

# A History of Juneteenth

In August, 1619, the first written record of slavery in the American colonies tells of about 20 people from Angola, who had been kidnapped by Portuguese sailors and sold to British colonists in Virginia. This likely followed countless undocumented kidnappings throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century as well. Slavery continued to grow, and although it was a heavily debated topic prior to signing the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the country's founders chose to leave the issue for future politicians to handle, in order to convince the southern states to join in fighting Great Britain.

By the 1850s, the topic of slavery was driving the nation apart. When Abraham Lincoln was elected president in 1860, South Carolina seceded in protest. It was followed by ten other southern states. On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1863 President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring slaves living in Confederate states to be free. This meant that as southern land was captured, the slaves living there no longer belonged to their owners; however, slaves living in land that had not rebelled against the Union were not freed, nor did free African Americans have the right to vote.

Nearing the end of the Civil War, and without the southern congressmen to oppose it, Lincoln could now push forward with the Thirteenth Amendment, which made slavery illegal throughout the United States. This passed on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1865 and began to take effect in the South when the Civil War ended on April 9, 1865. However, news did not travel quickly in those days. It was not until June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1865 that Union soldiers arrived in the westernmost town of the Confederacy: Galveston, Texas; announcing the ban on slavery. One year later, on June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1866; African Americans in Texas celebrated the one-year anniversary of learning about their new freedom. This was the first Juneteenth celebration. Celebrations continued to be held each year, despite attempts by former slave owners to stop them, often with violence.

The Juneteenth flag was created in 1977 by Ben Haith and Lisa Jeanna Graf. The colors are red, white, and blue; to show that freed slaves were true Americans. The white star in the center is from the Texas flag. The twelve-pointed star outline is a nova, representing a new beginning for African Americans, and the arc represents a new horizon. On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1980, Juneteenth became a state holiday in Texas, and on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021, it became a federal holiday.



# Juneteenth Timeline



**August  
1619**

**January  
1863**

**January  
1865**

**June  
1865**

**1977**

**January  
1980**

**June  
2021**

# Juneteenth Timeline



Cut out strips and glue onto the following page next to the year each event happened.

**The Thirteenth Amendment was passed.**

**Juneteenth became a state holiday in Texas.**

**First written record of slavery in the American colonies.**

**Union soldiers announced the ban on slavery in Galveston, Texas.**

**Juneteenth became a federal holiday.**

**The Juneteenth flag was created by Ben Haith and Lisa Jeanna Graf.**

**President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation.**