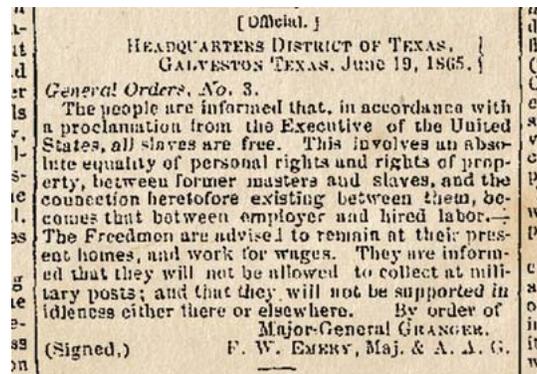


**Juneteenth: What does it mean?** Often referred to as America's Second Independence Day, Juneteenth is an American holiday that celebrates the true end of slavery in the United States. It commemorates the date of June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1865, when slaves in Galveston, Texas, first learned they had been freed two and one half years previously when the Emancipation Proclamation was signed into law. This was two months after the Civil War ended.

During the war, planters and ranchers in Confederate states did everything in their power to sustain slavery. They forcibly moved tens of thousands of slaves to Texas, hoping to keep them in bondage. Ending slavery was not only a matter of legislation nor of winning the war, it was a matter of forcing rebels to obey the law, and in Texas there weren't enough Union troops to enforce the law.

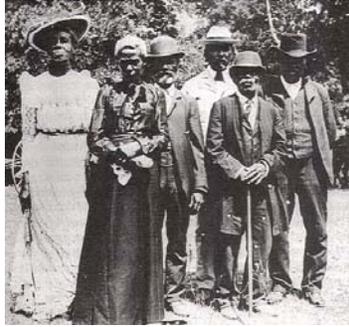
Thus, on June 19, 1865, US Major General Gordon Granger and 1,800 US troops arrived in Galveston with orders stating "all slaves are free" in Texas and there would be an "absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves."



The newly freed Americans dispersed, each to begin a life they had never known before. Some settled near by, others far away. But wherever they settled, they would gather with their families and celebrate this momentous day of Juneteenth. Some employers gave their employees the day off to celebrate; others interrupted the festivities to demand their people get back to work.

Many cities and towns would not let the celebrants gather in public parks so they would picnic in backyards, or in rural settings near streams or creeks, and sometimes on the property of black churches. When they became landowners, they donated their land for the celebrations. Money was raised to collectively buy land they could use freely.

Besides typical barbecue and baseball picnics, prayer services were a major part of the events. Guest speakers were brought in and elders recounted the events of their past. The pervading tone focused on education and self-improvement. Attire was an important element, particularly by direct slave descendants remembering the laws that once prohibited or limited the dressing of the enslaved.



Black children began to attend schools in America where all children were taught about the Emancipation Proclamation, but textbooks taught nothing of Juneteenth to all children in America's schools. As time went on, this story of officially ending slavery in America was at risk of being forgotten in America.

Clara Peoples grew up celebrating Juneteenth annually in Muskogee, Oklahoma. Upon moving to Portland, Oregon in 1945, she was surprised to learn Juneteenth was unknown there. On her first June 19th in Portland, she asked her supervisor at the Kaiser ship yard where she worked, if she could tell her hundreds of co-workers that it was an important day because it was Juneteenth. Perplexed but cooperative, the supervisor let Peoples make an announcement on the factory's public address system. She recalls these as her first four words: "Now hear this, y'all ..." And she went on to tell them what Juneteenth means. That day she celebrated her first Juneteenth in Portland.

In 1972, Peoples, with the help of Ora Lee Green, initiated Portland's first citywide Juneteenth celebration in a park across from the Lloyd Center shopping mall. A parade, added a year later, remains part of the festival that has been celebrated every year since.

In the 2009 parade, Peoples, then eighty-two, rode in the front passenger seat of a 1985 Mercedes convertible with the parade grand marshal Portland Mayor Sam Adams sitting in back, and Bruce Broussard, dressed in the uniform of a US Calvary Buffalo Soldier, behind the wheel.



Green, then seventy-five, a veteran teacher of twenty-five years, rode in the front passenger seat of a 1969 Cadillac Coupe de Ville. Waving at parade watchers, she would shout out, "Happy Juneteenth!" Spotting a young boy with an adult, the teacher in her emerged and she shouted again, "Tell him what it means!"

In 2011, the First Annual Oregon Juneteenth Jazz and Heritage Concert was held due to Peoples' leadership. In honor of her unwavering support of this holiday, as well as her work in the community as a whole, a proclamation from Mayor Sam Adams declared Mrs. Peoples the "Mother of Juneteenth," a day often referred to as America's Second Independence Day.



A Juneteenth Flag was created by Ben Haith who spearheaded raising it for the first time in Boston, Massachusetts on June 19, 2000. The words “June 19, 1865” were later added to its design. It, the American flag, and Clara Peoples are shown above.

Sources:

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