
Juneteenth

Can you even begin to imagine the disbelief and joy felt by American slaves when they learned they were freed? News reached Texas slaves two years after the Emancipation Proclamation, on January 1, 1863. In those days, news traveled slowly, and many slave owners had tried to keep the news of emancipation from their slaves.

On June 19th, 1865, General Granger, of the Union Army, rode into Galveston, Texas announcing "All slaves are free!" Slaves began "leaping, swaying, and whirling in unrehearsed glee." One slave declared "We was all walking on golden clouds—Hallelujah!"

Former Texas slaves began to celebrate the glory of that June 19th day, and celebration has continued to this day—shortened to being called "Juneteenth". The holiday spread all over the country as African Americans migrated North and throughout the United States. In Texas, Juneteenth has become a State Holiday on June 19.

With the advent of the Civil Rights movement in the Sixties, Juneteenth began to be more widely celebrated, and is today becoming increasingly popular, as well as important. From its earliest days, the occasion has been celebrated with picnics focused on barbecue, and other red foods—red to symbolize the blood that was shed in the civil war. In addition to BBQ, red beans and rice, red velvet cake, strawberry soda, and watermelon have been staples of the celebration. Hecky Powell had long wanted to produce his own strawberry soda—and he did so in Honor of both Juneteenth and his Great Grandfather who was born into slavery. Thus the picture of Forrest E. White on each bottle. All Proceeds from soda pop sales go to support the Forrest E. Powell Foundation (forrestpowell.com) which Hecky created in his own father's name—to support youth going into the trades and to honor the work ethic. Originally held mostly in church yards, the Juneteenth picnics now take place in the city parks, fields, vacant lots, school yards, and baseball fields.

The heart of the celebration is the reading of the General Order #3 that General Granger brought to Galveston, Texas in 1865 proclaiming that all slaves are now free.

Juneteenth is a day of joy and celebration for a people who survived the horrific trials of slavery. Often a theme at the Juneteenth picnics is the continuing importance of self-development and progress.

