



Why We Celebrate Juneteenth

Most Americans know that July 4th, 1776, was the day that the United States of America gained its independence from Britain. But only a few know about June 19, 1865, the nation's second Independence Day, which is celebrated primarily within the African American community. Juneteenth is also celebrated by the Mascogos, descendants of Black Seminoles who escaped from slavery in 1852 and settled in Coahuila, Mexico.^[1]

On January 1, 1863, often referred to as "Freedom's Eve," marked the first Watch Night services where African Americans gathered in anticipation of the Emancipation Proclamation from slavery. On that night, enslaved and free African Americans gathered in churches and private homes across the country, awaiting news that the Emancipation Proclamation would take effect. At the stroke of midnight, their prayers were answered as all enslaved people in the Confederate States were legally declared free by President Abraham Lincoln.

Unfortunately, the implementation of the Emancipation Proclamation was limited in areas still under Confederate control, delaying the freedom for many enslaved people, particularly those in Texas. Union soldiers, many of whom were black, marched onto plantations and across cities in the South, spreading the news of freedom in the Confederate States by reading small copies of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Freedom for enslaved people in Texas was officially announced on June 19, 1865. On this day, Major General Gordon Granger arrived in

Galveston Bay, Texas, along with 2,000 union troops and announced the freedom of more than 250,000 enslaved black people. By an executive decree, the final enforcement of the Emancipation Proclamation in Texas at the end of the American Civil War. This day came to be known as "Juneteenth."

Juneteenth is officially known as Juneteenth National Independence Day. It is a federal holiday in the United States. It was only through the Thirteenth Amendment that emancipation ended slavery throughout the United States. In January 1865, Congress proposed the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution for the national abolition of slavery. By June 1865, all the enslaved population had been freed by the victorious Union Army or by state abolition laws. When the national abolition amendment was ratified in December, the remaining enslaved people in Delaware and Kentucky were freed.

At emancipation, formerly enslaved people immediately sought to reunify families. They also established schools, ran for political office, pushed for radical legislation, and even sued slaveholders for compensation.

Often called "America's second Independence Day," Early Juneteenth celebrations date back to 1866. They initially involved church-centered community gatherings in Texas. They spread across the South among newly freed African Americans and their descendants, and it became more commercialized in the 1920s and 1930s. Celebrations were often centered on a food festival.

During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, Juneteenth celebrations were overshadowed by the civil rights movement. They later grew in popularity again in the 1970s, with a focus on African-American freedom and African-American arts, following the 1938 Texas proclamation and the 1979 legislation, leading to every U.S.

state and the District of Columbia formally recognizing the holiday in some way.

Juneteenth was formally recognized as a federal holiday in 2021, when the 117th U.S. Congress enacted the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act, which President Joe Biden signed into law. It became the first new federal holiday since Martin Luther King Jr. Day was adopted in 1983.

This article seeks to remind people of African descent of the reasons for celebrating Juneteenth. While there are many other reasons people of African descent gather on Juneteenth, it is important to remember that Juneteenth is a holiday that celebrates three main things:

The End of Slavery: Juneteenth is celebrated annually on June 19 to commemorate the end of slavery in the United States. It is a time in history when People of African descent in the Americas gained their human rights and the respect they deserve.

b. A Cultural Milestone: Juneteenth is a reminder to people of African descent of the triumph of the human spirit over adversity. While early celebrations faced immense pushback, African American communities preserved the holiday by organizing community gatherings, parades, and church services. The affirmation and celebration of one's history and heritage ensure that the experiences of people of African descent are not erased.

The Celebration of Heritage: Juneteenth is a day that honors Black resilience. It is a time to reflect on the African American experience, American history, and to celebrate culture through food (such as traditional barbecues and drinks that symbolize African resilience), music, and education.

Juneteenth is a legacy that reminds all of us, people of African descent, about the value of never giving up hope in uncertain times. Diaspora

Pan-African Center's vision and goals are designed to motivate and remind us of the power of history, remembrance, and celebration of life. Diaspora Pan African Center is a community that provides space where this spirit of resilience and hope lives on.

As we celebrate and reflect on historical events like Juneteenth, we affirm ourselves as people of African descent with a wonderful heritage and a complex history. As we celebrate, let us remember that it is our responsibility and duty to define our experience and strategize to live a fulfilling life. As we celebrate, here at DPAC, we say, Aloha!!!

References

Silva, Daniella (June 16, 2020). "[What to know about Juneteenth, the empowerment holiday](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/what-know-about-juneteenth-empowerment-holiday-n1231179)". *NBC News*. Archived, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/what-know-about-juneteenth-empowerment-holiday-n1231179>

Davis, Kenneth C. (June 15, 2011). "Juneteenth: Our Other Independence Day". *Smithsonian*. Archived from the original on June 17, 2020. Retrieved June 27, 2019.

Smithsonian, "The Historical Legacy of Juneteenth". *National Museum of African American History and Culture*, Smithsonian.com. Archived from the original on June 18, 2023. Retrieved June 19, 2023. <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/historical-legacy-juneteenth>

Ansari, Talal, and Eleanore Park. 2023. "What is Juneteenth—and how did it become a federal holiday?" *The Wall Street Journal*, Retrieved June 19, 2023. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/juneteenth-holiday-history-celebration-c51f1a2a>