



Jewish Federation
of Greater New Orleans



presents

2025
Sixteenth
SEDER

H A G G A D A H

Honor the journey towards freedom
and justice for all.

JUNE 18, 2025 | XAVIER UNIVERSITY

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AKWAABA

The Juneteenth Freedom Seder is a unique and powerful ritual that intertwines the traditions of the Passover Seder with the commemoration of Juneteenth. Juneteenth marks the emancipation of enslaved African Americans in the United States, a day of liberation and a pivotal moment in the ongoing struggle for freedom and equality. **Seder means "order" in Hebrew.** The Passover Seder, a Jewish ritual focused on the story of Exodus, celebrates the liberation of the ancient Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

The Haggadah, meaning "telling," is the book we use to guide us through the Seder. Just as the Israelites were commanded to tell their story of liberation to each generation, we gather tonight to tell the story of Juneteenth and reflect on its significance. Both the Exodus and Juneteenth are narratives of a journey from oppression to freedom, stories of resilience, hope, and the unyielding human spirit.

MA NISHTANA

THE MANY QUESTIONS

Our traditions provide us with the spiritual tools to remain curious about our lives, both individually and communally. Tonight, just as we do at Passover, we ask ourselves, **why is this night different from all other nights?** This night is different because we take the time to celebrate the liberation that is our birthright. We inhale and exhale deeply, embracing this knowledge. We understand, just like our ancestors, that our liberation can never be given or taken away. Tonight, we remember this feeling, knowing we will return to this well of strength again and again.

At this Juneteenth Seder, we will ask many questions. On all other nights, we are expected to have answers to problems we didn't create. Tonight, we embrace being messy, uncertain, and incomplete. But uncertainty can be liberating, as it allows us to engage our most creative and unbound imagination. We will ask questions that call upon your imagination in service of our collective liberation.

Leader: Why is this night different from all other nights?

Group: Because tonight we celebrate Juneteenth — our shared story of freedom delayed, but not denied.

Leader: Why is this night different?

Group: Because we remember that our liberation is our birthright — not granted, but God-given.

Leader: Why is this night different?

Group: Because we gather across race and faith to imagine a future of collective freedom and joy.

A BLESSING FOR LIGHT

נִבְרַךְ אֶת הָאוֹר כְּאִשֶּׁר נִקְבְּץ בְּצוֹתָא לְהַדְלִיק נֵרוֹת שֶׁל יוֹם טוֹב. בְּאוֹר הַחֵרֶוֹת נִבְרַךְ אֶת הַחַיִּים.

*N'varech et ha'or k'asher nikavatz b'tzavta l'hadlik neivot shel yom tov.
B'or ha'cherut n'varech et ha'chayim.*

Let us celebrate the light as we gather together to kindle the festival candles.
With the light of liberation, let us celebrate life.



THE FIRST CUP

Behold this cup of wine. Assata Shakur taught us: It is our duty to fight for our freedom. We raise this first glass to her, to our continued fight, and to our ancestors who believed in collective freedom & liberation: Fred Hampton, Harriet Tubman, Toussaint L'Ouverture, Frederick Douglass, Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera.

Raise your glass, say one of the following:

פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן: אֶתוֹ נִשְׁתֶּה "לַחַיִּים"

P'ri hagafen, ito nishteh, "l'chayim!"

The fruit of the vine, with it let us drink "to life!"

SANFOKA



The sea swallows. Our names, our clothing, our language — these were the only things we were allowed to take out of Egypt, and these are exactly what we lost when we were taken from Africa. The sea swallowed our ancestors' names and languages just as it swallowed the Egyptian armies.

We remember what we have lost and strive to be in right relation with all beings, including the earth.

Reader A: Once we lived in Nigeria, Senegal, Benin, Mali, Ghana. Once we dwelled in Jerusalem, Ethiopia, and Egypt.

Reader B: We gather today to remember and celebrate. Juneteenth, like Passover, presents us with the opportunity to re-enact the moment our people were in transition.

Reader C: We remember the ending of chattel slavery the way we remember our liberation from Egypt—through ritual, storytelling, and symbolic action. The story of the Exodus and the story of Juneteenth both center the moment when a people step out of bondage into freedom, not without struggle, not without delay, but with hope and sacred memory.

Reader D: For Black Americans and Jews—and especially for Black Jews—these histories are intertwined: both peoples carry inherited trauma, resistance, and the unyielding pursuit of dignity. In both traditions, we gather annually not only to remember, but to re-experience the journey toward liberation together is memory embodied.

