

Topic Juneteenth and freedom for Africans in America

Questions: Why do Africans in America celebrate Juneteenth?

Do Africans in America still have more to do to gain freedom?

Some Vocabulary:

Amendment (uh-MEHND-mehnt): a change to the United States Constitution. The Constitution explains the powers of the government and the rights of the people.

Civil War (SIH-vuhl WOHR): war between groups of people who live in the same country

Emancipation (ee-man-suh-PAY-shun): freedom from slavery

Jubilee (JOO-buh-lee): a time of rejoicing, often a special anniversary

Proclamation (prok-luh-MAY-shun): a formal public announcement of important news

Hook:

Play Glory by Common and John Legend or Freedom by Beyoncé

Play it once just the video and then play it a second time and have the children follow along with the lyrics.

Ask the following questions once the video is over:

What is the song talking about?

According to the song, are black people free? (Yes or No answer)



Ask the students to write down what the definition of freedom is in their own words

Next look at 3 definitions of freedom:

- The power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint. ([Definitions from Oxford Languages](#))
- **Freedom**, generally, is having the ability to act or change without constraint. (wikipedia)
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(Ask students to think about which definition of freedom their definition aligned with most closely)

- Inform students that there have been steps taken toward gaining freedom for Africans in America. One of these steps was the abolition of slavery, which Africans in America celebrate as Juneteenth

Activity

Elementary

Read children's book: [Juneteenth \(On My Own Holidays\)](#) by Vaunda Micheaux Nelson & Drew Nelson

Discuss the books

Practice Poem/Song from the book

Complete matching and writing worksheet

5th Grade

- Students will complete readings on Juneteenth, 54th Massachusetts, Fredrick Douglass, Harriet Tubman
- Students will write a short response answering the following two questions
- Why do Africans in America celebrate Juneteenth?
- Do Africans in America still have more to do to gain their freedom? If so what?

→ Alternative: Students can create a book that talks about Juneteenth and write a short paragraph at the end answering the second question

Middle School

- Students will complete readings on Juneteenth, 54th Massachusetts, Fredrick Douglass, Harriet Tubman
- Students will write a short response answering the following two questions
 - Why do Africans in America celebrate Juneteenth?
 - Do Africans in America still have more to do to gain their freedom? If so what?

→ Then have the students complete one of the activities from the list below

High School

- Students will complete readings on Juneteenth, 54th Massachusetts, Fredrick Douglass, Harriet Tubman
- Students will write a short response answering the following two questions
 - Why do Africans in America celebrate Juneteenth?
 - Do Africans in America still have more to do to gain their freedom? If so what?

→ Then have the students complete one of the activities from the list below

Next Lesson: What is next in our steps toward freedom?

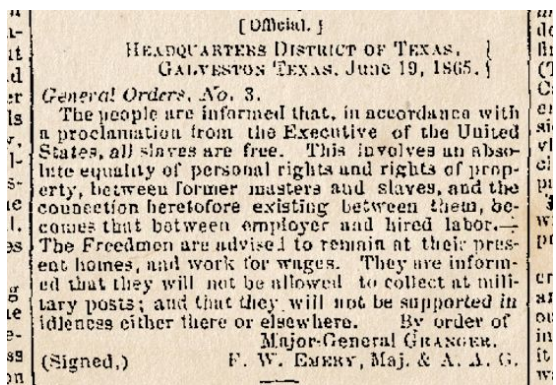
Worksheets

History Of Juneteenth

Juneteenth is the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the ending of slavery in the United States. Dating back to 1865, it was on June 19th that the Union soldiers, led by Major General Gordon Granger, landed at Galveston, Texas with news that the war had ended and that the enslaved were now free. Note that this was two and a half years after President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation - which had become official January 1, 1863. The Emancipation Proclamation had little impact on the Texans due to the minimal number of Union troops to enforce the new Executive Order. However, with the surrender of General Lee in April of 1865, and the arrival of General Granger's regiment, the forces were finally strong enough to influence and overcome the resistance.

