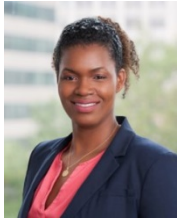


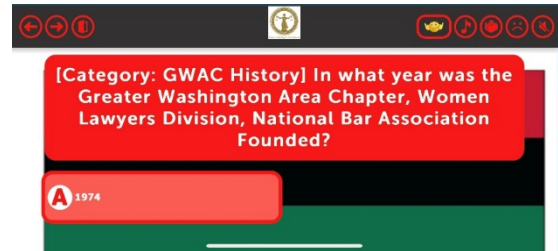
## Juneteenth: An Annual Celebration and Call to Action



*by Maryam Hatcher, President Greater Washington Area Chapter, Women Lawyers Division, National Bar Association (GWAC)*

Last week, many of us in this country observed Juneteenth. This holiday, celebrated annually on June 19, commemorates the end of legalized slavery in the United States. Though the Emancipation Proclamation was meant to be the initial vehicle to end legal slavery in the confederate states, it took several years for that news to reach many impacted Black Americans. Juneteenth was born on June 19, 1865 – two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed – when Union soldiers arrived in Galveston, Texas with news that the Civil War had ended and enslaved Black Americans were free.

This year, many bar associations across the country celebrated Juneteenth in some form, whether it was a brief acknowledgement of the day or a virtual celebration. For example, the Greater Washington Area Chapter, Women Lawyers Division, National Bar Association (GWAC), for which I serve as president, hosted a virtual Black History Trivia event.



After the trivia game ended, members in attendance shared the various ways in which their families were celebrating Juneteenth 2020. Like Independence Day, Juneteenth represents such a significant moment in our country that it is certainly worthy of recognition and celebration. I hope that all bar associations can find some way to acknowledge this important holiday each year.

But Juneteenth is more than an opportunity to celebrate a momentous and impactful event in American history. It is also a yearly reminder that our Constitution's promise of racial equity has not yet been fulfilled. As the torchbearers of justice, bar associations should continuously look for ways to promote racial equity and eliminate bias in the justice system; Juneteenth can be an annual call to action for bar associations to look within themselves and ensure that they are meeting that charge.

At its heart, Juneteenth is a symbol of freedom for the Black community, but we cannot benefit from the peace and joy that stems from freedom while systemic racism and disparate treatment in the justice system exists. As bar association leaders, we must be at the forefront of the fight for racial equality and justice for all.