Call and Response Hymn – “Angels” by Cynthia Liggins Thomas

1. Everywhere I go, there’s an angel there
Repeat: My God, my God, He never leaves me alone
2. Everywhere I touch, there’s an angel there
3. All around my home, there are angels there

Reflection Prompt: Share your name with your table. Name someone—past or present—who has inspired you to pursue justice, faith, or service. After you share, light a candle in honor of that person.

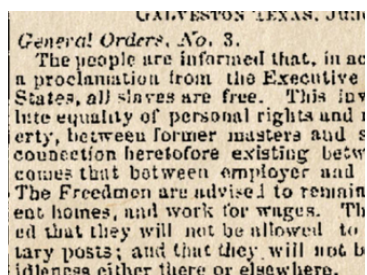
SHEHECHEYANU

ברוכה את יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ רוֹחַ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהֵחֵימָנוּ וְקִימָתָנוּ וְהִגִּיעַתָּנוּ לַזְמַן הַזֶּה

Barukh atah adonai eloheynu melekh ha'olam shehekheyanu, v'kiymanu, v'higiyanu lazman hazeh.

You are Blessed, Our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has kept us in life and sustained us, enabling us to reach this season.

MAGGID



There are various accounts explaining the two-and-a-half-year delay in delivering the news of freedom to Texas. Some stories suggest a messenger was murdered on his way to Texas with the news. Others believe the news was deliberately withheld by enslavers to maintain their labor force. Another theory is that federal troops waited for slave owners to reap the benefits of one last cotton harvest before enforcing the Emancipation Proclamation. Regardless of the reasons, the conditions in Texas remained unchanged until General Granger's arrival.

Reader 1: On June 19, 1865, Union General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas, to deliver news that had already been law for more than two years: the enslaved were free.

Reader 2: He read aloud General Order Number 3:

"The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free."

Reader 3: The Emancipation Proclamation had taken effect on January 1, 1863, but the people of Texas—over 250,000 still enslaved—had not been told.

Reader 4: Freedom was deliberately delayed. Some say a messenger was murdered en route. Others say enslavers hid the truth to secure one last cotton harvest. Whatever the cause—freedom was postponed.

Reader 5: And yet, it came. On June 19, 1865, Black people in Galveston heard the news and began to move. Some danced. Some wept. Some simply left.

Reader 6: They walked barefoot, with no money and no guarantees, toward dignity. Toward hope. Toward something they had only imagined. They walked into freedom.

Reader 7: They built homes. Schools. Churches. They reunited with family, started businesses, and held fast to joy in the midst of struggle. And they remembered.

Reader 8: Each year, on June 19th, the newly freed gathered to celebrate. To feast. To tell stories. To give thanks. They named the day "Juneteenth."

Reader 9: But the promise of freedom was incomplete. After slavery came Black Codes, lynchings, convict leasing, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration.

Reader 10: The journey from enslavement to emancipation to full equality has not been linear. But we keep walking. Each generation carrying the fire of the last.

Reader 11: Juneteenth was celebrated in Black communities long before the country took notice. It was sacred before it was recognized.

Reader 12: In 1980, Texas became the first state to make Juneteenth a holiday. In 2021, Juneteenth became a federal holiday in the United States.

Reader 13: Juneteenth reminds us that freedom delayed is still freedom fought for—and that Black joy is not a distraction from resistance; it is resistance.

Reader 14: In Jewish tradition, we eat matzah to remember the haste of our liberation. Tonight, we eat cornbread, sweet potatoes and sip red soda, remembering freedom's flavor and the long road to get there.

Reader 15: Juneteenth is not just a history lesson. It is a prophetic call: to build a world where freedom is real—for all people, in every generation.

CALL AND RESPONSE

Leader: What do we remember tonight? **Group:** We remember the crossing. We remember the waiting. We remember the joy. **Leader:** What do we commit to tonight? **Group:** To remember boldly. To act justly. To build a future rooted in freedom. **Leader:** What do we say to those still in chains? **Group:** We see you. We fight for you. We will not be free until you are free.

REFLECTION AND VISION

THE TEN PLAGUES OF SLAVERY IN AMERICA

Leader: Even in our joy, we remember...

All: We remember the suffering of our ancestors, and the plagues that American slavery brought upon generations.

