

# Juneteenth

June 19th is said to be the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the ending of slavery in the U.S.. The bill was finally signed in 2021 by President Joe Biden officially making it a federal holiday. Not only is it a celebration of resistance and courage, but also a day to come together and acknowledge the legacy of freedom, equality, and justice started by those before us.



## The 13th Amendment

The 13th Amendment was the first amendment to the United States Constitution during the period of Reconstruction. The amendment was ratified on December 6, 1865, and ended the argument about whether slavery was legal in the United States. The amendment reads,

*“Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”*

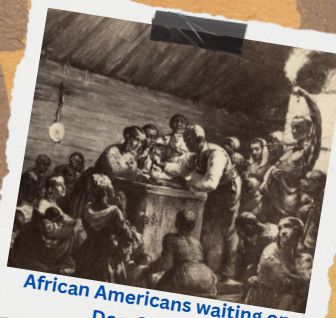
The 13th Amendment was necessary because the Emancipation Proclamation, issued by President Abraham Lincoln in January of 1863, did not end slavery entirely. Unfortunately those enslaved in border states had not been freed. Two years later, troops would arrive in Galveston, Texas to announce freedom.

## Freedom's Eve

On the night of December 31, 1862, enslaved and free African Americans gathered in churches and homes across the country awaiting news that the Emancipation Proclamation had fully taken effect. That night, Black Americans congregated to pray and sing as they waited for midnight. Both sides of the conflict reflected on the historical significance of what was to come the following morning, a morning full of pure joy. The tradition continued into the present and became known as Watch Night, or “Freedom’s Eve”. Today the service signifies the history of slavery and freedom, while being hopeful for the new year to come.



Fourth U.S. Infantry Detail, 1864



African Americans waiting on Dec. 31, 1862

## Guardian Angels

When President Abraham Lincoln signed the 13th amendment, he also declared that *“such persons [African American] of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States.”* For the first time, Black soldiers could fight for the U.S. Army. freedmen, runaways slaves, and anyone else who believe in this cause was recruited. Trained at Camp Nelson, Kentucky, these men enlisted in 19 Black troop regiments. They eventually gained their freedom by fighting in the Union Army. Over 10,000 soldiers were based in Galveston, Texas, when General Gordon Granger Order Number Three was issued, advising the people of the state that all slaves were free. President Lincoln said, *“Without the Military help of Black Freedman, the war against the South could not have been won.”*

## Juneteenth Flag

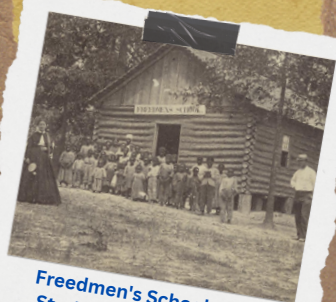
The symbols on the Juneteenth flag are self-evident in their importance. The star positioned in the center has a double meaning, the first representing Texas and the place where Juneteenth originated and was first acknowledged. Secondly, the star symbolizes all the states of America and how slaves became free across the country. The nova is known as a new star which can represent all the new beginnings that were given to people across the nation when slavery was abolished. The flag is colored this way to highlight how closely linked its overall meaning is to the United States. With these colors, it makes clear that slaves and their descendants have been, and always will be, part of America.



Juneteenth Flag, designed by Ben Haith

## The Scatter

Unpleased by the recommendation to remain in place after freedom was announced, many left the area during the order number three’s original reading. In the following weeks, the newly freed people left Texas in grand numbers to find family members and make their way into society. Advertisements with detailed descriptions were often used to locate loved ones. Churches also became conduits for people to find their families through word of mouth and by association. Often in some occurrences, partners of someone displaced may have remarried or began another family after 10 years of separation. On the other hand, reunited families would look to acquire land to establish communities and create generational wealth.



Freedmen's School with Students and Teachers

## Freedman's Bureau

The Freedmen’s Bureau was established in 1865-1868 by Congress to help millions of former Black slaves and poor whites in the South in the aftermath of the Civil War. The Bureau provided food, shelter, medical assistance, schooling, and legal aid. It also attempted to provide former slaves with land confiscated or abandoned during the war. However, the organization was prevented from fully carrying out its programs due to a shortage of funds and workforce, along with the politics of race and Reconstruction.



‘Juneteenth: Faith & Freedom’ Free PBS Documentary

## Galveston Freedom Walk

The Freedom Walk trail in Galveston retraces the footsteps of Major General Gordon Granger and the 2000 federal soldiers who arrived in Galveston on June 19, 1865, to announce that those enslaved were free. Every year, citizens and tourists visit Galveston to walk the city and explore the designated sites connected to the unfolding of June 19th:

- [Stop 1 – Pier 21 and the Middle Passage](#)
- [Stop 2 – Juneteenth marker and site of Union Headquarters](#)
- [Stop 3 – US Customs House](#)
- [Stop 4 – Reedy Chapel-AME Church](#)
- [Stop 5 – Ashton Villa](#)

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