

@issue is published by the Chrysalis Foundation to provide timely and relevant information about the lives of girls and women in our community. To learn more about our work, please visit chrysalisfdn.org.

June 2021

JUNETEENTH - LEARN, CELEBRATE, COMMIT

Every holiday begins with a history lesson, and the newest federal holiday – Juneteenth – is no exception. Named for the month in which it occurred; Juneteenth is the recognition that slavery finally ended.

President Lincoln signed the [Emancipation Proclamation](#) in 1863, in the midst of a bloody civil war, declaring “that all persons held as slaves are, and henceforth, shall be free.” But for slaves in Galveston, Texas, the news didn’t reach them until two years later, on June 19, 1865.

More than 150 years later, in 2016, 89-year-old Opal Lee began a petition to make Juneteenth a federal holiday. This year, her efforts paid off when the holiday was proclaimed, earning the now-94-year-old Lee the nickname “Grandmother of Juneteenth.”

Recognition of Juneteenth is viewed as a sign of progress for Black people, who for so long fought for their freedom. It is a day of liberation and a day for celebration. But that doesn’t mean the struggle is over; in 2020, our country collectively came face-to-face with lingering systemic racism following the brutal murder of George Floyd by a white law enforcement officer.

Likewise, 2021 has recorded an explosive number of campaigns that make voting more difficult, particularly for Black and low-income people. To date, 14 states including Iowa have enacted 22 laws that restrict voting access, including purging voter rolls, reducing early voting schedules, limiting poll hours, restricting help to people waiting in line to vote, and reducing the number of voting sites.

To help us understand racism, the Greater Des Moines Leadership Institute offered an extensive study of Black history based on the groundbreaking [1619 Project](#) by Iowa native and journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones. But in May, Jones was [denied tenure at the University of North Carolina](#) as critics claimed her recitation including slavery and colonialism was “unpatriotic.”

The challenges created by both racism and sexism persist. Today, [Black women die in childbirth at 3 times the rate](#) of white women, earn an average of [38% less and face a 90% wealth gap](#) when compared with white women. Through the pandemic, Black women have been [more likely to be essential workers](#) and more likely to die from COVID — at [3 times the rate of white men](#). And when it comes to state-sanctioned violence, Black women are [1.4 times more likely to be killed by police](#) than white women and are [more vulnerable to sexual assault by police](#).

Without the voices of all of us, this list of ongoing oppression faced by Black and other women of color will only continue to grow. As we celebrate the end of slavery this month, and our country’s freedom next month, let’s all work together to end the glaring disparities faced by our sisters and brothers every day. We **can** leave the world a better place.

