Juneteenth
Commemoration and Resistance

Learning Objectives:

• Students will be introduced to Frederick Douglass
• Learn about the end of slavery in the north and the south
• Develop an understanding of Juneteenth celebrations since 1866
• Learn about artist Faith Ringgold

Outcomes:

• Students will learn about the end of slavery in the north and south
• Students will develop an understanding of Juneteenth’s history
• Students will utilize critical thinking and visual skills by analyzing two pieces of contemporary artwork by Faith Ringgold

Associated Activities:

• Frederick Douglass and Suffrage Activity Pack
• Faith Ringgold Story Quilt
• Romare Bearden Mood Collage
Providing Context for Juneteenth
Introduction – What, to the American Slave, is your 4th of July?

Today, Frederick Douglass is remembered as one of the most prominent activists, authors, and public speakers of the 19th century. Born with slave status, he escaped north in 1838 at the age of 20 and rose to the forefront of the abolitionist movement. After the Emancipation Proclamation and the end of the Civil War, Douglass continued to advocate for human rights until his death in 1895.

When asked to speak at the Rochester Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Association’s July 4th Independence Day Celebration in 1852, Frederick Douglass agreed, but if he were to speak, it had to be on the 5th of July rather than the 4th. The speech he gave drew into question the hypocrisy of the United States and its celebration of freedom while the practice of slavery was still legal in southern states. Not only was the practice legal, but slavery was the basis of the South’s economy and culture. In his speech, his words forced the audience to confront “What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July?” Below is an excerpt from Douglass’s powerful speech, a full transcript can be accessed here.

Fellow-citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here to-day? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? and am I, therefore, called upon to bring our humble offering to the national altar, and to confess the benefits and express devout gratitude for the blessings resulting from your independence to us?

Learn more about the life and legacy of Frederick Douglass by visiting the National Park Service’s webpage for the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site and the Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress.
The End of Slavery in the South and the North

The South

10 years after Douglass gave his famous speech in Rochester, New York, Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared all slaves free as of January 1st, 1863. Even before the Emancipation Proclamation slaves were escaping and following the Union Army as it marched through the South influencing Lincoln’s decision. The Civil War continued until April 1865 when General Robert E. Lee surrendered at the Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia. The end of slavery did not come until two months later when Union Major General Gordon Granger marched into Galveston, Texas on June 19th, 1865 with news of emancipation. Granger’s army was approaching the many enslavers escaped to Texas to avoid emancipation and the advancement of the Union Army on the South. His declaration marked the official end of slavery in the United States.

Exactly one year later the first celebration took place in Texas to commemorate the end of slavery—this holiday is known as Juneteenth. Today, all but four states recognize June 19th as a holiday and there is a resolution to recognize it as a national holiday. Juneteenth has a rich history that helps us understand the African American struggle for freedom, justice, and equality that would continue through the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and is ongoing today as well.

The North

Though northern states had voted to abolish slavery within their borders by 1804, the n]North continued to benefit from the slave industry, especially since cotton was the first industrially produced product in northern textile mills. Other ways the North benefited from the slave industry:

- Northern merchants profited from cotton shipments overseas
  - Three quarters of the worlds cotton came from the American south

Figure 2 - The Acme Cotton Company was erected as a cotton mill in Killingly, Connecticut in 1846. The mill remained in active use until 1978. To learn more, click here.
- Northern bankers financed land for southern plantations
- Northern insurance companies insured slaves as they were seen as property

In Connecticut, as in many other northern states, the outlawing of slavery in 1804 did not mean its immediate end. A bill passed in 1784 outlawed slaves from being brought into the state and set up gradual emancipation by asserting that all children born slaves after March 1st of that year would be freed at the age of 25. In 1797, the age for freedom was reduced to 21. Slavery was not actually abolished in CT until 1848.

Gradual emancipation held children born after March 1st in servitude until they were in their early-to-mid-twenties and did not their free mothers, fathers, or any other relatives and adults. Despite this, Connecticut had 2,500 free Blacks by 1790 and 5,000 by 1800—most of whom born before 1784. Unwilling to accept these terms, enslaved people employed various tactics to earn their freedom, including negotiating with their owners for their release or through self-emancipation by escaping to freedom. A smaller number were assisted by white attorneys from the Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom.

**Juneteenth: Commemoration & Resistance**

Juneteenth is viewed by many Black Americans as their day of independence. Early celebrations in Texas were known as “Emancipation Day” or “Jubilee Day” and, only in the 1890s was the holiday called Juneteenth. By the early 1900s, Juneteenth celebrations in Texas, southeast Oklahoma, southwest Arkansas, and

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**Learn more:** Watch a 3-minute video that surveys the history of Juneteenth and its importance as an American and African American holiday.
Louisiana rivaled Independence Day celebrations. Parties included food, dance, sporting events, songs, and even fireworks. It was not only a commemorative event, but also a place where civic discussions about voting rights and the political process was happened.

Shortly after emancipation, in the Reconstruction Era, white Americans put into place restrictive laws, known as Black Codes, that attempted to disenfranchise Black Americans. Largescale celebrations that brought together entire communities became less frequent in the late 1910s due to the onset of the Jim Crow Era and segregation and racial discrimination. Just prior to World War II, Juneteenth celebrations were revived in Texas once again alongside the appeals for equal rights in the 1940s and 1950s. Further, during the Civil Rights Movement many African Americans made connections between their ancestor’s struggle for freedom and the continuing struggle for equal rights. For example, organizers of the Poor People’s March in 1968 held a Solidarity Day Rally in Washington, D.C. on Juneteenth, which roughly 75,000 people attended.

*Figure 4 - 1968 Solidarity Day Rally in front of the Lincoln Monument in Washington, D.C.*
https://www.dc1968project.com/

**Learn More:** The DC 1968 Project is a collection of 365 stories from Washington, D.C. in 1968. **Click here** to listen to Taquiena Boston, 14 years old at the time of the rally, read her diary entry from that day.
Faith Ringgold: Activism and Art

Juneteenth celebrations continue today and are a commemoration of the end of slavery in the United States, but the holiday’s history is also deeply rooted in civic dialogue about and activism for equal rights that began at the first Juneteenth celebration in 1866. This week’s associated activities are centered on African American artists, Faith Ringgold and Romare Bearden. Bearden, an influence on Ringgold early in her career believed that “an intense, eager devotion to present day life” was “the calling of the negro artist.” Both artists have done just that—their works are steeped in narrative and cover a range of topics from activism to the everyday happenings of their family. Like Bearden, Ringgold often celebrates aspects of American Black culture with bold and inviting colors. Her story quilts use fabric and cloth as the medium as Ringgold relates cloth with women’s work and the history of slavery. She often paints and adds text to her quilts to help communicate her narrative.

Art Analysis – Groovin High’ and We Came to America

Figure 5 - Groovin’ High, 1996
Questions for Consideration:

1. Ringgold’s work is just as often a celebration of Black life as it is a critique of modern society – when viewing each story quilt, which is a celebration? Which a critique?
2. What story is Ringgold trying to tell in each piece?
3. What “clues” can you use to support your answer?
4. How does the color of the fabrics used convey her story?

Learn More: Read a recent interview with Faith Ringgold to learn how she has used her artwork to respond to current events over the years and how the protests currently happening are influencing new artwork.