

June 19, 2020

Devereux Friends and Family:

By June 19, 1865, more than two and a half years had passed since President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation into law, freeing all enslaved people in the Confederate States of America. For almost three years, all slaves throughout the 11 states of the Confederacy had been free men and women according to federal law. And yet, on that afternoon in Galveston Island, Texas, when General Gordon Granger read aloud the contents of “General Order No. 3,” nearly four million Black people in America remained firmly bound in what was arguably the cruelest and most highly institutionalized system of slavery the modern world had ever known.

Granger read out, “The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves...” In the same breath Granger shared the news of Emancipation, he went on to announce, “The freedmen are advised to remain quietly at their present homes and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts and that they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere.”

In directing the newly freed people to remain in the service of – and ultimately, at the mercy of – those who had enslaved and tortured them, our government had firmly cemented the legal and institutionalized inequities between White and Black Americans. Even with the end of slavery – across the period of Reconstruction, into the Jim Crow Era and unto today, separate is not equal. The legal, financial and societal underpinning of a society founded inextricably on the enslavement of any group of its people is not equal.

June 19, 1865, was a momentous day – one which has since been celebrated by many Black Americans as *Juneteenth* – the day slaves in the Confederate States learned they were free. Our country was just 89 years old at the time, and yet at least 500,000 kidnapped Africans and millions of their descendants born into the unimaginable evil of the chattel system had been enslaved in America for 246 years – since August of 1619 when a ship carrying 20 kidnapped people from Angola landed in what would soon become the Colony of Virginia. The abolition of slavery, which finally came for all Black Americans in December of 1865 with the passing of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, was, and is, something to commemorate with great reverence – and with a deep respect for the enduring resilience of the people caught in slavery’s web of injustice, and all their descendants, who to this day live with its entrenched effects.

On this Juneteenth, as Devereux commits to combatting racism – in our organization, in the behavioral healthcare field and across our nation – we celebrate Emancipation and honor all those so deeply harmed by the institution of slavery and the structural inequalities created in its aftermath. On this important day, and on all days, we believe it is important to memorialize, to study and to understand the history of our nation, not just from the perspective of those who wrote our historic narratives, but critically, from the perspective of those Americans who were not permitted to do so.

It is long past time for the United States to honestly confront and address the implications of institutional inequity and racism embedded in the foundation of our nation. Devereux commits to this most important work, on this Juneteenth, and on all days.

For justice and for peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Leah S. Yaw". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Leah S. Yaw  
Senior Vice President and Chief Strategy Officer  
Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health