

JUNETEENTH

FREEDOM DAY



Juneteenth Watermelon Salad and Other Missteps Tarnishes the Significance of Juneteenth

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I really try not to read articles from TMZ. At times, I believe the focus is being first rather than the impact of the pieces that are produced. When I saw people in Indy sharing a TMZ article that focused on the Indianapolis Children's Museum, I went ahead and clicked the article to

learn what was going on in Indy that garnered attention from TMZ, and unfortunately, it did not put Indy in a good light.

Part of President Biden's legacy will be signing a bill that made Juneteenth a federal holiday in 2021. Juneteenth celebrates enslaved Black people in Texas finally learning they had been freed by the Emancipation Proclamation 2 ½ years after the Emancipation Proclamation had been issued under President Abraham Lincoln. Juneteenth, also known as Freedom Day and Jubilee Day, is significant because freedom is not real and tangible until people know they are free. Although July 4th is America's Independence Day, Juneteenth is considered, by many, as an Independence Day for Black Americans because not all Black people were free when the Declaration of Independence was signed in July 1776.

Part of Juneteenth celebrations includes a focus on indulging in red items such as barbecue, strawberry pop, bissap (hibiscus tea), and red velvet cake. This is where the Indianapolis Children's Museum enters the story. To acknowledge Juneteenth, the museum was selling a Juneteenth watermelon salad. This caused outrage once a picture of the salad was posted online. According to TMZ, a museum representative told the publication, "Red foods have historically been served by some to remember the blood that was shed along the way to freedom." Although I have heard this as a reason prior to this incident, it has also been said that the red color has ties back to Africa and that red is a spiritually powerful color and that two of the red items, kola nut tea and bissap are west African drinks enslaved Black people passed down through the generations. Although the museum has issued an apology on its website and has removed the food item, the negative impact has been felt by some in Indianapolis and amplified by others outside of the city and state.

The statement by the Children's Museum negates the fact that the watermelon is associated with a negative stereotype when it comes to Black people. As a Black person, I love watermelon and I even grow it, but even I raise an eyebrow to this. If the focus was truly on acknowledging that red is tied to Juneteenth for a number of reasons including being one of the colors in the Juneteenth flag, the museum could have simply said it was serving extra red-colored items for Juneteenth without labeling any item individually. Watermelon and Black people tie into a negative stereotype that Black people are lazy and all they want to do is eat watermelon. Watermelon is simply a good-tasting fruit that is healthy for your body, and it should not become a distraction for a day meant to celebrate Black liberation.

The Children's Museum is not alone in this misstep. Walmart had entered the arena of foolishness also by selling a Juneteenth ice cream under their Great Value brand, AND the

corporation had the nerve to put the trademark sign by the word Juneteenth. How are they trying to put a stake in a word that celebrates the freedom of Black bodies? They were misstepping all over the place! They were selling this item which was a red velvet flavored ice cream when they were already selling the Black-owned brand Creamalicious. Instead of using its large footprint to lift up a Black brand that is obtaining freedom through having its own business, Walmart instead focused on how it could cash in on the holiday.

Black bodies, Blackness, and all that is connected to the Black culture should not be seen as an opportunity to profit off of Black people, their struggle, or even the celebration of all of their ancestors knowing they were free. Yes, Walmart apologized and removed the product. However, I assert that if some time and critical evaluation were put in that these missteps could be avoided in the first place.

The people who really need to avoid missteps are teachers. They have an obligation to teach the complete story of emancipation and the story should include Juneteenth. Although school ends in many places before Juneteenth occurs, that is still no excuse not to teach about it. Students learn about the Fourth of July, and they are not in school then.

To be down for the cause, and that cause is Black liberation, that means elevating Black people. Teachers, that means teaching students about the entire picture. This does not mean using Juneteenth as a way to appeal to Black folks on social media, through products, or to gain street cred in the classroom. If that is what an organization has to do or teachers feel they need to do to reach Black people and they haven't done much to acknowledge lift up or celebrate Black people before that, the result will be offense.

Celebrate Juneteenth. It is an important holiday but avoid harm while celebrating. It is not that hard if the effort is put into understanding the significance and purpose of the holiday.