



Canceled Juneteenth Soul Festival is a Learning Opportunity

April 27, 2022 by Educator Barnes

“What do they want?”

This question is asked any time an activity or event is abandoned that was created for the goal of inclusion and celebrating diversity.

As my grandmother always said, “If you are going to do something, do it right.” Many diversity initiatives and events miss the mark. Let’s analyze what went wrong in Arkansas.

Last year, Juneteenth became a federal holiday. This holiday, which has been celebrated by many Americans for decades, acknowledges when enslaved Black people in Galveston, Texas, on June 18, 1865, finally learned that slavery had ended. This is significant because the Emancipation Proclamation had ended slavery more than two years earlier, but these people were still in bondage and enslaved because they had not been told.

Additionally, some Black people do not celebrate Independence Day because when America became a country on top of stolen land from Indigenous Peoples, Black people were still bound by the shackles of slavery. To learn more about that perspective, I strongly suggest you read Frederick Douglass’ speech, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” Juneteenth, a smash-up of the words June and nineteenth, is the day seen as true Independence Day for all Black Americans.

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Now wait a minute...
What kinda #Juneteenth are they celebrating???
This is like calling the Backstreet Boys onstage to sing all the hits by Jodeci and The Isley Brothers!!!

CELEBRATING
Juneteenth
UNITY
ARKANSAS

FOOD ★ MUSIC ★ FELLOWSHIP

SAVE THE DATE!

Juneteenth Soul Food Festival and Market

Come to experience 3 Floors of Food from some of Arkansas's top restaurants and caterers served in the War Memorial Press Box and Razorback Lettermen's Club!

FEATURED HOSTS
Rex Nelson, Heather Baker and David Bazzel
June 17, 2022 - 4:00 pm to 9:00 pm
War Memorial Stadium • Little Rock, Arkansas

1:58 PM · Apr 26, 2022

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The group of focus for Juneteenth is African Americans, but this Arkansas Juneteenth Soul Food Festival and Market in Arkansas had a flyer that centered white people. It is not even clear if the white people on the flyer had celebrated Juneteenth prior to this scheduled event.

Point one: start with the group of focus and center them.

The group of focus has most definitely been doing whatever it is an organization wants others to learn about. Instead of snatching up the day and putting a new spin on it, allow those people to take the lead and get the publicity.

Point two: Do not use groups or name-drop them to make an event seem legit.

At the bottom of the flyer, there were logos for the Arkansas Urban League and 100 Black Men. After the flyer was leaked, the Arkansas Urban League distanced itself from the event. Organizations at the bottom of the flyer were supposed to be recipients of the funds generated from the event. Even though the Arkansas Urban League shared it was not aware of the event, before this statement was released, the involvement could have been misinterpreted.

This wounds the organization that was used and it breeds distrust in the community. Even if the organization understands the why behind the poorly executed event, the poor execution does damage.

Point three: Vet initiatives with multiple people from the group.

The event organizer, Muskie Harris, is a Black man. It is not clear how many other Black people or organizations helped plan the event. Black people are not a monolith nor is any other racial group. Diversity within a group is important and multiple perspectives are needed to ensure foolishness like this does not occur.

For example, if a school I worked at previously had consulted some Black people, maybe they would not have celebrated Abraham Lincoln for freeing Black people on the first day of Black History Month.

Getting a diversity celebration wrong is worse than not having any celebration at all.

Organizations must do better. Although this canceled Juneteenth Soul Food Fest and Market was not an education event, the organizations that have been the worst offenders are school districts.

Schools, which are supposed to be safe havens for children, cannot afford to harm students when they are trying to celebrate them and share what is unique or important to various student groups with the entire student body.

Hopefully, organizations will learn from this misstep and avoid this kind of mistake.