

Celebrating The 19th of June

I was born and raised in Houston, Texas. And as far back as I can remember we celebrated the 19th of June or JUNETEENTH our “nickname” for this celebration, as the official day of the Liberation of African Americans from slavery. We knew about The Emancipation Proclamation but for us it was June 19, 1865, and not January 1, 1863. It was liberation for over 250,000 slaves still held in slavery in Texas and parts of Louisiana that were unaware of The Emancipation Proclamation declared by the pen of President Abraham Lincoln. Some would say, justice delayed while I would say that the institution of slavery was allowed and encouraged in the United States until God used people to right the wrong. The Congress and the President of the United States sought to set the record straight not just in Texas and parts of Louisiana but for all of our nation by declaring June 19, 1865, as the official date of federal and state supported forced labor known as slavery.

As a child growing up in Texas, I remember the day always being filled with bright sunshine, the freedom for me, my siblings, my cousins, and friends to run and play either in a park or someone’s BIG backyard. I remember the barbecue, potato salad, collard greens, baked beans, cornbread, Kool Aid (not tea), and the ice cream and cake served as dessert. The conversations between the adults that I was not supposed to listen to. I remember the heated debates between my uncles and other men as to whether we were or would ever be completely free. The removal of chains, the forced cotton picking, the having to look down when whites approached might have been gone, but the separate but equal was still there. It has always amazed me that Black people in the United States could endure so much and yet find a way to enjoy life. Maybe it’s because like our ancestors we have an innate knowledge that we were born to be “Happy Warriors” for freedom and justice in a world where so many are always striving for the gold which does not satisfy nor pay passage through this thing called life.

So I’m thankful for the Federal Holiday that celebrates the end of state sponsored slavery in the United States but more so I celebrate the countless thousands that died before the June 19, 1865 and have continued to die, be wounded and resist the crippling effects of hatred that we might someday be the nation we claim we want to be.

HAPPY JUNETEENTH! from Bishop Swanson & Staff