

## Celebrating Juneteenth



The Juneteenth celebration, observed every year on June 19<sup>th</sup>, is a reminder of the end of slavery in the United States. The freeing of slaves started with Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862. *Emancipation* means *setting free from another's power*. When slaves were emancipated, they were made into free men and women. The Emancipation Proclamation became official on January 1, 1863, but it wasn't until two and a half years later, on

June 19, 1865, that the last of the slaves in Texas were freed. On this day, General Granger and his Union troops rode into Galveston, Texas with the news that the war had ended, and that all slaves were now free. General Granger brought with him "General Order Number 3". His reading of the order, and the news that slaves were now free men and women, was greeted with shock and excitement. Some slaves stayed on the plantations, and kept on working. The difference was that they were now free workers, and were paid. But many more left the plantations, as they felt that this was the first step towards freedom. Some went north, and others headed off to find family in neighboring states. It was a very insecure time for the former slaves as they tried to fit into a society that had previously only thought of them as slaves. The celebration of June 19 every year gave stability to the lives of the members of the black community as they established themselves. Soon the June 19<sup>th</sup> celebration was known as "Juneteenth".

However, towards the turn of the century, the Juneteenth celebrations began to die down. Young people didn't feel the same connection with the emancipation of the slaves. During the time of the Depression many people moved into cities, and it was difficult for them to take time off to celebrate Juneteenth. Then, during the Civil Rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s, Juneteenth celebrations gathered new strength. On January 1, 1980, the Juneteenth celebrations received status as an official state holiday in Texas, through the efforts of state legislator Al Edwards. Since then several states have followed Texas in making Juneteenth a state holiday.

Juneteenth is a time for African-Americans and others living in the community to get together and celebrate their freedom. There are many barbecue feasts and gatherings on Juneteenth, and one special treat often found at Juneteenth celebrations is strawberry soda-pop. Juneteenth is a time to eat and drink with friends and celebrate what happened a long time ago in Texas, but why is this celebration still important today? To many African-Americans, Juneteenth is as important as any country's Independence Day. It is a celebration of freedom and togetherness. The fight to end slavery was a battle fought by many men and women. Let's all celebrate the victory by recognizing and joining in the Juneteenth celebration!



**Answer the following questions on the Juneteenth celebrations.**

1. When is Juneteenth celebrated?

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2. What does *emancipation* mean?

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3. When did the Emancipation Proclamation become official?

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4. Who rode into Texas on June 19, 1865, and what did he bring with him?

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5. After June 19, 1865, some of the former slaves continued to work on the plantations. What was different?

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6. Why did people start celebrating Juneteenth?

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7. Who was Al Edwards?

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8. What is one special drink often found at Juneteenth celebrations?

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9. Write a short paragraph on why you think it is important to continue celebrating Juneteenth.

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**Answers to Juneteenth.**

1. Juneteenth is celebrated on June 19 every year.
2. Emancipation means the setting free from another's power.
3. The Emancipation Proclamation became official on January 1, 1863.
4. General Granger rode into Galveston, Texas on June 19, 1865, and he brought with him General Order Number 3.
5. After June 19, some former slaves continued to work on the plantations, but the difference was that they were now free men and women, and were paid.
6. The celebration of June 19 every year gave stability to the lives of the members of the black community as they established themselves.
7. Al Edwards was an African-American state legislator in Texas. He helped Juneteenth gain recognition throughout the state and on January 1, 1980, Juneteenth became a state holiday in Texas.
8. Strawberry soda-pop is a special drink often found at Juneteenth celebrations.
9. Individual student answers.