Later attempts to explain this two and a half year delay in the receipt of this important news have yielded several versions that have been handed down through the years. Often told is the story of a messenger who was murdered on his way to Texas with the news of freedom. Another, is that the news was deliberately withheld by the enslavers to maintain the labor force on the plantations. And still another, is that federal troops actually waited for the slave owners to reap the benefits of one last cotton harvest before going to Texas to enforce the Emancipation Proclamation. All of which, or neither of these version could be true. Certainly, for some, President Lincoln's authority over the rebellious states was in question For whatever the reasons, conditions in Texas remained status quo well beyond what was statutory.

General Order Number 3



[Official.]
HEADQUARTERS DISTRICT OF TEXAS, }
GALVESTON TEXAS, June 19, 1865. }

General Order, No. 3.
The people 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, and the connection heretofore existing between them, becomes that between employer and hired labor.—
The Freedmen are advised to remain at their present homes, and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts; and that they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere. By order of
Major-General GRANGER,
(Signed,) F. W. EMERY, Maj. & A. A. G.

One of General Granger's first orders of business was to read to the people of Texas, General Order Number 3 which began most significantly with:

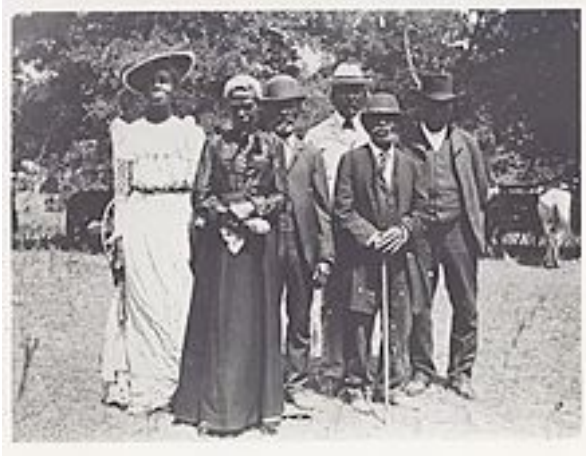
"The people of Texas are informed that in accordance with a Proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and hired laborer."

The reactions to this profound news ranged from pure shock to immediate jubilation. While many lingered to learn of this new employer to employee relationship, many left before these offers were completely off the lips of their former 'masters' - attesting to the varying conditions on the plantations and the realization of freedom. Even with nowhere to go, many felt that leaving the plantation would be their first grasp of freedom. North was a logical destination and for many it represented true freedom, while the desire to reach family members in neighboring states drove some into Louisiana, Arkansas and Oklahoma. Settling into these new areas as free men and women brought on new realities and *the challenges of establishing a heretofore non-existent status for black people in America*. Recounting the memories of that great day in June of 1865 and its festivities would serve as motivation as well as a release from the growing pressures encountered in their new territory. The celebration of June 19th was coined "Juneteenth" and grew with more participation from descendants. The Juneteenth celebration was a time for reassuring each other, for praying and for gathering remaining family members. Juneteenth continued to be highly revered in Texas decades later, with many former slaves and descendants making an annual pilgrimage back to Galveston on this date.

<http://www.juneteenth.com/history.htm>

The following is an excerpt from *Up From Slavery (1901)* where Booker T. Washington recalls a Union officer reading the Emancipation Proclamation on the Virginia plantation where he lived. He describes how his mother and other enslaved Africans reacted to the news of the end slavery.

