



JUNETEENTH HISTORY



Juneteenth is the oldest known celebration of the ending of slavery and 2015 is a very special year marking 150 years since the signing of the historic **Emancipation Proclamation (EP)**. While the EP had freed most slaves as a war measure, it had not made slavery illegal. On April 14, 1865 *President Lincoln* was shot by *John Wilkes Booth* and 8 months later on December 18, 1865 the 13th Amendment, which outlaws slavery and involuntary servitude except as punishment for a crime, was passed. The Amendment was passed by the Senate on April 8, 1864, by the House on January 31, 1865, and adopted on December 6, 1865. On December 18, Secretary of State *William H. Seward* proclaimed it to have been adopted. It was the first of the 3 Reconstruction Amendments adopted after the American Civil War. *President Lincoln* and other Republicans were concerned that the Emancipation Proclamation, which in 1863 declared the freedom of slaves in 10 Confederate states then in rebellion, would be seen as a temporary war measure since it was based solely on Lincoln's war powers. The Proclamation did not free any slaves in the Border States nor did it abolish slavery. Because of this, *Lincoln* and other supporters believed that the amendment to the Constitution was needed.

Dating back to 1865 it was on June 19th that the Union soldiers, led by *Major General Gordon Granger*, landed at Galveston, Texas with news that the war had ended and that the enslaved were now free. Note that this was two and a half years after *President Lincoln's* Emancipation Proclamation—which had become official January 1, 1863. The EP had little impact on the Texans due to the minimal number of Union troops to enforce the new Executive order. However, with the surrender of *General Lee* in April of 1865 and the arrival of *General Granger's* regiment, the forces were finally strong enough to influence and overcome the resistance.

Future attempts to explain this two-and-a-half year delay after receiving this important news have yielded several versions that have been handed down through the years. Often told is the story of a messenger who was murdered on his way to Texas with the news of freedom. Another is that the news was deliberately withheld by the enslavers to maintain the labor force on the plantations. And still another is that federal troops actually waited for the slave owners to reap the benefits of one last cotton harvest before going to Texas to enforce the EP. All or none of them could be true. For whatever the reason, conditions in Texas remained status quo well beyond what was statutory in modern times. Throughout the 1980's and 90's Juneteenth has enjoyed a growing and healthy interest from communities and organizations throughout the country. Institutions such as the *Smithsonian*, the *Henry Ford Museum* and others have begun sponsoring Juneteenth-centered activities with the mission to promote and cultivate knowledge and appreciation of African-American history and culture.

Juneteenth today celebrates African-American freedom while encouraging self-development and respect for all cultures. As it takes on a more national and even global perspective, the events of 1865 in Texas are not forgotten, for all the roots tie back to this fertile soil from which a national day of pride is growing. The future of Juneteenth looks bright as an increasing number of cities and states come on board; the local committees and organizations will help expedite this growth while minimizing waste and risk. **42 states and the District of Columbia** recognize Juneteenth as a **State Holiday or State Holiday Observance** through a Bill, House Resolution, Senate Resolution or Joint Resolution. It is only a matter of time before Congress passes legislation to make "**Juneteenth Independence Day**" a **National Day of Observance like Flag Day or Patriot Day**. It is through the slave trade that America became the greatest country on earth and African-Americans have come a long way, but yet there is a lot of work that has to be done. At the end of the day we want to use this celebration as a platform to finally unite us as a nation and keep the "**Dream of Dr. King**" alive where citizens should be judged by the content of their character and not the color of their skin. It is our intent to use Juneteenth and the Hip-Hop Culture to: enlighten young citizens about the history of slavery and their civic and social responsibility; address Black on Black Crime and put an end to Gun and Gang Violence. Young people this is your "**Call to Action**" to use your wisdom, skills and **FREEDOM** (which many of us take for granted) to improve public safety and make this a better world for the next generation.

