

JUNETEENTH

Juneteenth is a Federal holiday celebrating the end of slavery in the United States. Many people associate the Emancipation Proclamation signed by Abraham Lincoln as the official action freeing the American slaves. In reality, the slaves were not freed by the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation because the Civil War was still being waged, so the Southern Confederacy ignored President Lincoln's Order and held onto the millions of slaves. Ironically, the Emancipation Proclamation applied only to the Confederate States, and there were 2 Union border States, Kentucky and Delaware, that allowed some slavery. Juneteenth addressed this reality and freed these slaves, too, as the Emancipation Proclamation could not do so.

The official freeing of the last slaves occurred after the US had defeated the Confederacy. US/Union troops arrived in Galveston, Texas on June 19, 1865, to take control of the former Confederate State of Texas and ensure that all of the slaves there were freed.

Two months before June 19, 1865, Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered his command

in Virginia. That act officially ended the Confederacy, but the word did not immediately get down to Texas. Thus, the slaves in Texas remained enslaved for a brief period after Robert E. Lee's surrender. Two months later, US General Gordon Granger arrived in Texas and read General Orders Number 3: "The people in Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free."

A lull in the fighting of the Civil War in Texas helped allow slavery to flourish in Texas. As the US forces gained military victories in other Southern States, many of these Southern slaveowners fled to Texas where they found a safe haven until the Juneteenth proclamation.

Juneteenth celebrations began in 1866, led by Christian churches that had heroically resisted slavery and later resisted Jim Crow segregation. The first known Juneteenth celebration occurred in Texas—that became the first State to recognize Juneteenth by proclamation in 1938. Juneteenth was celebrated throughout the South, mostly by Black people, in the decades following the Civil War. Black people started to flee the South, termed The Great Migration, because of the

Southern States' harsh imposition of Jim Crow racial segregation laws complete with voting restrictions, separate but unequal facilities, mass murders via lynchings and other acts of violence, other human rights violations, and peonage. The millions of Blacks fleeing these atrocious conditions in the South brought Juneteenth celebrations more prominently to the Northern States.

A huge Juneteenth celebration drawing seventy thousand people occurred in 1951. A few years after that, the Christian-led US Civil Rights Movement increased momentum for Juneteenth recognition. The Reverend Ralph Abernathy of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference especially advocated for Juneteenth, and linked it to both racial justice efforts and a national movement to mitigate poverty. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. also spurred on these Juneteenth awareness efforts, by joining with other Christians—Black, White and other racial/ethnic groups--by pointing out clear Biblical teachings on liberation, unity, love, concern for the marginalized and mistreated, racial equality, ending oppression, and justice.

Texas became the first State to make Juneteenth an official State holiday, effective January 1, 1980. Other States followed Texas by making Juneteenth a State holiday. Juneteenth became a Federal holiday on June 17, 2021.

Juneteenth has gained International recognition as well, especially in Mexico. Juneteenth is about unity and equality, and is a powerful reminder in the USA as a great nation to be vigilant about fighting remaining racism and racial injustice. Juneteenth, due to its celebration of ending slavery, is also a reminder for the civilized world to take a strong stand against the tens of millions of slaves in the world tied to human trafficking.