



What Are These Cheers of Freedom to Me?

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On December 31, 1862, both enslaved and free Blacks Americans gathered together in churches, and homes across the country to await the turning of midnight to another day, a new day when the Emancipation Proclamation became the law of the land. That evening wait is still commemorated in many Black Churches annually in a “Watch Night Service.”

The Emancipation Proclamation was a negotiation tool of the Civil War. It was not a manifestation of repentant hearts or transformed minds, but rather a war measure used to weaken the rebellious states of the Confederacy. By the end of the war, over 200,000 Blacks would serve in the Union army and navy. Those newly emancipated people joined the Union and fought not only for this country that did not love them or their freedom; they fought to free themselves. The Emancipation Proclamation granted some enslaved people of African descent the ability to fight for their freedom, but it was not freedom itself.

The Emancipation Proclamation, a presidential act, could not be effectively implemented in states under Confederate control. For this reason, people of African descent in Texas continued to live under the evil of slavery until June 19, 1865, when Union troops arrived in Galveston Bay, Texas, to announce the emancipation of the 250,000 people still enslaved in that state. Signing such a proclamation cost neither President Lincoln, who maintained opposition of equal rights for those emancipated, nor his cabinet anything. In fact, slave holders who voluntarily obeyed this executive order received \$300 reparations for each freed slave. Yet enslaved Blacks received nothing for their generations of stolen bodies, snatched children, and expropriated labor other than their mere release from legal bondage.

I am mindful of this history as some celebrate Congress establishing Juneteenth as a federal holiday. I am mindful that such feigned acts of solidarity ring hollow in light of the 389 bills introduced in 48 states that include provisions that would restrict voting access. I am mindful of lawmakers who unanimously vote to

celebrate Juneteenth but refuse to enact the John Lewis Voting Rights Bill (H. R. 4) or the For the People Act (S.1) to protect the voting rights of the descendants of those freed on the day the nation now cheers. I am mindful that while announcements flood the headlines of this new federal holiday, governors are using state power to ban accurate teaching of American history in this country and thwart the intellectual engagement of Critical Race Theory in institutions of higher learning. I am mindful that we celebrate Juneteenth as a holiday in a country that, since 1900, has repeatedly failed to pass anti- lynching legislation.

Jesus said: "And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32)

What are your cheers for Juneteenth to me but yet another reminder freedom is not free?

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