The Inspiring Solidarity and Unfulfilled Promise Behind Juneteenth

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On June 19th, 1865 the last enslaved people in TX finally heard that the Civil War was over and they were free. Confederate General, Robert E. Lee, had surrendered at Appomattox on April 9th, but the remnants of rebel forces west of the Mississippi Rive did not do so until June 2nd. The arrival of Union General, Gordon Granger, in Galveston finally brought the promise of emancipation. This is the origin of Juneteenth, first celebrated in TX in 1866 as Jubilee Day (hearkening back to the JudeoChristian tradition of periodically freeing all slaves and cancelling all debts). African American communities across the south marked Juneteenth, and the holiday came north with the "Great Migration" as many sought a better life in urban manufacture compared to tenant sharecropping. Juneteenth gained popularity in the 1960s with the Poor People's Campaign of Rev. Abernathy who declared June 19th to be a Day of Solidarity with the civil rights struggle. Texas was the first state to make Juneteenth an official holiday in 1980 and by 2016 over 45 states had followed suit. Juneteenth became a federal holiday in 2021, the newest since Martin Luther King Jr. Day was recognized back in 1986.

In Wisconsin there are now many Juneteenth Celebrations from Madison, Beloit, and Milwaukee to Green Bay, Superior, and La Crosse. One event this year was held in the Driftless Region hosted by the Vernon County Historical Society invited people to dedicate a headstone for the previously unmarked graves of three African Americans - Jefferson and Lottie Craft, along with their daughter, Delta - who lived and died in Viroqua in the late 19th century. Jefferson Craft served in the Civil War with Company G of the Wisconsin Cavalry.

Wisconsin actually had hundreds of African American farmers in the 19th century - way more than exist today. In his "Black Settlers in Rural Wisconsin" booklet (WI Historical Society 1977), Zachary Taylor shares some history of these intentional African American communities. For example, Walden Stewart (born in NC) founded Cheyenne Valley in Vernon County in 1855, and there was also Pleasant Ridge in Grant County, built around the Greene and Shepard families. Charles Shepard and his son John were among the first blacks to join the Union Army, walking all the way to Prairie du Chien to enlist. The Founder of FFD, John Kinsman, often saw a descendant of these African American settlers, Mrs. Ironmonger, also walking six miles from her home in Lyon to work in Lime Ridge (and back) into the 1960s. Hillsboro in Sauk County was another popular African American destination, with over 150 families settling there with the help from the Quakers after the Civil War. As a result, Hillsboro led the way in Wisconsin with its integrated schools, churches, and sports teams. Algie Shivers of Hillsboro built many of the round barns in the early 20th century that are now so famous across the Driftless.

The abolition of slavery did not come easy in this country (or anywhere for that matter), and its sordid legacy remains with us today. The enslaved people of Haiti won their multiracial revolution in 1804 under the leadership of Toussaint Louverture, triggering nightmares for economic elites across the globe whose wealth depended upon forced labor. But the French Empire, under King Charles X, dispatched fourteen warships in 1825 and ultimately forced Haiti to pay 150 million gold francs for freeing itself. This odious "debt" (with massive interest) bankrupted Haiti's development and was not even paid off until 1947. When people speak about reparations to compensate for the legacy of slavery, this example may well come to mind. Slavery persisted in many parts of the world right up until the turn of the 20th Century. Brazil did not abolish slavery until 1888, and slavery was still legal in Zanzibar, a British colony, until 1897.

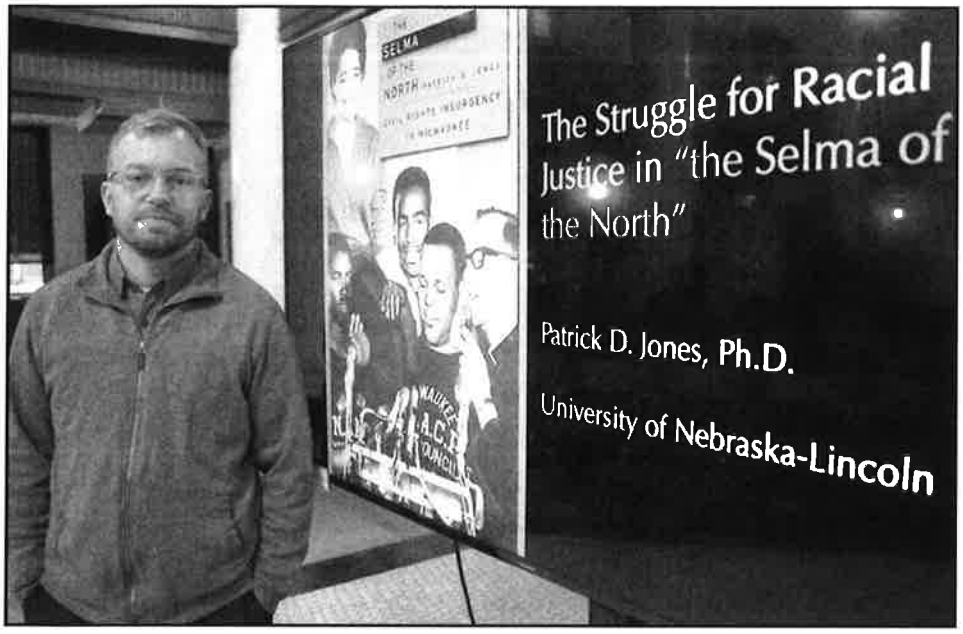
Pleasant Ridge, WI A Refuge for Formerly Enslaved People

Thankfully, there have also always been those who opposed slavery (remember Spartacus?), and across the Midwest these abolitionists were not just European immigrants, but included Native Americans (such as the Stockbridge-Munsee), as well as, African American settlers themselves. Dozens of uprising occurred across the south, and those who escaped slavery even formed renegade multiracial resistance movements against the Confederacy as depicted in the 2016 "Free State of Jones" movie. The Underground Railroad's success was built around such direct action, and over 100 people successfully escaped to Canada through Wisconsin alone using this solidarity network. The first one to do so in 1842 was Caroline Quarlis - just 16 years old - with a $300 price on her head - who managed to evade capture by many bounty hunters.

