

# Celebrating National Juneteenth Freedom Day

## June 19<sup>th</sup>: A Celebration of the End of Slavery



### ***Reading the Emancipation Proclamation***

H. W. Herrick, delineator; J. W. Watts, engraver

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Juneteenth is the oldest known celebration of the emancipation of slaves. It dates back to when Union General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas and on June 19, 1865 formally read aloud the contents of “General Order No. 3”, which declared in part:

*“The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free.”*

Former slaves in Galveston rejoiced in the streets after the announcement. Although the ratification of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution in December of 1865 ultimately abolished slavery

in all areas of the nation, Juneteenth captured the jubilation of the end of slavery in the Confederacy. Despite years of adversity, former slaves and their families strove to ensure that their struggle to achieve freedom was remembered and their victory, cherished. Juneteenth was their independence day. In the decades following emancipation, Juneteenth gave African Americans the unique opportunity to commemorate their ongoing quest for equal citizenship.

It wasn't until over 200 years later in 1980 when Juneteenth first became an official state holiday in Texas.

In New York state, Juneteenth didn't have official status until June 19, 2004 when Governor Pataki signed a bill establishing “Juneteenth Freedom Day” (a commemorative day, not a public holiday). Currently, Juneteenth has been adopted by 45 states and the District of Columbia as either a state holiday or ceremonial holiday, a day of commemoration/observance.

The holiday is now observed primarily at the local level with area or regional celebrations. Traditions include public readings of the Emancipation Proclamation, singing of traditional slave songs, parades, street fairs, cookouts, and family reunions.

It is important that we all recognize the spirit of Juneteenth regardless of race as stated by Coretta Scott King, “Struggle is a never ending process. Freedom is never really won, you earn it and win it in every generation.”

### **Newspaper Activities:**

Look through the newspaper and other sources for celebrations of freedom. Are any of them associated with Juneteenth or Emancipation Day? What do the celebrations you found have in common? How are they unique?

After reading several editorials, write an editorial about freedom.

### **Additional Resources:**

For lessons about Juneteenth from ReadWriteThink go to <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/calendar-activities/celebrate-juneteenth-20547.html>. Another resource from Fort Pulaski National Monument called “War for Freedom” can be found at <https://www.nps.gov/fopu/learn/education/war-for-freedom.htm>

*This feature is just one part of this newspaper's Newspaper in Education (NIE) program.*

Feature produced by the New York News Publishers Association Newspaper In Education/News Media Literacy Program, 2018