

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY OBSERVED

HOLIDAYS

Educational Resource Sheet

New Years Day: Civilizations around the world have been celebrating the start of each new year for at least four millennia. Today, most New Year's festivities begin on December 31 (New Year's Eve), the last day of the Gregorian calendar, and continue into the early hours of January 1 (New Year's Day). Common traditions include attending parties, eating special New Year's foods, making resolutions for the new year and watching fireworks displays.

Martin Luther King Day: Martin Luther King Jr. was a social activist and Baptist minister who played a key role in the American civil rights movement from the mid-1950s until his assassination in 1968. King sought equality and human rights for African Americans, the economically disadvantaged and all victims of injustice through peaceful protest. He was the driving force behind watershed events such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the 1963 March on Washington, which helped bring about such landmark legislation as the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 and is remembered each year on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, a U.S. federal holiday since 1986.

Memorial Day: Memorial Day is an American holiday, observed on the last Monday of May, honoring the men and women who died while serving in the U.S. military. Memorial Day 2023 will occur on Monday, May 29. Originally known as Decoration Day, it originated in the years following the Civil War and became an official federal holiday in 1971. Many Americans observe Memorial Day by visiting cemeteries or memorials, holding family gatherings and participating in parades. Unofficially, it marks the beginning of the summer season.

Juneteenth: Juneteenth (short for "June Nineteenth") marks the day when federal troops arrived in Galveston, Texas in 1865 to take control of the state and ensure that all enslaved people be freed. The troops' arrival came a full two and a half years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Juneteenth honors the end to slavery in the United States and is considered the longest-running African American holiday. On June 17, 2021, it officially became a federal holiday.

Confederate General Robert E. Lee had surrendered at Appomattox Court House two months earlier in Virginia, but slavery had remained relatively unaffected in Texas—until U.S. General Gordon Granger stood on Texas soil and read General Orders No. 3: "The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free."

Independence Day: The Fourth of July—also known as Independence Day or July 4th—has been a federal holiday in the United States since 1941, but the tradition of Independence Day celebrations goes back to the 18th century and the American Revolution. On July 2nd, 1776, the Continental Congress voted in favor of independence, and two days later delegates from the 13 colonies adopted the Declaration of Independence, a historic document drafted by Thomas Jefferson. From 1776 to the present day, July 4th has been celebrated as the birth of American independence, with festivities ranging from fireworks, parades and concerts to more casual family gatherings and barbecues. The Fourth of July 2023 is on Tuesday, July 4, 2023.

Labor Day: Labor Day 2023 will occur on Monday, September 4. Labor Day pays tribute to the contributions and achievements of American workers and is traditionally observed on the first Monday in September. It was created by the labor movement in the late 19th century and became a federal holiday in 1894. Labor Day weekend also symbolizes the end of summer for many Americans and is celebrated with parties, street parades and athletic events.

Thanksgiving Day: Thanksgiving Day is a national holiday in the United States, and Thanksgiving 2023 occurs on Thursday, November 24. In 1621, the Plymouth colonists and the Wampanoag shared an autumn harvest feast that is acknowledged as one of the first Thanksgiving celebrations in the colonies. For more than two centuries, days of thanksgiving were celebrated by

individual colonies and states. It wasn't until 1863, in the midst of the Civil War, that President Abraham Lincoln a national Thanksgiving Day to be held each November.

Winter Holiday (Christmas, Kwanza, and Hanukkah during this holiday):

- **Christmas** is celebrated on December 25 and 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.
- **Kwanzaa History:** Dr. Maulana Ka renga, professor and chairman of Black Studies at California State University, Long Beach, created Kwanzaa in 1966. After the Watts riots in Los Angeles, Dr. Ka renga searched for ways to bring African Americans together as a community. He founded US, a cultural organization, and started to research African “first fruit” (harvest) celebrations. Ka renga combined aspects of several different harvest celebrations, such as those of the Ashanti and those of the Zulu, to form the basis of the week-long holiday. Kwanzaa 2023 will take place December 26, 2023, through January 1, 2024.
- **Hanukkah History:** The eight-day Jewish celebration known as Hanukkah or Chanukah commemorates the rededication during the second century B.C. of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, where according to legend Jews had risen up against their Greek-Syrian oppressors in the Maccabean Revolt. Hanukkah, which means “dedication” in Hebrew, begins on the 25th of Kislev on the Hebrew calendar and usually falls in November or December. Hanukkah 2023 begins on the evening of December 7 and ends on the evening of December 15. Often called the Festival of Lights, the holiday is celebrated with the lighting of the menorah, traditional foods, games and gifts.

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Holiday	Learn More and References
New Year's Day	New Year's - Traditions, Resolutions & Date (history.com)
Martin Luther King Jr. Day	Martin Luther King Jr: Day, Death, Quotes (history.com)
Memorial Day	Memorial Day 2022: Facts, Meaning & Traditions (history.com)
Juneteenth	What Is Juneteenth? (history.com) The Historical Legacy of Juneteenth National Museum of African American History and Culture (si.edu)

Independence Day	History of the Fourth of July - Brief History, Early Celebrations & Traditions
Labor Day	Labor Day 2022: Facts, Meaning & Founding (history.com)
Thanksgiving Day and Day after Thanksgiving	Thanksgiving 2023 - Tradition, Origins & Meaning (history.com)
Winter Holiday December 24,25,31 st	History of Christmas - Origins, Traditions & Facts Kwanzaa (history.com) Hanukkah 2022 - Stories, Traditions & Origins (history.com) advent-nativity-fast.pdf (insidehopkinsmedicine.org)