

Township of Verona
Juneteenth Ceremony
Monday, June 16, 2025 - 10:30am
Mayor's Remarks – Dr. Christopher Tamburro

Good morning and welcome to the Township of Verona's Juneteenth ceremony and flag raising. Joining me today are Councilwoman Christine McGrath, Councilwoman Cynthia Holland, Bill Brown, First Vice President of the NAACP of the Oranges and Maplewood, and Ashanti Pope from Congresswoman LaMonica McIver's office. I would like to offer a special welcome to the H.B. Whitehorne Middle School 6th grade.

Moses Roper, who was born into slavery in Caswell County, North Carolina, lived in North and South Carolina and in Georgia before he successfully fled to the North and then to England. In this selection from his autobiography, he describes the punishment he faced after he tried unsuccessfully to run away.

My master gave me a hearty dinner, the best he ever did give me; but it was to keep me from dying before he had given me all the flogging he intended. After dinner he took me up to the log- house, stripped me quite naked, fasted a rail up very high, tied my hands to the rail, fastened my feet together, put a rail between my feet, and stood on the end of it to hold me down; the two sons then gave me fifty lashes, the son- in- law another fifty, and Mr. Gooch himself fifty more.

While doing this his wife came out, and begged him not to kill me, the first act of sympathy I ever noticed in her. When I called for water, they brought a pail- full and threw it over my back ploughed up by the lashes. After this, they took me to the blacksmith's shop, got two large bars of iron, which they bent around my feet, each bar weighing twenty ponds, and put a heavy log- chain on my neck....

Among the instruments of torture employed, I here describe one:- - This is a machine used for packing and pressing cotton. By it he hung me up by the hands, a horse, and at times, a man moving round the screw and carrying it up and down, and pressing the block into a box into which the cotton is put. At this time he hung me up for a quarter of an hour. I was carried up ten feet from the ground....After this torture, I stayed with him several months, and did my work very well. It was about the beginning of 1832, when he took off my irons, and being in dread of him, he having threatened me with more punishment, I attempted again to escape from him. At this time I got into North Carolina: but a reward having been offered for me, a Mr. Robinson caught me, and chained me to a chair, upon which he sat up with me all night, and next day proceeded home with me. This was Saturday. Mr. Gooch had gone to church, several miles from his house. When he came back, the first thing he did was to pour some tar upon my head, then rubbed it all over my face, took a torch with pitch on, and set it on fire,; he put it out before it did me very great injury, but the pain which I endured was the most excruciating, nearly all my hair having been burnt off. On Monday, he puts irons on me again, weighing nearly fifty pounds. He threatened me again on the Sunday with another flogging; and on the Monday morning, before daybreak, I got away again, with my irons on, and was about three hours going a distance of two miles. I had gone a good distance, when I met with a coloured man, who got some wedges, and took my irons off. However, I was caught again, and put into prison in Charlotte, where Mr. Gooch came, and took me back to Chester. He asked me how I got my irons off. They having been got off by a slave, I would not answer his question, for fear of getting the man punished. Upon this he put the fingers of my hands into a vice, and squeezed all the nails off. He then had my feet put on an anvil, and ordered a man to beat my toes, till he smashed some of my nails off.

The marks of this treatment still remain upon me, some of my nails never having grown perfect since.

Roper's treatment is simply one example of the extraordinary injustice suffered by millions of enslaved persons. His resistance represents the efforts of enslaved persons, abolitionists, clergy, and political leaders who sought to end the institution of slavery that was so ingrained in American culture. Eventually, the calls for abolition would take hold as states began in the late 18th and early 19th centuries to outlaw the practice or engage in gradual emancipation efforts. Ultimately, political and social divisions would result in the American Civil War.

In 1858, Abraham Lincoln observed "As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master." Four years later, President Lincoln drafted the emancipation proclamation, which ordered the freedom of all slaves in Confederate territories. While the proclamation would officially take effect on January 1, 1863, in reality it did not immediately free any enslaved persons because the Confederate states did not recognize President Lincoln's authority. It would take military action to enforce this doctrine, necessitating the bloodiest war in American history be extended for another two and a half years. As Union forces secured victory throughout the South, they enforced Lincoln's proclamation, signaling the start of military reconstruction.

On June 19, 1865, U.S. Army Major General Gordon Granger, upon his arrival in Galveston, Texas, imposed emancipation for enslaved Texans. We commemorate this as Juneteenth. Tragically, despite the end of bondage, in the South, slavery would remain in effect in several northern states, including New Jersey, until the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in December, 1865.

Unfortunately, the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments were not the end of the shameful treatment of black Americans throughout the United States. When military reconstruction of the

South ended 12 years after the conclusion of the Civil War, these citizens were held back by discriminatory Jim Crow laws, terrorized by hate groups, and excluded from the political process by poll taxes, literacy tests, and threats. It would take another century for the fight for civil rights to secure meaningful legislative and social success in America.

As we raise the Juneteenth flag today, we honor all of the enslaved persons who were subjugated in two and a half centuries of American history; those who fought for freedom and an end to slavery; all who suffered and persevered through inequality and prejudice; and everyone who took direct action in favor of civil rights in the 19th and 20th centuries; and all who suffer injustice today.

Thank you.