

DEI Insider

a diversity, equity, and inclusion periodical from Nukk-Freeman & Cerra, P.C.

The History and Significance of Juneteenth:

THE EDUCATION I NEVER GOT

BY SUZANNE CERRA

The older I get, the more I realize that the traditional public-school education I received was incredibly myopic. I learned a version of American history that was filtered through a very narrow lens; one which glossed over or ignored many of the shameful events in our Country's history. I barely remember my teachers talking about slavery or teaching us about the Civil Rights movement, and I certainly never learned about Juneteenth or the events surrounding it. In fact, most of the painful lessons I learned about slavery were taught to me at home by my parents. Unfortunately, they were ill-prepared to provide a detailed education on many of these issues, having received an even narrower view of them during their own schooling.

My goal with this article is to share what I have learned about Juneteenth through my own research, and to provide you with the education I never got. I hope it will help you better understand the history of this significant holiday and be able to share it with your family and friends.

Juneteenth takes place annually on June 19th. The holiday is a combination of the words "June" and "nineteenth." It has also been called Freedom Day, second Independence Day, Jubilee Day, and Emancipation Day.

As most of you probably learned in elementary school, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, which declared that all enslaved people in the Confederate states[1] were free. What many of you might not have learned is that President Lincoln's executive order did not fully abolish slavery in the United States. Despite the proclamation, slavery was largely unaffected in the state of Texas, which the confederates considered a safe place for slaveholders since it remained generally unoccupied by Union Army soldiers.

On June 19, 1865 – two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued – and just two months after General Robert E. Lee surrendered, Union troops arrived in Galveston, Texas. There, they issued General Order No. 3 to inform all enslaved people that they were free and that the Civil War was officially over. More than 250,000 African Americans embraced freedom that day by executive decree in what became known as Juneteenth or Freedom Day.

This is why we celebrate Juneteenth ... because it honors the day all people living in the United States, including our formerly enslaved citizens, were officially granted freedom. Juneteenth honors the end to slavery in the United States for all Americans.

Juneteenth is widely considered the longest-running African American holiday. However, this key American historical event did not receive federal recognition until 156 years later. On June 17, 2021, President Joseph Biden signed the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act, which officially made Juneteenth a federal holiday. President Biden shared the following sentiment at the White House signing: *(Continued on Page 2)*

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

REMINDER: POTLUCK LUNCH
JULY - ONE MONTH'S TESTAMENT TO DIVERSITY
JUDAISM 101 - A RECIPE FOR LIFE
AN AUTHOR'S LOG - FAV SUMMER BOOKS, PODCASTS & TV
SPOTLIGHT: ETHNICALLY INCLUSIVE PUERTO RICO
A POEM ON DIVERSITY
DEI QUARTERLY FIRM CALENDAR



Great nations don't ignore their most painful moments. They don't ignore those moments of the past. They embrace them. Great nations don't walk away. We come to terms with the mistakes we made. And in remembering those moments, we begin to heal and grow stronger.

While President Biden is credited for the legislative action that made Juneteenth a national holiday, it is important to recognize the citizens who fought for it. Opal Lee, a longtime activist, is widely recognized as a leader in the grass roots effort to make Juneteenth a national holiday. She began working to make Juneteenth a national holiday in 2016, when she launched the "Opal's Walk 2 D.C." campaign. Lee reported that, having watched her family confront racial violence in Fort Worth, Texas as a child on June 19th, she wanted to ensure that people remembered that the day is intended to symbolize freedom, and not just a day to attend festivals. She decided to walk from Fort Worth, Texas to Washington, D.C., doing two and a half miles in the morning and two and a half miles in the afternoon, to symbolize the amount of time (2.5 years) it took for the Emancipation Proclamation to reach the people of Texas. Lee eventually delivered a petition to Congress with 1.5 million signatures supporting making Juneteenth a national holiday.

