

Juneteenth: A Journey to Freedom and Unity [Middle School and Up]

Juneteenth holds a significant place in American history as a truly special day. It commemorates a pivotal event that took place on June 19, 1865, when enslaved individuals in Texas received the long-awaited news of their freedom. This momentous occasion is now celebrated throughout the entire United States and holds the esteemed status of an official state holiday in Texas.

Let me tell you a bit about the background of Juneteenth. When the celebration first started, back in the day, it was a time for people to give comfort and support to each other. People would come together to pray, and have family reunions with those they had been separated from. Decades later, many former slaves and their descendants would continue to make a pilgrimage back to Galveston, Texas, where it all began.

Something called the Emancipation Proclamation was issued by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863. This proclamation declared that slaves in the Confederate states and areas not under Union control were free. But news didn't reach Texas until two years later! So, the enslaved people in Texas had no idea that they were legally free while others were already celebrating their freedom.

It wasn't until June 19, 1865, that a regiment of Union soldiers arrived in Galveston, Texas, and Major General Gordon Granger announced General Order No. 3. He let everyone know that all slaves were now free and that their relationship with their former masters had changed to that of employer and free laborer. Can you believe it? It took two and a half years for the news to reach them! This order freed about 250,000 slaves who were still in bondage.

After hearing the news, many newly freed slaves were filled with joy and started celebrating right away. Some even threw away their old worn-out clothes and wore clothes they had taken from their former owners. Many left the plantations and traveled to nearby states like Louisiana, Arkansas, and Oklahoma to reunite with their families.

Over time, the Juneteenth celebration grew bigger and spread to other states. People who had moved out of Texas brought the traditions with them, and by the 1970s, African Americans in Texas started reconnecting with their cultural heritage. They wanted to honor their ancestors who had been freed on June 19. So, they campaigned for Juneteenth to become a state holiday, and in 1979, the Texas House of Representatives passed an act making it a paid holiday. The first official celebration took place in 1980.

On Juneteenth, people come together to remember and celebrate. They have thanksgiving services where they sing powerful songs and read important historical documents like the Emancipation Proclamation. Barbecues are a big part of the celebration, and families enjoy sharing delicious food while recalling their own family histories. There are also activities like baseball games, parades, and contests like the Miss Juneteenth pageant. It's a day filled with joy, unity, and reflection.

While Juneteenth is recognized as a holiday in many states, efforts are underway to make it a national holiday. These days, 47 out of 50 states, including the District of Columbia, officially recognize Juneteenth. It's incredible to see how this day has grown in significance and how people from all backgrounds come together to commemorate it.

Even in places where it's not officially recognized, Juneteenth is still celebrated. Towns and cities hold their own events and observances, keeping the spirit alive. And it's not just limited to the United States. Juneteenth is also observed on college campuses, where students organize parades, performances, and educational activities to honor this important part of history.

Juneteenth is a powerful reminder of the strength and resilience of the African American community. It's a day to recognize the struggles and triumphs of those who fought for freedom and equality. It serves as a time to reflect on the progress that has been made and the work that still lies ahead in the ongoing pursuit of justice and equal rights for all.

Juneteenth has become more than just a historical event. It has evolved into a celebration of African American culture and heritage. It's a day to honor the contributions and achievements of African Americans in various fields, including art, music, literature, science, sports, and more. It's a time to recognize the richness and diversity of African American traditions and to celebrate the resilience and perseverance of a community that has faced immense challenges throughout history.

As the popularity of Juneteenth continues to grow, more and more people from different backgrounds are joining in the festivities. It's an opportunity for communities to come together, learn from one another, and foster unity and understanding. By commemorating Juneteenth, we acknowledge the importance of acknowledging and learning from our shared history, as well as embracing the values of freedom, equality, and respect for all individuals.

In recent years, there have been calls for Juneteenth to be recognized as a national holiday. Supporters argue that it would not only provide a momentous occasion to celebrate the end of slavery and the progress made towards racial equality but also serve as a time for reflection on

the ongoing struggle for justice. Efforts are underway to raise awareness about Juneteenth and its significance, with organizations and individuals advocating for its official recognition at the national level.

