

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

15 September - 15 October 2022

18 September 2022

1 of 4 in a series

Hispanic Heritage Month is an annual celebration of the history and culture of the United States Latinx and Hispanic communities. The event, which spans the dates from September 15 to October 15, commemorates how those of these communities have influenced and contributed to American society at large.

The term Hispanic or Latino (or the more recent term, Latinx) refers to a person's culture or origin, regardless of race. On the 2020 census form people were counted as Hispanic or Latino or Spanish if they could identify as having Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or "another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin."

Hispanic Heritage Month began as a commemorative week when it was first introduced in June of 1968 by California Congressman George E. Brown. The push to recognize the contributions of the Latinx community had gained momentum throughout the 1960s when the civil rights movement was at its peak and there was a growing awareness of the United States' multicultural identities. Brown, who represented East Los Angeles and a large portion of the San Gabriel Valley – both heavily populated by members of the Hispanic and Latinx communities – wanted to recognize the role played by those communities throughout American history.

On September 17, 1968 Congress passed Public Law 90-48, officially authorizing and requesting the president to issue annual proclamations declaring September 15 and 16 to mark the beginning of National Hispanic Heritage Week and called upon the "people of the United States, especially the educational community, to observe such week with appropriate ceremonies and activities." President Lyndon B. Johnson issued the first Hispanic Heritage Week presidential proclamation the same day.

WHY THE DATE OF HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH IS IMPORTANT

The timing of Hispanic Heritage Month coincides with the Independence Day celebrations of several Latin American nations. September 15 was chosen as the kickoff because it coincides with the Independence Day celebrations of the five "Central American neighbors," as Johnson called them – Costa

Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. These five nations declared their independence from Spain on September 15, 1821.

In his proclamation Johnson also acknowledged Mexico, which declared its independence from Spain on September 16, 1810. Although not mentioned specifically by Johnson, Chile also celebrates its independence from Spain during that week (September 18, 1810). Belize, which declared its independence from Great Britain on September 21, 1981, was subsequently added to the list of nations specifically celebrated during what is now Hispanic Heritage Month.

HISPANIC HERITAGE EXPANDS FROM A WEEK TO A MONTH

From 1968 until 1987, Presidents Nixon, Ford, Carter and Reagan all issued the yearly proclamations, setting aside a week to honor Hispanic Americans. In 1987 U.S. Representative Esteban E. Torres of California proposed expanding the observance to cover its current 31-day period. Torres wanted more time so that the nation could "properly observe and coordinate events and activities to celebrate Hispanic culture and achievement." In 1988 Senator Paul Simon of Illinois submitted a similar bill that successfully passed Congress and was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan on August 17 that same year. And on September 14, 1989 President George H. W. Bush (who had been a sponsor of the original Hispanic Heritage Week resolution while serving in the House of Representatives) became the first president to declare the 31-day period from September 15 to October 15 as National Hispanic Heritage Month.

"Not all of the contributions made by Hispanic Americans to our society are so visible or so widely celebrated; however, Hispanic Americans have enriched our nation beyond measure with the quiet strength of closely-knit families and proud communities," Bush said.

In the decades since National Hispanic Month proclamations have been made by every sitting president of the United States. Hispanic Heritage Month 2022 began this past Wednesday and will continue through October 15, 2022.