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CROSSROADS COMMUNITY CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

INTERSECTIONS

Revolutions

Welcome to the special summer installment of *Intersections*. Through this publication, the Crossroads Community Center aims to help the University of Alabama community look at similarities, or intersections, across cultures.

Each quarter, Crossroads offers a new issue sharing stories and traditions that

cross cultural lines and barriers. In every issue we highlight other parts of the world, while at the same time allowing Alabama's light to shine.

Each edition of *Intersections* includes information about local and global seasonal celebrations. In addition, in many issues we take a moment to spotlight individuals at the Univer-

sity of Alabama who are making connections across cultures.

We hope you will take a moment to enjoy this issue, which explores several independence celebrations recognized across the globe each summer.

— Bettina Byrd-Giles
Crossroads Community Center

Juneteenth

Juneteenth is an annual celebration that commemorates the ending of slavery in the United States. The holiday dates back to June 19, 1865 when Union soldiers landed at Galveston, Texas with news that the Civil War had ended and that the enslaved were now free. The news came two and a half years after President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation- which had become official January 1, 1863.

Also known as Freedom Day or Emancipation Day, Juneteenth has since been celebrated annually with festivities all over the U.S. While

hardships during the Great Depression unfortunately forced festivities to wane for many years, the holiday regained popularity in the 1950's and 60's during the Civil Rights movement. Years later, in 1980, Juneteenth was declared an official state holiday in Texas.

Today, Juneteenth is celebrated with music, dancing, food and family. Throughout the festivities great emphasis is placed on education and achievement, and the holiday is recognized as a time for both reflection and rejoicing.

Alabama is home to a number of notable Juneteenth celebrations. Each year the Anniston Juneteenth Heritage Board organizes a celebration that includes everything from hip hop and step shows to business exhibits.

The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute also sponsors a Juneteenth festival each year. Held the first weekend in June, the event features concerts, speakers, parades, and a reading of the Emancipation Proclamation. It is one of the country's largest Juneteenth celebrations.

Fourth of July: Independence Day

Each year the United States celebrates July 4th as Independence Day. The celebration marks America's official split from the rule of Great Britain and the beginning of the American Revolution.

Although the celebration only lasts one day, the actual process of America's fight for independence took far longer.

In 1775, the thirteen American colonies began their fight

for independence from British rule, known as the Revolutionary War. In



Fireworks, such as these, are a popular part of the United States' Independence Day celebrations.

June of 1776 a committee headed by Thomas Jefferson was appointed by the Continental Congress to prepare a document declaring the

United States free from British rule.

The document, now known as the Declaration of Independence, was adopted by Congress on July 4th. Although

the war for independence was not officially ended until 1783, July 4 has since been celebrated as a national holiday marking America's independence from Britain.

Today, the holiday is celebrated all around the country with patriotic displays. For many, work is suspended for the day and families gather to mark the Fourth with a picnic or barbeque.

In the evening, communities gather, flags in hand, to watch displays of fireworks overhead.

Mexican Independence Day

On September 16, 1810 in the Mexican town of Dolores, a parish priest by the name of Miguel Hidalgo issued the *Grito de Dolores*, a call for the independence of Mexico from Spain.

Hidalgo rang his church bell to gather the congregation and issued a plea for Mexican independence along with the arrest of all Spaniards in Mexico. He ended the speech by calling out “*Mexicanos, ¡viva México!*” (Mexicans, long live Mexico!).



The Mexican flag flies in front of the zócalo in Mexico City.

Shortly after this, Hidalgo gathered an army and attempted to usurp the government. Although Hidalgo was eventually defeated, the revolutionary movement lived on until the war ended and Mexico's independence was recognized by the Spanish government in 1821.

On September 16, 1825, the Republic of Mexico officially declared the day its national Independence Day, or *Día de la Independencia*. Hidalgo's bell has since been moved from Dolores to the National Palace in Mexico City. It is customary that each

year on the night of September 15, the President of Mexico rings this bell and repeats Hidalgo's call for independence.

This reenactment can be witnessed all over the country in every city's *zócalo*, or plaza. In addition, cities are decorated with flags and with Mexico's national colors: green, white, and red. Enjoying traditional foods and music, crowds gather at the local plaza to witness the reenactment and the fireworks display that follows. At the end of the celebration, the entire community joins together to shout the names of the heroes of the Independence ending with “*¡Viva México!*”

Indian Independence Day

On August 15, 1947, after centuries of British rule, India finally became a sovereign nation.

Indian independence was not easily won—the struggle lasting from 1857 until 1947. The initial rebellion was sparked in 1857 when soldiers serving in the British East India Company's British Indian Army and Indian kingdoms rebelled, unsuccessfully, against British control.

After the revolt was defeated, widespread suppression of Indian civil liberties, political rights, and culture led to increased disenchantment with British rule. Between 1918 and 1922, the Indian

On this day, Indians rejoice in their freedom and pay homage to those who sacrificed their lives to make it possible.

independence movement was revived when Mahatma Gandhi, leading the Indian National Congress, organized a series of non-violent campaigns of civil disobedience.

In 1942, Congress led a movement known as the *Quit India Movement*—an all-out revolt demanding that the British leave India. By the late 1940's Great Britain openly agreed to the eventual independence of India, and on August 15, 1947 India officially won freedom.

Today, August 15th is recognized as an Indian national holiday. Schools and businesses are closed, and cities are

decorated with the Indian national colors of saffron, green and white.

On the morning of the 15th, the Prime Minister sets the mood by hoisting the national flag and addressing the nation from the Red Fort, an historical monument in Delhi. Similar ceremonies are held in state capitals across the country.

On this day, Indians rejoice in their freedom and pay homage to those who sacrificed their lives to make it possible.

August 15th is recognized as the one true, Indian national festival in which the entire country can partake, and thus it has come to signify a feeling of nationalism, solidarity and celebration.

Bastille Day

Bastille Day, known as *Fête Nationale* in France, is a French national holiday that commemorates the *Fête de la Fédération*, a huge feast held in July 14, 1790 to celebrate the end of the French monarchy and the establishment of the French Revolution.

The celebration is commonly referred to as Bastille Day, as it is often associated with the storming of the Bastille, a prison in Paris. This siege took place on July 14, 1789 and marked the beginning of the French Revolution.

To citizens of France in the 18th century, the Bastille was not simply a prison. Rather, it was a symbol of the absolute and arbitrary power of Louis the 16th's Ancient Regime.

Although the building only held seven prisoners at the time of its capture, the storming of the prison was a symbol of liberty and victory over oppression for all

French citizens. It marked the end of the absolute monarchy and, eventually, the creation of the French Republic in 1792.

Bastille Day was declared the French national holiday on July 6, 1880, when the new Republic was firmly established.

Today the holiday is celebrated with fireworks, parties and parades. Military parades are held on the morning of July 14. The largest of these takes place on the *Champs-Élysées* avenue in Paris in front of the President of the Republic, and includes the French Republican Guard and Paris Fire Brigade. Meanwhile, the *Patrouille de France*, the precision aerobatic demonstration team for the French Air Force, performs overhead.

Bastille Day also falls during the running of the Tour de France, and is traditionally the day on which French riders will make a special effort to take a stage victory for France.

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