

HOUSE BILL 1626

By Parkinson

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 15,
relative to Juneteenth.

WHEREAS, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which became official on January 1, 1863. Although the intention was to change the federal legal status of more than 3.5 million enslaved African Americans in areas of the Confederacy that were not under the control of the Union forces, the Confederacy did not actually recognize President Lincoln's authority; and

WHEREAS, two and one-half years after the Emancipation Proclamation took effect, Major General Gordon Granger and Union forces arrived in Galveston, Texas, two months after the official end of the Civil War. Since Texas was isolated geographically and strategically, it was the last territory to receive news of the proclamation; and

WHEREAS, on June 19, 1865, in Galveston, Major Granger announced to the people of Texas that "all slaves are free," which "involves an absolute equality of rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and hired labor"; and

WHEREAS, in honor of Major Granger's announcement, June 19th has been recognized in African-American communities as "Juneteenth" for more than a century; and

WHEREAS, in the early years, little interest existed outside African-American communities, but the annual celebrations flourished until economic and cultural forces caused a decline in participation for a number of years; and

WHEREAS, although July 4th marks the American colonies' 1776 Declaration of Independence from Britain, the Founding Fathers did not include America's enslaved people among "all men" who had been "created equal," and with an already established independence

holiday, a rise in patriotism focused more on July 4th with little acknowledgment of June 19th;
and

WHEREAS, in addition, classroom textbooks proclaimed President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, as the date signaling the end of slavery, and mentioned little or nothing at all on the impact of General Granger's arrival in Galveston on June 19, 1865; and

WHEREAS, in the 1950s and 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement brought a resurgence of recognition of the importance of June 19th, and Juneteenth ceremonies started to spread to areas that hadn't previously participated in the celebrations; and

WHEREAS, on January 1, 1980, Texas became the first state to formally recognize Juneteenth an official state holiday, and, today, most states recognize Juneteenth as a state holiday or a day of special observance; and

WHEREAS, institutions, including the Smithsonian and the Henry Ford Museum, have begun sponsoring Juneteenth-centered activities, and nationally, Juneteenth is observed to promote and cultivate knowledge and appreciation of African-American history and culture, to celebrate African-American freedom and achievement, and to encourage continuous self-development and respect for all cultures; and

WHEREAS, in House Joint Resolution 170, the 105th General Assembly recognized June 19, 2007, as Juneteenth Day and indicated a desire that the 19th day of each June thereafter be observed as Juneteenth Day in Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, the time has come for this State to officially recognize what Abraham Lincoln called in his Gettysburg Address "a new birth of freedom" by designating June 19 as a State holiday; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 15-1-101, is amended by adding the following language "June 19, known as Juneteenth;" immediately following the language "Decoration Day";.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.