Affinity

MOULEDOUX | BLAND
LEGRAND | BRACKETT
ATTORNEYS AT LAW, NEW ORLEANS

Volume 5, Issue 5

September 18, 2026

By: Daniel J. Estrada

National Hispanic Heritage Month 2026: A time to reflect on and celebrate Hispanic contributions to the USA[1]

2026 National Hispanic Heritage Month is upon us, and once again it is a time of recognition. Running from September 15 to October 15, it is a time to celebrate Hispanic history and culture as well as the impact that Hispanics have had on the United States of America.

Background

National Hispanic Heritage Week was established by legislation and signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1968. Originally, it took place on the week of September 15.[2] In 1988, the commemorative week was expanded to a month (September 15 to October 15) by legislation and signed into law by President Ronald Reagan.[3] It was enacted into law on August 17, 1988, on the approval of Public Law 100-402.[4]

September 15 was chosen as the start date because it is the anniversary of independence for Latin American countries Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. In addition, Mexico and Chile celebrate their independence days on September 16 and September 18, respectively.

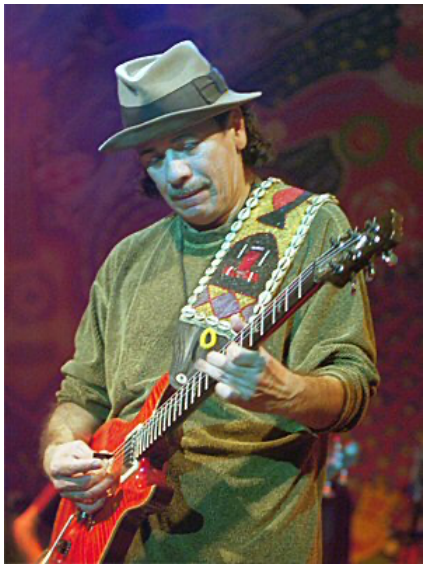
---

[1] National Hispanic Heritage Month banner https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hispanic_Heritage_Month_(8664684).jpg
[2] https://history.house.gov/HistoricalHighlight/Detail/15032398402?ret=True
[3] https://web.archive.org/web/20200915163205/https://www.hispanicheritagemonth.gov/about/
[4] https://web.archive.org/web/20200915163205/https://www.hispanicheritagemonth.gov/about/

Hispanic American Contributor

There have been many Hispanics that have been contributors to the United States and its culture. In law, several Hispanics have contributed to the profession, including Justice Sonia Sotomayor who is the first Hispanic justice on the U.S. Supreme Court. Justice Sotomayor was born to Puerto Rican parents in New York City, New York. Additionally, Alberto Gonzales, who is of Mexican descent, served as the U.S. Attorney General under President George W. Bush when he was in office.

As for Hispanic elected officials in the United States, these include Senator Alex Padilla (California-Mexican descent), Representative Mario Diaz-Balart (Florida-Cuban descent), Senator Ruben Gallego (Arizona-Colombian descent) and Senator Bernie Moreno (Ohio-Colombian descent), to name a few.



In music, there is Ricky Martin (Puerto Rican descent), Juanes (Colombian descent), Jennifer Lopez (Puerto Rican descent), Los Lobos (Mexican descent) and Selena (Mexican descent). Of course, who can forget Grammy Award-winning guitarist Carlos Santana (Mexican descent),[5] or Ritchie Valens whose brief career gave us such hits as “La Bamba” which he adapted from a Mexican folk song and sung in Spanish. Recent artists include Bad Bunny (Puerto Rican descent) and Kali Uchis (Colombian descent) whose song “Moonlight” includes lyrics sung in Spanish. The music these artists have created has helped to introduce Latin-influenced music to a new generation, giving them an appreciate of the Hispanic contribution to pop, traditional and blues music.

In entertainment, there is Rita Moreno, Eva Longoria, Esai Morales, Benicio Del Toro and Jessica Alba, to name just a few. Ms. Moreno was awarded an Academy Award for best supporting actress for her role in “West Side Story” in 1961, becoming the first Hispanic woman to do so.

