

“What does Emancipation Day, May 20th mean to me?”. Explain the historical significance of Emancipation Day, May 20th, 1865, and describe what this day means to you.

Opportunity

“We the People,” the first three words of the United States Constitution, is a potent phrase that conveys a sense of unity and power amongst Americans. Through guaranteed rights to life, liberty, and property, citizens in America have endless opportunities. Citizens are regularly pushing the bounds of what is possible through the application of higher education. However, before May 20th, 1865, this was not the case for slaves in Florida. Moreover, Emancipation Day in Florida not only opened the door of opportunity for slaves in 1865, but it continues to present their black descendants with boundless opportunities.

I recall attending my church’s annual May 20th celebration as a young child, eager to learn about my family’s history. I remember sipping ice-cold red punch as I listened to my church’s elders talk about the importance of Florida’s Emancipation Day. I distinctly remember them showing me an old rusty cotton gin and explaining how my ancestors used to use that tool during slavery. I will never forget the stories my great grandfather shared with me as he stood under the cooling shade of my favorite oak tree. Once he tilted his tan fedora hat and looked into the sky, I knew I was in for a sweet treat. As he spoke, he looked far into the distance, into a place that I was unable to see. I remember trying to figure out what he was looking at and the pain I felt in my heart because I could not see what he saw. After failing to find what only his eyes could see, I decided to listen. At once, his words painted a picture in my mind that no history book could have ever shown me. With age, I realized that my great granddaddy was not only grasping his memories of the past as he looked into the distance, but he was envisioning all the opportunities that his descendants would have as a result of that life-altering day.

Every generation in my family has been vastly affected by the opportunities gained on Florida’s Emancipation Day. My great grandfather gained the opportunity to continue his education because of his great grandparents’ emancipation on May 20th. I can only imagine the excitement in his eyes when he became the first person in my family to graduate from college. Thus, he began a legacy of educational accomplishments within my family that has dramatically affected my view of higher education and the mindsets I have adopted. The foundation of this black legacy was built upon the opportunities enabled by the emancipation of slaves in Florida on May 20th, 1865.

The positive effects of Florida Emancipation Day continue to ripple out towards future generations, cultivating in them the motivation to seek opportunities. Just as a raindrop in the ocean can create a tsunami, the emancipation of slaves in Florida has caused a tsunami of positive impact upon the black descendants of those in bondage. Henry David Thoreau asserted, “Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you’ve imagined.” I value and appreciate the sacrifices made to emancipate slaves on May 20th because the freed slaves’ foundation continually allows me to “Go confidently” and live the life of my dreams. I can take advantage of a wide variety of educational opportunities, like participating in different clubs at my school and preparing for college, because of Florida’s emancipation. When I consider my privileges, rights, liberties, and family history, I see many reasons to revel in the opportunities I gained by Florida’s Emancipation Day.

Through the emancipation of slaves, black Floridians began the long marathon towards equality. As Black Americans move toward equality, the discriminatory barriers that impede fair treatment of black people in America are steadily tumbling down. As a result, the idea of what it means to be black in American is frequently evolving in the eyes of the majority. George Washington Carver contended that “No individual has any right to come into the world and go out of it without leaving behind them distinct and legitimate reasons for having passed through it.” As I regard Florida’s Emancipation Day, I am reminded of my obligation to seek the opportunities I gained on account of Florida’s emancipation.