

Name: _____

Juneteenth Sources

Instructions: Read the sources below and answer the questions on your “Analyzing the Sources” worksheet. All of the quotes are by African Americans.

Part 1: Symbolism in Juneteenth Commemorations

Food

“Red food dominates the dinner menu during the Juneteenth, whether it’s barbecue, red velvet cake, red soda, hibiscus tea, watermelon or strawberries. Southerners have many tales on the reason why red food is used during the celebration from the bloodshed of millions of slaves to rituals of the Asante tribe [in West Africa].”

—Kenneth Temple, chef, 2019

“Two traditional drinks [brought to the United States] from West Africa that had a lot of social meaning are kola nut tea and bissap [hibiscus tea].... I love eating red-colored foods, especially red drinks, because it connects me to previous generations of African Americans.... I think about all of those Emancipation celebrations, church suppers, family reunions and other occasions when people got together to celebrate, renew family ties and friendships, and affirm their humanity.”

—Adrian Miller, author and soul food expert, 2017-2018

Dress

“Dress remains a big part of Juneteenth celebrations today. When I was growing up, it was customary to wear your nicest outfits as a way to honor the enslaved who had no control over their clothing choices. A common theme is dressing in red, white, and blue to highlight the ‘Independence Day for Black folks’ vibe of the holiday. It’s also a nod to the Juneteenth flag, which sports bright red and blue stripes and a bold white star overlay to represent the ‘new star’ on the horizon for our community. Others opt to wear red, black, and green, the colors of the Pan-African flag. And of course, some celebrate Juneteenth with a white party with guests sporting crisp linens and white cotton dresses....”

—Bridget Todd, journalist, 2019

Ritual

“We’re drumming in our ancestors. Drums play an important role in every aspect of African life, including physical, emotional and spiritual. African hand-drums are played to communicate and celebrate, to mourn and inspire.”

—Kimberly Calvin, director of the Akoma Unity Center, on the role of drums on Juneteenth holiday commemorations, 2019

“We will light the torches and walk in our ancestors’ footsteps along the Trail of Enslaved Africans. And they will be there, and they will be present, and they will be happy that they are being remembered.”

—Janine Y. Bell, president of the Elegba Folklore Society, on a Juneteenth ceremony in Richmond, Virginia in which participants walk the same historic trail that enslaved people had walked from slave ships on the James River to the Richmond slave markets, 2018

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Part 2: Meaning and Significance of Juneteenth Commemorations

“Personally, for me, Juneteenth is important and I celebrate it because I love all people. I have friends of all colors, races, and nationalities, and I cherish each of them. Without the sacrifices of my ancestors, this may not be a reality for me today. We might still be separated by skin color with separate restaurants, schools, and public restrooms. I proudly celebrate Juneteenth each year with my family because I believe what this day represents should never be forgotten.”

—Michael, Michigan 7th grader, in an essay on what Juneteenth means to him, 2019

“We’re looking to highlight the achievements of African Americans in the community that have set new standards for high achievement. One message that the festival and Juneteenth has that we really try to promote is for our community to dream big.”

—Norman Harris III, Juneteenth celebration organizer, Denver, Colorado, 2018

“This is emotional because I’m thinking of the 400 years that we’ve been here, the trial and tribulations and we’re still fighting for the same things that we were fighting for when we first got here—freedom and liberation.”

—Linda Hart, member of the African American Health Coalition, 2019

“For me, Juneteenth is a reminder that waiting for a declaration of liberation from white people does not guarantee freedom of Black people. Not in 1865, not in 2019.... So this Juneteenth, I plan to eat my festival food, attend an event or two, but also continue to look for synergies among other Black people because our freedom cannot wait for people who will never benefit from giving it to us. We must take it.”

—Abre’ Conner, attorney at the ACLU, 2019

“There was always an understanding that we were there to celebrate the end of slavery, but the holiday was also used as a chance to address problems that were affecting our communities. In addition to dance circles and food stands, there were often resource booths for folks to register to vote, schedule medical checkups for themselves and their families, and sign youth up for various summer camps. For Black folks, celebrations are rarely simple events centered on happiness. They usually involve remembering those we are conditioned to forget, honoring those whose accomplishments are often undervalued and erased, and reimagining what our future can and will be....”

—Candace Miller, National Women’s Law Center, 2018

“I think that Juneteenth is a necessary moment of observation because our government and, to a certain degree, our nation and our culture has not really acknowledged the trauma of 4 million enslaved people and their descendants. It hasn’t acknowledged the impact this institution has had on this country and continues to have on this country. There hasn’t been a national accounting, and I think the Juneteenth holiday is kind of a reminder of that.”

—Karlos Hill, historian, 2018