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Juneteenth: Fact Sheet

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Contents

Introduction	1
History	1
Legislation	1
Sample Congressional Speeches and Recognitions.....	3
Presidential Proclamations and Remarks	4
Historical and Cultural Resources	4

Tables

Table 1. States That Commemorate or Observe Juneteenth	1
--	---

Contacts

Author Information.....	4
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Introduction

Juneteenth celebrates the end of slavery in the United States. It is also known as Emancipation Day, Juneteenth Independence Day, and Black Independence Day. On June 19, 1865, Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, TX, and announced the end of the Civil War and the end of slavery. Although the Emancipation Proclamation came 2½ years earlier on January 1, 1863, many slave owners continued to hold their slaves captive after the announcement, so Juneteenth became a symbolic date representing African American freedom.

This fact sheet assists congressional offices with work related to Juneteenth. It contains sample speeches and remarks from the *Congressional Record*, presidential proclamations and remarks, and selected historical and cultural resources.

History

June 19, 1865, marks the date that Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, TX, and announced the end of both the Civil War and slavery. His announcement, General Order Number 3 reads:

The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property, between former masters and slaves and the connection heretofore existing between them, becomes that between employer and hired labor. The Freedmen are advised to remain at their present homes and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts; and they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere.

The 1865 date is largely symbolic. The Emancipation Proclamation, issued by President Abraham Lincoln, had legally freed slaves in Texas on January 1, 1863, almost 2½ years earlier. Even after the general order, some slave masters withheld the information from their slaves, holding them as slaves through one more harvest season.

Texans celebrated Juneteenth beginning in 1866, with community-centric events, such as parades, cookouts, prayer gatherings, historical and cultural readings, and musical performances. Over time, communities have developed their own traditions. Some communities purchased land for Juneteenth celebrations, such as Emancipation Park in Houston, TX. As families emigrated from Texas to other parts of the United States, they carried the Juneteenth celebrations with them.

On January 1, 1980, Juneteenth officially became a Texas state holiday. Al Edwards, a freshman state representative, put forward the bill, H.B. 1016, making Texas the first state to grant this emancipation celebration. Since then, 45 other states and the District of Columbia have also commemorated or recognized the day.

Legislation

Although Juneteenth is not a federal holiday, most states and the District of Columbia have passed legislation recognizing it as a holiday or observance.

Table 1. States That Commemorate or Observe Juneteenth

State	Year of Recognition	State Legislation
Alabama	2011	Act No. 2011-398

State	Year of Recognition	State Legislation
Alaska	2001	Alaska Stat. § 44.12.090
Arizona	2016	Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 1-315
Arkansas	2005	Ark. Code § 1-5-114
California	2003	Cal. Gov't Code § 6719
Colorado	2004	HJR 04-1027
Connecticut	2003	Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-29a(48)
Delaware	2000	Del. Code tit. 1, § 604
District of Columbia	2003	PR 15-109
Florida	1991	Fla. Stat. § 683.21
Georgia	2011	SR 164
Idaho	2001	SCR 101
Illinois	2003	5 Ill. Comp. Stat. 490/63
Indiana	2010	HCR 0038
Iowa	2002	Iowa Code § 1C.14
Kansas	2007	SR 1860
Kentucky	2005	Ky. Rev. Stat. § 2.147
Louisiana	2003	La. Rev. Stat. § 1:58:2
Maine	2011	Me. Stat. tit. 1, § 150-H
Maryland	2014	Md. Code Ann., Gen. Prov. § 7-411
Massachusetts	2007	Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 6, § 15BBBBB
Michigan	2005	Mich. Comp. Laws § 435.361
Minnesota	1996	Minn. Stat. § 10.55
Mississippi	2010	SCR 605
Missouri	2003	Mo. Rev. Stat. § 9.161
Montana	2017	Mont. Code § 1-1-231
Nebraska	2009	LR 75
Nevada	2011	Nev. Rev. Stat. § 236.033
New Jersey	2004	N.J. Rev. Stat. § 36:2-80
New Mexico	2006	N.M. Stat. Ann. § 12-5-14
New York	2004	N.Y. Exec. § 168-a
North Carolina	2007	HB 1607
Ohio	2009	Ohio Rev. Code § 5.2247
Oklahoma	1994	Okla. Stat. tit. 25, § 82.4
Oregon	2001	SJR 31
Pennsylvania	2001	HR 236
Rhode Island	2013	S 169
South Carolina	2008	S.C. Code § 53-3-85

