

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

The Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is excited to share the heritage month newsletter to highlight diverse communities. We hope to increase our shared understanding and appreciation of the rich histories, cultures, and people from different heritages.

For more information on diverse holidays and celebrations, please visit the [NIH Diversity Calendar](#).

History and Significance

Every February, we celebrate Black History Month to highlight African Americans' achievements and recognize their central role in U.S. history. Black History Month originated from Negro History Week in 1926 during the second week of February to coincide with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. It was sponsored by the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, an organization dedicated to researching and promoting achievements by African Americans and other peoples of African descent. This inspired communities nationwide to host local celebrations, lectures, and performances.

The theme for 2024 Black History Month, "African Americans and the Arts," examines the pivotal history and life of African American arts and artisans.

Ways to Celebrate in NYC

Here are a few ways to celebrate Black History Month locally:

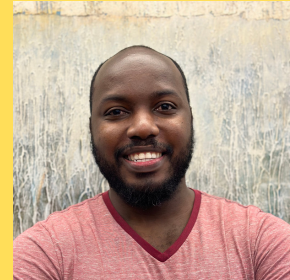
- [10 Best Black History Month Events In NYC Happening This February](#)
- [The best Black History Month events in NYC](#)
- [Celebrating Black History Month 2024 in NYC](#)
- [Black History Month at New York Public Library: Events](#)

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) Enduring History

Originating in the early 19th century, HBCUs have played a crucial role in addressing the exclusion that individuals of African descent faced from existing higher education institutions. HBCUs have evolved into cornerstones of academic excellence and cultural pride, creating an inclusive space that educates, empowers, and celebrates the achievements of Black individuals.

The Rockefeller family was an early investor in HBCUs. In 1882, John D. Rockefeller made a transformational donation to the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary, clearing the college's property debt and funding the construction of essential campus buildings. The institution was renamed Spelman College in 1884 to honor Laura Spelman, Rockefeller's wife and daughter of abolitionists. Continuing this spirit, the Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion hosted a cohort of students from HBCUs for our inaugural Rising Scholars Workshop in 2023. The workshop provided scientific training, mentorship, and leadership development opportunities.

Community Spotlight



Chad Morton is a talented student in Ruta lab.

From the enchanting landscapes of St. Kitts, Chad harbored an early fascination for the intricacies of behavior. This led him to intern at a biomedical institute in St. Kitts, exposing him to the world of scientific exploration.

The transition to the U.S. for his undergrad studies posed challenges – cold weather, work-life balance, and cultural disparities were stark contrasts to his roots. Noticing the underrepresentation of people of color in STEM, he found solace in a church community where he received guidance on navigating the unique challenges faced by black men.

A turning point came when Chad attended a post-bac program at Northwestern University, which equipped him with the skills to communicate science effectively and navigate the unspoken rules of the graduate school application process.

The journey led him to Rockefeller, where he discovered a tight-knit community of trainees, especially the Rockefeller Inclusive Science Initiative (RiSI) group. Believing that the true value of science lies in its impact on the community, he embraced Rockefeller's mission. The university empowered him to delve into neuroscience research, providing abundant resources and fostering an environment that encourages out-of-the-box thinking.

Chad's vision extends beyond the lab. Proud of his Caribbean identity, Chad is deeply committed to fostering sustainable development in the Caribbean by constructing vital infrastructure to elevate STEM education and awareness, promoting environmental sustainability, and improving retention and engagement in scientific fields.