

# On Black Liberation and Interracial Solidarity

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For those who are unaware of what Juneteenth is, Juneteenth is a holiday that falls on June 19<sup>th</sup> and celebrates the day that the enslaved Black people in Galveston Bay, Texas received word from Union troops in June 1865 that they were free from slavery, as per the Emancipation Proclamation, which outlawed slavery in the Confederate states on January 1, 1963. The Emancipation Proclamation was the first major step in the abolition of chattel slavery in America, a fight that hundreds of brave Blacks and their white abolitionist allies had been waging for decades.

Even as progressive legislation of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments heralded improvements to the material conditions of Blacks, their struggle didn't cease in the Reconstruction era—the rebuilding of the southern states. The end of the Civil War heralded a crusade by former Confederates and their supporters to institute regressive legislation and terrorist violence to maintain the old order of Black submission and servitude. The Reconstruction era ended without significant lasting improvements in the material conditions of Blacks in the South, with Jim Crow America settling in.

In spite of the white supremacy that dominated America, Blacks continued to risk their lives for the empowerment and liberation of their people in all aspects of their lives. One area of struggle that still persists in America to this day is the overrepresentation of Blacks in the most hazardous and underpaid jobs in the country, with few to no protections or benefits. In this dynamic, systemic racism torments Black workers and allows the owning class to exploit their labor by getting more work out of these workers for less pay.

In these struggles, Blacks found allies in the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the 1900s, who opened their union to all workers, regardless of race. Later on, and here in Louisville, Blacks were welcomed by the United Farm Equipment Workers of America (FE) Local 236, who promoted and built rigorous interracial solidarity, with their philosophy of class struggle unionism demanding that all union members at the International Harvester plant in Louisville view each other as brothers in a mutual fight for better working conditions. This hyper-focus on interracial solidarity strengthened the union in the face of severe corporate attacks, allowing Local 236 to achieve better working conditions, pay, and brotherhood among the Black and white workers.

Since the time of FE Local 236, the struggle for Black empowerment and liberation has grown more dire in many respects, as the gains of the labor movement and their allies were repealed or eroded away. Despite this, the modern-day fight for Black empowerment and liberation is still alive and kicking. With each passing day, more and more working people realize that if we abolish the system of exploitation, oppression, and brutalization that the owning class perpetuates, then all workers of all backgrounds and identities must stand united—we must forge unbreakable ties of solidarity built on the shared attunement to the particular struggles of all sections of the working class—to stand up to the owning class which exploits, oppresses, and brutalizes all of us.

Juneteenth represented the liberation from bondage for hundreds of thousands in Galveston Bay and has served as a rallying cry for millions of Blacks worldwide to continue the fight for their empowerment and liberation. It is the duty of every working person to carry the legacy of Juneteenth and other liberation holidays forward toward our shared dream of a free, equitable, and democratic society.