

Galveston, TX



Origins of Juneteenth

Galveston, TX is the birthplace of Juneteenth, the oldest celebration of the emancipation of enslaved African Americans in the USA. Two years after the Emancipation Proclamation, in June 1865, General Gordon Granger and over 2,000 United States Colored Troops docked in the port of Galveston. They announced Order No. 3, which granted freedom to the enslaved people of Texas. The announcement was made to people on plantations across the island and countryside of Texas. Prior to this announcement, the enslaved people of Texas were unaware of Lincoln's proclamation of freedom. This event marked the end of slavery in Texas and is celebrated annually on June 19th.

Celebrations of Freedom in Galveston

Jubilee Day on the Island (1866)

The first Emancipation Day or Jubilee celebrations in Galveston were held the year after General Granger declared the end of slavery. In 1866, a Galveston newspaper reported on the large procession of "colored people of Galveston" who marched across the city. The parade ended at Reedy Chapel, where participants gave testimonies and prayers of thanksgiving. The annual event included musical performances, dancing, food, and family gatherings across the island. Over time, more towns and settlements celebrated the holiday as part of the Freedmen's Bureau campaign, and as more freedmen moved from Galveston to other parts of the state and country.

Annual Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation

In Galveston, Texas, a statue of the late Texas State Representative Al Edwards stands in front of Ashton Villa. Edwards was known as Mr. Juneteenth for his efforts to make Juneteenth a recognized holiday in Texas. In 1979, he introduced legislation which was adopted and signed into law, making Texas the first state to officially observe Juneteenth in 1980. Each year on Juneteenth, a reading of the Emancipation Proclamation takes place on the grounds of Ashton Villa, initiated by Edwards and conducted annually for over 40 years.

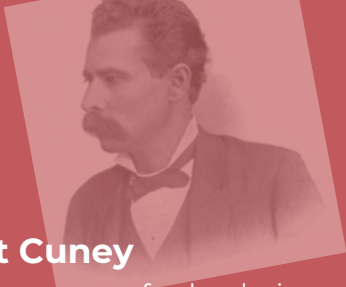
"Absolute Equality" on display in Galveston (2021)

In recent years, there have been various efforts to commemorate the history of Juneteenth in Galveston. One such effort was the erection of the official Texas Historical Marker at 22nd and Strand Blvd in 2014. Today, there are several permanent exhibitions that aim to educate people about the history of Juneteenth, including the Nia Cultural Center and the "And Still We Rise: Galveston's Juneteenth Story Exhibit." In 2021, the Juneteenth Legacy Project led the city's commemoration with the unveiling of a 5000 square-foot mural called "Absolute Equality". The mural project, inspired and led by world-renown visionary artist Reginald C. Adams, is located on the Strand, near the spot where General Granger's Order No. 3 was originally announced. Adam's Galveston mural launched the nationwide campaign to create "Absolute Equality" murals across the nation to commemorated the legacy of freedom and spread awareness about the significance of Juneteenth across the country.

Trailblazers of Freedom

United States Colored Troops

On June 19, 1865 over 10,000 color soldiers accompanied General Gordon Granger into Galveston Bay. Comprised of mostly newly freedmen, the soldiers were instrumental in both witnessing and enforcing the orders of emancipation that liberated the enslaved people of Texas.



Norris Wright Cuney

Norris Cuney, a free person of color during the Civil War, is regarded as one of the most influential men in Texas history. He moved to Galveston after the war, having originally hailed from Sunnyside Plantation in Hempstead. Cuney dedicated himself to advocating for the education and employment rights of African Americans, and his political career began in 1870 when he was appointed as First Sergeant-at-Arms of the Texas Legislature. Soon after, he was appointed as a delegate to the Republican National Convention. Cuney became the first black Alderman on the Galveston City Council, and today, Wright Cuney Park, located near the port of Galveston, is a site of one of the city's annual Juneteenth celebrations.



