



Juneteenth



History of Juneteenth

The American Civil War began in April 1861 when eleven southern states seceded and formed the Confederacy (with Kentucky and Missouri joining later), in large part to protect to continue chattel slavery. While a majority of the states in the Confederacy had slaves, four slaveholding border states initially remained in the Union: Maryland, Missouri, Delaware, and Kentucky.

On January 1st, 1863, while the Civil War still raged, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. The proclamation declared "that all persons held as slaves are, and henceforward shall be free." However, the legislation was limited in many ways and included wording such that it would apply only in states that had seceded from the Union. On January 31st, 1865, the 13th Amendment was passed by the House of Representatives which abolished slavery and involuntary servitude across the United States, except as punishment for a crime.

On April 9th, 1865, Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered his army to Union General Ulysses S. Grant at the Appomattox Court House in Northern Virginia, leading to the end of the bloodiest conflict in American history.

June 19th, 1865 is considered the date that the last slaves in America were freed, when Major General Gordon Granger, along with 2,000 Union soldiers (including many Black soldiers), rode into Galveston, Texas with the news that the Civil War had ended and that 250,000 enslaved people were now free. Although the Emancipation Proclamation had formally freed them almost two and a half years earlier, Texas was the most remote of the slave states with few Union troops, so enforcement of the proclamation had been slow. Celebrations began immediately. Newly liberated people walked away from their former places of servitude and began to dance, sing, and play music. Today Juneteenth celebrations and recognition continue to expand as Black Americans seek to ensure the events of 1865 are not lost to history.



Be'chol Lashon (Hebrew for "in every language") celebrates and prioritizes diversity as a Jewish value by uplifting the historic and contemporary racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the Jewish people and in doing so, strengthens the entire Jewish community.

To learn more about Juneteenth and access resources that celebrate the diversity of the Jewish community, visit us at Globaljews.org. To support our work visit globaljews.org/donate



@Globaljews
in Be'chol Lashon
f Facebook.com/bechollashon

Juneteenth



Traditions and Customs

Juneteenth celebrations take many forms and vary from place to place. It has become a day of celebration of freedom and is traditionally marked by the Black community with parades, prayer services, cookouts, and picnics. Many of the celebratory elements draw from the history and strength of the Black experience, sometimes deliberately highlighting the freedom Black people have to participate in activities that were once forbidden to their enslaved ancestors. Often celebrants wear fancy clothing, and participate in parades and pageants featuring dance troupes, drum corps, floats towed by cars, horseback riders, and marching bands.

Many families and communities hold large cookouts and certain foods have become popular with Juneteenth celebrations. For some, it means indulging in traditional black Southern cuisine like fried chicken, catfish, barbecue, collard greens, okra, black-eyed peas, and cornbread. Many people eat red foods, as a reminder of the blood spilled and the perseverance of the Black community such as strawberry soda and red velvet cake (see Strawberry Lemonade recipe). Celebrations were traditionally most common in Texas due to the holiday's origin. Though Juneteenth was originally a public communal celebration, it is also true that throughout American history, access to public spaces has historically been limited for Black Americans. As laws were created to ban Black people from having access to public space, celebrations became private, often held in churches or people's homes. In 1872, Reverend Jack Yates organized a fundraiser in Houston among members of his church and other formerly enslaved people. Raising \$1,000, they purchased 10 acres of land to establish Emancipation Park where Juneteenth celebrations could be held in the open, which resulted in the tradition becoming more widespread.

During the Civil Rights Era, there was a resurgence of interest in Juneteenth as a celebration of freedom and resilience and as a way to remind people of history. In 1979, Texas became the first state to make Juneteenth a holiday. As Black Texans fanned across the country, Juneteenth became more widely celebrated. In recent years, the murder of George Floyd and subsequent racial reckoning in the summer of 2020 prompted renewed interest in the holiday. Juneteenth continues to symbolize Black resistance and joy and was declared a Federal holiday in 2021.



Be'chol Lashon (Hebrew for "in every language") celebrates and prioritizes diversity as a Jewish value by uplifting the historic and contemporary racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the Jewish people and in doing so, strengthens the entire Jewish community.

To learn more about Juneteenth and access resources that celebrate the diversity of the Jewish community, visit us at Globaljews.org. To support our work visit globaljews.org/donate



Juneteenth



Controversies and Complexities

Taking time to celebrate freedom and resilience is important, but it cannot be separated from the recognition of the complexities and limitations of the Black historical experience.

For many, Juneteenth is bittersweet. While it marks the end of legalized slavery, it does not represent the full embodiment of the freedom promised to all Americans. After emancipation, formerly enslaved persons, also known as freedmen and freedwomen, had no personal possessions or capital with which to build new lives. Often, their poverty and limited economic opportunities meant they ended up as sharecroppers, in many instances indentured to their former masters.



While the end of slavery broke the historic relationship between master and slave, the subjugation of Black people in America continued by way of new methods of legally limiting their rights. In the late 19th-century South the backlash to Reconstruction included the building of an extensive prison system developed in the interest of maintaining the racial and economic relationship of slavery under the framework of “law and order.”

Prisons served as a mechanism to re-enslave Black workers through a system of Convict Leasing, using the loophole in the 13th amendment that outlawed slavery except for in the context of imprisonment. The conditions that Black prisoners worked under were harsh, unrelenting, and often life-threatening. Black people could face a lifetime imprisonment for offenses as small as loitering or falling behind in making rent payments. Jim Crow laws maintained separate and unequal treatment of Black Americans. The long-term impact of these systems can be seen in many aspects of contemporary American life such as the documented disproportional incarceration rates of the Black population, as well as educational and economic disparities between white and Black Americans.

As Martin Luther King said in his “I Have a Dream” speech, “Until all are free, none are free,” an oft-repeated maxim that highlights the significance of the end of the era of slavery in the United States and the work that still needs to be done.

Be'chol Lashon (Hebrew for “in every language”) celebrates and prioritizes diversity as a Jewish value by uplifting the historic and contemporary racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the Jewish people and in doing so, strengthens the entire Jewish community.

To learn more about Juneteenth and access resources that celebrate the diversity of the Jewish community, visit us at Globaljews.org. To support our work visit globaljews.org/donate