

# Famous Hispanic Americans: A Proud Heritage

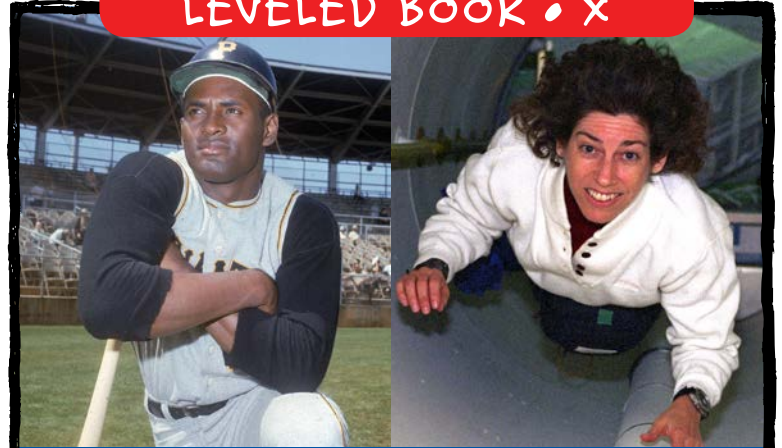
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Written by Thea Feldman

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page 1: Artist Frank Romero checks one of his murals, *Going to the Olympics*.

page 3: Actor Andy Garcia accepts an American Latino Media Arts (ALMA) award. The ALMA awards honor outstanding Latino artistic achievement in television, film, and music.

Famous Hispanic Americans:  
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Level X Leveled Book  
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### LEVEL X

Fountas & Pinnell	S
Reading Recovery	40
DRA	40



## Table of Contents

A Nation of Immigrants	4
Luis W. Alvarez	5
Roberto Clemente	6
Andy Garcia	7
Roberto Garza	8
Rita Moreno	9
Antonia Coello Novello	10
Ellen Ochoa	11
Oscar de la Renta	12
Frank Romero	13
Sonia Sotomayor	14
Conclusion	15
Glossary	16



## A Nation of Immigrants

The United States has always been a nation of **immigrants**. Since the early 1600s, before it was a country, people have come seeking freedom and **opportunity**, and they have been coming for the same reasons ever since. The early settlers came from England and other places in Europe. Today, **Hispanic** Americans are the fastest-growing group of immigrants in the United States, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. They come from Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Spain.

About 317 million people live in the United States. Nearly 17 percent of them are Hispanic. Mexicans are the largest group of Hispanic Americans. Puerto Ricans are the second largest. Some Hispanic families have been in the United States for **generations**, while others have just arrived. Government, entertainment, science, sports, and the arts are just a few fields that Hispanic Americans have **contributed** to.

A man from the Dominican Republic stands for the Pledge of Allegiance during a ceremony that will make him a U.S. citizen.





## Luis W. Alvarez

**Date of Birth:** June 13, 1911  
(died September 1, 1988)  
**Birthplace:** San Francisco, California  
**Profession:** Physicist

Physics is a branch of science that deals with how matter and energy interact. Luis W. Alvarez, who is of Spanish **descent**, spent his entire life learning about that interaction. His father, a doctor, had always urged Alvarez to think of new problems to solve. Alvarez used science to do that.

Among other things, he studied atoms, which are the tiniest pieces of matter—too tiny to see without special equipment. During World War II, Alvarez helped the U.S. government develop the world's first atomic bomb.

After the war, he eventually devised a new way to see and study atoms. For this contribution, he was awarded the 1968 Nobel Prize for Physics, the highest honor a physicist can receive.

## Latino vs. Hispanic

While the terms *Latino* and *Hispanic* are often used interchangeably, *Hispanic* mainly refers to people of Spanish-speaking ancestry. *Latino* is often used to refer to anyone of Latin American ancestry, including Brazilians (who speak Portuguese).



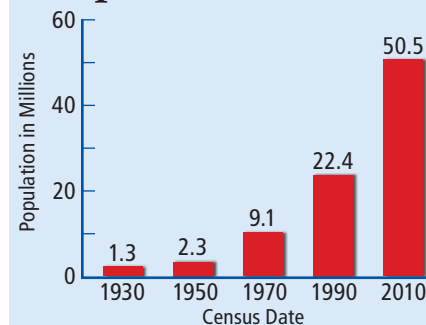
## Roberto Clement

**Date of Birth:** August 18, 1934  
(died December 31, 1972)  
**Birthplace:** Carolina, Puerto Rico  
**Profession:** Baseball Player

Roberto Clement was one of Major League Baseball's first Hispanic players. He joined the Pittsburgh Pirates as a right fielder in 1955 and played for them until his death in 1972. He was an excellent fielder and hitter and was named an All-Star player twelve times. He also became the first Hispanic player to get three thousand hits.

