



A Resolution supporting Juneteenth as a National Holiday

Committee: Social and Economic Justice

Resolution: SEJ-20-10

1. **WHEREAS**, Juneteenth is the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the ending
2. of slavery in the United States. Dating back to 1865, it was on June 19th that the Union
3. soldiers, led by Major General Gordon Granger, landed at Galveston, Texas with news
4. that the war had ended and that the enslaved were now free.
5. **WHEREAS**, this was two and a half years after President Lincoln's Emancipation
6. Proclamation – which had become official January 1, 1863. The Emancipation
7. Proclamation had little impact on the Texans due to the minimal number of Union troops
8. to enforce the new Executive Order.
9. **WHEREAS**, a range of activities were provided to entertain the masses, many of which
10. continue in tradition today. Rodeos, fishing, barbecuing and baseball are just a few of the
11. typical Juneteenth activities you may witness today.
12. **WHEREAS**, Juneteenth almost always focused on education and self-improvement.
13. Thus, often guest speakers are brought in and the elders are called upon to recount the
14. events of the past. Prayer services were also a major part of these celebrations.
15. **WHEREAS**, certain food became popular and subsequently synonymous with
16. Juneteenth celebrations such as strawberry soda-pop. More traditional and just as popular
17. was the barbecuing, through which Juneteenth participants could share in the spirit and
18. aromas that their ancestors- the newly emancipated African Americans, would have
19. experienced during their ceremonies.

20. **WHEREAS**, the barbecue pit is often established as the center of attention at Juneteenth
21. celebrations. Food was abundant because everyone prepared a special dish. Meats such as
22. lamb, pork and beef which were not available everyday were brought on this special
23. occasion. A true Juneteenth celebration left visitors well satisfied and with enough
24. conversation to last until the next.

25. **WHEREAS**, dress was also an important element in early Juneteenth customs and is
26. often still taken seriously, particularly by the direct descendants who can make the
27. connection to this tradition's roots. During slavery there were laws on the books in many
28. areas that prohibited or limited the dressing of the enslaved.

29. **WHEREAS**, during the initial days of the emancipation celebrations, there are accounts
30. of former slaves tossing their ragged garments into the creeks and rivers and adorning
31. themselves with clothing taken from the plantations belonging to their former 'masters'.

32. **WHEREAS**, economic and cultural forces led to a decline in Juneteenth activities and
33. participants beginning in the early 1900's. Classroom and textbook education in lieu of
34. traditional home and family-taught practices stifled the interest of the youth due to less
35. emphasis and detail on the lives of former slaves.

36. **WHEREAS**, classroom textbooks proclaimed Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of
37. January 1, 1863 as the date signaling the end of slavery- and mentioned little or nothing
38. of the events of June 19th, 1865.

39. **WHEREAS**, the depression forced many people off the farms and into the cities to find
40. work. In the urban environments, employers were less eager to grant leaves to celebrate
41. this date. Thus, unless June 19th fell on a weekend or holiday, there were very few
42. participants available. July 4th was already the established Independence holiday and a

43. rise in patriotism steered more toward this celebration.

44. **WHEREAS** today, Juneteenth is enjoying a phenomenal growth rate within communities
45. and organizations throughout the country. In recent years, a number of local and national
46. Juneteenth organizations have arisen to take their place alongside older organizations- all
47. with the mission to promote and cultivate knowledge and appreciation of African
48. American history and culture.

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

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

59. **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the National Organization of Black
60. Elected Legislative Women supports Juneteenth as a state and federal holiday.

Introduced by The Honorable Alicia Hyndman

New York State Assembly