

Al Edwards
state representative
district 146



I had the honor and privilege of successfully sponsoring House Bill 1016 in the 66th Texas Legislature which made Emancipation Day "Juneteenth" an official state holiday.

This accomplishment was not without difficulties. Some pseudo — sophisticates asserted that I had ignorantly chosen the wrong day. Other critics charged that the whole effort was trivial — it would neither alleviate the suffering of the poor nor ameliorate the effects of racism; indeed, that it would perpetuate cliches about red soda water and watermelons.

June 19, 1865 was, of course, the day slavery ended in Texas and for that reason its anniversary has always been celebrated not only in Texas but also in bordering areas of Louisiana, Arkansas and Oklahoma.

The official recognition of Emancipation Day is a significant step forward. It is a symbol and symbols are important. What are the cross and the flag but symbols. I believe the Biblical injunction that "It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness." I feel that for a state which not too long ago celebrated Jefferson Davis' Birthday, now to celebrate the end of slavery means that many have now seen the light of someone's candle. This is a holiday not just for Black Texans but for all Texans. This is a day to take pride in our culture and history.

Freedom is worth celebrating and I am pleased that we in Texas have been celebrating it for 115 years. I am proud that the celebration is now official and that I had a part in making it so.

Al Edwards

State Representative Al Edwards
June 1, 1980

P.O. Box 2910
Austin, Texas 78769
(512) 475-5847

AL EDWARDS
state representative
District 85

4913 Griggs Road
Houston, Texas 77021
(713) 741-6700



66th LEGISLATURE—REGULAR SESSION

Ch. 481

EMANCIPATION DAY IN TEXAS—HOLIDAYS

CHAPTER 481

H. B. No. 1016

An Act relating to a declaration of Emancipation Day in Texas as a legal holiday.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Texas:

Section 1. Article 4591, Revised Civil Statutes of Texas, 1925, as amended, is amended⁶⁴ to read as follows:

Art. 4591. Enumeration

The first day of January, the 19th day of January, the third Monday in February, the second day of March, the 21st day of April, the last Monday in May, the 19th day of June, the fourth day of July, the 27th day of August, the first Monday in September, the second Monday in October, the 11th day of November, the fourth Thursday in November, and the 25th day of December, of each year, and every day on which an election is held throughout the state, are declared legal holidays, on which all the public offices of the state may be closed and shall be considered and treated as Sunday for all purposes regarding the presenting for the payment or acceptance and of protesting for and giving notice of the dishonor of bills of exchange, bank checks and promissory notes placed by the law upon the footing of bills of exchange. The nineteenth day of January shall be known as "Confederate Heroes Day" in honor of Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee and other Confederate heroes. The 19th day of June is designated "Emancipation Day in Texas" in honor of the emancipation of the slaves in Texas on June 19, 1865.

Sec. 2. This Act takes effect January 1, 1980.

Sec. 3. The importance of this legislation and the crowded condition of the calendars in both houses create an emergency and an imperative public necessity that the constitutional rule requiring bills to be read on three several days in each house be suspended, and this rule is hereby suspended.

Passed by the House on May 4, 1979, by a non-record vote; House concurred in Senate amendments to H.B. No. 1016 on May 26, 1979, by a non-record vote; passed by the Senate, with amendments, on May 25, 1979: Yeas 29, Nays 1.

Approved June 7, 1979.

Effective Jan. 1, 1980.

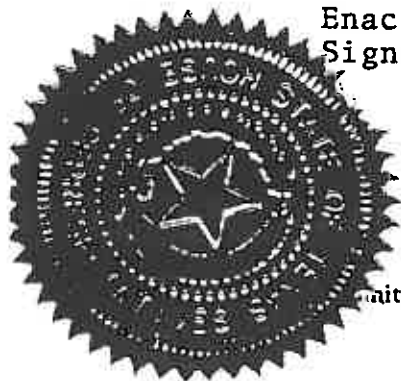
⁶⁴. Vernon's Ann.Civ.St. art. 4591.

