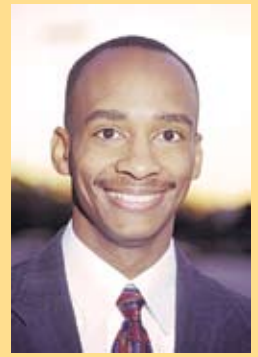


Juneteenth...

Why did it take so long?

by James E. Payne



President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation abolished slavery effective January 1, 1863. This proclamation would have a devastating economic impact on slave owners, especially in Texas. Therefore, the great statutory right was not recognized nor even considered in Texas. Although legally free, the slaves in Texas remained the property of their masters for 2 ½ years. Finally, with the surrender of General Lee on April 9, 1865, the Union was able to overcome the tremendous Texas resistance. On June 19, 1865, General Gordon Granger stood on the balcony of Ashton Villas in Galveston Bay and proclaimed General Order No. 3 which stated: "The people of Texas are informed that in accordance with a Proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore, existing between them becomes that between employer and free laborer."

Can you imagine the next day, June 20, 1865? Certainly, there must have been rejoicing among the freed slaves and frustration among the slave owners. Remember, the freed slaves still had to return to work but now as employees instead of slaves. While, I too, would want to celebrate the freedom, I would have some difficulty returning to a job where I knew my employer deliberately withheld news about my freedom. For 2 ½ years, family members and friends were killed and beaten for leaving plantations, yet they were legally free. For years, slaves were made to

feel disgusted, frustrated and humiliated about their circumstances during a time of freedom. June 20, 1865, might have been a day my work performance and profitability changed.

Why did it take so long? We know the answers are racism and economics. The real question is whether the cycle has been broken. In 2004, do we still have an enslaved people who are legally free? Do we still have a group of people receiving lower wages although their expected output is greater than their counterparts? Do we still have a cultural section of the work force who has to train less qualified co-workers who ultimately become their supervisors? Do we still have to rely upon interpretation of the laws of this state that seem



State Rep. Al Edwards (r), author of a bill establishing an official Texas Juneteenth Holiday, with former State Rep. Al Price celebrating at Mr. & Ms. Paul Jones' Juneteenth affair.

inconsistent with the Emancipation Proclamation? How is that possible in 2004? Maybe the answers are the same today as they were in 1865 – Racism and Economics. What was once to be called slavery, may now be called corporate downsizing or re-organization. We are no longer beaten with whips and chains, we are now beaten with company bylaws and policies.

Juneteenth should be a day of not only rejoicing and reflection, but also a day of revitalization. We must each work diligently to make Texas a truly emancipated State. **HAPPY JUNETEENTH!!!**

Editors Note: James E. Payne is an attorney practicing law in Texas, where he has been recognized as a "Super Lawyer" by his peers, an honor held by only five percent of the lawyers in Texas.