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COMMUNITY MEDIA

# Juneteenth in Alexandria

On June 19, we celebrate Juneteenth (June + 19th), commemorating the end of slavery in the United States. Celebrated first as a state holiday in Virginia in 2020 by executive order, legislation was passed unanimously in October 2020 to officially declare Juneteenth a permanent state holiday. The City of Alexandria also recognized it as a paid holiday for City staff starting in 2020.

We remember that on June 19, 1865, Gen. Gordon Granger of the Union Army and his troops arrived in Galveston to announce that the enslaved people in Texas were free. It had taken approximately two-and-a-half years after President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation for the news to reach the enslaved people in Texas. Texans began celebrating Juneteenth in 1866, and it was the first state to declare Juneteenth an official state holiday in 1980.

A special Juneteenth flag was created in 1997 and revised in 2000 and 2007. It features a star, a burst, an arc and the colors red, white and blue.

All have special meaning to the story of Juneteenth.

The star represents Texas, the Lone Star State, and the freedom of African Americans in all 50 states. The burst outlining the star is inspired by a nova, or new star, representing a new beginning for African Americans across America. The arc across the width of the flag represents a new horizon full of promise and new opportunities. Finally, the colors red, white and blue represent the flag of the United States of America and are a reminder that enslaved people and their descendants were and are Americans.

Alexandria has a rich history of observance, starting as early as 1889. The first decade featured two eminent and renowned speakers, Frederick Douglass and John Mercer Langston. More recently, the Alexandria Black History Museum has had outdoor festivals as well as notable speakers, such as U.S. Senate Chaplain Barry Black in collaboration with the Northern Virginia Urban League, and historian



Emancipation Celebration in D.C., Harper's Weekly April 19, 1866.

PHOTO/HARPER'S WEEKLY

C.R. Gibbs.

On Friday, there will be a Memorial at Douglass Cemetery from 10 to 11:15 a.m. The keynote speaker is Elgin Klugh, Ph.D., a professor and chairperson in the Department of Applied Social and Political Sciences at Coppin State University. His research interests include heritage, cultural landscapes, community revitalization and genealogy.

On Friday afternoon, there will be a free concert from 1 to 3 p.m. performed by the Washington Revels Jubilee Voices at Shiloh Baptist Church. During the concert, the Revels will highlight each of the four churches that were established during the Civil War. The churches are Shiloh Baptist Church, Beulah Baptist Church,

Zion Baptist Church and Third Baptist Church.

The City of Alexandria also celebrates Juneteenth with the Juneteenth Festival on Friday at Charles Houston Rec Center. Highlights include the Event Kick Off at 4 p.m. with opening remarks by Mayor Alyia Gaskins. Activities start at 3 p.m. and include outdoor performances, a health fair and tours of the African American Hall of Fame.

*To learn more about Juneteenth, to find out more about the Juneteenth Festival or get ideas for visiting the City's many sites that bear witness to the journey to freedom, visit alexandriava.gov/juneteenth.*

*Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.*