

I didn't celebrate Juneteenth growing up. I certainly heard of it, kinda like that song on the radio.. you don't know the artist or all the lyrics, but you can kinda hum the melody when it comes on. Two years ago, another organization I serve in as vice chair to, Beyond Black asked me to participate in the first ever Juneteenth celebration in Gresham. I agreed. Unsure of what would really come of it. In a little bit over a month, we turned out nearly 2,000 people to Vance Park for a day of music, vendors, art and most importantly community and education. Just as history was made on that day, we continue to stand on the legacy of June 19, 1865. A day of moving closer to freedom.

For some years now, I have made a habit to listen or read "What is the Fourth to The Slave" by Frederick Douglas on this place's Independence Day. When he addressed the crowd then, America was but 76 then.

I read recently on Twitter that Ronald Regan and Harriet Tubman we're alive at the same time. You can check it yourself. If enslaved Black folks were allowed schooling, I'm sure Frederick and Harriet could have been classmates, if they're lives hadn't been subject to the terror of separation in Maryland.

I remember when Ronald Regan died, my mom made my weekend hell. She literally forced me to sit in front of the TV and watch the pageantry for the dude unfold for what had to be hours. I was over it before it started. A graduate of the NE Portland 80's she was far from a Republican trying to get me to celebrate a hero. She was preparing me for moments like this, I just didn't know at the time.

The links of the not so distant past are made stronger when we keep holidays like this at our center. Juneteenth is a celebration, of our freedom we should be afforded at birth, to not be born to chains. We have much work to do to make that so. But keeping the history of Juneteenth at our state's center is a necessary thread in ensuring Black legacies of resistance AND joy remain for generations.

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