Prior to the 2021 law signed by President Biden, Washington, D.C. and 48 states had passed legislation to recognize Juneteenth as an official state holiday. Hawaii became the 49th state to formally recognize the day on June 16, 2021—the same day Congress voted to approve it as a national holiday. In February 2022, South Dakota became the 50th state to make Juneteenth an official state holiday.

Juneteenth is the first new federal holiday to be approved since Martin Luther King, Jr. Day was established back in 1983 (signed into law by President Ronald Reagan). While many large U.S. based corporations like Target, Nike, Twitter, and the NFL have also declared Juneteenth a paid company holiday, many others have not. NFC made Juneteenth a Firm holiday in 2022.

Many of us have grown up with the idea that the Fourth of July is a celebration of American independence. In my mind, the national observance of Juneteenth provides a fuller, and more accurate, portrayal of American history. Considering that one-third of the people who signed the Declaration of Independence were slaveholders, July 4th was founded on an idea of freedom created by a group of men who either believed they could rightfully own human beings or were not willing to stand up to the atrocities of slavery in the United States. Celebrating July 4th without recognizing Juneteenth ignores these historical facts.

In the wake of the George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery murders, the Juneteenth holiday has taken on a larger significance for many people who are seeking ways to honor the struggles of the Black community and recognize the ongoing fight for human rights and equality. It is a day to honor and recognize those struggles, and to reflect on how we can use our own power and voices to help create an America that is truly free for everyone.

[1] Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, Arkansas, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia



DEI SOCIAL PILLAR: POTLUCK LUNCH

RESCHEDULE



BY CHRISTINA CASSIDY

HONORING DIVERSITY THROUGH FOOD AND CULTURE

Our next 2023 DEI event will be a Potluck lunch on **Wednesday, October 25th at 12:30 pm** and will reflect our DEI Social pillar. We are excited to celebrate diversity together through food and learn about others' cultures.

A calendar invite has been sent to hold the date and we will reach out for those interested in participating by bringing a culturally-inspired dish or one of your favorite dishes, as the date approaches.

Firm Integration Committee – Nivi, Iman, Reema & Christina

J U L Y

CELEBRATING DISABILITY PRIDE MONTH, INTERNATIONAL NON-BINARY PEOPLE'S DAY AND SOUTH ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

BY WILL GARCIA

July is a special month in which we recognize and celebrate the importance of diversity and inclusion. July plays host to three separate celebrations: Disability Pride Month, International Non-binary People's Day, and South Asian Heritage Month. As such, July stands as a testament to the unity in diversity, and the fostering of a global culture of acceptance and understanding.

Disability Pride Month

Disability Pride Month is a powerful affirmation of the rights, needs, and experiences of individuals living with disabilities. This worldwide observance stresses the importance of recognizing disability not as a limitation, but as a unique aspect of diversity, thereby driving society towards acceptance and inclusion. Disability Pride Month champions the idea that disability is a natural part of human diversity and works to eliminate stigma and biases, ultimately improving societal understanding and equality.



July 14th International Non-Binary People's Day

On the 14th of July, we commemorate International Non-binary People's Day. Non-binary individuals, those who do not identify strictly as male or female, have historically faced erasure and misunderstanding. This day is not merely a celebration but a commitment to visibility, recognition, and respect for non-binary individuals around the world. By recognizing non-binary people, we are reaffirming the fundamental truth that gender identity is deeply personal, valid, and deserving of respect.



July 18th South Asian Heritage Month

Simultaneously, South Asian Heritage Month highlights the richness of South Asian culture and the significant contributions of the South Asian diaspora. It offers an opportunity to enhance understanding and appreciation of the diverse cultures, histories, and achievements of South Asian people. As we explore this vibrant heritage, we are reminded of the enriching impact that diverse cultures have on our world.



The intersection of these commemorations in July is an enlightening testament to the strength and beauty of diversity. Each celebration is an avenue to learn about, understand, and honor different aspects of human diversity, creating a more inclusive and supportive world. This period acts as a timely reminder that our global society thrives on diversity, and acknowledging it is paramount for our mutual growth and prosperity.

