

“When Peace Come”: Teaching the Significance of Juneteenth

By Shennette Garrett-Scott

It is sometimes hard to teach small but pivotal moments in American history. Survey classes mostly allow for covering the biggest events and the most well known people. Indeed, considering the jubilee as one of the most important events in history, the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, it is even more important that we understand the small historical moments that made it possible. As educators, we strive to impart the complexities and nuances of the past to our students. That desire is part of why we teach African American history: We understand that it is the quintessential American story. Juneteenth is one of those small but important moments in not only African American but also American history. It pushes students to ask questions beyond the historical facts; it encourages them to explore the lived reality of Americans of all races and ethnicities at critical moments in history. It helps them better appreciate the long desire and struggle for freedom acknowledged in the Civil Rights Act.

When Northern states in the new republic began emancipating enslaved people after the American Revolution, Blacks throughout the United States began celebrating Emancipation Day, usually on the first day of the year. However, Juneteenth is the only Emancipation Day celebration widely observed throughout the United States and parts of Africa, the Caribbean, and South America. Why is that so? To understand the significance of such a small moment, this article invites teachers and students to examine the roles of race, politics, region, and culture over time. Including Juneteenth in how we teach history contributes to the essential goals of helping students understand the world we live in now and why things change.¹

Understanding Juneteenth: The Historical Background

“When peace come they read the ‘Mancipation law to the cullud people. [The freed slaves] spent that night singin’ and shoutin’. They wasn’t slaves no more,”² said former slave Pierce Harper in 1937, recalling 1865 when slaves in Texas learned that the Civil War was over and they had been emancipated more than two years earlier.



The singing and shouting of emancipated slaves in Texas did not occur until months after the Civil War was over. In spite of Confederate General Robert E. Lee’s surrender in April 1865 at Appomattox Courthouse, the end of the Civil War did not immediately come to Texas. Slaveholders in Texas refused to acknowledge that the war was over and give up their slaves. Holding on to such a fantasy was not as hard as one might think. The Civil War had barely touched Texas compared to other Southern states. A Confederate blockade shielded it from much of the fighting and effectively isolated the state. In fact, many Southern slaveholders, especially those from Louisiana and Mississippi, took their slaves to Texas to hide them from the Union army. Hiding slaves in such a way was known as “refugeeing.” Thus, by the end of the Civil War, tens of thousands of additional slaves were added to the more than 180,000 slaves already living in Texas.³

Union Brigadier General Gordon Granger and 1,800 federal troops arrived off the coast of Galveston in mid-June 1865. Though many enslaved people had already learned that they were freed, on June 19 Granger made the news of freedom official. He stepped onto the balcony of Ashton Villa, the former headquarters of the Texas Confederate Army, and read General Orders No. 3. The order informed the slaves that the war was over and that they had been freed by the Emancipation Proclamation two and one-half years earlier. The reactions of the newly emancipated were mixed: some stood in quiet shock and disbelief, others shouted prayers to God, but most sang and danced right there in the streets.⁴

June 19 became Afro-Texans’ new “Emancipation Day” or “Jubilee Day.” The first Jubilee Day celebrations took place in 1866. Former slaves celebrated with parties, food, and sporting events. They sang songs, especially spirituals like “Go Down, Moses” and “Many Thousands Gone.” They even had fireworks, created by cutting holes in trees, filling them with gunpowder,

and lighting the trees on fire. Many of these early celebrations took place in freedom colonies, or settlements of free Blacks. By 1870, nearly fifty freedom colonies were located near Comanche Crossing in Limestone County, and the largest and most popular Juneteenth celebrations occurred there. Blacks also celebrated in Texas cities. In 1872, Reverend Jack Yates, local Black churches, and community groups in Houston raised money to purchase ten acres of land for an “Emancipation Park” to hold Juneteenth celebrations. Blacks in other cities also purchased land to hold special Jubilee Day celebrations.⁵

In the early 1890s, blacks began using “Juneteenth” to describe Jubilee Day.⁶ By the early 1900s, Juneteenth celebrations in Texas, southeast Oklahoma, southwest Arkansas, and parts of Louisiana rivaled Independence Day celebrations. To the casual observer, these celebrations seemed like jubilant, spiritual celebrations on one special day of the year. However, they were also civic celebrations that, according to historian Elizabeth Turner Hayes, “took on broader implications for citizenship.”⁷ During the celebrations, Blacks discussed voting rights and encouraged attendees to participate in the political process. Freedom included the right to vote, which was slowly being taken away by the last decade of the nineteenth century and completely compromised by the first decade of the twentieth century.⁸

Therefore, though it is a small important moment in the Civil War and Reconstruction, a focus on Juneteenth highlights how the Civil War affected different parts of the South in different ways. A close examination of General Orders No. 3 and the experiences of emancipated Blacks during Reconstruction highlight the gaps between the promise, meaning, and reality of freedom. Juneteenth celebrations belie the notion that Blacks did not take an active role in shaping the meaning of freedom, despite the serious challenges to their claims. Indeed, this unique celebration highlights the construction of citizenship: Blacks used Juneteenth celebrations to enact their citizenship rights in the realms of both formal and informal politics. They also asserted their economic rights by raising money within their own communities to purchase land and possess their own piece of the “American dream.”