In her book, The Bone and Sinew of the Land, (*Hachette Book Group 2018*), Anna-Lisa Cox tells many inspiring stories of black Midwest pioneers who encouraged others to challenge systemic racism. Frank McWorter was one of these "Freedom Entrepreneurs" who bought himself out of slavery from the saltpeter mines of KY in the 1830s, did the same for others, and moved north to homestead and establish the town of New Philadelphia in IL. In order to frustrate this route to emancipation, many southern states soon passed laws, requiring a free black to leave within a year or risk being re-enslaved. James Wilkerson was another respected "Freedom Entrepreneur" who organized self-defense units against violent racist white mobs who attacked African Americans in Cincinnati, OH in 1841.

When Joshua Glover headed north from Missouri to find freedom in Racine, WI in 1852 he was hardly alone - over 60 formerly enslaved people were already living there in open defiance of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.This law gave the southern slavers and their thugs the "right" to pursue "property" into Free States, and Bennami Garland had already been running ads in Missouri papers offering a $200 bounty for Glover. Garland arrived in Milwaukee in 1854 where he convinced federal judge, Andrew Miller, to issue an "arrest warrant" for Glover, and then recruited Deputy U.S. Marshall, Charles Colton, as part of his kidnap posse. They managed to capture Glover at his Racine cabin, beat him brutally, then threw him into a wagon, but then got lost on their way back to Milwaukee.

This proved to be their downfall, since word quickly spread amongst the abolitionists, with Sherman Booth, editor of the popular Wisconsin Free Democrat newspaper, even riding his horse through Racine to rally supporters. Over 500 people marched to Milwaukee with the sheriff and their own "arrest warrant " for Garland and Colton. The abolitionists broke down the jailhouse door and held off the kidnap posse, while Joshua Glover was spirited away in a buggy. He was then sheltered by local farmers for several days until he could be hidden on a Lake Michigan Steamer bound for Canada. Booth and other abolitionists ended up being arrested and sentenced on felony charges, spending years in federal prison until the Civil War, but this direct action led the WI Supreme Court to declare the Fugitive Slave Act unconstitutional in 1855 and galvanized abolitionists nation wide. For more on the significance of the Glover incident, check out Robert Baker's book: The Rescue of Joshua Glover:A Fugitive Slave:The Constitution and the Coming of the Civil War (*Ohio Univ. Press 2006*) as well as Finding Freedom:The Untold Story of Joshua Glover (*WI Historical Society Press 2022*) by Ruby West Jackson and Walter T. McDonald. *(Continued on pg. 6)*



Patrick Jones, author of **The Selma of the North.**
Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee

Sadly, emancipation on Juneteenth in 1865 did not bring freedom or equality for African Americans. The promised "Forty Acres and a Mule" for those no longer chained to southern plantations never materialized and exploitative sharecropping took its place.

Reconstruction led to Jim Crow and systemic racism spread nationwide. The many promising programs of FDR's New Deal in the 1930s excluded tenant farmers, and even those black farmers who owned their own land still faced rampant USDA discrimination. It is no accident that the number of African American farmers in the U.S. has plummeted from nearly a million a century ago to less than 50,000 today. Sundown towns, where it was unsafe to be after dark if you were not white, spread north of the Mason Dixon line. Over 250 such sundown towns existed in WI alone up until WWII. Racist housing covenants and overt citywide redlining entrenched segregation, with Milwaukee being among the worst in the nation- just one of the many reasons why the 1960s Civil Rights Struggle there was so intense - for more details, read Patrick Jones' The Selma of the North. Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee. (*Harvard Univ Press 2010)*

Thanks to their own organizing and resistance, along with support from many allies, African American farmers have not disappeared. Collective mutual aid initiatives such as Fannie Low Hamer's Freedom Farm and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives inspired many other efforts. Monica White's book Freedom Farmers (*UNC Press 2018*) traces this historic trajectory of agricultural empowerment from the Delta all the way up to the Great Lakes. Pembroke Township, south of Chicago, remains a vibrant center of black agriculture and food sovereignty today, long after its founding by Pap and Mary Eliza Tetter who fled NC for freedom in IL back in 1861. Project Self Help and Awareness (PSA) which John Kinsman helped establish in the late 1960s challenged Jim Crow by hosting youth exchanges between farm families in Wisconsin and Mississippi, and those solidarity relationships continue today. The 1999 Pigford vs Glickman discrimination case brought to light the USDA's own sordid role in black land loss, and the Justice for Black Farmers Act introduced by Sen. Cory Booker, as part of the 2023 Farm Bill debate is just another step on a much longer road to redress the misery of slavery.

And, of course, the 13th Amendment- that formally abolished slavery- did not include everyone. Those behind bars were explicitly excluded - that's over 2 million people in the U.S. (there were 4 million slaves in the U.S. at the end of the Civil War...) So, the abolitionist movement still remains relevant today as part of the broader critique of the prison industrial complex in 21st Century America. As for Juneteeth, it is probably one of the most meaningful holidays anyone could celebrate -not just for the inspiration we can draw from an amazing struggle for human freedom, but also for the reminder that solidarity in the quest for justice and equality is ongoing.