



Speak Out Now

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Juneteenth – The Ongoing Struggle for Black Liberation

June 19th, known as Juneteenth, is the recognition of the last day of chattel slavery in the U.S. It was first celebrated by formerly enslaved people in Texas the year after Northern troops defeated pro-slavery forces there. This was two months after the end of the Civil War. It was the last battle against slavery that had been waged, in large part, by Black people who freed themselves from slavery during the Civil War in what the historian WEB DuBois called a “general strike” of the enslaved people.

In 2021, a year after the massive response to the murder of George Floyd, the Biden administration declared Juneteenth a national holiday. In the proclamation of the holiday, Biden said the purpose of the declaration was to “commit together to eradicate systemic racism that still undermines our founding ideals and collective prosperity.”

The notion that the U.S. government will commit to eradicating racism, the deadly legacy of slavery, is a lie and an insult to the generations of people who have fought for Black liberation. It is a denial of the role the government plays in maintaining the system that benefits from the oppression of Black people.

In 1961, Black author and activist James Baldwin said that being Black in America is “to be in a state of rage almost all of the time.” What has changed since then? Nothing! Rage is exactly what we should feel about a society in which Black people face the legacy of slavery and racism, in every aspect of life in the U.S.

The violence of the government, its courts, prisons, and police, overwhelmingly targets Black people. In the U.S., one in three Black men born in 2001 will spend time in prison. One in ten Black adults are currently on parole or in prison. More Black people are in jail today than there were Black people enslaved at the height of slavery. Unarmed Black Americans are five times as likely as unarmed white Americans to be shot and killed by a cop.

The government probe of the Minneapolis police department that murdered George Floyd concluded that officers have been engaging in rampant discrimination and unlawful conduct throughout the department for years. This shouldn't come as a shock. The same goes for the police across the U.S., not just those in Minneapolis. The racist roots of policing and incarceration in the U.S. continue to flourish.

Police violence is only part of the story. The labor of Black people was stolen outright for 400 years during slavery, and even after emancipation, Black people have been shut out of the best jobs by discrimination, and denied access to home ownership and education. One in three Black children live in poverty. One third of Black families have zero wealth or are in debt. Only 40% of Black families own homes, compared to 70% of white families. Black people have been forced to work harder for less since the foundation of the U.S. and it shows.

Black people have fought for everything they have won in this country. Emancipation from slavery was won by Black people who liberated themselves during the Civil War. In the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, Black people tore down segregation and forced the U.S. government to take action against segregation and legal discrimination. Nothing was given, everything had to be fought for.

Racism cannot be overcome by a declaration. It is woven into the fabric of the system of capitalism that gave birth to slavery. The divisions that it maintains today perpetuate the conditions faced by most Black workers. The struggle for Black liberation is an essential part of the broader fight for liberation from exploitation by this system. And it won't be over until the rule of a small wealthy minority over the majority is put in the dustbin of history, allowing all of humanity to thrive. Let's recognize Juneteenth by honoring the struggles of the past and preparing to take part in the struggles to come.