

WHAT IS JUNETEENTH?

On June 17th, 2021, The U.S. President Joe Biden signed new law, [S. 475] "The Juneteenth National Independence Day Act", accepting Juneteenth as the 11th Official U.S. Federal Holiday. The 4th of July did not recognize independence for millions of African American enslaved people.

On January 1st, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, Announcing that "all persons held as slaves within any State...shall be forever free." While this proclamation was declared law in the Union, the succeeding Confederate states did not recognize the Union proclamation or their President until April 1865, when the Confederacy surrendered to the Union at Appomattox, Virginia.

It took another two months before the enslaved African-Americans, as far as Galveston, Texas, were informed of their Emancipation on June 19th, 1865. This announcement was the foundation and beginning of Juneteenth. Ironically, even after being freed from slavery by the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, that proclamation was not ratified by Congress until December 6th, 1865, with the 13th Amendment to the Constitution abolishing slavery throughout the United States. Still, June 19th, "Juneteenth," is the most popular date to celebrate the holiday, emancipating African-Americans from enslavement.

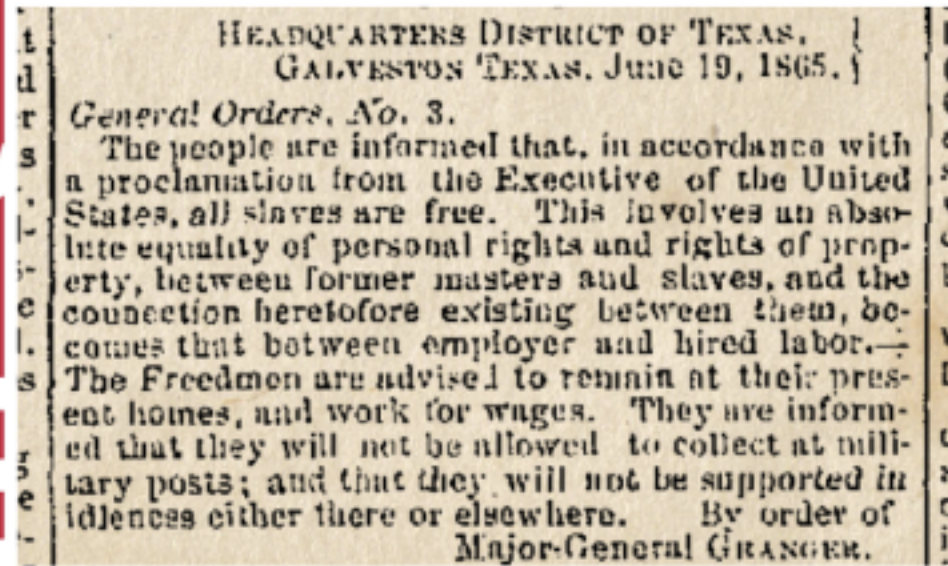


Signing ceremony of S.475 in the East Room of the White House in Washington, Picture from CNBC.com



Surrender of General Lee - at Appomattox, C.H. Va. April 9th 1865 Library of Congress

TEXAS CONNECTION



Above is a picture of General Order #3 posted by General Gordon Granger in Galveston, Texas alerting the enslaved people to their freedom. Although there were celebrations that day, the first official Juneteenth celebrations were a year later, also known as Freedom Day. Juneteenth is the oldest known celebration of the end of slavery in the United States. Initially, celebrations were used as political rallies to give voting instructions to newly freed African Americans. Today, celebrations often include community gatherings, barbecues, parades, picnics, fireworks, and events highlighting African American culture, history, and achievements. It is a day to celebrate unity and reflect on the legacy of slavery and ongoing struggles for racial equality and justice. Juneteenth is our Country's second Independence Day, Juneteenth celebrates the emancipation from America's worst history, slavery.



Galveston's Juneteenth Exhibit "And Still We Rise..." overseen by Galveston Historical Foundation's African American Heritage Committee in Texas.

VIRGINIA CONNECTION

Slavery was not confined to the South and was a national atrocity. The Commonwealth of Virginia played the most prominent role of all the states in both the beginning and Emancipation of slavery. It was in Virginia in 1619, the first enslaved African people were dropped off in Hampton, Va., only 50 miles from where Nat Turner, in 1832, would lead the most bloody insurrection for Emancipation in the nation's history in Southampton, Va. It was also in Hampton, Virginia, that on August 6th, 1861, Major General Benjamin F. Butler, also a lawyer, used clever thinking to implement what would later be known as The "Contraband Decision." It allowed thousands of enslaved people from states controlled by the Confederacy to seek refuge behind Union lines at Freedom's Fortress, later named Old Point Comfort, and is known today as Fort Monroe. Enslaved peoples who made their way to Freedom's Fortress became known as "contrabands."



The Confederacy finally surrendered the Civil War in the Commonwealth of Virginia at Appomattox Court House. While this was the most significant surrender of the War, the President officially announced its end on August 20th, 1866, sixteen months after Appomattox. This War created the conditions for the Emancipation of the captive African-American people. Juneteenth celebrates that Freedom on the day the last of the captive enslaved people were alerted to this liberation in Galveston, Texas, on June 19th, 1865.