

Good afternoon Rotarians,

This Sunday, June 19th, 2022, will be both Father's Day and Juneteenth, and I want to share with you a passage from an article from "the Good Men Project" that touches on both holidays.

The article is titled "I Celebrated a Juneteenth Father's Day: The Meaning of Emancipation for Black Dads." Quoting from the book "Slavery, Fatherhood, and Paternal Duty in African American Communities over the Long Nineteenth Century" by history professor Libra Hilde, the article reads:

Enslaved fathers faced additional agonizing contradictions. To act as caretaker deepened a man's social connections and provided one form of human meaning, but it also further tied him to a system that eroded his humanity. To be an involved, nurturing father was a form of resistance that was simultaneously humanizing and dehumanizing. Fatherhood imbued men with some authority, severely limited by slavery, and yet fatherhood also gave slaveholders increased leverage over a man. Fathers faced intractable dilemmas. To stand up for oneself or loved ones was to risk removal from and hardship for one's family. To be a man could mean compromising one's sense of duty as a man, and this remained true of the African American experience in the postwar period. African Americans articulated an abiding conception of paternal duty from the antebellum period through the 1930s because they faced consistent and ongoing challenges that did not end with emancipation. Slavery and Jim Crow placed two of the central imperatives of masculinity, duty to self and duty to family, in opposition. As a result, enslaved and then free fathers found alternate, indirect, and concealed ways to support their kin, often channeling their leadership and authority through ideas and religion.

In many ways, the challenges faced by Black Americans after the Civil War are the same faced by Black Americans today: disproportionate impoverishment, premature death, incarceration, and structural racism that cripples the collective pursuit of happiness. In this regard, what it meant to be a newly freed Black man and a father in 1865 mirrors what it means to be a Black man and a father today: providing for and protecting your family, nurturing your children's sense of self-worth and identity, defying stereotypes, resisting oppression, keeping the faith, and reckoning with the understanding, as Smithsonian Institution secretary Lonnie Bunch observed, that emancipation is "a process that is still unfolding—not simply a day or a moment of jubilee."

Thank you, happy Juneteenth, and happy Father's Day to all the Rotarian pops, grandpas, and great grandpas!