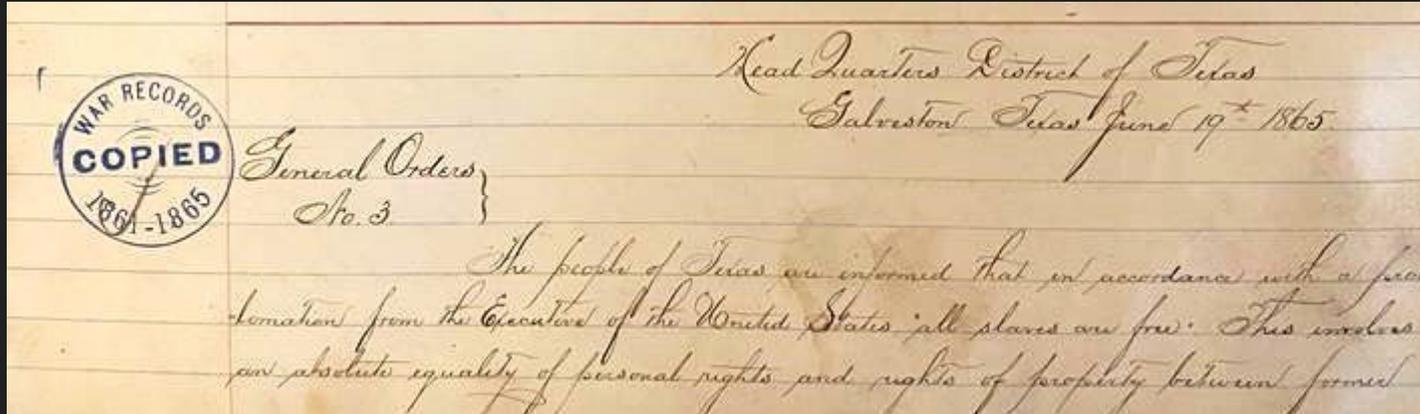


Today is Juneteenth.

June 19, 2020



What are the origins of Juneteenth?

June 19, 1865: The day Union Army Maj. Gen. Gordon Granger read the Emancipation Proclamation in Galveston, Texas, and issued General Order, Number 3, announcing that “all slaves are free.”

“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.”



But the Emancipation Proclamation freed all enslaved people in 1863, didn't it?

- SEPTEMBER, 1862: Lincoln issued the “preliminary emancipation proclamation” warning confederate states that if they didn't rejoin the union by January 1st, all enslaved people in the confederacy would be freed.
- JANUARY, 1863: the emancipation proclamation freed all enslaved people in rebelling states (this meant that enslaved people living in Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri were not freed, and any enslaved people living in areas controlled by the Union were also not freed.
- APRIL, 1865: The Confederacy surrendered and the war ended.
- JUNE 19TH, 1865: General Granger arrives in Galveston, TX with “General Order No. 3” announcing the freedom of all enslaved people.

It was not a “general order” that freed slaves, however.

Enslaved people had always freed themselves.

From “stealing time” to “stealing away” -- and actually escaping north or into a maroon community -- bondsmen and women actively resisted slavery from its inception until emancipation. During the Civil War itself, enslaved people sought freedom and protection from former masters behind Union lines and in Union-held cities. They were referred to as “contraband” and often employed to assist with the war effort. After emancipation, the instituting of the Black Codes (1866) and eventually Jim Crow laws across the south (beginning in the 1890s) meant that nominally free black Americans continued to struggle against white supremacy in its legal, cultural, and extralegal forms, manifesting in the violence of thousands of lynchings.

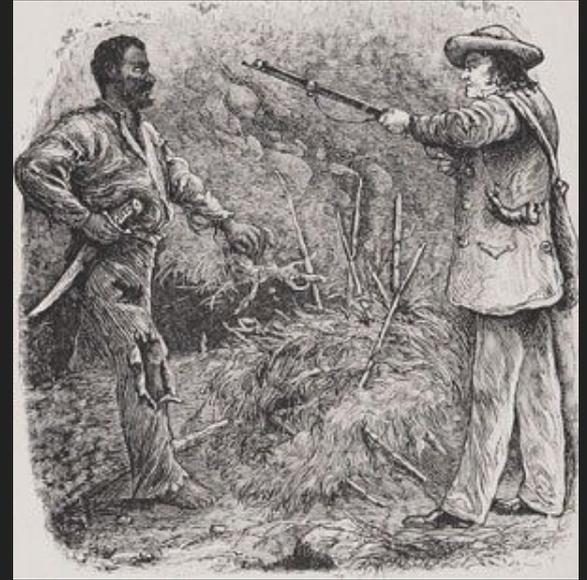


Image of Nat Turner upon his capture in Dismal Swamp in 1831.

When was it first celebrated?

FIRST COMMEMORATIVE CELEBRATION:

1866, just one year after General Granger arrived in Galveston.

FIRST STATE TO MAKE IT OFFICIAL:

Texas was the first state to make it an official holiday in 1979.

Now it is a recognized holiday or observance in 47 states and the District of Columbia.

Parades, concerts, barbeques, pageants and other celebrations mark Juneteenth in thousands of communities across the country, such as in Austin, Texas in 1900, and Denver Colorado in 2019, pictured at right.

Some of the largest Juneteenth celebrations outside Texas are in the midwest and northeast-- in cities such as Minneapolis and Milwaukee.



