Juneteenth & the Path to Freedom
Through the Funn Collection

Alexandria Black History Museum
“On the 19th of June, 1865, Major General Granger arrived in Galveston Texas to command the District of Texas following the Civil War and officially announced the freedom of the slaves in Texas. This occurred two and one half years after the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect, January 1863.

Juneteenth

‘The Emancipation Proclamation’
June 19, 1865”

This poster was mounted onto cardboard by Carlton Funn to become a display board, one of nearly 1,500 that he made and exhibited, as the “The National/International Cultural Exhibits (NICE)”.
This board is mounted with a poster of a poem entitled, *Juneteenth*! It describes the process of emancipation and how the 13th Amendment finally spread across the South to the State of Texas.

The poem is filled with evocative imagery and lyrical verse, including the repeated refrain:

"On the 19th day of June, 18 hundred 65
Slavery drizzled out of time, blue skies of truth reign and thrive!"
For some, emancipation had come earlier by their own hands, self-emancipated via the Underground Railroad. For others, it would not come until the ratification of the 13th Amendment in December of 1865.
In the years that followed, June 19th was commemorated, with some previously enslaved people, and their descendants, travelling to Galveston to mark the date.

The commemoration became known as Juneteenth and is now celebrated across the country with family reunions, community events and in song.

These boards from the Funn Collection are mounted with the song, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” and an image of Marian Anderson, as she lifted her voice and sang.
The song, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” was written by the brothers, J. Rosamond Johnson and James Weldon Johnson. James, one of the co-founders of the NAACP, wrote the lyrics and his brother, a music teacher, wrote the melody.

Originally the song was written in honor of Lincoln’s birthday, but it has since evolved into what has become known as the Black National Anthem. It is sung in schools, churches and at times of celebration, such as during Juneteenth events.
These display boards are from the Carlton Funn, Sr. Collection at the Alexandria Black History Museum.

They began, when a young African American seventh grade history teacher, in Alexandria’s public school system in the 1950s, was dismayed at the lack of positive African American representation and the distorted version of history within the school’s textbooks.

This prompted Funn to purchase posters, books, pamphlets, artifacts and more, to broaden the narrative he could teach.
The material he amassed grew into his first exhibit, “The Afro-American Experience,” and took his collection beyond his classroom.

In this 1972 photograph, Funn is talking to students at the National Education Association five-day display of his exhibition. He also presented a series of talks and films related to improving race relations.
Funn continued to collect material and create new display boards throughout his life. He broadened his scope from the African American experience to include the history, culture and contribution of all people.

His final exhibition was entitled, “The National/International Cultural Exhibits (NICE)”.

Funn stated that the purpose of the exhibition was to “promote awareness, human dignity and cultural understanding”. For him, it is not enough to learn our own history, we need also to learn and appreciate the history and cultural contribution of all people and embrace and celebrate our diversity.
Born in Alexandria, Virginia on January 29, 1932, Carlton A. Funn, Sr. was a Parker-Gray High School alumnus.

He received a B.A. from Storer College and an M.A. in Education from Virginia State University, before returning to his native Alexandria to teach in the public school system.

Funn taught in the Alexandria, Fairfax County and the District of Columbia public school systems for 38 years.

Although his exhibition took him across the country, Funn was a dedicated member of the Alexandria community.
Juneteenth 1970: This *Alexandria Gazette* article from June 19, 1970 shows Funn bringing his collection and his teaching to the Alexandria Police Department.

He had offered his services to improve police and community relations just weeks after the city had erupted in riots following the death of 19-year old Robin Gibson, an African American, who was shot and killed by a white employee at a 7-Eleven in Alexandria.
Funn's dedication to community work continued throughout his life.

He was a trustee at Alfred St. Baptist Church, and on the Freedman's Cemetery Commission and the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast Committee.

He was also the N.A.A.C.P. Membership Chair and a Past President of the Alexandria Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage. This society, together with the Parker-Gray Alumni, were responsible for the creation of the Alexandria Black History Resource Center, now the Alexandria Black History Museum.
Funn passed away in 2012, but due to the generous donation of his children, nearly 1,500 display boards from Funn’s exhibitions are now in the collection of the Alexandria Black History Museum and his legacy of teaching cultural understanding, respect, human dignity and love can continue.

Over the last year, the entire Funn collection has been catalogued and photographed and we are delighted to announce that it is now available to view on our online database. Search using keywords, by the subject or people headings, or just simply browse images to start your journey. 

https://historicalalexandria.pastperfectonline.com/

To learn more about Funn see the online exhibition https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/historic/info/blackhistory/FunnExhibitTheImportanceofBeingNice.pdf

Please note that the Carlton Funn Collection consists of educational materials created from the 1950s to the 2010s and some of the information and language used may be outdated or incorrect. Please be aware of this when choosing materials to use with students. Also note that some content, such as graphic images of the Holocaust, may be upsetting to viewers.