



**Waiting for the hour [Emancipation]
December 31, 1862.
Carte de visite. Washington, 1863.**

WATCH NIGHT

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Monday, December 31, 2007

**Bernice Johnson Reagon, Lectionary Team Cultural Resource Commentator
William Wiggins, Jr., Lectionary Team Cultural Resource Commentator**

I. Historical Background and Documents

The renewal of the individual's covenant with God through a service was established and emphasized by John Wesley in 1755. Wesley believed that Methodists, and all Christians, should reaffirm their covenant with God annually. Using words written by Richard Allen, Wesley published this service in a pamphlet in 1780, and this form was used without alteration for nearly a century in England. It has been modified somewhat in more recent years. The covenant hymn, "Come, Let Us Use the Grace Divine," was written for this service by Charles Wesley. The service is included in *The Book of Worship* under the title

"An Order of Worship for Such as Would Enter into or Renew Their Covenant with God-
-For Use in a Watch Night Service, on the First Sunday of the Year, or Other Occasion."
This Covenant Service is often used in United Methodism as a Watch Night service on
New Year's Eve. The Covenant Service is observed in some local churches on New
Year's Day or on the first Sunday in January. The service focuses on the Christian's
renewing the covenant of response to the grace of God in Christ.

Within the African American tradition, Watch Night services evolved around the
issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation by Abraham Lincoln in 1862, when Black
people gathered on December 31, 1862, to wait for the new day and the freedom that was
promised for January 1863.

The **Emancipation Proclamation** consists of two executive orders issued by United
States President Abraham Lincoln during the American Civil War. The first one, issued
on September 22, 1862, declared the freedom of all slaves in any state of the Confederate
States of America that did not return to Union control by January 1, 1863, and the second
one, issued on January 1, 1863, enumerated the specific states still in rebellion, where it
applied.

The Emancipation Proclamation was widely attacked at the time as freeing only the
slaves over which the Union had no power, but in practice, it committed the Union to
ending slavery, which was controversial in the North. It was *not* a law passed by
Congress, but a presidential order empowered, as Lincoln wrote, by his position as
"Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy" under Article II, section 2 of the United
States Constitution.

*On June 19, 1865, General Gordon Granger rode into Galveston, Texas and read the
following order:*

General Order #3

"The people are informed that in accordance with a Proclamation from the Executive
Branch of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of
personal rights and rights of property, between former masters and slaves, and the
connection heretofore existing between them, become that between employer and hired
labor. The freed are advised to remain at their present homes, and work for wages. They
are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts; and that they will
not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere."

The decision to issue it was made in June 1862. Lincoln held off issuing it until the Union
forces had won a battle and with their victory at Antietam, MD, September 18, 1862, the
document was issued four days later. Many understood this as a war policy document
aimed at undermining the Confederate rebellion. War Policy or not African Americans
saw the Emancipation Proclamation as a freedom document, a blow against slavery and
moved as if that was the case. In Harrisburg, PA came this supportive and defining
proclamation:

The proclamation did not free any slaves in the Border States (Kentucky, Missouri, Maryland, Delaware, and West Virginia), or any southern state already under Union control. It first directly affected only those slaves that had already escaped to the Union side, but as the Union armies conquered the Confederacy, thousands of slaves were freed each day until nearly all (an estimated 4 million) were freed by July of 1865.

After the war, there was concern that the proclamation, as a war measure, had not made the elimination of slavery permanent. Several states had prohibited slavery; however, some slavery continued to exist in Kentucky and Delaware until the entire institution was finally wiped out by the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment on December 18, 1865.

THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION: JANUARY 1, 1863

Whereas, on the twenty-second day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two, a proclamation was issued by the President of the United States, containing, among other things, the following, to wit:

"That on the **first** day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.

"That the Executive will, on the first day of January aforesaid, by proclamation, designate the States and parts of States, if any, in which the people thereof, respectively, shall then be in rebellion against the United States; and the fact that any State, or the people thereof, shall on that day be, in good faith, represented in the Congress of the United States by members chosen thereto at elections wherein a majority of the qualified voters of such State shall have participated, shall, in the absence of strong countervailing testimony, be deemed conclusive evidence that such State, and the people thereof, are not then in rebellion against the United States."

