



# Juneteenth FAQs

In the midst of your Inclusion work, you may be thinking about how to mark days that you may not have a personal history with. One of these holidays is Juneteenth.

Though Juneteenth is a holiday that's not new to many in the Black community or to folks of all ethnicities with ties to Texas, it is one that has recently come into the consciousness of our synagogue communities. Once Juneteenth became a federal holiday, many have had the inclination to add it's celebration to the inclusion work that they are doing but then worried that they were going to fall into culturally appropriative behaviors by doing so. The very tools that are now in our toolboxes are giving us pause, causing us to ask questions and making us hesitant to commemorate this important moment in American history.

Since 2021, USCJ has been marking Juneteenth and has provided helpful tools to support in the effort to bring this holiday into our Jewish communities in meaningful ways. As we're grappling with these big concepts and navigating how to get this right, there are common questions that folks have popped up the most. I hope to provide a level of insight about how to start thinking about how your community might start marking this holiday this year.

**Question: *We don't have any Black Jews in our community, is it still appropriate to celebrate Juneteenth in our community?***

Answer: Yes! Juneteenth is an American holiday and it's a great opportunity to learn about the holiday and explore the history of your community's participation in Civil Rights action (or inaction) and what the history of the area was in terms of enslavement. During a recent USCJ social justice trip to the South, participants learned that the areas around their synagogues had a history of lynchings and were [sundown/sunrise towns](#). The Haggadah for Juneteenth was designed for everyone to use and has notes about how to modify practices or use them for discussion points in racially homogenous communities.

**Question: *If we find that we do not have Jews of Color in our community, how do we do an internal inventory of our welcoming practices?***

Answer: When I support communities with this question, one thing we look at is how we are signaling our values on our externally facing presence. We are in a digital age and folks have often made the decision about whether or not they will visit your community long before they step foot into it. Take a look at your website and social media—how are you signaling your openness and diversity? You may think that you don't currently have any JOCs in your community or that you don't want to tokenize the members that you have. Thinking with inclusive practices first is a mindset shift—how do you signal that your community is safe for LGBTQIA+ folks or folks with disabilities? We often lean on our values since those parts of our intersected identities may not be visible. As a start, how do you signal welcoming in your Mission and Vision statement? Think about who attends your simchas and other synagogue events? Who might be included and who might feel left out? First impressions are everything—How do your greeters welcome new people into your space? What practices are universal and which might seem (regardless of intention) to single folks out? Those are good places to start.

**Question: *Are there Tikkun Olam or social justice projects that we can engage in (including activities for kids) leading up to Juneteenth?***

Answer: Once you've started an internal communal inventory about the history of the area that your synagogue is situated in and how the demographics of that area came to be, there may be work that you can identify that your external community needs. Are there other community organizations that you can partner with? Are there volunteer opportunities (including tutoring in the library) that you may not have thought of? Do you have relationships with the other houses of worship in your neighborhood (and if not, what is the history there)? We have to expand our thinking beyond relationships with the Black community because there may be other ethnic groups that your community may be proximate to that have their own histories and needs. Regardless of the project that you choose, you want to avoid coming in from a place of 'saving' the community from an issue that you have determined that they need help with. Accepting a shared liberation mindset means that we believe that we are obligated to be mutually accountable to each other. It also means that we don't help others based on whether or not they help us, we do so because we believe that it is work that we are commanded to do.

**Question: *We want to do this work but have no idea where to start.***

Answer: First, I suggest reaching out to your synagogue consultant who can get you in touch with USCJ's Racial Justice Specialist. The suggestions mentioned in this article are great places to start and if you'd like to start working groups in your community, take a look at the resources compiled by the Racial Justice Subcommittee of the Rabbinical Assembly's Social Justice Commission. Every community is different and has different relationships with different communities of color (including transracial adoption and how those kiddos were raised with a connection to their culture of origin) and the recognition, repair and celebration is going to look different for everyone. No matter where you begin, be in touch with us. We look forward to supporting you!

**Past Juneteenth resources:**

[Juneteenth Through the Eyes of Jews of Color](#)

[Haggadah for Juneteenth \(updated for 2023\)](#)

[Kiddush Over Red Drink](#)

[Bringing Juneteenth Onto the Bimah](#)

**Resources on Welcoming (particularly about the High Holidays but these are excellent resources to get us thinking about how we welcome new participants year-round):**

[Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Considerations for the High Holidays \(2021\)](#)

[Creating Security & a Feeling of Safety for All: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility \(2022\)](#)

[The Power of Hello](#)