

Understanding August 1st 1834 Emancipation Day



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August 1, Emancipation day, is the day on which slavery was abolished in 1834 throughout the British Empire. The British Empire in 1834 consisted of most of the Caribbean islands, (e.g. Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Grenada, St. Vincent to St. Kitts, Antigua), Guyana, Honduras, Canada, West Africa — including what is today Ghana and Nigeria, South Africa — which was then called Cape Colony: West Africa; part of North Africa; India — including what is today Pakistan; part of China (i.e. Hong Kong); Australia; New Zealand; and the Pacific Islands.

In other words, the British Empire was massive. The ending of slavery throughout the British Empire, therefore, signaled the death knell of the institution of slavery throughout the rest of the world. This was indeed a major victory by our ancestors.

August 1, 1834 represents one of the most important days of the 19th century and indeed of this modern era. Thereafter the French, Dutch, Spanish, Americans and Por-

tuguese were forced to put to an end the institution of slavery in their respective territories.

SLAVERY

It was August 1, 1834 which ultimately led to the American Civil War of 1861 - 1865 during which slavery was abolished by the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863 and the 13th Amendment to the American Constitution in 1865 for which President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated.

The American civil war was fought simply because the southern states wanted to nationalize slavery and eventually extend it to Canada in the north and to South America in the south.

HUMAN LIBERTY

It was people like Nat Turner; Harriet Tubman; Frederick Douglass; John Brown; Sojourner Truth and many others who were determined to bury slavery once and for all. The impetus, however, was derived from the events which took place on August 1, 1834. There was a brilliant speech delivered by Frederick Douglas on August 1, 1880 in New York at an Assemblage to celebrate August 1st Emancipation Day:

“We are sometimes asked why we American citizens annually celebrate West Indies emancipation, when we might, American emancipation, why go abroad , say they, when we might as well stay at home? The answer is easily given. Human liberty excludes all ideas of home and abroad. It is universal and spurns localization.

It is bounded by no geographical lines and knows no national limitation.

The downfall of slavery under British power meant the downfall of slavery, ultimately, under American power, and the downfall of Negro slavery everywhere. But the effect of the great and philanthropic measure: naturally-enough, was greater here than elsewhere. Outside the British Empire no other nation was in position to feel it so much as we. The stimulus it gave to the American anti-slavery movement was immediate, pronounced and powerful.”

August 1, 1834 is a day that can therefore stand the scrutiny of history. It is a day representing freedom and the right of a people to be free. Slavery was an affront to humanity.

August 1st presents a moment in time to reflect collectively on the past and to point to the future together as a people. This is the foundation of genuine unity. To think of this large mass of people focusing in unison on the theme of Emancipation and the African’s destiny at least one day of the year, is a tremendous thought and this is what the internationalization of August 1st can do.

CIVILIZATION

The internationalization of August 1, Emancipation Day also has the goal of reaching out to the African world in order to determine the common threads within the many strands of African civilization. The search for the elements of African unity will ultimately give the one billion Africans worldwide an opportunity to rise and seek their former glory.

August 1, Emancipation Day is therefore a sacred



Marcus Garvey

day. Its annual observance must bring a new meaningfulness within the African family diaspora. This will also mean a renaissance, a resurgence of African value systems throughout the world.

This process will serve to reconnect the hundreds of millions of Africans in Brazil, Venezuela, Columbia, Panama, Peru, Argentina, Ecuador, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Mexico, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, the English speaking islands of the Caribbean, the U.S.A., Canada, Britain, Europe, the Far East, together with the hundreds of millions on the African continent itself.

It was on August 1, 1914, for example, that Marcus Mosiah Garvey formed the UNIA and thereafter succeeded in mobilizing and organizing millions of Africans throughout the world.

We need to build a national as well as an international awareness of August 1, Emancipation Day. We do not only need to internationalize a day, but in so doing we will be creating the framework for international co-operation, trade, communications, collaboration and therefore unity, politically, economically, socially, culturally, technologically etc, thereby ending centuries of isolation and disconnectedness. This new development will open unlimited windows of opportunities that will be to the benefit of one and all.

At the same time, August 1st, Emancipation Day, focuses on the concept of freedom as a human right to which every individual and to which all peoples of the world are entitled. It therefore embraces the struggles of all peoples

who have either struggled to achieve their freedom or who are still seeking to attain their freedom. One thing however is certain. The horrifying experience of the African who underwent the horrors of the brutal and inhuman slave trade and the institution of slavery should never again be experienced by any people at any time again in humanity's history. Never Again Slavery.

There is therefore the need, against this background, for an immediate nationwide programme of education, in the churches, community, organizations, on radio, television, newspapers, through cultural associations etc. The Caribbean Historical Society formed in 1982 by the National Joint Action Committee of Trinidad and Tobago, has been mandated to initiate an international movement to bring about the internationalization of August 1, on Emancipation Day.

May we all be reminded of the words written on the entrance to the Dungeons at Cape Coast Castle in Ghana, West Africa:

“In everlasting memory of the anguish of our ancestors.

May those who died rest in peace.

May those who return find their roots.

May humanity never again perpetuate such injustice against humanity.

We the living vow to uphold this.”

How best then can we the living truly and effectively uphold this, if not by the annual observance of August 1, Emancipation Day, the day on which our ancestors broke the chains of slavery, never to return.