



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

June 18, 2021

**Juneteenth**

FRESNO—The Fresno County Democratic Party applauds President Biden’s signature on the legislation passed by Congress to make Juneteenth a federal holiday. Tomorrow, June 19, will be the first time this important date will be officially enshrined on the national level. It is both a joyous and bittersweet day, as we can celebrate a victory for the righteous liberation of millions while remembering the founding sins of our nation’s past that rendered such liberation necessary.

This holiday celebrates the victory not only of freedom over enslavement but also of truth over lies. For the defeated slaveowners of Texas tried to hide the truth from Black Texans that they were free men and women—free Americans. Juneteenth represents the day that the truth of emancipation finally reached the formerly enslaved people of Texas, years after the passage of the original proclamation, and months after the surrender of the Confederacy marked the official end of the Civil War.

The announcement by the U.S. Army in Texas on June 19 represents the moment when the last major group of Americans achieved their freedom from centuries of chattel slavery. Since then, that date has been honored as Freedom Day, Liberation Day or Emancipation Day, but is most commonly known by the shorthand name informally given to it by many of America’s Black communities.

On that date 156 years ago, the truth won over attempts to suppress it. On that day, Black Americans celebrated that after centuries of struggle they had won a monumental step toward equality. Even to this day we can join in that wonderful celebration.

However, we also cannot forget what came next. After that first flourishing of Black liberty and political influence during reconstruction, once the federal government withdrew its heavy control over the southern states, Jim Crow rose.

Voting restriction laws passed in the name of election security erased the political power of Black communities and ensured that the first crop of Black southern elected officials was the last for 100 years.

When federal aid to emancipated slaves did not materialize, uncountable numbers were forced into sharecropping arrangements with White landowners, similar to the slavery they had labored under prior to the war. The “right to discriminate” gave rise to the apartheid reign of “separate but equal.”

It is vital that we remember the true shape and nature of the past, both its glory and its pain. To be a progressive means always striving to help your fellows escape the grasp of injustice rooted in that history we share. But while we fight for tomorrow, celebrations like this are what keep us going. Days where we can celebrate that people in need of freedom and truth finally found a victory.

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