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Summer 2021 is the time to celebrate Black culture once again

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After more than a year of unbelievable stress and divisiveness, hate and overt racism toward people of color, we find ourselves in this summer of 2021. We lift our heads above those realities to celebrate and embrace our wonderful Black and African American cultures.

The African American culture is rooted in African culture, but for over 400 years, our distinct African American culture has survived and evolved into something wonderful to behold. That culture is found in our remarkable and unique foods, and our diverse music (including slave songs, spirituals, blues, jazz, rhythm and blues, hip hop, rap and more). It includes our rich commitment to the spiritual, comprising many denominations and religions; our art, including performing arts and visual arts, spoken word and written word; a rich history of scholars; and an elaborate fabric of social groups; our intercollegiate sororities and fraternities; all rooted in some form in the African American culture.

All of this is on full display in our Black communities, including my beloved North Omaha. These communities have endured all forms of slavery, lynchings, redlining, bigotry, overt racism, generations of voter suppression and poverty, yet, have endured and produced. Our culture is a product of our history and a testimonial to our people and their strength and resolve.

Which brings us again, to the wonderful display this summer of our culture. You can find our people enjoying summer by going to and cooking in the park, feasting on our wonderful food dishes and social gatherings galore.

On this weekend of June 19, many celebrations will remember what is called Juneteenth. June 19, 1865, was the day word finally reached slaves in Galveston, Texas, that they had been freed via the Emancipation Proclamation, which was signed in January 1863.

The slaves began to celebrate their freedom. The celebrations took many names over the years, including Freedom Day and Emancipation Day, among others. Though initially celebrated in Galveston, Juneteenth has become a national celebration day for African Americans and throughout North Omaha.

Racism, redlining and lack of opportunities in Omaha forced a generation of young people, including myself, to flee to other cities, mostly west and north, to seek better opportunities and a better life. This took a tremendous toll on North Omaha and its potential — a brain drain of some of our most talented African Americans and their financial potential.

While the escape was comprehensive, many returned home to North Omaha during holidays of summer. That evolved into a tradition that is known as Native Omaha Days in July for celebrations with friends and families. This wonderful display of African

American culture often includes family and class reunions. This year the “Days” begin in the last week of July, centered at 24th and Lake.

Down the road in December, African Americans celebrate Kwanzaa, an annual seven-day celebration Dec. 26-Jan. 1, that focuses on unity, creativity, faith and giving, and celebrates our culture.

Each summer, my organization, Black Votes Matter, conducts an annual six-day, all-expenses-paid tour for Omaha high school youth. We visit Memphis, Jackson, Birmingham, Tuskegee, Selma, Montgomery and Atlanta to teach and expose our youth to both their history and their culture, and hope that they learn and respect it, and then return home to become leaders, stay here and prosper.

This year the tour will leave July 11, carrying 40 of our youth and 20 adults. Please note the wisdom of the Omaha Public Schools, in that 10 OPS principals will join the tour for two days. It is my contention that better understanding by all of the richness, contribution and potential of the various cultures will serve to mitigate white supremacy, hate and even all forms of divisiveness that we are faced with in our country today.