INFORMATION PAPER

SUBJECT: JUNETEENTH

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Introduction

Since its inception on June 19, 1866 as a celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation's extension to Texas the previous year, the commemoration of Juneteenth gradually gained widespread acceptance as a public holiday. This process culminated in Juneteenth National Independence Day's recognition as a national holiday on June 17, 2021.

Juneteenth is a "second" Independence Day, one that celebrates the formal extension of the liberties enumerated in the Declaration of Independence to the Black Americans to whom freedom and dignity were for so long denied in this country. Much like America's original Independence Day, the U.S. Army played a fundamental role in securing the freedoms extended to Black Americans by the Emancipation Proclamation and the Reconstruction Amendments which followed.

With the Pen and the Bayonet

After Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation took effect on January 1, 1863, the Army enforced the liberation of enslaved individuals at bayonet point. Without legislative action codifying the formal abolition of slavery as an institution, unilateral executive emancipation was justified as the confiscation of rebel property categorized as war materiel. Since the Proclamation was a war measure and only applied to those States in open rebellion against the Union, implementation of its terms fell to the Army as a matter of necessity.[1]

Thus, although the Proclamation established the legal freedom of all enslaved persons throughout the rebellious states, the actual abolition of slavery only occurred in tandem with the arrival of Union soldiers in rebel-held territory. By the time of Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865, an estimated one million of the four million persons held in bondage throughout the Union and Confederacy had been liberated (a significant portion of this

[1] Perry D. Jamieson and Bradford A. Wineman, *The Maryland and Fredericksburg Campaigns, 1862-1863*, The U.S. Army Campaigns of the Civil War (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2016) p. 56-58

total having been the result of legally codified emancipation in Unionist Missouri, Maryland, and West Virginia rather than the Proclamation).[2]

In areas where the Proclamation was enforced before the war's end, such as the Mississippi River valley, southern Louisiana, Tennessee, and the Confederacy's Atlantic Coast (particularly Virginia and North Carolina) the institution of slavery was dissolved not merely due to the arrival of Union troops, but because of their ongoing presence. It was the employment of the Union's overwhelming force of arms, above all else, that forced the recalcitrant South to accept the reality of emancipation.[3]

Texas: The Last Frontier of Emancipation

Despite the Army of Northern Virginia's surrender at Appomattox on April 9, 1865, the spirit of rebellion remained alive and well in the Lone Star state into the summer of that year. Texas on the whole had been untouched by the ravages of war, and having avoided widespread Union military occupation during the conflict, its civilian will to resist emancipation remained unbroken. The commander of the Confederacy's Trans-Mississippi forces, General Edmund Kirby Smith, held out formally until June 2, and bands of Confederate partisans continued to roam the vast countryside.[4]

Under orders from Major General Philip H. Sheridan, commander of the newly formed Military Division of the Southwest (composed of Texas, southwestern Arkansas, most of Louisiana, and the Indian Territories), in mid-June Major General Gordon Granger led an advance force of 1,800 men from the XIII Corps out of New Orleans by steamboat to the major port city of Galveston.[5] Sheridan's communiques to Granger indicate their general understanding of the hostility U.S. troops would face in unbowed Texas: *"There is not a very wholesome state of affairs in Texas. The Governor, all the soldiers, and the people generally are disposed to be ugly, and the sooner Galveston can be occupied the better."*[6]

Upon his arrival in Galveston on June 19, 1865, Gen. Granger assumed command over the Military District of Texas and immediately set about the task of breaking the defunct Confederacy's grip over civil affairs in the state. To this end, Granger issued a number of orders establishing Union military control, the most famous of which was General Order No. 3.[7]

Granger's issuance of General Orders No. 3 secured his place in abolitionist history, for it was through that decree that the provisions of the Emancipation Proclamation were formally enforced in Texas for the first time. Granger dispatched his troops across Galveston on the 19th in a show

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[2] Gregory P. Downs, *After Appomattox: Military Occupation and the Ends of* War (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015) p. 41-42

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] William L. Richter "'It Is Best to Go in Strong-Handed': Army Occupation of Texas, 1865-1866." *Arizona and the West* 27, no. 2 (1985): p. 113-114. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40169408.

[5] Richter, "'It Is Best to Go in Strong-Handed': Army Occupation of Texas, 1865-1866." P. 115

[6] United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: a compilation of the official records of the Union and Confederate armies*. Series 1, Volume 48, Part 2 p. 841

[7] United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: a compilation of the official records of the Union and Confederate armies*. Series 1, Volume 48, Part 2 p. 929

of force, and his decree was announced to the public in a variety of places, including his headquarters at the Osterman Building, the local courthouse and customs house, and at least one Black church.[8]

The full text of General Orders No. 3 is as follows:

The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and hired labor.

