

Cultural Observances

January

New Year's Day

Celebrations of the New Year around the world

Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Martin Luther King Jr. Day is a US Federal holiday marking the birthday of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It is observed on the third Monday of January each year, which is around the time of King's birthday, January 15. King was the chief spokesman for nonviolent activism in the civil rights movement, which successfully protested racial discrimination in federal and state law. He was assassinated in 1968.

February

Black History Month

Prior to 1925, little information could be found in the U.S. about African American history. Important achievements were left out of the history books, and a widely held belief existed that African Americans had made little contribution to society or history.

In 1926, Carter G. Woodson, a Harvard trained PhD, spearheaded the first Negro History Week to raise awareness. 50 years later, the week became a month. February was selected because of the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, two individuals who dramatically affected the lives of African Americans.

Ground Hog Day

Legend holds that if the groundhog comes out of its hole and sees its shadow, it will go back in and six more weeks of winter and a bad growing season will follow. If it is cloudy, the groundhog will not see shadow, winter will soon be over, and crops will be good.

Valentine's Day

This date recognizes the possible execution date of one of the two or three early Christian martyr's names Valentine. Legend has it that one of the Valentines secretly performed marriages between young people in opposition to the Roman emperor's law.

President's Day

Until 1971, both February 12 and February 22 were observed as federal holidays to honor the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln (Feb.12) and George Washington (Feb. 22). In 1971, President Richard Nixon proclaimed one single federal holiday, President's Day, to be observed on the third Monday of February, honoring all past presidents of the United States of America

March

Women's History Month

The evolution of a month to honor women began on March 8, 1857, when garment workers in New York City staged one of the first organized protests by working women. Since then, women's groups internationally have designated times to mark this day and the many other accomplishments of women. In an effort to begin adding women's history into the educational curricula, a Women's History Project successfully petitioned Congress to include all of March as a celebration of women.

April

Multicultural Communication Month

Multicultural communications may seem difficult at first; differences in languages, backgrounds, customs, etc. all seem a challenge. By learning more about our different cultures, it becomes easier to interact. This month has been dedicated to further this cause.

Fiesta (local)

Fiesta really is one of America's truly great festivals. It began as a way to honor the memory of the heroes of the Alamo and the Battle of San Jacinto. That commemoration still takes place. But over the past century and more, Fiesta has grown into a celebration of San Antonio's rich and diverse cultures.

May

Asian Pacific American Heritage Month

Asian Pacific American Heritage Month (APAHM) is celebrated in May to commemorate the contributions of people of Asian and Pacific Islander descent in the United States. Congress passed a joint Congressional Resolution in 1978 to commemorate Asian American Heritage Week during the first week of May. This date was chosen because two important anniversaries occurred during this time: the arrival of the first Japanese immigrants in America on May 7, 1843 and the completion of the transcontinental railroad (by many Chinese laborers) on May 10, 1869. In 1990 Congress voted to expand it from a week to a month long celebration and in May 1992, the month of May was permanently designated as "Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month."

Cinco de Mayo

Cinco de Mayo is a date of great importance for the Mexican and Chicano communities. It marks the victory of the Mexican Army over the French at the Battle of Puebla. Although the Mexican army was eventually defeated, the "Batalla de Puebla" came to represent a symbol of Mexican unity and patriotism. With this victory, Mexico demonstrated to the world that Mexico and all of Latin America were willing to defend themselves of any foreign intervention. Especially those from imperialist states bent on world conquest.

Mother's Day

In the United States of America Mother's Day was first suggested in the year 1872 by Julia Ward Howe who wrote the words to the Battle hymn of the Republic as a day dedicated to peace. She would hold an organized Mother's Day meeting in Boston, Massachusetts every year.

It wasn't until in 1907 when Anna Jarvis, from Philadelphia, began a campaign to establish a national Mother's Day. Ms. Jarvis persuaded her mother's church in Grafton, West Virginia to celebrate Mother's Day on the second anniversary of her mother's death, the 2nd Sunday of May. By the next year Mother's Day was also celebrated in Philadelphia.

She and several of her supporters began to write to ministers, businessman, and politicians in their endeavor to establish a national Mother's Day. In 1910, the governor of West Virginia proclaimed the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day and a year later every state celebrated it. It was successful as by 1911 Mother's Day was celebrated in almost every state. President Woodrow Wilson, in 1914, made the official announcement proclaiming Mother's Day as a national holiday that was to be held each year on the 2nd Sunday of May.

June

World Environment Day

World Environment Day, commemorated each year on 5 June, is one of the principal vehicles through which the United Nations stimulates worldwide awareness of the environment and enhances political attention and action. It was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1972 to mark the opening of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. Another resolution, adopted by the General Assembly the same day, led to the creation of UNEP.

