**Emancipation Proclamation Day to Juneteenth: The Struggle Wages On**

Dr. Brad R. Braxton

Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer

St. Luke's School

New York, New York

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**Note**: As many communities celebrate Juneteenth, it seemed fitting for me to offer some background on this holiday and its significance in the ongoing struggle for freedom.

**Emancipation Proclamation Day Then: January 1, 1863**

On Thursday, January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, liberating enslaved African Americans in states that seceded from the Union. The Emancipation Proclamation was not a moral testimony against slavery but rather a military tactic as the Civil War waged on. Nonetheless, the proclamation's anti-slavery sentiment heralded the dawn of a new day for African Americans and the entire country.

Despite the proclamation's symbolic importance, African American emancipation has come neither quickly nor easily. Frederick Douglass declared that January 1, 1863 was "the most memorable day in American annals." Aware, however, of the difficulties of achieving freedom, Douglass further commented, "The slave will yet remain in some sense a slave, long after the chains are taken from his limbs" (William K. Klingaman, *Abraham Lincoln and the Road to Emancipation, 1861-1865*, p. 234).

Frederick Douglass's words still convey a haunting truth. While African Americans and other disenfranchised groups have achieved certain freedoms, the emancipation efforts must continue. Mental shackles of systemic racism that devalue people of color have replaced the metal shackles used during chattel slavery. Different mechanisms of oppression are now utilized, but the results remain lethal—so many bodies and dreams continue to die prematurely and unnecessarily. As each year begins on January 1, many communities across the country commemorate Emancipation Proclamation Day. These groups gather to seek guidance and strength to cast off the oppression that keeps the United States from fully embodying its noble creeds in tangible deeds.

**Juneteenth Then: June 19, 1865**

Juneteenth originated in Galveston, Texas on June 19, 1865. On this date, the people of Texas learned that the Civil War had ended, and enslaved African Americans had gained their freedom. Major General Gordon Granger, the leader of the Union troops, issued General Order Number 3, emancipating the last 250,000 enslaved African Americans who remained captive despite President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. Justice was delayed but ultimately not denied.

The name Juneteenth may capture the excitement those enslaved African Americans felt. According to the "Queen's English," the celebration should be called "June Nineteenth." But when chains of captivity fell from their bodies and souls, their tongues were not concerned about grammar. Newfound freedom prompted the creation of a new word: "Juneteenth."

**Emancipation Proclamation Day and Juneteenth Now: June 19, 2020…**

While we have made many strides toward freedom, justice is still being denied to so many disenfranchised groups including, but not limited to, a wide assortment of people of color, LGBTQ people, and people with undocumented status. At some point during this year's celebration of Juneteenth, I encourage you to pause, gaze deeply within yourself, and ask this question: **What am I willing to risk and do so that *everyone* can be free?**

Share your response(s) to this question with family and friends as your accountability partners. Then move courageously from emancipation proclamation to emancipation activation!

**A Juneteenth Celebration at Carnegie Hall: An Invitation**

**June 19, 2020, 7:30 p.m. on Facebook and YouTube**

Dr. James A. Forbes, Jr., a renowned faith leader, progressive theologian, and the first African American Senior Minister of New York City's historic Riverside Church, orchestrated a magnificent public celebration of Juneteenth in 2019 at Carnegie Hall. Dr. Forbes is one of my most cherished mentors. I was his successor at the Riverside Church, and I serve on the board of the Healing of the Nations Foundation which he leads. It was my privilege to attend this event last year at Carnegie Hall, which was one of the most inspiring cultural celebrations I have ever witnessed.

Portions of the 2019 Juneteenth Celebration at Carnegie Hall will be aired again tonight at 7:30 p.m. on Facebook and YouTube. During tonight's Carnegie Hall celebration, Dr. Forbes will have a real-time conversation about social justice with Carnegie Hall Chairman Robert F. Smith. The program also will include commentary from Bill Moyers and Bishop Michael Curry and musical performances from Wynton Marsalis and the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. I highly recommend that members of the St. Luke's School community watch the event. [Click here](http://email.email.stlukeschool.org/c/eJxlUctqwzAQ_Br7aFZv6-BDbdmU0kL_oPixjkUUO_hRk7-vJNJTQDAzyzKz2h0KCUyMqS0oUABJNKEMqM5IJoEayXXZVFzxhpOEA95a67Jtd8cVt35aFpct6yWdCk5z6AaSD0oiz2WHtBVUCK1BaqL6LnXFtO_3hL0ltPHvPM8XG1_uxx-cl92ODy-cna_jsp7tOmT9eEtYE9Ivx5wwQxIqIwqWe3p46uOEpxiqjISGAbfdqxC8JVSEbBHSRcwPWPftOuPF4tQ6FwtxDt9QtQ7noV2jCKuJBGQEoiN82l8MxJx2nyKpnnZRvD89zccx4444_zehw25td7vMUYNi8P31nPeKDz8yIyUYXatK1mBIxcvGf8qwvGFlDlJRDkwrpqioiNRaKVU2b94IFDem1DVJ18KH4-3ulgfi5i_3crO45x7tUIQd_gFapZcT) for information about viewing the event.

In this season of serious struggle and great opportunity, whatever else you do, please "stay in the light"!

In Solidarity,

Brad

**Editorial Note:** This essay is adapted from my essay "Emancipation Proclamation Day and Juneteenth" in [*The African American Lectionary*](http://email.email.stlukeschool.org/c/eJxlUMGuhCAM_Bo9GmgB5eBBVH7jBRBWs6gbdWP8-4deNyF02kxm2hlqQZCHfKqBACGCSgpIQBa0EAQ6waTSLSuZZjRjxM9misV-xO_b725c11is2ysfa8E4t07CYJ0lJViBwXI7IHIegrAyj_V4HJ8Mmwx0eud5_siksQt_flmPKVypidPyDut2mm0oXJgz1Lf767tk2NEMxFM5Vgl-EwTOeYL-niK9CYPfj9Q9xsBva36bp-8YvQnb5MxiZv_U6N0xrYvZrpvQP-s87Efl7a8kRDiFFlNCTSlaBKH7VtKeCaUrXSpFSYsVaytJFCjdoWxU05dY9g0DBlpBvtUmRj9_4np5v6c8f5J8rnd-Gur7sn-T2ntf)*.* This website was created by Dr. Martha Simmons, a celebrated scholar of African American history and culture. The website was funded by the Lilly Endowment, contains more than 200,000 pages of free scholarship on African American history and cultural practices, and has received more than 10 million views.