JUNETEENTH in Georgia

WHAT ABOUT HERE IN GEORGIA? Georgia officially recognized “Juneteenth Celebration Day” in 2011:

“WHEREAS, it is only fitting and proper that the State of Georgia appropriately recognize this glorious event marking the end of slavery and the beginning of freedom for so many who had wrongfully suffered in this state and nation.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE that the members of this body hereby recognize “Juneteenth Celebration Day” in remembrance of those who received the exultant news of their freedom and as a memorial to all those who suffered from the cruelties of slavery, and encourage ceremonies, celebrations, and other activities to be held in their honor.”



South Fulton Band at annual Juneteenth Parade

<http://www.juneteenthatl.com/>

How did Juneteenth celebrations reach so far beyond the South?

During the [first and second Great Migrations](#), African Americans left the South for cities in the midwest and northeast, fleeing Jim Crow and seeking economic opportunity-- particularly in cities such as Detroit, St. Louis, Chicago, Cleveland, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York.



Jacob Lawrence, The Great Migration Series, 1940-1941

(all 60 panels [viewable online](#))

By 1970, more than half the country's African Americans had left the South.

“The migration began, like the flap of a sea gull’s wings, as a rivulet of black families escaping Selma, Alabama, in the winter of 1916. Their quiet departure was scarcely noticed except for a single paragraph in the *Chicago Defender*, to whom they confided that “the treatment doesn’t warrant staying.” The rivulet would become rapids, which grew into a flood of six million people journeying out of the South over the course of six decades. They were seeking political asylum within the borders of their own country, not unlike refugees in other parts of the world fleeing famine, war and pestilence.” - Isabel Wilkerson, “[The Long Lasting Legacy of the Great Migration](#),” *Smithsonian Magazine*, 2016

George Floyd and Juneteenth in Minneapolis

Target, which is headquartered in Minneapolis, has just recognized Juneteenth as an “official company holiday” allowing all full time employees to take today - or any day they choose- off of work. Target is one of many companies (Twitter, Best Buy, Nike and others) to respond to George Floyd’s murder and resulting protests with a recognition of Juneteenth.

--[Target, Best Buy, U.S. Bank make Juneteenth company holiday](#)



2015 Juneteenth celebration in Minneapolis, courtesy of the Star Tribune.

Why isn't it a federal holiday?

“For generations thereafter, hundreds of communities across the U.S. eventually regarded June 19 as a holiday, replete with family-friendly festivities and cultural celebrations.

Michigan Congresswoman Barbara Rose Collins introduced a bill in 1996 that petitioned the U.S. government to make Juneteenth a federal holiday. In her congressional remarks on the legislation, which still hasn't been enacted, she stated, “The dehumanizing and degrading conditions of slavery were unnecessarily prolonged for hundreds of thousands of black men, women, and children, because our American government failed to communicate the truth.” -- LaNesha DeBardalaben, “A Living Lesson”

<https://crosscut.com/2019/06/living-lesson-juneteenth>

Juneteenth advocacy as resistance to Confederate Commemorations

Commemorations of the Confederacy and the “Lost Cause” began almost immediately after the end of the war. We see them in the hundreds of confederate statues and monuments across the country and in state-recognized holidays. Only very recently did states such as Virginia renounce enshrining that legacy. As late as the year 2000, Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday was celebrated as “Lee Jackson King” day, and Virginia still honors “Lee Jackson Day” every January.

Recognizing Juneteenth federally is only one step in addressing the steadfast grip of the Confederacy and the Lost Cause on American memory and politics.



Opal Lee of Forth Worth, Texas, pictured on her walk to Washington, DC, in 2019 to advocate for the recognition of Juneteenth as a federal holiday, courtesy of the [Houston Chronicle](#)

Ways to celebrate Juneteenth

- The National Museum of African American History & Culture is hosting a free virtual celebration “[Juneteenth: A Celebration of Resilience.](#)”
- [Unexpected Atlanta](#) is hosting a virtual barbecue and various tours (\$10)- the June 19th tour is at 7:30pm.
- Faith-based [March on Atlanta](#) starts at Centennial Olympic Park at 9am. (Please note this is an in person event.)
- Local artists Charmaine Minniefield and Julie Johnson are hosting “[Let Us Come Together,](#)” a 24-hour virtual ring shout in connection with [Minniefield’s installation](#) honoring recently discovered unmarked graves in Oakland Cemetery.
- More!: [Juneteenth Events and Celebrations Across Georgia](#), including art installation at the Flatiron Building, 11-6pm

Sources and Resources on Slavery and Freedom

Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, 1997

Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves*, 2003

Walter Johnson, et al, *Slavery's Ghosts: The Problem of Freedom in the Age of Emancipation*, 2011

Henry Louis Gates, "The Five Greatest Slave Rebellions"

Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 1983

The WPA "Slave Narratives" ([accessible online](#) via the Library of Congress)

More Sources and Resources

Ralph Ellison, *Juneteenth* (unfinished novel published posthumously)

Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*

“How We Juneteenth,” NYT, June 19th, 2020

The History and Meaning of Juneteenth, “The Daily” (podcast), June 19, 2020

Uncivil (podcast)

Seeing White (podcast)

Come Through with Rebecca Carroll (podcast)

Ava Duvernay, *13th* (2016) and *When They See Us* (2019)



<https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/takeaway/segments/juneteenth-america-can-shine-light-its-dark-past>