

Hispanic Heritage 2006...Honoring Two Cultures

Lo Mejor de Dos Mundos – The Best of Two Worlds

By Cristina Benitez

Mexican Independence
Day
Parade
Chicago 2006

Hispanic traditions and celebrations go beyond the 30 days from the middle of September to October 15th of each year. As Latinos, we celebrate our rich cultures throughout the year. For us it's important to recognize where we came from and that our rich history and traditions are celebrated by the mainstream. Today the United States is witnessing the *Latinization* of the United States as Hispanic values, styles and celebrations are being accepted and embraced by the general public. Our traditions and celebratory view of life is seen by all during the designated Hispanic Heritage Month.

Officially celebrated from September 15 through October 15 each year, Hispanic Heritage commemorates the cultural contributions Latinos have made to the U.S. In 1968, Congress authorized President Johnson to proclaim Hispanic Heritage Week and twenty years later, the celebration was expanded to Hispanic Heritage Month. Today, the events begin earlier in September and end later in October, but the original dates were selected because they are significant in many Latin American countries. September 15 is the Independence Day for Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua; Mexico and Chile celebrate their independence on September 16 and September 18 respectively.



ESPAÑOL

Why is this so important? The Latino immigrant population comes to the United States primarily for two reasons - political oppression or financial need. Coming to the U.S. is seen as a wonderful opportunity, but it does not eliminate a longing for the home country. Many experiences from our formative years in our native country are remembered with loving nostalgia. It is common to see Latinos from all nationalities proudly wave their native flags and we see this act of "patriotism" toward their homelands coincide with a love for the United States. I heard one gentleman from Puerto

Rico state, "Puerto Rico is my motherland and the United States is my Uncle Sam. I love them both."

So, tradition is important. It validates Latinos and gives us access to the "roots" we pulled up and planted in another land. As Latinos living in the U.S., we are a composite of many traditions; indigenous, Spanish and Americanos -South, Central and North Americans. We feel comfortable carrying two flags, as witnessed this year in immigration marches and Mexican Independence parades. We love and honor two cultures and that gives us the best of two worlds -"Lo mejor de dos mundos."

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