

Twas the 19th of June, year 1865, when slaves were finally pronounced **free**... or so we thought. What does it truly mean to be free? The Oxford definition says, “not or no longer confined or imprisoned.” Can we truly say that is the truth that Black Americans are living today?

Juneteenth. Jubilee Day. Freedom Day. Emancipation day. Uncle comes over to Barbeque Day. All synonyms for this important day that represent no longer being enslaved. For so long, African Americans have been **fighting. FIGHTING! Fighting** for equal rights. Fighting for acknowledgement. Although African Americans were technically supposed to be free after President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, and after the Civil War ended. 2.5 years later. Imagine ordering a package, and it comes 2.5 years late. To make matters worse, it does not even look like the picture that was shown! That is what it feels like to be Black in America, the “Land of the free” today. That sounds like a rip off to me. As much as Juneteenth is meant to represent freedom, it is a reminder of how long it took, and the delay White Americans were to realize, “ Just because this person does not have the same color skin as me, does not mean I need to treat this person poorly and make them my slave.” They took their sweet sweet time.

Progression within the African American community can be dated from the late 1800. But as stated earlier, we **Never. Stop. Fighting.** Another time that brought an exuberance of cultural growth, was the roaring twenties, which ignited the spark for the Harlem Renaissance and progression of African Americans. I believe this was a major start to our fight for freedom. We were blessed with our jazz music, from artists such as Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. Our literature from artists such as Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes. Our art! Artists who go by the names of Jacob Lawrence, or Augusta Savage.

We have heard the stories of amazing Civil Rights Activists. Stories of Rosa Parks, who decided that the color of her skin was not a determining factor for where she decides to take a seat on a bus. Malcolm X, who believed in “protection by any means necessary” even though it was juxtaposed against what Martin Luther King Jr. preached. Martin Luther King Jr, a man who brought African Americans so far, and who would die for what he believed in. Equality. These are the names of just a few Civil Rights Activists that have brought inspiration among the black community. Their approaches to equality, to freedom, may not be the same. But something these activists had in common, was that they were not afraid to fight. Whether it be through actions, through boycotts, through words, through silence. **A lot of times, our silence is louder than a thunderous scream.**

We can learn so much from these activists, and apply their knowledge to our world today. Our presence alone is a form of social justice. When the Black Lives Matter movement began in 2013, it was chanted across the United States to bring justice due to unfair police officers, unnecessary deaths, and to remind the people around us that our lives simply matter. The real question is, why must we **fight**, protest, and hurt, for people to realize black people matter? Weren't we freed from this pain in 1865? But not given the right to vote until 1780? Then in 1776, Jefferson condemned the slave trade? Oh, and don't forget how we fought in the Revolutionary War from 1775-1782. Then, there was the 1880 compromise. And then again during the Civil Rights Movement in 1954. There are so many important dates of progress for African Americans, and I am so grateful for how far we have come. So why must we keep **fighting?**

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*Fighting for Juneteenth*

We must keep **fighting** because our lives are worth **fighting** for. Simple as that. Since May 25, 2020, our **fight** has been stronger than ever. It has been extremely empowering to see the change and impact that African Americans have on our rapidly changing society. According to Larry Buchanan, Quoctrung Bui and Jugal K. Patel, from New York Times, the Black Lives Matter movement may be the largest movement in the history of the United States. After mourning the deaths of my brothers and sisters, almost Every. Single. Day. It is refreshing, rejuvenating to hear news such as this. How our peaceful protests have brought change. How difficult conversations with people encourage growth. How we must keep **fighting**, in the ways we please. **Fight** to enjoy the freedom we were once promised.

I am my ancestors' wildest dreams. When they would be brutally murdered, for even attempting to fight for themselves or others, I have the free will to do so. My freeness is something I should never ever let go of. I must see my voice as an advantage, a blessing that my ancestors may not have had. Due to this, I should never be ashamed of my blackness. My blackness is a dial. Why do I feel obligated to turn it down to make my peers comfortable? We need to unite. Our world needs improvement, and if every individual takes the time to do their part, that is when we can make America great again. That is when America can rightfully be called "The Land of the Free." I hope that one day African Americans will Black and Proud, and Black out Loud. That is the significance Juneteenth has for me.

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