

Juneteenth is more than a holiday—it's a reminder of the ongoing struggle for justice and equality.

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**Hi Lauren,**

**Juneteenth has been special to many Black communities before becoming a federal holiday in 2021.**

It marks the day June 19, 1865, when enslaved people in Galveston, Texas learned they were free and had been for a while. Since I was born in Galveston, Texas—just blocks from where Union General Gordon Granger arrived to share the news of “freedom”—I heard the story from my grandfather often.

Even though the message took two years to reach the shores of Galveston, after the Civil War and the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, the people there dropped everything to rejoice.

From then on “Juneteenth” became a tradition rooted in parades, festivals, and pageants. As a former Juneteenth queen and festival board member in my hometown of El Campo, Texas, I can acknowledge that growing up I didn’t understand the value of reuniting with relatives each June, but now I understand the true essence of the words “from whence we come.”

The recently ratified [union contract at New Flyer](#) in Anniston, Alabama, combined with the [community benefits agreement](#) with the company negotiated by JMA and the Greater Birmingham Ministries, is a step towards healing one of the communities that has deep scars from racism. Anniston is the site of the Ku Klux Klan attack on a Freedom Riders bus in 1961, as well as Monsanto's poisoning of the city's mostly Black residents for over four decades. The new union contract and the community benefits agreement creates opportunities for Black residents to get good union jobs making electric buses in their communities—**and shows us that healing and progress are possible if we act strongly and together.**

As we prepare to observe the holiday with a day off from work, we must give some real thought to continuing the healing process. From Texas to Alabama and Mississippi, and every state in between, there's still work to be done. Juneteenth marks the final news of the abolishment of slavery but it doesn't erase the oppression still being experienced today. **In 2024, we are still working to dismantle the legacy of slavery.** We see this now in the form of incarcerated workers working long hours for little pay and in other forms of systemic racism.

In my eyes, Juneteenth is more than a holiday but rather a moment in history and a reminder of the ongoing struggle for justice and equality. My connection to Galveston, Texas, where Juneteenth originated, adds a deep resonance to my reflection of the day. **Juneteenth is a day of commemoration—but let's remember the call to action we can't ignore.**

It is my sincerest hope that as we rejoice and relax tomorrow, let's take time to reflect on shaping freedom for all.

In solidarity,



**Troy Washington**  
Communications Director

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