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Juneteenth



What is Juneteenth?

An American holiday celebrated on June 19th that commemorates the emancipation of enslaved people in the United States. It is also referred to as Emancipation Day and Freedom Day, and serves as a celebration of Black history, culture and progress. The holiday was first celebrated in Texas to mark the events of June 19th 1865, when the Emancipation Proclamation, which was signed in 1863, was finally enforced in the aftermath of the Civil War. The name "Juneteenth" comes from the conjunction of June and nineteenth.



Juneteenth from a Jewish Perspective

As Jews, we know the value of marking the end of slavery with a yearly celebration. Juneteenth has much in common with Passover as a holiday of thanksgiving, joy, ritual, and remembrance. On both holidays, people come together, share food, and sing songs. Those gatherings, rituals, foods, and songs have symbolic meanings that give shape to the memory, sacrifices, and resilience of our ancestors. They connect past and present, inspiring

us to give thanks for what we have and encouraging us to continue to work towards change.

As a multicultural Jewish community that includes Black and Brown American Jews who descend from those who were enslaved in the United States, this key date in American history should be recognized by all American Jews. Celebrating Juneteenth allows Jews to focus on the multicultural nature of our community and the variety

of ways American Jews have experienced the American past and experience the American future. Raising our awareness can help us focus our attention on the need to work together as Jews to ensure a future that includes attaining the American vision of freedom and equality for all- values that remain fundamental to our collective Jewish experience as well as the principle of Tikkun Olam (repairing the world).



Traditions and Customs

Juneteenth celebrations take many forms and vary from place to place. It has become a day of celebration of freedom and is traditionally marked by the Black community with parades, prayer services, cookouts, and picnics. Many of the celebratory elements draw from the history and strength of the Black experience, sometimes deliberately highlighting the freedom of Black people to participate in activities that were once forbidden to our enslaved ancestors. Celebrants sometimes wear fancy clothing, and participate in parades and pageants featuring dance troupes, drum corps, floats towed by cars, horseback riders, and marching bands.



Be'chol Lashon (Hebrew for "in every language") celebrates and prioritizes diversity as a Jewish value by uplifting the historic and contemporary racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the Jewish people and in doing so, strengthens the entire Jewish community.

To learn more about Juneteenth and access resources that celebrate the diversity of the Jewish community, visit us at Globaljews.org. To support our work visit globaljews.org/donate



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Food as Celebration: A Juneteenth Recipe and Discussion

Juneteenth celebrations are filled with foods that symbolize joy and memory. The color red is a symbol on the flags of many African countries where it often stands for the blood that has been spilled in the fight for liberation. Similarly, on Juneteenth, red color foods symbolize both the blood spilled as a result of enslavement but also the resilience and power of the Black community. Michael Twitty, a James Beard award-winning scholar, who brings together his Jewish and Black identities to his work about food explains the symbolism of the

color red as follows: "Juneteenth has a tradition of red foods: red soda, barbecue sauce, sweet potatoes, baked beans, watermelon. Even red velvet cake gets in there. It symbolizes perseverance because, for our ancestors in West and Central Africa, red was one of the most important colors: it's the color of creativity, the color of fire, the color of war, the color of resistance. When red shows up, you know it's a most spiritual moment."

You will likely find a variety of red drinks served for

Juneteenth, including red soda (like Big Red Pop made in Texas) or strawberry lemonade. According to Adrian Miller, another James Beard award-winning author, traditional West African drinks like kola nut tea and bissap (more commonly known as Hibiscus tea) include two ingredients brought to the Americas through the slave trade, and link the past and present. For more background, read "Hot Links and Red Drinks: The Rich Food Tradition of Juneteenth"

"For our ancestors in West and Central Africa, red was one of the most important colors: it's the color of creativity, the color of fire, the color of war, the color of resistance."



Strawberry Lemonade

Ingredients:

½ pound fresh strawberries—stems removed, or ½ pound frozen strawberries defrosted
 1 ½ cups granulated sugar
 4 ½ - 5 cups water, divided
 1 ½ cups fresh-squeezed lemon juice (approximately the juice from 8-9 lemons)
 For serving: Ice cubes and frozen strawberries

Directions:

1. Use blender or food processor to puree the strawberries.
2. In a small saucepan, over medium heat, stir together sugar and 2 cups of water to make a simple syrup. Bring to a boil, and stir until sugar is dissolved. Remove from heat and allow to cool to room temperature.
3. In a 2 quart jug, mix lemon juice with the simple syrup and pureed strawberries and stir to combine. Refrigerate until cold.
4. When ready to serve, add 2 ½ cups of cold water and stir. Taste, and add more water if it's too sweet.
5. Mix before pouring. Serve with ice and/or frozen strawberries.

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Questions for Discussion

- 1** What other red foods might you make to celebrate Juneteenth? How is eating red foods on Juneteenth similar or different than eating other symbolic foods?

- 2** What other symbolic foods can you think of that help make holidays meaningful? (This can include Jewish holiday foods like those eaten on Rosh Hashanah or other holidays that are not specifically Jewish)

- 3** What foods does your family eat (if any) that remind you of where your family came from?



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A Psalm for Juneteenth

In honor of Juneteenth Be'chol Lashon commissioned this prayer from writer, actor, director, educator and filmmaker Rebecca S'manga Frank.

Clap Your Hands, All You Nations

Clap your hands, all you nations
 Shout to God with cries of joy
 Black is Queen!
 Black is King!
 Black is Free!
 Black is Free.

Why is this day different from all other days?
 On this day the message of freedom was no longer delayed

Galveston, Texas 1865, and Today

May I carry the message of freedom
 May I receive the message of freedom

May I stretch my arms wide, breathing deeply
 May a gust of wind blow boundless through my mind
 May I remember forgotten dreams
 May tears escape from my eyes and evaporate on my cheek
 May I feel joyful shouts escape from my mouth as freely as birds fly into pink sky over salty water
 May I lull myself and others into a peaceful sway by singing:
 Oh Beautiful, Willow Weep For Me, The Sweetest Sound, Go Tell It On The Mountain of
 This Little Light of Mine...

May our teeth shine as we smile at one another
 May we cook, may we potluck together, giving thanks to the God in each of us

On this day we eat soul food, infused with the spirit of freedom
 On this day we relax in the spirit of freedom
 On this day we dance in the spirit of freedom
 On this day we laugh in the spirit of freedom
 On this day we tell the story in the spirit of freedom, we spread the news!

And as we clasp hands, all you nations
 Our palms transmit an inner whisper
 No words of false equivalency are shared
 Only the inner language of God
 Heard in silence:

Freedom.



Rebecca S'manga Frank

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