

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER BY THE JOINT DEI COMMITTEE

Making Connections Through DEI Discourse

“Disability rights initiatives have often taken a colorblind approach [...] and then diversity initiatives do not tend to think of disability as an aspect of diversity. [BIPOC people with disabilities] are stuck in the middle because our needs cannot be met through a single-issue lens. Rather an intersectional focus is needed to understand how our multiple identities impact our lives”

Dr. Angel Miles (Policy expert at Access Living in Chicago)

The American disability rights movement has been significantly influenced by the civil rights work of Black Americans, some of whom played pivotal roles in both movements. Black Americans with disabilities have worked to bring about good change for historically marginalized individuals and groups for decades. In order for us to understand these contributions, it is important for us to come to terms with how disability is connected to race. So let us briefly start from a historical perspective.

It's common to imagine racism and ableism as opposing oppressive systems that function independently to maintain social hierarchies. This style of thinking about the world ignores not only the realities of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) who have disabilities but also fails to look at how racism was built upon pathologizing (representing someone's characteristics as a disease or something to be medically treated) race among other things.

Disability and race scholars, as well as disability and racial justice activists try to reconcile these connections in order to center those most marginalized within racial justice and disability movements. One example is the acknowledgement of the impact that Brad Lomax had on the disability rights movement. Lomax became an important figure when he joined in the 1977 occupation of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare offices (HEW) in San Francisco California. The goal of this sit-in was to convince the government of enforcing a section of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that had been ignored. Section 504, which was modeled after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, outlawed the discrimination of people with disabilities for recipients of federal aid.

Known as the 504 sit-in, this demonstration became the largest peaceful occupation of a federal building in the nation's history. Lomax was both a disabilities activist and a racial justice activist. He realized, as a Black wheelchair user, that people with disabilities were regularly denied access to education, access to housing, and to the workplace, especially if they were also Black. Today, we talk about this connection as an intersection – when two systems of oppression coalesce to inform the lived experience of a single person. Misunderstanding these intersecting systems of oppression limit our efforts towards equity and inclusion, especially when it comes to people with disabilities that also happen to be Black, LGBTQIA+ and/or immigrants among many others. For example, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2021) Black students with disabilities are more likely to experience segregated, restricted placements than White students with disabilities.

According to Vilissa Thompson, disability consultant, writer, and activist, “the disability community has a very stark racism problem and has a very stark issue with creating space for Black disabled folks and other disabled folks of color to understand disability that is not whitewashed.” Contributions to the disability movement by people like Lomax are not remembered and celebrated as much by disability rights communities. When they are recognized, more often than not, the racism that Black people with disabilities experience is largely ignored.

Talila “TL” Lewis, a community lawyer, educator and organizer recognized as a 2015 White House Champion of Change, works on the intersections between the nature of ableism (the system of power which oppresses, devalues, and discriminates against people with disabilities) and anti-Black racism. TL recounts the societal presumption that Black people in the U.S. lacked the intellectual capacity to participate or compete on an equal footing in society with White Americans, which was the foundation upon which the economic system of slavery was built. The emergence of various diseases that were thought of only being found in Black people has proven this theory to be true. For instance, drapetomania, a disorder that ‘irrationally forced’ enslaved people to desire freedom, and attempt to escape, was described as “much an illness of the mind as any other kind of mental alienation” (Price, 1997).

The example above, among many others shows how ableism and racism have been intimately interconnected for centuries. Racism and ableism together impact political and cultural institutions, our work and workplaces, our interpersonal relationships and our beliefs around value and disposability. So, as we learn together, we will continue to unpack the connections that disability rights have with other isms (for example, racism and sexism). Even though we cannot automatically stop living within existing societal structures of oppression, we are able to dig deeper and critically analyze the histories and belief systems in which these structures are built so we can better understand how to dismantle them.

In order to determine more accurately who is being excluded from disability activism and why—as well as what steps future disability rights strategies can take to more intentionally center racism/ableism in its framework—the future of disability rights calls for advocacy and consciousness that holds racism/ableism and intersecting systems of oppression at its center. The future viability of disability rights is threatened by the lack of a critical racism/ableism consciousness in its approach.