“The most distinct thing that I now recall in connection with the scene was that some man who seemed to be a stranger (a United States officer, I presume) made a little speech and then read a rather long paper- the Emancipation Proclamation, I think. After the reading we were told that we were all free, and could go when and where we pleased. My mother, who was standing by my side, leaned over and kissed her children, while tears of joy ran down her cheeks. She explained to us what it all meant, that this was the day for which she had been so long praying, but fearing that she would never live to see. For some minutes there was great rejoicing, and thanksgiving, and wild scenes of ecstasy. But there was no feeling of bitterness. In fact, there was pity among the slaves for our former owners. The wild rejoicing on the part of the emancipated coloured people lasted but for a brief period, for I noticed that by the time they returned to their cabins there was a change in their feelings. The great responsibility of being free, of having charge of themselves, of having to think and plan for themselves and their children, seemed to take possession of them. It was very much like suddenly turning a youth of ten or twelve years out into the world to provide for himself. In a few hours the great questions with which the Anglo-Saxon race had been grappling for centuries had been thrown upon these people to be solved. These were the questions of a home, a living, the rearing of children, education, citizenship, and the establishment and support of churches. Was it any wonder that within a few hours the wild rejoicing ceased and a feeling of deep gloom seemed to pervade the slave quarters? To some it seemed that, now that they were in actual possession of it, freedom was a more serious thing than they had expected to find it. Some of the slaves were seventy or eighty years old; their best days were gone. They had no strength with which to earn a living in a strange place and among strange people, even if they had been sure where to find a new place of abode. To this class the problem seemed especially hard.”



An early celebration of Emancipation Day (Juneteenth) in 1900



Emancipation Day celebration in Richmond, Virginia in 1905



[Juneteenth celebration in Eastwoods Park, Austin, 1900 (Austin History Center)]



Africans under enslavement

54th Massachusetts Regiment



This picture is titled, "The Gallant Charge of the 54th Mass. [colored] regiment of the rebel works of Ft. Wagner... July 18, 1863"

The Fifty-fourth [Massachusetts](#) Infantry Regiment was the first Northern black volunteer regiment enlisted to fight in the [Civil War](#). Known simply as "the 54th," this regiment became famous after the heroic, but ill-fated, assault on Fort Wagner, South Carolina. Leading the direct assault under heavy fire, the 54th suffered enormous casualties before being forced to withdraw. The courage and sacrifice of the 54th helped to dispel doubt within the Union Army about the fighting ability of black soldiers and earned this regiment undying battlefield glory. Its accomplished combat

record led to the general recruitment of African-Americans as soldiers.

Following the [Emancipation Proclamation](#), and as the demand for Northern recruits outgrew the supply, President Abraham Lincoln agreed to enroll African-Americans in the Union army. At the start of 1863, Massachusetts' [abolitionist](#) governor John A. Andrew received the War Department's consent to form a regiment of free Northern blacks. Prominent abolitionist Robert Gould Shaw, who at the time was 25, accepted the position of colonel of the Fifty-fourth, believing that the regiment presented an opportunity to vindicate anti-slavery ideals. By May of 1863, 1,007 black men had enlisted in the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts.

Although the Fifty-fourth demonstrated great skill and courage, the War Department did not yet recognize the equality of the African-American soldier. Although promised 13 dollars a month, the Fifty-fourth was paid only ten, and the army expected the men to purchase their own uniforms. In protest, the men fought for 18 months for no pay whatsoever. Finally, after several appeals to the Attorney General, the Secretary of War, and the President, in July of 1864, Congress granted the Fifty-fourth their full salary, retroactive to the time of enlistment.

Renowned American sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens completed the memorial in 1897, and it was unveiled outside of the State House in a Memorial Day ceremony. The names of the five white officers killed in battle were inscribed on the back of the monument, but it was not until 1981 that the names of the fallen black soldiers were added.

In 1989 Tri-Star Pictures released the Academy Award-winning film *Glory*, based on the history of the Fifty-fourth and the Fort Wagner attack. While *Glory* succeeded in stimulating popular discussion about the regiment and perceptions of blacks in the military, the movie also perpetuated the legacy of historical invisibility for these soldiers. While Robert Gould Shaw is portrayed realistically, every black soldier is fictional, the film ignoring such notable figures as [William H. Carney](#), the first African-American recipient of the Medal of Honor.

