

Long Time Coming (a Juneteenth cocktail) – Comfort du Jour

Juneteenth has at last become a federal holiday, and it's been a long time coming. Rather than assume what kind of celebration is respectful, I have done some research into the significant themes around Juneteenth, and I am responding with this bright red cocktail, created in honor of those for whom respect has been a long time coming.

Red drinks have always played a major role in celebration of Juneteenth, as the color symbolizes both the bloodshed of Black peoples' ancestors and the courage and resilience that brings them to this point in history. Hibiscus, a deeply-hued flower, is a significant ingredient in red drinks, as it was one of many favored foods that enslaved Africans brought with them to this land. It is delightfully tart and somewhat astringent—not particularly sweet on its own, almost like cranberry, but with hints of floral.

I've paired that lively hibiscus flavor with Uncle Nearest 1856 premium whiskey, a Black-owned brand named for the enslaved man who taught Jack Daniels how to make whiskey. Also in the mix, a spicy ginger beer, a few drops of aromatic bitters (made by another Black-owned company), a squeeze of lime, and a subtle hint of vanilla—a flavor most of us would never have known, had it not been for the 17th century discovery and effort of an enslaved 12-year old boy named Edmond Albius.

INGREDIENTS

1.5 oz. Uncle Nearest 1856
0.5 oz. hibiscus-vanilla simple syrup* (see notes, recipe below)
2 or 3 drops Hella aromatic bitters
Quick squeeze of fresh lime
About 2 oz. spicy ginger beer*
Lime wheel to garnish

*NOTES

Simple syrup is made with water and sugar, and in our house, that means fair trade-certified sugar because I learned the real, true story about slave labor in the sugar industry several years ago. Profit-driven exploitation of human beings must stop, and as consumers, we have the power influence companies to do the right thing. Is it more expensive? The answer depends on who you ask.

If spicy is not your thing, any ginger beer will lend a nice little zip to this cocktail. I chose the Q brand "hibiscus ginger beer," obviously for the hibiscus twist but also because its recipe includes spices that are celebrated in African-American cuisine. It turned out to be perfect in this drink.

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine Uncle Nearest 1856, hibiscus-vanilla simple syrup and bitters in a cocktail mixing glass. Add 1 cup of ice and stir until the outside of the glass becomes frosty. Strain over new ice into a double rocks glass. Squeeze in lime juice and top with ginger beer. Garnish with a lime wheel.

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HIBISCUS-VANILLA SIMPLE SYRUP

Over medium heat, dissolve 1/4 cup fair-trade turbinado sugar into 1/2 cup water. Add 3 hibiscus tea bags and steep several minutes until the syrup is a brilliant red color. Discard the tea bags and stir in about 3/4 teaspoon pure vanilla paste (or a scant 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract). Cool completely and transfer syrup to a jar or bottle. It will keep in the fridge for about 3 weeks.