

CELEBRATING JUNETEENTH!

JUNETEENTH marks the day when the last enslaved people in the United States learned they were free. All 50 states now recognize Juneteenth as a state holiday, and in 2021 President Joseph Biden signed a bill to make June 19 (Juneteenth) the newest federal holiday.

In 1776 our country was freed from British rule, but the people were not **all** free. It took until June 19, 1865 for the entire country to be declared free. Most states now hold celebrations honoring Juneteenth as a day of recognition. The holiday has also been called Juneteenth Independence Day, Freedom Day, Second Independence Day and Emancipation Day. Although President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation freed the slaves in 1863, it was not enforced in many states until the end of the Civil War. Texas had the distinction of being the last holdout. Union Army Major Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas on June 19, 1865 and posted the proclamation from the Executive of the United States that all slaves were free. "This involves an absolute equality of personal rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and hired labor."



Credit: Sahan Journal, 6/13/22

President Lincoln also inaugurated Thanksgiving Day. One historian, David Silverman, described it as a national holiday "advancing a false narrative about Indigenous and English settler relations". We might say the same about Juneteenth. Do all people have an "absolute equality of personal rights" as the Emancipation Proclamation provides, or do some states still place undo burdens on certain communities with regard to their right to vote, for example? In some southern states voters needed to pass a literacy test as a prerequisite for voting. On August 6, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed into law The Voting Rights Act, restricting these kinds of discriminatory voting practices by the states. Congress continued to pass provisions to protect the power of this law, but in 2013 the United States Supreme Court overturned certain significant parts of the Voting Rights Act and

returned sovereignty to the states. Some states immediately moved to curtail the rights of ethnic minorities, making it harder for them to vote. It is in the spirit of working toward “absolute equality of personal rights”, including equality of voting rights for **all** citizens in **every** state, that we celebrate Juneteenth.



A recent article in the New York Times written by Tiya Miles, a professor of history at Harvard University, offered the perspective that making Thanksgiving a national holiday has served to create a sense of commonality and shared identity, bringing people of diverse heritages together through the intimacy of a meal. “With care and concerted effort, the Juneteenth holiday might rival Thanksgiving as a new communal ritual, highlighting the value of shared freedoms...” repairing “... a torn national fabric from the inside out. For the sake of our history and maybe our country, we should let a thousand Juneteenths bloom!”