As we celebrate Disability Pride Month, International Non-binary People's Day, and South Asian Heritage Month, we are reminded that diversity adds a special richness to our lives. Each individual's unique experiences and perspectives contribute to our collective understanding and growth, enhancing our abilities to innovate, empathize, and collaborate and grow.

So while we step into July, let's embrace this beautiful combination of identities, backgrounds, and experiences. May we always strive to create a society where every individual feels valued and included, fostering a world that celebrates not just our common humanity but also the diversity that makes us uniquely beautiful.



DID YOU KNOW?

Q: Why do they call July the dog days of summer?

A: When Sirius would appear in the sky just before the sun, near the end of July, that marked the beginning of the very hottest days of the year. The Romans referred to this period as "dies caniculares" or "days of the dog star," which was eventually translated as just "dog days."

JUDAISM 101 - THE ESSENCE

A RECIPE FOR LIFE

BY GARY LAVEMAN (RACHEL MANNE'S FATHER)

Two thousand years ago, a non-Jew asked Rabbi Hillel, one of the greatest sages of all time, to teach him the Essence of Judaism while standing on one leg. Rabbi Hillel replied: "What is hateful to you, never do to your neighbor: that is the entire Torah; all the rest is commentary."

One of the oldest world religions, Judaism, can be characterized as ethical monotheism, that is, belief in one God, with a strong emphasis on ethical behavior, how one should interact with family, friends, spiritual leaders, community. Although this religion incorporates a multitude of laws- what to eat, how to eat, how to pray, what to wear, when to celebrate, how to observe the Sabbath, the true Essence of Judaism comes down to Hillel's summary- how to treat other human beings.

Let's take a short journey to see, at first hand, how Hillel's commentary is actually applied in the real world: the most basic and famous instructions from God are the Ten Commandments: do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not covet your neighbor's household. Killing would result in termination of life, the exact opposite of which is fundamental to the religion. Adultery would destroy the sacredness of the family unit, stealing would result in possessing something you did not earn, bearing false witness is familiar to all attorneys, being jealous of your neighbor's possessions would prevent any positive relationships from developing in the community.

The Torah, which Jews believe descended directly from God to the Israelites, through Moses, further outlines terms of human behavior: "Your mother and father shall you revere." Without this, family life is meaningless. "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not pluck the underdeveloped twigs of your vineyard... for the poor... shall you leave them." It is quite explicit that attention should be paid to the unfortunate who dwell amongst us. "You shall not lie to one another...."

What kind of society exists where people fail to trust their fellow men and women? "You shall not cheat your fellow and you shall not rob...." Business dealings, too, are subject to truth and honesty, at all times. And here is one requirement that should pique the interest of every attorney: "You shall not commit a perversion of justice; you shall not favor the poor and you shall not honor the great; with righteousness shall you judge your fellow." If only this were true in our contemporary legal system!

The "Ethics of the Fathers," one part of the Talmud (Jewish Oral Tradition) elaborates even more fully on interpersonal relationships. A few examples: "Let your house be a meeting place for scholars... drink in their words thirstingly." Jews are renowned for being "people of the book," who value study of sacred texts, applying them to current issues. "Keep aloof from a bad neighbor; do not associate with an evil man...." Your reputation suffers when you befriend those who fail to behave responsibly. "... do not judge your fellow man until you have been in his position." It is presumptuous to criticize someone unless you have experienced a similar challenge. "Do not keep aloof from the community...." You are clearly not an island unto yourself.

In short, Judaism is a religion, and even a civilization, but, more essentially, it is a recipe for life.



