

Juneteenth, a new federal holiday

June 18, 2021

In news

The US President Joe Biden is likely to sign legislation designating June 19, or “Juneteenth,” a federally recognised national holiday marking the end of slavery following the American Civil War (1861-65).

Key updates

A bill to establish Juneteenth National Independence Day received bipartisan support in both houses of the US Congress this week, and now needs to be approved by the White House to become law. The legislation comes a year after the killing of George Floyd triggered anti-racism protests across the country, bringing about a national reckoning on systemic racism.

June 19th(Juneteenth) in the history of USA

- It was on June 19, 1865, two months after the Civil War had ended, Major General Gordon Granger, from the victorious Union side, had issued an order to free the last enslaved people on US soil.
- Since then, Juneteenth has become a largely symbolic date representing freedom for African Americans.
- In the state of Texas, the first Juneteenth celebration started from 1866, with community-centric events such as parades, cookouts, prayer gatherings, historical and cultural readings and musical performances.
- Juneteenth was recognised as an official holiday in Texas on January 1, 1980.
- As per the National Juneteenth Observance Foundation (NJOFF), the era of the “Modern Juneteenth Movement”

began in 1994 when a group of Juneteenth leaders from across the country gathered in New Orleans, Louisiana, to work towards the greater recognition of Juneteenth.

- Juneteenth– the portmanteau of June and nineteenth– is the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the ending of slavery in the US, observed on June 19 every year.
- Currently, it is recognised as a holiday in 47 US states and the District of Columbia.
- It is also known as Emancipation Day or **Juneteenth Independence Day**.
- The Emancipation Proclamation, signed by then-President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863, declared that “all persons held as slaves” within the states of rebellion “are, and henceforward shall be free.”

Significance of the move

Juneteenth will be the first new federal holiday created in almost four decades, and will now enjoy the same status as the 10 existing annual holidays, which include Memorial Day, Veterans Day and Thanksgiving. The last such holiday Martin Luther King Jr. Day – was created in 1983, in honour of the civil rights hero.