

Juneteenth Day History

June 15, 2022

Background into what is Juneteenth (Emancipation Day)?

- On June 19, 1865, Major General Gordon Granger marched into Galveston, Texas and officially issued an order informing slaveholders and slaves that they were free. **Therefore, we celebrate Juneteenth**, because it honors the day in history when all Black people in America were both aware of the Emancipation Proclamation *and* officially legally “released” from slavery.
- The official word of freedom reached the slaves in Texas two-and-a-half years after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed by Lincoln.
- Juneteenth” is the combination of the words June and nineteenth. Juneteenth is also known as “Jubilee Day” (Freedom Day), “Emancipation Day”, “Liberation Day”, and even “Independence Day”, by some.
- Texas was known to many in the Confederate as a safe space for slaveholders, as it was largely unoccupied by Union soldiers during the war. After the Emancipation Proclamation, many rebels from neighboring states fled to Texas and brought their (illegal) enslaved people with them.
- It is estimated that over 250,000 slaves in Texas were freed with the Juneteenth Day announcement.
- There are many theories why the slaves in Texas were never made aware of their freedom. Theories include:
 - The original messenger was killed on the way to deliver the message of freedom.
 - Plantation owners wanted to hold the slaves longer for pending cotton harvest and planting seasons.
 - Slaveholders wanted to continue to get free labor from the slaves.
 - Texans suppressed the announcement. However, the real reason might be that Lincoln’s proclamation was not enforceable in rebel states until the civil war had ended.
 - Many slaves actually were aware of the fact that they were free, but had little power to physically free themselves from plantation owners, it was not until the troops march in to enforce their freedom did they feel “safe enough” to leave.
- But the truth is that at least 125 newspapers articles, from that time, have been found that announced the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing all slaves as early as June 1865. However, since Lincoln was not the president of the confederacy, they (Texas) had no intention of telling the slaves that they were free, and the Proclamation was not enforceable in rebel states until Union Troops march in to enforce it.
- The Texas announcement of freedom urged freed slaves to stay with their former owners.
- The period between the time that slaves were notified that they had been freed and left the plantations, became known as “The Scatter”. This is the time when many former slaves left the plantations and migrated across the USA and elsewhere. Often slaves were shot before they could leave the plantation as free people.

- Juneteenth Day has an official flag. Designed by L.J. Graf, the flag is packed with meaning. The colors are red, white, and blue which echo the American Flag and symbolizes that the enslaved people and their descendants are Americans. A star in the middle pays homage to Texas, while a bursting star “new star” on the horizon of the red and blue fields represents a new freedom and a new people.



Even after June 19th, 1865 there were still states that did not free their slaves? If so, why do so many people celebrate Juneteenth? Who led these celebrations?

- Historically it is noted that not all slaves were free, even after the June 19, 1865 (Juneteenth Day) announcement.
- The Emancipation Proclamation that declared all enslaved people in the rebellious Confederate states—Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, Arkansas, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia—were free. But this executive order did not fully abolish slavery in the U.S., as it did not apply to those held as property in bordering states who were loyal to the Union.
- Four states emancipated their slaves by state action after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued. They were Maryland on November 1, 1864, Missouri on January 11, 1865, West Virginia on February 3, 1865, and Tennessee on February 22, 1865.
- Even if you still think that the Emancipation Proclamation freed the slaves in the ten states in which it declared them free, not only were the slaves in the exempted portions of Virginia and Louisiana not yet free by this time, neither were those in New Jersey, Delaware, or Kentucky.
- In fact, New Jersey, Delaware, and Kentucky all rejected ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment and their slaves were not freed until it was ratified on December 6, 1865, six months after the slaves were freed in Texas.
- The current push to recognize Juneteenth is based on the actions of its advocates that it brought freedom to the last slaves and, therefore, marked the end of slavery in the United States.
- However, it is obvious from the historical facts that this is not a completely true narrative.
- This push points to slavery in the former Confederate states while turning a blind eye to the fact that slavery still existed in three other states for almost six months after the Juneteenth Day announcement.
- Juneteenth Day celebrations were started and led by the freed slaves.
- The freed slaves began celebrating Juneteenth Day in commemoration of the June 19th, 1865, announcement one year after the day’s first anniversary on June 19, 1866. However, they were faced with a problem: segregation laws were expanding rapidly, and there were no public places or parks that they were permitted to use.

