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Juneteenth: Fact Sheet

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Summary

Juneteenth celebrates the end of slavery in the United States. It is also known as Emancipation Day, Juneteenth Independence Day, and Black Independence Day. On June 19, 1865, Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas and announced the end of the civil war and the end of slavery. Although the Emancipation Proclamation came 2½ years earlier on January 1, 1863, and many slave owners continued to hold their slaves captive after the announcement, Juneteenth became a symbolic date representing African American freedom.

Juneteenth is not a federal holiday. Forty-five states and the District of Columbia celebrate Juneteenth as a state holiday.

This fact sheet assists congressional offices with work related to Juneteenth. It contains sample speeches and remarks from the *Congressional Record*, presidential proclamations and remarks, and selected historical and cultural resources.

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Introduction

Juneteenth celebrates the end of slavery in the United States. It is also known as Emancipation Day, Juneteenth Independence Day, and Black Independence Day. On June 19, 1865, Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas and announced the end of the Civil War and the end of slavery. Although the Emancipation Proclamation came 2½ years earlier on January 1, 1863, and many slave owners continued to hold their slaves captive after the announcement, Juneteenth became a symbolic date representing African American freedom.

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History

June 19, 1865, marks the date that Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas and announced the end of both the Civil War and slavery. His announcement, General Order Number 3 reads:

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.

The 1865 date is largely symbolic. The Emancipation Proclamation, issued by President Abraham Lincoln, had legally freed slaves in Texas on January 1, 1863, almost 2½ years earlier. Even after the general order, some slave masters withheld the information from their slaves, holding them as slaves through one more harvest season.

Texans celebrated Juneteenth beginning in 1866, with community-centric events, such as parades, cookouts, prayer gatherings, historical and cultural readings, and musical performances. Over time, communities have developed their own traditions. Some communities purchased land for Juneteenth celebrations, such as Emancipation Park in Houston, Texas. As families emigrated from Texas to other parts of the United States, they carried the Juneteenth celebrations with them.

On January 1, 1980, Juneteenth officially became a Texas state holiday. Al Edwards, a freshman state representative, put forward the bill, H.B. 1016, making Texas the first state to grant this emancipation celebration. Since then, 44 other states and the District of Columbia have also declared it an official holiday.

Legislation

Although Juneteenth is not a federal holiday, most states and the District of Columbia have passed legislation recognizing it as a state holiday.

Table 1. States That Recognize Juneteenth as a State Holiday

State	Year of Recognition
Alabama	2011

State	Year of Recognition
Alaska	2001
Arizona	2016
Arkansas	2005
California	2002
Colorado	2004
Connecticut	2003
Delaware	2000
District of Columbia	2003
Florida	1991
Georgia	2011
Idaho	2001
Illinois	2003
Indiana	2010
Iowa	2002
Kansas	2009
Kentucky	2005
Louisiana	2003
Maine	2011
Maryland	2014
Massachusetts	2007
Michigan	2005
Minnesota	1996
Mississippi	2010
Missouri	2003
Nebraska	2009
Nevada	2011
New Jersey	2004
New Mexico	2006
New York	2004
North Carolina	2007
Ohio	2009
Oklahoma	1994
Oregon	2001
Pennsylvania	2011
Rhode Island	2013
South Carolina	2007
Tennessee	2007
Texas	1980
Utah	2016
Vermont	2008
Virginia	2007
Washington	2007
West Virginia	2008
Wisconsin	2009
Wyoming	2003

Source: National Juneteenth Observance Foundation.

In recent years, the Senate has passed annual resolutions recognizing June 19 as Juneteenth Independence Day:

S.Res. 500, June 16, 2016,

S.Res. 201, June 15, 2015, and

S.Res. 474, June 12, 2014.

Similar resolutions have been introduced in the House of Representatives:

H.Res. 787, June 15, 2016,

H.Res. 316, June 15, 2015, and

H.Res. 309, June 19, 2014.

Sample Congressional Speeches and Recognitions

Members of Congress often make floor statements, issue press releases, or enter Extensions of Remarks into the *Congressional Record* to recognize federal holidays and observances. The following are some recent examples that may be of assistance in preparing such statements:

Representative Sheila Jackson Lee, “Commemorating Juneteenth 2016,” Extension of Remarks, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 162 (June 20, 2016), p. E955.

Senator Harry Reid, “Celebrating Juneteenth,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 162 (June 16, 2016), p. S4258.

Representative Jeb Hensarling, “Hensarling Commemorates Juneteenth,” press release, June 19, 2015.

Representative Al Green, “In Recognition and Celebration of Juneteenth,” Extension of Remarks, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 160 (June 19, 2014), p. E1036.

Representative Julia Brownley, “Recognizing Ventura County’s 24th Annual Juneteenth Celebration,” Extension of Remarks, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 160 (June 19, 2014), p. E1023.

Representative Tom Graves, “Statement on Juneteenth,” press release, June 19, 2013.

Presidential Proclamations and Remarks

One of the many uses of a presidential proclamation is to ceremoniously honor a group or call attention to certain issues or events. Some proclamations and remarks commemorating Juneteenth from the *Compilation of Presidential Documents* include the following:

Statement on the Observance of Juneteenth—President Barack Obama, June 19, 2016

Message on the Observance of Juneteenth—President George W. Bush, June 18, 2008

Remarks at a Southwest Voter Registration Education Project Reception in Houston, Texas—President William J. Clinton, June 19, 2000

Other presidential proclamations are available through the Federal Digital System (FDsys) on the Government Publishing Office website.

Historical and Cultural Resources

Numerous resources provide information on the history and culture of the holiday. Some of these include the following:

Smithsonian, “Juneteenth: Our Other Independence Day.” This blog post includes pictures of Major General George Granger and the house from which he read General Order Number 3.

Library of Congress, “Juneteenth.” This blog post includes links to several interviews with former slaves about their memories of becoming free.

Texas State Historical Association, “Juneteenth.” A longer narrative of the history of Juneteenth.

National Archives and Records Administration, “The Emancipation Proclamation.” The original, handwritten document.

Galveston.com, “The Roots of Juneteenth.” A video describing the history of Juneteenth in Galveston, Texas.

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