

Seven Goals. *One Summer.*

- 01 Build the base.** An empowered, skilled, and energetic coalition of Black people and allies ready for long-term freedom work.
- 02 Mobilize voters.** For the 2026 midterms and every election that follows.
- 03 Strengthen local organizing.** Plug national moments into local organizations — so the movement lives where people live.
- 04 Universalize the attack.** What's happening to voting rights is also happening to education, housing, and safety — the threat is one.
- 05 Send a signal.** Alert every enemy of progress: we will rise without fear or hesitation.
- 06 Educate the body politic.** Mass political education on fighting rising authoritarianism — in plain language, for everyday people.
- 07 Found a new nation.** Invite everyday people into radical imagination, shared power, and collective action.

People's World is a voice for progressive change and socialism in the United States. It provides news and analysis of, by, and for the labor and democratic movements to our readers across the country and around the world.

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Freedom Summer 2026 launches this Juneteenth

On June 19, 1865, enslaved people in Galveston, Texas learned they were free—two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation had already declared it. The lesson of Juneteenth has never faded: Rights announced on paper mean nothing without the power to enforce them.

That history hangs directly over Freedom Summer 2026, a nationwide campaign of civil rights organizations, labor unions, faith communities, and youth groups that formally launches this Juneteenth week at a rally in Harlem and continues with events that follow throughout the next few months all the way to Election Day.

The coalition behind Freedom Summer was mobilized in response to the landmark Supreme Court ruling in *Louisiana v. Callais* that gutted Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, stripping federal oversight from nine Southern states overnight.

That decision drew immediate and broad response from civil rights groups and organized labor. AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler called it “an outright attack on the fundamental freedoms of working people,” adding that the Voting Rights Act “came out of a triumph of organizing and activism, a victory the people of the civil rights movement—with labor standing shoulder to shoulder— fought and died for over decades.”

Organizers describe Freedom Summer 2026 as a continuation of the unfinished work of the Civil Rights Movement, rooted in the legacy of the 1964 Freedom Summer, while responding to what they call escalating attacks on Black communities and democratic participation nationwide.



Rev. William Barber—leader of the Poor People's Campaign—has pinpointed the goals of the campaign.

“Did you know that, in every state now, if just 10 to 12% of poor and low-wage folk, Black folk who don't vote were to vote, it would change everything,” he said. “Did you know that the current president only won by less than 2% of the vote...but 90 million people didn't even vote?”

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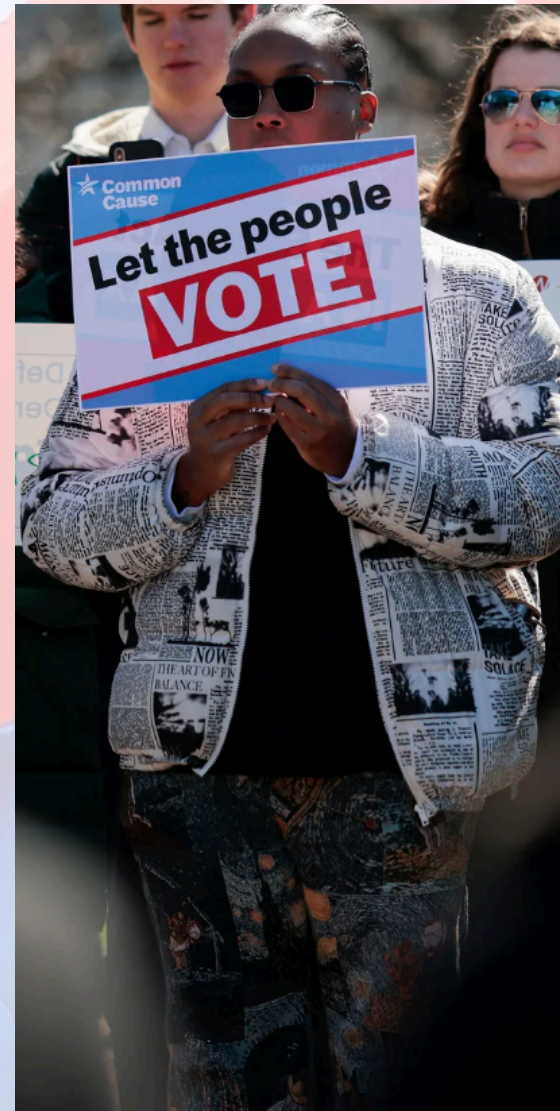
“If we use our voice and our vote, wannabe kings and dictators will have to go home to Mar-a-Lago or somewhere. They won’t even have a chance.”

