

A day to remember

Juneteenth is a US holiday about both uplifting the African American community and acknowledging a history that needs to be told, writes Lynn Brown



The Emancipation Proclamation – the act that freed enslaved African Americans after the US Civil War – was signed in 1863, but implementing it was a much longer process. Despite the law, many people remained enslaved for years after the act was passed. It wasn't until the Union army marched into Texas on 19 June 1865 that all enslaved African Americans – including those living in the furthest outpost of the Confederate army, Galveston, Texas – finally received word that they had been freed.

The subsequent celebration, which is known as 'Juneteenth', has been a ubiquitous summer holiday in the African American community ever since, often celebrated privately via weekend cook-outs and family gatherings. However, it wasn't until 2021 that Juneteenth was made a federal holiday (19 June) in the US, creating an official day that focuses on uplift-

ing African Americans across the country and also serves to educate those outside the Black community about this important history.

Today, a variety of events and celebrations pop up annually around the US to commemorate Juneteenth and celebrate the resilience and many contributions of the country's Black community. Cities such as New York, Chicago and Los Angeles all have Juneteenth celebrations planned for 2023, but Galveston, Texas, where the holiday began, hosts one of the best-known events. The island city, off the east coast of the state, holds a multi-day Juneteenth celebration every year. The festival includes a parade, picnic and several talks and exhibitions that are held at varying locations across town.

Another great Juneteenth celebration takes place in Washington, DC, where the National Museum of African American History and Culture will have special Juneteenth

programming, including a community day that features a drum circle, a look at African and African American plants and a 'History Alive' presentation that teaches visitors about the event that precipitated the holiday and celebration.

For those who can't visit the States, there are plenty of other ways to celebrate Juneteenth wherever you are. The theme of the holiday is the empowerment of the Black community and education of others about Black history, so making time to watch documentaries or read books that will teach you more about African American history or the history of the African diaspora in your area is a great way to celebrate. Supporting Black-owned businesses or restaurants closer to home, or donating time and money to a nonprofit or community organisation that works to combat the injustices still felt by the community also fit well with the theme of the celebration. ▶

DID YOU KNOW?

THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION was signed on 1 January 1863, but many enslaved African Americans were not freed until 19 June 1865, over two years later

MORE THAN 4 MILLION PEOPLE WERE STILL ENSLAVED IN THE US WHEN UNION TROOPS ARRIVED IN TEXAS IN 1865

ONLY THOSE ENSLAVED IN CONFEDERATE STATES were technically freed by the Emancipation Proclamation

AROUND 2,000 BLACK MEN were elected to political office during Reconstruction, the era directly following the American Civil War

PRIOR TO BECOMING A NATIONAL HOLIDAY, AFRICAN AMERICANS often held cook-outs to celebrate Juneteenth. There are many public cook-out events where you can now join in