*Rabbi Hillel sums it up best:
"If I am not for myself, who will be for me?
And I am only for myself, what am I?
And if not now, when?"*



DIVE RIGHT INTO SUMMER

AN ARRAY OF GOOD READS, BINGE WORTHY PODCASTS AND THIS AUTHOR'S FAV DRAMAS TO COOL YOUR SUMMER NIGHTS

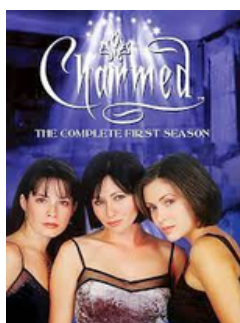
BY REEMA CHANDNANI

Summer is finally here! While you're out vacationing, at the beach, or just enjoying the nice weather, here is a list of books to read and podcasts to listen to that provide some insight on the holidays and celebrations that are coming up. Alternatively, if you are like me, and prefer relaxing close to a television with the air conditioning blasting, here are some shows and movies you can watch that offer an entertaining perspective on these events and celebrations.

- **The Civil Rights Act of 1964 (July 2):** Even though school's over, that doesn't mean kids should stop reading. I am Ruby Bridges is a picture book by Ruby Bridges. Bridges writes about her experience as the first Black child to desegregate an all-white elementary school in 1960. Additionally, to learn more about the mothers of the most prominent activists during the Civil Rights Movement, including MLK Jr. and Malcolm X, listen to this podcast [here](#).



- **Independence Day (July 4):** If you are looking for a light movie that gives those summer, 4th of July vibes, The Sandlot and A League of Their Own are the picks for you.
- **Muharram (begins July 18):** The Islamic New Year occurs on the first day of the Muharram (first month of the Islamic calendar). On the first of the Muharram in the 14th century of the Islamic calendar, the Grand Mosque Mecca was seized by militants for two weeks, in which thousands of individuals were kept hostage. For a history of the Siege of Mecca, please listen to the NPR podcast [here](#).
- **International Friendship Day (July 30):** Proclaimed in 2011 by the UN General Assembly, this is a time to celebrate togetherness between people and cultures. For some 90s nostalgia, I recommend the 1997 movie, Romy and Michele's High School Reunion, a comedic movie about two best friends preparing for and attending their high school reunion.
- **Barack Obama's Birthday (August 4):** What better way to celebrate the 44th President then to read his memoir *A Promised Land*. If you prefer not to read the 768-page book, there is an audio version that is read by the former President himself.
- **Sister's Day (August 6):** If you want to binge watch a show that focuses on the bond of three powerful, independent sisters, I highly recommend the television show, Charmed (the original version), which is one of my favorite shows.



- **Purple Heart Day (August 7):** The movie American Sniper, which is loosely based on a true story, tells the story of Chris Kyle's lengthy service in Iraq and the impacts his four tours had on his personal life. Chris Kyle earned a number of Purple Hearts, which is awarded to service members who have been wounded or killed while serving in the U.S. military, in addition to various other awards, for his service.
- **Raksha Bandhan (August 30):** Raksha Bandhan, which means the "bond of protection" is a Hindu holiday to celebrate the bond between a brother and sister. For this holiday, the sister will tie a string (aka "Rakhi") around her brother's wrist and pray for his well-being. In return, the brother will protect his sister, and oftentimes gives a gift in return. The Bollywood movie, Hum Saath Saath Hain, which focuses on the relationship between three brothers and their sister, can be found on Netflix. Subtitles are available.
- **Labor Day (September 4):** To learn more about the 9to5 group, a group of female secretaries who made tremendous efforts to improve the rights of female office workers, please watch the 1980 movie, 9 to 5 on HBO Max and the related documentary titled 9to5: The Story of A Movement on Netflix.
- **Janmashtami (September 6-7):** Janmashtami is a Hindu holiday to celebrate the birth of Lord Krishna. To hear about the birth of Lord Krishna, you can listen to this BBC Heart and Soul Podcast [here](#).
- **Rosh Hashanah (evening of September 15 to September 17 evening):** Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year that oftentimes is spent with family and close friends. To get a better understanding of this spiritual time of the year, please listen to the BBC's Beyond Belief Podcast, which discusses the holiday and the impacts COVID-19 had on the holiday. A link to the podcast can be found [here](#).
- **Ganesh Chaturthi (September 19):** To get a glimpse into this Hindu holiday celebrating the birth of Lord Ganesh, the God of wisdom, take a look at Season 1, Episode 4 of Never Have I Ever called "... felt super Indian." The show can be found on Netflix.



