

The Foot of the Mountain

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I'm not a historian. I never really was. When it came down to looking back or looking forward, I usually don't dwell on looking back at facts and hypothesizing how things could be different. I never studied salient details about the past; if required to do so, such facts were quickly forgotten. I just haven't been a person who loved history, no matter who tried to earnestly to impress upon me its inherent value.

Still, when June 19<sup>th</sup> rolls around every year, I try to take pause, if at least momentarily. As a black Texan, the 19<sup>th</sup> of June, Emancipation Day, or Juneteenth, however you may call it is an important day in our past that we should remember. It is a signpost along the road of our people's and our nation's development.

It has been said that black people in America have been united on only one issue in our history. That issue was not integration. DuBois and Washington fought that battle and Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X continued that same argument after that. It's not on the future of our artistic creation; the camps for and against hip hop could certainly tire themselves out in any discussion on that matter. It's not about religion; while many blacks have roots in the church, there's a steadily growing contingent of people who convert to Islam and even turn their backs on religious beliefs altogether. We are not a monolithic race with one mind on certain issues, and to some extent, I'm glad of that. But June 19, 1865, was the day that united blacks all throughout the State of Texas as we all rejoiced for our freedom,

Never before nor after that date have we as a people agreed on a matter. Never before nor after that day have we agreed on a distinct agenda for us strive toward. As we look back on the progress we have made in America, those who have achieved great things in our past, written poems and essays, given great speeches, invented important products, written groundbreaking laws, we must note that the lynchpin of all this culminated in a document that finally made its way to our state 145 years ago.

My generation, the Millennial Generation, is one that is steadily breaking down the boundaries of race. We strive toward seeing one another in equal eyes. While there are those in my age range who see race as irrelevant, there are others who see it as a crucial factor of our individual identities, all the more necessary to meld with other distinct cultures and backgrounds. It is with these varying world views in which Juneteenth is so crucial. Our rich history (whether we avow it or not, whether we cherish it or not) is what brought us to this point.

Juneteenth matters because it's the beginning of true black progress in America. It is the start of the road of our development. It is the foot of the mountain. For years prior to that fateful day in June, we were a people striving to achieve things for ourselves, the first of which was freedom. From then on, we had the liberty to make our own goals for ourselves. We no longer had the monolithic ideals of a people but we had the option down the line to realize the potential of our freedom.

From that point on after Texas' receipt of Lincoln's proclamation and the subsequent conclusion of the Civil War, blacks spanning the country were able to ask where they should go next. We had the liberty to decide our own individual paths. We chose to start our own farms, we made our own businesses, we started our own towns. We wove new patterns in the American tapestry.

That fateful day in June started us off to become the divergent, distinct people that we are today. What began as a large group of people who merely survived under their masters' hands to subsist and see another day eventually became a people who could truly be whatever they chose to be. The conclusion of the Civil War led the America's auspicious Reconstruction period in which more blacks served in Congress than at any point of time in America's history, including today.

Juneteenth is the start of that journey of African-American progress. While the day itself is not as widely recognized as it once was, the spirit of that day's significance lives on in the Millennial Generation. People my age are people who have goals as divergent from one another as they are from the generations that preceded us, but they are still strongly rooted in the idea of progressing ourselves, individually and as a people.

Yet just as black people no longer stand together with the same set of ideals, and rightfully so, the Millennial Generation does not hold some united set of ideals. Just as there are those who cherish each June 19<sup>th</sup>, there are many who are flippant about that day. There are those who wish to leave the past behind us. We cannot force some set of values about the importance of historical reverence on these dissenters but we must instead do all we can to teach the importance of this date and its position in our people's progress.

Juneteenth is the foot of the mountain. It is the start of our ongoing race. It is our own piece of America's belief of *Annuit Coeptis*, "He (God) approves our undertaking." Our people from that day forward were capable of undertaking our own varied goals. We were able to accomplish great things without our shackles holding us back. We continue this undertaking today in 2010 and will always have the freedom to continue to do so.

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