



From The Desk of V Corps Equal Opportunity Sgt. Maj. Evy Lacy

Hispanic Heritage Month

This year's theme for Hispanic Heritage Month observances is

Hispanic Americans: Making a Difference in Our Communities and Our Nation. Hispanic Heritage Month is recognized by presidential

proclamation and extends annually from September 15 through October

15. It is important to understand the ethnic diversity of our armed forces and our country, and this commemoration gives us the opportunity to celebrate the many contributions Hispanics have made to the United States and our national culture.

According to the United States Census Bureau, more than 39.9 million people in the United States are of Hispanic origin. This equates to approximately 13.7% of the total population, making Hispanics the nation's largest race or ethnic minority. This number does not include the 3.9 million Hispanic residents of Puerto Rico. The Hispanic population of the United States is expected to reach 102.6 million by July 1, 2050.

Many Hispanic Americans can trace their roots to the culture of the indigenous people of the Americas, including the Arawaks of Puerto Rico, the Aztec of Mexico, the Tainos of Cuba, the Maya of Central America and many others. Some even trace their roots to the early Spanish explorers, most of whom were soldiers and priests, and to African peoples.

Spain has been a Roman Catholic country for centuries, so the priests the Spaniards sent to help settle the Americas. Thus, even today, the most prominent religious identity for Hispanics is Roman Catholic. However, over the past 40 years, there has been an increase in Hispanic Protestants. Mexico's population of Protestants is now 6 percent; Chile's is 11 percent; Costa Rica's is 14.4 percent, and Puerto Rico's is 15 percent.

Popular Hispanic celebrations include *Dia de la Raza* (Columbus Day); *Cinco De Mayo* (The 5th Of May), which commemorates the victory of the Mexicans over the French army at The Battle Of Puebla in 1862; *Mexican independence day* (September 16), and several other holidays and festivals celebrated throughout Central America and the Caribbean.

The following is a list of Hispanic contributions in the areas of entertainment, science and medical and military:

Entertainment: Rita Moreno became the first Hispanic actress to win an Oscar, for her 1961 performance as Anita in *West Side Story*. Other actors and actresses of Hispanic heritage who have enjoyed successful careers include Freddie Prinze, Anthony Quinn, Erik Estrada, Maria Conchita Alonso, Sandra Santiago, Martin Sheen (and his sons Emilio Estevez and Charlie Sheen) and Raquel Welch (who was born Jo Raquel Tejada to a Bolivian father and American mother), to name a few.

Science and Medical: Dr. Franklin Chang-Diaz, born in Costa Rica, became America's first astronaut of Hispanic heritage. Dr. Antonia Novello (born in Puerto Rico as Antonia Coello) was the first woman and first Hispanic appointed as Surgeon General for the U.S. Public Health Service, and served from 1990-1993.

Military and Politics: Luis Gutierrez became Illinois' first Hispanic in Congress. Nydia Velazquez became the first Puerto Rican woman to serve in the House of Representatives. And of course the officers and Soldiers of V Corps serve under the leadership of Lt. Gen. Ricardo S. Sanchez, who is of Mexican-American heritage. (To read about his visit to a recent Hispanic Heritage Month salute to Hispanic heroes of World War II, and brief accounts' of several of those heroes' exploits, go to our V Corps Equal Opportunity [homepage](#)).

For you'd like more information on Hispanic Heritage Month or other EO topics, call me or V Corps EO Program Manager Maj. John Sirmon at 370-5768 or 380-5763.