

PUBLICATION

Diversity Matters: Note from the Editor - National Hispanic Heritage Month

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September 15 to October 15 was National Hispanic Heritage Month, the month each year during which we celebrate histories, cultures and contributions of Americans whose ancestors came from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean and Central and South America. September 15 is significant, as it is the anniversary of independence for Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. The other notable dates that fall within the 30-day period are September 16 and 18, independence anniversaries for Mexico and Chile, respectively, and October 12, the anniversary of the day Christopher Columbus arrived in the Americas in 1492. The landing is celebrated as Columbus Day in the United States, as Día de la Raza (Day of the Race) in many countries in Latin America, as Discovery Day in the Bahamas, as Día de la Hispanidad and Fiesta Nacional in Spain, as Día del Respeto a la Diversidad Cultural (Day of Respect for Cultural Diversity) in Argentina, as Día de las Américas (Day of the Americas) in Belize and Uruguay, and as Giornata Nazionale di Cristopher Columbus or Festa Nazionale di Cristoforo Colombo in Italy.

"Hispanic" or "Latino" refers to Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. According to the 2010 census, 50.5 million people or 16 percent of the American population are of Hispanic or Latino origin, up from 35.3 million or 13 percent according to the 2000 census.

In 1968, Congress passed legislation authorizing and requesting the President to issue an annual proclamation designating a week, to include September 15 and 16, as National Hispanic Heritage Week. The first such proclamation was issued by President Lyndon Johnson, stating in part as follows:

Wishing to pay special tribute to the Hispanic tradition, and having in mind the fact that our five Central American neighbors celebrate their Independence Day on the fifteenth of September and the Republic of Mexico on the sixteenth, the Congress by House Joint Resolution 1299, has requested the President to issue annually a proclamation designating the week including September 15 and 16 as National Hispanic Heritage Week.

In 1988, Congress amended legislation to establish National Hispanic Heritage Month, requesting and authorizing the President to so designate the 30-day period from September 15 to October 15.

Most recently, President Obama lauded the accomplishments and contributions of Hispanics to American culture and society, in his 2014 National Hispanic Heritage Month Proclamation, therein indicating that Hispanics' hard work and pursuit of the American dream represent the spirit of our nation, in part as follows:

This month's theme, "*Hispanics: A legacy of history, a present of action and a future of success*," reminds us of all the ways Hispanics have enriched our Union and shaped our character. From those with roots that trace back generations to those who have just set out in pursuit of the promise of America, they have come to represent the spirit of our Nation: that with hard work, you can build a better life for yourself and a better future for your children. Hispanics have served honorably in our Armed Forces, defending the values we hold dear. They have transformed industries with new, innovative ideas. And they have led and inspired movements that have made our Nation more equal and more just.

Hispanics are advancing our economy, improving our communities, and bettering our country. In celebration of National Hispanic Heritage Month, let us renew our commitment to ensuring ours remains a society where the talents and potential of all its members can be fully realized.