



FEBRUARY 2024

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

In honor of Black History Month, the BIPOC ERG co-chairs, Dr. Tim Myles and Tawney Carlson, have shared cultural perspectives about what Black History Month means to them and elements of their community that are important to them.



DR. TIM MYLES: THE INFLUENCE OF THE BLACK CHURCH ON MY COMMUNITY.

The Black Church has a rich history of being the staple of the communities they represent. For communities of people who have historically been undervalued, underestimated, and marginalized, the Black Church has been the institutional backbone.

They provide hope, spiritual guidance, mental health care, and social support for African Americans. The Church has represented the central hub for political, social justice, and advocacy for its congregants. The Church long stood as a place for the oppressed and marginalized to find refuge and healing, remaining a gateway to reach and mobilize African Americans for meaningful change and reform.

The Church creates a strong sense of kinship and social connectedness through resilience while engaging in capacity building and surviving in the face of adversity. The parishioners have persevered despite the scarcity of resources and historical threats.

The Church facilitates community engagements with programming around education, health initiatives, healthy eating, and physical activity by disseminating faith-based interventions while enhancing spiritual knowledge and building a culture of health through community-driven policy and system and environmental change. Seeing the Black Church as a place of worship and a source of community wellness is essential.





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TAWNEY CARLSON: TAKING TIME DURING BLACK HISTORY MONTH TO REMEMBER THE HARDSHIPS AND THE JOY

I grew up seeing Black History month as a time to educate us all on the trauma Black and African American people have endured to make their place in the United States. I have learned to view these stories through the lens of awe for the strength, resilience and joy our ancestors had to not only fight for the future that I get to enjoy and continue their fight in, but that they passed down to us. From slavery to the Civil Rights Movement, to inequality in all systems, the fight has been and still is an uphill battle. While learning this history is integral to understand culture and how to continue dismantling our current systems of oppression that have been built over the course of generations, I invite myself others to also rope in stories of Black and African American joy as well. Black and African American culture is creative, tenacious, and vibrant. Learning about black and African American hairstyles, trying an African recipe, watching an inspirational black speaker on YouTube, listening to African drum and dance and learning about cultural complexities are all great ways to celebrate Black History Month. Speaking of cultural complexities, did you know that there are 250 ethnic groups speaking 500 distinct languages in Nigeria alone?

The heaviness of the history and current fights for equality makes African American joy only possible through the strength and wisdom of our ancestors and those who are currently living. Black history month, to me, is a time to celebrate my grandmother, a world traveler who spoke 9 languages. Black history month is a time to celebrate soul food and a time to re-read or re-listen to anything by Maya Angelou. My daughter and I learn about our culture by learning about the struggle and the beauty, the pain and sorrow and the joy and resilience. My hope for everyone during Black History Month is that our community learns something new, tries something new to connect to a deepened understanding of Black history and culture.

