AMERICAN CIVIC HOLIDAY RESOURCES

JUNETEENTH

Juneteenth commemorates June 19, 1865, the date Union soldiers entered Galveston, Texas and proclaimed freedom to the state's Black residents. Although the Civil War had ended a few months earlier on April 9, 1865, Texas remained under Confederate control until June 19th. Enslaved persons in the Confederacy had been freed even earlier by the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. And slavery was further abolished within the United States when Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment on January 31, 1865. Many enslaved people in the Westernmost Confederate state of Texas, however, were not aware of their freedom or able to act on it, until June 19th and the arrival of 2,000 Union troops who brought news of freedom to enslaved Texans.

The day, June 19th, became known by Black Texans as both Freedom Day, and more popularly as Juneteenth. Juneteenth has historically been celebrated in Southern Black communities with religious services, picnics, parades, and the Miss Juneteenth beauty pageant. In 1865, along with celebrating their freedom, formerly enslaved African Americans needed to build their lives as free persons. Public awareness of Juneteenth increased outside the Black community, after the death of George Floyd in 2020. In 2021, Juneteenth became a federal holiday.

A core methodology of Civic Spirit is to ground discussion of complex ideas in texts and other primary sources. The sources below offer a window into different ways in which African Americans exercised their freedom. Analyzing these texts will help students understand the importance of Juneteenth and the priorities of newly freed Americans. Before reading through the sources, you may wish to start a conversation with students about what it means to be free and how they think individuals would want to exercise their freedom.

Source 1: Martin Jackson's Oral History, recorded in the 1930s

The master's name was usually adopted by a slave after he was set free. This was done more because it was the logical thing to do and the easiest way to be identified than it was through affection for the master. Also, the government seemed to be in a almighty hurry to have us get names. We had to register as someone, so we could be citizens. Well, I got to thinking about all us slaves that was going to take the name Fitzpatrick. I made up my mind I'd find me a different one. One of my grandfathers in Africa was called Jeaceo, and so I decided to be Jackson.[1]

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why was choosing a last name important to Mr. Jackson?
2. How is the name Jackson a source of pride for Mr. Jackson?

1. Norman R. Yetman, ed., *Voices from Slavery: 100 Authentic Slave Narratives* (Dover Publications, 2012), 175.

Source 2: *A Visit from the Old Mistress,* painted by Winslow Homer, 1876 [2]

Questions for Discussion:

1. What do you notice about the dynamic between the former mistress and the newly freed women?
2. What do you notice about the body language of the newly freed women? How do you think body language might differ if they were still enslaved?

2. Homer, W. (n.d.). *A visit from the old mistress.* Smithsonian American Art Museum. https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/visit-old-mistress-10737

Source 3: Hagar Outlaw, Advertisement in the Christian Recorder, April 7, 1866

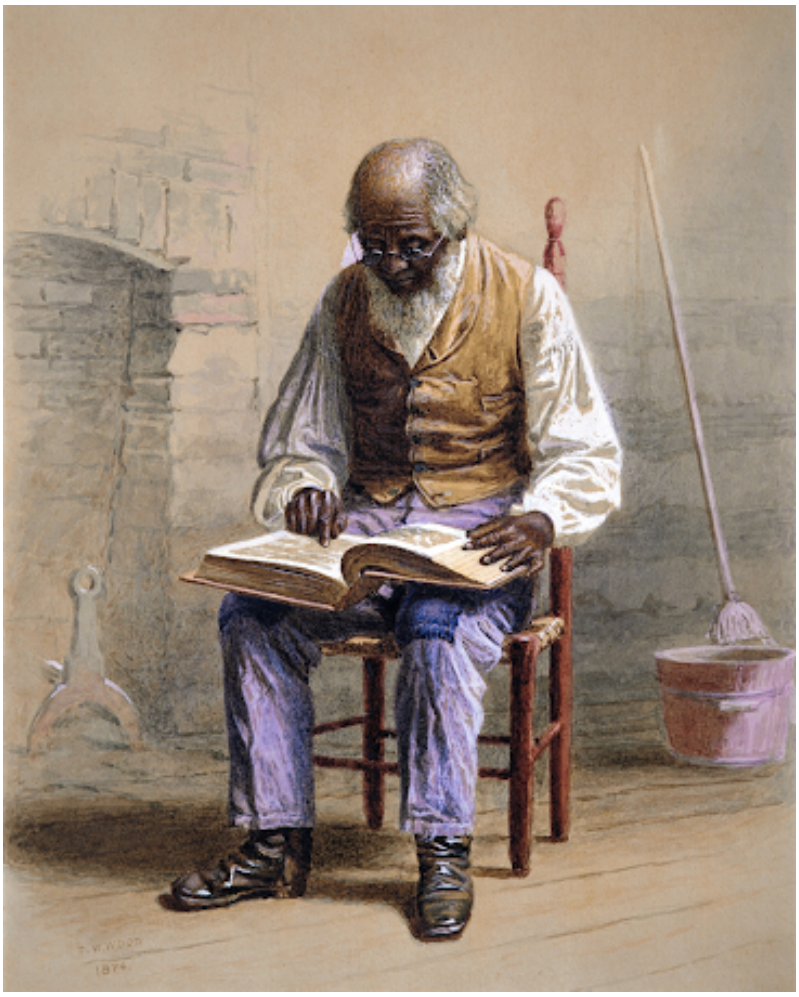
Information wanted of the children of Hagar Outlaw, who went from Wake Forest. Three of them, (their names being Cherry, Viny, and Mills Outlaw) were bought by Abram Hester. Noah Outlaw was taken to Alabama by Joseph Turner Hillsborough. John Outlaw was sold to George Vaughn. Eli Outlaw was sold by Joseph Outlaw. He acted as watchman for old David Outlaw. Thomas Rembry Outlaw was sold in New Orleans by Dr. Outlaw. I live in Raleigh, and I hope they will think enough of their mother to come and look for her, as she is growing old and needs help. She will be glad to see them again at her side. The place is healthy, and they can all do well here. As the hand of time steals over me now so rapidly, I wish to see my dear ones once more clasped to their mother's heart as in days of yore. Come to the capital of North Carolina, and you will find your mother there, eagerly awaiting her loved ones.[3]

Questions for Discussion:

1. What is the message that the author, Hagar Outlaw, is trying to convey in her advertisement?
2. Newspaper ads cost between fifty cents and two dollars, a significant sum for a typical income of $5-$25 as an Black agricultural worker in the South. Knowing that fact, what can you learn about the author from this advertisement?

3. Williams, H. A. (2015, October 13). *The desperate, hopeful ads freed people published in search of their lost relatives after the Civil War*. Slate Magazine. https://slate.com/human-interest/2015/10/enslaved-peoples-newspaper-ads-in-search-for-family-members-after-the-civil-war.html

Source 4: *Reading the Scriptures,* painted by Thomas Waterman Wood, 1863[4]



Questions for Discussion:

1. How do you imagine the man in the painting feels at this moment?
2. Why is reading such an important act for the formerly enslaved?

4. Johnson, E. (n.d.). *The lord is my Shepherd.* Smithsonian American Art Museum. https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/lord-my-shepherd-11494

Summary Questions:

1. **Looking at the sources, how did formerly enslaved African Americans express their freedom after the Civil War?**
2. **What did they prioritize? Why do you think they prioritized these actions?**