

Statement from ACTEC DEI Committee:

Juneteenth celebrates and commemorates June 19, 1865 as Emancipation Day. On that day, Union General Gordon Granger announced “To the people of Texas” that by the President’s Executive Order 250,000 formerly enslaved Black Texans possessed “absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property”. This Order came 2.5 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, and 6 months after the 13th Amendment was constitutionally ratified!

The Texas announcement created muted ‘July 4th type’ celebrations by Black Texans. There were spontaneous fireworks, family gatherings and faith-based praise all on full display. However, the 2+ years of **resistance** to racial equality did not end on the June 19th announcement. Local attempts to stop emancipation and Juneteenth celebrations began immediately but Black persistence in celebrating freedom won the day.

While Texas was the **last** state to recognize Black emancipation, it was the **first** state to make Juneteenth a State holiday. Many of the Juneteenth traditions of outdoor barbecue, watermelon, red punch and red-beans and other “red” food are related to Texas cuisine. Unfortunately, as Black people migrated out of Texas Jim Crow laws, restrictions on the use of parks by people of color and the suppression of Black-inclusive history guaranteed that Juneteenth would not be universally celebrated, even among African Americans.

All that changed in 2021. The creation of a Federal holiday in the wake of the George Floyd murder created “an outpouring of joy and unity”. The historians of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture point out that on that 2021 date Americans of all backgrounds enjoyed parties, attended soulful concerts, and shared communal feasts in a triumphant reminder of the rich tapestry of African American culture.

ACTEC is committed to continuing our DEI efforts that helped reverse years of Black exclusion. Instead of a holiday off from professional affiliation and education, the ACTEC summer meetings give us the opportunity to celebrate boldly together an emancipation to a better future for America and ACTEC.

We invite you to wear, drink and eat the color **red** in commemoration and celebration of Juneteenth. “The roots of the color red can be traced to West Africa, where it has been associated with strength, spirituality, life, and death. Furthermore, culinary historians trace the color to certain foods that traveled to the Americas along with the Africans during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, such as hibiscus and the kola nut.” Kelly Navies, Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture Museum Specialist and Oral Historian.

We also invite you to join DEI in advancing ACTEC goals of diversity, equality and inclusion by mentoring, nominating, acknowledging and voting on diverse Fellows. We ask that you especially focus on those groups that were specifically excluded from our legal profession by the laws of our nation and the bylaws of our legal organizations.