

Holidays: Juneteenth, MLK Day, Kwanzaa, and more

Juneteenth

Juneteenth is the oldest known celebration of the ending of slavery. It was the name given to emancipation day by the slaves in Texas. On June 19, 1865, the Union Major General Gordon Granger proclaimed that the war had ended and the slaves were free. This took place two and a half years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Juneteenth is a time for celebrating freedom and encouraging self-development and respect for all cultures. African Americans gather with loved ones and celebrate with prayer, guest speakers, barbecues, parades, dancing, rodeos, fishing, picnics, and baseball. Institutions such as the Smithsonian, the Henry Ford Museum, and others have sponsored Juneteenth activities. Texas declared June 19th a legal state holiday in 1980. Since that time Juneteenth celebrations have been growing across the nation.

For more information about Juneteenth you can contact your local community centers, libraries or see printed version for web site address.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday is January 15th. In 1983, fifteen years after Dr. King's death, Congress decided to celebrate this day. All did not agree with this decision. The first national celebration took place on January 20, 1986. Dr. King's birthday is celebrated on the first Monday on or after January 15th each year.

This day is one of celebration for Dr. King's dedication to the fight for equality, dignity, and freedom for all—regardless of color or nationality. Dr. King began his career in civil rights when Mrs. Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give her seat to a white man on a public bus. Dr. King and other community leaders decided to protest this treatment. This event became known as the Montgomery Boycott. Martin Luther King Jr. incited his followers to take action without resorting to violence, to love the people whose hatred would cost him his life.

Kwanzaa

This holiday has roots in ancient Africa. However, activist Maulana Jarengato developed this holiday in 1966 for the purpose of strengthening and uniting African communities throughout the world. The word *Kwanzaa* comes from the phrase "matunda ya kwanza" which means "first fruits" in Swahili. Jarengato added the extra "a" to distinguish the holiday as African American.

Kwanzaa celebrates family, community, and culture. It is a seven-day holiday celebrated with poetry, dancing, singing, drumming and other music, feasting, dialogue

and rituals. It begins on December 26th and ends on January 1st. Kwanzaa is based on seven principles that are (1) unity (2) self-determination (3) collective work and responsibility (4) cooperative economics (5) purpose (6) creativity and (7) faith.

Each day of the holiday is devoted to the celebration of one of these principles. Family members gather around the celebration table to read the seven principles while the youngest child lights one of the candles. They discuss the significance of each principle in their lives. For more information about Kwanzaa celebrations see printed version for web site address

More Holidays

Malcolm X Day-- May 19th

African Liberation Day-- May 25th

Marcus Garvey's Birthday-- August 17th

Kuuma-- Jan 31st

Ancestor Honor Day-- Last Saturday in May

Sources:

Barbara Eklof (1997). *For Every Season*. HarperCollins Publishers

See printed version for web site address.