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About the USA – Virtual Classroom Newsletter for English Teachers

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German-American Day

“Throughout our history, the spirit and hard work of German Americans have been an important part of the cultural fabric of our Nation. On German-American Day, we celebrate German Americans and their many contributions to the character of our country...”

German-American Day is also an opportunity to recognize the friendship between Germany and the United States. By working together as partners in peace with a mutual commitment to liberty, the United States and Germany can lay the foundation for a more hopeful tomorrow.”

President George W. Bush. A Proclamation by the President
of the United States of America

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/10/20061003-8.html>

The contribution of German-Americans to American society and culture is recognized each year on German-American Day. It is celebrated every year on October 6 in commemoration of the arrival of 13 Mennonite families from Krefeld on October 6, 1683. These immigrants settled in Pennsylvania and founded Germantown near the city of Philadelphia. President Ronald Reagan issued the first proclamation declaring October 6th as German American Day in 1983. Each succeeding President has continued to honor German Americans.

According to the 2000 census, 42.8 million Americans (15% of the population) considered themselves to be of German ancestry. German-Americans celebrate their heritage at regional “Oktoberfest” events and other festivals. Large Steuben Parades are held in New York, Chicago and Philadelphia during the month of September.

60th Anniversary of the “Speech of Hope”

September 6 marked the 60th anniversary of the landmark “Restatement of Policy on Germany” or “Speech of Hope” by James F. Byrnes, then United States Secretary of State. The speech, held in Stuttgart on September 6, 1946, set the course for U.S. relations with Europe and laid the groundwork for the Marshall Plan. In its edition of September 16, 1946, Time magazine, the U.S. news weekly, wrote that “Europe and Asia recognized [the Stuttgart speech] as America’s boldest move yet towards leadership of the world.” The state of Baden-Wuerttemberg commemorated the speech with a ceremony on October 4, 2006.

Read more:

★ **James Francis Byrnes** (*Deutsch-Amerikanische Zentrum/James-F.-Byrnes-Institut*) - www.daz.org/enJamesFByrnes.html

★ **Festakt am 4. Oktober 2006** - <http://www.byrnes-rede.de/index.php?id=289>



More information:

★ **About the USA > German-Americans**

usa.usembassy.de/germanamericans.htm

★ **About the USA > History of German-American Relations (1683 – 2003)**

www.usembassy.de/usa/garelations.htm

★ **German-American Relations - Latest Developments**

www.usembassy.de/policy/relations.htm

★ **How German is American?** (Max Kade Institute)

mki.wisc.edu/HGIA/HGIA_booklet.pdf

★ **Teacher's Guide to Celebrate German-American Day, October 6** (IUPUI Max Kade German-American Center)

www.ulib.iupui.edu/kade/g_immigr.html

★ **Celebrating German Heritage in America Today** (German Embassy, Washington, DC)

www.germany.info/relaunch/info/publications/infocus/german-americans/index.html



Time Magazine, September 16, 1946

www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,888296,00.html



Fast Facts

42.7 million - The estimated Hispanic population of the United States as of July 1, 2005, making people of Hispanic origin the nation's largest ethnic or race minority.

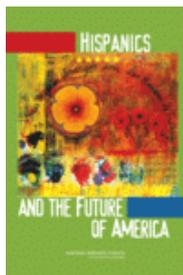
Hispanics constituted 14 percent of the nation's total population.

102.6 million - The projected Hispanic population of the United States as of July 1, 2050. According to this projection, Hispanics will constitute 24 percent of the nation's total population on that date.

43% of New Mexico's population is Hispanic, highest of any state. Hispanics also make up more than one-third of the population in California and Texas, at 35 percent each.

13 states have at least half a million Hispanic residents. These states are: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Texas and Washington.

31 million - The number of U.S. household residents age 5 and older who speak Spanish at home. Spanish speakers constitute a ratio of more than 1-in-10 U.S. household residents.



Hispanics and the Future of America
Committee on Population, National Academies.
www.nap.edu/openbook/0309100518/html/

Cultural Diversity in the U.S.: Hispanic Americans

Hispanics, who became the largest minority group in the United States in 2002, are changing American society and culture. The roots of the Hispanic experience in America date from the time of the Spanish empire in "New Spain," which included present-day Mexico, the countries of the Caribbean and Central America, and the U.S. states of California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.