- **Yom Kippur (evening of September 24 evening to evening of September 25):** Yom Kippur, the day of atonement, is the holiest holiday in the Jewish culture in which Jewish individuals seek forgiveness for their wrongdoings. Season 2, Episode 7 of The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel provides a glimpse into the practices that occur on Yom Kippur. The show can be found on Amazon Prime.

This is just a small portion of the vast resources out there to learn more about the different holidays, cultures, and celebrations during the summer months.

P.S. Don't forget to wear your sunscreen!

Puerto Rico...a multicultural mosaic

TRACING INDIGENOUS AND AFRICAN INFUSION ON THIS ISLAND'S LANGUAGE AND MUSIC

BY CORASI CAICEDO



Puerto Rico, originally named Borikén by its inhabitants, is lauded as a cultural melting pot. The Spanish first made contact with the indigenous people of Puerto Rico when they landed on the island in 1493. The Taíno (and Carib) tribes had been living on the island for many generations prior to the Spanish colonization.

The Taíno tribe was nearly eradicated under Spanish rule. Enslaved Africans were brought over to the island to compensate for the dwindling indigenous population and work the lands. Both groups were obligated to learn the Spanish language and abandon their native tongue, though remnants of the latter can still be heard when speaking to a Puerto Rican. In 1898, the United States seized control of Puerto Rico, and the island's language and culture went through a second wave of hybridization. English phrases can be heard in the language. Phrases or words like "parqueo" or "cachea" (parking and catch) are some examples of the anglicism commonly heard on the island.

The merging of the American English culture with the Taíno, African, and Spanish cultures led to a complex language and identity, which remains today and is very unique to Puerto Rico.

INDIGENOUS INFLUENCE ON LANGUAGE

Before the arrival of the Spanish colonists, the Taínos had their own culture, language, and government structure. Their contact with the Spanish led to a clash of cultures that affected the identity and language development throughout Borikén. Further, during the Spanish colonization of Puerto Rico, the Taíno and Spanish languages were combined, later becoming a Spanish-Taíno creole, which became a standardized form of communication among Puerto Ricans. Words like iguana (arboreal lizard) and canoa (canoe) are part of that legacy, which the Spanish also carried to other parts of the world. Taíno words are still used for municipalities throughout Puerto Rico, such as Utuado, Mayagüez, Caguas, and Humacao, among others.

AFRICAN INFLUENCE ON LANGUAGE

Enslaved African peoples brought an array of customs that drew from various African cultures, but studies suggest the vast majority were captured from the Yorubas and Igbo tribes in Nigeria and the Bantus from the Guineas. Linguists document the tonal language of Yoruba as the most present linguistic influence in Puerto Rico's mixed culture. Instruments such as barriles, a cuisine rooted in African ingredients, and dance forms such as bomba and plena are some of the enriching elements enslaved African peoples introduced to the Puerto Rican identity.

The African language gave Puerto Rican Spanish a distinctive sound. Words like *chévere* (a colloquial word for something special or 'cool'), food like *ñame* (mashed yam), and *gandules* (pigeon peas) are all examples of Puerto Rican expressions with African origins.

The African languages in Puerto Rico also influenced the phonology of Puerto Rican Spanish with the deletion of final consonants like /s/ and /n/, and the alternation of the /l/ and /r/ consonants. These phonological changes are recognizable linguistic elements in Puerto Rican language and are often misunderstood by other Spanish speakers.

AFRICAN AND INDIGENOUS INFLUENCE ON MUSIC

Even though the use of the Taíno language declined under Spanish colonization, Taíno traditions carried on and influenced everyday life in Puerto Rico. Their food (yuca, malanga, batata, etc.), music, dances, storytelling, and language became a part of Puerto Rican heritage. Musical instruments such as maracas (rumba shakers) and güiros (percussion instruments made from a gourd) are staples in Puerto Rican folkloric music.

