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, TX, 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.

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.

History

June 19, 1865, marks the date that Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, TX, 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, TX. 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, 45 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Year of Recognition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>2001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>2002</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Illinois 2003
Indiana 2010
Iowa 2002
Kansas 2007
Kentucky 2005
Louisiana 2003
Maine 2011
Maryland 2014
Massachusetts 2007
Michigan 2005
Minnesota 1996
Mississippi 2010
Missouri 2003
Montana 2017
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: Table compiled by the Congressional Research Service (CRS).

Note: States without links do not have publicly available versions of the bill or resolution online. Copies can be found on Lexis Advanced or requested from CRS.

In recent years, the Senate has passed annual resolutions recognizing June 19 as Juneteenth Independence Day:
S.Res. 214, August 1, 2017,
S.Res. 500, June 16, 2016, and
S.Res. 201, June 15, 2015.

Similar resolutions have been introduced in the House of Representatives:

H.Res. 386, June 15, 2017,
H.Res. 787, June 15, 2016, and

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:


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 of the Observance of Juneteenth—President Donald Trump, June 19, 2017
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 gaining their freedom.

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.


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