The Meaning of Juneteenth over Time

Juneteenth can also teach us a great deal about twentieth- and twenty-first-century society, politics, and culture. Examined within the context of various moments in U.S. history, Juneteenth celebrations reveal deeper meanings and significances in those moments—the otherwise hidden histories. For example,

from the late 1910s to the mid-1930s, large-scale community-wide Juneteenth celebrations actually became less frequent. To help students understand why celebrations that had once been important events that brought whole communities together became smaller and more private, consider the historical context of the early twentieth century and use Juneteenth to discuss the links between segregation, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and nativism. By World War I, segregation laws were firmly in place, and a tide of nativism engulfed the country. Many Whites and even some Blacks saw Juneteenth as un-American because it focused attention on a dark period in U.S. history. Ironically, Juneteenth was considered unpatriotic or disloyal to the United States, and there was a wave of deadly lynching and racial violence that occurred between 1919 and 1921.⁹

A renaissance in Juneteenth celebrations occurred shortly before the United States entered World War II. The important catalyst for the revival of Juneteenth celebrations happened in Texas. Antonio Maceo Smith, an educator and a leading force in the newly reorganized Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce, led efforts to create a major exhibit of Black achievement at the Texas Centennial Exposition in 1936. When State Fair organizers refused, Smith and other civic leaders in Texas and around the country secured a \$100,000 grant from the federal government. They used the money to build the Hall of Negro Life. Local white leaders protested the construction of the hall, but it was completed and dedicated on June 19, 1936. Over 46,000 Blacks streamed into the state fair grounds for the largest Juneteenth celebration ever held at that time. Although the hall was demolished soon after the fair closed, the 1936 Juneteenth celebration was the most important celebration of Black life in the state’s history, and it revived the public celebration of Juneteenth.¹⁰

Emboldened by their accomplishments during the Texas Centennial and rallied by WWII calls for a “Double V”—a victory abroad against fascism and a victory at home against racism—Juneteenth celebrations in the 1940s and 1950s highlighted appeals for equal rights. They also honored Black veterans who had served in the Spanish-American War and in World Wars I and II, as well as surviving former slaves.¹¹ During the Civil Rights Movement from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s, many Blacks drew connections between their present-day movement and their ancestors’ historical struggles for freedom and equal rights. In debate and reactions surrounding the Civil Rights Act, many made explicit connections between the act and fulfilling the freedom first guaranteed in the Emancipation Proclamation. President

John F. Kennedy mentioned the proclamation in his speech calling for federal civil rights legislation. Lyndon B. Johnson's aide told him, "It's equivalent to signing an Emancipation Proclamation."¹² Explore historical newspapers such as the New York Times for contemporary responses and debate about the act and the proclamation. Consider how the "deferred" freedom celebrated during Juneteenth speaks to the struggle for equality and rights that continues even after passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.¹³

Activists in the 1960s also made connections to Juneteenth. Organizers of the 1968 Poor People's March held the Solidarity Day Rally on Juneteenth. Blacks attended from around the country, and, after they returned home, they revived or initiated Juneteenth celebrations in their hometowns around the country. As the Civil Rights Movement gave way to Black Power, celebrations in the 1970s focused on Black pride and cultural heritage. Houston was among the first Texas cities to rekindle large-scale celebrations, with a blues festival in 1973 at Hermann Park. By the late 1980s, California, Wisconsin, Illinois, Georgia, and Washington, D.C. had major Juneteenth celebrations, which included music, art, and expressions of African heritage.

Therefore, a good way to use Juneteenth to help students not see the past as static and unchanging is to nest it within its historical context. Linking Juneteenth to other struggles for freedom, such as those of immigrants or during the Civil Rights Movement, or focusing on its cultural expressions and meanings, demonstrates how freedom came to mean different things to different generations. Juneteenth also highlights the unchanging same. With regard to the riots, people continued to use violence to oppose Blacks' claims. Juneteenth celebrations from the 1930s to the 1970s forced Americans to deal with the gap between the promises of freedom and democracy and the realities of racism, discrimination, and segregation.

