

Juneteenth Resolution

WHEREAS, Juneteenth is a celebration of the date, June 19, 1865, when people who were enslaved in Texas were informed that the US government had officially outlawed the brutal practice of slavery, three years *prior* with the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation; and

WHEREAS, the Emancipation Proclamation issued on January 1, 1863, declared that the people who were enslaved in Confederate-controlled areas were officially free people (state action was used to abolish slavery in areas controlled by Union forces with the exceptions of Kentucky and Delaware where slavery was finally ended by the Thirteenth Amendment in December 1865); and

WHEREAS, isolated from both Union and Confederate forces during the Civil War, Texas had become a refuge for those who wished to continue the practice of holding human beings as property; and

WHEREAS since the capture of New Orleans in 1862, people who held human beings as property in Mississippi, Louisiana and other points east had been migrating to Texas to escape the Union Army's reach and more than 150,000 people held in bondage had been moved to Texas; and the White people of Texas actively worked to ensure that the people held in bondage who should have been freed in 1863, did not hear of the freedom granted by the Emancipation Proclamation; and

WHEREAS, although the Emancipation Proclamation was issued on January 1, 1863, there were still a total of 250,000 people held as human chattel in Texas when U.S. Army general Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas and on June 19, 1865—Juneteenth—proclaimed the war had ended and so had the captivity of people who had been enslaved; and

WHEREAS, the following is the text of the official recorded version of the order:

“The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and hired labor. The freedmen are advised to remain quietly at their present homes and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts and that they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere.”; and

WHEREAS, although news of emancipation came at different times during that Texas summer and autumn 1865, African Americans in Texas started to celebrate the freedom of enslaved persons on June 19 (Juneteenth) as their day of celebration; and

WHEREAS, beginning in 1866, they held parades, barbecues, and gave speeches in remembrance of their liberation. The oldest of the surviving formerly enslaved people were often given a place of honor and Black Texans initially used these gatherings to attempt to locate family members from whom they had been separated and soon these events became staging areas for family reunions and an opportunity to uplift each other as they moved through hostile environments; and

WHEREAS, by 1900, Juneteenth had unofficially become Texas Emancipation Day and was sponsored by black churches and civic organizations; and

WHEREAS, with the migration of African Americans from Texas to the West Coast, especially during World War II, Juneteenth grew in the emerging black communities of Los Angeles, San Diego, and Oakland in California; Portland, Oregon; and Seattle, Washington; and

WHEREAS, activists in the 1980s began to advocate for wider recognition of the Juneteenth Holiday; and

WHEREAS, Texas became the first state to make Juneteenth a state holiday; and

WHEREAS, by June 2020, 47 states and the District of Columbia had established either full or partial recognition of the holiday. Only Hawaii, North Dakota, and South Dakota have not; and

WHEREAS, Juneteenth is the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the ending of slavery in the United States; and

WHEREAS, Juneteenth has been declared a paid holiday by the governing bodies of Orange County, Town of Chapel Hill, the Town of Carrboro, the Town of Hillsborough, the Orange County School District and the Chapel Hill Carrboro City School District; so

WHEREAS, The Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution passed by Congress on January 31, 1865, and ratified by the required 27 of the then 36 states on December 6, 1865, and proclaimed on December 18, 1865 abolished slavery and involuntary servitude, except as punishment for a crime; and

WHEREAS, we recognize that while the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th amendment may have officially ended the legal practice of enslaving human beings in the United States of America, one hundred and fifty-six years later, there is still progress which must be made to dismantle the insidious systems and practices which continue to harm Black people and deny them access to the rights and resources to which they are entitled; so

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that we, the Orange County Schools Board of Education collectively stand with the Black, Indigenous and People of Color [BIPOC] Elected Officials, honoring the perseverance and hope that inspired African Americans to celebrate freedom, to look for lost relatives, and to thrive in a hostile and white supremacist environment, recognize Juneteenth as an important date in American history; and

FURTHERMORE, we will honor their legacy by building a more equitable future for our children, our children's children, and their children and we will continue to advocate and work to that end.

Adopted this 7th day of June 2021.

Hillary MacKenzie, Chair
Orange County Board of Education

Dr. Monique Felder, Superintendent
Orange County Schools