Clemente spent a great deal of time doing charitable work. He died in a plane crash while flying supplies to Nicaragua after an earthquake there caused severe damage. Just three months later, Clemente became the first Hispanic American to be elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

## Hispanic Americans on the Rise



The term *Hispanic* was first introduced in the U.S. Census in 1970. Before that, the Census gathered information about Hispanic Americans through questions about last names, language, or place of birth.

Source: U.S. Social Security Administration



## Andy Garcia

**Date of Birth:** April 12, 1956

**Birthplace:** Havana, Cuba

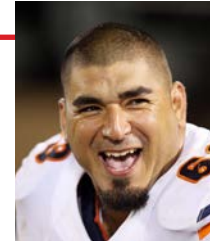
**Profession:** Actor

Andy Garcia and his family moved from Cuba to Miami, Florida, when Garcia was five years old. He became interested in acting when he was in high school and then studied acting in college. Garcia has now appeared in more than forty films, including *The Untouchables*, *Godfather III*, and *Ocean's Eleven*. He has also produced and directed films and has appeared in many TV shows.

Garcia sometimes chooses films that allow him to explore his Cuban **heritage**. In 2000, he played Cuban jazz musician Arturo Sandoval in the film *For Love or Country*, for which he received both Golden Globe and Emmy nominations.

## Cuba

For many years, the country of Cuba was led by a corrupt government. In 1959, Fidel Castro led a group that overthrew the existing government. However, under Castro, the new communist government took over private businesses, land, buildings, and more. Concerned for their freedom and future, many Cubans began to leave the country. The Cuban population in the United States grew from fewer than 71,000 in 1950 to more than double that by 1960. Today, there are close to two million Cuban Americans in the United States.



## Roberto Garza

**Date of Birth:** March 26, 1979

**Birthplace:** Rio Hondo, Texas

**Profession:** Football Player

Roberto Garza joined the Chicago Bears in 2005. He has been one of the team's steadiest players, appearing in 101 consecutive games.

A military recruiter once told him that a Mexican could never play professional football. Garza, who was born in Texas just a few months after his parents immigrated from Mexico, recalls, "Any time someone tells you you're not going to do something, that drives you to continue."

Garza is also involved in United Way, an organization that helps less fortunate children and elderly people. His **achievements** on the field and charitable work have resulted in a street being named for him in his hometown of Rio Hondo. In fact, in Rio Hondo, December 2 is Roberto Garza Jr. Day!

His team didn't play in the 2014 Super Bowl, but Garza still made a historic contribution. He was a reporter for the first-ever Spanish language broadcast of the game in the United States.



## Rita Moreno

**Date of Birth:** December 11, 1931  
**Birthplace:** Humacao, Puerto Rico  
**Profession:** Actress, Singer, Dancer

Only a handful of entertainers have won a Grammy, an Oscar, a Tony, and an Emmy. Rita Moreno is the only Hispanic American to have won them all. Hers were, respectively, the highest awards for singing and for performing in a film, in a play or musical on Broadway in New York City, and on television.

Moreno came to New York City when she was five years old. At age thirteen, she had her first part in a Broadway show, where she was discovered by Hollywood talent scouts.

At the time, films had few good roles for Hispanic actors. However, the movie *West Side Story* (1961) began to change all that. Moreno's performance earned her an Oscar for Best Supporting Actress.

Moreno continued her film career, returned to Broadway, and also began to work in television. In 2004, she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom for her lifetime contribution as an entertainer. It is the highest honor a United States **citizen** can receive.



## Antonia Coello Novello

**Date of Birth:** August 23, 1944  
**Birthplace:** Fajardo, Puerto Rico  
**Profession:** Doctor, U.S. Surgeon General  
(March 9, 1990–June 30, 1993)

Antonia Coello Novello was sickly as a child, but she always knew she wanted to become a doctor. She never dreamed, however, that in 1990 she would become the United States Surgeon General, the top doctor in the entire United States! She also made history by becoming both the first woman and first Hispanic American to hold the position.

The U.S. Surgeon General is a doctor, but not one that sees patients. The U.S. Surgeon General is in charge of making recommendations that help keep the public healthy. During her time as Surgeon General, Novello focused much of her efforts on health issues facing children and **minorities**.

### Do You Know?

Not every Hispanic who became an American started out as an immigrant. Many Mexicans became part of the United States in 1848 as a result of the Mexican-American War. That war changed the U.S.-Mexican border and gained the United States a huge amount of land in what is now the American West, land stretching from Texas to California to parts of Wyoming. Mexicans in that part of the country had the choice of relocating to Mexico or becoming American citizens. More than 90 percent chose to remain.





## Ellen Ochoa

**Date of Birth:** May 10, 1958

**Birthplace:** Los Angeles, California

**Profession:** Electrical Engineer, Astronaut

Ellen Ochoa is passionate about so many things that, as a student at San Diego University in the late 1970s, she changed her major five times. She started with music and wound up with a degree in physics. Her broad interests are part of why NASA chose her for its astronaut training.

