

### What is Juneteenth, and why is it important? - Karlos K. Hill and Soraya Field Fiorio

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lq8TNKZVEWs> (Feb 2023 [5.5 mins])

This animated video begins with how enslaved persons continuously pushed against their enslavers by spying, communicating information, escaping, procuring needed items, and planning rebellions. 17-year-old Charlotte Brooks overhears her Texas enslaver talk about the Emancipation Proclamation. She spreads the news throughout her plantation/ forced labor camp community and then flees, returning in the night to get her child. They both live in hiding, evading capture until freedom arrives.

In a brief overview, the video describes how slavery defined the colonies, fueled economic development, and made the young country a “leading economic power.” Ten of the first twelve presidents were enslavers. Because of how lucrative it was, as slavery began to be contained on the national landscape, greater efforts to control slavery split the country, eventually resulting in the Civil War. Ending U.S. slavery “was a [very] long and uneven process,” with several slow steps-- beginning with Massachusetts and Vermont abolishing the institution during the American Revolution, and 125 years later the outlawing of international ‘trade’ in 1808.

In 1860 when Lincoln was elected, 4 million people were enslaved in the country. While Lincoln opposed the institution, he had no plans to abolish it. However, Lincoln’s intentions were not enough to control the Southern states from seceding-- and they were not returning. It was not until two years later on January 1, 1863 that Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation and Union soldiers began announcing emancipation. But the Confederacy held much of the south, and people held in enslavement were not freed for more than two years. On June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1865 in Texas, the final enslaved persons were freed.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6unHgUZ6IA> (June 2022 [6.5 mins])

**Henry Louis Gates Jr. on the significance and history of Juneteenth** CBS Morning News 

Black Americans are hungry for celebrations. They-- and all Americans—need an accurate and inclusive accounting of history. In this interview with Henry Louis Gates, he corrects the miseducation that the Emancipation Proclamation [issued in 1863, passed and ratified in 1865] freed the slaves; only about a half million of the approximately 3.9 million enslaved persons were freed. Gates expands: “We all think that the Civil War happened when Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox which was April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1865. But that’s not true. There were several different Confederate armies, so Texas finally surrenders to the Union on June 2<sup>nd</sup> [1865]. Gordon Granger comes and on June 19<sup>th</sup> in Galveston, he issues the Emancipation Proclamation because now the Union army is in possession of the territory... One of the myths about Juneteenth is that nobody in Texas had heard about [their legal right to freedom]. But there are two reasons historians think that Black people knew about the Emancipation Proclamation,”: 1. the “grapevine” and “miraculous way for enslaved people to communicate plantation to plantation and state to state,”; 2. Texas was removed from the “action” however plantation owners/ enslavers moved to Texas during the war bringing enslaved persons with them who would have communicated with other enslaved persons.

Gates ends with idea that the first concentration of Black Power followed the ratifications of the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments under Acts of Reconstruction when 80% of Black men vote and elect Ulysses

S. Grant. Gates celebrates the national holiday or Juneteenth stating that anyone who is American and dedicated to freedom should be joining him.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pfzXbBQVIY> (June 2022 [12.5 minutes])

### **Why Do We Celebrate Juneteenth? Columbians Share the History and How They Observe the Day** [Columbia University](#)

Columbia University academics, students and others share their Juneteenth knowledge, experiences, reactions, activism, and rituals. Tying the newly nationalized holiday to the recognition of structural racism following the murder of George Floyd, they make recommendations regarding collectivizing power among People of Color, and naming how Americans dedicated to freedom play a key role in strengthening the impact of the holiday—one that is as important and anchored in history as July 4th.

(Historically, as one professor describes, Juneteenth was not the most celebrated of the holidays ending slavery among enslaved persons or free Blacks. January 1<sup>st</sup> was heralded because it commemorated the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 on January 1<sup>st</sup>. There were “big, big” celebrations that were well documented; Frederic Douglass referred to that day.)

Samuel Roberts, Assistant Professor of History, Sociomedical Sciences, and African American and African American Studies at Columbia decided to look up, “Major Gordon Granger’s General Order #3 which he read to the freed people of Galveston, Texas on June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1865... ‘The people of Texas are informed that in accordance with the 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 former slaves and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and hired labor. The freedmen are advised to remain quietly 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.’”

General Order #3 begins in a powerful and informative tone but ends without apology and by insulting the very people who were enslaved-- foreshadowing the future of US white supremacy.

#### **Additional Resources:**

[The Historical Legacy of Juneteenth -Smithsonian](#)

<https://www.npr.org/2021/06/17/1007315228/juneteenth-what-is-origin-observation>