

The relevance of Juneteenth

On June 19, 1865, Union general Gordon Granger marched into Galveston, Texas and announced that the enslaved people of Texas were now free. Although the Emancipation Proclamation was signed over two years earlier, the reality was that it did not end slavery for all, only announced freedom for slaves in states in rebellion i.e., the Confederacy. The end of slavery was not official until the adoption of the 13th Amendment in December of 1865. But, the following year, newly freed Black Americans in Texas organized community wide celebrations on June 19th, becoming known as Juneteenth.

Why is Juneteenth important today? To understand the significance of this commemoration, John Gunn, 2020-21 Missouri Bar President provides the following viewpoint.

Diversity of ideas and perspectives can feel threatening to many whose self-interest historically coincides with the efforts of society at large. After all, if we are honest with ourselves, many of us don't occupy our spaces without a fairly massive assist from our privilege.

A cursory consideration of prominent surnames in the Missouri legal community provides a striking rejoinder to any suggestion that communities of color have not been marginalized within our profession. A conscious decision must be made by each of us to peer out from behind the privilege into which many of us were born to observe the spectrum of humanity our self-interest so often obscures.

Historical reluctance to acknowledge that privilege suppresses celebration by broad swaths of American society of the official end of slavery on June 19, 1865. Viewed in isolation, it seems anathema not to celebrate the formal termination of our country's edition of one of the most dark and cruel manifestations of human avarice.

Tomorrow provides another opportunity for us all to harmonize and appreciate the progress the date signifies, while simultaneously conceding how far it is we have yet to go.

As we continue as a society to work to educate ourselves about bias and the historical implications of racial disparity, it is important to recognize the significance of holidays like Juneteenth. It is notable that Texas adopted Juneteenth as a state holiday in 1980 and Missouri has recognized the date's significance since 2003. That said, it is also notable that the date has largely been unrecognized outside of Black communities for many years, even though celebrations have been held for over 150 years marking Juneteenth's importance.

This year, Supreme Court of Missouri Chief Justice Draper authorized the closing of all state judicial offices for four hours Friday, June 18, 2021, for the Juneteenth holiday. Most offices will close at noon to allow staff time to reflect on the importance of Juneteenth, although the Jackson County Court will close for the entire day.

Please [check with your local court](#) if you have questions about the hours of operation or need assistance. For more information about the full history of Juneteenth, an interactive article curated by the National Museum of African American History and Culture is [available online](#).

Happy Juneteenth!