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# Presidential Documents

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Title 3—

Proclamation 6919 of September 18, 1996

The President

National Hispanic Heritage Month, 1996

By the President of the United States of America

## A Proclamation

America draws strength from the extraordinary diversity of its people. Our national character is enhanced by citizens who maintain and honor cultural customs brought from other lands. Hispanics, who have long been part of this tradition, were the earliest European settlers of this great Nation, with the Spanish founding cities in Florida in the 1500's, and Mexicans establishing homesteads in the Southwest in the 1600's. Puerto Ricans became U.S. citizens in 1917, and other Latinos over the years, including Cubans and Central Americans, came to the United States in search of democracy, freedom, and a better way of life.

Hispanics, who are of all races, distinguish themselves as a community by fostering connections rooted in the Spanish language. Their diverse and vibrant culture includes elements originating in Spain, North America, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. Hispanics share deep family values, recognize their obligations to the less fortunate of our society, protect their children, cherish freedom, and fulfill their patriotic duty to defend their country.

Earlier this month, I awarded our Nation's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, to Dr. Antonia Pantoja. Dr. Pantoja has inspired generations of Latino youth to "dare to dream." Believing that hard work can overcome any obstacle, she went from factory worker to college professor and has dedicated her life to bringing educational and economic opportunities to the Puerto Rican community.

Sadly, we recently lost one of our great countrymen, Dr. Hector P. Garcia of Corpus Christi, Texas. A member of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, he is best remembered for his service to the Latino community, founding the American GI Forum to defend the civil rights of Hispanic veterans and organizing one of the first civil rights marches in the 1940's.

Many other Hispanic sons and daughters have served our country with distinction, making important contributions in the arts and sciences, the business world, academia, government, agriculture, and the Armed Forces. Helping to preserve the democracy and freedom all Americans enjoy, Hispanics have served in the United States Armed Forces in proportions much larger than their percentage of the population. Since World War I, our Nation has awarded the Medal of Honor, our highest military honor, to more Latinos than any other ethnic group.

Today, let us honor Hispanics for their example of community and patriotism, and for the richness of their contribution to this great land.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim September 15 through October 15, 1996, as National Hispanic Heritage Month. I call upon all government officials, educators, and people of the United States to honor this observance with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities, and encourage all Americans to rededicate themselves to the pursuit of equality.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this eighteenth day of September, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-first.

*William Clinton*

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