

"Juneteenth continues to be important, not just because it marks the end of slavery, but because it becomes a ritualized, political holiday that tells and retells the story of Black people's ongoing struggle in a nation that's so invested in forgetting."

*Jarvis Givens, Assistant Professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education*



*Juneteenth Flag*

Juneteenth (June 19th) - also known as Freedom Day, Jubilee Day, Liberation Day, and Emancipation Day - is a holiday celebrating the emancipation of those who had been enslaved in the United States. On June 19, 1865, the news of the emancipation proclamation had finally reached slaves in Texas.

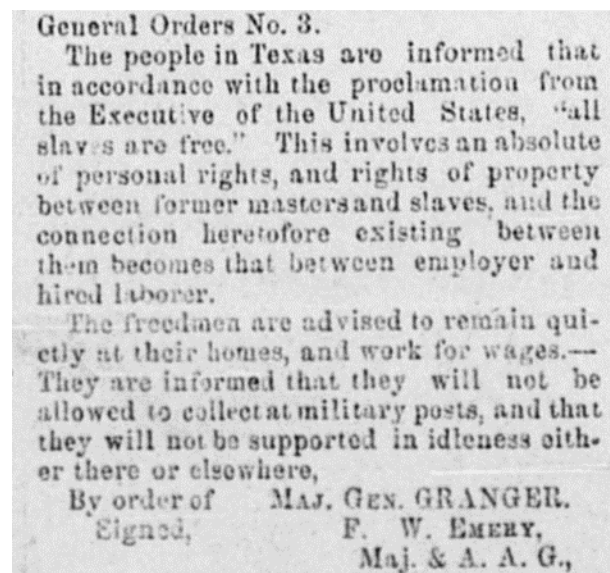
Juneteenth is the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the ending of slavery in the United States. Dating back to 1865, it was on June 19th that the Union soldiers, led by Major General Gordon Granger, landed at Galveston, Texas with news that the war had ended and that the enslaved were now free. Note that this was two and a half years after President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation - which had become official January 1, 1863. The Emancipation Proclamation had little impact on the Texans due to the minimal number of Union troops to enforce the new Executive Order. However, with the surrender of General Lee in April of 1865, and the arrival of General Granger's regiment, the forces were finally strong enough to influence and overcome the resistance.

Later attempts to explain this two-and-a-half-year delay in the receipt of this important news have yielded several versions that have been handed down through the years. Often told is the story of a messenger who was murdered on his way to Texas with the news of freedom. Another is that the news was deliberately withheld by the enslavers to maintain the labor force on the plantations. And still another is that federal troops actually waited for the slave owners to reap the benefits of one last cotton harvest before going to Texas to enforce the Emancipation Proclamation. All of which, or none of these versions could be true. Certainly, for some, President Lincoln's authority over the rebellious states was in question. Whatever the reasons, conditions in Texas remained status quo well beyond what was statutory.

The reactions to this profound news ranged from pure shock to immediate jubilation. While many lingered to learn of this new employer to employee relationship, many left before these offers were completely off the lips of their former 'masters' - attesting to the varying conditions on the plantations and the realization of freedom. Even with nowhere to go, many felt that leaving the plantation would be their first grasp of freedom. North was a logical destination and for many it represented true freedom, while the desire to reach family members in neighboring states drove some into Louisiana, Arkansas and Oklahoma. Settling into these new areas as free men and women brought on new realities and the challenges of establishing a heretofore non-existent status for black people in America. Recounting the memories of that great day in June of 1865 and its festivities would serve as motivation as well as a release from the growing pressures encountered in their new territories. The celebration of June 19th was coined "Juneteenth" and grew with more participation from descendants. The Juneteenth celebration was a time for reassuring each other, for praying and for gathering remaining family members. Juneteenth continued to be highly revered in Texas decades later, with many former slaves and descendants making an annual pilgrimage back to Galveston on this date.

