



Juneteenth is an Opportunity for Education & Celebration

June 18, 2022 by Educator Barnes

Juneteenth has been a celebration for decades, especially among Black people in Texas. When Opal Lee, a former teacher who is as known as the grandmother of Juneteenth, walked for miles in an effort to make it a US federal holiday, she rooted her efforts in touting Juneteenth as a celebration to be celebrated by everyone. Unfortunately, the media has been dominated

lately by missteps such as the Juneteenth watermelon salad incident at the Children's Museum of Indianapolis, Juneteenth ice cream at Walmart, paper party products such as "It's the freedom for me," and the all-white Juneteenth panel in Arkansas to name a few.

This puts us at a fork in the road. People can get stuck in the mode of cancel culture and calling out folks, or they can help take back the Juneteenth narrative and get focused on what really matters: education and community. I am not saying that people or organizations should not be called out; however, once they are called out and make efforts to fix errors, let's move on. Being angry is exhausting; I rather center joy, fun, and education.

Like many Americans, I did not learn about Juneteenth during my K-12 education, nor did I learn about it in college. I learned about it as an adult from organizations like the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art and the Children's Museum of Indianapolis ... yes, the same museum with the salad incident. Regardless of how you feel about the incident, they have had a Juneteenth celebration for years just like the Eiteljorg Museum. They did not just hop on the train once Juneteenth became a US federal holiday.

The first step we should take is to get educated about what happened after slavery ended. Next, we should learn the history of Juneteenth in the United States and outside of the United States. Have you heard about the Southern Underground Railroad? All enslaved people who escaped did not go north some went to Mexico, and this is part of the reason Juneteenth is celebrated there, too. It is also an opportunity to learn about Emancipation Day, celebrated annually on August 1, which became a countrywide holiday in Canada last year. Remember, Black people are not a monolith. Some Black Canadians see it as a Canadian Juneteenth and others do not.

Once history is learned, it is time for fun. The best way to celebrate is to find an event to attend. Some events might focus on more on the Juneteenth aspect or some might focus on lifting up Black people. The key is that these events are open to all! You do not have to be Black to attend.

In Indianapolis, there are two events I am planning to attend today. The first is at the Indiana State Museum which has free admission on Saturday, June 18 (the day before Juneteenth). From 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., the museum is having a Major Taylor Festival that centers around award-winning Black cyclist Major Taylor. I featured him in my Hoosier Black Excellence Series for Keep Indiana Learning. Also, I will stop by the 5th Annual Indy Juneteenth

Celebration. The celebration is taking place from noon to 6 p.m. at the White River Park Celebration Plaza at 801 W. Washington Street in Indianapolis.

During this Juneteenth weekend consider learning, having fun, and gathering and experiencing joy with your fellow community members. Maybe I will see you at one of these events today if you live in Indianapolis.