

The Coffeeville Courier

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The Histroical Legacy of Juneteenth

On "Freedom's Eve," or the eve of January 1, 1863, the first Watch Night services took place. On that night, enslaved and free African Americans gathered in churches and private homes all across the country awaiting news that the Emancipation Proclamation had taken effect. At the stroke of midnight, prayers were answered as all enslaved people in Confederate States were declared legally free. Union soldiers, many of whom were black, marched onto plantations and across cities in the south reading small copies of the Emancipation Proclamation spreading the news of freedom in Confederate States. Only through the Thirteenth Amendment did emancipation end slavery throughout the United States.

But not everyone in Confederate territory would immediately be free. Even though the Emancipation Proclamation was made effective in 1863, it could not be implemented in places still under Confederate control. As a result, in the westernmost Confederate state of

Texas, enslaved people would not be free until much later. Freedom finally came on June 19, 1865, when some 2,000 Union troops arrived in Galveston Bay, Texas. The army announced that the more than 250,000 enslaved black people in the state, were free by executive decree. This day came to be known as "Juneteenth," by the newly freed people in Texas.

Publishers throughout the North responded to a demand for copies of Lincoln's proclamation and produced numerous decorative versions, including this engraving by R. A. Dimmick in 1864.

The post-emancipation period known as Reconstruction (1865-1877) marked an era of great hope, uncertainty, and struggle for the nation as a whole. Formerly enslaved people immediately sought to reunify families, establish schools, run for political office, push radical legislation and even sue slaveholders for compensation. Given the 200+ years of enslavement, such changes were nothing short of amazing. Not even a generation out of slavery,

(Cont'd. on Back Page)

Coffeeville Hosts First Annual Miss Juneteenth Pageant

By Syreeta Kee

COFFEEVILLE, Miss. — The spirit of Juneteenth, culture, and community pride took center stage on Friday, June 12, 2026, as the first annual Miss Juneteenth Pageant was held at the Coffeeville High School Auditorium. The event brought together contestants, families, supporters, and community leaders for an evening celebrating heritage, achievement, and young leadership.

Hosted by Alisa Thompson, a well-known North Mississippi stylist, entrepreneur, minister, former pageant contestant, and radio personality, the pageant highlighted the talents and accomplishments of local young women while emphasizing the historical significance of Juneteenth.

Contestants were evaluated in several categories, including best Juneteenth attire, talent, formal attire, knowledge of Juneteenth, and fundraising. Judges also considered each contestant's poise, confidence, and stage presence throughout the competition.

After a competitive and inspiring evening, Janiyah Smith, daughter of Chaniqua Armstrong, was named First Runner-Up. The title of Miss Juneteenth

2026 was awarded to Samantha E. Longstreet, daughter of Mary Roberson, who impressed judges and audience members alike with her grace, confidence, and overall performance. Samantha will be officially presented during the community's Juneteenth Celebration on June 20, 2026.

The pageant was judged by an esteemed panel consisting of Claudette Avery of Grenada, Valerie Morgan of Taylor, and Rodnie Buford of Oxford, whose thoughtful and professional evaluations helped determine the evening's winners.

Adding to the excitement of the event, musical entertainment was provided by Dephane Hayes and Gail Smith, whose performances energized the audience and enhanced the celebratory atmosphere.

Organizers described the pageant as a meaningful addition to Coffeeville's growing Juneteenth observance. The event not only showcased the talents of its contestants but also reinforced the importance of remembering and celebrating the history, resilience, and contributions of African Americans.

The pageant was spon-

sored by the Coffeeville Juneteenth Planning Committee, whose members include William Shelton, Clayton Horton, Earlene Townes, Sandra Kimble, Jermaine Taylor, and Latrice Kee. Committee

members expressed appreciation to the contestants, judges, performers, volunteers, and community supporters whose efforts made the inaugural event possible.



Miss Juneteenth Samantha E. Longstreet



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