

Assembly Concurrent Resolution

No. 197

Introduced by Assembly Member Weber
(Coauthors: Assembly Members Burke, Cooper, Gipson, Holden,
Jones-Sawyer, Kamlager, and McCarty)
(Coauthors: Senators Bradford and Mitchell)

May 22, 2020

Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 197—Relative to Juneteenth.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

ACR 197, as introduced, Weber. Juneteenth.

This measure would recognize June 19, 2020, as Juneteenth and would urge the people of California to join in celebrating Juneteenth as a day to honor and reflect on the significant role that African Americans have played in the history of the United States and how they have enriched society through their steadfast commitment to promoting unity and equality.

Fiscal committee: no.

1 WHEREAS, Juneteenth, also known as “Juneteenth
2 Independence Day,” “Emancipation Day,” “Emancipation
3 Celebration,” and “Freedom Day,” is the oldest African American
4 holiday observance in the United States; and

5 WHEREAS, Juneteenth, or June 19, 1865, is considered the
6 date when the last slaves in America were freed when General
7 Gordon Granger rode into Galveston, Texas, and issued General
8 Order No. 3, almost two and one-half years after President Lincoln
9 issued the Emancipation Proclamation; and

1 WHEREAS, 2020 marks 155 years of freedom celebrations;
2 and

3 WHEREAS, Juneteenth commemorates the strong survival
4 instinct of African Americans who were first brought to this
5 country stacked and shackled in the bottom of slave ships in a
6 monthlong journey across the Atlantic Ocean known as the “Middle
7 Passage”; and

8 WHEREAS, August 2019 marked 400 years since the first
9 arrival of Africans to colonial America, and the United States
10 Congress has established the 400 Years of African-American
11 History Commission to commemorate the historic heritage and
12 contributions that Americans of African descent have made to help
13 shape the cultural, academic, social, economic, and moral attributes
14 of this nation; and

15 WHEREAS, In August 1619 the first documented Africans
16 arrived in the English colony of Virginia. The group, recorded
17 upon arrival as “20 and odd Negros,” was part of a larger group
18 of West Africans enslaved by Portuguese slave traders. They were
19 on their way to Veracruz, Mexico, aboard a Spanish ship when
20 they were captured off the coast of Mexico by an English privateer
21 ship and transported to Virginia, where they were put ashore at
22 what is now Hampton, Virginia, and sold as involuntary laborers
23 or indentured servants; and

24 WHEREAS, Slavery had not yet been institutionalized, so the
25 Africans were informed they would work under contract for a
26 certain period of time before being granted freedom and the rights
27 afforded other settlers. However, while European indentured
28 servants were listed along with their year of expected freedom, no
29 such information accompanied the names of the African indentured
30 servants; and

31 WHEREAS, On September 22, 1862, President Lincoln issued
32 the celebrated Emancipation Proclamation, warning the rebellious
33 Confederate States that he would declare their slaves “forever free”
34 if those states did not return to the Union by January 1, 1863.
35 Enforcement of the Emancipation Proclamation occurred only in
36 Confederate States that were under Union Army control; and

37 WHEREAS, Even after the lapse of California’s Fugitive Slave
38 Law in 1855, masters informally held enslaved people in California
39 until 1864, and it was not until June 28, 1864, that all fugitive slave
40 laws were officially repealed; and

1 WHEREAS, Prior to the end of the Civil War, on January 31,
2 1865, Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment to the United
3 States Constitution, which abolished slavery throughout the United
4 States and its territories. Spontaneous celebrations erupted
5 throughout the country when African Americans learned of their
6 freedom; and

7 WHEREAS, Texas, as a part of the Confederacy, was resistant
8 to the Emancipation Proclamation. But on June 18, 1865, Union
9 troops arrived in Galveston, Texas, to take possession of the state
10 and enforce the emancipation of its slaves. Former slaves in
11 Galveston rejoiced in the streets with jubilant celebrations. The
12 following day, June 19th, became known as “Juneteenth,” a name
13 derived from a portmanteau of the words “June” and “nineteenth.”
14 Juneteenth celebrations began in Texas the following year; and

15 WHEREAS, Juneteenth education and celebrations declined in
16 America in the early part of the 20th century. But the Civil Rights
17 Movement of the 1950s and 1960s saw a resurgence of interest in
18 Juneteenth, along with renewed community celebrations of the
19 day; and

20 WHEREAS, A growing number of American and African
21 American cultural institutions have sponsored Juneteenth cultural
22 events designed to make all Americans aware of this celebration,
23 including the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of
24 American History in Washington, D.C., the Chicago Historical
25 Society, the Black Archives of Mid-America, Inc., in Kansas City,
26 Missouri, the California African American Museum in Los
27 Angeles, California, the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield
28 Village in Detroit, Michigan, the African American Museum in
29 Dallas, Texas, and the National Juneteenth Observance Foundation.
30 Juneteenth celebrations are a tribute to those African Americans
31 who fought so long for freedom and worked so hard to make the
32 dream of equality a reality; and

33 WHEREAS, California law requires the Governor to proclaim
34 the third Saturday in June of each year to be known as “Juneteenth
35 National Freedom Day: A day of observance,” to urge all
36 Californians in celebrating this day to honor and reflect on the
37 significant roles that African-Americans have played in the history
38 of the United States and how African-Americans have enriched
39 society through their steadfast commitment to promoting freedom,
40 brotherhood, and equality; and

1 WHEREAS, Juneteenth commemorates African American
2 freedom and emphasizes education and achievement. It is a day,
3 a week, and in some areas, a month marked with celebrations,
4 guest speakers, picnics, and family gatherings. It is a time for
5 reflection and rejoicing. It is a time for assessment,
6 self-improvement, and for planning the future; now, therefore, be
7 it

8 *Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate*
9 *thereof concurring*, That the Legislature of the State of California
10 hereby recognizes June 19, 2020, as Juneteenth; and be it further

11 *Resolved*, That the Legislature urges the people of California to
12 join in celebrating Juneteenth as a day to honor and reflect on the
13 significant role that African Americans have played in the history
14 of the United States and how they have enriched society through
15 their steadfast commitment to promoting unity and equality; and
16 be it further

17 *Resolved*, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies
18 of this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.