



Black History Month

February is recognized as Black History Month. So, why is it important to remember and honor different cultures and holidays in our community? Two important reasons come to mind for me as your Mayor.

The most important reason is to “pass it on,” to inform future generations, so stories and history are never forgotten. It is also helpful to avoid repeating the sins of the past—lessons learned.

Black History Month recognizes a rich culture and the many contributions of African Americans to our country, American Culture, and our community. It is a time to recommit to being a nation of opportunity and hope for every citizen. As a member of the African American community, I can speak to the rich culture and contributions.

Briefly, my family legacy provides memories of strong faith and visiting my grandfather’s church during Easter and presenting my Easter speech focusing on my faith and how it would support me through all challenges in life. The memories of stories involving family and friends that were an integral part of our culture and our history, on a personal level. Adam Clayton Powell dinners with my parents in NY. My dad’s childhood and college friend at Illinois, Claude “Buddy” Young, one of the first men of color in the NFL front office. Billie Holiday giving a young pharmacist (my mother) multiple rides home from work in NY so she would not have to ride the subway. My mother’s letters from her college boyfriend who later became the baseball legend Jackie Robinson.

My mother graduating Phi Beta Kappa at 19 from the Xavier School of Pharmacy in New Orleans and becoming the first Black professional and Director of Pharmacy at Great Lakes Naval Center, formerly known as Downey. My son and her grandson’s acceptance to Yale early action and graduating from Yale with honors - both examples of progress and a rich family legacy. Yes, our culture and family history is rich and has added so much.

There are countless examples of African American inventors that are often overlooked and have made our daily lives better because of their patents and inventions. For example, in 1923, Garrett Morgan was awarded a patent for a new improved three light traffic system that helps us safely navigate our roads today. Dr. Charles R. Drew, a physician and surgeon, pioneered the method for storage and processing blood plasma for transfusions. He also organized the first large-scale blood bank in the US during World War II. These discoveries have impacted our lives and are still being utilized today.

We also want to honor the Tuskegee Airmen, the first Black airmen/pilots in the US Military, established in 1941. They fought in World War II bomber missions as part of the US Army Air force during segregation, playing an integral role in the US air strikes. These are just a few examples of historical contributions and inventions that have played a key role in our lives but have not received the attention that equals their contributions in our schools or our historical textbooks. That is why it is so important that in our community we honor African American culture and its impact on our history and daily lives.

This article is just beginning the journey of recognizing various cultures in our community.

Looking forward to 2023, under my leadership, and working with our Board and Human Relations Commission, we plan to explore a variety of ways to honor and recognize all cultures in the coming year.

So happy to share and celebrate Black excellence today, and every day.

Mayor Johnson