



June 23, 2021

Our First Juneteenth National and State Holiday

Living to watch Juneteenth because a national and state holiday is watching history in the making. The story about the holiday is being documented incorrectly, and this is an example of how history lessons are sometimes inaccurate. It is being reported that Juneteenth marks the day slavery ended. That is not exactly accurate.

We have to start by going back to the Emancipation Proclamation. The Emancipation Proclamation was an order by U.S. President Abraham Lincoln to free those enslaved in 10 states still in rebellion (excluding some specific counties in Virginia and Louisiana) on January 1, 1863. To quote the Proclamation's lofty language: "all persons held as slaves within any State, or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free". It applied to those enslaved in the states still in rebellion in 1863 during the American Civil War. However, it did not actually immediately free people enslaved in those states, because these areas were still controlled by the Confederacy.

Those enslaved within the Confederacy were freed with the Emancipation Proclamation, but slave owners continued to enslave people in Texas and other parts of the Confederacy. This was even after the Civil War ended when Robert E. Lee surrendered the last major Confederate army to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse on April 9, 1865, and after the last battle was fought at Palmito Ranch, Texas, on May 13, 1865. Juneteenth's commemoration is on the anniversary date of the June 19, 1865, announcement of General Order No. 3 by Union Army General Gordon Granger, proclaiming and enforcing the freedom of enslaved people in Texas, which was the last state of the Confederacy with institutional slavery. Ratification of the 13th Amendment on December 6, 1865 would finally make slavery illegal in all parts of the United States, including areas not initially covered by the Emancipation Proclamation.

Now that our country has made Juneteenth a national holiday, we have recognition of the harms of our country's original sin against Black people. The Juneteenth holiday should be a day of reflection and action, knowing that our personal freedom as Black people was fought for and won for us by our enslaved ancestors. This realization eliminates any excuses concerning whether we as a nation can overcome personal racism, systematic racism, police brutality, or any other barriers before us. If enslaved Americans can promote the nation's freedom and free a race of people, we must face our present-day challenges head on and give ourselves a chance to win, even knowing the difficulties ahead. If enslaved Americans made excuses why they couldn't overcome the torture of slavery, the story of America would be different.

We come together to celebrate independence from Great Britain as a nation because of how enslaved Americans helped to build a nation that could defeat the immense power of Great Britain. That's why we all must celebrate July 4 and remember that this national holiday also reminds all of us of the promise of America. Black Americans must celebrate this promise on the 4th of July too, and we all must be reminded of the continuing fight ahead for equality and justice. The blood of our ancestors is our passport to freedom and justice

in America - but it is up to us to make no excuses and continue to fight for our freedom like our blood ancestors did, overcoming all barriers and odds.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LSK', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District