

About JUNETEENTH

NYSNA recognizes and commemorates Juneteenth celebrating the emancipation of enslaved African Americans in the United States, and honors those who continue to advocate for racial justice, health equity, and workplace dignity.

NYSNA uplifts the significance of Juneteenth, as we stand in solidarity across organized labor and recognize its powerful and compelling call to action. As a union committed to social justice, NYSNA resists all forms of discrimination and works to secure equitable economic, social, and legal justice for all. Juneteenth is a day both to celebrate progress and to recommit to ensuring equity, equality, and justice in our communities and across the state.

■ What is Juneteenth and why do we observe it?

Juneteenth commemorates the effective end of slavery in the United States. Juneteenth (short for “June Nineteenth”) marks the day when union soldiers arrived in Galveston, Texas in 1865 and declared the freedom of more than 250,000 enslaved people. This took place more than two years after the Emancipation Proclamation, which ended slavery in the Confederate states, was signed in 1863. Juneteenth is a day of remembrance of the long, hard realities of slavery and subjugation, as well as a celebration of hard-won freedoms. It is a day to recognize and celebrate Black Americans, who have endured generations of brutal oppression, the ongoing trauma it caused and the persistent struggle for justice, dignity, equity and equal rights and opportunities. The realities and repercussions of racism, inequity, and injustice play out in our workplace and in patient care.

■ Why Juneteenth matters for nurses and health care providers as well as for our patients

Our patients’ health doesn’t occur in a vacuum. As healthcare providers, we know that the places where our patients are born, grow, live, and work have a profound impact on their health and health outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted that we are not all equally vulnerable to public health emergencies, and that racial and ethnic background, class, and profession, play huge roles when it comes to exposure, and as well as morbidity and mortality. Racism is a public health crisis, and the way it’s embedded in our institutions greatly impacts all aspects of our lives.

■ Why Juneteenth matters for unions and working people

Juneteenth is a unique holiday in that it was created by working people — specifically, by formerly enslaved Black people. It celebrates emancipation from slavery and the rejection of a system of forced labor based on race for the enrichment of a few at the top. Juneteenth became recognized as a federal holiday in 2021.

Unions are in a unique position as spaces where workers build power in numbers to demand our rights to labor and live in dignity with equitable access to opportunities.

■ Why Juneteenth is everyone’s issue

Racism, as it relates to labor, is a system of social control that divides workers in order to exploit and extract profit for the enrichment of the few at the top. Understanding that all workers have more in common and everything to gain by standing in solidarity and rejecting these constructs is our greatest source of power. While race is a social construct, racism and its impact are real and have been used to justify everything from slavery to Jim Crow segregation to the current obstacles to social and economic opportunities. Juneteenth is a reminder of our history and the legacy of forced labor, which continue to shape today’s economy, politics and overall society.

It is important to consider what kind of world we want to live in. As nurses and healthcare professionals, we are committed to quality care for all our patients and all our communities.

For more information contact NYSNA’s Labor Education Department at labored@nysna.org

