

Make Juneteenth a national legal holiday

Ann Vandeman

It is time to make Juneteenth a national legal holiday to celebrate the abolition of slavery in the United States. June 19, 1865 was the day General Gordon Granger rode into Galveston, Texas, and announced that enslaved people were now free. He read General Order #3 which states "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..."

It's a Washington holiday already

Washington State has recognized Juneteenth as a day of remembrance since 2007. Last year a bill was introduced to make it a legal holiday in Washington, with the same level of observance as Presidents Day, Memorial Day and Independence Day. It didn't make it to a vote, but it can't end there.

The fight to end slavery and the fight for independence

The Civil War victory over slavery and for freedom and liberty is as fundamental to American identity and values as the struggle for American independence. A Juneteenth legal holiday would recognize that all those who fought to end slavery - soldiers, abolitionists, underground railroad conductors, the slaves who joined the Union army and those who led insurrections to free themselves. Theirs

was a cause in common with the freedom fighters of the American revolutionary war.

We as Americans need finally to say out loud that the Civil War is over. We need to acknowledge the

bravery, sacrifice and dedication of those freedom fighters who brought us, through the abolition of slavery, one step closer to becoming a free people, with liberty and justice for all.

Fulfillment of the American promise

The current uprising led by Black Lives Matter is another step on the road to freedom and justice too

long denied for African American people. Their movement is revealing the extent to which police harassment, violence and imprisonment are integral to the system of oppression and exploitation designed to prevent the fulfillment of

the American promise. It is also bringing into sharp relief the need to seek and accept leadership from the African American community and this movement. Because they know what it means to be deprived of their individual liberty,

Slavery is a stain on our history; this is our opportunity to turn an anniversary of its end into a celebration across the land.



After the vigil, 200-plus participants gathered for a moment of properly distanced solidarity. Photo by Ricky Osborne

A timeline history of Juneteenth

Cita Cook

April 16, 1862: Congress outlawed slavery in the District of Columbia and the Western Territories, paying money to people who considered themselves slaveowners for the loss of their "property." President Lincoln recommended that newly freed people emigrate to Haiti or Liberia, since he believed that both "races" suffered when they lived together.

January 1, 1863: President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation made the freeing of slaves a goal of the Civil War by declaring them emancipated in areas not controlled by the US government (meaning ONLY in areas controlled by Confederate troops). Most enslaved people liberated themselves at some point during the rest of the war, especially when the presence of Union troops made it relatively safe for them to do so. Many began celebrating each January 1 as the day of the Emancipation Jubilee.

June 19, 1865 (Juneteenth): Even though most of the approximately 250,000 enslaved people in Texas may have known about the Emancipation Proclamation and that the Confederate Army of the Trans-Mississippi had surrendered on June 2, they also would have realized that white authorities in Texas were not prepared to let them go.

That changed when US Major General Gordon Granger and about 1,800 Union soldiers (white and black) arrived at Galveston Island on June 19, three weeks after the

last regular Texas Confederate soldiers had surrendered. Granger announced to "the people of Texas" that, according to General Order Number 3, "all slaves" were free and that there would be an "absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves," who would now interact as "employer and hired labor."

Many black people walked away from slavery, unwilling to become wage workers for the same people who had enslaved them. For a number of months, US soldiers spread across the state to enforce the order, including arresting judges and sheriffs who tried to keep slavery alive.

People who had been enslaved kept doing whatever seemed necessary to protect and define their freedom. Many were killed by white people. Ever since then, most black Texans and, later, many in other states celebrated June 19 as their Emancipation Day, eventually (at least by the 1890s) calling the day Juneteenth.

December 6, 1865: The Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution was ratified, making slavery and "involuntary servitude" ("except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted") unconstitutional. In other words, people convicted of a crime could still be enslaved.

June 19, 1867: The Freedmen's Bureau in Austin, Texas helped organize a celebration in an Austin park for the second anniversary

of the Galveston announcement (Juneteenth). It then became an annual event there.

1872: To celebrate the end of slavery, three black community leaders in Houston purchased four acres for \$800 to create Emancipation Park, now the oldest park in Houston and in Texas. At first, they could afford to use it only for celebrations each Juneteenth. It became a city park in 1916 and, from 1922 to 1940, was the only park in Houston that African Americans could enter (except for black females wearing a uniform while caring for a white child). In 2019, the park became a UNESCO Slave Route Project site.

1916-1940: In the Great Migration, hundreds of thousands of African American southerners became refugees in northern cities to avoid sharecropping, Jim Crow laws, denial of the right to vote, lynchings, and other forms of racial terrorism. Black Texan migrants took the celebration of Juneteenth with them

June 19, 1917: On Juneteenth, the Rice Hotel in Houston, Texas held a "rescue party" for wealthy white families who felt helpless on this day every year without the black women and men who usually cooked and served meals for them.