Juneteenth

Juneteenth is the oldest known celebration of the ending of slavery. Dating back to 1865, it was on June 19th that the Union soldiers, led by Major General Gordon Granger, landed at Galveston, Texas with news that the war had ended and that all slaves were now free. Note that this was two and a half years after President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation - which had become official January 1, 1863. The Emancipation Proclamation had little impact on the Texans due to the minimal number of Union troops to enforce the new Executive order. However, with the surrender of General Lee in April of 1865, and the arrival of General Granger's regiment, the forces were finally strong enough to influence and overcome the resistance.

Father's Day

Father's Day is the day to honor fathers and celebrate fatherhood. It was during a 1909 sermon about Mother's Day when Sonora Smart Dodd became inspired to create Father's Day. She wanted to show how thankful she was to her father for taking care of her and her siblings after the death of her mother. Thus, the first Father's Day was celebrated on June 19, 1910

National LGBT Month

LGBT History Month is a month-long annual observance of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender history, and the history of the gay rights and related civil rights movements. On June 2, 2000, President Bill Clinton declared June 2000 "Gay & Lesbian Pride Month". President Barack Obama declared June 2009 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Pride Month 2009 on June 1, 2009.

July

4th of July

On July 4, 1776, The United States of America claimed its independence from Britain and Democracy was born. The Second Continental Congress unanimously adopted the Declaration of Independence. The Constitution provides the legal and governmental framework for the United States, however, the Declaration, with its eloquent assertion "all Men are created equal," is equally beloved by the American people. Every day thousands leave their homeland to come to the "land of the free and the home of the brave" so they can begin their American Dream.

Interesting 4th of July Fact: In a remarkable series of coincidences, both John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, two founding fathers of the U.S., and the only two men to sign the Declaration of Independence to become President died on the same day: July 4, 1826, which was the United States' 50th anniversary. President James Monroe died exactly 5 years later, on July 4, 1831, though he did not sign the Declaration of Independence.

August

Women's Equality Day

August 26 is designated as Women's Equality Day. First established in 1971, the date commemorates the passage of the 19th Amendment, the Woman's Suffrage Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which gave U.S. women full voting rights in 1920. Winning the right to vote gave women the opportunity to take control of their lives, and their communities, according to Mary Wilson, President of the League of Women Voters.

September

Hispanic Heritage Month

In 1968, Congress first designated the week including September 15 and 16 as National Hispanic Heritage Week. This week was chosen because of two historical events: Independence Day (September 15), which celebrates the formal signing of the Act of Independence of Central America in 1821; and Mexico's Independence day (September 16), which commemorates the beginning of the struggle against Spanish control in 1810. In 1988, Congress expanded the week

October

National Disability Employment Awareness Month

This annual observance, designed to recognize the contributions of workers with disabilities, began in 1988 with the Presidential Proclamation of Public Law. The cornerstones of this initiative are to increase access to technology, expand educational and employment opportunities, and promote increased participation in community life for Americans with disabilities.

November

American Indian Heritage Month

Since 1900, both American Indians and non-Indians have sought to recognize the great influence American Indians have had upon the history and cultural development in the U.S. Selected dates and weeks were acknowledged until 1976, when Congress authorized a week in October as Native American Awareness Week. Congress continued to enact yearly legislation designating various times until finally in 1990, the month of November was chosen because it is traditionally a time when many American Indians hold fall harvest and world-renewal ceremonies.

Thanksgiving Day

Thanksgiving Day is a harvest festival celebrating primarily in the United States and Canada. Traditionally, Thanksgiving is associated with giving thanks to God for the harvest and expressing gratitude. While historically religious in origin, Thanksgiving is now primarily identified as a secular holiday.

December

Christmas

Christmas is both a sacred religious holiday and a worldwide cultural and commercial phenomenon. For two millennia, people around the world have been observing it with traditions and practices that are both religious and secular in nature. Christians celebrate Christmas Day as the anniversary of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, a spiritual leader whose teachings form the basis of their religion. Popular customs include exchanging gifts, decorating Christmas trees, attending church, sharing meals with family and friends and, of course, waiting for Santa Claus to arrive. December 25—Christmas Day—has been a federal holiday in the United States since 1870.

Hanukah

Hanukkah (also known as Chanukah, Hanukah and the Festival of Lights) is an eight-day Jewish holiday that usually takes place between late November and late December. It commemorates the victory of the Maccabees, a Jewish rebel army, over the Syrians in 165 B.C.E., as well as the subsequent rededication of the holy Temple in Jerusalem. Jews around the world celebrate with eight nights of merriment. Traditions include lighting the menorah, exchanging gifts and enjoying treats cooked in oil.

Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa is a non-religious African American holiday which celebrates family, community, and culture. It is celebrated for seven days: December 26 - January 1.