Juneteenth is widely celebrated as Freedom Day, the June 19, 1865 date that many enslaved Africans held captive on plantations and farms in Galveston, Texas learned they had been liberated 2.5 years prior on Jan 1, 1863 by the so-called Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln originally issued the Proclamation on September 22, 1862 and signed it on December 18 with a declaration that 3/4 of enslaved Africans in the confederate states were “forever free” as of January 1, 1863 (with the exception of some 800,000 slaves across four slaveholding states that declared loyalty to the union). Freeing some of the slaves was a bargaining chip for states engaged in rebellion against the union.
December 31, 1862 thus began widely held Watch Night Services, as enslaved and liberated Africans and white abolitionists watched the Master’s clock at watch meetings and watch parties in sanctuary spaces, waiting for the new year to arrive, and with it, confirmation by newspaper or word of mouth that Lincoln’s proclamation had in fact been implemented. (Other researchers have linked Watch Nights to a pre-emancipation ritual known as Heartbreak Day on January 1, “when slave families anticipated being split up as owners would balance their books by auctioning off slaves, as well as hogs and horses.”) (U.S. Slave Blogspot).

With the Emancipation Proclamation going into effect, this makes January 1, 1863 the first documented celebration or observance of an Emancipation Day, Liberation Day, a Freedom Day Zero, but of course only for some. Which brings us back to that day on June 19th, 1865 in Galveston, Texas when General Granger and troops arrived to bring news that the Civil War was over and that the slaves were in fact free and had been for 2 years. Many slavers had moved their plantations to Texas during the Civil War, given that no major battles had touched Texas. They waged an active campaign of disinformation and fake news to obscure the issuing of the emancipation proclamation, and found ways to ensure that many of their captives did not learn about the end of the Civil War in April of 1865 – or couldn’t collectively act on it, even if they knew.

Facticity means a thing can only take on the feature of being a fact, of being real, of being truth or a part of reality when it has been pinpointed to the linear timeline and assigned a date. Anything that cannot be pinpointed to a date on the calendar and time on the clock is not considered real, factual, event(ual) or as having happened. The word derives from Latin factum “an event, occurrence, deed, achievement,” in Medieval Latin also “state, condition, circumstance,” literally “thing done” and from the 1630s, a fact is a “thing known to be true” and “something that has actually occurred.” Eve Ruhnau writes that “to test the truth or falsehood of predictions, measurements have to be made. Measurements produce facts. Predictions are about possible future events. Facts are constituted in the present and are, retrospectively described as past events with respect to instants which have already passed.”

In order for freedom for Black people to become fact by definition – an event or a truth – a measurement had to be made: a date and time assigned that would mark it upon the western timeline. Here we see “the Gregorian calendar and clock-time come together in capitalist social time relations and coalesce into specific hegemonic time forms,” and into “the expression of specific forms of historical consciousness.” (Martineau). Time Scholar Kevin Birth notes that “like the clock, the Gregorian calendar emphasizes uniform duration as the means of reckoning time” representing time “as consisting of empty containers to be filled.”
The nature of the two primary Freedom Days that we recognize - January 1 and June 19 - as a historical fact marking a freedom date and the idea that on either day Black people became liberated demonstrates the fallacy of facticity. It is the evidence of time being out of sync with liberation of Black people on the Western timeline, where time is measured by observing facts (Ruhnau, 56). Progress and accumulation of facts or points on the linear timeline always comes at the expense of Black lives, the goal of linear western Time is always to lock Black bodies out of the Future.

Again, there is a third liminal space of waiting time for enslaved Africans, during when yet another group of 800,000 enslaved Africans who still were not able to call themselves free from the tyranny of slavery. The slaveholding states that pledged allegiance to the union flag, (including 13 parishes in Louisiana and 48 counties in Virginia), were allowed to keep their slaves. 800,000 people waiting even longer for political time to unfold, for the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery to pass into law on December 6, 1865 - nearly six months after Juneteenth. Freedom Day celebrations for the enslaved Africans liberated in this third wave are often consolidated/collapsed into January 1. So here we have three waves of liberation in fact, January 1 1863, January 1 1865-December 6, 1865, and June 19 1865, all overlapping and intermingling despite holding discrete markers or calendar dates.

Our freedom from bondage and white terrorism via slavery was declared in a written document but we still had to wait for it - wait for the violence of war to end, wait for the Master’s Clock to stroke midnight on January 1, wait for Lincoln to sign the proclamation, wait for the information to travel, wait for the sun to rise on June 19, wait to escape, wait for General Granger to leave Louisiana and march upon Galveston and read General Order No. 3 before liberation could become fact and freedom could become truth.

Such means of time reckoning and truth-rendering and facticity are in direct opposition to Black folk traditions of time reckoning and truth rendering. As Laura C. Jarmon notes:

“...”The features of time and reality [...] may not always operate as criteria stable enough to delineate information status across communities. Consequently, Black folk narrative may employ contemporary information and it may in various ways relate information to fact. Black folk narrative reports events with participant group interests informing the report’s tenor and reiterating the group’s perspective.” (xxxiii).

Black folk narrative reports were activated when other enslaved Africans traversed time and space to liberate one another long before the time of the Emancipation Proclamation, during the time of the Civil War, and after the time of so-called freedom. They also strategically used wait time, communicating in codes, symbols, songs, chants and other means of obscuring the message - a social network relying on Afro diasporian technologies that white colonialist human traffickers thought they had left behind.

