

Massachusetts declares “Juneteenth Independence Day” as a state holiday; America’s second Independence Day

On January 1, 1863, almost 3 years into America’s Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln declared “that all persons held as slaves are, and henceforward shall be free.” with his Emancipation Proclamation that officially made slavery illegal.

However, the enforcement of slavery depended solely on how deep Union troops advanced into those states that allowed it. The last bastion of these states was Texas and until that state was reached slavery would continue to exist. Texas would eventually fall to Union troops almost 2 1/2 years after President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. From Galveston, Texas Union General Gordon Granger would issue General Order No. 3 on June 19th, 1865 which declared the Union’s authority of the state of Texas, finally putting an end to the practice of slavery.

The order stated:

“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. All acts of the Governor and Legislature of Texas, since the Ordinance of Secession, are hereby declared illegitimate.”

155 years later, on Friday July 24th, 2020, Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker signed legislation that officially declared June

19th as Juneteenth Independence Day, a state holiday and an action to “recognize the continued need to ensure racial freedom and equality.”

That leaves only Hawaii, North Dakota, and South Dakota who do not recognize Juneteenth as a holiday and only Texas observing Juneteenth as a paid holiday.

UPDATE: At the time of this article, 07/28/20, it was true that all but three states recognized Juneteenth. North Dakota recognized the holiday on April 13, 2021 and Hawaii would follow suit on June 16, 2021. The last state standing, South Dakota would observe the holiday for 2021 *only*. However, under pressure South Dakota would finally make it an official holiday in February of 2022.