Hispanic influence in New Orleans and Louisiana

While many know that the French owned and controlled Louisiana and by extension New Orleans, fewer know that the Spanish owned and controlled this territory from 1762 to 1800. During this time, the Kingdom of Spain was ruled by King Charles III. Louisiana and New Orleans were acquired from France after the Seven Years War

[5] Photograph of Carlos Santana, Carlos Santana.jpg: Jaudderivative work: Yarl - Carlos Santana.jpg, CC BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2408215

pursuant to the treaty of Fontainebleau.[6] Louisiana and New Orleans became part of the Viceroyalty of New Spain whose capital was in Mexico City.

One noteworthy Spaniard during the time of Spanish control was Governor Bernardo de Galvez y Gallardo. Born in the province of Malaga Spain on July 25, 1746, he became governor of New Orleans in January 1777.[7] During his time as governor, he collaborated with the American colonists seeking independence from Great Britain, and he captured the British outposts of Mobile and Pensacola. Galvez was immortalized in New Orleans with a street named after him and in the USA with a painting that was hung in the Capitol building in Washington, D.C., honoring his contributions to the American Revolution. [8]

Visitors and inhabitants of New Orleans can still see and feel the Spanish influence even today. Spanish architecture can be seen at the Cabildo in the French Quarter. Certain New Orleans streets are named after former Spanish governors such as Miro, Galvez and Ulloa. An interesting fact is that St. Charles Street was named after the patron saint of King Charles III. There is also the Spanish Plaza (Plaza de Espana) located at the Riverwalk that overlooks the Mississippi River. The plaza's fountain is surrounded by the names of Spanish provinces and was a gift from Spain and inaugurated on April 12, 1978.[9]

Finally, in certain areas of New Orleans' French Quarter or Vieux Carré, there are glazed tiles from Talavera, Spain, which display the royal coat of arms of Spain and the Spanish name of each street in the 18th

[6] The Spanish In New Orleans and Louisiana author Jose Montero de Pedro, Marques de Casa Mena and translated by Richard E. Chandler, Pelican Publishing Company 2000.
[7] The Spanish In New Orleans and Louisiana author Jose Montero de Pedro, Marques de Casa Mena and translated by Richard E. Chandler, Pelican Publishing Company 2000.
[8] Painting of Galvez, by Unknown author - http://bdgsar.org/galvez.htm, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=96882
[9] The Spanish In New Orleans and Louisiana author Jose Montero de Pedro, Marques de Casa Mena and translated by Richard E. Chandler, Pelican Publishing Company 2000.

century.[10] For example, Royal Street is identified as Calle Real.[11] These were put in place in 1962 and, again, demonstrate Spanish influence in New Orleans.

Current Hispanic Population in the United States

According to the Pew Research Center, Latinos are among the fastest-growing racial or ethnic groups in the United States.[12] Between 2000 and 2024, the Latino population nearly doubled, rising from 35.3 million to 68 million.[13] In fact, Latinos are the country's second-largest racial or ethnic group, making up one-in-five Americans.[14]

According to the United States Census Bureau, in New Orleans, Louisiana, the Hispanic population make up 8.2% of the total population of 362,154.

The Future for Hispanics in the United States

Hispanics in the United States have greatly contributed to this great nation and the Spanish influence extends from the east coast to the west coast. Hispanics of the United States should "sentir orgullo" in the accomplishments of their fellow Hispanics and culture during National Hispanic Heritage Month 2026. No doubt Hispanics will continue to contribute to and impact the culture, ambition and greatness of the United States of America in the coming years.

---

[10] The Spanish In New Orleans and Louisiana author Jose Montero de Pedro, Marques de Casa Mena and translated by Richard E. Chandler, Pelican Publishing Company 2000.
[11] Yair Haklai, CC BY-SA 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>, via Wikimedia Commons
[12] Key Facts about U.S Latinos by Gabriel Pina and Gracie Martinez, Pew Research Center October 22, 2025
[13] Id.
[14] Id.