Bomba is an emblematic Puerto Rican musical genre that emerged 400 years ago from the colonial plantations where West African enslaved people and their descendants worked. The dance had many meanings. The enslaved Africans would find a spot at the plantation to dance and connect with their ancestors and deities. It was both a form of worship and protest against the Spanish rule. Cane workers released feelings of sadness, anger, and resistance through fiery drums played in dance gatherings called Bailes de Bomba (Bomba Dances). The towns of Mayagüez, San Juan, Loíza, and Ponce, among others, were the cradle of the various styles that make up this genre. In these areas, enslaved people also used them to celebrate baptisms and marriages, communicate with each other, and plan rebellions. The roots of this tradition can be traced to the Ashanti people of Ghana, and the etymology of the word "bomba" to the Akan and Bantu languages of Africa. Bomba is still a popular dance on the island. It is mainly danced at festivals and large gatherings. Click [here](#) to learn more about bomba straight from the source.

Despite colonization, Puerto Ricans hold a strong sense of identity, which includes everything from language to culture. Through this determination to keep the indigenous, African, and English influences alive in their Spanish, Puerto Ricans demonstrate a cultural resistance against those forcing monolingual ideologies.

A BOX OF CRAYONS

A POEM ON THE SPIRIT AND BEAUTY OF DIVERSITY

While walking in a toy store
The day before today, I overheard a
crayon box
With many things to say.
"I don't like red!" said yellow.
And green said, "Nor do I!"
And no one here likes orange,
But no one knows quite why."
"We are a box of crayons
That really doesn't get along,"
Said blue to all the others "Something
here is wrong!"
Well, I bought that box of crayons and
took it home with me and laid out all
the crayons so the crayons could see.
They watched me as I colored
With red and blue and green
And black and white and orange and
every color in between.

They watched as green
Became the grass
And blue became the sky.
The yellow sun was shining bright
On white clouds drifting by.
Colors changing as they touched,
Becoming something new.
They watched me as I colored.
They watched till I was through.
And when I'd finally finished,
I began to walk away.
And as I did the crayon box
Had something more to say...
"I do like red!" said the yellow
And green said, "so do I!"
"And blue you are terrific
So high up in the sky."
"We are a box of crayons
Each of us unique,
But when we get together
The picture is complete."

OUR MISSION:

At NFC, we celebrate Diversity, promote Inclusion, and strive for Equity to ensure a welcoming workplace for our valued colleagues and clients. DEI is deeply woven into the fabric of NFC, allowing us to ignite courageous and compassionate change in our Firm and communities, by:

- ✓ Leading with respect and empathy for others in all that we do
- ✓ Empowering and positioning historically underrepresented groups for success in the legal field and beyond
- ✓ Creating intentional opportunities and platforms for DEI awareness and growth
- ✓ Honoring and embracing each person's authentic self and uniqueness
- ✓ Serving as role models to promote equity and belonging within the workplace and society

Our goal is to embody Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion the "NFC Way."



diversity | equity | inclusion
NUKK-FREEMAN & CERRA, P.C.

JULY
DISABILITY PRIDE MONTH
SOUTH ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

1
Canada Day (Dominion Day)

4
Independence Day (U.S.)

5
Culture Club Event: Ice Cream Truck

12
NFC DEI Council Meeting

14
International Non-Binary People's Day

18
Muharram begins

26
July CORE Day

27
Black Women's Equal Pay Day

AUGUST

9
NFC DEI Council Meeting

23
August CORE Day

23
International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition

30
Raksha Bandhan

SEPTEMBER
AMERINDIAN HERITAGE MONTH
NATIONAL HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH
NATIONAL RECOVERY MONTH

2
VJ Day, WWII

5
Labor Day (U.S.)

6
Janmashtami begins

11
911 Remembrance

15
International Day of Democracy

15
Rosh Hashanah begins

16
Octoberfest begins in Germany

17
Constitution Day

19
Ganesh Chaturthi

21
International Peace Day

22
Native American Day

24
Yom Kippur begins

27
September CORE Day