

In the United States, we observe Hispanic Heritage Month from September 15th to October 15th. This began as Hispanic Heritage week in 1968 under President Lyndon Johnson. Twenty years later, President Ronald Reagan expanded Hispanic Heritage Week into Hispanic Heritage Month. During this time, we recognize the contributions of American citizens with ancestors from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. We celebrate Hispanic histories and culture.

The observance time selected for Hispanic Heritage Month is significant, because it is a time when many countries celebrate freedom. September 15th is the anniversary of independence for Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Within the period of September 15th to October 15th, there are other countries celebrating their respective independence days. For instance, Mexican Independence Day is September 16th and Independence Day in Chile is September 18th.

Hispanic Americans have long contributed to our nation's maritime history. Read some of their stories below!

The Hispanic Veterans of World War II



“The Fighting Medinas,” seven brothers from Rio Grande, Puerto Rico and Brooklyn, New York who served in World War II.

Photo Credit: The National WWII Museum

Over 500,000 Latinos served in the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II, and countless others worked in industries and farms that contributed to the war effort. Seventeen Hispanic Americans were awarded the Medal of Honor for their service during World War II.



Photo Credit: The USS Utah

Mexican-American Rudy Martinez joined the Navy before World War II broke out. He was stationed at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. At twenty-one years old the Electrician's Mate was killed when on December 7, 1941 two torpedoes struck the USS Utah. Martinez was the first Hispanic American to die in World War II. He was posthumously awarded a Purple Heart and World War II Victory Medals for his service. The USS Utah was never salvaged, and it remains where it sank during the attack on Pearl Harbor. Even today, Martinez remains entombed within the ship. He is one of many Hispanic

Americans who sacrificed their lives while serving the United States.

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/national-hispanic-heritage-month-teacher-resources>

<https://www.ussutah1941.org/rudy-martinez.html>



Captain Kathlene Contres

Photo Credit: U.S. Navy Office of Information

Kathlene Contres joined the U.S. Navy in 1980. Until her retirement in 2010, she was the highest-ranking female Hispanic American officer in the U.S. Navy. She was also the first Hispanic American woman to command the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, an organization that encourages collaboration and inclusion.

Contres' Mexican-American father served in the Army. At the time she joined the Navy in 1980, women were not allowed to go to sea despite serving in a seagoing service. Throughout her career, she dedicated much of her time to increasing the diversity of the U.S. Naval force.

Captain Contres was the president of the Association of Naval Services Officers, an organization dedicated to supporting the needs of Hispanic sailors. Her efforts improved the recruitment, retention, and promotion of Hispanic sailors across all ranks of the U.S. Navy. According to the Naval History and Heritage Command, Contres believes that “the success of a good leader is measured by the success of those that they mentored.” This belief is a testament to how Captain Contres spent three decades of honorable service in the Navy: Uplifting those around her, especially serving as an inspiration to women and Hispanic people.

<https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/diversity/women-in-the-navy/contres.html>

<https://www.navy.mil/Women-In-the-Navy/Past/Display-Past-Woman-Bio/Article/2955215/capt-kathlene-contres/>



Lou Sandoval

Photo Credit: Chicago Yacht Club

Lou Sandoval was the first Hispanic person to serve as the Commodore of the Chicago Yacht Club in its 145-year history. He led the prestigious Club for two years, including during the start of the Covid-19 Pandemic in 2020.

Sandoval is the son of Mexican immigrants. He grew up in South Chicago where there were few opportunities to access the water, and was first exposed to sailing through the Boy Scouts. Since then his heart has belonged to the water, and as Commodore he worked to share that love with others. In an interview with ABC 7 Eyewitness News he explained his determination to develop a Yacht Club rooted in inclusion: “Diversity means that you invite everybody in. Equity means that everybody has a seat at the table. But inclusion means that everybody is having fun at the party.”

Sandoval himself is an accomplished sailor. He has won the Race to Mackinac several times on his boat, Karma. His two-year term as the Chicago Yacht Club Commodore ended on December 31st, 2020. Sandoval recognizes his ability to inspire others, particularly Hispanic children learning about his accomplishments. In April 2022 he published his book, *Tenacity for Life*, detailing his experiences with perseverance in the face of difficulty and the pursuit of the American Dream.

Lou Sandoval offered some powerful words of advice: “My message for Latinos is, you belong. You work hard, you make your money, you belong.”

<https://abc7chicago.com/hispanic-commodore-chicago-yacht-club-sailing/9036989/>

<https://www.chicagoyachtclub.org/about-us/board-of-directors>

For more information to help you celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, check out these websites:

The Library of Congress: <https://www.hispanicheritagemonth.gov/>

The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration:
<https://www.archives.gov/news/topics/hispanic-heritage-month>

Naval History and Heritage Command: <https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/diversity/hispanic-americans-in-the-navy.html>

The Hispanic Heritage Foundation: <https://hispanicheritage.org/>