John Arthur "Jack" Johnson

The "Galveston Giant", Jack Johnson was a the first black heavyweight boxing world champion from 1908-1915. Johnson reached his career peak during the height of Jim Crow and led a life that angered many white citizens at the time. He was arrested and fined for violating the Mann Act, due to his affiliations with white women. He was eventually issued a post-humous pardon in 2018.

The Path to Absolute Equality

Port of Galveston - A Major Point on the TransAtlantic Slave Trade

During the height of the TransAtlantic Slave Trade, Galveston was a major point of trade. The Strand marked the location of many slave trading auction houses. By the civil war, there were several hundred enslaved people on Galveston Island. Following the end of the slave trade, the Port of Galveston continued to flourish as a major cotton port.

The Spirit of Galveston - Black Places of Worship

Black churches and places of worship have been a cornerstone of Galveston, dating back to before emancipation. The legendary Avenue L Baptist Church, is noted as the oldest church where enslaved African Americans could worship freely in Texas. A few blocks away, the Reedy Chapel was established as the first African American Methodist Episcopal Church and was granted it's own property deed in 1866. These houses of faith have served as a place of refuge, community building, education, and collective progress for Blacks in Galveston. Having survived over a century, fourteen of Galveston's historic churches exist today.

Galveston in the "Green Book"

During the early 1900's, Black Galvestonians sought opportunities and enjoyment, but like many other cities in the South, Galveston had strict segregation policies. The beaches in Galveston were segregated, with a small one-black area allocated for Black residents. On the African American beachfront, black residents patronized the Gus Allen Villa, Jambalaya Restaurant and the Manhattan Club. During the period of Jim Crow, black residents were only allow to work at white beachfront businesses and attractions, therefore the block of 29th and Seawall became the prime destination for black beachgoers from across the area. In addition to the beach locations, several other locations were listed in the "Green Book" as safe spaces for black travelers. Included in the Green Book listing was Imperial Barber Shop, Little Shamrock Hotel, Gulf View Tavern, and Mrs. J. Pope's Tourist Home.

Black Galvestonians fight for Civil Rights

Blacks in Galveston led the charge for civil rights long before the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's. As early as 1879, black longshoremen unionized as the Cotton Jammers Association to fight for working conditions and pay at the Port of Galveston. By the 1940's more efforts to achieve civil rights emerged in Galveston as black educators sought equal pay and admissions into collegiate programs on the island. During the height of the Civil Rights Movement, Galveston was home to several lunch counter sit-ins and boycotts led by young students and community leaders.



Gus Allen

Gus Allen moved to Galveston from Louisiana in the early 1920's. As a young man he worked at the Hotel Galvez as a shoeshiner. He became a successful entrepreneur and opened the Gus Allen Cafe and Gus Allen Villa, a hotel for black beachgoers during the height of Jim Crow. Mr. Allen later opened a nightclub, Manhattan Club, on black-only section of Seawall Boulevard.



MIDDLE PASSAGE MARKER



REEDY CHAPEL AME CHURCH



**CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL
"OLD CENTRAL
CULTURAL CENTER"**

Eldrewey Joseph Stearns

Eldrewey Stearns was born and raised in Galveston, TX. In 1959 he experienced the injustice of police brutality during a traffic stop in Houston. Stearns, a 28 year old law student at Texas Southern University emerged a leader of the Civil Rights Movement in Houston as a result of his tragic experience. He successfully utilized the media and student coalitions to promote demonstrations such as lunch counter sit-ins, store boycotts, and student protests across the city.



ABSOLUTE EQUALITY MURAL



Historical Resources and References

United States Colored Troops, The Complete Juneteenth Story

<https://www.juneteenthlegacyproject.com/united-states-colored-troops>

PEOPLE, PLACES, AND STORIES OF GALVESTON'S BLACK HISTORY

<https://www.galvestonhistory.org/news/black-history-month>

Galveston in the Green Book. Galveston History Center

<https://www.galvestonhistorycenter.org/research/galveston-in-the-green-book>



www.absolteequality.org