

OPINION



the Astorian

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A scarlet red recipe for change

Red velvet beet cake, hibiscus lemonade, strawberry cornbread cobbler. Each of these Juneteenth delights showcases an auspicious vibrancy symbolic of our nation's history.

Juneteenth is a festival day unfamiliar to many white Americans, and one deserving of pensive commemoration.



JEN MUNSON

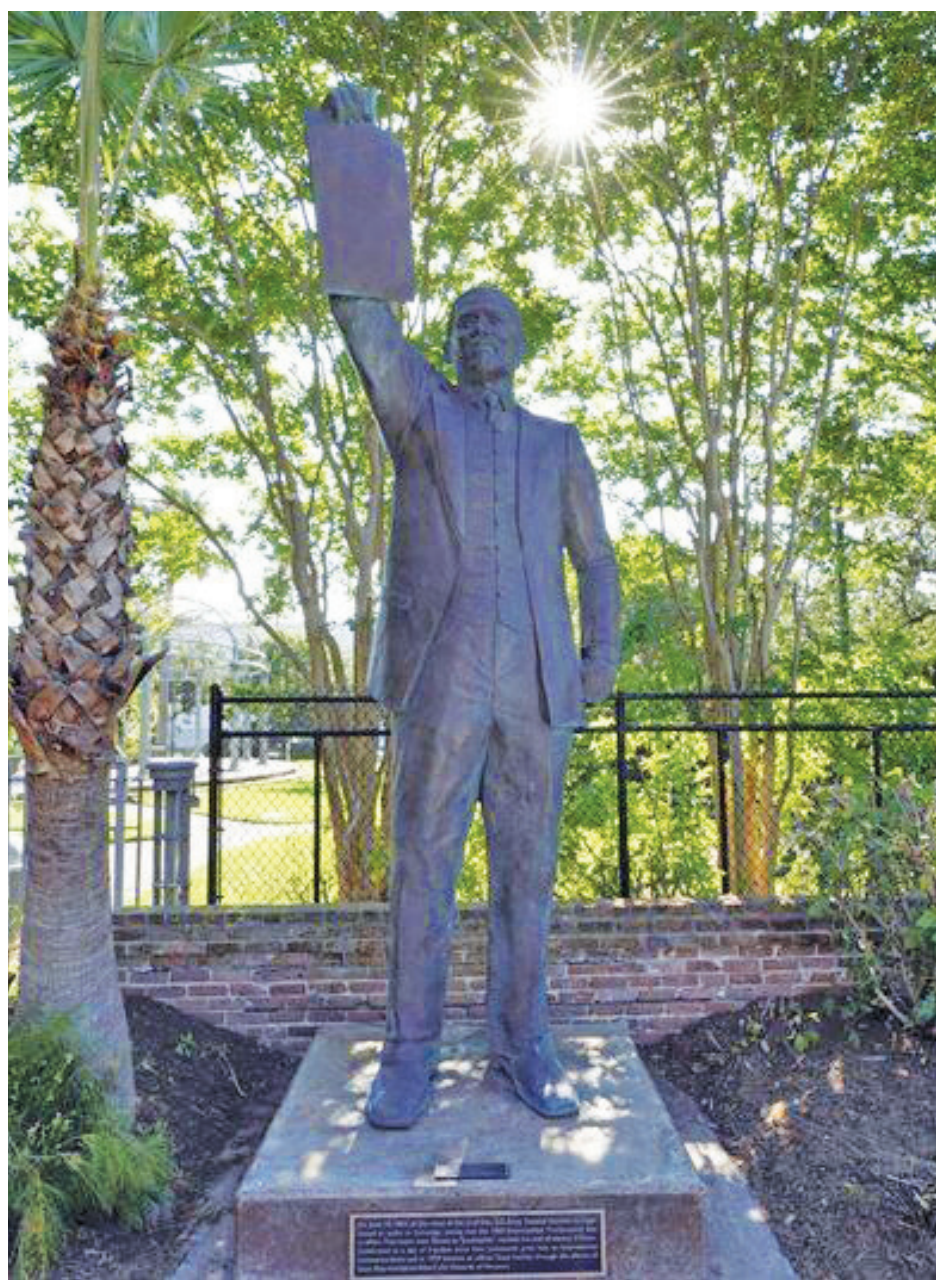
Also referred to as Jubilee Day, Juneteenth has been a holiday celebrated by many Black Americans on June 19 to commemorate the emancipation of all enslaved people in the United States. The holiday was first celebrated

in Texas, where on that date in 1865, after the Civil War ended, slaves were declared free.

It may be easy to fall out of touch with the fact that although most of us celebrate July 4 as our Independence Day, many Black people remained enslaved long after 1776. It wasn't until 90 years later, when the Emancipation Proclamation was signed in January of 1863, that slavery was ended by law. Importantly, it took another two years for that law to be communicated with purposeful enforcement to Confederate slave owners further south.

There are numerous ways to pay homage to this remarkable event in American history. My own ritual induction has seen a series of fits and starts. After all, like most white folks, I'm no expert here and my learning is never complete. But once I was able to set aside my white fragility goggles, I got down to brass tacks.