### General Order Number 3

One of General Granger's first orders of business was to read to the people of Texas, General Order Number 3 which began most significantly with:



General Orders No. 3.  
The people in Texas are informed that in accordance with the proclamation from the Executive of the United States, "all slaves are free." This involves an absolute of personal rights, and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and hired laborer.  
The freedmen are advised to remain quietly at their homes, and work for wages.— They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts, and that they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere,  
By order of MAJ. GEN. GRANGER.  
Signed, F. W. EMERY,  
Maj. & A. A. G.,

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*General Orders No. 3, June 19, 1865 - was a general order which transmitted the news of the Emancipation Proclamation to the residents of Texas and freed all remaining enslaved people in the state. It was issued by Union General Gordon Granger on June 19, 1865 at Ashton Villa upon arriving at Galveston, Texas, over a month after the formal end of the American Civil War and two years after the original issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation.*

Celebrations date to 1866, at first involving church-centered community gatherings in Texas. It spread across the South and became more commercialized in the 1920s and 1930s, often centering on a food festival. During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, it was eclipsed by the struggle for postwar civil rights, but grew in popularity again in the 1970s with a focus on African American freedom and arts. By the 21st century, Juneteenth was celebrated in most major cities across the United States. Activists are campaigning for the United States Congress to recognize Juneteenth as a national holiday. Hawaii, North Dakota and South Dakota are the only states that do not recognize Juneteenth, according to the Congressional Research Service.



An early celebration of Emancipation Day (Juneteenth) in 1900



Emancipation Day celebration in Richmond, Virginia, 1905



### **Juneteenth Festivities and Food**

A range of activities were provided to entertain the masses, many of which continue in tradition today. Rodeos, fishing, barbecuing and baseball are just a few of the typical Juneteenth activities you may witness today. Juneteenth almost always focused on education and self improvement. Thus, often guest speakers are brought in and the elders are called upon to recount the events of the past. Prayer services were also a major part of these celebrations.

Certain foods became popular and subsequently synonymous with Juneteenth celebrations such as strawberry soda-pop. More traditional and just as popular was the barbecuing, through which Juneteenth participants could share in the spirit and aromas that their ancestors - the newly emancipated African Americans, would have experienced during their ceremonies. Hence, the barbecue pit is often established as the center of attention at Juneteenth celebrations.

Food was abundant because everyone prepared a special dish. Meats such as lamb, pork and beef which were not available everyday were brought on this special occasion. A true Juneteenth celebrations left visitors well satisfied and with enough conversation to last until the next.

Dress was also an important element in early Juneteenth customs and is often still taken seriously, particularly by the direct descendants who can make the connection to this tradition's roots. During slavery there were laws on the books in many areas that prohibited or limited the dressing of the enslaved. During the initial days of the emancipation celebrations, there are accounts of former slaves tossing their ragged garments into the creeks and rivers and adorning themselves with clothing taken from the plantations belonging to their former 'masters'.