Now, therefore, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, by virtue of the power in me vested as Commander-in-Chief, of the Army and Navy of the United States in time of actual armed rebellion against the authority and government of the United States, and as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing said rebellion, do, on this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and in accordance with my purpose so to do publicly proclaimed for the full period of one hundred days, from the day first above mentioned, order and designate as the States and parts of States wherein the people thereof respectively, are this day in rebellion against the United States, the following, to wit:

Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, (except the Parishes of St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Jefferson, St. John, St. Charles, St. James Ascension, Assumption, Terrebonne, Lafourche, St.

Mary, St. Martin, and Orleans, including the City of New Orleans) Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia, (except the forty-eight counties designated as West Virginia, and also the counties of Berkley, Accomack, Northampton, Elizabeth City, York, Princess Ann, and Norfolk, including the cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth, and which excepted parts, are for the present, left precisely as if this proclamation were not issued.

And by virtue of the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons.

And I hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defense; and I recommend to them that, in all cases when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.

And I further declare and make known, that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.

And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

In witness whereof, States to be affixed, have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States Done at the City of Washington, this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty three, and of the Independence of the United States of America the eighty-seventh.

By the President: ABRAHAM LINCOLN
WILLIAM H. SEWARD, Secretary of State.

Sources:

Franklin, John Hope

The Emancipation Proclamation: January 1, 1863

Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration

Preamble and Resolution from “A Jubilee of Freedom”¹

On January 15, 1863, a group of colored citizens residing in Harrisburg, PA gathered for a public meeting held at Bethel A.M.E. Church. The meeting was to take into consideration the newly decreed (January 1, 1863) Emancipation Proclamation. This group was inclusive of Mr. J.H. Dickinson (chair), Messrs. Z. Johnson, S.M. Bennet, Rev. Mifflin Gibbs (all appointed vice presidents), John Wolf and H. Jones (secretaries). The following preamble and resolution speak to the sentiments and awareness of the

people of Harrisburg. The members in attendance viewed the Emancipation Proclamation as a step in the right direction for equal rights and justice, though they were not impervious to the fact that one of the underlying factors of the proclamation was to serve the war effort. This was an effort in which they were willing to undertake for God and country.

WHEREAS, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States of America, did, on the 1st day of January, 1863, issue a Proclamation that those states or parts of states that were resisting the lawful authority of the Government of the United States, that their slaves should be freed on the 1st of January, 1863, therefore;

Resolved, That we, the colored citizens of the city of Harrisburg, hail the 1st day of January, 1863, as a new era in our country's history—a day in which injustice and oppression were forced to flee and cower before the benign principles of justice and righteousness—a day in which the Goddess of Liberty, decked with the jewels of justice, presented to the sable sons and daughters of the south the inestimable boon of liberty—a day from which the enfranchised will be able to look forward into the future with the full assurance that they will be able to sit down under their own "vine and fig tree, with none to molest them or make them afraid."

Resolved, That if our wishes had been consulted we would have preferred that the proclamation should have been general instead of partial; but we can only say to our brethren of the "border States," be of good cheer—the day of your deliverance draweth nigh--do not act contrary to the rules of propriety and good citizenship, for the rod of your oppressors will eventually be smitten by the omnipotence of truth--the "ark" of liberty will yet dwell within your borders and rest within your gates--the fires of freedom shall light your hill tops, and your valleys shall be made vocal with the songs of liberty.

Resolved, That the American flag is now a true emblem of liberty; and if called upon we feel bound as citizens to maintain its supremacy o'er land and sea, against foreign foes or domestic traitors.

Resolved, That we are well aware that freedom and citizenship are attended with responsibilities; and that the success or failure of the proclamation depend entirely upon ourselves, as public sentiment will be influenced for or against that righteous decree by our correct deportment and moral standing in the community.

Resolved, That although the proclamation was not made as an act of philanthropy, or as a grand deed of justice due to those suffering in bonds, but simply as a war measure, still in it we recognize the hand of God; and for it we are constrained to say, roll forward the day when the American soil shall no more be polluted with that crime against God, American slavery; but all will be able to say "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace and good will to man."

