Asian Pacific American Heritage Month

Today, the entire month of May is reserved to celebrate Asian-Pacific American heritage. Back in 1977, though, just 10 days were reserved in observation of the month. In June of that year, New York Congressman Frank Horton and California Congressman Norman Mineta introduced a bill calling for the president to declare the first third of May “Asian-Pacific Heritage Week.” In July 1977, senators Daniel Inouye and Spark Matsunaga launched similar legislation in the Senate. After both bills passed, President Jimmy Carter designated early May as “Asian-Pacific Heritage Week.” It would take a dozen years before President George H.W. Bush expanded the week-long celebration into a month-long celebration of Asian-Pacific heritage. In 1992, all 31 days of May were officially designated Asian-Pacific American Heritage Month.

Why May?

It's no coincidence that May is the month in which the U.S. government pays tribute to those of Asian-Pacific American heritage. May has played a key role in Asian-American history. For one, the first Americans of Japanese heritage immigrated to the U.S. on May 7, 1843. And 26 years later on May 10, Chinese laborers finished work on the transcontinental railroad in the U.S. So, what better time of year to honor those Americans of Asian ancestry?

Which Groups Does APA Heritage Month Honor?

To say that the ethnic groups encompassed by the term “Asian-Pacific American” aren’t monolithic would be an understatement. After all, the label includes everyone with ancestry on the Indian subcontinent to ancestry on any of the numerous Pacific Islands—Fiji, Guam, Samoa, etc.—not to mention those of Chinese, Japanese and Korean descent. While celebrating APA Heritage Month, it's important to distinguish between the wide range of ethnic groups recognized during the commemoration. Each of these ethnic groups has achieved different accomplishments and faces different challenges.

APA Heritage Month Celebrations

How does one celebrate APA Heritage Month? Many participate in cultural heritage festivals or simply dine at a sushi restaurant or order out for Chinese. But there are far more meaningful ways to observe APA heritage. For example, the Asian Nation website suggests visiting an Asian-American place of worship, talking to family elders about their experiences, reading books by Asian Americans or talking to Asian business-owners about the obstacles they've overcome. But that’s not all. APA Heritage Month also provides an opportunity for Asian Americans to contemplate their connectedness to the Asian-American community and to identify ways to get involved in serving the community more. Don’t know how large the Asian-American community is in your region? Use data from the U.S. Census to find out how big the APA community is where you live and the areas of town Asian Americans call home in large numbers. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Los Angeles County houses the greatest number of Asian Americans at 1.4 million, while Santa Clara County, Calif., saw the largest gain in Asian Americans in the nation from 2008 to 2009 with 17,000 new residents of Asian ancestry. Meanwhile, Honolulu County Hawaii has the highest percentage of Asian Americans overall at 57%.

New Interpreter Profile: Minh Tam Dang

Minh Tam grew up in Saigon, Vietnam. After obtaining Baccalaureate degrees in Vietnamese and French language, she moved to the U.S where she attended college and dental school in Virginia and obtained a Doctor of Dental Surgery degree. She has been practicing dentistry in California for more than 25 years. Minh Tam speaks Vietnamese and French fluently, and wants to use her language skills to help doctors and patients communicate and improve the quality of healthcare for Vietnamese patients with limited English proficiency.

In 2012, she went back to school and earned a certificate in Healthcare Interpreting at American River College. In March 2014, she shared her knowledge about dentistry at the 14th Annual California Healthcare Interpreters’ Educational Conference in Sacramento.

During her free time, Minh Tam enjoys light gardening and practices the virtue of patience by training her cat to be a more interactive pet. She also enjoys taking long walks along the American River with her husband, watching birds & animals in their natural habitat.

Minh Tam also has a hidden talent, that not many people are aware of. She enjoys reading and writing poetry in Vietnamese. She writes poems mainly about her family and has had a few published in a Vietnamese literary publication in San Jose, CA.

We asked Minh Tam, how does she feel about joining the Medical Interpreting Department at UC Davis Health System? In her own words, “I have great respect for the high caliber of professional interpreters in the department. I enjoy the camaraderie among my coworkers and I also appreciate the chance to interpret for complex cases that can only be seen in a large medical center/teaching hospital”.

Welcome on-board, Minh Tam!

History of Cinco De Mayo

Cinco de Mayo—or the fifth of May—commemorates the Mexican army’s 1862 victory over France at the Battle of Puebla during the Franco-Mexican War (1861-1867). A relatively minor holiday in Mexico, in the United States Cinco de Mayo has evolved into a celebration of Mexican culture and heritage, particularly in areas with large Mexican-American populations. Cinco de Mayo traditions include parades, mariachi music performances and street festivals in cities and towns across Mexico and the United States.

History of Cinco de Mayo: Battle of Puebla

In 1861 the liberal Mexican Benito Juárez (1806-1872) became president of a country in financial ruin, and he was forced to default on his debts to European governments. In response, France, Britain and Spain sent naval forces to Veracruz to demand reimbursement. Britain and Spain negotiated with Mexico and withdrew, but France, ruled by Napoleon III (1808-1873), decided to use the opportunity to carve a dependent empire out of Mexican territory. Late in 1861, a well-armed French fleet stormed Veracruz, landing a large French force and driving President Juárez and his government into retreat.

Certain that success would come swiftly, 6,000 French troops under General Charles Latrille de Lorencez (1814-1892) set out to attack Puebla de Los Angeles, a small town in east-central Mexico. From his new headquarters in the north, Juárez rounded up a rag-tag force of 2,000 loyal men—many of them either indigenous Mexicans or of mixed ancestry—and sent them to Puebla. Led by Texas-born General Ignacio Zaragoza (1829-1862), the vastly outnumbered and poorly supplied Mexicans fortified the town and prepared for the French assault. On May 5, 1862, Lorencez drew his army, well provisioned and supported by heavy artillery, before the city of Puebla and led an assault from the north. The battle lasted from daybreak to early evening, and when the French finally retreated they had lost nearly 500 soldiers. Fewer than 100 Mexicans had been killed in the clash.

Although not a major strategic win in the overall war against the French, Zaragoza’s success at Puebla represented a great symbolic victory for the Mexican government and bolstered the resistance movement. Six years later—thanks in part to military support and political pressure from the United States, which was finally in a position to aid its besieged neighbor after the end of the Civil War—France withdrew. The same year, Austrian Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian, who had been installed as emperor of Mexico by Napoleon in 1864, was captured and executed by Juárez’s forces. Puebla de Los Angeles was renamed for General Zaragoza, who died of typhoid fever months after his historic triumph there.

Cinco de Mayo in the United States

In the United States, Cinco de Mayo is widely interpreted as a celebration of Mexican culture and heritage, particularly in areas with substantial Mexican-American populations. Chicano activists raised awareness of the holiday in the 1960s, in part because they identified with the victory of indigenous Mexicans over European invaders during the Battle of Puebla. Today, revelers mark the occasion with parades, parties, mariachi music, Mexican folk dancing and traditional foods such as tacos and mole poblano. Some of the largest festivals are held in Los Angeles, Chicago and Houston.

http://www.history.com/topics/holidays/cinco-de-mayo