

Juneteenth National Independence Day

Juneteenth

Juneteenth is America's newest federal holiday. It is observed each year on June 19th to mark the official end of slavery in the United States.

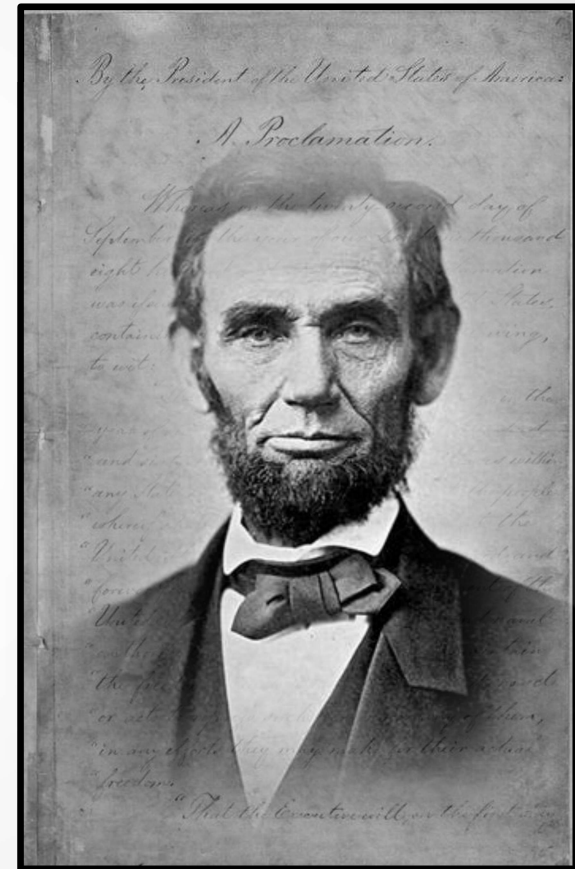
The day has long been celebrated by Black Americans as a symbol of their emancipation — but the story behind the holiday, and how Juneteenth got its meaning, starts more than 150 years ago in Galveston, Texas.



Emancipation Proclamation

President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, as the nation entered the Civil War's third year.

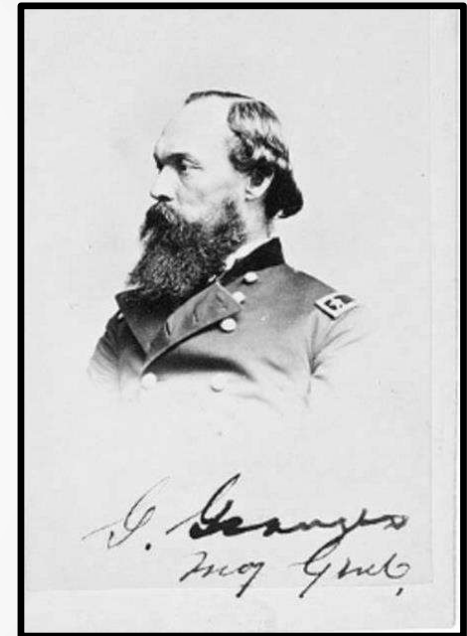
The proclamation declared that the three million slaves living in the Confederate states were free.



Major General Gordon Granger

For those who were largely isolated from Union armies, life continued as if the emancipation proclamation did not exist. This was the case in Texas, where thousands of slaves were unaware of their declared freedom.

On June 19, 1865 — over 2 years after President Lincoln declared enslaved persons free — Major General Gordon Granger and Union Army troops marched to Galveston, Texas, to enforce the Emancipation Proclamation. They freed over 250,000 Black Americans, the last enslaved people in Texas.



General Order No. 3

According to the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Major General Granger read General Order No. 3:

“The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality 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 labor. The freedmen are advised to remain quietly at their present 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.”

Leaving Texas



Regardless of the message, “*The freedmen are advised to remain quietly at their present homes and work for wages...*” many former slaves immediately left Texas for neighboring states.

Celebrations

Large celebrations commemorating Granger's announcement began in 1866, and they continued regularly into the early 20th century.

The June 19th celebration spread from Texas to the neighboring states of Louisiana, Arkansas, and Oklahoma.

Later it appeared in Alabama, Florida, and California as African American Texans migrated.



1950s - 1979

During World War II, the celebrations declined. Then, a major celebration returned in 1950 at the Texas State Fair in Dallas.

By the late 1950s and 1960s, interest and participation again decreased as attention focused on expanding civil rights.

As we entered the 1970s, Juneteenth began to slowly revive in some communities and its popularity grew.

In 1979, Texas became the first state to make Juneteenth an official holiday; several others followed suit over the years.

Opal Lee (1 of 2)

Opal Lee, also known as the “Grandmother of Juneteenth” played a large part in making Juneteenth a federal holiday.

On June 19, 1939, at the age of 12, Lee and her family were displaced by 500 white rioters in the town of Marshall, Texas. Her home was then burned and destroyed.

As she grew up, she became a teacher and an activist. She helped establish the Tarrant County Black Historical & Genealogical Society, Citizens Concerned with Human Dignity organization, and the Fort Worth Juneteenth Museum.

Opal Lee (2 of 2)

Lee campaigned for decades to make Juneteenth a federal holiday. She promoted the idea by leading 2.5 miles walks each year, representing the 2.5 years it took for news of the Emancipation Proclamation to reach Texas, bringing an end to American slavery.

At the age of 89, she conducted a symbolic walk from Fort Worth, from which she departed in September 2016, to Washington, D.C., where she arrived in January 2017.

National Holiday



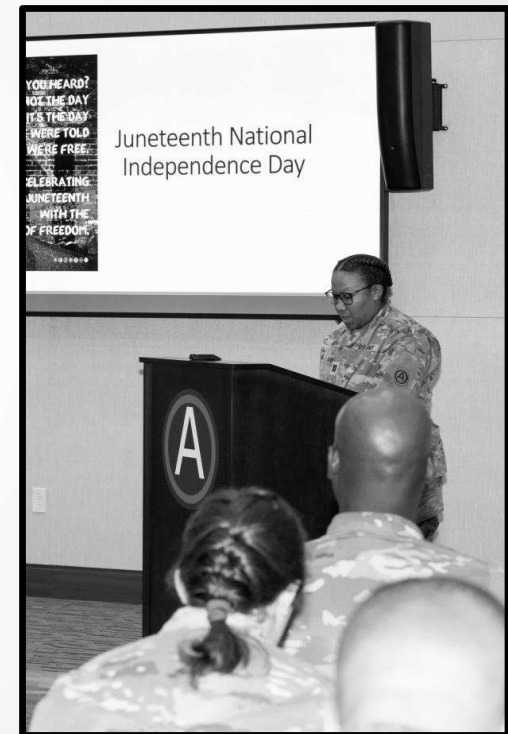
In June 2021, at the age of 94, Lee's efforts succeeded as a bill to make Juneteenth a federal holiday was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Joe Biden.

She was an honored guest at the bill signing ceremony.

Conclusion

On Juneteenth, we recommit ourselves to the work of equity, equality, and justice.

We honor the centuries of struggle and progress led by abolitionists, educators, civil rights advocates, lawyers, activists, trade unionists, religious leaders, public officials, and everyday Americans who have brought our Nation closer to fulfilling its promise.



End

Defense Equal Opportunity Management (DEOMI),
Patrick Space Force Base, Florida
June 2023



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