The organizers framed the Juneteenth timing deliberately: “Juneteenth is a reminder that we save ourselves—our ancestors did it. Texas reminded us to celebrate our power, and now it's time to renew and revive our commitment to our own freedom.”

The coalition, which includes over 90 civil rights, faith, labor, and community organizations, says the campaign is designed to cultivate an “empowered, skilled, and energized base” of Black voters and allies committed to sustained freedom work beyond a single election cycle.

Freedom Summer 2026 runs from Juneteenth Week through John Lewis Days, Voter Registration Day, and Election Day—a coordinated arc designed to keep pressure on through the November midterms. Activities include mass meetings, voter registration drives, trainings, church revivals, and direct action campaigns designed to strengthen local organizing infrastructure.

The connection between labor and voting rights is well-established. As Shuler has put it: “Voting rights and labor rights are one. Economic justice and racial justice go hand in hand.”



Juneteenth and the power of Black history

Beatrice Lumpkin

Black History has the power to uncover the truth and expose the lies about the key contributions Black people have made to winning democratic rights for all. This is especially true of the Civil War and Reconstruction—a crucial time that has been deeply "falsified," as W.E.B. Du Bois noted in his groundbreaking 1935 book, *Black Reconstruction*. As Du Bois proved, the North had to call in Black men to save the Union, abolish slavery, and establish democracy.

When Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, he was only recognizing facts on the ground. Hundreds of thousands of enslaved people had already freed themselves and run away, depriving slaveowners of their workforce. Du Bois called this mass resistance "the first General Strike." Over 180,000 of these self-freed men joined the Union Army, turning the tide of a war the North had been losing. Early on, progressive immigrant German Communists serving as Union generals—friends of Karl Marx like Joseph Weydemeyer, Franz Sigel, and August Willich—emancipated the enslaved wherever they marched, realizing the strategic necessity of Black freedom.

The Union victory unleashed the creative energies of 3.5 million freed people who rushed into the political arena. Despite the setback of Lincoln's assassination and President Andrew Johnson's pro-slavery policies, a Radical Republican majority in Congress rose up, impeached Johnson, and took charge.

Real Reconstruction began. Long before the 15th Amendment established the right nationally, Black men won the right to vote in state elections. Over 4,000 Black men were elected or appointed to public office. A lasting achievement of this era was the creation of the South's first public school system, driven by an explosion of energy within Black communities themselves. Furthermore, the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments laid the constitutional basis for the democratic rights we must defend today.

Yet, Reconstruction remained an "Unfinished Revolution." Democratic rights were tied to land reform. While General Sherman's "Special Field Order 15" successfully gave 40 acres each to 14,000 Black families, the federal government ultimately returned most confiscated plantations to former slaveowners. This left freed people with little choice but to return to plantations under semi-serf conditions. By 1877, the Union Army was withdrawn from the South to smash Northern railroad strikes and wage genocidal wars against Native Americans, leaving the South to the Ku Klux Klan and former slavemasters.

This period brought forward thousands of heroes. Researchers are finally bringing their names to light, like Sergeant Fred Brown, who held a pistol to a train engineer's head to save his Black regiment from a Confederate ambush. Or Abraham Galloway, who escaped slavery, became a Union spy, and held a gun to a recruiter's head to demand equal pay and protection for Black soldiers. Galloway later became a North Carolina State Senator, introducing bills for a 10-hour workday, women's suffrage, and public education.

The Civil Rights Movement was a "Second Reconstruction." Today, it is time for a "Third Reconstruction" to finally finish the revolution left incomplete in 1877.

How to get involved

Individuals interested in participating can sign up online at FreedomSummer2026.com to volunteer, organize locally, or host a stop through their organization, congregation, or campus. Those unable to travel can pledge to take action in their own communities.

Organizations can co-host an event, mobilize their networks, or support the campaign financially. Faith communities can register their congregations for Juneteenth Week programming. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund, whose roots trace directly to the original 1964 Freedom Summer, continues its legal defense work at naacpldf.org.

The march—as organizers put it—is not over.

