

Presidential Remarks

Juneteenth: Invoking the Promise of Independence

June 19, 2021

On Thursday, President Joe Biden signed a bill to make Juneteenth a federal holiday in the United States. As a university that places the highest priority and value on diversity, equity and inclusion, we enthusiastically endorse the commemoration of Juneteenth, which will now occur annually on June 19.

On June 19th, 1865, Union soldiers arrived at Galveston Island to tell the last remaining slaves in the United States that they were finally free – two-and-a-half years after the Emancipation Proclamation, and two months after the formal end to the Civil War.

Over the years, Juneteenth has been referred to as Jubilee Day, Freedom Day, Liberation Day, and Emancipation Day. While the day has many names, there should be a unified interpretation: The vile legacy of slavery, segregation, racism and prejudice must be exposed, challenged and eradicated for us to live up to the inherent promise in the Declaration of Independence.

Elevating the importance of Juneteenth should bring much-needed reflection of the infamous legacy of slavery in U.S. history, and hopefully lead to a deeper understanding of disturbing currents of intolerance that creep into American culture. Finding a common cause as Americans must be at the heart of our collective effort to build a more just and fair nation.

Among the highest values of education is the ambition to broaden minds and enlighten the common cause of our shared community and nation. Oakland University's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion falls within the proud tradition.

With the naming of Juneteenth as a national holiday, we must rededicate ourselves to making sure that everyone within our community feels welcomed, safe, included, valued and accepted.

Glenn McIntosh

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