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Juneteenth

**Introduction**

More often than not, Juneteenth, June 19, is referred to as the second Independence Day of the United States. Juneteenth commemorates the emancipation of all enslaved people as the Civil War concluded in the United States.

As the date changed to January 1 in the year 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation was promulgated. With immediately coming into effect, the Emancipation Proclamation set all the people free who were enslaved previously in the Confederacy with an imposed condition that the Union should win the war (Adkins, 3). This imposed condition transformed the war into a fight aimed to achieve freedom. Some 200,000 black soldiers who joined the struggle for freedom disseminated the news of freedom as they made their way deep into the South.

Texas was the strongest bastion of the South and freedom for the enslaved people; there was a long time coming. In 1865, two years later, after the promulgation of the Emancipation Proclamation, the ultimate battle of the Civil War was witnessed (Adkins, 5). Unfortunately, there were still many enslaved people who did not have any idea about the promulgation of the Emancipation Proclamation and their subsequent freedom. Surprisingly, about 250,000 people came to know the news of their freedom when General Gordon Granger, a Union leader, announced and informed them about the Emancipation Proclamation in Galveston, Texas. It was June 19, 1865, when Granger emancipated some 250,000 people. As the announcement by Granger came on the 19th of June, the day is remembered as Juneteenth ever since. Juneteenth put an end to slavery in Texas.

The celebrations of Juneteenth propagated across the country as the newly emancipated Texans began to move in neighboring states. In 1980, Texas Legislature passed legislation that recognized June 19 as a state holiday. Almost all states took the lead of Texas Legislature and have recognized June 19. Movements are underway to get June 19 federal recognition (Adkins, 7).

Juneteenth was celebrated every year with church services, huge gatherings reciting Emancipation Proclamation until the Civil Rights movement attained impetus in the 60s. Juneteenth is regaining its lost popularity in recent years as many communities are celebrating it. Moreover, Juneteenth has contributed to raising awareness regarding numerous issues faced by the African-American community. Furthermore, advocates of Juneteenth celebrations demand reparations to be paid to the heirs of the unfortunate victims of brutal slavery. This paper intends to argue why Juneteenth should be considered and celebrated as a national holiday.

**Discussion**

The most deadly and probably the bloodiest war which America has witnessed was fought on the issue of slavery. More than half a million Americans laid their lives in the war, which successfully saw the abolishment of the heinous institute of slavery. In reality, the number of deaths that occurred during the war did not mirror the sufferings and plight of the black people (Blanck, 5). Uncountable dreams were shattered as thousands of black lives were devastated under the brutal slavery. The black people suffered barbaric punishments at the hands of their masters. Moreover, they were forced to indulge in arduous physical labor without receiving any sort of remuneration against it. Husbands were separated from wives while children saw their parents taken away. Certainly, the suffering which the black people experienced in the era of pre-abolishment of slavery cannot be measured by any yardstick.

As many Americans recall the days of slavery as "original sin," the end of the sin seems to be an appropriate candidate for annual commemorations all across the country (Blanck, 9). The day which commemorates millions of black people gaining freedom for which they were fighting for more than two hundred years should be given space in the national calendar. Recognizing Juneteenth nationally would only add greater meaning to what America truly is. Moreover, by recognizing Juneteenth nationally, the sufferings that the black community has experienced would be projected to the entire world. Currently, Juneteenth is celebrated only at the state level. However, the day which saw the emancipation of thousands of Texan slaves in 1865 should be celebrated at the national level (Blanck, 5). Moreover, the oldest known significant event of the history of the African American community is Juneteenth, which marks the day of their freedom from the shackles of slavery is only recognized in some forty states. Because the African American community is an integral part of the success which the United States of America has witnessed collectively, Juneteenth should be recognized by every state legislature as a holiday. Only after all the states recognize Juneteenth as a holiday to commemorate the freedom of black people, the movement to get Juneteenth federal recognition would gain unprecedented impetus. Mentioned below are the reasons which describe why Juneteenth should be recognized as a national holiday.

