

# THE LIBERATOR

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## IN RECOGNITION OF HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

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Written by **Frances Molina**

*\*\*Latin@ is being used in place of Latino/Latina in order to synonymously acknowledge both men and women in the Latin@ community as well as gender neutral and gender fluid Latin@ people\*\**

From September 15<sup>th</sup> to October 15<sup>th</sup>, the United States recognizes Hispanic Heritage Month. Besides being the only national month of recognition fortunate enough to straddle two months, Hispanic Heritage Month also serves as a reminder for both Latin@ and non-Latin@ people alike of the rich culture, diverse heritage, and myriad accomplishments and contributions of Latin@ people in the United States.

Hispanic Heritage Month started in 1968 as Hispanic Heritage Week, which was introduced under Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency. The week was then extended to the full 30-day period by President Ronald Reagan in 1988. The date of September 15<sup>th</sup> was chosen because it observes the anniversary of the independence of five Latin American countries including Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. An additional three countries – Mexico, Chile, and Belize – each celebrate their independence days on the 16<sup>th</sup>, the 18<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> of September.

While we continue to acknowledge this history, the present social and political significance of Hispanic Heritage Month cannot be understated. For Latin@s, Hispanic Heritage Month represents a time to actively celebrate and appreciate a collective cultural heritage, the importance of which has been largely diminished, erased, and discounted in American history. This recognition is especially crucial at a time in our state and in our country, when Latin@ communities are experiencing widespread racial discrimination and dehumanization and when our cultural relevance, historic presence, and our identities continue to be steadily erased by the systemic mechanisms of white supremacy. Consequently, it is that much more important to observe Hispanic Heritage Month and the people it celebrates with the community-wide respect and appreciation it deserves.

This was precisely what Dr. Victoria deFrancesco Soto at the Center for Mexican American Studies (CMAS) had in mind when she began to organize this year's celebratory Hispanic Heritage Month events. During a brief interview, she explained that while independent groups and organizations on campus had put on smaller scale events, there was no full-fledged university effort to observe Hispanic Heritage month. This, she said, served as the impetus for the month-long series of panels, discussions, and events presented by the Center for Mexican American Studies.

DeFrancesco Soto, along with co-director of the department Dr. Domino R. Perez, organized these events in order for both Latin@s and non-Latin@ students, faculty, and staff at the University of Texas to celebrate and learn from all of the culture and history that Hispanic Heritage Month has to offer. In an effort to "build interest across the university", the Center for Mexican American Studies has also worked in tandem with popular university centers like the LBJ Library, the McCombs School of Business, and the Hispanic Alumni Center in order to promote campus and community inclusivity.

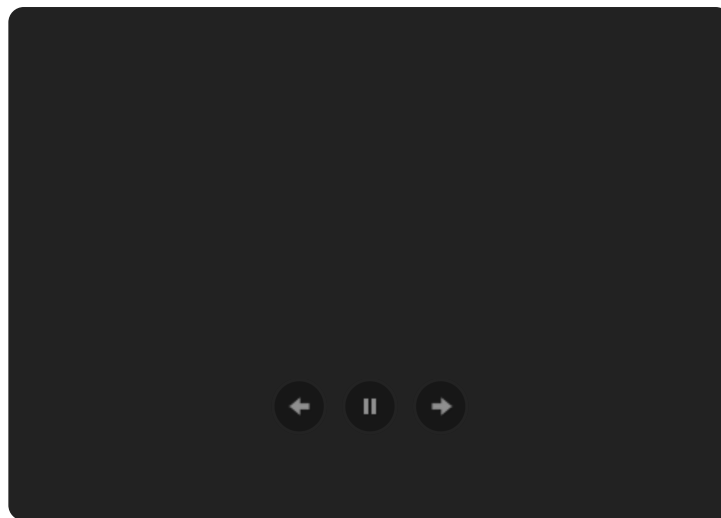
DeFrancesco Soto hopes that these events will inspire a greater "self-consciousness" of cultural identity among the Latin@ student population and will encourage these students to seek out the resources offered them by centers and departments, such as the CMAS. Furthermore, by publicly recognizing and legitimizing the accomplishments

of Latin@s past and present, the University can provide the necessary representation for younger Latin@ generations of students and encourage their respect and appreciation for the past, while fostering intercultural pride and a sense of community belonging on campus.

Following the lead of DeFrancesco Soto and her team at the Center for Mexican American studies, we take this month to celebrate all Latin@ people. From the migrant workers who revolutionized the agricultural and industrial economy of the early American southwest; to the scholars, writers, and artists who invigorated their respective fields with Latin@ voices and experiences; and the politicians and community organizers who labor to influence politics and legislation in favor of a more accessible and racially inclusive America. As such, we recognize that Latin@ people have made and continue to make outstanding economic, social, intellectual, and political contributions to this country.

*For more information on the Center for Mexican American Studies' month-long celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month:*

<http://www.utexas.edu/cola/cmas/events/event.php?id=38169>



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