

Montana Juneteenth 2015 in Billings: a Great Celebration

Mike Yakawich
June 25, 2015



Hello Friends:

Here are some photos on our Juneteenth program today.

As we often talk about race relations (from Ferguson to Charleston) and our thoughts on them, we are grateful for the relationships we have among and within our community here in Billings. Pastor Melvin Terry is the Chair of the Black Heritage Foundation and I am a Board member. The BHF spearheaded this event. GPF was a partner. Jim Ronquillo, Jake Romero, Peanuts and many others worked so hard to make this a great event.

Today we had many people from the African American community as well as Native American, Hispanic, Asian and European decent. We respected, appreciated and for many loved each other as family.

One outcome was a commitment to address racial tensions in other communities by working together and coming together on such events. We keep building our partnerships and collaboration.

Yours,

Mike Yakawich



Juneteenth Celebration: Billings, Montana

June 20, 2015 At South Park



Welcome and M.C.: Mike Yakawich
City Council Ward 1

Prayer: Rev. Paul Reeder
BHF Treasurer

Welcoming Remarks: Pastor Melvin Terry
Chair: Black Heritage Foundation

History of Juneteenth:

Mr. Robert Brown/BHF Membership Chairman

Black Heritage Foundation Regular Meeting

- Secretary & Treasurer's Report
 - Old Business
 - New Business
- Election of Officers

Closing Words:

Closing Prayer:

Thank you all for attending. Enjoy the Potluck Picnic and BBQ & Cake Walk. We appreciate the Issac G. and the Motivators & the Brick House Band for performing & the City of Billings for the use of the South Park Gazebo and the support of all the many residents of Billings, MT. Enjoy your meal and let's keep celebrating freedom all year round. God Bless!

For more information on the Black Heritage Foundation please call Pastor Melvin Terry at at 406-690-3644 or allnationschurch@bresnan.net

Juneteenth is the oldest known celebration commemorating the ending of slavery in the United States. Dating back to 1865, it was on **June 19th** that the Union soldiers, led by **Major General Gordon Granger**, landed at **Galveston, Texas** with news that the war had ended and that the **enslaved were now free**. Note that this was **two and a half years after** President Lincoln's **Emancipation Proclamation** - which had **become official January 1, 1863**. The Emancipation Proclamation had little impact on the Texans due to the minimal number of Union troops to enforce the new **Executive Order**. However, with the **surrender of General Lee in April of 1865**, and the **arrival of General Granger's regiment**, the **forces** were finally strong enough to **influence** and **overcome the resistance**.

Later attempts to explain this **two and a half year delay** in the receipt of this important news have yielded **several versions** that have been handed down through the years. Often told is the story of a messenger who was **murdered** on his way to Texas with the news of freedom. Another, is that the news was **deliberately withheld** by the enslavers to maintain the labor force on the plantations. And still another, is that federal troops actually waited for the slave owners to reap the benefits of **one last cotton harvest** before going to Texas to enforce the Emancipation Proclamation. All of which, or neither of these version could be true. Certainly, for some, **President Lincoln's authority** over the rebellious states was in question. For whatever the reasons, conditions in Texas **remained status quo** well beyond what was statutory.

General Order Number 3

One of General Granger's first orders of business was to read to the people of Texas, **General Order Number 3** which began most significantly with:

"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 rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and free laborer."

The **reactions to this profound news** ranged from pure **shock** to immediate **jubilation**. While many lingered to learn of this new employer to employee relationship, many left before these offers were completely off the lips of their former 'masters' - attesting to the varying conditions on the plantations and the realization of freedom. **Even with nowhere to go**, many felt that leaving the plantation would be their first grasp of freedom. North was a logical destination and for many it represented true freedom, while the **desire to reach family members in neighboring states** drove the some into Louisiana, Arkansas and Oklahoma. Settling into these new areas as free men and women brought on new realities and **the challenges of establishing a heretofore non-existent status for black people in America**. Recounting the memories of that great day in June of 1865 and its festivities would serve as motivation as well as a release from the growing pressures encountered in their new territory. The celebration of **June 19th was coined "Juneteenth"** and grew with more participation from descendants. **The Juneteenth celebration was a time for reassuring each other, for praying and for gathering remaining family members.** Juneteenth continued to be highly revered in Texas decades later, with many former slaves and descendants making an **annual pilgrimage back to Galveston** on this date.

