What Does Juneteenth Mean to Me?

FELICIA A. SMITH
RACIAL JUSTICE & SOCIAL EQUITY LIBRARIAN
Juneteenth was “more” freedom - - for more Black enslaved people - - but not all.

“The Five Civilized Tribes” were deeply committed to slavery. They established their own racialized black codes, immediately reestablished slavery when they arrived in Indian territory, rebuilt their nations with slave labor, crushed slave rebellions, and sided with the Confederacy in the Civil War. In October 1861, the Cherokee Nation entered into a treaty to join the Confederate cause because they viewed the war as one of “Northern fanaticism against the institution of African servitude.” But on Feb. 19, 1863 — shortly after Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation went into effect — they issued An Act Providing for the Abolition of Slavery in the Cherokee Nation, which called for “the immediate emancipation of all Slaves in the Cherokee Nation.” The treaty ratified on July 27, 1866

{That was more than 1 year after Juneteenth}.

Researching Juneteenth, I learned about a vast plantation in Georgia, named Diamond Hill. Its owner James Vann, was the wealthiest and “reportedly cruelest of Cherokee slave owners,” of at least 100 enslaved people.

The case of the Cherokee Freedmen, the story of Native Americans as enslaved people who were also slave owners remains a relatively unknown aspect of American history.


&
https://time.com/4935802/cherokee-slavery-court-decision/
Sovereign Nation exception – only Black American Enslaved?

• Henry Louis Gates Jr. revealed actor, Don Cheadle’s family ties to enslaved people who were not freed on Juneteenth.

• **1866 A sovereign nation** within the United States, the Chickasaw Nation did **not** recognize the end of slavery until 1866.

• After 1866, the freedmen in the Chickasaw Nation, Don Cheadle's family among them, held neither U.S. nor Chickasaw citizenship until the 1890s when the Dawes Commission redistributes communally held land.

https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/aalives/profiles/cheadle.html
Felicia Smith’s grandfather’s grandparents were enslaved.

Author Clint Smith says this is discussed as if it happened during the Jurassic age when dinosaurs roamed.
Slavery didn’t end in 1865.

It evolved.

Bryan Stevenson

Free-ish

No longer enslaved?
- 13th Amendment

Mentally liberated?
- Patriotic Curriculums vs 1619 Project

4th of July 1776?
- Before Juneteenth

Tshirt @ https://physiciantee.com/product/freeish-juneteenth-george-floyd-shirt/

Image @ https://www.barrons.com/articles/juneteenth-how-popular-the-day-was-this-year-51592604552
The Thirteenth Amendment in 1865

The Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution abolished slavery and involuntary servitude, except as punishment for a crime.
Frederom to Be Taught the Truth?

“Historians have long disputed whether members of Congress signed the Declaration of Independence on July 4, even though Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin all later wrote that they had signed it on that day. Most historians have concluded that the Declaration was signed nearly a month after its adoption, on August 2, 1776, and not on July 4 as is commonly believed.”

https://doi.org/10.2307/1921451
Frederick Douglass in 1852 – Before Juneteenth asked “What, to the American Slave is Your Fourth of July?”

https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/nations-story-what-slave-fourth-july

What, to the American slave, is your Fourth of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy — a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour.

~Frederick Douglass, 1852
Senate unanimously passes a bill making Juneteenth a federal holiday.

Stanford or Nah?
Juneteenth’s meaning for me remains COMPLICATED - “Feel Me?”

On the Background section of my LibGuide, I link to Equal Justice Initiative’s daily calendar that states:

“Juneteenth does not denote a struggle completed or a finished line reached. Black Americans faced many threats to their liberty and their lives in the years after the Civil War and face continued injustice still.”

https://calendar.eji.org/racial-injustice/jun/19

https://guides.library.stanford.edu/c.php?g=1154266

https://exhibits.stanford.edu/saytheirnames/about/biography