

# JUNETEENTH HOLIDAY: IT'S MEANING FOR US TODAY



BY EDDIE ELLOIE, BLACK PROBATION OFFICERS ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT

Juneteenth is a reminder of Black people's ongoing pursuit of equality and full justice citizenship in the American context. We are reminded of the ever so present struggle as we continue to move towards making America a "more perfect Union," which means all Americans should enjoy the fruits of full citizenship, free of all limitations, primarily race, class and gender, and sexual discrimination.

The past year's demonstrations and marches calling for social justice, with a spotlight on the justice and law enforcement systems, call for us to reimagine a 21st century probation model. Given this, we will mark our Juneteenth celebration to continue our Social Justice and Social Healing dialogue. We have invited Chief Probation Officer Dr. Adolfo Gonzales and Local 685 and SEIU 721, Association of Probation, to respond to the call to refashion and rethink Probation. The status quo will not hold. Other stakeholders have spoken. As the African American National Anthem urges, it is now time for us to Lift Every Voice.



Juneteenth celebration in Los Angeles, Friday, June 19, 2020.

## The Historical Legacy of Juneteenth

From the National Museum of African American History & Culture

On "Freedom's Eve," or the eve of January 1, 1863, the first Watch Night services took place. On that night, enslaved and free African Americans gathered in churches and private homes all across the country awaiting news that the Emancipation Proclamation had taken effect. At the stroke of midnight, prayers were answered as all enslaved people in Confederate States were declared legally free. Union soldiers, many of whom were black, marched onto plantations and across cities in the south reading small copies of the Emancipation Proclamation spreading the news of freedom in Confederate States. Only through the Thirteenth Amendment did emancipation end slavery throughout the United States.

But not everyone in Confederate territory would immediately be free. Even though the Emancipation Proclamation was made effective in 1863, it could not be implemented in places still under Confederate control. As a result, in the westernmost Confederate state of Texas, enslaved people would not be free until much later. Freedom finally came on June 19, 1865, when some 2,000 Union troops arrived in Galveston Bay, Texas. The army announced that the more than 250,000 enslaved black people in the state, were free by executive decree. This day came to be known as "Juneteenth," by the newly freed people in Texas.

The post-emancipation period known as Reconstruction (1865-1877) marked an era of great hope, uncertainty, and struggle for the nation as a whole. Formerly enslaved people immediately sought to reunify families, establish schools, run for political office, push radical legislation and even sue slaveholders for compensation. Given the 200+ years of enslavement, such changes were nothing short of amazing. Not even a generation out of slavery, African Americans were inspired and empowered to transform their lives and their country.

Juneteenth marks our country's second independence day. Although it has long celebrated in the African American community, this monumental event remains largely unknown to most Americans.