

Juneteenth

Juneteenth is short for June 19th (nineteenth). It is a federal holiday in the United States that commemorates the emancipation of enslaved African Americans. Because it's a federal holiday, if it falls on a weekend day (Saturday or Sunday), it will be observed on the closer weekday (Friday or Monday).

June 19, 1865 was the day that federal troops arrived in Galveston, Texas to take control of the state of Texas and ensure that all enslaved people be freed. In December 1865, slavery was formally abolished when the 13th Amendment was adopted.

In 1979, Texas became the first state to make Juneteenth an official holiday, and several other states made it a holiday in the years following. In June 2021, Congress passed a resolution establishing Juneteenth as a federal holiday, and President Joe Biden signed it into law on June 17, 2021.

Slavery in the United States

In the 1700s, European settlers in North America began enslaving men and women from Africa as a form of cheap labor. Millions of people from Africa were forcibly brought to North America to be slaves. In the 17th and 18th centuries, slaves mainly worked on plantations that grew products such as tobacco and rice.

Slavery was not widespread in the northern part of the United States because most of the plantations were in the south. In the south, however, slaves were one-third of the total population of people. Slaves were treated horribly. They were often forbidden to learn how to read and write. Women were raped, and slaves were beaten. There was also a hierarchy of slaves which the slave owners used to keep them divided. Slaves could marry each other, but it was not a legal marriage. Family members were sold and separated from each other. As slaves tried to rebel, slave owners became afraid and used the rebellion as an opportunity to oppress the people they enslaved even more.

Abolitionist Movement

Between the 1830s and 1860s, the abolitionist movement grew. The movement was led by freed former slaves and by white supporters. They wanted to abolish, or get rid of, slavery. One of the most famous people during this time was Frederick Douglass, a freed Black man. Some people wanted to abolish slavery because it was immoral, and some people thought slavery did not make economic sense. People in the north began helping slaves escape from southern plantations. The Underground Railroad was transportation where people such as Harriet Tubman guided escaped slaves to the north where they would be free.

The United States Civil War

Slavery was one of the issues that made the states in the United States divide. After Abraham Lincoln was elected president, several states seceded and became the Confederate States of America, and civil war began. In the beginning, the goal of the civil war was not to end slavery but to make America one country again and end the succession. Later, abolishing slavery became a goal of those fighting against the Confederates.

The Civil Rights Movement to Today

After the Civil War ended, the 13th Amendment to the Constitution abolished slavery. Despite slavery being abolished, racism and hatred persisted in the United States with white supremacist hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. Segregation and unfair laws continued. There were laws that Black Americans couldn't use the same facilities as white Americans. Black and white children also had to attend different schools. During segregation, there was no equality because what was given to Black Americans was never as good as what was given to white Americans. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement fought against the prejudice that Black Americans were still facing. One of the leaders of this movement was Martin Luther King, Jr. Today, racism is still an issue, and laws and policies continue to change as new and old problems are brought to light.