



MSPC | Maxwell Street
Presbyterian Church
social justice committee

Dismantling Systemic Racism Movie/Documentary Viewing 2019: Harriet

For Reflection: There is only one successful instance of a slave rebellion in world history that led to the dismantling of the slavery system. This is the Haitian Revolution, which began on August 23, 1791 and lasted until 1804. The Haitian Revolution highlighted the abuses of slavery and dealt a huge blow to the Atlantic Slave Trade. Haiti in the 18th century was the most unequal and brutal place in the Western Hemisphere. The Revolution was encouraged by the juxtaposition of Haiti's inequitable society and its brutal slavery system to the document produced by French Enlightenment thinkers and politicians in 1789, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. This document is the precursor to the French Revolution, the United States Bill of Rights, and freedom and democracy in Europe and worldwide. It described fundamental characteristics of rights which are qualified as being "natural, unalienable and sacred." The document is explicitly for men who are free, and so inspired free black men in Haiti to begin applying for rights. As these men were publicly executed for their attempts to access their rights as free people, the Revolution built in Haiti.

The American Revolution resulted in gradual freedom for slaves in the Northern colonies. Shortly after the Haitian Revolution, the Underground Railroad grew and began moving slaves into freedom during the early to mid- 1800s. The abolitionist movement recognizes the Haitian Revolution as the most successful slave rebellion and catalyst for freedom world-wide. Harriet Tubman and all those connected with the Underground Railroad, in a line of Black abolitionists connected to the Haitian Revolution, would also win victories for freedom. For, when freedom from bondage is concerned, every person liberated is a victory over tyranny and oppression. May the words and stories of the Haitian Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man inspire our reflection on Harriet Tubman, her courage, and crusade for freedom.

What are your reactions to the film? Focus on your emotions at this moment. Take deep breaths and an honest inventory of what you're feeling without any shame attached.

"Let us enslaved look to our African brethren in Haiti for hope and inspiration."

-Prince Hall, founder of the African Masonic Lodge

What does freedom mean to you?

"Liberty consists of doing anything which does not harm others: thus, the exercise of the natural rights of each man has only those borders which assure other members of the society the fruition of these same rights."

-Article IV, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen

How might having to dare against oppression, fight, and be violent to obtain your own freedom affect one's selfhood and soul? Is there generational trauma or oppression that continues today?

"We have dared to be free, let us be thus by ourselves and for ourselves."

-The Haitian Declaration of Independence, 1801

Some believe the very founding of our nation and its government is intrinsically tied with the violence of slavery. Do you feel optimistic, apathetic, or neutral about our democracies ability to protect the rights of all people? Why?

"The goal of any political association is the conservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, safety and resistance against oppression."

-Article II, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen

In what way are people today still living in bondage? Do we feel connected to the freedom of others?

"All men can work at all forms of employment, whatever their color."

"No other distinctions exist than those of virtues and talents, nor any other superiority than that granted by the law in the exercise of a public charge. The law is the same for all, whether it punishes or protects."

-Articles IV and V, The Haitian Declaration of Independence, 1801

What daily spiritual practices or social practices do we have already, or can we begin to better our ability to listen to the voice calling us towards the liberation of others?

"...your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else..." –

Toni Morrison (not related to Haitian Revolution, but related in content)