JOHN WOLF, H. JONES, Secretaries.

II. Emancipation Celebrations in History

Definitions

(a) “Junkanoo is a Bahamian cultural expression, which has been derived from ancestry. It encompasses parades that are held here in the Bahamas twice a year, the 1st in January and the 2nd on the 26th December. In these parades, we showcase this part of our culture in three forms: Music, Art and Dance. . . .In the pre-Emancipation era, the slaves were allowed three (3) days off during the year: 1st January, 25th December and 26th December. On the 1st January and the 26th December, they were allowed to perform their Junkanoo festival.”²

(b) “John Canoe. The practice was once common in central North Carolina, where it was called John Canoe, John Koonah, or John Kooner. Historian Stephen Nissenbaum describes the ritual as it was preformed in nineteenth-century North Carolina:

“Essentially, it involved a band of black men – generally young – who dressed themselves in ornate and often bizarre costumes. Each band was led by a man who was variously dressed in animal horns, elaborate rags, female disguise, whiteface (and wearing a gentleman’s wig!), or simply his ‘Sunday-go-to-meeting-suit’. Accompanied by music, the band marched along the roads from plantation to plantation, town to town, accosting whites along the way and sometimes even entering their houses. In the process the men performed elaborate and (to white observers) grotesque dances that were probably of African origin. And in return of this performance they always demanded money (the leader generally carried ‘a small bowl or tin cup’ for the purpose), though whiskey was an acceptable substitute.”^{3, 4}

For additional information see:

“Junkanoo History." Bahamas Government online location:

<http://www.bahamas.gov.bs/BahamasWeb/Culture/sitehome.nsf/Subjects/Junkanoo>

“Junkanoo." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junkanoo 8 November 2007

Davidson, Marcia. “John Canoe or Jon Konuu Parade."

www.jamaicans.com/culture/intro/johncanoe.shtml

Nissenbaum, Stephen. The Battle for Christmas. New York: Vintage Books, 1997.

III. Stories and Illustrations

A. A New Year’s Prayer: "We pray tonight, O God, for confidence in ourselves, our powers and our purposes in this beginning of a New Year. Ward us from all lack of faith and hesitancy and inspire in us not only the determination to do a year's work well, but also the unfaltering belief that what we wish to do, we will do. Such faith, O Lord, is born of Works. Every deed accomplished finishes not only itself, but is also fallow ground for future deeds. Abundantly endow us, Our Father, with this deed-born Faith. Amen." ⁵

B. The illustrious African American historian John Hope Franklin chronicles the tense, yet joyful, anticipation for a long-denied freedom in the hearts of Watch Night participants on New Year's Eve, 1862:

By nightfall, Negroes all over the country nervously awaited their "Day of Days." In Washington, close to the center of history, they crowded into the chapel in the contraband camp at Twelfth and Q Streets for the "watch night" meeting. There were prayers of thanksgiving and hallelujah hymns. One man rejoiced that wives and children could not be sold anymore. It was near the break of day before they disbanded.

In New York's Shiloh Presbyterian Church, there was a New Year's Eve Grand Emancipation Jubilee...By nine o'clock the church was filled to overflowing, one third of the audience being white. Negro and white speakers hailed the forthcoming proclamation as one of the great landmarks of human freedom...At 11:55 p.m., there was a five-minute period of silent prayer. At midnight the choir sang, "Blow Ye Trumpets Blow, The Year of Jubilee has come."

Wherever Negroes were on New Year's Eve, 1862, there was little time for sleeping!⁶

IV. Traditional Songs for Watch Night/Emancipation Day

Oh Day Yonder Come Day⁷

[Chorus]:

Oh-o-oh day
Yonder come day
Oh-o-oh day
Yonder come day
Oh-o-oh day, yonder come day
Day done broke in my soul, yonder come day

Additional lines:

Come and look at day...
See heah come day

It's a brand new day...
It's a newborn day...

Oh come on day...
Good Morning day...

It's a crying day...
Oh come on day...

I heard the pastor say...
I heard the elders say...

It's a New Year's day...
It's a New Year's day...

I was on my knees...
I was on my knees...

Ask the Watchman How Long⁸

(New Years Eve Song)

We don't know how long will we meet together.

