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# Here's to Freedom: THE BEAUTY OF JUNETEENTH

By Yolanda F. Johnson

Juneteenth (short for “June Nineteenth”) marks the day when federal troops arrived in Galveston, Texas in 1865 to take control of the state and ensure that all enslaved people be freed. The arrival of the troops arrival came a full two and a half years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Juneteenth honors the end to slavery in the United States and is considered the longest-running African American holiday. On June 17, 2021, it officially became a federal holiday.

Essentially speaking, the slaves were free, but didn't know it yet. What jubilation must have burst forth; what joy they must have had to know that they finally had their freedom. So, for this Juneteenth, only two years into the official Federal holiday, let's look at a few different ways we can embrace such an important celebration.

## #1: SAVOR YOUR FREEDOM

What is it that you are grateful you can do because you are free? In today's climate, freedom is not something to take lightly. I am grateful for freedom of speech, religion, and that even though some might want to take steps backwards, as Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends justice bends toward justice.”

## #2: GIVE BACK

Is there a Juneteenth celebration near you? Check your local calendars and there are often national guides in outlets such as U.S. News & World Report. Is there a local shelter or food bank you can support? An organization that champions racial justice? Go outside of your comfort zone and remember that you can give many different “T's” – time, talent, treasure, testimony, and more.

## #3: TAKE THE HOLIDAY SERIOUSLY

I've noticed that in the past few years, holidays for which many people fought long and hard to have recognized are still ignored by many. We have to be the change we want to see in this regard by taking the day off and actually doing at least one thing to celebrate. Turn on your out-of-office message to let others know not to expect a response from you. If you are a manager or business owner, encourage your team members to actually take the day off instead of plowing through as though it does not matter.

## #4: TAKE A CULINARY JOURNEY

Try some new soul food delicacies. From hushpuppies to red beans and rice, collard greens to red velvet cake, there are so many things to try. And now, there are many vegetarian options as well. Red velvet cake, in particular, has a very close association with Juneteenth celebrations and is a truly delicious treat to enjoy on a hot summer day with ice cream.

As we celebrate the season, let's remember the beauty of liberty and all the ways we can give back and recognize our country's history. As we think of Juneteenth, raise a glass (or a piece of that cake) and proclaim, “Here's to freedom!”