

Thanks for Juneteenth!: *Continuing to Remedy the American Historical Narrative*

By the stroke of his pen, President Joseph Biden affirmed the law passed by the United States House of Representatives designating June 19th, Juneteenth, as the twelfth Federal Holiday. We the people of the Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN) offer our full support for the designation. That said, it is an imperative to understand at least three realities remain intact. Namely, the designation does not obfuscate the need to teach the unvarnished truth of what is the meaning of Juneteenth. Secondly, the designation is a recognition that, like July 4th, June 19th is a road marker, not a terminus, in the journey to full citizenship for people of African descent. Thirdly, the ending of the privatized chattel system left solidly intact a public chattel system demanding the work of PIIN and any entity committed to justice.

By the stroke of his pen, President Abraham Lincoln by affixing his signature to the Emancipation Proclamation declared all enslaved people in states rebellious to the Union would be declared free on January 1, 1863. Two and a half years later, almost two months after the surrender of the Confederate Army in Virginia, Union General Gordon Granger led soldiers into Galveston, Texas to inform still enslaved people they were free from private chattel systems. That day was June 19, 1865, the first Juneteenth. It has been celebrated in many states since the late 1800's. President Biden's pen simply cosigned at the federal level what many states were already celebrating.

By the stroke of their pens 56 land-owning (most slave owning) white men affixed their signatures to the Declaration of Independence which was adopted on July 4, 1776. The Declaration was aspirational. It expressed the hopes of a subset of oppressed people. June 19th does the same for the oppressed people of African descent. There should be no delusion that a federal holiday is the nirvana moment for the oppressed. It is not! It is, however, another road marker in the continuing journey to remedying the American historical narrative. Each is left to vision how large or miniscule the designation is, but a road marker is undeniable.

By the stroke of his pen, President Abraham Lincoln affirmed the law passed by the United States House of Representatives passing the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution on January 31, 1865, a little over two years after the Emancipation Proclamation and six months before the first Juneteenth. The Thirteenth Amendment codified a public chattel system (prison system) which is still in full affect today.

We the people of PIIN are thankful to President Biden and the United States House of Representatives for recognizing the significance of Juneteenth in the pathway to full citizenship for those of the African Diaspora. It is hope future legislation will receive the stroke of his pen on this such as a universal living wage, universal healthcare, free education from kindergarten through undergraduate degree, just to name a few.