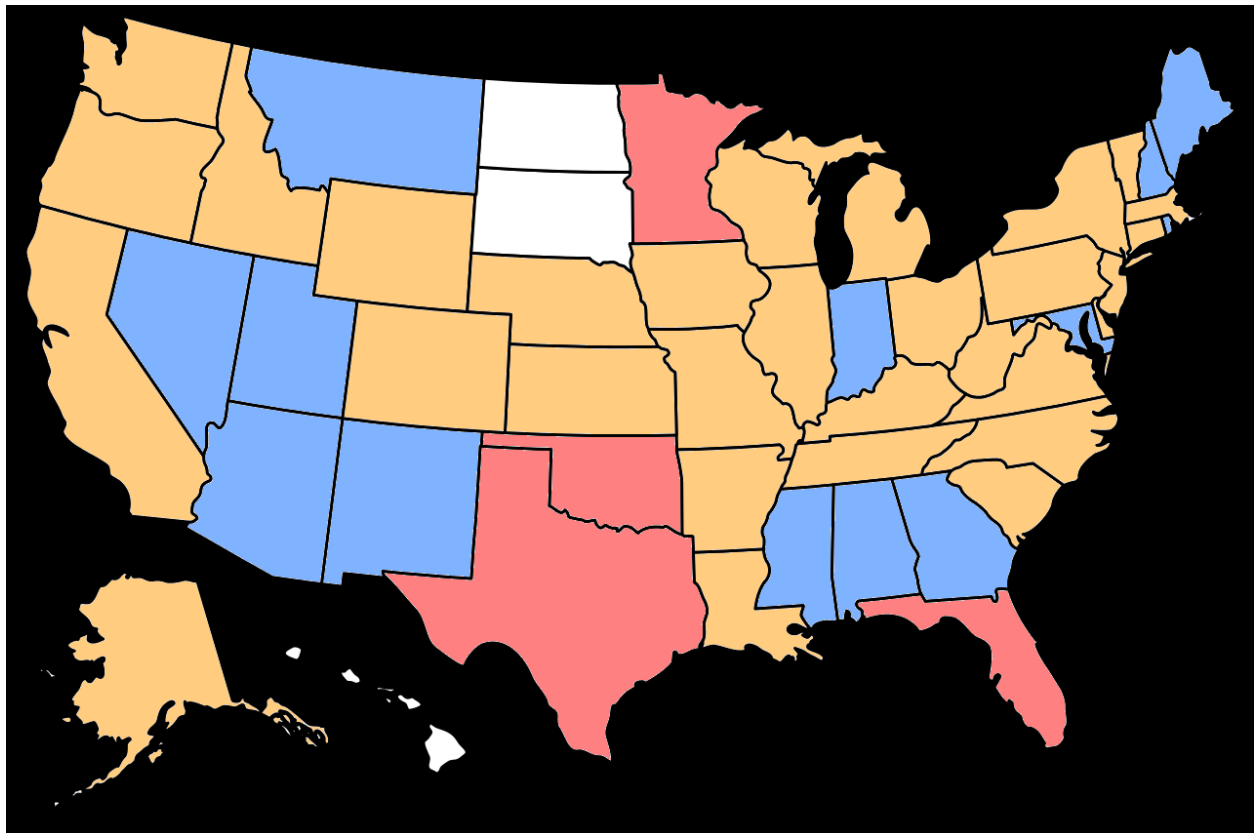




On January 1, 1980, Juneteenth became an official state holiday through the efforts of Al Edwards, an African American state legislator. The successful passage of this bill marked Juneteenth as the first emancipation celebration granted official state recognition. Edwards has since actively sought to spread the observance of Juneteenth all across America.

Al Edwards Statue

Al Edwards "Unknown Legislator" statue of the Texas State Legislator holding up the 1979 legislation making Juneteenth a paid Texas state holiday. The statue was dedicated on the grounds of Ashton Villa (Galveston, TX) on Juneteenth 2006 at Ashton Villa, the location of the annual Al Edwards Prayer Breakfast and Juneteenth Commemorative Celebration.



Recognition of Juneteenth as a holiday in the US: ■ Recognized before 2000. ■ Recognized between 2000 and 2009. ■ Recognized in 2010 or after.

## Juneteenth In Modern Times

Today, Juneteenth is enjoying a phenomenal growth rate within communities and organizations throughout the country. Institutions such as the Smithsonian, the Henry Ford Museum and others have begun sponsoring Juneteenth-centered activities. In recent years, a number of local and national Juneteenth organizations have arisen to take their place alongside older organizations - all with the mission to promote and cultivate knowledge and appreciation of African American history and culture.

Juneteenth today, celebrates African American freedom and achievement, while encouraging continuous self-development and respect for all cultures. As it takes on a more national, symbolic and even global perspective, the events of 1865 in Texas are not forgotten, for all of the roots tie back to this fertile soil from which a national day of pride is growing.

The future of Juneteenth looks bright as the number of cities and states creating Juneteenth committees continues to increase. Respect and appreciation for all of our differences grow out of exposure and working together. Getting involved and supporting Juneteenth celebrations creates new bonds of friendship and understanding among us. This indeed brightens our future - and that is the spirit of Juneteenth.

*"Juneteenth is a day of reflection, a day of renewal, a pride-filled day. It is a moment in time taken to appreciate the African American experience. It is inclusive of all races, ethnicities and nationalities - as nothing is more comforting than the hand of a friend."*

*"Juneteenth serves symbolically, and in reality, as a reference point from which to measure and appreciate the progress and contributions made by African Americans to this society."*

*"Juneteenth is a day on which honor and respect is paid for the sufferings of slavery. It is a day on which we acknowledge the evils of slavery and its aftermath. On Juneteenth we talk about our history and realize because of it, there will forever be a bond between us."*

*"On Juneteenth we think about that moment in time when the enslaved in Galveston, Texas received word of their freedom. We imagine the depth of their emotions, their jubilant dance and their fear of the unknown."*

*"Juneteenth is a day that we commit to each other the needed support as family, friends and co-workers. It is a day we build coalitions that enhance African American economics."*

*"On Juneteenth we come together young and old to listen, to learn and to refresh the drive to achieve. It is a day where we all take one step closer together - to better utilize the energy wasted on racism. Juneteenth is a day that we pray for peace and liberty for all."*

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