The word "Hispanic" – once used as a reference to people originating from Spain – has now taken on new meaning. Today, the overwhelming majority of the U.S. Hispanic population hails from Latin America. Many Latin Americans in the United States call themselves Latinos or claim other ethnic identities because of their racially mixed background, either Native American or African, along with some European ancestry. Mexican-Americans, especially, often choose not to identify with Spain because of their colonial experience under Spanish domination.

Whatever their ethnic background, people of Latin American or Spanish-speaking European origin have a major influence on American society and culture. Their contributions to American life are recognized by the U.S. government, which designates the period from September 15 to October 15 each year as National Hispanic American Heritage Month. During this period, the United States honors Hispanic Americans, who have served as leaders in business, government, law, science, athletics, the arts and many other fields. The celebration of America's Hispanic heritage began on a national scale in 1968 with Public Law 90-498, which authorized an annual Presidential Proclamation making the week of September 15 and 16 Hispanic Heritage Week. The designated week was selected to coincide with Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua's Independence Day celebrations on September 15, and Mexico's on September 16.

Hispanics and the Future of America

Marta Tienda, Mitchell Faith [Editors], Committee on Population, National Academies, 2006.

Over the past few years, many long-term research projects have examined the role that Hispanics play in the transformation of American social, cultural and economic life. This volume, written and edited by noted sociologists covers a broad spectrum of research interests to provide a comprehensive portrait of the Hispanic population in the United States. The book includes chapters on "Latino Civic and Political Participation", "Hispanics in the U.S. Labor Market", "The Demographic Foundations of the Latino Population", "Hispanic Families in the United States," and "Barriers to Educational Opportunities for Hispanics in the United States."

Read more:

- ★ **About the USA > Society > Hispanic Americans** - usa.usembassy.de/society-hispanics.htm
- ★ **Hispanic Heritage Month** (InfoPlease.com) - www.infoplease.com/spot/hhm1.html
- ★ **We the People: Hispanics in the United States** (U.S. Census Bureau) - www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/censr-18.pdf
- ★ **Celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month: Lesson Planning Article** (Education World) www.education-world.com/a_lesson/lesson023.shtml
- ★ **Events in Hispanic American History** - www.galegroup.com/free_resources/chh/timeline/index.htm
- ★ **Hispanic Americans** (U.S. Dept. of State, IIP) usinfo.state.gov/scv/history_geography_and_population/population_and_diversity/hispanic_americans.html
- ★ **Celebrate Hispanic Heritage** (Scholastic) - teacher.scholastic.com/activities/hispanic/

Columbus Day, October 9, 2006

Columbus Day is the annual U.S. commemoration of the landing of Christopher Columbus in the New World on October 12, 1492 (at San Salvador Island, also known as Watling Island, today part of the British Bahamas). Columbus was not the first European to successfully cross the Atlantic. Viking sailors are believed to have established a short-lived settlement in Newfoundland sometime in the 11th Century; and scholars have argued for a number of other possible pre-Columbus landings. Columbus, however, initiated the lasting encounter between Europeans and the indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere.

A number of nations celebrate this encounter with annual holidays: Discovery Day in the Bahamas, Hispanic Day in Spain, and Día de la Raza in much of Latin America. In 1971, Congress moved the U.S. holiday from October 12 to the second Monday in October, to give workers a long holiday weekend. U.S. federal government offices close on Columbus Day, as do most banks. Schools usually remain open, as do most American businesses. Columbus Day is typically a celebration of Italian and Italian-American cultural heritage, since Columbus is generally considered to be a native of Genoa. New York City hosts a large and festive Columbus Day parade.



★ **About the USA > Holidays > Columbus Day** usa.usembassy.de/holidays-columbus.htm

★ **Beyond Columbus: Teaching the Lessons of 1492** (Education World) www.education-world.com/a_curr/curr167.shtml

★ **The Voyage of Columbus.** Lesson Plan, Grade 9-12 (NEH) - edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=322

Halloween - "Trick or Treat!"

While not an official holiday, the traditional October 31 Halloween celebration is much beloved by children in the United States, for whom the day is a chance to don costumes — often depicting ghosts, goblins and other "supernatural" creatures — and to collect candy and other treats. Costumed children appear at their neighbors' doors shouting "Trick or treat!" The neighbors, pretending to be afraid of such scary ghosts, vampires and zombies, distribute treats so as to avoid any possible "trick." Many youth forgo their candy in favor of Trick-or-Treat for UNICEF, collecting not sweets, but money, in small boxes distributed by the United Nations Children's Fund. American children have collected an estimated \$120 million in this fashion, with the proceeds funding education, immunization and other programs in the developing world.