There are numerous opportunities to work in solidarity and promote systemic change while bringing attention to systems of oppression. Disability, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other identity markers, intersect to shape systemic barriers. With this written piece, I want to inspire each of us to consider how we might actively work on a daily basis to promote the voices of people with disabilities living with other intersecting identities, and how do we use our work in our, policies, practices, and organizational culture. Ask yourselves; how do we prioritize and learn from minority perspectives, experiences, and sources of information? How do we change the structures of privilege and power that prevent equity and inclusion for all?

Work Cited

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Did You Know?

Lesser-known quotes from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King

Every year, during the month of January you hear and read feel-good quotes from Dr. King. Usually these are quotes captured from his famous 'I have a Dream' speech. However, America's favorite soundbites don't represent his entire work or beliefs. His Whitewashed quotes do not do justice to his work, his intellectual brilliance, and his ability to bring together several social issues for the betterment of society at large. Even though today's society remembers soft-spoken, and non-confrontational teachings, we would be doing a disservice to ourselves if we did not see the entire picture. The below facts are meant to get us to critically acknowledge fuller, more empathic ways of thinking about systems of oppression and how Civil Rights Leaders have, and continue to fight for the betterment of humanity.

At one point he was the most hated man in the U.S. Before Dr. King's murder at the age of 39, a Harris poll showed a 75 percent disapproval rating (at the time of his assassination) due to his push for economic and racial justice. In fact, his approval rating got systematically worse after the speech that everyone likes quoting.

He was also in the 'Most Wanted' list of the FBI and deemed one of the most dangerous men in the country. He was imprisoned 29 times during his lifetime. By 1966, Dr. King had become an outspoken opponent of "liberal" white complicity in white supremacy, of American imperialism and of the capitalist system itself. Below are a few of the less popularized quotes from speeches and letters, written and spoken.

- "I must confess that that dream that I had that day has in many points turned into a nightmare. Now I'm not one to lose hope. I keep on hoping. I still have faith in the future. But I've had to analyze many things over the last few years and I would say over the last few months, I've gone through a lot of soul-searching and agonizing moments. And I've come to see that we have many more difficulties ahead and some of the old optimism was a little superficial and now it must be tempered with a solid realism. And I think the realistic fact is that we still have a long, long way to go." (Interview with NBC, May 8, 1967)
- "Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed." (Letter from Birmingham City Jail, 1963)
- "And I must say tonight that a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it America has failed to hear?...It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice and humanity." ("The other America," 1968)
- "Again we have deluded ourselves into believing the myth that capitalism grew and prospered out of the Protestant ethic of hard work and sacrifices. Capitalism was built on the exploitation of Black slaves and continues to thrive on the exploitation of the poor, both Black and White, both here and abroad." (The Three Evils speech, 1967).

This Month...

American Heart Month

February is American Heart Month, a time when all people can focus on their cardiovascular health. The Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention is shining a light on hypertension (high blood pressure), a leading risk factor for heart disease and stroke. The Division is committed to addressing barriers to health equity in communities disproportionately affected by cardiovascular disease.

[Learn more](#)



Black History Month

Black History Month is an annual celebration of achievements by Black Americans and a time for recognizing their central role in U.S. history. Also known as African American History Month, the event was partly founded by noted historian Carter G. Woodson and other prominent Black Americans. Since 1976, every U.S. president has officially designated the month of February as Black History Month. Other countries around the world, including Canada and the United Kingdom, also devote a month to celebrating Black history. Throughout future Newsletters we will learn more about Black American history and engage it on a monthly basis. Stay Tuned!

[Learn more](#)



Days of the Month

February 1st National Freedom Day

The holiday commemorates the day in 1865 when President Abraham Lincoln signed what would later become the 13th Amendment. This amendment is important because it effectively ended slavery in the United States.

