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Juneteenth: an American holiday for all

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Juneteenth: an American holiday for all

JUN 12, 2022



Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Mary Wardell-Ghirarduzzi.

Starting in 2023, University of the Pacific will celebrate Juneteenth as a university holiday.

Strawberry soda. Savory BBQ. Collard greens. Sweet corn and watermelon. And cherry pie. My father was a Black Texan. My mother is a Black Arkansan. When they migrated West, they brought with them traditions passed down through ancestors from West Africa, the Congo and Nigeria.

This is my Juneteenth.

This month, the nation will join in celebrating Juneteenth, a federal holiday that acknowledges when enslaved Black people in Texas were finally freed on June 19, 1865—more than two years after President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. Starting next

year, [University of the Pacific will celebrate Juneteenth as a university holiday.](#)

As a child, I thought Juneteenth was a celebration solely for African Americans. In time, I would learn that Juneteenth is for everyone.

I was eight years old when my mother explained to me what Juneteenth meant: “It’s when Black people got freed.” She continued, “but they didn’t want us to know it.”

The first part of my mother’s response was about the opportunity that comes only when we are invited into a place of critical reflection: the remembrance of our ancestors, why they mattered and how we celebrate their resistance and ingenuity.

The second part of her response—“*But they didn’t want us to know it*”—is a critical analysis, urging us to pay close attention to how inequality happens.

“*But they didn’t want us to know it.*” Within a mere eight words, she provided a historically informed and equity-focused context for examining persistent inequality. Her analysis exposed why racism endures and how it is enacted by people within institutions to maintain the status quo. We must recognize how dominance persists only through positions of power, privilege and property. She reminded me that we stay oppressed only when we are unaware of this inequitable paradigm. African Americans, along with many others, are working together to dismantle oppressive systems for all.

My mother’s revelatory response has stayed with me on the importance of the holiday: Juneteenth exists as a symbol of pride and a warning of injustice—both affirming and cautionary at the same time.

Juneteenth is a time for all Americans to join in celebrating important traditions that extend to every culture and community in the United States, reminding us of who we are and who we can become. As we work together to become a model anti-racist university, I invite all Pacificans to learn about Juneteenth.

If you are interested in attending a Juneteenth celebration, there are events taking place in our three cities over the June 17–19 weekend:

- **Stockton:** <https://www.stocktonjuneteenth.org/events>
- **Sacramento:** <https://sacramentojuneteenthinc.org/festival/>
- **San Francisco:** <https://www.sanfranciscojuneteenth.com/>

My hope is that we each take time this month to ask our own questions, reflect on our cultural heritage and learn how Juneteenth is as much a holiday for the Pacific family.

Sincerely,

Mary J. Wardell-Ghirarduzzi

Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

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