

In 1968, Congress authorized President Lyndon B. Johnson to proclaim a week in September as National Hispanic Heritage Week. The observance was expanded in 1988 to a month long celebration (September 15 – October 15). During this month, America celebrates the culture and traditions of U.S. residents who trace their roots to Spain, Mexico and the Spanish-speaking nations of Central America, South American and the Caribbean. September 15 was chosen as the starting point for the celebration because it is the anniversary of independence of five Latin American countries – Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. In addition, Mexico and Chile celebrate their independence on September 16 and September 18, respectively.



National Hispanic Heritage Month is an opportunity to celebrate the Hispanic American Culture, with its many traditions and inherent diversity. This year's theme is "Hispanic Americans, Making a Difference in Our Communities and Our Nation." Despite its diversity, the Hispanic community shares the American values of a solid work ethic and a personal responsibility to family, patriotism and spiritualism. The contributions of Hispanic Americans are legion and the Hispanic community has done much to make this country better and stronger. In the arts and sciences, business, industry, military, sports and in all facets of American life, Hispanics have made major contributions to the growth and development of our great Nation.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the estimated Hispanic population of the United States as of July 1, 2003, was 39.9 million, making them the nation's largest race or ethnic minority. It is projected that by July 1, 2050, the U.S. Hispanic population will grow to 102.6 million. This means that Hispanic Americans would constitute 24 percent of the nation's total population.

At NOAA, we are working to ensure that Hispanic Americans direct their attention to careers with NOAA. In the spirit of NOAA's Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez and through the hard work and perseverance of Israel Matos, Meteorologist-in-Charge at San Juan, the National Weather Service has established a multi-year grant with that university to establish a Meteorology/Atmospheric Sciences degree program. This will lead to an expanded pool of highly qualified candidates for employment at in those NOAA mission related sciences for years to come.

During the past year our Environmental Entrepreneurship Program has provided developmental and environmental demonstration grants to Minority Serving Institutions with strong Hispanic American representation in Florida, Texas, New York and California. They will be using those grants to attract new students and train students and faculty to address environmental issues in resource-depleted areas and to practice sustainable development.

As we celebrate the rich history and cultural traditions of Hispanic Americans, let us remember their countless contributions to America's distinctive diversity.