[Learn more](#)

February 3rd International Wear Red Day

The first Friday in February (February 3) is National Wear Red Day. On this day, taking place during American Heart Month, everyone across the country dons the color red in order to raise and spread awareness in hopes to help eradicate heart disease and stroke in millions of women all over the nation.

[Learn More](#)



February 4 Rosa Parks Day

Rosa Parks Day honors an American Civil Rights hero twice a year on February 4th (her birthday) or December 1st. The holiday recognizes the civil rights leader Rosa Parks. Learn more about Rosa Parks, her experiences on the bus in Montgomery, Alabama, and her role in the Civil Rights movement. Discover how the Montgomery Bus Boycott affected the bussing system. Some movies and books to consider: Quiet Strength: The Faith, the Hope, and the Heart of a Woman Who Changed a Nation by Gregory J. Reed and Rosa Parks, Rosa Parks by Rosa Parks, She Would Not Be Moved by Herbert R. Kohl, Boycott (2001) and Selma (2014).

[Learn more](#)



February 5th to 6th Tu B'Shevat

Tu B'Shevat (Tu Bishvat) marks the “birthday of the fruit trees” under Jewish law, and is often celebrated by a symbolic meal and tree planting activities. Some Jewish people gather with family and friends to celebrate Tu B'Shevat by serving a seder (holiday meal) of dried fruit and nuts, red wine and grape juice. Pickled etog, a type of citrus, is often a featured dish at these festivities. Other Jewish people celebrate by planting trees or joining in on efforts to raise environmental awareness.



[Learn more](#)

February 11th International Day of Women in Science

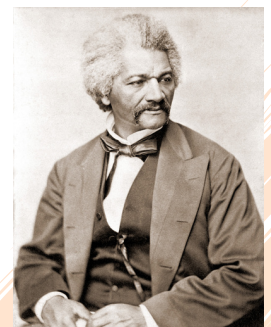
Globally, only 33 per cent of researchers are women, and they are awarded less research funding than men, and are less likely to be promoted. In the private sector too, women are less present in company leadership and in technical roles in tech industries. Women account for just 22 per cent of professionals working in artificial intelligence and 28 per cent of engineering graduates. These glaring under representations limit our ability to find inclusive, sustainable solutions to modern problems and build a better society for all.



[Learn More](#)

February 14th Frederick Douglass Day

While the year of his birth has been narrowed down to two possible candidates, the actual month and day Douglass was born are still unknown. Although Douglass was born into bondage, and never knew his birthdate, he chose to celebrate every year on February 14th. We celebrate this day as a moment for preserving Black history together. Douglass first rebelled against his southern captors by learning to read and write mostly with the help of young white children who lived nearby, even though it was illegal for enslaved people to learn such things. After escaping, he used his writing and wordsmithing skills as a way to make a case against slavery.



[Learn more](#)

February 14th Valentine's Day

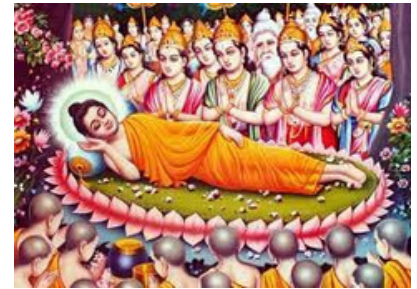
There are a number of Saints called Valentine who are honored on February 14. The day became associated with romantic love in the Middle Ages in England. This may have followed on from the Pagan fertility festivals that were held all over Europe as the winter came to an end. Traditionally, lovers exchanged handwritten notes. Commercial cards became available in the mid nineteenth century.



[Learn more](#)

February 15th Nirvana Day (Parinirvana)

Parinirvana Day, or Nirvana Day is a Mahayana Buddhist holiday celebrated in East Asia, Vietnam and the Philippines. By some it is celebrated on 8 February, but by most on the 15 February. In Bhutan, it is celebrated on the fifteenth day of the fourth month of the Bhutanese calendar. Day when the Buddha is said to have achieved Parinirvana, or complete Nirvana, upon the death of his physical body.



