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## **COMMENTARY**

**Palaima: Juneteenth is a reminder of a reality that is still overdue**

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*Austin American-Statesman* Monday, June 17, 2010

As the Juneteenth celebration approaches, we should remind ourselves of its significance, important lessons and incompletely realized dreams.

On June 19, 1865, Major Gen. Gordon Granger landed at Galveston and brought to Texas news that the Civil War was over and that adherence to the Emancipation Proclamation in our state was 2\_ years overdue. His General Order Number 3 informed the people of Texas that "in accordance with a Proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and free laborer."

Proclaiming rights and equality is one thing. Getting human beings to change the ways they live and how they view and relate to other people is another. Even with the vision of a great statesman like Abraham Lincoln, the authority of federal law, the enforcing power of federal troops, and the good intentions of some moral and God-fearing human beings, the full imagined change did not come.

So on April 3, 1968, in his last sermon, more than a century after the original Juneteenth day, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. could say to men of God: "Who is it that is supposed to articulate the longings and aspirations of the people more than the preacher? Somehow the preacher must be an Amos, and say, 'Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.' Somehow, the preacher must say with Jesus, 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to deal with the problems of the poor.'"

As King and President Lyndon Johnson saw, poverty and racial segregation went hand in hand in creating conditions that were little different than slavery. The poll tax kept poor blacks and Hispanics from voting. And Jim Crowism kept well-off white communities separate from those of color.

As William S. Clayson documents in his recent book, "Freedom is not Enough," in 1960s Texas, "43 percent of nonwhites had no hot and cold running water in their homes, and 29 percent lacked flush toilets." And "Dallas had four census tracts in which 40 percent of the population lived on poverty wages or less." The populations of all four were 80 percent black. And a resident of Houston's Third Ward, when informed that the federal government considered \$3,000 per year a poverty-level income, told *The Texas Observer*: "Man, who makes close to \$3,000 a year? ... [T]hey ain't a whole lot makes that much."

King spoke of seeing the promised land. But LBJ had seen the unpromised land in his youth and never forgot the effects of crushing poverty and denied opportunity. Speaking at Howard University in June 1965, LBJ emphasized that obtaining a chance at economic equality was "the next and more profound stage of the battle of civil rights." He proclaimed, "Freedom is not enough. You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, 'You are free to compete with all the others,' and still justly believe you have been completely fair."

Juneteenth was not enough. *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, Selma, the March on Washington and the war on poverty were not enough. And post-Hopwood in Texas, the top 10 percent rule has not been enough.

Now as funding to education at all levels in our state is being radically cut back, let us hope that the spirit of Juneteenth might move those in power to remember MLK's martyred vision and LBJ's pragmatic intolerance of denial of equal opportunity.

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