By learning about Juneteenth and participating in its observance, we can foster a sense of empathy, understanding, and solidarity among all Americans. It's an opportunity to acknowledge the past, celebrate the present, and strive for a better future. As we honor the legacy of Juneteenth, let us continue to work together towards a society that values diversity, equality, and social justice for all its members.

Juneteenth: A Journey to Freedom and Unity [Questions]

On what date did the event known as Juneteenth take place?

- a) June 19, 1865
- b) July 4, 1776
- c) February 14, 1967

What year did enslaved people in Texas receive the news of their freedom?

- a) 1802
- b) 1865
- c) 1901

How long did it take for the news of freedom to reach enslaved individuals in Texas after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued?

- a) One weeeek
- b) Six months
- c) Two years

Who issued the Emancipation Proclamation?

- a) President Abraham Lincoln
- b) President George Washington
- c) President Thomas Jefferson

In which state did the Juneteenth celebration originate?

- a) New York
- b) California
- c) Texas

What did people do during the early Juneteenth celebrations?

- a) Play sports and have picnics
- b) Pray and have family reunions
- c) Watch fireworks and go to concerts

How did the Emancipation Proclamation affect the slaves in Texas?

- a) It declared them free
- b) It extended their slavery
- c) It had no impact on them

Who announced General Order No. 3, declaring the freedom of all slaves?

- a) Colonel John Smith
- b) General Robert E. Lee
- c) Major General Gordon Granger

What did General Order No. 3 state about the relationship between former slaves and their former masters?

- a) It declared them enemies
- b) It changed their relationship to that of employer and free laborer
- c) It allowed them to become business partners

How many years after the Emancipation Proclamation did General Order No. 3 make slavery illegal in Texas?

- a) Five years
- b) One year
- c) Two and a half years

What were some of the immediate actions taken by newly freed slaves after hearing the news?

- a) Celebrating and reuniting with their families
- b) Returning to work for their former masters
- c) Moving to a different state

Where did many newly freed slaves go to reunite with their families?

- a) Canada
- b) Nearby states like Louisiana, Arkansas, and Oklahoma
- c) Europe

When did Juneteenth become an official state holiday in Texas?

- a) 1985
- b) 1865
- c) 1979

What are some common activities and traditions observed on Juneteenth?

- a) Science experiments and art exhibits
- b) Movie marathons and video game competitions
- c) Barbecues, parades, and Thanksgiving services

How many states officially recognize Juneteenth as a holiday?

- a) 47

- b) 10
- c) 20

Juneteenth: A Journey to Freedom and Unity [Answers]

1. On what date did the event known as Juneteenth take place?
June 19, 1865
2. What year did enslaved people in Texas receive the news of their freedom?
1865
3. How long did it take for the news of freedom to reach enslaved individuals in Texas after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued?
Two years
4. Who issued the Emancipation Proclamation?
President Abraham Lincoln
5. In which state did the Juneteenth celebration originate?
Texas
6. What did people do during the early Juneteenth celebrations?
Pray and have family reunions
7. How did the Emancipation Proclamation affect the slaves in Texas?
It declared them free
8. Who announced General Order No. 3, declaring the freedom of all slaves?
Major General Gordon Granger
9. What did General Order No. 3 state about the relationship between former slaves and their former masters?
It changed their relationship to that of employer and free laborer
10. How many years after the Emancipation Proclamation did General Order No. 3 make slavery illegal in Texas?
Two and a half years

11. What were some of the immediate actions taken by newly freed slaves after hearing the news?
Celebrating and reuniting with their families
12. Where did many newly freed slaves go to reunite with their families?
Nearby states like Louisiana, Arkansas, and Oklahoma
13. When did Juneteenth become an official state holiday in Texas?
1979
14. What are some common activities and traditions observed on Juneteenth?
Barbecues, parades, and Thanksgiving services
15. How many states officially recognize Juneteenth as a holiday?
47