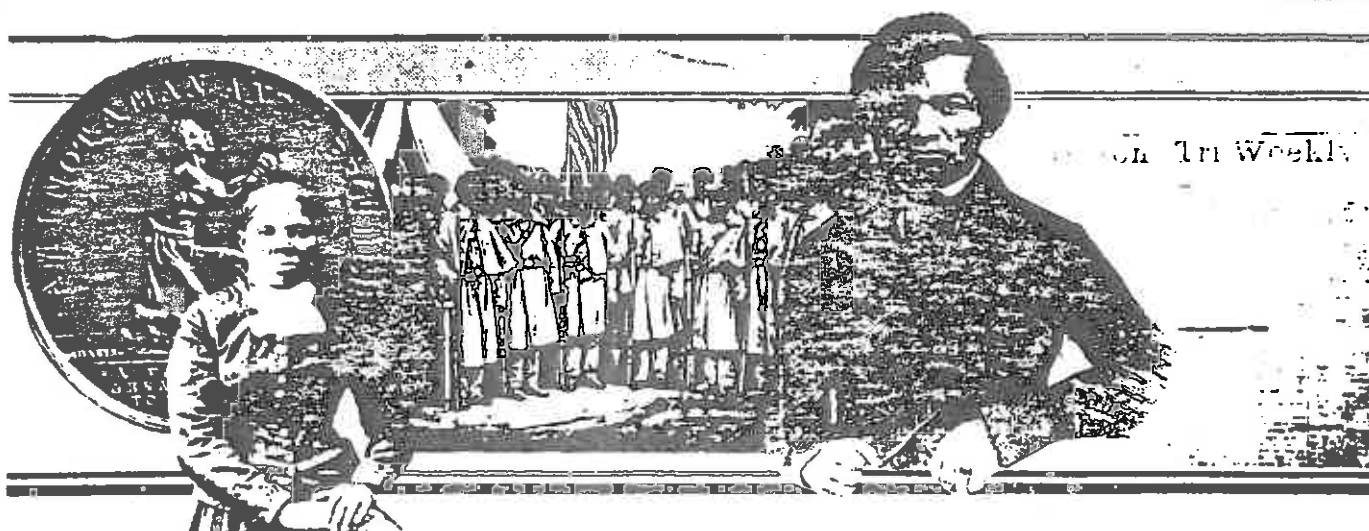
Enacted by Representative Al Edwards
Signed by Governor William P. Clements, Jr.
on June 13, 1979.

Happy Juneteenth!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Al Edwards".

Committees: Human Services; Intergovernmental Affairs; Co-chairman of Freshman Caucus





The New JUNETEENTH

Freedom is a cherished word to all humanity, particularly to those in bondage. On January 1, 1863, as church bells extolled the news that President Lincoln had issued his promised Emancipation Proclamation, slaves and sympathizers in Boston, Washington, Richmond, New York, and other cities danced in the streets, sang praises unto God, and cried tears of joy.

Although General Robert E. Lee surrendered his confederate army on April 9, 1865, the Trans - Mississippi Department States, under the leadership of Texas generals and officials had already set into motion schemes for prolonging the war in the Southwest. Federal forces smothered their efforts and General Kirby Smith surrendered the Confederate holdouts at Galveston Bay on June 2, 1863.

Thirty months after President Lincoln had signed the Emancipation Proclamation, General Gordon Granger, who had been placed in command of the Federal occupation troops, arrived at Galveston Bay, June 19, 1865. He issued GENERAL ORDER NO. 3 -EMANCIPATION. This was the birth of Juneteenth in Texas.

Juneteenth Celebrations were held informally for 114 years. In 1978 State Representative Al Edwards of Houston, Texas envisioned that blacks could have a formal celebration of emancipation from slavery. During his first year as a legislator he authored the most meaningful piece of legislation for the black community that had ever existed in the history of Texas or any other state. He wrote and lobbied to get passed into law the bill making June 19th a legal state holiday, the first official black holiday in the United States. After numerous setbacks and hard work Rep. Edwards pushed the bill through successful votes of the Texas House of Representatives and Senate within the last twenty-four hours of Texas' 66th Legislative Session. At a memorable and historical ceremony on the grounds of Texas' State Capitol in Austin, Texas, hundreds of supporters witnessed the bill's being signed into law by Governor William P. Clements on June 13, 1979. As a result of Rep. Edwards' efforts, Texans now witness the "NEW CELEBRATION OF JUNETEENTH," an Official State Holiday.

JUNETEENTH U.S.A.

4913 Griggs - Houston, Texas 77021
(713) 741-1900