

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Corner

This Month's Happenings: February 2023

Black History Month

Celebrated nationally since 1976, [Black History Month](#) honors the achievements of African Americans throughout U.S. history. The month itself dates back to 1915, half a century after the [Thirteenth Amendment](#) abolished slavery in America. That September, historian Carter G. Woodson and minister Jeese E. Moorland founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) in response to the lack of information on the accomplishments of African Americans available to the public. Known today as the [Association for the Study of African American Life and History \(ASALH\)](#), in 1926 the group declared the second week of February as Negro History Week, with February being chosen as it coincided with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. That event inspired schools and communities nationwide to organize local celebrations, gaining traction on a national scale in the 1960s due to the civil rights movement, with U.S. president Gerald Ford officially recognizing Black History Month in 1976.



St. Valentine's Day 2/14

[Valentine's Day](#) as we know it today, a holiday of love, has been celebrated since the 14th century. However, the origins of this day are a bit unclear. Given Valentine was a popular name in ancient Rome, with at least 50 stories of saints by the same name, it is hazy how the holiday got its name. It might have been from St. Valentine who was martyred in the third century. According to this legend, the priest signed a letter "from your Valentine" to his jailer's daughter, who he had befriended. Or it could be from St. Valentine of Terni. This legend states that the bishop defied the emperor's orders and secretly married couples to spare the husbands from war. To add another element to these theories, it is also possible these saints were the same person.

Fast forward to 1370, the first historical reference to Valentine's Day. English poet [Geoffrey Chaucer](#) wrote a poem with the line "for this was on Saint Valentine's Day, when every bird comes there to choose his mate." Chaucer's poem, the first point in time that stories began to appear linking St. Valentine to romance, inspired others to write their own "valentines" to their love interests and thus Valentine's Day was born.



Valentine card from 1909

Mardi Gras 2/21

[Mardi Gras](#), also known as Carnival, is a Christian holiday and cultural celebration on the Tuesday ("Fat Tuesday") before Ash Wednesday and the start of [Lent](#). When Christianity arrived in Rome, religious leaders decided to incorporate popular local traditions into the new faith, resulting in the Mardi Gras

season as we know it today. Given Mardi Gras is a prelude to Lent, the 40 days of fasting and penance before Easter Sunday, traditional Mardi Gras celebrations included enjoying all the rich, fatty foods that remained in individual's homes in anticipation of several weeks of eating only fish and fasting. Brazil, Venice, and New Orleans host some of the largest and most famous celebrations, with the first American Mardi Gras celebrated on March 3, 1699.



Ash Wednesday 2/22

[Ash Wednesday](#), the first day of Lent, is celebrated by many Christian denominations as a reminder of human mortality and the need for reconciliation with God. The use of ashes dates back to ancient Rome, where those who had sinned were sprinkled with ashes, dressed in sackcloth, and obliged to remain apart until they were reunited with the community on [Maundy Thursday](#), the Thursday before Easter. While these practices fell into disuse in the 8th-10th century, Ash Wednesday is still celebrated by the modern Roman Catholic Church with the placing ashes on the heads of worshippers in the shape of a cross. Today, Ash Wednesday is one of the most heavily attended non-Sunday masses, with many fasting during the day.