Each table facilitator reads aloud one plague:

1. **Family Separation** – Children sold away from their parents, never to be seen again.
2. **The Middle Passage** – An oceanic graveyard where bodies and names were lost to the sea.
3. **Forced Reproduction** – Where people were treated as property and denied control over their own bodies.
4. **Criminalization of Literacy** – Laws that punished those who dared to learn to read.
5. **Lynching** – Terror in the trees, violence used to uphold white supremacy.
6. **Sharecropping Debt** – A system of economic slavery that kept freedom just out of reach.
7. **Jim Crow Laws** – Legal segregation that codified racism and inequality.
8. **Mass Incarceration** – Today's chains: targeting, arresting, and caging Black bodies at unprecedented rates.
9. **Voter Suppression** – From poll taxes to purges, the ongoing fight to silence Black political power.
10. **Environmental Racism** – Poisoned air, water, and soil disproportionately burdening Black communities.

All: We remember. We resist. We rise.

Leader: Let us raise our glasses not only in memory, but in a vow: to never allow these plagues to be repeated, and to uproot their remnants wherever they remain.

THE SECOND CUP

Behold this cup of wine. Assata taught us: It is our duty to win. We drink to her, to our commitment to winning, and to our ancestors who invested in our winning and building power: Fannie Lou Hamer, Bayard Rustin, A. Philip Randolph, Ella Baker, Pedro Albizu Campos.

Raise glass, say one of the following:

פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן: אֵתוּ נִשְׁתֶּה "לַחַיִּים."

P'ri hagafen, ito nishteh, "l'chayim!"

The fruit of the vine, with it let us drink "to life!"

NIA

What does a future of joy, freedom, and collective liberation look like?

Be specific:

- What does your community look like? Who is there? What do you see around you?
- What does it feel like to walk in your neighborhood or house of worship?
- Are you tense and afraid, or fearless and relaxed?
- What does it feel like to be Black and/or Jewish in this vision?

Discussion Prompt: Share your vision. *What must change to get us there? What part will you play?*

THE ELEMENTS

THE SEDER PLATE

Red foods are customary for Juneteenth, with the color crimson symbolizing ingenuity and resilience during times of bondage. Traditional items include hibiscus tea, red soda, hot sauce, hot links, watermelon, red velvet cake, and strawberry pie. This year, we offer a Juneteenth Seder plate that brings together the legacies of two periods of enslavement. It serves as a reminder that although our ancestors were once slaves, we have continuously fought for liberation and taken significant steps toward freedom. This Seder plate incorporates the food traditions of Juneteenth and the American South, creating an altar of abundance for all to partake and celebrate.

Z'roa: זרוע — Beets

Karpas: כרפס — Okra

Beitzah: ביצה — Black eyed peas/Eggs boiled in hibiscus tea

Maror: מרור — Hot red pepper

Charoset: חרוסת — Baked sweet potato

Lehem: לחם — Tea cakes or cornbread

Cup: כוס — Red soda/hibiscus tea

WATER

Water is both a symbol of liberation and a witness to our suffering, carrying the weight of our past and the hope of our future. As you say the following blessings, we invite you to embody the journey across oceans and the work our hands must do to liberate others. Water has marked every crossing. Tonight, we wash away what no longer serves our liberation. *What are you ready to release? In what ways can we use our hands to help us hear the work that needs to be done?*

**Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam,
asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav vitzivanu al n'tilat yadayim.**

**Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with
Your commandments, and commanded us concerning the washing of the hands.**



WADE IN THE WATER

"Wade in the Water" is a traditional African American spiritual with deep roots in the history of slavery and the struggle for freedom. This song, like many spirituals, was used as a code to communicate secret messages among enslaved people. It provided guidance and hope for those seeking to escape to freedom through the Underground Railroad.

Wade in the water
Wade in the water, children,
Wade in the water
God's a-going to trouble the water

THE MEAL

HAMOTZI

We recognize that a communal meal is one of the strongest tools for peacekeeping and community building. Breaking bread together nurtures, celebrates, and sustains our lives as a unified community. When we say HaMotzi, we thank G-d for bringing food from the earth to sustain us.

On Juneteenth, we add a layer of awareness, acknowledging that today, people continue to perform the backbreaking labor to create the bread we are blessing. Sharing a meal is not just about physical sustenance; it is a symbol of our shared humanity and our commitment to support and uplift one another. As we eat together, let us remember those who toil in the fields and kitchens, and honor their contributions to our collective well-being.

