

The United States and Mexico Celebrate for the Same Reason: Independence Day

Bu Walter S. Zapotoczny Jr.

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American Independence Day

On July 4th the United States will celebrate 234 years of Independence with national and local public events. Independence Day, commonly known as the Fourth of July, is a federal holiday commemorating the adoption of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, declaring independence from the Kingdom of Great Britain. Independence Day is the national day of the United States. All banks and non-essential federal institutions are closed.

Although the signing of the Declaration was not completed until August, the 4th of July has been accepted as the official anniversary of United States independence. The first Independence Day celebration took on July 4, 1777. Families often celebrate Independence Day by hosting or attending a picnic or barbecue and take advantage of the day off and, in some years, long weekend to gather with relatives. Decorations (*e.g.*, streamers, balloons, and clothing) are generally colored red, white, and blue, the colors of the American flag. Parades often are in the morning, while fireworks displays occur in the evening at such places as parks, fairgrounds, or town squares.

Mexican Independence Day

September 16th is Independence Day in Mexico and is considered a patriotic holiday, or *fiesta patria* (literally, *holiday of the motherland*). This year Mexico will celebrate its 200 years of Independence with national and local public events. In the early hours of September 16th, 1810, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a priest in the small town of Dolores, Guanajuato, rang the church bell to gather the townspeople. He called for the people of Mexico to rise up against the Spanish Crown, thus initiating Mexico's War of Independence. The country did not achieve independence until 1821, but it is this event, known as the *Grito de Dolores* (Cry of Dolores) which is commemorated every year in town squares across Mexico.

Streets, houses, buildings and cars are decorated everywhere in the country. On every street corner there are vendors selling flags, balloons, *sombreros* and cufflinks, all with the green, white and red, the national colors. Flags wave from practically every house and building. People of all ages come to their town plaza to celebrate the holiday and to take part in the collective gaiety! During September, *Mes de la Patria*, the month of our nation as it is called in Mexico, restaurants serve traditional Mexican dishes, such as *Mole Poblano*, *Chiles en Nogada*, *Guacamole* and chips.

Cinco de Mayo Confusion

Many among the non-Mexican community in the United States mistake *Cinco de Mayo*, or May 5th, with the Mexican Independence Day. *Cinco de Mayo* actually commemorates the victory of the Mexican Army over the French Empire at the Battle of Puebla in 1862, during the French invasion of Mexico.