State	Year of Recognition	State Legislation
Tennessee	2007	HJR 170
Texas	1980	Tex. Gov't Code § 662.003
Utah	2016	Utah Code § 63G-1-401(1)(e)
Vermont	2007	Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 1, § 375
Virginia	2007	HR 56
Washington	2007	Wash. Rev. Code § 1.16.050
West Virginia	2008	HR 19
Wisconsin	2009	Wis. Stat. § 995.20
Wyoming	2003	Wyo. Stat. § 8-4-107

Source: Table compiled by the Congressional Research Service (CRS).

Note: States without links do not have publicly available versions of the bill or resolution online. Copies can be found on Lexis Advanced or requested from CRS.

In recent years, the Senate has passed annual resolutions recognizing June 19 as Juneteenth Independence Day

S.Res. 547 (115th Cong.)

S.Res. 214 (115th Cong.)

S.Res. 500 (114th Cong.)

S.Res. 201 (114th Cong.)

Similar resolutions have been introduced in the House of Representatives

H.Res. 948 (115th Cong.)

H.Res. 386 (115th Cong.)

H.Res. 787 (114th Cong.)

H.Res. 316 (114th Cong.)

Sample Congressional Speeches and Recognitions

Members of Congress often make floor statements, issue press releases, or enter Extensions of Remarks into the *Congressional Record* to recognize federal holidays and observances. The following are some recent examples that may be of assistance in preparing such statements:

Senators Bill Nelson and Cory Booker, “Juneteenth Independence Day,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 164 (June 19, 2018), pS4032-S4033.

Representative Sheila Jackson Lee, “Commemorating Juneteenth,” remarks in the House of Representatives, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 162 (June 19, 2018), p. H5274-H5275.

Representative Adriano Espaillat, “Remembering Juneteenth,” Extensions of Remarks, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 163 (June 21, 2017), p. E863.

Representative Brian Babin, “Celebrating Juneteenth 2017,” Extensions of Remarks, *Congressional Record*, daily edition vol. 163 (June 15, 2017), p. E828.

Senator Harry Reid, “Celebrating Juneteenth,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 162 (June 16, 2016), p. S4258.

Representative Jeb Hensarling, “Hensarling Commemorates Juneteenth,” press release, June 19, 2015.

Representative Julia Brownley, “Recognizing Ventura County’s 24th Annual Juneteenth Celebration,” Extensions of Remarks, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 160 (June 19, 2014), p. E1023.

Presidential Proclamations and Remarks

One of the many uses of a presidential proclamation is to ceremoniously honor a group or call attention to certain issues or events. Some proclamations and remarks commemorating Juneteenth from the *Compilation of Presidential Documents* include the following:

Statement of the Observance of Juneteenth—President Donald Trump, June 19, 2018

Statement on the Observance of Juneteenth—President Barack Obama, June 19, 2016

Message on the Observance of Juneteenth—President George W. Bush, June 19, 2008

Remarks at a Southwest Voter Registration Education Project Reception in Houston, Texas—President William J. Clinton, June 19, 2000

Other presidential proclamations are available through govinfo, a portal for free public access to official publications from all three branches of the government, maintained by the Government Publishing Office (GPO).

Historical and Cultural Resources

Numerous resources provide information on the history and culture of the holiday. Some of these include the following:

Smithsonian, “Juneteenth: Our Other Independence Day.” This blog post includes pictures of Major General George Granger and the house from which he read General Order Number 3.

Library of Congress, “Juneteenth.” This blog post includes links to several interviews with former slaves about their memories of gaining their freedom.

Texas State Historical Association, “Juneteenth.” A longer narrative of the history of Juneteenth.

National Archives and Records Administration, “The Emancipation Proclamation.” The original, handwritten document.

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