

“Front Porch Living,” by Dr. Chris Jones

I spent much of my childhood on my grandparents' front porch on West 17th Street in Pine Bluff. That porch wasn't just a part of the house — it was a sanctuary. It held the prayers, the laughter, the hard conversations, and the quiet moments when all you could hear was the breeze and God whispering through the trees. It carried the weight of generations who had seen too much, lost too much, and yet still found the strength to believe in tomorrow.

When my grandfather's 18-wheeler rumbled up and parked out front, our hearts would leap. To us, he was Pawpaw. Out there on the open road, they called him Dawg. He would climb down from that big rig like a giant returning home, cigarette hanging, hat turned just so, plaid shirt crisp as always. Pawpaw never made it past the third grade, but he carried a wisdom the world could not measure. He'd sit me down and say, *“Big Man, get an education—because once it's in your head, no one can take it out.”* He didn't just say “no one”... some of y'all will catch that. That was his gospel. And I heard it.

We kids ran wild during the day, but we always came back to that porch. That was where life happened. The grown folks would gather — talking, laughing, praying, testifying, even arguing — but always loving. We sat at their feet and soaked it all in. The front porch was our first church, our first classroom, our first council.

In Black communities across Arkansas, porches like ours have long been sacred ground. When the world outside was cold, cruel, and dangerous, the porch was where we found shelter — not just from the weather, but from the weight of a world that did not always see our worth. On those porches, we reminded each other who we were: children of God, fearfully and wonderfully made.

Now many of those porches are gone. The houses are built without them. Life moves faster. Screens steal our time. But the need for connection, for fellowship, for community — that need is still with us. And in these days, when our people still carry burdens, when injustice still knocks at our door, when division tries to steal our unity — we need those gathering places more than ever.

As Juneteenth approaches, my mind returns to those porches. Juneteenth is more than a holiday — it is a testimony. A testimony that freedom came late, but it came. A testimony that even in bondage, our people held on to their faith. And a testimony that freedom is not just release from chains, but the work we do with open hands and open hearts to build something better.

So, this summer, let's reclaim the porch. And if you don't have a porch, find a front yard, a folding chair, a picnic table, a church lawn. Find a place where community can live again. Sit with your neighbor. Share your story. Offer a meal. Extend your hand. And not just to those who look like you — but even to those who don't. Healing starts when we sit close enough to see each other's faces, close enough to listen without defense, close enough to love.

The porch may be gone, but the calling remains. This summer let's find a porch — and fill it with life. God is still in the business of bringing His people together. Let's not miss our moment.