[Learn more](#)

February 16th Magha Puja Day

The second most important Buddhist festival after Vesak, celebrated on the full moon day of the third lunar month in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Sri Lanka and on the full moon day of Tabaung in Myanmar. It celebrates a gathering that was held between the Buddha and 1,250 of his first disciples, which, according to tradition, preceded the custom of periodic recitation of discipline by monks. On the day, Buddhists celebrate the creation of an ideal and exemplary community, which is why it is sometimes called Saṅgha Day, the Saṅgha referring to the Buddhist community, and for some Buddhist schools this is specifically the monastic community. In Thailand, the Pāli term Māgha-pūraṇamī is also used for the celebration, meaning 'to honor on the full moon of the third lunar month.

[Learn more](#)

February 18th Maha Shivarati

Maha Shivaratri is a Hindu festival celebrated annually in honour of the god Shiva. The name also refers to the night when Shiva performs the heavenly dance called Tandava. In every month of the luni-solar Hindu calendar, there is a Shivaratri – "night of Shiva" – on the day before new moon.

[Learn more](#)



February 20 World Day of Social Justice

Each year on February 20th, the United Nations, countries, communities, and individuals worldwide commemorate the World Day of Social Justice. This year, we celebrate this day to support international efforts to promote transitions to formal employment as a necessary condition for reducing poverty and inequalities, advancing decent work, and increasing productivity and sustainability.

[Learn more](#)



WORLD DAY OF
**SOCIAL
JUSTICE**

20 FEBRUARY

February 22nd Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday is a holy day of prayer and fasting in many Western Christian denominations. It is preceded by Shrove Tuesday and falls on the first day of Lent. It is observed by Catholics in the Roman Rite, Lutherans, Moravians, Anglicans, Methodists, Nazarenes, as well as by some churches in the Reformed tradition.

[Learn more](#)



Words & Concepts of the Month

Intersectionality

For this month's concept, I want to start by broadly explaining Intersectionality, where it comes from and what it means. Intersectionality will also be the framework/worldview/lens through which we understand DEI work. So even though I am just outlining the concept, I want you all to know that this will inform how we understand identity-based inequities.

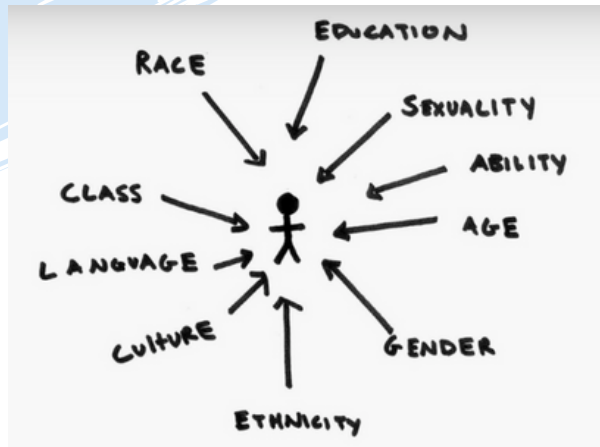
I am also linking a TedTalk from the one and only Kimberlé Crenshaw. In the video, she will ask the audience to participate in an exercise. I strongly recommend you use this video to conduct the same exercise on your own. I have used it in my seminars and have found that it always has an eye-opening effect on my non-Black students.

So, what is Intersectionality?

Intersectionality is a framework, or a way of understanding the world around us that exposes how different forms of discrimination/inequality are connected to each other and inform each other. This results in many identity-based roadblocks being unaddressed by your typical social advocacy and/or DEI.

This understanding of how identity-based discrimination takes place was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 (yes, thaaaat long ago). Kimberlé Crenshaw is a critical race theorist, law professor, and legal scholar that introduced the concept to explain racial discrimination that Black women experience in the courts and workplace. Kimberlé Crenshaw points out how Black women's experiences can only be understood by uncovering the intersection of both race and gender.

At the time when she introduced the term to expand legal studies, she had taken on the case of a Black woman who was discriminated against in the workplace because of being a woman AND being Black. However, the courts would only recognize, or take on one or the other. The judge dismissed her case on the basis that she could not file two complaints at the same time, against the same workplace.



