

5 Interesting Facts About Juneteenth

Juneteenth marks the date of June 19, 1865 in celebration of the day that troops arrived in Galveston, Texas to announce and enforce emancipation for enslaved people. Although Juneteenth is becoming more widely known, many people do not know what the day represents. It is important to know what this federal holiday stands for and how the date it commemorates changed our nation. We have compiled five interesting facts about Juneteenth, below:

1. Juneteenth occurred two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation.

In 1862, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, an order that abolished slavery and proclaimed all slaves were to be set free. While this was a monumental event, the news was slow to make its way to the Southern states. It was not until two and a half years after the Proclamation was announced that federal troops arrived in Galveston, Texas to deliver the news on June 19, 1865.

Since this day saw the Emancipation Proclamation reach the entire nation, June 19 became the official day of celebration! A year later, it became known as "Juneteenth."

2. Juneteenth was not recognized as a federal holiday until June 2021.

While Juneteenth is a widely known and celebrated holiday, it was not actually recognized as a federal holiday until June 17, 2021. In 1980, Texas was the first state to declare Juneteenth a state holiday, and afterwards, many other states followed Texas' lead. In 1997, Congress passed legislation to commemorate June 19, 1865, as "Juneteenth Independence Day" and encouraged its celebration as an opportunity to learn about American history and how that history has shaped our nation today.

3. Juneteenth has been celebrated by the African American community since 1866.

Public observances of Juneteenth are a long-standing tradition. In 1866, small Juneteenth celebrations began in church-centered community gatherings. In 1867, the Freedmen's Bureau organized the first large-scale Juneteenth commemoration. The Freedmen's Bureau was a government agency established to help newly liberated slaves navigate the aftermath of the Civil War and support them on their path to freedom. In the beginning, Juneteenth was celebrated in the streets of Galveston, TX, because it was difficult to celebrate in public parks due to segregation laws.

In 1872, a group of African American leaders in the community came together and raised \$800 to purchase 10 acres of land in Houston, TX. They called this the Emancipation Park, which underwent a \$33.5 million renovation in 2016 and was rededicated in the summer of 2017. The renovation helped the architecture tell the story of Juneteenth--the story of oppression, struggle, freedom, and hope.

4. Juneteenth has its own commemorative flag.

In 1997, Ben Haith, founder of the National Juneteenth Celebration Foundation (NJCF), designed the first national Juneteenth commemorative flag. In 2000, the design underwent a revision by Designer L.J. Graf, which is the modern-day flag you will find displayed today.

The commemorative flag is full of symbolism. Its colors, red, white, and blue, symbolize the enslaved and their descendants are American. The bursting star in the middle represents Texas and the newfound freedom bursting throughout the land. The flag represents the importance of African American history and of American freedom for all people.

This year, you will find the Juneteenth flag being raised in commemorative ceremonies throughout our nation. It is a reminder of the struggles of the African American community as they fought for freedom and the importance of being committed to racial equality and justice today.

5. Juneteenth is regaining popularity and recognition.

Today, Juneteenth is recognized and celebrated around the world. Juneteenth has always been a day intended for the celebration of freedom. Today, it is more than just a celebration; it is a time of reflection. It gives us the space to learn more about the significance of this important day and to have conversations with people who come from different backgrounds and experiences. It can be a step toward reconciliation and healing as we strive to achieve racial equality and justice in our world.

This Juneteenth, there is a great opportunity to be here for good and to come alongside those hurting in our community as we celebrate this day of freedom, pray for justice and against racism, and strive to make a difference right where we are.