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# Hispanic History in the National Register of Historic Places



Discover Our Shared Heritage travel itinerary series relates the history of a variety of Hispanic cultural resources in South and West Texas, the American Southwest, and along the Florida, Georgia, and California coasts.

Seven lesson plans produced by the Teaching with Historic Places program highlight Hispanic history. Shown here is the cover of Ybor City: Cigar Capital of the World.

One of the goals of the National Register of Historic Places program is to encourage and foster the identification, survey, registration, and interpretation of a wide variety of historic resources representing the cultural backgrounds of all Americans. Considering the enormous impact that Hispanic culture has had upon the United States, especially in the Southwest, West, and lower Southeast, it is surprising to learn that Hispanic cultural heritage is under represented in the National Register. The National Register Information System (NRIS) database indicates that only 73 of the 67,000 properties individually listed in the National Register were nominated for Hispanic ethnic heritage. Ten states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, New Mexico, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Texas) and Puerto Rico have nominated Hispanic-related properties to the National Register, most of which are located in the Southwest. Though brief, the list of properties significant for Hispanic heritage includes a wide array of property types from various periods of significance. These cultural resources represent the Hispanic experience in America from the Spanish Colonial era up to the mid-20th-century with the influx of immigrants from such places as the Caribbean, Mexico, and the Basque region of Spain.

The National Register has produced a number of publications that spotlight cultural resources associated with Hispanic heritage. *Discover Our Shared Heritage* is a series of travel itineraries that link a wide range of historic places from national parks, to National Historic Landmarks, to state and locally significant historic resources. Four National Register travel itineraries have been

published, with a fifth on Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands in development, that cover areas of the United States associated with early exploration and settlement. *South and West Texas, Along the Georgia/Florida Coast, American Southwest, and Early History of the California Coast* relate the history of a variety of Hispanic cultural resources from the San Diego Presidio in California to the St. Augustine Town Plan Historic District in Florida. Maps, color photographs, and a description of each historic property introduces the traveler to the world of early European explorers and settlers.

Another series of publications that feature Hispanic resources are the lesson plans produced by the Teaching with Historic Places program. Each lesson plan uses a place listed in the National Register to teach a topic usually included in history and social studies curricula and links a dramatic story to larger themes, issues, and events in history. Seven Teaching with Historic Places lesson plans that highlight Hispanic history are: *California to American: A Study in Cultural Change*

- Castolon: A Meeting Place of Two Cultures*
- Forts of Old San Juan: Guardians of the Caribbean*
- Gran Quivira: A Blending of Cultures in a Pueblo Village*
- San Antonio Missions: Spanish Influence in Texas*
- Vieux Carre: A Creole Neighborhood in New Orleans*
- Ybor City: Cigar Capital of the World.*

Other lesson plan themes include African American History, American Indian History, and Women's History.

Here are a few of the historic properties associated with Hispanic heritage that students, teachers, and travelers will learn about in the National Register travel itineraries or the Teaching with Historic Places lesson plans.

- The St. Augustine Town Plan National Historic Landmark District, featured in *Along the Georgia/Florida Coast* travel itinerary, sur-



Pilgrims climb El Cerro Tome in New Mexico on Good Friday toward the calvario on the summit. Photo by Miguel Gandert, courtesy New Mexico State Historic Preservation Office.

rounds the site of the oldest occupied European settlement in the United States. The town grew from a Spanish military base established by Don Pedro Menendez de Aviles in 1565 and was part of Ponce de Leon's 1513 claim to *La Florida*. North of St. Augustine on the Georgia coast is the Cumberland Island National Seashore. In 1566, the Spanish established Fort San Pedro on Cumberland Island. Later, a Franciscan mission was established to convert the Timucuan Indians to Christianity. Cumberland Island and the other barrier islands off the coast of Georgia, claimed by the Spanish, were won by the British in 1742 at the Battle of Bloody Marsh on St. Simons Island.

- The San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, featured in the *South and West Texas* travel itinerary and a Teaching with Historic Places lesson plan, consists of a chain of 18th-century Spanish missions. Connected by the eight-mile Mission Trail, these missions form the basis of the original town of San Antonio and were meant to act as spiritual centers for spreading the Catholic faith among the Coahuiltecan Indians.
- Commemorating the expedition of Francisco Vasquez de Coronado in 1540–1542, the 5,000-acre Coronado National Memorial lies on the U.S.–Mexico border. Featured in the *American Southwest* travel itinerary, the Memorial lies within site of the San Pedro Valley, where the Spanish explorer first entered the United States, and offers spectacular views of the surrounding countryside at the Montezuma Pass overlook.
- The San Diego Presidio, which travelers are introduced to in the *Early History of the California Coast* itinerary, was the base of operations for the Spanish colonization of California. Established in 1769, the San Diego Presidio was the first permanent European settlement on the Pacific Coast.
- The San German Historic District in Puerto Rico is an early-19th-century residential district that is laid out in a classical Spanish plan with plazas and squares. Famous Puerto Ricans that lived in the San German Historic District include Lola Rodriguez de Tio (1843–1924), a poet and political leader who wrote the lyrics of the “La Borinquena,” the unofficial national anthem of Puerto Rico; and Santiago R. Palmer Irizarry (1844–1887), a newspaper publisher and outspoken defender of Puerto Rican rights, who was jailed by the Spanish in 1887.
- A company town that grew up around a number of cigar factories, Ybor City Historic



District in Tampa, Florida, was a vibrant neighborhood settled primarily by Cuban immigrants. In 1885, Vincent Martinez Ybor built a cigar factory and started constructing housing for his workers. Ybor City, featured in a Teaching with Historic Places lesson plan, soon out-produced Havana in cigar production, and by 1900, became known as the “Cigar Capital of the World.”

