



TRIAD CULTURAL ARTS

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STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF JUNE 19 “JUNETEENTH” AS AN OFFICIAL WINSTON-SALEM CITY HOLIDAY

On January 1, 1863, President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation declared that all slaves within any confederate state or designated part of a confederate state shall be freed. His proclamation did not free enslaved persons within Union states, states that did not join the confederacy, or Union occupied areas of Louisiana and Tennessee. This moral compromise was tragic for African Americans across the nation.

It was more than two years, that on June 19, 1865, in Galveston, Texas, President Lincoln’s proclamation would end what remained of slavery in the United States. In 1866, one year later Juneteenth was a formalized celebration which not only served to celebrate freedom but as a way to gather lost family members, to give voting instructions to newly freedmen and to assess progress that had been made.

Today, Juneteenth is widely recognized and celebrated nationwide in 47 states and the District of Columbia. It symbolizes a time for our community to remember the history of African Americans in this nation, to teach the next generation of its cultural significance, and celebrate our freedom. Local celebrations in Winston-Salem started as early as 1999 and have been observed annually in our community in some form since that time.

We fully acknowledge that the enactment of a Juneteenth holiday cannot repair the breach with Black Americans and we call for reparations be considered along with the institution of the Juneteenth holiday. Our City’s recognition of Juneteenth as an official holiday will not only be a step towards reconciling the systematic racism that stems from our nation’s greatest sin – slavery, but a catalyst to address the disparities in education, housing, employment, healthcare, policing, disproportionate incarceration and inequities in our system.

At its July 21 meeting, the Greensboro City Council unanimously approved Juneteenth as a paid holiday for City employees beginning in 2021, joining other North Carolina cities. The State of Massachusetts; Austin, Texas; Augusta, Georgia; and universities and municipalities across the nation have approved Juneteenth Independence Day as an official, paid holiday.

Our City should move forward in these efforts to approve Juneteenth as an official paid holiday for city employees and day of observance.

The recognition celebrates the core values of our nation, liberty and freedom.