

Emancipation Day, which falls on Aug. 1, celebrates the day slavery was outlawed in the British Empire in 1834. When the Abolition of Slavery Act came into effect, it freed an estimated 900,000 Black and Indigenous slaves across British-controlled territories. The fight against anti-Black racism isn't a "trend," it's a movement for more equality for Black people. We are dealing with two pandemics that continue to disproportionately impact Black and Indigenous people: COVID-19 and racism. True freedom is still far off in the future.

For us to discuss and talk about freedom or emancipation, or to say we have arrived at either, and celebrate liberation is totally wrong because we have reached neither. We are witnessing the continuation of slavery, particularly in the form of systemic domination. Racial inequality, police brutality, and systemic oppression are all legacies of enslavement.

"Canada seems to have written its promise of freedom for Black and Indigenous Canadians in disappearing ink. *But was it ever written...*"-Kathleen Newman-Bremang

Emancipation Day recognizes not only when slavery was outlawed in "Canada", on Aug. 1, 1834, but also Black people's battle against racism and discrimination that continues today. This day is now especially important now as the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacts racialized communities, and Black and Indigenous residents to be specific. And police violence against Black, Indigenous and people of colour have led to calls to defund the police and a surge of support for the Black Lives Matter movement.

Aug. 1 serves to challenge systemic racism and celebrate the power, potential, and capability of Black and Indigenous Canadians. Celebrating this day is our way of recognizing the outstanding contributions of Black and Indigenous Peoples in every field of human endeavour, made all the more impressive given the legacy of slavery that continues today. On this day, we come together to celebrate our achievements as a society.

August 1 is important in our history because the Abolition of Slavery Act drastically changed the lives of those enslaved and the lives of their family. Enslavement was and is not just an American thing— it occurred in "Canada", and to ignore that is to ignore years of history and trauma that our country's systems and government is built on. Our country didn't even end enslavement itself, It was eliminated by Britain across its empire in 1834 meaning that the unseeded country, "Canada" obviously didn't find anything wrong with it.

Emancipation Day isn't just about the past. It keeps on influencing the lives of Canadians today. As recent months have shown, this is something we need now more than ever. Emancipation Day is also about **reflecting on our present**, taking the time to examine the current circumstances, confronting the legacy of slavery, white supremacy, domination, inequality, and racial injustice in "Canada" and our world. Connecting the present to our past is a way of recognizing how slavery and segregation are the roots of racism and many of our other injustices in our world. Emancipation Day is also about **preparing and getting ready for the future**. We are preparing for our fight for equality so that we will be ready when future generations battle for justice. Emancipation Day is for remembering why we have Orange Shirt Day and why Black Lives Will Always Matter.

"Supporting Indigenous decision-making is key to fighting racism, the climate emergency and biodiversity loss. Empowering Black voices is key to reflecting our true history. ***Just as Indigenous laws are Law, Black history is Canadian history.***"-Annamie Paul

Canadian history is taught in schools from a Eurocentric perspective that overlooks and minimizes the human rights infringements against Black and Indigenous people. Students study white European explorers instead of the Black and Indigenous people they enslaved and colonized. A significant part of recognizing Emancipation Day is discussing the many forgotten areas of "Canada's" past that don't make it into the "normal" history-class program that students learn about. Emancipation Day is about learning "Canada's" shared history - not rewriting our history but telling our complete history that displays the history and legacy of slavery and systemic discrimination.

Decades before slavery was abolished and outlawed, the first piece of legislation to limit slavery in the British Empire was passed in Upper "Canada" (currently Ontario) after the abuse of a Black woman named Chloe Cooley. In 1793, her owner and several other men forcefully tied her in a boat and took her across the Niagara River to sell her in New York.

Even after "emancipation" and "liberation", Black and Indigenous people were and are continuous targets for discrimination, prejudice, and oppression among other things. Recognizing Emancipation Day questions why slavery happened in the first place and continues the fight to end systemic racism for future generations. Slavery and created

contrast cycles of prolonged suppression, unequal access to basic human needs such as health care, and lost opportunities which were much enhanced by segregation. Even after slavery was abolished in "Canada", Black and Indigenous people continue to be devalued with inadequate health care services, education and lack of opportunities. Communities were unrightfully segregated and separated, creating significant barriers to success in all its forms.

"The declaration of August 1st as a national Emancipation Day holiday would be an obvious way to acknowledge ongoing systemic racism within a ***continuum of injustice***."-The Policy Magazine

The current revolution from many communities and individuals fighting systemic racism and police brutality is a sign that society has ignored extreme issues affecting and plaguing us for far too long, and emancipation is acknowledging our issues and problems and working towards building a better tomorrow. As much as emancipation is a celebration of the end of one of the most brutal chapters in Black and Indigenous history, it must also be used as an opportunity to review what freedom and liberation mean today and how we can use them to move toward a better future.

Emancipation must also mean fairness and equity, for a just society where everybody has a balanced shot at a quality of life that reflects the resourcefulness and wealthiness of our country. Acknowledging Emancipation is a step forward in seeing Black and Indigenous history as a significant part of our society's story and teaches the following generations about the humiliating, disgraceful, and forgotten parts of our past history that must not get repeated.

Only by acknowledging and accepting its dark past can a community begin to heal itself. We have never apologized for our actions, or even truly acknowledged them, nor executed policies to undo the harm. We whitewash the legacy and brutality of slavery today. The bottom line is that we can't move forward as a nation until we confess and accept our faults from the past. ***Recognizing Emancipation Day on the federal level would be a major step toward accepting our mistakes of the past and working toward building a multiracial democracy where all of us are finally, truly free.***

Works Cited

Beattie, Samantha. "Emancipation Day Is Marked On Aug. 1 In Canada. Here's What That Means." HuffPost Canada, HuffPost Canada, 31 July 2020, www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/emancipation-day-meaning-canada_ca_5f24694fc5b6a34284ba886d. Accessed 18 Oct. 2020.

blackhistory. "Emancipation Day in Canada: Past, Present and Future – BC Black History Awareness Society." Bcblackhistory.Ca, 2019, bcblackhistory.ca/emancipation-day-in-canada-past-present-and-future/#:~:text=August%20is%20important%20in,the%20lives%20of%20their%20descendants. Accessed 18 Oct. 2020.

"Emancipation Day." Annamie Paul | Leader of the Green Party, 2020, www.annamiepaul.ca/emancipation_day. Accessed 18 Oct. 2020.

"Free at Last*: Make Emancipation Day a National Holiday – Policy Magazine." Policymagazine.Ca, 2020, policymagazine.ca/free-at-last-make-emancipation-day-a-national-holiday/. Accessed 18 Oct. 2020.

"In Push for Emancipation Day Declaration in Canada, Black Community Leaders Say It's an Opportunity to Examine What Freedom and Liberation Mean Today." Thestar.Com, thestar.com, 28 July 2020, www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/07/28/august-1-is-emancipation-day-in-canada-advocates-say-that-is-actually-what-the-civic-holiday-should-be-all-about.html. Accessed 18 Oct. 2020.

Newman-Bremang, Kathleen. "Emancipation Day Is A Reminder That Black Liberation Is Long Overdue In Canada." Refinery29.Com, Refinery29, 31 July 2020, www.refinery29.com/en-ca/emancipation-day-canada. Accessed 18 Oct. 2020.