

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/juneteenth-offers-an-opportunity-to-reflect-on-past-injustices-and-the-need-to-continue-addressing-them-today>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Yesterday, many Americans celebrated the holiday known as Juneteenth, which commemorates the emancipation of enslaved Africans and Black Americans on June 19th, 1865, when news of emancipation reached Texas, two years after the Emancipation Proclamation.

Juneteenth is certainly a cause for celebration. However, it should also prompt reflection about how far America has come, as emancipation was followed by continued oppression through the [Jim Crow era, white supremacy and violence](#), and mass incarceration.

Our nations legacy of racism and white supremacy lives on in many ways, including in our modern criminal justice system. African Americans make up just 13 percent of the countrys population, but they represent more than 35 percent of those in American prisons. In fact, the [13th Amendment](#) abolished slavery in the United States, except for those who are found to be a criminal under the law. This dangerous loophole has helped to pave the way to our current era of mass incarceration and the systematic oppression of Black people through over-criminalization.

Today, discrimination continues through racial disparities in the enforcement of seemingly race-neutral laws. For example:

Additionally, the burden of bail falls disproportionately on Black people, hundreds of thousands of whom are held in pretrial detention: they are accused, but not convicted, of a crime, and are jailed only because they cant pay bail.

This Juneteenth and beyond, we must confront our history of racism and contemplate the ways in which the American criminal justice system mimics past systems of oppression. Veras [Reimagining Prison](#) report calls for a radical shift in our current system from one that promotes retribution and punishment to one that promotes healing and human dignity.

While there is progress to celebrate, there is still much work to do. We hope that the celebration of Juneteenth and public awareness of historic injustices as well as the relationship of past racism to our current state continues moving us toward effective change. At Vera, [we acknowledge that true criminal justice reform can only go hand-in-hand with the advancement of racial equity](#), and we remain committed to this work.

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