Raise bread, say one of the following:

נוציא מצה לחם מן הארץ—כדי שנסתפק ונתכלכל כלנו.

Notzi matzah - lechem min ha'aretz—k'dei sh'nistapek v'nitkalkel kulanu.

Let us bring forth bread from the land—so we all may be satisfied and sustained.

THE THIRD CUP

Behold this cup of wine. Assata taught us: *We must love and support each other—* And we remember our ancestors who loved us, supported us with love: James Baldwin, Zora Neale Hurston, Audre Lorde. Sojourner Truth. And we know that this is what gives us the courage and strength to love and support each other into a different world.

Raise glass, say one of the following:

פרי הגפן: אתו נשתה "לחיים".

P'ri hagafen, ito nishteh, "l'chayim!"

The fruit of the vine, with it let us drink "to life!"

Table Discussion Prompt: *From what do we seek liberation today? In our communities? In our justice systems? In ourselves?*

THE FOURTH CUP

Behold this cup of wine. Assata taught us: *We have nothing to lose but our chains—* Ancestors who were the folks who played outside of the rules, gave us a difference sense of ourselves in the future — boundary breaking ancestors: Octavia Butler, Prince, Billie Holiday, Gladys Bentley, Sammy Davis, Jr., Nina Simone, Jackie Shane.

Raise glass, say one of the following:

פרי הגפן: אתו נשתה "לחיים".

P'ri hagafen, ito nishteh, "l'chayim!"

The fruit of the vine, with it let us drink "to life!"

Table Discussion Prompt: *What personal commitments can we make to ensure we are collectively supporting liberation in our communities? How can we hold ourselves and each other accountable to these commitments?*

GIVING THANKS

It is important that we take moments every day to express our gratitude for all that we have.

Modim anachnu lach sh'ata hu Adonai Eloheinu v'elohei avoteinu l'olam va'ed. Tzur chayenu, magen yeshuateinu ata hu l'dor vador.

Nodeh lecha u'nesaper tehilatecha chayeinu hamesurim b'yadecha v'al nishmoteinu ha'pekudot lach v'al nisecha shebechol yom imanu v'al niflotecha v'tovotecha shebechol et: erev, vavoker, v'tzohorayim.

Hatov ki lo chalu rachamecha v'ham'rachem ki lo tamu chasadecha. Mei'olam kivinu lach.

We give thanks to You that you are the Lord our God, and God of our ancestors forever and ever, Rock of our lives and Shield of our salvation from generation to generation.

We give thanks to you and recount your praises, for our lives that are entrusted in your hand, and for our souls that are in your safekeeping, and for your miracles that are with us every day, and for your wonders and good deeds that are with us at all times: evening, morning, and midday.

Good One, your mercies never fail us, Compassionate One, your loving kindness never ceases.

THE CHARGE

Leader: We are not free until we are all free.

Group: And we have nothing to lose but our chains.

LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING *by James Weldon Johnson*

Lift every voice and sing,
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the list'ning skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.

Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by Thy might,
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
**Shadowed beneath Thy hand, May we forever stand,
True to our God, True to our native land.**

CREDITS

This Juneteenth Seder Haggadah is an adaptation of the 2024 AJC Heartland Unity Seder Haggadah, the 2022 USJC Juneteenth Seder, and the JFREJ 2018 Juneteenth Seder authored by members and friends of the JFREJ Jews of Color Caucus, including Graie Barasch-Hagans, Shoshana Brown, Leo Ferguson, Koach Baruch Frazier, Sara Goldberg, Megan Madison, Alexis Ortiz, and Yehudah Webster. Thanks to April Baskin, Rakel Joseph, Leah King, Amparo Abel-Bey, Isaiah Rothstein, Autumn Leonard, Teresa Babilio, Ana Rubenstein, Yavilah McCoy, Meg Sullivan/JCC Harlem, Solar One, Lucas Shapiro, and Jules Skloot, and Cecilia Lim.

Special thanks to Wendell Shelby-Wallace, Katie Bauman, and Terrell Mims for Haggadah coordination and editorial support.



The Behar Center for Jewish-Multicultural Affairs (CJMA) is an in-house initiative of the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans that contains all of the Federation's external relations programs and directly reaches out to the wider community, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

The Center focuses on the following primary outreach areas:

- Black-Jewish relations
- Latin-American relations
- Multi-faith relations

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