Hispanic Heritage Month

The four weeks between September 15 and October 15 have since 1988 been designated as the National Hispanic Heritage month and, while a relatively new designation compared to other minority group months, it has quickly become a point of pride within the Latino community and been recognized by everyone from the president of the United States down to local community boards.

But what many people may not realize is the meaning behind the mid-month to mid-month celebration and how the Hispanic Heritage Month first came about.

The origins of Hispanic Heritage Month date back to 1968, when the U.S. Congress and President Lyndon Johnson declared the week including September 15 and 16 Hispanic Heritage Week.

President Ronald Reagan in 1988 extended it to cover a 30-day period from September 15 to October 15.

It was enacted into law on August 17, 1988, on the approval of Public Law 100-402.

The reason why September 15 was chosen as the official start of the month was it is the anniversary of independence of a number of Latin American countries.

Back in 1968, the White House proclamation about the week stated, “Wishing to pay special tribute to the Hispanic tradition, and having in mind the fact that our five Central American neighbors [Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica] 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.”

Two other countries in the region celebrate their independence days during the current Hispanic Heritage Month, with Chile and Belize celebrating theirs on September 18 and September 21, respectively.

The 30-day celebration acknowledges the huge impact the Latino community has had on shaping the United States into the country it is today. From Christopher Columbus’ first contact with the indigenous peoples of the Americas in 1492, to the Spanish colonies of the West to the fortress of St. Augustine, Florida — the oldest continuous European settlement in North America – founded in 1565, decades before Jamestown, Virginia.

Hispanics have been in this country longer than anyone beside Native Americans.

“Many Hispanic-Americans trace their roots to the cultures of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, including the Arawaks (Puerto Rico), the Aztecs (Mexico), the Incas (South America), the Maya (Central America), and the Taínos (in Cuba, Puerto Rico and other places),” the National Hispanic Heritage Month’s website states.

“Some trace their roots to the Spanish explorers, who in the 1400s set out to find an easier and less costly way to trade with the Indies. Other Latinos trace their roots to the Africans who were brought as slaves to the New World.”

Latinos now are arguably more vital to the U.S. than they have ever been before, representing the fastest-growing minority group in the country and holding positions of power in government, business, sports and entertainment.

The Hispanic population of the United States is around 53 million, constituting 17 percent of the nation’s total population. And that does not even the 3.7 million residents of the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico.

“This commemorative month honors the influence and impact of Hispanics in all spheres of U.S. society, including science, art, politics, culture and the economy,” Mariana De Maio of Catholic Relief Services wrote on its website.

Navaratri - The famous Hindu festival

The word Navaratri literally means nine nights in Sanskrit. There are three Navaratris commonly celebrated out of which the Sharada Navaratri, which is celebrated during the beginning of winter (Sept-Oct) is the most popular and significant one.

Almost all Hindu festivals have a religious significance. Navaratri is no exception. During this festival nine forms of “Shakti” (literally meaning power) are worshipped. Shakti has been considered a female form in Hinduism. The nine female forms (the nine “Devis”) worshipped during Navaratri are:

- Durga, Bhadrakali, Amba or Jagadamba, Annapurna, Sarvamangala, Bhairavi, Chandi, Lalita, Bhavani, Mookambika.

The “Brihat Dharma Purana” describes the mythology of how these ten “figures” appeared. According to this mythology, Sati, wife of Lord Shiva, wanted to go to her father’s house, because her father, Daksha, was organizing a huge “yagya” (fire sacrifice). However, Daksha had not invited Lord Shiva to go and attend, so Shiva advised Sati not to go there. This angered Sati so much that fire emitted from her third eye, and she changed into Kali, a dark skinned Devi. Scared Shiva also saw these ten forms at that time.

Navaratri is celebrated in different ways throughout India. In the South Indian states of Tamil Nadu & Karnataka, Sharad Navratri is celebrated by setting up of Bombeagal. The last four days of Sharad Navratri is celebrated as Durga Puja in the state of West Bengal. It is thought that Durga, the divine mother, had destroyed the evil force (in the form of the demon Mahishāsura) during this period. This is the biggest festival of the year in this state.

In Western parts of India, Sharad Navratri is celebrated with the famous Garba dance.

In northern India, especially in Varanasi, Dusshera overlaps with “Ramleela” or “Rama Drama” - traditional plays in which scenes from the epic saga of the mythical Rama-Ravana strife are enacted by professional troupes. In Ramleela, the tenth day, popularly known as Dusshera, is celebrated as the day of defeat and death of the demon king Ravana in the epic Ramayan.

Navaratri is divided into sets of three days to adore different aspects of the supreme goddess. On the first three days, the Mother is invoked as powerful force called Durga in order to destroy all our impurities, vices and defects. The next three days, the Mother is adored as a giver of spiritual wealth, Lakshmi, who is considered to have the power of bestowing on her devotees the inexhaustible wealth. The final set of three days is spent in worshipping the mother as the goddess of wisdom, Saraswati.

http://www.shraddhananda.com/Navaratri_The_famous_Hindu_festival.html

Welcome aboard, Elsa! We are happy to have you as part of the UC Written Translations Team!

Welcome aboard, Adriana! We are glad to have you as a part of the Medical Interpreting team!