

What, to People of Color & Immigrants, is your 4th of July?

By Shawnta S. Barnes - Posted on July 4, 2018



Last year I wrote, “What, to a Slave Descendant, is your 4th of July?” to bring attention to the fact there is an increasing number of black Americans who don’t acknowledge or celebrate July 4th. Instead, many of them celebrate Juneteenth, a day that acknowledges when the last slaves learned they were free. Those slaves in Texas didn’t learn about their freedom until almost two years after the Emancipation Proclamation. Freedom means nothing if you don’t know you’re free.

I assert black Americans aren’t the only ones who are realizing July 4th is just one of many reminders of America’s legacy of killing, stealing,

destroying, and conquering. Many people of color and immigrants have found out the hard way that the land of the free and the home of the brave doesn't want them. Strange fruit might not hang from the poplar trees anymore, but it is littered across the hard pavement. The American dream continues to be deferred for Dreamers and seeking asylum results in separation of families and children caged and traumatized. Freedom means nothing if what you seek, including preserving your life, is taken away without notice.

White people, who are descendants of those white colonizers who stole this land from our Native brothers and sisters and then created laws to further their agenda, might call people who don't celebrate July 4th unpatriotic. Then, there are white people who claim to understand the refusal to celebrate, but will say, "Don't blame me for the actions of my ancestors." How can people of color and immigrants separate you from your ancestors when your actions or lack of actions furthers the agenda of your ancestors? Freedom means nothing if at any moment the cops can be called on you simply for existing.

If a person tells you he or she is not celebrating July 4th, respect it. Save your chastising and educate yourself. If you need a good place to start, read the speech Frederick Douglass delivered on July 5, 1852, referred to as either "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro" or "What, to a Slave, is Your 4th of July?" in Corinthian Hall in Rochester N.Y. Freedom means nothing if you are ignorant of the true realities of America because, in a blink of an eye, you could find yourself in chains.