- In the 1870's, the former enslaved people pooled together \$800 and purchased 10 acres of land, which they deemed "Emancipation Park". It was the only public park in the Houston area that African Americans could use until the 1950's.
- As these freed slaves moved across the USA, they continued to celebrate Juneteenth Day and made others aware of the significance of this day. This became widely accepted as the day in which all slavery was abolished in the USA and more celebrations sprang up across the country.
- As a result, many African Americans began to recognize "Juneteenth" as their "Independence Day".
- Juneteenth day is the oldest known nationally celebrated commemorative day that celebrates the ending of slavery in the USA.
- On January 1, 1980, Juneteenth became (for the first time) an official state holiday in Texas due to the tireless efforts of an African American State Representative named Al Edwards. Edwards passed away on April 29, 2020, at the age of 83.
- Congress officially recognized "Juneteenth Day" in 1997.
- Prior to June 17, 2021, 47 states and the District of Columbia recognize the significance of Juneteenth Day and it had been made an official state holiday in some states. Although in most cases it is not considered to be a paid or a federal holiday.
- There was a growing and consistent push to make Juneteenth Day a Federally recognized paid holiday. As a Senator, Barack Obama co-sponsored legislation to make Juneteenth Day a national holiday, his legislation and similar bills have consistently stalled in Congress.
- Following the international uprising against police violence and systemic racism after the murder of George Floyd in 2020, the holiday gained more attention outside African American communities, as pressure mounted on federal, state and local governments to recognize the nation's legacy of racism.
- During the Black Lives Matter protest in 2020, many companies such as Nike, the NFL, Twitter, Hearst Magazines, and others are now recognizing the day and are giving their employees full leave and holiday pay.
- Only three states do not recognize Juneteenth Day, prior to it becoming a federal holiday, they are Hawaii, North Dakota, and South Dakota.
- On June 19, 2019, Governor Tom Wolf signed into law Act 9, formerly House Bill 619, which designates June 19th as "Juneteenth National Freedom Day" and honors the annual observance of this day in Pennsylvania.
- Prior to this only a handful of states have already made June 19th an official holiday. They are, Texas (1980), Pennsylvania (2019), New York & Virginia (2020), Oregon & Washington (2021).
- Only five states had an official law regarding Juneteenth Day, all others only had Juneteenth Day resolutions.
- Pennsylvania was the second state to lawfully recognize Juneteenth after Texas.
- Almost all states recognize Juneteenth in some capacity. Only three states do not, they are Hawaii, North Dakota, and South Dakota.
- **On June 15, 2021**, The U.S. Senate passed a bill (S) to recognize June 19, or Juneteenth, as an official holiday. It passed with unanimous consent without a roll call vote or objections from the chamber. The bill is now

headed to the House of Representatives, where its passage is all but assured, then on to President Biden's desk for signature into law as an official national holiday.

- On June 17, 2021, Juneteenth became a federally recognized holiday across the United States of America.
- When it passed into law, Juneteenth Day became the 11th nationally recognized holiday.

Juneteenth means:

- Opportunity to recognize and celebrate our history, American history.
- Opportunity to tell our own story, recognize those who fought for us, and acknowledge our oral tradition of keeping our history alive.
- Opportunity to recognize that we have made progress, yet more progress is needed.
- Opportunity to celebrate our ancestors.

For people (everyone – not just African Americans) Juneteenth is it important to remember and celebrate because:

- History has taught us that if we do not write our own narratives of our history, then others will write it for us usually using alternative facts.
- Our history is equally as important, as any other group of people and should be treated with the same amount of respect.
- Our history is often lost, stolen, or strayed. Slavery is a prime example of this. If it were not for those freed men and women in Texas efforts to acknowledge, remember, celebrate, and spread the information the significance of their emancipation; we probably would have never heard of it or be celebrating Juneteenth Day today. the push to eliminate critical race theory is a prime example of this.
- Future generations should know about their history.
- Because this is not just our history, it is American History.
- To honor and celebrate our ancestors and their tenacity to survive.
- To be inspired by the fact that not only did our ancestors survive, but they built and they fought for our survival.

Juneteenth and the 4th of July

- Since we were not all free on the 4th, then why not recognize and give legitimacy to a day when we all finally were. If we want to celebrate America, then why not be inclusive and celebrate all Americans.
- Juneteenth has historically been the day when many black Americans have celebrated their independence. This is not to say that they don't celebrate the 4th of July also.

- **Juneteenth Day events** – Juneteenth Day celebrations occur everywhere. They can be as simple a family BBQ or as large community events celebrated by entire cities or small communities.
- Celebrations are generally open and free to the public.
- The day is celebrated with parades, marches, cultural festivals, concerts, galas, banquets, pageants, family gatherings, BBQs, church services, educational events, and various other community events hosted across the US.

The significance/Relevance of Juneteenth Day

- ***Our history is American History, PERIODT!***
 - Our history is equally as important, as any other history and should be treated with the same amount of respect. It should not be whitewashed or overlooked.
 - We must tell our own stories. History has taught us that if we don't, it will be told by others and often with distorted facts.
 - Oral history is what has kept many of our traditions and history alive. Without it, we would probably not be celebrating Juneteenth Day. But our history is worthy of more than just verbal recognition.
 - Our History, Black History should never be forgotten. We remember it by recognizing it, celebrating it, and teaching about it to other who do not know the history and the significance of this day.
- ***It recognizes our Freedom and our Right to it***
 - It makes the end of slavery, making many African American physically free after the Civil war.
 - It recognizes the longest-running African American holiday in the United States (Juneteenth).
- ***It Teaches Us***
 - About our history, what we have had to overcome (and are still overcoming) and creates a framework for future generations.