

Juneteenth

June 19 is now officially Juneteenth National Independence Day, a US federal holiday commemorating the end of Civil War era slavery in the United States.

The holiday, long celebrated by African Americans in the U.S., recognizes June 19, 1865, when many enslaved people in Texas learned they had been freed. (Juneteenth is a blend of the words June and nineteenth) Although President Abraham Lincoln had signed the Emancipation Proclamation two years earlier (1863), it could not be enforced in many places until after the end of the Civil War in April 1865. Two months after Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered, Union Maj. Gen. Gordon Granger and his troops arrived in Galveston, Texas, with news that the war had ended and that the enslaved were now free.

While Texas was the first state to make Juneteenth a state holiday, the vast majority of states recognize Juneteenth as a holiday or have an official observance of the day. Juneteenth is a paid holiday for state employees in Texas, New York, Virginia and Washington, and hundreds of companies give workers a day off for Juneteenth.

Opal Lee, the "Grandmother of Juneteenth" is a 94-year-old Texas activist. She has been a prominent face of the movement to recognize the holiday since translating her love of the Juneteenth celebrations as a child in Texas and turning it into action.

-June 18, 2021