The rituals of Watch Nights and Freedom Days ties waiting time and political time together. Black people have always needed to be vigilant of political and institutional time, with an intimate understanding of how it moves. Whether it comes to the legislative process, voting times, and the many other ways in which time does violence or is not aligned with lived times and realities, the ways in which the Western linear timeline is openly hostile to Black bodies, and openly denies us access to our own futures.
Liberated Black laborers of Galveston - the original essential workers - understood the toll of waiting time, and that their freedom had in fact been purposely delayed. Demonstrating an elite understanding of facticity on the Master's timeline, they began advocating for a policy proposal using the white master's own language of time as money, turning facticity, and reclaiming their waiting time to demand just compensation and accountability from slaveholders who had kept them in captivity from January 1, 1863 to May 20, 1865 in spite of the proclamation's end date of 1/1/63. They understood, as Nanni observes, that “the rise of capitalism and the work-clock [...] went hand-in-hand: time became a quantifiable measure of exchange-value in the marketplace for trading in the commodity of human labour, the currency in which the workers' lives - their time, reified - was bought and sold.” The liberated Black laborers of Galveston challenged and chose not to accept the war end date of April 9, 1865 as the date by which they should measure the start date of their freedom and waged services.

Waiting time is an inherently complicated matter for Black people, problematizing the question of whether any of us free until all of us are free. What if we don't or can't even know that all of us aren't free? To quote Moor Mother: “The end has already happened and everyday someone figures it out.” We continuously make time bends and time mutations that allow us to escape points on the western timeline as a means of survival, and maybe we will never know if/when we are collectively liberated. We get pulled out of one portal and into another. What does it mean to be emancipated, pulled out of the portal of slavery, only to be pulled back in by indentured servitude or redlining or forced sterilization or police murder or while giving birth or while sleeping or while playing or while protesting or while...
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Weighting Time: Pandemic x Uprising Timescapes

weight (v.) "to load with weight," 1747 (figuratively, of the mind, from 1640s), weight (n.) Old English gewiht "weighing, weight, downward force of a body, heaviness,"

For certain communities, families, individuals, and identities, pandemic time is not new. We are always in a time of crisis, and many of us live with an ever present sense of urgency, an anxiety, a gravity, a weighting time that ties us down to the Western timeline. World changing decisions are made everyday on this timeline that permanently impact Black people's lives, health, job prospects, their futures, cutting their timelines short. While many have made the point that the pandemic has exposed or "laid bare" inequity and broad system failure, these inequities have always been plain to see and have been purposely ignored by white people and those in power until it becomes fashionable or profitable to hashtag Black Lives Matter. It is telling that we should have to proclamate our existence and beg for our lives to matter, to have gravity. To beg to not die is to beg to be weighted on the timeline. To matter is to gain access to the future: weighting time.
Many of us experience time as non-linear, interconnected, and are aware of the ever-present and overlapping nature of 1919 - 1968 - 1919 - 1964 - 1919 - 1921 - 2020 - 2014 - 1919. How are we marking the interpenetration of times of Black massacres and Black resistance? How do we recover and count every body? In 2019 Pennsylvania joined many other states around the country to recognize Juneteenth as a holiday, yet it did not require employers to treat it as a legal or official holiday under the law. This recognition of the holiday in name but failure to elevate it to a national holiday or one that allows paid time off can only serve to continue a ritual violence, an upholding of the victor’s timeline, a performance of Master Clock to slave clock. The idea of slave and master even extended into the development of mechanical clock time technology - clock makers in the early 19th century created systems of synchronization, with the concept of “master” clocks to “slave clocks.” (A Geography of Time, 1997).

In Time Wars Jeremy Rifkin describes in detail the ways in which "whether sacred or secular, every calendar expresses the essential politics of a culture," nothing that no other device in the entire political repertoire is as critical as the calendar in forging a sense of group cohesion." Birth agrees that "the relationship of time, politics, and globalisation involves the interaction of the global imposition of a Western timescale, local ideas of timekeeping, and how cycles of holidays shape sentiments and approaches to political challenges."

While writing this blog, Philadelphia Mayor Kenney announced that Juneteenth is now a paid holiday off for Municipal workers in the City of Philadelphia. I hope that Black people who can, will take the day as rest reparations (see The Nap Ministry), but know that rest and family time will likely not be a possibility for those tokenized as essential workers, disproportionately bearing the weight of pandemic time.
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Wading Time: Finding Ways Forward in the Western White Timestream

wade (v.) Old English wadan "to go forward, proceed, move, stride, advance" (the modern sense perhaps represented in oferwaden "wade across"). Specifically "walk into or through water" (or any substance which impedes the free motion of limbs) c. 1200. Figurative sense of "to go into" (action, battle, etc.) is recorded from late 14c.

"Time is like a river made up of the events which happen, and a violent stream, for as soon as a thing has been seen, it is carried away, and another comes in its place, and this will be carried away too." - Marcus Aurelius, Meditations (167 A.C.E.)

Wade in the Water is a Negro Spiritual said to contain codes, symbols, and geographical directions. It was one of the many songs Harriet Tubman would sing when transporting liberation seekers on the Underground Railroad. "Wade in the water" meant to get off the path and "wait in the water" in order to cover their scent from blood hounds. Many articles and blogs and books have analyzed and referenced the symbolism of water in Negro Spirituals and in Wade in the Water specifically.
As I have previously written, and as the quote by Marcus Aurelius demonstrates, traditional European spatiotemporal consciousness, around and prior to the 14th century, saw time as flow and inevitability. The word time itself derives from the word tide/tidiz, which has etymological roots in the sanskrit word for division, or to cut up, and tide or to flood (as in, the time of high water).

This context of water as time further affirms Wade in the Water as a technology to hack the European time stream. Wading/waiting in the water was an an act in the war for liberation that created a temporary time portal, a vortice of protection. To wait in the water, to stop, to rest against the current, to submerge the Master's clock, was a revolutionary act within a revolutionary act of escape.

What does it mean for us to wade in the water right now?

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