Following extensive historical research, including a number of earnest focus group dialogues among obliging friends, I decided upon an event that invokes the traditional Texan one. It will feature a modest gathering and a tasting of wondrous



A statue in Galveston, Texas, depicts a man holding the state law that made Juneteenth a state holiday.

David J. Phillip/AP Photo

red fare! We shall dazzle our loved ones with a flight of my wife's homemade summer berry wines — crimson, coral and all ruddy shades between.

We will muddle our way through a reading of the Emancipation Proclamation, as tradition dictates. With chagrin, we will lament Astoria's rather

memorable tango with the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s and reflect on how it must have felt for townspeople to see the cross burning on Coxcomb Hill one chilling night. And, finally, we will marinate over what a historical "civil rights walking tour" of Astoria might look like in anticipation of Juneteenth to come.

But all of these intellectual ruminations must be paired with a purposeful offering too — one of action, one of service.

In honor of Juneteenth, I donate my time to an agency that shares my values. United Way of Clatsop County is my chosen beneficiary — it's where I concentrate my local attention to help understand and correct inequities that lead to racial injustice, oppression and violence against people of color in my community.

Locally, nationally and worldwide, United Ways are taking steps to forge more equitable communities. We affirm that power lies within individuals. Individuals must act in order for structures to change, and once the structures change, culture may begin to recognize every human for exactly that: their humanity.

Wondering how to learn more about Juneteenth? Democracy advocacy group NextGen America has an excellent short video, "History of Juneteenth," available free online that can start you on your journey and bring modern relevance to your engagement with equity. Another brief video, Vox's "Why all Americans should celebrate Juneteenth" is similarly edifying.

Gov. Kate Brown signed a bill into law this month making Juneteenth a state holiday.

This year, armed with both curiosity and humility, join me in founding your own Juneteenth ritual.

For buried in these rituals, these offerings, is a scarlet red recipe for change.

Jen Munson is a disability rights advocate and social worker.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Stop the stall

Nearly two million Oregonians voted for ballot Measure 107 in November to allow campaign finance reform, but the Oregon Legislature seems to be ignoring that mandate from voters.

The bill by state Rep. Andrea Salinas, House Bill 3343, addresses voters' main concerns by providing contribution limits, tracking and transparency. When will there be a work session scheduled for it? Without one, this bill will die.

The bill by state Rep. Dan Rayfield, HB 2680, seems to be a bait and switch by providing possible good ideas, but actually eliminating the very basis of campaign finance reform: setting effective, meaningful limits on contributions.

People more cynical than I might suspect that legislators love their big campaign contributions, and aren't willing to lose the financial support of their big contributors. Perhaps they believe voters won't notice if they simply ignore Measure 107, and give us a weak and largely meaningless bill.

Let's hope our legislators don't add to the widespread mistrust and demeaning of good governance by side-stepping Measure 107. This is an opportune time for legislators to prove they listen to voters, and want to strengthen our democracy by passing effective campaign finance reform, HB 3343.

Please urge state Sen. Betsy Johnson and state Rep. Suzanne Weber to help pass HB 3343 this session. Contact information is at incoregon.org; legislative information is at olis.oregonlegislature.gov

LAURIE CAPLAN
Astoria

Agent Orange in Oregon

On June 28, PBS will premiere an important documentary film on their Independent Lens series that all Oregonians should watch.

"The People vs. Agent Orange" will both remind and outrage viewers about the terrible impact Agent Orange made, and continues to make, on the health of the Vietnamese people. But the film's focus isn't just on Vietnam.

Protest from the science community asserting that the U. S. military was perpetrating genocide finally pressured them to stop using Agent Orange in 1971. Not so here in Oregon, where the highly toxic chemical was used as a defoliant in the timber industry from 1969 to 1979 under



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LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Astorian. Letters should be fewer than 250 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone number. You will be contacted to confirm authorship. All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are allowed each month. Letters written in response

to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil. Send via email to editor@dailyastorian.com, online at bit.ly/astorianletters, in person at 949 Exchange St. in Astoria or mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR., 97103.

the name Silvex.

The film tracks how Oregonians living in the Coast Range were harmed by the spraying of Silvex, and eventually banded together to stop its use in our state. It's a dramatic story of lawsuits, corporate malfeasance, personal courage, as well as great suffering and personal loss.

One of the main components of Agent Orange, 2,4-D, is still being sprayed in the

forests of Oregon. The main ingredient 2,4,5-Trichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4,5-T), containing the highly carcinogenic dioxin molecule, has been banned.

But dioxin is slow to break down. That raises the question of whether any precautions were taken to protect workers in the likely event that the contaminated areas have been reharvested.

What about dioxin being tested for in

the groundwater and streams?

ROGER DORBAND
Astoria

Amazing neighbors

I want to tell about my amazing neighbors, who have become such great friends.

My husband has terminal cancer, and has limited time. They have all rallied around us, and are helping so much — giving us food and baking things for us, mowing and edging the yard, taking out the garbage, taking us back and forth to the hospital in Portland.

We are a close-knit bunch of seniors, and try to help each other when needed. I come from an area in West Linn, and never knew my neighbors in all the years we lived there. I feel this is the most amazing community, and I'm so thankful we are here.

LYNNE RICHMAN
Warrenton