

# Brianna Willis Northwestern University - Informative

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

loo, la, black, white, patriotism, celebration, july, explains, parade, fourth, charleston, residents, juneteenth, 4th, aforementioned, celebrate, quelled, history, whitewashing, festivities

## SPEAKERS

Brianna Willis

### **B** Brianna Willis 00:01

On July 5, 1852, Frederick Douglass stood solidly in front of a crowd of nearly 600 abolitionists in Rochester, New York. Douglass, who escaped slavery 14 years prior had a scathing question for the nearly all white crowd at the Rochester Ladies Anti-Slavery Society. What to the slave is the Fourth of July? a harrowing question that many are still trying to answer, today. ColorLines of July 2, 2018 explains that Douglass's "The meaning of July 4 to the Negro" serves as a vignette capturing the nation's hypocrisy in its celebration of independence, while a white America celebrated, a still enslaved African America suffered. However, as the Atlantic of July 3rd 2018 points out, this is exactly why newly emancipated slaves transformed Independence Day into the Too-la-loo. A uniquely African American celebration of black independence. But white Southerners violently quelled these celebrations, leaving many African Americans today with tense ties to the Fourth of July. Despite being a vital piece of our nation's history, what contextualize the complicated relationship many African Americans have today with patriotism. Many Americans remain unaware of the whitewashing of our nation's most defining holiday. So today, we'll examine the Black History of the Fourth of July by exploring its celebration, its whitewashing and develop implications that seek to answer the question that the Huffington Post of July 4th 2018 poses "What to the black diaspora is Independence Day?" Post Civil War, Charleston, South Carolina serves as the epicenter of the Too-la-loo evident through the festivities, and the dance it was named after. But first, African

American celebrations were a lively affair, as they always have been. According to the aforementioned Atlantic, thousands of black South Carolinians would gather for parades that were filled with formerly enslaved Civil War veterans. The end of the parade brought even more festivities. The Charleston Daily News from 1867 depicts the parade's end at White Point garden, a large and beautiful park, where the city's black residents could enjoy themselves among booths and stalls selling cakes and sassafrass beer. White Point garden was also the birthplace of the Too-la-loo which was the most important part of the festivity. Archives published by the Charleston County Public Library on June 29th 2018, explained that the Too-la-loo before becoming shorthand for the black Fourth of July, was a type of rain dance performed by hundreds of people and said to be a fusion of African tradition and popular culture during the mid 19th century. The best and most fun way to learn about the Too-la-loo is to actually participate. Charleston News and Courier from 1876 was kind enough to provide the lyrics and I have provided the tune. Please feel free to participate by clapping along.

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Brianna Willis 03:49

(Clapping and music) Go hunt your lover, Too-la-loo! Go find your lover, Too-la-loo! Nice little lover, Too-la-loo! Oh! I love Too-la-loo!

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Brianna Willis 03:59

The Courier goes on to note that these dances would last from six in the morning until well after midnight. For the dancers the Too-la-loo was not only an excuse to get together and have a fun time with loved ones, but a way to rejoice over civil rights regained. But unfortunately, where there was black celebration, there was white retaliation. White Charlestonians quelled the Too-la-loo both socio- economically and politically. But first, white Charlestonians tried to socio-economically encumber the Too-la-loo. The Charleston Daily News from 1866 explains that white residents suspended all business on the 4th to maintain both social and economic distance from the city's Freedmen community. Chapter commemorations serve the role of reinforcing Confederate involvement in the Civil War and reducing the number of resources available to the city's black community. Stores closed before noon, didn't accept any black business, and white residents made sure that the 4th was just as loud as for their Confederate Veterans. Second, violent rhetoric and political tension generated by white South Carolinians contributed to the Too-la-loo's erasure. Ethan J Kytle and Blain Roberts explain in their 2018 book, Denmark Vesey's Garden that white residents regarded the Fourth with hatred. As a journal entry written in 1866 indicates they called it "the day of the niggers" and describe the parades and dances as "nigger promenades and balls." As white residents regained control over Charleston, the white residents who'd been lobbying for the banning

of the Too-la-loo got their wishes in 1881 as the aforementioned Charleston County Public Library archives indicate all celebrations were banned in White Point Garden. In 1882, the park was renamed and by 1883 it had been completely relandscaped and made inhospitable to any dancing. As Jim Crow set in during the 1890s the Too-la-loo became a life endangering activity. The tune I played earlier was Camptown Races, the closest historians say we have to the original tune of the Too-la-loo, which now has been forever lost and hidden by a history of hatred. The disappearance of the Too-la-loo raises important implications that justify today's skepticism of patriotism. First, the Too-la-loo's erasure highlights how understanding the history of patriotism is necessary to understand its present day protests. The ridicule that former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick faced for kneeling during the national anthem is but one episode in a long series of black commentary on the hypocrisy of patriotism. The Conversation of May 29th 2018 explains that patriotism alone was never enough to overcome white supremacy. So black people had to turn to protests to remind this country that black life lasted far longer than some Sunday afternoon game facing both social and economic white laughs for doing so as the Washington Post of September 29th 2017 reminds alternative Black American celebrations such as Juneteenth exists, not because Black Americans rejected patriotism, but because traditional patriotism rejected Black Americans. And finally, the Too-la-loo's erasure challenges the value of American national holidays. From the Fourth of July to Thanksgiving Day. To, yes, even Martin Luther King Jr. Day, this nation's national holidays are saturated with whitewash narratives and respectability politics. As the aforementioned Washington Post explains, because white culture is used to regulate the benefits of American citizenship, groups of color are invited to celebrate and assimilate to whiteness, just to fit in and survive.

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Brianna Willis 08:38

Perhaps this is why I never felt any particular inclination to even celebrate the 4th, until this past summer in DC. I attended a reenactment of Frederick Douglass's speech at his home in Anacostia. Instead of attending the parade at the National Mall, where I legitimately fear receiving sneers from MAGA hat wearers I had never gotten used to during my summer there. Surrounded by black families all wearing Juneteenth shirts. I, for the first time in my life, felt that there was something I could safely celebrate on the 4th. But as the history of the Too-la-loo teaches us, how long will that feeling of safety even last? Today, we explored the Black History of the Fourth of July by examining its celebration, its whitewashing and develop implications. The holidays this nation monitors with obsessive fixation are very often the ones that derive from silencing the narratives of the oppressed. So when the Fourth rolls around again this year, maybe you'll ask yourself, whose independence am I celebrating anyway?

