“All About Juneteenth”
By Immanuel Fowler

During history class, many students have learned that slavery ended after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. Unfortunately, the practice of slavery continued much longer after the signing of President Abraham Lincoln’s decree because the concept of freedom was kept from those that were enslaved.

Juneteenth is a holiday that celebrates the freedom of a group of Texan slaves who did not receive true freedom until two and half years after the Emancipation Proclamation. On June 19, 1865, African Americans celebrated their new freedom from slavery. This was the first Juneteenth celebration which later became an annual holiday and was named Juneteenth after combining June and 19. It is also known as “Emancipation Day” or “Freedom Day”.

Initially, Juneteenth was only celebrated by African Americans. However, as African American groups and other social justice groups rallied for Juneteenth to be a national holiday, other races and countries begin to celebrate Juneteenth increasing its popularity. Although Juneteenth has failed to gain enough support to become a national holiday, in 1980 Texas became the first state to make it a state holiday. Since then, 47 states and the District of Columbia, began observing Juneteenth as a state holiday or special day of observance. Some companies have honored Juneteenth by making it a company holiday. Furthermore, institutions such as the Smithsonian, the Henry Ford Museum, and others have begun sponsoring Juneteenth-centered activities.

Today, Juneteenth continues to be celebrated by many. For it to continue to grow, the entire country, including all races must join in to celebrate African American freedom and achievement. This is especially important considering the current state of racially motivated unrest that has resurfaced related to differential police brutality, disparities in health, and housing discrimination. Similar to the Fourth of July, Juneteenth is a celebration. This year, join us at a parade, picnic, festival, or family gathering to help us celebrate Juneteenth.

References:

