

My Newfound Historic Parade

By Emma Jackson

I am familiar with several well publicized parades:

1. The Tournament of Roses Parade or Rose Bowl Parade on January 1st in Pasadena, California, preceding a football game played between the two top football teams of the season.
2. Macy's Thanksgiving Parade preceding top colleges' football teams of the year.
3. The Mardi Gras Parade or "Fat Tuesday" preceding Ash Wednesday before Lenten season begins.

Specifically, in Denver we have parades including the:

1. Veterans Day, honoring veterans
2. Memorial Day, honoring those who lost their lives fighting for our country's freedom
3. St Patrick's Day, a celebration of Irish Culture and religion; remembering Ireland's Patron Saint who ministered Christianity in Ireland.

After 20 years in Denver I became acquainted with a parade in East Denver around the Historic Five Points Neighborhood called the "Juneteenth Day Parade." I'd never heard of "Juneteenth." Upon researching "Juneteenth" I learned that it is a festival held annually on the nineteenth of June by African Americans mostly (especially in the southern states - specifically in Texas) to commemorate emancipation from slavery in Texas on that date in 1865.

About Juneteenth:

1. President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation became official January 1, 1863.
2. There was a 2-½ year delay in the people of Texas getting the official word or executive order to end slavery in Texas.
3. There are several explanations about the delay. Some theories include: "The messenger got killed on the way to deliver the message; the enslavers withheld the information to get more time for the last harvest and some even questioned the authority President Lincoln had over the rebellious southern states." All or none of the versions for the delay could be true.
4. For whatever the reason, conditions in Texas remained status quo 2-½ years beyond statutory orders to end slavery.

In Denver, the Juneteenth parade is held usually on a Saturday closest to June 19th. It begins at Manual High School several blocks away and proceeds to and along Welton Street, the center of Historic Five Points and ends about 10 blocks from its starting point. There are floats, marches, drill teams, bands, civic and political dignitaries in or on cars and more. The parade ends in an area of community vendors and stage presentations of speakers, music, dance, religious programs and entertainment. Vendors include community organizations giving health information and screenings, crafts, games and gift-winning contests and food – lots of food: bar-b-que, turkey legs, drinks and more.

Juneteenth, sometimes called “Freedom Day” or “Emancipation Day” is celebrated across the country in Atlanta, Philadelphia, New York and others. In Denver, from my observation and attendance at the parade, starting as mainly an African American or Black Celebration, it is now becoming more of an intercultural and participatory event, with cultures learning more about each other.