



HR Highlights August 2021

Celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month September 15 - October 15



Why do we recognize and celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month in the United States? To address this question, we have to learn a bit of history. It might be helpful to remember that the first European power to land and explore in the Americas (after the Vikings did around the year 1000!) was Spain. The Spanish, just like the Europeans that followed, never really considered the indigenous peoples living in the Americas as “civilized” human beings, and thought they could just lay claim to territory all over the “new”

continent. This they did—from Florida, throughout the Caribbean, in what became the city of New Orleans, and in vast areas of the American southwest. Florida, and the territory from the eastern border of Texas stretching all the way west and north as far as today’s Utah and California, were Spanish holdings in America that today constitute territory of the United States. Except for Florida and New Orleans, when these areas became independent from Spain, they were the territory of independent Mexico. Of course, in every space and territory the Spanish claimed and settled, they spread Spanish culture, language, and customs.

In 1819, the U.S. negotiated a treaty with Spain to acquire Florida, and portions of Alabama, Mississippi, Colorado, and Louisiana. From 1836 to 1848, Americans—either from the “Texas Republic” or acting for the Government and military of the United States, clashed with Mexico. The United States, acting on the self-proclaimed doctrine of “Manifest Destiny,” pushed to claim land in North America from whomever owned it so that the U.S. territory could stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The war with Mexico during these years was an example of the “Manifest Destiny” doctrine. To see the land that used to belong to Spain—and then Mexico—acquired by the U.S. during these years, look at this map:



Additionally, during the period of “Imperialism,” the United States made war on Spain in 1898, and gained the territories of Puerto Rico, Guam, The Philippines, and took Cuba as a “protectorate.” In 1903, the U.S. forced Colombia to grant independence to Panama, and negotiated the rights to build the Panama Canal with independent Panama, holding on to the “Canal Zone” until 1979, and the canal itself until 1999.

As you can see, the United States became a home territory for Spanish culture and heritage due to territorial expansion....And we haven’t even discussed the number of countries in Latin America where the U.S. has been involved throughout history, and where therefore it had an effect on Latin American migrations! So, “Hispanic Heritage Month” is really about a big part of our history and culture in the United States.

Most importantly today, there are 41 million people in the United States who speak Spanish exclusively at home. There are 12 million more in the U.S. who are bilingual in Spanish and English. This means that the United States has more Spanish speakers than Spain itself—which has a total population of 47 million!

The term “Hispanic” refers to people from Spanish-speaking areas, regions, or countries. So it includes a big chunk of U.S territory and U.S. population. It came into usage in the U.S. in the 1980 census. Since it specifically references Spanish language as its unifying identifying feature, it includes people of Spanish heritage (i.e. from Spain), but does not include people from Brazil, where Portuguese is the national language. Still, people who identify as “Hispanic” are very diverse: Indigenous peoples of Latin America who speak Spanish are called Hispanic, people of Afro-Caribbean lineage can be Hispanic since Spanish could be their main language, and people who are racially White in Argentina are Hispanic also because their main language is Spanish! In the United States, there are 53 million people who are Hispanic! So, as you can see, “Hispanic Heritage” is a celebration of many, many cultures and backgrounds that are *all* represented here, in the United States. For more on the identities that can accompany the term “Hispanic,” see <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/09/15/who-is-hispanic/>