

Celebrating Black

Op-Ed by Moriah Israel, School Based Day Treatment Therapeutic Group Leader



Although slavery in its traditional sense has long been abolished, the underlying precedents of America's Three-Fifths Compromise remain the de-facto law of the land. The long-term effects of dehumanizing Black Americans has recently been highlighted in the media and the hearts of many. The parameters of black identity are being redefined and people are finally ready to celebrate blackness. Ideas about inclusion, tolerance,

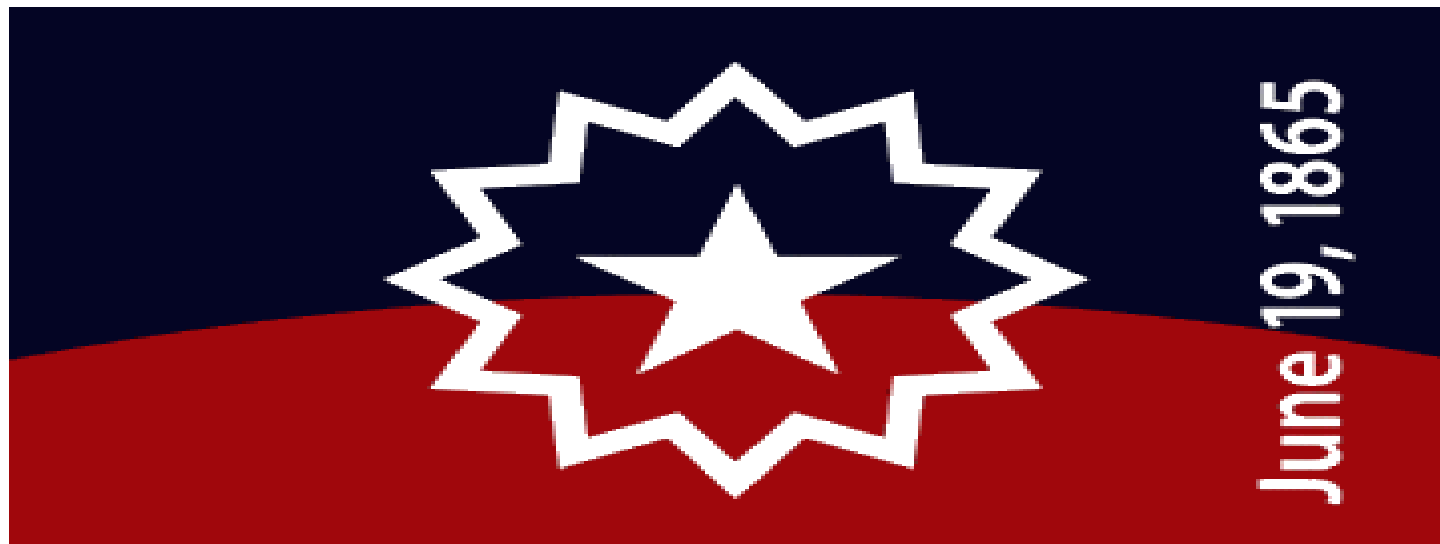
and permission are mitigated by the country's preparation to honor the freedom of black bodies, black ideas, and black advancement.



Juneteenth is currently acknowledged by most states in the U.S. to commemorate the day all slaves were officially given their freedom. On June 19, 1865, two years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, Union General Gordon Granger traveled to Galveston, Texas where slave-owners had yet to inform slaves of their freedom. He proclaimed, "The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free," thereby marking the end of American slavery and the inception of freedom for Black America. Freed men and women in Texas commemorated this day on its anniversary with prayers, feasts, and music.

Celebrations continued annually with festivals and parades before losing popularity and then re-surfing in the 1980s. People continue to celebrate with bar-b-ques featuring red foods like strawberries, watermelon, and red velvet cake as a symbol for resilience. People play traditional games like spades and dominoes. Songs about the beauty in brown and the flowers that grow from seeds

sown in sorrow play loudly while children and elders bop along to the beat. Young people discuss the negative connotation associated with the word "nappy" and the history of African American Vernacular English. The restrictions of euro-dominant mainstream culture are cast aside and the emphases on grace and decorum are replaced by rhythm and zest. Blackness is not censored, but exalted. People are laughing. People are living. This year, things are different; the allies want in. People are cashing in black cards and cookout invitations with the best intentions, yet many are also aware of the very thin line between appreciation and appropriation. If you are one of these people, you may be in the market for some sort of "Appreciating Blackness" manual.



Call me Sway because I don't have all the answers, but here are a few tips on how to maneuver this new territory without stepping on any toes:

Do have fun! Releasing your own judgment will present the opportunity to move a bit more freely. Tuck in your inhibitions and make the best of it. Sing songs you know, learn the steps to line dances, and forget about counting calories! People will be much more open when they perceive the possibility of reciprocity.

Don't make assumptions. It may be difficult to consider norms of behavior outside of what is predominately acceptable. If you see something different, remember it is just that, different. Different does not mean wrong or less.

Do ask questions. Take this one with a grain of salt. Many Black Americans have been called to explain the current state of Black America, give tips on how to combat racism, and offer well-wishes to those that do. Some people are tired of explaining things that are readily available for self-initiated discovery. Others are eager to educate people and share their experiences. If you do ask, be prepared to listen to the response, be it palatable or not.

Don't take offense. Pro-black is not anti-white. As previously mentioned, Black Americans are a lot less likely to censor themselves in spaces where they are affirmed so try to sift through the passion for nuggets of mutual understanding. When faced with feelings of discomfort, assess your own values and boundaries rather than that of the unapologetic.



Do learn something. Take the time to learn something new about blackness. Seek out information and experiences that broaden your understanding and share your findings with someone close to you. Here are some research topics to consider: Black Wall-street, Fred Hampton, The Black Panther Party of Self-Defense, The Tuskegee Experiment, MOVE bombings of 1985, intersectionality, implicit bias, black inventors and artists, the white savior complex, health disparities, redlining, poverty tax, and the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The city's annual Juneteenth celebration has been cancelled this year. However, below you will find a list of virtual and in-person events happening this weekend in honor of the holiday.



[A Mindful Juneteenth](#)

[Drive-in Movie: "The Hate You Give"](#)

["Raising Anti-racist Kids"](#)

[Throwback and Paint](#)

Still want more? Check out these books, movies and documentaries about blackness and racism in America.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2020/06/06/871023438/this-list-of-books-films-and-podcasts-about-racism-is-a-start-not-a-panacea>

<https://www.cnet.com/news/black-lives-matter-movies-tv-shows-and-books-on-systemic-racism/>

