

THE *Current*

February 16, 2012

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UCSB to Host Lecture on the History of Cinco de Mayo

Although Cinco de Mayo commemorates an event in Mexican history -- El Día de la Batalla de Puebla (The Day of the Battle of Puebla) -- the holiday was created and first celebrated by Latinos living in California.

As the 150th anniversary of the first Cinco de Mayo approaches, David Hayes-Bautista, professor of medicine and director of the Center for the Study of Latino Health and Culture at the School of Medicine at UCLA, will give a talk on the history behind this American holiday. His talk will begin at 6 p.m. on Thursday, March 8, at the Loma Pelona Conference Center at UCSB. It is free and open to the public.

According to Hayes-Bautista, the first Cinco de Mayo celebration recognized the Mexican army's defeat of invading French troops in the town of Puebla on May 5, 1862. Overjoyed that freedom and democracy had won a victory over forces of slavery and oligarchy, Latinos in California celebrated with fireworks, patriotic songs, and impromptu speeches.

"Cinco de Mayo is important to California because it was invented here," said Hayes-Bautista, whose book, "El Cinco de Mayo: An American Tradition," is forthcoming from UC Press. "It provides a collective identity for all Latinos, whether they were born here in California, or immigrated from Mexico, Central America, or South America."

Hayes-Bautista is the only U.S. citizen to serve as a member of Mexico's Commission for the Celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the Battle of Puebla. He was sworn in by President Felipe Calderón. The commission is charged with organizing commemorations of the first Cinco de Mayo throughout Mexico and the U.S. Hayes-Bautista's talk is part of the Cinco de Mayo University Speaking Tour.

About UC Santa Barbara

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