Memorializing Juneteenth

In 1979, Representative Al Edwards, a Democrat from Houston, introduced H.B. 1016 legislation to make Juneteenth a state holiday. A coalition of African American, Latina/o, and Anglo legislators supported the bill, making Juneteenth the first legal state emancipation holiday. The legislature signed the bill into law on June 7, 1979.¹⁴ Edwards then pushed for a Juneteenth memorial. A memorial was completed in 1999; however, due to controversies and fundraising difficulties, it was not until 2005 that part of the memorial was installed near Ashton Villa in Galveston,

Texas. To understand the political and cultural ramifications of historical memory, it would be instructive to explore the efforts to form a multiracial coalition to honor Juneteenth and other holidays like Martin Luther King Jr. Day and controversies surrounding memorials, particularly their design.¹⁵

Today, people of all races, ethnicities, and nationalities in the United States, the Caribbean, and Africa celebrate Juneteenth. The fact that Juneteenth has endured as a national and international celebration for nearly one hundred and fifty years highlights it as one of those small but important moments in U.S. history. As we consider the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation and jubilee of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, it is also important to consider how Juneteenth complicates how we view key historical moments and our multifaceted past. As educators, we must strive to help students decide for themselves what the past means to them today.



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Lesson Plan

Teaching Resources for

‘When Peace Come’: Teaching the Emancipation Proclamation and Juneteenth”

By Rebecca Cummings Richardson, Venita Dillard-Allen, & Shennette Garrett-Scott

Connections to Middle School and/or High School

“When Peace Come” is a journey of intellectual and personal discovery highlighting Juneteenth and the meaning of freedom in social, political, economic, and cultural contexts from the 1860s to the present. Student outcomes and learning objectives focus on analyzing evolving American identity with particular emphasis on personal liberty, which makes this unit relevant not only to state and national goals for social studies education but also to our students—regardless of their background—as they discover the impact of a significant historical thread on their present-day life.

“A Dream Deferred”: From Slavery to Freedom

Goals of Lesson Plan: This lesson aims to take students on a journey from the historic Juneteenth moment of revelation to our modern-day American identity and concept of freedom. The basic strategy of the lesson is a chronological and thematic review of African American history from emancipation to the end of the Reconstruction era, as well as connecting to the Harlem Renaissance. The lesson can easily be extended to the present by adding additional events and broadening the parameters.

Objectives: Through collaborative activity, students will define what it means to be free in the United States, evaluate the significance of freedom as well as relevant historical events through primary source document analysis, and create a thematic timeline tracing the development of American identity over time.

National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) Standards: U.S. History Teacher Expectations:

- Enable learners to assess the importance of cultural unity and diversity within and across groups.
- Guide learners in constructing reasoned judgments about specific cultural responses to persistent human issues.
- Help learners apply key concepts such as time, chronology, causality, change, conflict, and complexity to explain, analyze, and show connections among patterns of historical change and continuity.
- Guide learners in the processes of critical historical inquiry to reconstruct and interpret the past.

Warm-Up (Anticipatory Set):

Provide a short lesson on Juneteenth, which can be incorporated into a typical Civil War unit that already includes the Emancipation Proclamation and related events/themes such as Frederick Douglass’s communication with President Lincoln, Black Union troops, and the Thirteenth Amendment. Use visuals such as maps and photographs along with note taking (students write down the main ideas from the lesson or teacher may provide brief outline notes).

Activity (Instruction Input and Collaborative Analysis of Primary Sources):

Activity #1:

Following the anticipatory set, divide the class into five groups. Assign each group one of the five primary sources listed below. (See Resources section for links to documents.) Present each group with one focus question and give them time to read their assigned primary source and prepare an answer to their focus question. Lead a class discussion by allowing groups, one by one, to share their answers. At this time the teacher may review the main idea of each document for the class if it is not clarified by the group contributions.

Source A: "All Men Are Created Equal," excerpt from Declaration of Independence (1776)

- Why were African Americans left out of the American ideal of "all men are created equal" as expressed in the Declaration of Independence?
- What prevented African Americans from being included in the American ideal of "all men are created equal"?

Source B: Preamble to the U.S. Constitution (1787)

- Identify the ways African Americans were excluded from "We the People" in Constitutional compromises such as the 3/5 Compromise.
- Why were African Americans excluded from the American goal of "secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity"?

Source C: Emancipation Proclamation (1863)

- What was the purpose of the Emancipation Proclamation?
- If the Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves, why was the Thirteenth Amendment added to the Constitution?

