

# NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS



## All About Juneteenth

By Meghan O'Dell

In 2021, June 19 became the eleventh federal holiday and the first to obtain legal observance since Martin Luther King Jr. Day was designated in 1983. Activists and members of Congress had advocated for state and national observances of the day that marked the end of slavery in the United States for decades. Texas was actually the first state to recognize the date in 1980, but it wasn't signed into law until June 16, 2021 by President Joe Biden after renewed interest following the 2020 protests around the police killings of Black Americans such as George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. Now, federal government employees get Juneteenth off (or whichever Friday or Monday falls closest to the date if the 19th is on a weekend), and many private companies also observe it as a holiday.

### **What is Juneteenth?**

Although Abraham Lincoln declared the end of slavery in the United States with the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863, many people remained in slavery until the surrender of Confederate General Robert E. Lee in April 1865. In addition, the news of emancipation arrived at various times across the country: U.S. Major General Gordon Granger, Texas' military district governor, didn't receive the news until May 1865. On June 19 of that year, he performed a reading in Galveston, Texas, of General Order Number 3, which proclaimed that all slaves in Texas were now free. A year later, former slaves in Galveston celebrated their first year of emancipation with what later was called "Jubilee Day."

These early celebrations often involved prayer and family gatherings. The celebrations then spread across the country, honoring the end of slavery in the United States with joyous singing, dancing, and feasting. The Black community began using the word "Juneteenth" in the early 1890s, and the term was first printed in a Texas magazine in 1909.

### **Why Texas?**

As the Civil War was coming to an end, Texas became a refuge for slave owners to keep their slaves; there was only a small Army presence in Texas since not much fighting occurred there. More than 150,000 slaves were forced to move to Texas during this time. Once they were officially free (which was a long process, as many slave owners delayed delivering the news until forced to), many former slaves in Texas organized and purchased lands as "emancipation grounds" for the annual Juneteenth celebration—two of these include the Emancipation Parks in Houston and Austin.

### **How about Long Beach?**

There's been a noticeable increase in Juneteenth celebrations across the U.S. over the past several years, especially after Biden made it a federal holiday. Some celebrations take place among families and some cities hold larger events like parades and festivals. This year, Long Beach will celebrate on Saturday, June 17 at Rainbow Lagoon Park from 10:30 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Reserve your free ticket at <https://www.lbjuneteenth.com/> and see the event listings, which include African drummers, face painting, arts and crafts, the Greater LA Cathedral Choir, a Belizean band, poetry readings, a jazz band, R&B and gospel singer Kelly Price, and DJ Jiji Sweet.

### **What else can I do?**

Juneteenth's history is new to many of us. Here are ideas and suggestion to learn more and to thoughtfully celebrate Juneteenth:

- Watch a documentary such as *13th*, available on Netflix
- Visit a museum such as the California African American Museum in LA
- Read books by Black authors and poets
- Support Black-owned businesses and restaurants
- Donate to Black-led nonprofits and community organizations
- Listen, learn, and amplify Black voices

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*Meghan O'Dell is Managing Editor of Westways and AAA Explorer, and has been a Long Beach resident for 18 years. She loves reading, seeing live music, and watching too many shows, and she lives with her husband and their Calico cat in the Bluff Heights neighborhood.communities.*