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Common Council President



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15th District Alderman

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*City of Milwaukee Common Council*

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## Juneteenth Day: A Solemn Celebration

One year ago, I enjoyed the festivities of Juneteenth Day, alongside so many friends and family within the African-American community – as well as friends of other races and backgrounds from all over southeastern Wisconsin. As usual, there was delicious food, good music and a lot of laughter. Juneteenth is a proud, rich cultural tradition for African Americans in Milwaukee and all over the nation.

We annually celebrate the end of slavery in the United States on Juneteenth. We commemorate the birth of freedom for Americans of African descent. In 1865, Union soldiers in Galveston, Texas, first received the news that the Civil War was over and slaves were – from then on – to be truly known as free men, women and children.

Just as God has led other nations and individuals out of captivity, we African Americans were set free from bondage nearly 150 years ago. Historically, those who gain newfound freedom often leave the nation of their captors; however, African ex-slaves – for the most part – stayed and attempted to coexist in peace with their former slave owners. A difficult proposition, to say the least.

Despite the struggles we have endured and the fight for equality that still continues, there can be no doubt that Juneteenth Day is a sacred day for African Americans. Yes, there is singing and dancing and great food to eat. But there should also be a solemn awareness of the history that accompanies June 19, the day we finally heard the clear ring of freedom in the air.

Tragically, far too many of our young people are painfully uninformed in regard to our history. I believe that knowing our legacy is the key to having pride in our identity. One of the primary reasons that so many of our young men resort to disastrously violent decisions, is because they do not consider themselves – or their neighbors, classmates or community – to be of value. On Monday evening, a 19-year-old man was shot and killed in the 15<sup>th</sup> District. Last weekend, seven shooting incidents set an ominous tone for our young summer that is already tainted with brutality.

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## **Juneteenth/ADD ONE**

This destruction does not exist in a vacuum. It is borne out of hopelessness, anger and lack of understanding in regard to the exceeding worth of every individual.

At last year's Juneteenth celebration, solemn reverence and spirited revelry was replaced with this brand of ignorant violence. Instead of an atmosphere of thankfulness for our deliverance, the waning minutes of the day gave way to a physical beating, which left Milwaukee with a national shame that still lingers today, especially for African Americans. Instead of celebrating the history of Juneteenth with my own family, I found myself on CNN, defending the national reputation of the city I love.

We in the African-American community must not allow a spirit of violence and destruction to overtake the spirit of celebration and honor that are rightfully ours to enjoy. Parents and guardians at the Juneteenth Day event have an obligation to keep a watchful eye over their children this year, even more so than in years past. More importantly, parents and guardians have an obligation to sit down with their children and explain the importance of Juneteenth Day.

It is vital that we, as a community, take the time to tell young people about the history of Juneteenth. Our children will not realize why this celebratory day is so important if no one tells them. Police and elected officials cannot engage every child. Parents, teachers and neighbors must make the message clear, as well. We must all share the costly burden of passing on our legacy to the next generation.

We must teach them before it's too late.

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