Source D: General Orders No. 3 (1865)

- What impact did General Orders No. 3 have on American identity?
- Why were these orders communicated?

Source E: Langston Hughes, "A Dream Deferred" (1926)

- Explain what Langston Hughes meant by a "dream deferred."
- Identify the challenges facing African Americans in the 1920s.

Activity #2:

Following Activity #1, have students resume collaborative work by creating a thematic timeline to analyze the extent to which African Americans were free. This timeline can be completed simply by adding notes defining each event on the timeline (knowledge gained from Activity #1) followed by group answers for the two questions included in the timeline. It is recommended that students are given a printed timeline with the events and analysis question (a worksheet) with space for notes and answers. Students could also create their own timelines.

Assessment/Closure: Provide students with an Emancipation Day song lyric primary source (see Resources section), and have them write a response to the following prompt: Summarize the positive changes celebrated on Juneteenth (insert year for selected song) and explain what goals remained to be reached. Assess student comprehension individually through their written responses.

Extension Activity: Ask the students, "How would you have felt in Galveston on June 19, 1865?" Divide them into five groups. Each group will assume one of the following identities: slave, slaveholder, free citizen (non-slaveholder), former Confederate soldier, or one of General Granger's soldiers. Have them choose a spokesperson for the group's responses. They may write their responses on a poster board or piece of paper. Allow them ten minutes to discuss the following:

- It is January 1863. How would you have felt about news of the Emancipation Proclamation?
- It is April 1865. How would you have reacted to news of the Confederate defeat?
- It is June 19, 1865. What are three specific ways Granger's announcement would affect your lifestyle? For the slave group, substitute this question: What would be the first three things you would do once you learned you were free?

Encourage students to include their own gender and ethnicity in their observations. Remember, Galveston was a port city with a melting pot of people. For the remaining time left in the class, have students discuss the reasons for similarities and differences in historical actors' reactions.

Teacher Resources:

Note: Links to all of these online resources were active as of and accessed on February 28, 2013.

Sources

- “Charters of Freedom,” National Archives: <http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/charters.html>
- Excerpts from Declaration of Independence: <http://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/111decin.html>
- Preamble to the Constitution: <http://onlinesocialstudies.mpls.k12.mn.us/uploads/10768214238.jpg>
- Emancipation Proclamation:
http://www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/inline-pdfs/Emancipation%20Proclamation%2C%20January%201%2C%201863_0.pdf
- General Orders No. 3: http://www.blackpast.org/files/blackpast_images/juneteenth_general_order3.jpg
<http://deadconfederates.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/juneteenth.png>
- Hughes, “A Dream Deferred”:
http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-d0rkY1UDGNM/TvAZXa_ksvI/AAAAAAAAALE/uB7pajlWLUM/s1600/Dream+Deferred.png
- Eighteenth-Century African-American Sheet Music, Library of Congress:
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/sheetmusic/brown/aasmabout.html> (Use index or search collection for “Emancipation Day.”)

Documentaries

- Texas Institute for the Preservation of History and Culture, Juneteenth: A Celebration of Freedom (Prairie View: Texas Institute for the Preservation of History and Culture, 2008), 26 minutes, OCLC Number 247564115



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(Endnotes)