The freedmen are advised to remain quietly at their present homes and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts and that they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere.[9]

The Birth of Juneteenth and the Death of Slavery

Jubilant celebrations erupted in Galveston and rippled across Texas as the news of the Union's military occupation and enforcement measures swept the Lone Star state. Pierce Harper, an enslaved man held in bondage in northeast Texas, recalled the arrival of emancipation in the summer of 1865 thusly: *"When peace come [Federal authorities] read the 'mancipation law to the cullud people and they stayed up half the night…, singing and shouting. They spent that night singin' and shoutin'. They wasn't slaves no more."*[10]

Known alternatively as Jubilee Day and Emancipation Day, Juneteenth (a portmanteau of "June" and "Nineteenth") became one of multiple local holidays commemorating the official end of slavery at different points across the South. Originally commemorated annually most commonly in Galveston, over the years and through successive waves of migration Juneteenth spread to the rest of Texas and eventually the country at large.[11]

In order to enforce the Emancipation Proclamation in Texas, the Union began to garrison the state. However, even as tens of thousands of troops poured into Texas, orders from the Adjutant General in Washington instructed Sheridan to muster out all troops with less than four months remaining in their enlistments.[12] Since the longest-serving units were generally all-white (as most units of United States Colored Infantry were first constituted fairly late in the war), this policy transformed the occupying force into one overwhelmingly composed of Black soldiers, many of whom were former slaves liberated by the Emancipation Proclamation. By January

[8] "Juneteenth and General Order No. 3" Galveston Historical Foundation, June 13, 2021, https://www.galvestonhistory.org/news/juneteenth-and-general-order-no-3

[9] United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: a compilation of the official records of the Union and Confederate armies*. Series 1, Volume 48, Part 2 p. 929

[10] Pierce Harper, in Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938, Texas Narratives, File 420163, Volume 16, Part 2, p. 111, Library of Congress, American Memory

[11] Shennette Garrett-Scott, Rebecca Cummings Richardson, and Venita Dillard-Allen. "'When Peace Come': Teaching the Significance of Juneteenth." *Black History Bulletin* 76, no. 2 (2013): p. 19.

[12] Mark L. Bradley, *The Army and Reconstruction, 1865-1877,* The U.S. Army Campaigns of the Civil War (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2015) p. 15

1866, Sheridan commanded around 6,500 white and nearly 20,000 Black soldiers throughout the Gulf states.[13]

The people of Texas, residing in the last bastion of slavery in the former Confederacy, were not pleased by the position of authority occupied by the Union's Black volunteer troops, such as the all-Black XXV Corps. Throughout Texas, race riots, murders, and other acts of violence directed towards the occupying Black troops were commonplace; despite these provocations, Black units generally comported themselves with distinction, especially when compared to some of their all-white counterparts.

A particularly shameful episode is that of the Regular 17th Infantry and the Volunteer 10th Colored Infantry, both of which occupied Galveston in the year after the issuance of General Order No. 3. Members of the 17th rampaged through the city, often while under the influence or in pursuit of alcohol. They routinely beat civilians, pillaged with abandon, and engaged in street brawling with members of the 10th Colored Infantry (as well as other Black units passing through Galveston). So bad was their conduct that only the intervention of Major General Horatio G. Wright (Granger's successor as commander of the Military District of Texas) prevented a race war. The 10th Colored Infantry, to their credit, made such a positive impression upon the residents of Galveston that their departure in May of 1866 provoked a public expression of admiration from the city's white-run newspaper.[14]

A Legacy of Liberty

The situation in Texas was a microcosm of that which persisted across the South in the earliest years of Reconstruction. Through the summer of 1866, Black soldiers kept the peace in the former Confederacy while the Army reoriented from large-scale warfare to military occupation; in the process they fended off threats from revanchist Southerners and even from their white compatriots as they helped build a foundation for the post-emancipation South.

As the United States celebrates Juneteenth and the end of slavery's institutions, the U.S. Army remembers its role in the liberation of enslaved persons throughout the Confederacy as one of its core legacies. Army actions taken to enforce the terms of the Emancipation Proclamation proved that the war was not merely about states' rights, but fundamental issues of justice, morality, and humanity.

Equally important to the Army's legacy are those Black Americans, whether they were born free or in bondage, who took up the cause of liberty themselves by enlisting in the Army. The Black soldiers who held the South in the immediate aftermath of the war, like the XXV Corps and the 10th Colored Infantry, helped cement the gains provided by the Civil War for the duration of Reconstruction, and opened the door to widespread Black military service for the first time in American history.

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[13] Bradley, *The Army and Reconstruction, 1865-1877,* p. 15-16; John Y. Simons, ed. *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), Volume 15, p. 451

[14] Richter, "'It Is Best to Go in Strong-Handed': Army Occupation of Texas, 1865-1866." p. 137-140