<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/fifty-fourth-massachusetts-infantry-1863-1865/>

Frederick Douglass's Role in the Civil War

African Americans were ready and willing to fight in the Civil War, but President Lincoln and Union leaders were not sure how they felt about enlisting black troops. By 1860, Douglass was well known for his efforts to end slavery and his skill at public speaking. During the Civil War, Douglass was a consultant to President Abraham Lincoln and helped convince him that slaves should serve in the Union forces and that the abolition of slavery should be a goal of the war.

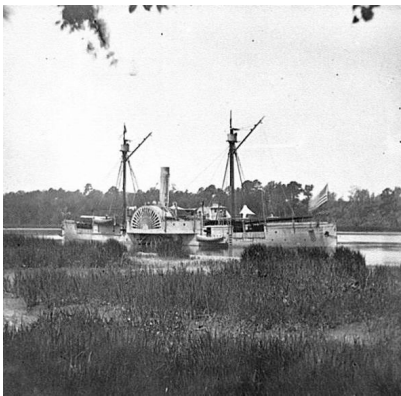
On January 1, 1863, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation clearly stated that Confederate slaves were now free and they could serve in the Union army. By the end of the war, about 186,000 African American men had enlisted. Douglass also worked as a recruiter in several regions of the country signing up African Americans to serve in the Union army. This letter requests Douglass's presence to help in the recruitment effort.



Douglass recruited his sons, Charles and Lewis, who both joined the famous 54th Massachusetts Regiment. This army unit was made up of black volunteers who fought a bitter battle at Fort Wagner, South Carolina, in July 1863. Here you see a photo of Charles, Douglass's third youngest son, who wrote to his father while he was in the army. In one letter Charles said he heard that "the colored people were rushing into Philadelphia and that yourself and . . . others were doing all you could for them[.]"

Harriet Tubman's Role in the Civil War

During the Civil War, Tubman worked for the Union army as a nurse, a cook, and a spy. Her experience leading slaves along the Underground Railroad was especially helpful because she knew the land well. She recruited a group of former slaves to hunt for rebel camps and report on the movement of the Confederate troops. In 1863, she went with Colonel James Montgomery and about 150 black soldiers on a gunboat raid in South Carolina. Because she had inside information from her scouts, the Union gunboats were able to surprise the Confederate rebels.



At first when the Union Army came through and burned plantations, slaves hid in the woods. But when they realized that the gunboats could take them behind Union lines to freedom, they came running from all directions, bringing as many of their belongings as they could carry. Tubman later said, "I never saw such a sight." Tubman played other roles in the war effort, including working as a nurse. Folk remedies she learned during her years living in Maryland would come in very handy.

Tubman worked as a nurse during the war, trying to heal the sick. Many people in the hospital died from dysentery, a disease associated with terrible diarrhea. Tubman was sure she could help cure the sickness if she could find some of the same roots and herbs that grew in Maryland. One night she searched the woods until she found water lilies and crane's bill (geranium). She boiled the water lily roots and the herbs and made a bitter-tasting brew that she gave to a man who was dying-and it worked! Slowly he recovered. Tubman saved many people in her lifetime. On her grave her tombstone reads "Servant of God, Well Done."

Elementary Activities:

- Sequence activities
- Create a song
- Coloring book of events
- Create a sequence story book
- Create African flags
- Read African folktales
- Create a Poster
- Create a video about black accomplishments

Middle School Activities

- Write a poem
- Write a short story
- Write an essay about Juneteenth and the role black people played in ending slavery
- Make a poster about black regiments during the civil war
- Make a song, rap, dance
- Create a comic book
- Celebrate Juneteen instead of July 4th activity

High School Activities

- Write a poem
- Create a lesson to teach children
- Create African flags
- Write an essay
- Write a short story
- Create a short film
- Create a poster
- Plan and execute Juneteenth celebration
- Celebrate Juneteen instead of July 4th activity