

SEPTEMBER

National Hispanic Heritage Month

Hispanic Heritage Month evolved from a Congressional declaration of Hispanic Heritage week in 1968. It was to be celebrated during the week of September 15th and 16th, covering a wide number of Independence Days for Latin American countries.

On September 15th, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua celebrate their independence.

On September 16th, Mexico celebrates its independence. In 1988, the celebration of Hispanic heritage was officially extended to 31 days. Now it includes the independence of Chile on September 18th, and Día de la Raza (Columbus Day) on October 12th. The final holiday recognizes the first immigration of Hispanic ancestors from the Eastern Hemisphere (Europe/Africa/Asia) to the Americas.

The United States contains two of the oldest European colonial cities, both of them Spanish. One is the Spanish settlement of St. Augustine in Florida (1565); the other is San Juan, Puerto Rico (1508). Cuzco, Peru is the oldest continually inhabited city, dating back thousands of years. Jamestown (1607), the first English settlement wasn't established until a hundred years after San Juan.

Hispanics have been instrumental in exploring and mapping this hemisphere for Europe. Many of our states were part of the Spanish or Mexican territories. These include California, Texas, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Louisiana and Utah.

Hispanics are often looked at as newcomers, but they were among the first here, both as indigenous people and as European immigrants. Many of the Hispanic families in the United States have resided in the same area for hundreds of years, retaining cultures older than the borders that define modern countries.

Hispanics have helped form the United States from the very beginning. Since the Revolutionary War, they have aided the nation in every major war from outside and from within. Hispanics have received more Congressional Medals of Honor than any other identifiable ethnic group and have consistently received awards for heroism out of proportion to the actual population of Hispanics.

Puerto Rico is the second highest American jurisdiction in per capita war casualties. They have fought for almost 100 years despite their inability to vote for the Commander-In-Chief.

Women's Health Month

This month was set to recognize and increase the awareness of Women's Health Issues.

First Monday of the Month: Labor Day

"Labor Day differs in every essential from the other holidays of the year in any country, said Samuel Gompers, founder and longtime president of the American Federation of Labor." All other holidays are in a more or less degree connected with conflicts and battles of man's prowess over man, of strife and discord for greed and power, of glories achieved by one nation over another. Labor Day is devoted to no man, living or dead, to no sect, race, or nation." Labor Day, the first Monday in September, is a creation of the labor movement and is dedicated to the social and economic achievements of American workers. It constitutes a yearly national tribute to the contributions workers have made to the strength, prosperity and well being of our country.

Founder of Labor Day

More than 100 years after the first Labor Day observance, there is still some doubt as to who first proposed the holiday for workers. Some records show that Peter J. McGuire, general secretary of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners and a co-founder of the American Federation of Labor, was first in suggesting a day to honor those "who from rude nature have delved and carved all the grandeur we behold." But Peter McGuire's place in Labor Day history has not gone unchallenged. Many believe that Matthew Maguire, a machinist, not Peter McGuire, founded the holiday. Recent research seems to support the contention that Matthew Maguire, later the secretary of Local 344 of the International Association of Machinists in Paterson, N.J., proposed the holiday in 1882 while serving as secretary of the Central Labor Union in New York. What is clear is that the Central Labor Union adopted a Labor Day proposal and appointed a committee to plan a demonstration and picnic.

The First Labor Day

The first Labor Day holiday was celebrated on Tuesday, September 5, 1882, in New York City, in accordance with the plans of the Central Labor Union. The Central Labor Union held its second Labor Day holiday just a year later, on September 5, 1883. In 1884 the first Monday in September was selected as the holiday, as originally proposed, and the Central Labor Union urged similar organizations in other cities to follow the example of New York and celebrate a "workingmen's holiday" on that date. The idea spread with the growth of labor organizations, and in 1885 Labor Day was celebrated in many industrial centers of the country.

Labor Day Legislation

Through the years the nation gave increasing emphasis to Labor Day. The first governmental recognition came through municipal ordinances passed during 1885 and 1886. From them developed the movement to secure state legislation. The first state bill was introduced into the New York legislature, but the first to become law was passed by Oregon on February 21, 1887.

During the year four more states -- Colorado, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York -- created the Labor Day holiday by legislative enactment. By the end of the decade Connecticut, Nebraska, and Pennsylvania had followed suit. By 1894, 23 other states had adopted the holiday in honor of workers, and on June 28 of that year, Congress passed an act making the first Monday in September of each year a legal holiday in the District of Columbia and the territories.

A Nationwide Holiday

The form that the observance and celebration of Labor Day should take were outlined in the first proposal of the holiday – a street parade to exhibit to the public "the strength and esprit de corps of the trade and labor organizations" of the community, followed by a festival for the recreation and amusement of the workers and their families. This became the pattern for the celebrations of Labor Day.

Speeches by prominent men and women were introduced later, as more emphasis was placed upon the economic and civic significance of the Holiday. Still later, by a resolution of the American Federation of Labor convention of 1909, the Sunday preceding Labor Day was adopted as Labor Sunday and dedicated to the spiritual and educational aspects of the labor movement. The character of the Labor Day celebration has undergone a change in recent years, especially in large industrial centers where mass displays and huge parades have proved a problem. This change, however, is more a shift in emphasis and medium of expression. Labor Day addresses by leading union officials, industrialists, educators, clerics and government officials are given wide coverage in newspapers, radio and television.

The vital force of labor added materially to the highest standard of living and the greatest production the world has ever known and has brought us closer to the realization of our traditional ideals of economic and political democracy. It is appropriate, therefore, that the nation pay tribute on Labor Day to the creator of so much of the nation's strength, freedom, and leadership -- the American worker.

What Can You Do?

- Organize a Labor Day Picnic and celebrate Labor's contribution to the growth of America.
- Design a Women's Committee float; perhaps honoring famous women in the labor movement.
- Distribute leaflets or union literature as you march.
- Put a display in your library or mall or city hall or union hall.
- Have the local press run programs and editorials about men and women in the community to have worked for the rights, equality and safety of workers in the community.

September 19: Love Your Body Day

(This date may fluctuate each year)

Organized by the Now Foundation and part of its Women's Health Project, Love Your Body Day is an opportunity for activists to speak out against images of women that are harmful, dangerous, offensive and disrespectful. The advertising, tobacco, fashion, cosmetic and diet industries are profiting from women's and girls' dissatisfaction with their bodies, and this is our chance to fight back.

What Can You Do?

- Write letters or collect signatures for a petition to send to magazines and advertisers whose ads are offensive to women and girls.
- Organize a workshop at school, the library or a women's center on body images, self-esteem, nutrition and health.
- Hold a news conference or a speak-out to publicize concerns about eating disorders, cosmetic surgery and lung cancer in women. Give awards, good and bad, to local merchants who present women in positive or negative ways.
- Perform a play, have a poetry reading, put together a collage, get creative!
- Hold a poster contest in your community, local, library, or schools.
- Check the NOW site on the Internet and get free materials for a house party.