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# JUNETEENTH

## AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE

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*“There’s a paradox inherent in the fact that emancipation is celebrated primarily among African-Americans, and that the celebration is rooted in a perception of slavery as something that happened to Black people, rather than something that the country committed. The paradox rests on the presumption that the arrival of freedom should be greeted with gratitude, instead of with self-reflection about what allowed it to be deprived in the first place.”*

- Jelani Cobb

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## Why is Juneteenth important?

Established just after the Civil War, Juneteenth is the oldest and most popular date that acknowledges the compound cultural trauma of generational Black enslavement in America. This holiday remembers the extension of enslavement well beyond the Emancipation Proclamation, which was issued in 1863. More than 250,000 Black people remained captive for another two-and-a-half-year until the news reached Galveston, Texas on **June 19, 1865**. It has also been known under other names, such as “Freedom Day,” “Emancipation Day,” and “Juneteenth Independence Day.” Historically, this date was commemorated with readings of the Emancipation Proclamation, religious services, and prayer, gathering of lost family members, preservation of slave food delicacies (aka barbecue), as well as new traditions. Today, this holiday is celebrated with parades, cookouts, and an overall celebration of freedom and Black American Culture in its many different forms.

The state of Texas designated Juneteenth a holiday in 1980. And in 2021, President Biden signed legislation making Juneteenth a federal holiday. This came on the coattails of the nationwide protests and worldwide support in the summer of 2020 after the police killings of George Floyd in Minneapolis, MN, and Breonna Taylor in Louisville, KY. In doing so, the national, historic struggle to end inequality, racism, and discrimination was acknowledged by the US Government.

When Juneteenth became a federal holiday, it also became another holiday that could be exploited for “commercial” gain. The symbolic acknowledgment can mistakenly be celebrated through cultural appropriation, commodification, and commercial consumption.

## What is cultural appropriation?

The adoption of elements of one culture by another, especially in cases where a dominant culture exploits aspects of a minority culture outside of its original cultural context and/or at the expense of the original culture for personal gain. For example, Disney attempting to trademark Dia de Los Muertos before the release of *Coco* exploits this sacred, Mexican Holiday. Where does this fit in the context of Juneteenth? While Juneteenth celebrations were upheld solely by the Black community, up until recently, many companies are giving time off for this new holiday. While this is a huge recognition of the trauma inflicted upon enslaved people and their descendants in this country, there is still much work to be done.

## How can you personally, professionally, and respectfully celebrate Juneteenth?

Take the time to find a Juneteenth Parade or festival happening in your community. Build relationships to foster understanding and learn how to truly act as an ally in support of the Black community. Support Black Businesses as a form of support to help decrease financial disparities as a result of systemic racism. Speak up at work, with your politicians, and in your community where you see racial inequality.

Why is going to a Parade Meaningful? It may seem insignificant, however... Implicitly, you are showing up. If you are informed as to why the parade is happening, you are giving credence to the cause and showing your support.

We encourage you to embrace this holiday as an opportunity to create space for cultural competency. It is through that lens we will begin to move toward gaining more understanding of others and ultimately ourselves. Not sure where to begin? Here are a few suggestions to help you open the door for meaningful conversation and observance.

## 1. Invest in Educating Yourself & Your Teams

Spend time learning about Black History and the origin of Juneteenth. Simply giving your employees a day off without acknowledging why is a superficial attempt at celebrating this holiday. Take time to acknowledge the ways in which freedoms of Black bodies are still being infringed upon and how that impacts your company.

## 2. Practice Appreciation Without Consumption

Cultural appropriation monetized for commercial purposes is not a way to celebrate Juneteenth or any day of cultural significance. You can appreciate and learn about cultural identifiers within their natural, original context, such as fashion and foods.

If you are holding an event, you can provide a contact for further inquiries and feedback, so that you may be able to invite conversation. Maybe a part of holding the event includes education with the invitation as a helpful tool.

Find creative ways to invest in the community that created this culture. This can be extended into the celebration or acknowledgment of many cultural holidays. Know the particular cultural nuances of original histories and how that group treats its history, and then reflect the message of that history to your organization.

### 3. Support Black initiatives year-round.

Establish lasting and genuine relationships with the Black community, not just based on calendar holidays or Black History Month. Align your principles and values to continue to support initiatives of the Black community to eradicate racial discrimination.

### 4. Promote Racial Equity in the Workplace

Work with your employees to spread awareness about 1) the difference between Equity and Equality, 2) the difference between racism and prejudice, and 3) how bias and inclusion affect your work environment.

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## Resources

<https://www.hrdiver.com/news/juneteenth-workplace-cultural-appropriation/624710/>

[https://www.studioatao.org/cultural-appropriation?gclid=CjwKCAjw7vuUBhBUEiwAEdu2pD91qIP-qcdw-bW5-sNrObB6KXK0W\\_Z1VmxjuyH3isjpi6N7d1yEUBoCatYQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.studioatao.org/cultural-appropriation?gclid=CjwKCAjw7vuUBhBUEiwAEdu2pD91qIP-qcdw-bW5-sNrObB6KXK0W_Z1VmxjuyH3isjpi6N7d1yEUBoCatYQAvD_BwE)

<https://hbr.org/2020/09/how-to-promote-racial-equity-in-the-workplace>