Juneteenth reflects freedom

Even after the abolishment of the practice of slavery, there were many monuments found in different cities all across the United States, which were created to honor the days of slavery. To put it simply, Confederate monuments were still in place in numerous cities in the US. However, during the year 2018, numerous cities took to the streets demanding to destroy the monuments, which referred to the days of slavery (Hume and Arceneaux, 4). As a result of the street protests, mayors of cities having Confederate monuments intended to honor the terrible slavery era made unprecedented decisions. The mayors decided to destroy the last remaining symbols of the heinous slavery era, which is a blot on the US history. Most notably, the mayor of New Orleans, Mr. Mitch Landrieu, announced a bold decision that contended to destroy the four remaining statues which pay homage to the Confederacy that promoted slavery in the US. Sadly, the notion of slavery still has its roots in place in American society. Racist groups waged violent protests against the decision of New Orleans mayor. However, Police intervened and contained violent protestors. Moreover, workers destroyed the four of the last remaining statues, honoring the Confederacy, which advocated slavery, in the late hours of the night. The workers were escorted and guarded by heavily armed contingents of the police force. Another city that saw protests from racist groups was Charlottesville in Virginia.

Although the monuments paying respect to the Confederate should have destroyed much earlier, it is only a small part of the healing process whose wounds were suffered years ago. Moreover, there should be the creation of more monuments that pay respect to the struggle of the black community.

Declaring Juneteenth as a national holiday would be virtually equal in acknowledging the struggle of black people that is an integral part of American history. Confederate monuments only held importance for the white people and completely ignored the struggle for freedom by the black people (Hume and Arceneaux, 12). Declaration of Juneteenth as a national holiday would allow every American citizen to see the Civil War, and freedom of the black people from the lens of the people most affected by it- the African American community.

Emancipation holds significant importance in US history

The abolishment of the institute of slavery is a watershed in American history and should be celebrated by every American citizen. In 1963, the Emancipation Proclamation granted freedom to the slaves in several states of the Confederacy. Two years later, Congress signed the 13th Amendment into effect, which eliminated slavery of all kinds all across the nation. The institution of slavery, which resulted in the abduction of millions in their homeland, destroying thousands of households, women, and children being subjected to sexual assaults, and saw human beings treated as mere objects was legally eliminated by Congress (Jeffries, 8).

There is little doubt over the importance of the Emancipation Proclamation in US history. The document of the Emancipation Proclamation can be placed in the same column in which documents such as Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are placed; such is the worth of the Emancipation Proclamation. Moreover, Emancipation Proclamation served as a cornerstone for further legislation which aimed to grant civil and human rights to the black community. 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments eliminated slavery all across the US, granted black people the status of US citizens, and ended discrimination of voters based on their race, respectively (Jeffries, 6). There are not many pieces of any kind of legislation that so comprehensively changed the entire landscape of the country.

Due to the above mentioned significant importance; Juneteenth should be recognized as a national holiday and celebrated all across the nation. Juneteenth consolidates the fact that black history, in essence, is American History.

Remembering how far America has come

Although freedom came with a price, promulgation of Emancipation Promulgation was the first step towards equality. The black community is still paying the price somewhat. Often, African American children are given poor education, a considerable racial wealth gap exists, and biased sentencing in criminal proceedings against black people affects the mental health of black people.

Even though the 13th Amendment ended slavery legally, it did not address the issue of forced labor. The practice of forced labor was prevalent even after the enactment of the 13th amendment. The following clause in the 13th amendment allowed forced labor to prevail in the American society; "except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted." This exception is written in the 13th amendment allowed convict-leasing on a wider scale despite the abolishment of the heinous institution of slavery. Moreover, this clause in the 13th amendment served as a basis for the mass incarceration of black people.

It Juneteenth is recognized as a holiday at the federal level, it would be equal to the recognition of efforts made by the black people striving hard to put a curb on race-based discrimination. Moreover, granting the level of a national holiday to Juneteenth would reinvigorate the modern-day movement that demands full independence and equality for every American citizen (Jeffries, 9).

**Conclusion**

For years, people from all walks of life have been voicing demand to make Juneteenth a national holiday. For instance, Opal Lee, an educator and an ardent supporter of black civil rights, walked from Texas to Washington DC in the year 2016. She intended to garner widespread support and about 100,000 signatures, which were mandatory to get the attention of White House. Sadly, time ran out, and she could not manage to get the required signatures. However, her efforts are an example of various efforts that have been made to get Juneteenth a federal recognition. Certainly, every citizen in America does not enjoy complete freedom despite numerous acts and legislation enacted to ensure freedom for every citizen. Numerous people are struggling to break the shackles of gender, ethnic, racial, economic boundaries. The fight to achieve equality for every American citizen is still going on. Sadly, some of the recent incidents suggest that achieving equal rights and freedom for every citizen would remain an elusive dream. However, the nation must recognize the importance Juneteenth holds in American history. Only recognizing Juneteenth as a national holiday to commemorate the struggle of black people would allow realizing the dream of full freedom and liberty for every citizen.

Works Cited

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