Neither we don't know how long we sing together.

This time next year, we all ask Watchman, "How Long?"

We don't know how long before the roll call.

Janie Hunter

Ask the Watchman how long,
How long Watchman, how long,
Oh, we don't know how long,
How long Watchman, how long,
Oh, in '64 how long,
How long Watchman, how long,
Oh, ask my brother how long,
How long Watchman, how long,
Well, ask my daughter how long,
How long Watchman, how long,
Well, ask my preacher how long,
How long Watchman, how long,
Oh, all my neighbors how long,
How long Watchman, how long,
Oh, before the roll call,
How long Watchman, how long,
Oh, just a few more risings,
How long Watchman, how long,
Well, soon it will be over,
How long Watchman, how long,
Watchman, how long
How long, how long,
How long Watchman, how long,
(Shout)
In '62 how long
How long Watchman, how long,
In '64 how long
How long Watchman, how long,
You know how long,
How long Watchman, how long,
Ask my friends how long,

How long Watchman, how long,
Ask my preacher how long,
Etc...
Brother Jenkins, how long,

Source: Moving Star Hall Singers, Johns Island, SC, led by the late Janie Hunter, daughter of the legend's great singer Joe Bligen. Other singers are: Isabel Bligen Simmons, Benjamin Bligen, Mary Pinckney daughter of Mrs. Hunter, and Ruth Bligen, daughter-in-law of Joe Bligen. Joe Bligen began to learn these songs at 12 and died at 75.

"We sing these old songs because we made our daddy a promise. He tell us that one of these days he gonna leave us, but 'though he leave us he still be with us as long as we keep these old songs up. We promise him, long as we live, we sisters and brothers, we will remain singing these songs. *Ask the Watchman* is my father's famous song, and when we sing that song we just feel like he's here with us."

... "All these songs go way back yonder in slavery time. When the old people didn't have nothing to do but grow sweet potatoes and corn and grind corn grits, then they sat down and taught us these old songs. Always it was families together, we sit down by the old chimney fire and were taught these old songs..."

Janie Hunter⁹

Free at Last

Free at last, free at last
Thank God almighty I'm free at last
Free at last, free at last
Thank God almighty I'm free at last

Satan's mad and I am glad,
Thank God almighty I'm free at last
He missed this soul, he thought he had
Thank God almighty I'm free at last

You can hinder me here but you cannot there
There's a God in heaven and he answers prayer

Only chain that I can stand
Is the chain that linked hand to hand...

V. Image Suggestions for Worship Services and Freedom Celebrations

Art depicting Watch Night and freedom celebrations.
Facsimile of Emancipation Proclamation printed on or placed inside the worship bulletin.

Notes

1. "A Jubilee of Freedom." Harrisburg Daily Telegraph. 18 January 1863. Original material on this page copyrighted 2003-2005 Afrolumens Project, online location: www.afrolumens.org/rising_free/jubilee.html accessed 8 November 2007
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Moving Star Hall Singers and Alan Lomax. "Ask The Watchman How Long." Sea Island Folk Festival, 1965, Folkways Records Album No. FS 3841, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings SFW 40031, 1990. p. 285. Smithsonian Folkway Recordings. Online location: www.folkway.si.edu accessed 8 November 2007
5. Dubois, W.E.B. "A New Year's Prayer." Prayer's for Dark People. Amherst, MA: Univ. Mass, 1980.
6. Franklin, John Hope. The Emancipation Proclamation. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963; reprint edition, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1995.
7. Jones, Bessie. Put Your Hand on Your Hip, and Let Your Backbone Slip Songs and Games from the Georgia Sea Islands. Rounder heritage series. Cambridge, MA: Rounder Records, 2001; Reagon, Toshi. Justice. Chicago, Ill: Flying Fish, 1990.
8. Moving Star Hall Singers and Alan Lomax. "Ask The Watchman How Long." Sea Island Folk Festival, 1965, Folkways Records Album No. FS 3841, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings SFW 40031, 1990.
9. Sea Island Festival DS 3841. Online location: Smithsonian Folkway Recordings. Online location: www.folkway.si.edu accessed 8 November 2007