Another Halloween custom is the decoration of a pumpkin by scooping out the inside, carving out a face and illuminating the result with a candle. Today, these "jack-o'-lanterns" are purely decorative but they originated long ago in Britain, where turnips were used, and the "jacks" were believed to ward off evil spirits.

Halloween has its roots in ancient end-of-harvest festivals, as celebrated, for example, by the ancient Celts and the Romans. As Christianity spread across Europe, folk beliefs often were adapted and incorporated into such Christian occasions as All Saints' Day (November 1). The evening immediately preceding All Saints' Day was known originally as "All Hallows Eve" (hallowed means sanctified or holy). This is how Halloween got its name. Halloween came to English North America via different immigrant groups. The New England Puritans disapproved but the observance took hold in a number of Southern colonies and was spread broadly by mid-19th century Irish immigrants.

Some communities host festive Halloween parades. Anoka, Minnesota, population 18,000, has proclaimed itself "Halloween Capital of the World," leading up to the big day with two weeks of activities including a "haunted house" and pumpkin-carving contest. Even the White House has its share of Halloween ghost stories, but Chief Usher Gary Walters insists that any poltergeists residing there are friendly.



Kids dressed up for Halloween.

© U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

Fast Facts

36.1 million - The estimated number of potential "trick-or-treaters" in 2005 — 5- to 13-year-olds — across the United States.

108 million - Number of occupied housing units across the nation — all potential stops for "trick-or-treaters."

Jack O' Lanterns

1.1 billion pounds - Total production of major pumpkin-producing states in 2005. Illinois led the country by producing 497 million pounds of pumpkins, followed by California, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

26 pounds - Per capita consumption of candy by Americans in 2005; a large portion is consumed around Halloween.

More information:

★ About the USA > Holidays > Halloween usa.usembassy.de/holidays-halloween.htm

★ Library of Congress: Happy Halloween! memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/oct31.html

★ The History Channel: The History of Halloween www.historychannel.com/exhibits/halloween



Most U.S. states have held their preliminaries as they prepare for the upcoming midterm elections in November. (© AP Images)

Read more:

★ **U.S. Dept. of State, IIP: Midterm Elections**

<http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/democracy/elections.html>

★ **Foreign Press Center. Midterm Elections**

<http://fpc.state.gov/fpc/c18259.htm>

Looking Ahead: Midterm Elections November 7, 2006

Every two years Americans elect members of the House of Representatives to two-year terms and about one-third of their Senators, who serve six-year terms. The House of Representatives and the Senate make up the U.S. Congress. Presidents are elected to four-year terms. The elections in which Americans vote for their congressional representatives but not for president are known as midterm elections, which this year will be on November 7, 2006. Thirty-six states will also vote for their governors this year. The next presidential election will be in November 2008.

Currently the Republicans hold a small majority of seats in both houses of Congress. Because Congress has the power to pass laws and determine how funds are spent, the outcome of the midterm elections could greatly impact U.S. politics and law.

InfoAlert - For More on Trends and Current Events in the United States infoalert.usembassy.de

InfoAlert highlights recent articles and reports from leading U.S. journals and provides informed commentary on

Webchat Station

Upcoming Webchats:

Oct. 16 [Studying and Working in the U.S.](#)

Oct. 17 [Democracy Dialogues: The Role of International NGOs in Promoting Religious Freedom](#)

Oct. 26 [Democracy Dialogues: Freedom of Religion in Islamic Societies](#)

Nov. 13 [Studying and Working in the U.S.](#)

Upcoming Programs

October 27–30, 2006 - U.S. Embassy Teacher Academy 2006 – The American South

October 30, 2006 - Midterm Elections: A New Direction for America?
Teacher Training Workshop with David Lublin, American University.

October 31, 2006 - Midterm Elections: A New Direction for America?
Panel discussion with David Lublin, American University, Peter Range, Democratic Leadership Council, and Karsten Voigt, German Foreign Office (tbc.)

November 23, 2006 - 20:00 - Reading from "The Echo Maker" by Richard Powers

Registration and more information at:

www.usembassy.de/germany/upcoming_events.html



usa.usembassy.de

About the USA is a digital collection of background resources on American society, culture, and political processes. In addition to featuring selected websites, it provides access to documents in full text format (E-Texts) on topics ranging from the history of German-American relations, government and politics to travel, holidays and sports.

About the USA is maintained by the Information Resource Centers/U.S. Diplomatic Mission to Germany. For information about this and other information products and services, see:

www.usembassy.de/germany/irc/

Contact: IRCBerlin@state.gov