What the judge failed to see is that the Black woman was being discriminated against because of BOTH identities (please watch the video for information on this case). Separating both identities fails deeply in understanding the experiences Black women face.

Intersectionality is a necessary lens to analyze social hierarchies, power imbalances and discrimination.

Here's the thing, even though intersectionality started to understand the legal and professional roadblocks that Black women face, it is not the only framework that addresses this complexity. Meaning that this way of understanding the world around us is so important, and so needed, that other scholars, from many academic fields have theorized similarly.

Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins has identified concepts like intersectionality in early work by Black, Latinx, Indigenous and Asian American feminists (some are Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, and Gloria E. Anzaldua). Since the introduction of the concept of intersectionality (1990s) intersectional feminists have explored the impact of social hierarchy and inequality related to race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, age, disability, class and citizenship among others.

How do we translate this information into practice? Here are some initial suggestions (not all):

1. Self-reflexivity, recognize your own identity. The experiences of Black women are very different from those of a White woman, Black man or White man. The experiences of Black LGBTQIA+ are ALSO very different. Recognizing that these differences exist can help us build empathy, understand struggles, and take necessary steps to improve the lives of those who are discriminated against based on identity.
2. Self-reflexivity also means that we need to question every stereotype that comes up. Every single individual embodies more than one identity (for example, a single person can be Black, part of the LGBTQIA+ community and Neurodivergent at the same time). Oversimplifying people's identity is very harmful, we are all complicated and multilayered beings. So before making assumptions, ask yourself, and consider that they might have an identity that you are not aware of.



The Urgency of Intersectionality

Trigger and Content Warning: The content and discussion in this video will necessarily engage with racism and violence against Black Women by authorities. After minute 16:00 there is graphic or intense content. For a moment to decompress, for any comments or concerns, please contact me at snoveiri@ahrc.org or 516.626.1000, ext. 1210.

Please, honestly watch the video, and even if you are watching alone, participate in her activity, you might be surprised

“The way the gender of [B]lack women is constructed differs from constructions of white femininity because it is also subject to racism” (Hazel V. Carby, p. 112).

Independence Days Around The World

February 4th Sri Lanka Independence Day

Sri Lankan national holiday celebrated annually on 4 February to commemorate the country's political independence from British rule in 1948. It is celebrated all over the country through a flag-hoisting ceremony, dances, parades, and performances.



[Click to learn more](#)

February 7th Grenada Independence Day

On 7 February 1974, Grenada became a sovereign nation, gaining independence from over 200 years of British colonial rule. Almost precisely 300 years after the island first became a French Crown colony in 1674 (the island was settled by the French in 1649), Grenada became the first of the Associated States to gain independence, becoming one of the smallest independent nations in the Western Hemisphere at the same time.

[Click to learn more](#)



February 18th Gambia Independence Day

Gambia Independence Day is celebrated on February 18 to mark the anniversary of The Gambia's liberation from the British Empire. After centuries of colonization and exploitation, The Gambia finally gained the right to self-governance on February 18, 1965.

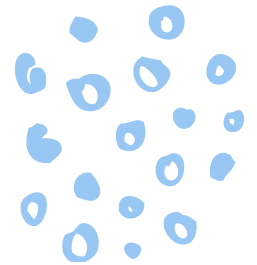
[Click to learn more](#)



February 22nd Saint Lucia Independence Day

Saint Lucia Independence Day is celebrated annually on February 22 to commemorate the day when Saint Lucia gained its complete independence from the United Kingdom in 1979. First inhabited by the Arawaks and Caribs, Saint Lucia was colonized by the French and British in the 17th century. Previously called Iyanola by the Arawaks and later Hewanorra by the Caribs, Saint Lucia was also known as Helen of the West Indies due to being frequently switched between French and British control. It was then officially ceded to the British by the French in 1814.

