

JUNETEENTH

A Celebration of

FREEDOM



On June 19, 1865, on the close of the Civil War, U.S. Army General Gordon Granger issued an order in Galveston, Texas, stating that the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation was in effect. That order, later known as "General Order 1," marked the end of slavery in Texas. Celebrated as a day of freedom since then, Juneteenth grew into an international commemoration and in 1979 became an official Texas holiday through the efforts of State Representative Albert (Al) Edwards of Houston.

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A CELEBRATION OF FREEDOM

E-Zine

By



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Juneteenth

First called Emancipation Day by African Americans in Texas, Juneteenth marks the date in 1865 when enslaved people in Texas learned about the Emancipation Proclamation, and what it would mean for them - freedom.

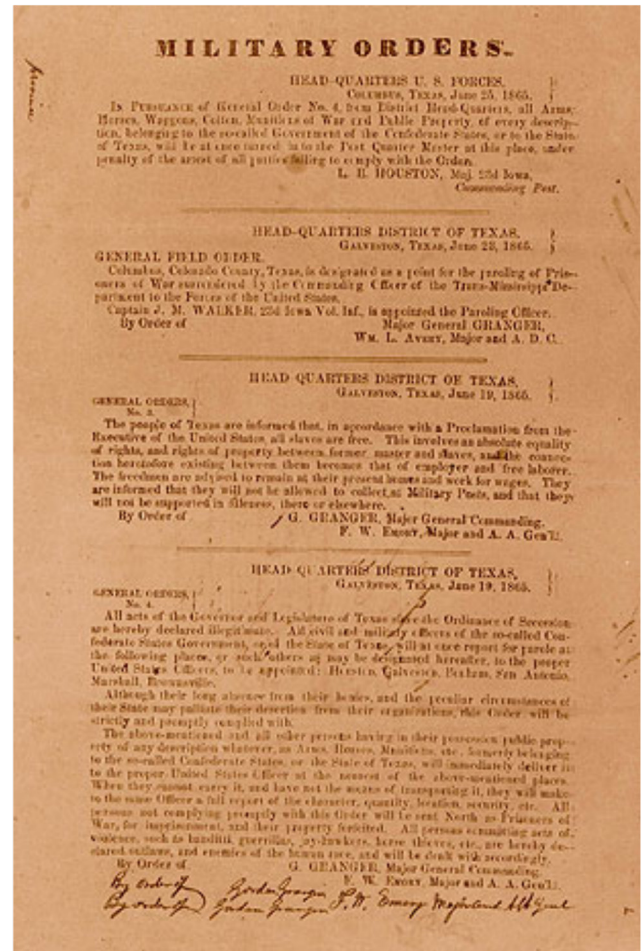
Emancipated, but not Free?

You may recall that on January 1st, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation declaring that all enslaved persons in states that rebelled against the Union, which included about 250,000 people in Texas, were to be free from slavery. Unfortunately, many of them were not given this news for a long time.

In Texas, it took until the 19th day of June, 1865, 2 ½ years after the Emancipation Proclamation. On that day, Major General Gordon Granger issued General Order number 3, in Galveston, Texas.

Following is an excerpt of the order.

"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 at their present homes and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts; and they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere."



General Order, No. 3, June 18, 1865
Credit - Gordon Granger, (1821-1876). Public Domain.

With this order, all of the people, including enslaved persons who hadn't been told about Lincoln's Proclamation, would finally be told that slavery was over in Texas.

Some plantation owners still delayed sharing the information until officials showed up, but eventually the news reached everyone. Slavery was ending.



In Texas, an Emancipation Day Celebration, June 19, 1900. Celebrations often involved dressing in beautiful clothing, something that enslaved people weren't able to do. Photo credit - Mrs. Charles Stephenson (Grace Murray), June 19, 1900. Public domain.

The 13th Amendment

By the end of 1865, slavery was outlawed across the United States with the ratification of the 13th amendment to the Constitution.

"Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

Celebrating Freedom

African Americans in Texas began annual celebrations the next year on June 19, 1866, calling it Emancipation Day. It was a time of celebration and prayer, with historical readings, music, food, and other activities to commemorate their freedom from forced enslavement.

Of course, it is essential to note that while the institution of slavery was now illegal in the United States, many hardships lay ahead for the newly freed Americans. In most cases, they had no education, homes, property, or money. Discrimination and cruelty would persist for their lifetimes and even the lifetimes of their children.

Despite these realities, they had something very precious. At long last, there was a legal recognition that no one had the right to own any other person, and along with it, the freedom to make choices for their own lives and their families. Life was extremely hard for most newly freed people. Still, they persevered, paving the way for future generations to realize the dreams they had for themselves. Their collective hope was further strengthened as they celebrated together each year on Emancipation Day.

The Juneteenth Flag



Quick Facts

- Designed by L. J. Graf
- Represents African American freedom
- Colors remind all that the freed slaves and their descendants are American citizens
- The bursting star denotes the state Flag of Texas with new freedom and a new people on the horizon

Juneteenth Continues to be Celebrated

Although segregation and Jim Crow laws sometimes made it difficult, annual commemorations continued throughout Texas. Eventually, Emancipation Day celebrations, also called Jubilee Day, Freedom Day, and eventually Juneteenth, would spread throughout the south and across the United States.