- 1 On the importance of teaching history, see Peter N. Stearnes, "Why Study History?" American Historical Society, accessed January 15, 2013, <http://www.historians.org/pubs/free/WhyStudyHistory.htm>.
- 2 Pierce Harper, in *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938*, Texas Narratives, File 420163, Volume 16, Part 2, 111, Library of Congress, American Memory, accessed January 15, 2013, http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mesn&fileName=162/mesn162.db&recNum=115&tempFile=./temp/~ammem_ZUft&filecode=mesn&next_filecode=mesn&itemnum=1&ndocs=25.
- 3 Refugee slaves in Texas estimates from Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, *Slaves No More: Three Essays on Emancipation and the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 56; and Texas slave numbers from Randolph B. Campbell, "Slavery," Texas State Historical Association, Handbook of Texas Online, accessed January 15, 2013, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/yps01>.
- 4 African Americans learned or suspected that freedom had come when they saw the Union ship arrive in the Gulf of Mexico off the coast near Galveston a few days before Granger read the actual announcement. When Confederate Major H. A. Wallace arrived in Galveston on June 17, he saw African Americans celebrating in the streets. See his first-person account in David G. McComb, *Galveston: A History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 84. In addition, it is important to stress that, while it is true that Texas slaveholders and Confederates ignored or even concealed news of the Emancipation Proclamation, the document actually freed very few slaves. Many slaves did not wait around for a proclamation or for anyone's permission to claim their freedom. An estimated 500,000 to 800,000 of the 3.5 million slaves in the South freed themselves by running away. Many of the slaves who remained on plantations and farms and in towns and cities throughout the South took advantage of the confusion and anxiety brought on by the war or used the threat of running away to make their lives more bearable and gain some freedoms. To understand more about how slaves resisted slavery, see John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
James Alex Baggett, "Granger, Gordon," Handbook of Texas Online, Texas State Historical Association, accessed January 15, 2013, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fg10>; "Ashton Villa," National Park Service, accessed January 15, 2013, <http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/tx/tx49.htm>; and William H. Wiggins Jr., "Juneteenth: A Red Spot Day on the Texas Calendar," in *Juneteenth Texas: Essays in African-American Folklore*, ed. Francis Edward (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1996).
- 5 William H. Wiggins Jr., ed., "From Galveston to Washington: Charting Juneteenth's Freedom Trail," in *Jubilation!: African American Celebrations in the Southeast* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 61-67; Thad Sitton and James H. Conrad, *Freedom Colonies: Independent Black Texans in the Time of Jim Crow* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 104-107; and Doris Hollis Pemberton, *Juneteenth at Comanche Crossing* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1983).
- 6 Juneteenth is a shortened version of "June nineteenth"; the nine is omitted, and the June and "teenth" are pushed together. See early references to "Juneteenth" in Brenham [Tex.] Weekly Banner, June 25, 1891, 7, and Parsons [Kan.] Weekly Blade, June 22, 1895, 4.
- 7 Elizabeth Turner Hayes, "Juneteenth: Emancipation and Memory," in *Lone Star Past: Memory and History in Texas*, ed. Gregg Cantrell and Elizabeth Hayes Turner (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 157.
- 8 On disenfranchisement and Jim Crow in Texas, see Darlene Clark Hine with Steven F. Lawson and Merline Pitre, *Black Victory: The Rise and Fall of the White Primary in Texas*, New Ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2003); in the South, see Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*, Reprint (New York: Anchor, 2009); and in the United States, see Desmond King and Stephen Tuck, "De-Centering the South: America's Nationwide White Supremacist Order after Reconstruction," *Past and Present* 194, no. 1 (February 2007): 213-54.
- 9 For negative feelings about and reactions to Juneteenth among Whites, see Turner, "Juneteenth," 161.
- 10 Stephanie Fernandez, "The Hall of Negro Life at the 1936 Texas Centennial Exposition" (Master's Thesis, University of Virginia, 2007), and Paul M. Lucko, "Hall of Negro Life," Handbook of Texas Online, accessed January 15, 2013, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/pkh01>. On events that occurred during 1936 celebration, see "Texas Juneteenth," *The Negro Star* [Wichita, Kan.], July 3, 1936, 3, and Kevin Mooney, "Texas Centennial 1936: African-American Texans and the Third National Folk Festival," *Journal of Texas Music History* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 36-43, accessed January 15, 2013, <https://digital.library.txstate.edu/handle/10877/2654>.
- 11 "Texas Preparing for 'Juneteenth' Celebration," *The Negro Star*, June 6, 1941, 3; Photograph, Several former slaves are seated together during a Juneteenth Celebration, June 19, 1948, Dallas Public Library, 1995 Miscellany Collection, PA95-1/10, accessed January 15, 2013, http://catalog.dallaslibrary.org/Repository/PA95_1_10.jpg.
- 12 Lee White, quoted in Thomas J. Craughwell and Edwin Kiester Jr., *The Buck Stops Here: The 28 Toughest Presidential Decisions and How They Changed History* (Beverly, MA: Fair Winds Press, 2010), 254.
- 13 See, for example, "The Issue: Civil Rights," *New York Times*, October 13, 1964, 42, and text of the "President's Message to Congress Calling for Civil Rights Legislation," Special to *The New York Times*, June 20, 1963, 16.
- 14 Turner, "Juneteenth," 164.
- 15 See Minjae Park, "Juneteenth Project Stalls, and New Monument Emerges," *Texas Tribune*, June 8, 2012, accessed January 15, 2013, <http://www.texastribune.org/2012/06/08/juneteenth-monument-capitol/>, and "Get Moving on Our Juneteenth Monument," *Austin Statesman*, June 18, 2012, accessed January 15, 2013, <http://www.statesman.com/news/news/opinion/get-moving-on-our-juneteenth-monument/nRpZg/>. Also see Resolution 155, "Recognizing the Significance of Juneteenth Independence Day," U.S. House, Congressional Record, Vol. 153, Part 12, June 18, 2007, 16130, accessed January 15, 2013, <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?r110:H18JN7-0020>.