[Click to learn more](#)



February 23rd Brunei National Day

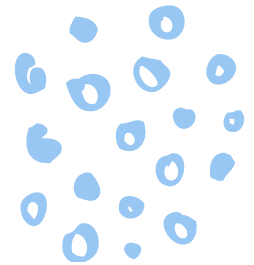
The National Day of Brunei Darussalam is celebrated annually on February 23. This marks the day that Brunei became officially independent from British control on February 23, 1984. Though the Proclamation of Independence was made before that on January 1, 1984, Britain's control over Brunei ceased on February 23, making it the official date of the country's independence. On December 31, 1983, the country's citizens geared up for the big day during mass gatherings in various mosques all over the country. Then, as the clock struck midnight on January 1, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah read the proclamation that declared Brunei's independence.



February 25th Kuwait National Day

Kuwait National Day is celebrated on (يوم الكويت الوطني) the 25th of February every Year with vigor and enthusiasm. Kuwaitis celebrated their first Independence Day on June 19, 1962. This time Kuwaitis will celebrate 61st Kuwait National Day in 2023

[Click here to learn more](#)



February 27th Dominican Republic

Dominican Republic Independence Day is celebrated every year on February 27. It first gained independence from the Spanish Empire in 1821, and from Haiti in 1844. The first celebration was observed in 1844 and it has been almost two centuries since. The Dominican Republic was under Haitian rule for 22 years before the independence war finally set them free. After they gained autonomy, the island of Hispaniola was divided into Haiti and Dominican Republic.

[Click here to learn more](#)



Bass Reeves, The First Black U.S. Marshall

By Susan Gill-Orange

Once upon a time, riding a white horse and carrying a six shooter came the most successful and undefeated lawmen to ride in the Old West. Bass Reeves, a formerly enslaved man from Arkansas, a Black man, was one of the finest marksmen in the West and was hand selected by Judge Isaiah Parker to serve as a United States Marshall in Indigenous Territory (now the State of Oklahoma).

Born to enslaved parents in 1838, Bass Reeves would become the first Black U. S. Deputy Marshall west of the Mississippi River and one of the greatest frontier heroes in history. Because Reeves knew the Indigenous Territory, and was fluent in several Indigenous languages, he was recruited as a U.S. Deputy. His job was to essentially “clean up” the Indigenous Territory. Always riding a large white stallion, Reeves began to be known for his bravery. Reeves’ signature look was his large hat, his courteous manner and his polished boots.

One time, he was pursuing two notorious outlaws near the Texas border. In disguise, he followed the outlaws to their hideout and knocked on the door. A woman answered only to see a dirty, ragged, Black man who told her a tale that he had been pursued by a posse and shot at. She let him in, fed him and introduced them to the two outlaws who turned out to be her sons. Reeves was able to stay the night, and when the outlaws were asleep, he handcuffed them and marched them the 28 miles to the camp where Reeves’ posse was waiting to assist him. Reeves delivered the desperados to authorities and collected a \$5000 reward, a significant amount of money.

Although there are many stories regarding Reeves’ heroics, none represents more clearly his devotion to the law than the tracking down of his own son, Bennie. Reeves insisted on taking the responsibility and was able to bring his son to justice within a few weeks. Bennie was sent to prison for life, but records show he did not serve his entire sentence, was paroled and lived a quiet life thereafter. This episode, capturing his own son, revealed how much justice meant to Bass Reeves. He was quick on the draw, smarter than the outlaw and legendary in his exploits.

In an era of Jim Crow laws and confusing Reconstruction, Bass Reeves was given the unique ability to arrest White men. He died in 1910. The Fort Collins Express of January 20, 1910 said this of Reeves, “No history of the frontier would be complete without mention of Bass Reeves.” A fascinating character for all Americans to know.

Recipe of the Month

By Susan Gill-Orange

Cowboy One Shot Pot

Early in the morning cut up stew meat in small pieces (beef or venison), onions, garlic, celery (celery salt will do fine).

Cook until tender which will take about two hours.

Then add a can of tomatoes, 1 can of corn, 1 can of green beans and 1 can peas.

If no canned goods available you can add one cup macaroni, 1 cup rice and several diced potatoes.

This is called Slum-gullion in some parts of the West.