In 1980, Texas officially recognized the 19th of June as a state holiday, Juneteenth, becoming the first state to do so. Today, Juneteenth is recognized as a holiday in 47 states, celebrating the end of slavery in the United States. Additionally, some would like Juneteenth to be recognized as a national holiday.

Did you Know?

Juneteenth is an example of a portmanteau - a word that combines the sounds and meanings of two other words. It is a combination of the words June and nineteenth.



Congressional Representative, Sheila Jackson Lee has advocated for Juneteenth to become a national holiday. Photo source: <http://jacksonlee.house.gov/issues2.cfm?id=6251>. Public domain.

Commemorative plaque at intersection of Strand Street and 22nd Street in Galveston, Texas.

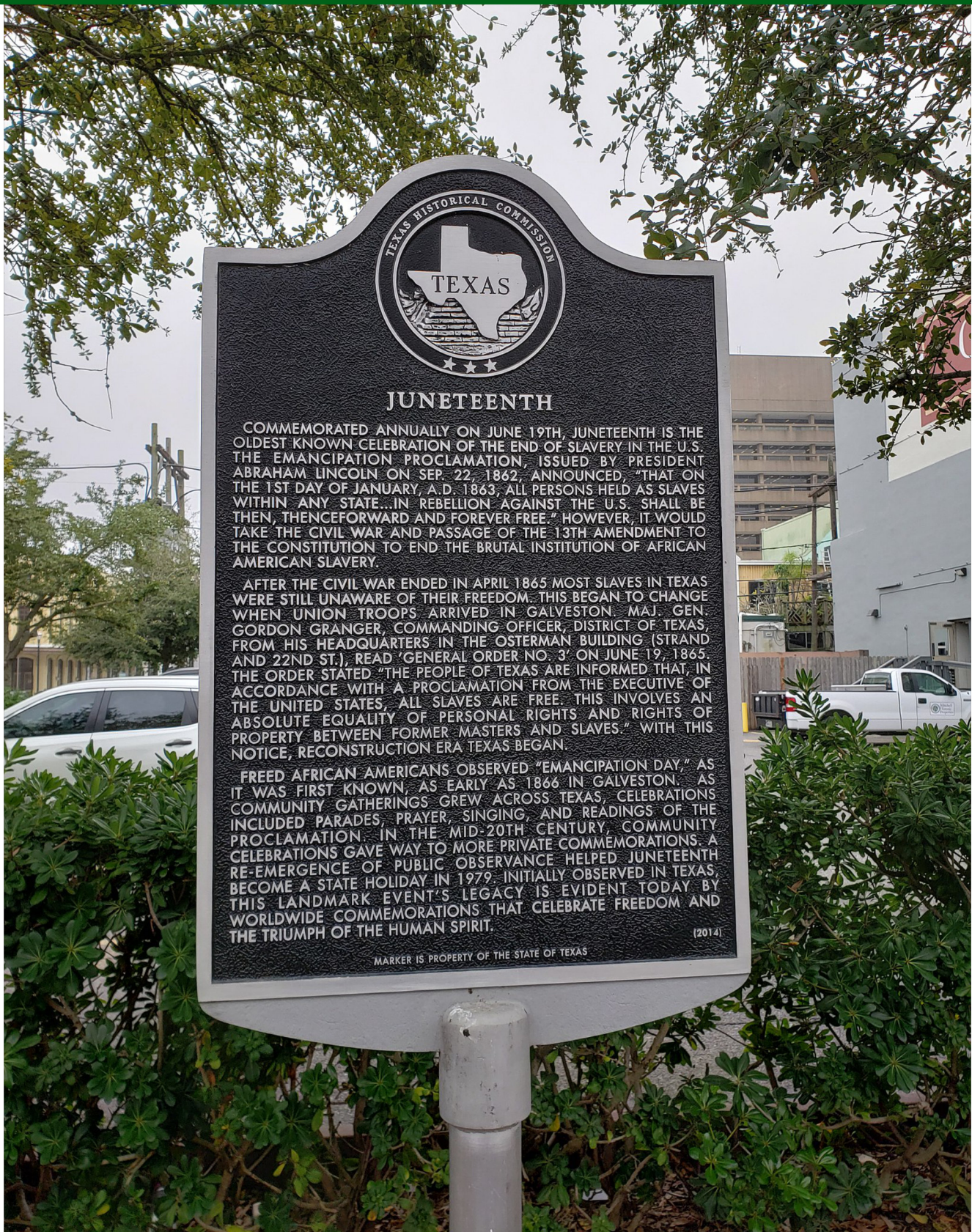


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Discussion Questions

1. What is Juneteenth?
2. Why is it celebrated?
3. Most enslaved people dreamed of a day when they would be free, however, freedom did not mean the end of hardships. What were some of the challenges that newly freed people faced?
4. Why did it take so long for the enslaved people in Texas and other parts of the United States to find out about the Emancipation Proclamation?
5. Why was it important for people to dress up for the Juneteenth celebrations?
6. What were other names for Juneteenth?
7. What state first made Juneteenth an official holiday?
8. What do the colors in the Juneteenth flag stand for?
9. What does the bursting star in the flag represent?
10. The word Juneteenth was made up by combining two other words. What are those two words?

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