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## The queer side of Black History Month

February proves to be a significant time for black LGBT history

by Richard Wells

During the month of February, the U.S. formally celebrates the many contributions African-Americans have made to the country's heritage. Black History Month, as it has come to be known, was initiated by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, a noted Black scholar and historian, on Feb. 12, 1926.

For many years, the second week of February (chosen so as to coincide with the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln) was celebrated in the United States. In 1976, as part of the nation's Bicentennial, Black History Week was expanded and became established as Black History Month.

For those in the gay and lesbian community, Black History Month is significant because it pays tribute to a number of LGBT individuals who have made contributions in the arts and the ongoing struggle for civil rights in both the African-American and LGBT communities.

The month of February, in particular, proves to be a particularly significant month for LGBT folk of color. Take a look at who was born during Black History Month:

Poet and author *Langston Hughes* was born Feb. 1, 1902. One of America's greatest poets and one of this country's most famous gay atheists, Hughes was better known for his poetry, though he also produced other works of fiction, essays and libretti for opera. Hughes was the first African-American poet whose works inspired a literary society, one which still



Langston Hughes

Painting by artist Winold Reiss, Memorial Portrait Gallery

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## HRC Carolina dinner Feb. 21

Former senator Cheryl Jacques, now HRC head, joins award-winning entertainers for event

by W. Todd Humphrey

GREENSBORO, N.C. — On Saturday, Feb. 21 the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) will host A Place at the Table: the 9th Annual HRC Carolinas Dinner. Featured guests at the dinner are HRC President and Executive Director Cheryl Jacques, actress and activist Judith Light and popular recording artist Regina Belle. The Triad Pride Men's Chorus and the Allison King Band will provide additional entertainment.



HRC President Cheryl Jacques

Cheryl Jacques was named executive director and president of the Human Rights Campaign in November 2003 and is making one of her first HRC Dinner appearances at the Carolina Dinner. She spent the past 11 years working as one of Massachusetts' most active policy makers and political leaders in the Massachusetts State Senate. As one of only five openly gay state senators in the country, she has played a critical role in the battle for equal rights for

the LGBT community.

"My top priorities coming into HRC this year are for us to defeat any attempt to amend the Constitution, and to get as many members of our community involved in the upcoming election as possible," says Jacques. "There is so much at stake this year, and I cannot overestimate the importance of the challenges that lay ahead. This is absolutely the time for every single member of our community to get involved in the political process, volunteer for a campaign, support your local candidates and always, always, always vote."

The HRC Carolina Dinner, in unison with other HRC dinners held across the country, serves to raise awareness about political and social issues of importance for the LGBT community.

"The HRC Carolina Dinner is shaping up to be a great event and I'm looking forward to meeting and spending time with local HRC members and community leaders," says Jacques. "As a former state senator, I have spent a lot of time meeting constituents, but going out into the country and meeting with members and local activists has really been a whole new experience. The energy, the passion and dedication of the people I've met traveling for HRC has really been just incredible."

Judith Light is well known to television audiences from "Who's The Boss?" and "One Life to Live." This Emmy Award-winning actress starred in the ground-breaking "The Ryan White Story," which introduced many Americans to the horror of AIDS. Light has been at the forefront of AIDS activism

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## What are you doing on Valentine's day?

What Carolina queers are doing during the lover's holiday

by Marcus Bennett

Feb. 14 is Valentine's Day. Although it is generally celebrated as a lovers' holiday with the giving of candy, flowers and other gifts between couples in love, it has origins deeply rooted in the fifth Century Rome as a tribute to St. Valentine, a Catholic bishop.

But similar celebrations held during the same month date back eight hundred years prior to the establishment of Valentine's Day when the Romans practiced a pagan celebration in mid-February commemorating young men's rite of passage to the god Lupercus. The celebration featured a lottery in which young men would draw the names of an individual who would be his sexual companion during the remaining year.

In an effort to do away with the pagan festival, the pope of the day ordered a change in the lottery. In the newly refined Catholic version, both men and women were allowed to



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