

Juneteenth National Independence Day: A New Federal Holiday

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On June 17, 2021, President Joe Biden [signed the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act](#) (P.L. 117-17) into law. It had passed the [Senate](#) on June 15 and the [House of Representatives](#) on June 16. The act amends [Section 6103\(a\)](#), Title 5 of the *United States Code* to designate June 19 as Juneteenth National Independence Day.

In the 117th Congress, two companion bills—H.R. 1320 and S. 475—were both introduced on February 25, 2021. In the 116th Congress (2019-2020), [legislation was introduced](#) to create a federal holiday and the [House](#) and [Senate](#) also agreed to resolutions honoring Juneteenth. Legislation to designate Juneteenth as a federal holiday had not been introduced prior to the 116th Congress.

After he signed P.L. 117-17 (S. 475) into law, President Biden [issued a proclamation](#) to celebrate the observance of Juneteenth. In part, the proclamation read

On June 19, 1865—nearly nine decades after our Nation’s founding, and more than 2 years after President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation—enslaved Americans in Galveston, Texas, finally received word that they were free from bondage. As those who were formerly enslaved were recognized for the first time as citizens, Black Americans came to commemorate Juneteenth with celebrations across the country, building new lives and a new tradition that we honor today. In its celebration of freedom, Juneteenth is a day that should be recognized by all Americans. And that is why I am proud to have consecrated Juneteenth as our newest national holiday.

On June 17, 2021, the [United States Office of Personnel Management](#) (OPM) issued [guidance on the recognition of Juneteenth National Independence Day](#) in the federal workplace. In addition to providing guidance on the application of the federal holiday to various employment categories, OPM noted that Juneteenth fell on a Saturday in 2021, and that the holiday would be observed on Friday, June 18, the same “[in lieu of](#)” policy employed when other federal holidays fall on a weekend.

Juneteenth

On June 19, 1865, Major General Gordon Granger of the Union Army issued [General Order No. 3](#) in Galveston, TX. The order [announced to the people of Texas](#) that the [Emancipation Proclamation’s](#) freeing of enslaved people in the Confederate states was in effect. Specifically, General Order No. 3 stated

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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 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.

Since the issuance of General Order No. 3, the observance of [Juneteenth](#) on June 19 has evolved. Today, 49 states and the District of Columbia have passed legislation recognizing Juneteenth as a holiday or observance (see Table 1 in CRS Report R44865, *Juneteenth: Fact Sheet*, by Erin M. Smith).

Federal Holidays

With the enactment of S. 475 and the creation of the Juneteenth National Independence Day, the United States now has [12 permanent federal holidays](#), codified at [5 U.S.C. §6103](#). They are, in the order they appear in the calendar, New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday, Inauguration Day (every four years following a presidential election), George Washington's Birthday, Memorial Day, Juneteenth National Independence Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Columbus Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day. Although frequently called public or national days, these observances are only legally applicable to federal employees and the District of Columbia, as the states individually decide their own legal holidays (see [5 C.F.R. §610.202](#)). According to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), for the public holidays codified at 5 U.S.C. §6103, "[full-time employees who are not required to work on a holiday receive their rate of basic pay for the applicable number of holiday hours.](#)"

The first four federal holidays were created in 1870, when Congress granted paid time off to federal workers in the District of Columbia for [New Year's Day](#), [Independence Day](#), [Thanksgiving Day](#), and [Christmas Day](#). In 1880, [George Washington's Birthday](#) was added. In 1941, Congress specifically designated the fourth Thursday of November as the official date for the observance of Thanksgiving. Prior to that time, Thanksgiving was recognized either on the third or fourth Thursday of November.

Since 1888, Congress has added seven federal holidays, creating [Decoration Day](#) (now Memorial Day) in 1888, [Labor Day](#) in 1894, [Armistice Day](#) (now Veterans Day) in 1938, [Inauguration Day](#) in 1957 (quadrennially and only celebrated in the District of Columbia), [Columbus Day](#) in 1968, [Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday](#) in 1983, and [Juneteenth National Independence Day](#) in 2021. Further, in 1968, the [Uniform Monday Holiday Act](#) was enacted to "provide for uniform annual observances" of Washington's Birthday (referred to as Presidents' Day by many states and municipalities), Memorial Day, and Veterans Day. Additionally, the Monday Holiday Law established Columbus Day to be celebrated on the second Monday in October. In 1975, [Congress returned](#) the Veterans Day observance to November 11.

For more information on federal holidays, see CRS Report R41990, *Federal Holidays: Evolution and Current Practices*, by Jacob R. Straus.

Author Information

Jacob R. Straus
Specialist on the Congress

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