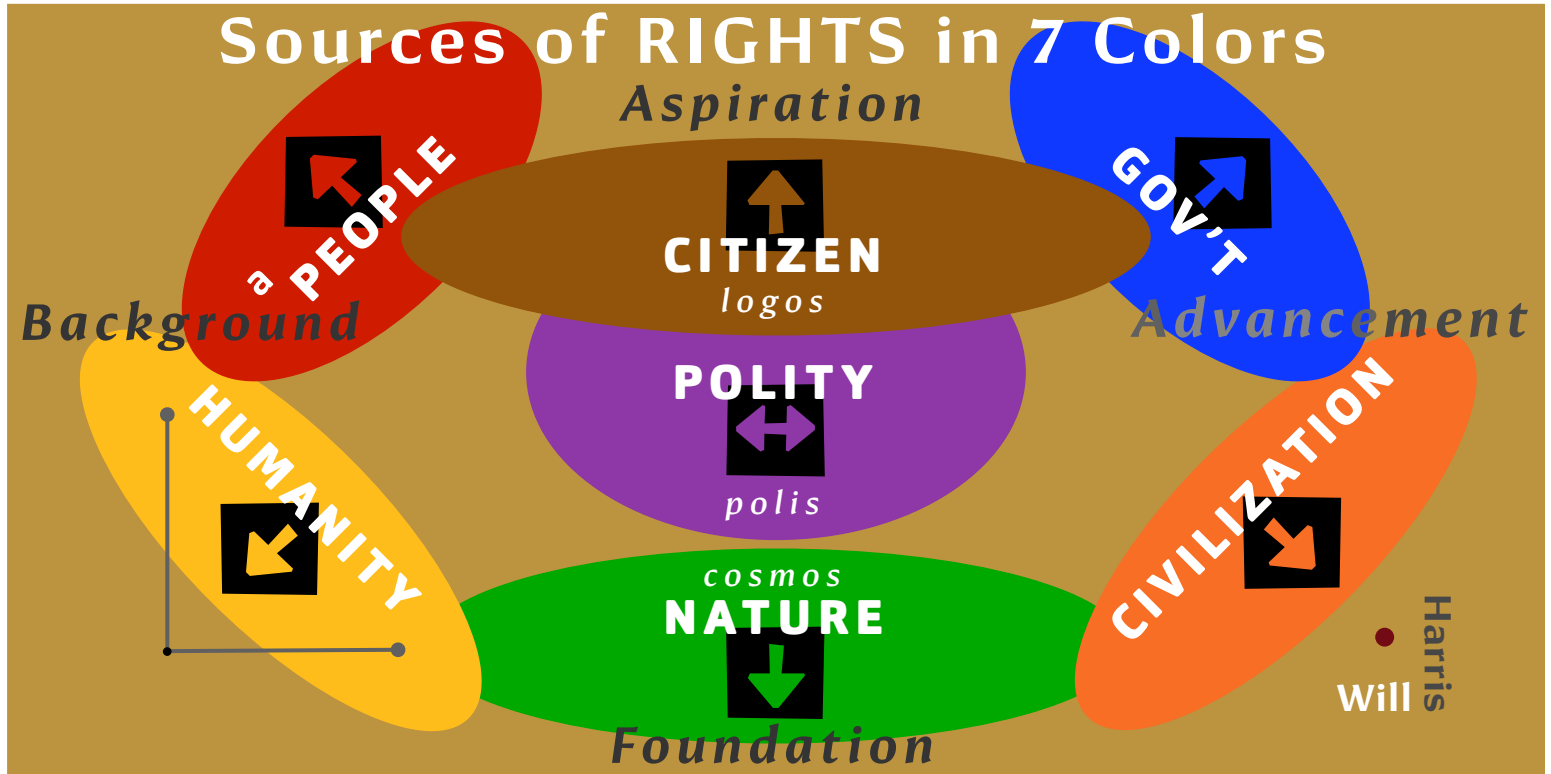
**Zoom Seminars, Fourth Program**  
*presentation and questions:*

Sat., Feb. 27, 2021, 2–3:30 p.m. ET

*follow-up conversation:*

Mon., Mar. 1, 2021, 7–8:30 p.m. ET

Rights, as such, are more than the “property” of persons or citizens. They are the attributes or traits that constitute who they are. They may be differentiated by their sources, for they do not all arise from the same place. And, if we are not aware of all of the possible main sources, it will be a challenge to assure that the full range of colors has been deployed in our portrait. The result may then be that the world to be composed will, in turn, be deficient in its essential components. So what would a “full-spectrum” picture of this human being look like?



The conventional approaches to ideas about “rights” have included a large number of distinctions that deserve revisiting. Some scholars separate categories into “civil rights,” “personal rights,” and “economic rights,” as one example. We might learn something from these groupings, or others, but they need to be examined for what they might do for a “rights regime” and for a Constitution that is designed not only to secure rights but also to generate more on behalf of prospering a community based on the advancement of freedom, equality, and human dignity.

Long before economic and political practices can be fundamentally changed to Make America Better, our mental picture of the essentials that lie in the background must be revised. You can’t improve basic conditions durably without changing minds.

Do we want a whole new thing, or just a shined up old model that doesn't embarrass us any more? If we want the former, we’re going to need to work at it, first with our brains, so we’ll know what it would look like and how it will function if it achieved. Our time of general crisis presents just the right opportunity, and an urgent need, to go deep. Too much has been sacrificed for us to be satisfied merely to return to the way things were before.

One way to address an idea that may seem too general or too big to engage with the mind is to break it down into its constituent parts or different aspects, then to assess each one, and finally to put it back together with its components still visible, reminding us of how we made it whole again. To do this, we will look closely at the pivot points where “conventional wisdom” arose in a manner so as to block the imagination of alternatives. Surely, the current regime today is not so successful that its fundamental ideas shouldn’t be put up for thoughtful public reassessment and redeployment.

If you want to reconstruct a world made by human beings — that is, the constitutional community for Americans — the way to start is to re-think it. And the best way to do that is to learn to “think in color” about what we are making so that it will coordinate with the elegant contours and substance of the world not made by humans.

Let’s pick up this process again, with your contributions, during the ICRCM’s fourth program in this series, as we consider one of the colorful ideas that matter most in building a space for meaningful life to match the spectrum of light.

This New Series runs concurrently with the Civil Rights Museum’s other series on the Three Foundings that make up the New Constitution of the United States. NEXT Zoom Seminar for that other Series, Sat., Mar. 19, & Mon., Mar. 22, 2021, on “The Consolidated American Constitution of the Three Foundings.”

INITIATIVE for the NEW CONSTITUTION

Apr. 3 & 5, 2021

Workshop on the Writings of Martin Luther King Jr.

According to the Three Constitutional Foundings of the United States

Follow-Up to Martin Luther King Day Program on Jan. 16 & 18, with additional background from this Seminar on the “Seven Colors of Rights” and the March 2021 program on “The Consolidated Constitution.”

134 S. Elm St., Greensboro, N.C. 27401