At some point between 1865 and 1917, black domestic workers in Houston and probably elsewhere had agreed that they would always refuse to work on Juneteenth (except for events like that at the Rice Hotel). That tradition continued at least into the late 1950s

when country clubs hosted parties for their wealthy white members (with the help of black cooks and waiters).

June 19, 1936: On what white authorities in Dallas called "Colored People's Day," 200,000 African Americans attended the opening of the Hall of Negro Life at the Texas Centennial Exposition. The local white elite had opposed the construction of this building, but black leaders such as the head of the Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce had convinced the US Department of Commerce to support it.

June 19, 1968: On the last full day of the six weeks that people connected to the Poor People's Campaign were living in Resurrection City, tens of thousands came out to celebrate "Solidarity Day." Ralph David Abernathy spoke about the importance of Juneteenth and Coretta Scott King read a speech her husband had planned to read if he had lived to do so. Celebrations of Juneteenth picked up after that.

June 19, 1971: The first Juneteenth celebration in a black community in Milwaukee started what has been an annual tradition since then. Someone had returned from a visit with a southern relative inspired by her experience in the celebration down there.

1980: A bill proposed by Texas freshman State Representative Al Edwards became a law, making June 19 a state holiday known as "Emancipation Day in Texas." A year later, Edwards had to fight to stop a bill that would have overturned the holiday. Some black people opposed it because they considered January 1 to be the



Beverly Farris, Honorary Chair, and Carolina Mejia along with Deborah Sioux Cano Lee and Noel Parrish circled the bridge with cleansing smoke, drumming for peace and justice. Brenda Warner carried the Juneteenth flag. Photo by Dave Harris

true Emancipation Day, but others accepted it as "Juneteenth." As a "partial staffing" holiday, government offices stay open, but agencies and other employers may choose to allow some or all their employees to stay home from work. Other states followed over time.

June 19, Late 1980s-present: The Georgia Citizens Coalition on Hunger and Project South have celebrated Juneteenth in Atlanta, usually with barbecues, peach cobbler, and some recognition of the history.

June 19, 1985: Some black neighborhoods in North Minneapolis held the city's first Juneteenth celebration. By 2019, the Twin Cities Juneteenth Celebration was one of the two largest in the nation. One man explained in 2019 that he had never heard of it when he lived in Chicago but had come to consider it very special "because it's a day of peace, love, and happiness."

June 19, 2015: 150 years after enslaved Texans were officially emancipated, President Barack Obama observed what he called "a symbolic milestone on our journey toward a more perfect union," adding that "Just as the slaves of Galveston knew that emancipation is only the first step toward true freedom...our work remains undone.... Juneteenth has never been a celebration of victory.... Instead, it's a celebration of progress.... No matter where we come from or who we love, today is a day to find joy in the face of sorrow, to count our blessings and hold the ones we love a little closer. And tomorrow is a day to keep marching."

June 19, 2019: 46 states plus the District of Columbia, have declared Juneteenth to be a holiday. Washington state is one of them.

Historian Cita Cook compiled this timeline for the Southern Movement Assembly, June 2020.

and they know how to conduct this struggle.

We could not have become the beacon of freedom and democracy we have been in the world without the victory over slavery represented by Juneteenth. A legal holiday would be a powerful declaration of this fact. Slavery is a stain on our history; this is our opportunity to turn an anniversary of its end into a celebration across the land.

Ann Vandeman is an Olympia-grown farmer, accountant, disability rights advocate and impassioned advocate for equal rights for all.

Juneteenth 2020

You died under the knee
Of white revenge warlords
enforcing imaginary utopian
hopes and dreams with
The reality of racial capitalism.

Carrot on a stick, the
White capitalists lure.
Conscripting black
And white working masses.
Selling the false narrative,
Commodifying black and brown
Dreams in endless spirals.
Promising utopias unleashed
Across the human spectrum.
But at the last minute,
Getting the stick,
The old switcheroo.

Siren songs sung by elites
That promise equality and justice for all,
That recording's old saw goes.
Round and round on the
Ghetto's gritty precarity turntable.
Cutting and stroking white fear of
Black revenge with tall tales,
Including your liberal
sanctimonious ideas
Promoting calm and strategic
organization.

Rage forward with striding feet,
rebellion, negation,
Of white institutional racist capitalism's
False and deadly utopia,
By any means necessary.

M Bean
June 2020

Law & order

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other cops because they are the only ones who are twisted in that special manner unique to cops. Even cops' wives only hang out with other cops' wives—and anecdotally, I once had a girlfriend who had previously dated a cop, and she said that the other cops' wives subjected her to a variety of litmus tests to make sure she was worthy to join their exclusive little club.

What does a cop have to say to a teacher or to a factory worker in a bar after work, after all? The thing is that cops are humans too, and their responses to their realities are also human. This doesn't make it right or okay and this doesn't mean we don't fight their mindset with everything we have—I just think it would also be good to keep their humanity in mind as we do it.

Dana Walker is the producer of a weekly podcast, The Thunderbolt, and a longtime Olympia resident.