- Another Hispanic-related property detailed in a Teaching with Historic Places lesson plan is the Castolon Historic District in Texas. Located in the southwest corner of Big Bend National Park, the Castolon Historic District is an example of how American settlers worked harmoniously with local Hispanic families to develop a prosperous border town during the late-19th century.

Other National Register properties, not discussed in the travel itineraries or lesson plans, also record the history of Hispanic people in the United States. What can be learned from the National Register documentation on these historic places? Find out about a refugee center in Miami that has come to symbolize freedom and democracy for Cuban immigrants; discover the history of Tucson’s “Wishing Shrine”; read about the earliest permanent settlement in Colorado and a more contemporary farm worker’s village in Texas; and learn about an urban neighborhood in Toledo, Ohio that has become the center of the Hispanic community in that city:

- Freedom Tower, built in 1925 as the headquarters for the *Miami Daily News and Metropolis*, functioned as the Cuban Refugee Emergency Center from 1962 to 1974. Originally called the Miami News Tower, the building was renamed “Freedom Tower” on June 29, 1962.
- El Tiradito or “The Wishing Shrine” is a traditional cultural property in Tucson, Arizona. Many local Mexican-Americans believe that those who light a candle on this site will have their prayers (or wishes) answered.



A National Register property associated with Basque culture, the Pelota Fronton in Jordan Valley, Oregon, was constructed in 1915 and used up until the 1930s. The fronton, or court, was the gathering place for Basque immigrants to play the traditional handball game of pelota. Courtesy Oregon State Historic Preservation Office.

- El Cerro Tome in New Mexico, another traditional cultural property, is the site of historic and modern day religious pilgrimages. Residents of nearby El Cerro have created a shrine and erected four crosses or *calvario* on the summit of the hill where traditional passion plays take place on Good Friday.
- Plaza de San Luis de La Culebra, established in 1851, is the oldest permanent settlement in Colorado. The town still owns the *vega*, a grassland area used for pasturing livestock, given to the town by Mexican-born landowner Don Carlos Beubien in 1863.
- A more contemporary settlement is the La Mesa Farm Workers Community, which was built by the Farm Security Administration (FSA) between 1941–1944 in an effort to improve housing and living standards for migrant workers in the cotton producing area of West Texas.
- The central focus of the Hispanic community in Toledo, Ohio, the Saints Peter and Paul Historic District was first developed by German and Swiss immigrants in the 1860s. Spanish-speaking Texans and immigrants from Mexico first came to the area in the 1920s to work for railroad companies and industrial plants. By 1929, the Hispanic population had banded together to form the Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission, which was later merged with the Saints Peter and Paul parish.
- During the late-19th- and early-20th-centuries, immigrants from the Basque region of Spain settled in the western United States and were employed primarily in sheepherding and agriculture. The Santa Fe Hotel in Fresno, California, was the base of operation for nomadic Basque sheep herders working in the San Joaquin Valley. The hotel served as hospital, post office, and boarding house. An unusual National Register property associated

with Basque culture is the Pelota Fronton in Jordan Valley, Oregon. Constructed in 1915 and used up until the 1930s, the *fronton* or court was a gathering place for Basque immigrants to play the traditional handball game of *pelota*.

- McAlester, Oklahoma was the site of a tragic gas explosion that killed 32 Hispanic miners in 1929. After a national appeal by Will Rogers, more than \$70,000 was donated to the victims' survivors. Hispanic miners played an important role in the Oklahoma coal mining industry. Between 1910–1930, over 1,200 Mexican immigrants worked in the mines in the southeastern part of the state.
- Each spring before planting time, the residents of La Cienega, New Mexico, join together with tools and shovels to clean out the Acequia System of El Rancho de las Golondrinas. The acequia system, which has been used for over 200 years to water fields of corn, beans, and alfalfa, serves as a powerful cohesive force in the life of the village.

The history of these fascinating places and many more are housed in the National Register archives and are available to the public.

These historic places illustrate the rich variety of National Register properties listed for their significance in Hispanic cultural heritage. However, more buildings, sites, objects, districts, and structures associated with Hispanic heritage need to be nominated and listed. Listing additional cultural resources would further encourage the preservation and interpretation of the places that document the important role Hispanic Americans have played in our nation's history.

For information on ordering the *Discover Our Shared Heritage* travel itineraries, contact the National Register, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240, 202-343-9536. To order Teaching with Historic Places lesson plans, call Jackdaw Publications at 800-789-0022. Access to the NRIS database is available through the National Register Web site at <[www.cr.nps.gov/nr](http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr)>.

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