Ochoa, who is of Mexican descent, became the first female Hispanic astronaut in 1990. In March of 1993, she made the first of four trips into space. Ochoa has spent 978 hours in space!

Today Ochoa is director of the Johnson Space Center, which trains future astronauts. "Being an astronaut is a wonderful career," Ochoa says. "I feel very privileged. But what I really hope for young people is that they find a career they're passionate about, something that's challenging and worthwhile."



## Oscar de la Renta

**Date of Birth:** July 22, 1932

(died October 20, 2014)

**Birthplace:** Santo Domingo,  
Dominican Republic

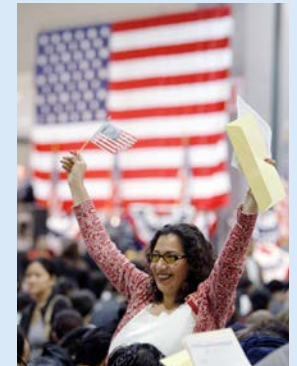
**Profession:** Fashion Designer

Growing up in the colorful, tropical Dominican Republic, Oscar de la Renta thought he would become a painter. But when he arrived in Spain in 1950 to study painting, the eighteen-year-old quickly became interested in fashion design. He began his training and eventually rose to the top of the fashion design world, moving from Paris to New York City. De la Renta became a U.S. citizen in 1971.

## On Becoming a U.S. Citizen

If you were born in the United States or have at least one parent who was already a U.S. citizen at the time of your birth, you are automatically a U.S. citizen. If someone immigrates to the United States, he or she can still become a U.S. citizen by meeting some requirements, including being at least eighteen years old. Anyone wanting to become a U.S. citizen will also have to take and pass the naturalization test. This test has questions about U.S. history, geography, and government.

After a person passes the naturalization test, he or she must take the U.S. Oath of Allegiance. In return he or she gets to enjoy the rights, privileges, and opportunities shared by all U.S. citizens.



In 1965, de la Renta launched his own label—his own company with clothes that he designed. He dressed a number of American first ladies, including Jacqueline Kennedy, Nancy Reagan, Hillary Clinton, and Laura Bush. Referred to by Vogue magazine as “the guru of glamour,” de la Renta won many design awards.



### Frank Romero

**Date of Birth:** 1941

**Birthplace:** East Los Angeles, California

**Profession:** Painter

When Frank Romero, who is of Mexican descent, began painting more than forty years ago, he became part of a group of artists called *Los Four*. During the civil rights movement, Los Four used their art to help raise awareness of and pride in Hispanic **culture**. In 1974, their work was exhibited in the first major art show featuring U.S. Hispanic artists in the country’s history.

Romero’s art often depicts social conflicts and struggles. It can also be large! He has painted more than fifteen murals around Los Angeles, some more than 20 feet (6 m) in length. His art has also appeared in shows around the world.



### Sonia Sotomayor

**Date of Birth:** June 25, 1954

**Birthplace:** Bronx, New York

**Profession:** Lawyer, Supreme Court Judge

From the time she was a little girl, Sonia Sotomayor, who is of Puerto Rican descent, dreamed of becoming a judge. Sotomayor became the first member of her family to graduate from college. In 1992, she became the first Hispanic federal judge in all of New York State.

In 2009, Sotomayor achieved her biggest “first” yet. She became the first Hispanic judge on the Supreme Court, the highest court in the country. Every year, Sotomayor and the eight other Supreme Court judges select the cases they hear. Their decisions on the cases can affect the way people in the United States live. Since Sotomayor joined the



court, she has heard cases dealing with health care, parental rights, gun control, and much more.



## Conclusion

The United States loves success stories. There is much more to the stories in this book, however, than individual success. The Hispanic Americans introduced here have all contributed to the culture and society of the United States. Along with their drive to succeed, they bring and share their backgrounds and beliefs, and contribute to making the United States a **diverse** and unique country.

### More Success Stories



**Isabel Allende:**

Date of Birth: August 2, 1942

Birthplace: Lima, Peru

Profession: Author, Journalist

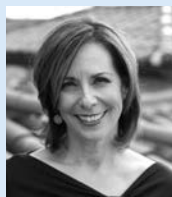
**Cesar Chavez:**

Date of Birth: March 31, 1927

(died April 23, 1993)

Birthplace: Yuma, Arizona

Profession: Labor Leader



**Pam Muñoz Ryan:**

Date of Birth: December 25, 1951

Birthplace: Bakersfield, California

Profession: Author

**Bill Richardson:**

Date of Birth: November 15, 1947

Birthplace: Pasadena, California

Profession: New Mexico Governor  
2003 to 2011



## Glossary

<b>achievements</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	accomplishments reached as a result of effort (p. 8)
<b>citizen</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	an official member of a country or state (p. 9)
<b>contributed</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	did something for or gave something to a person or cause (p. 4)
<b>culture</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the ideas and customs of a certain group of people (p. 13)
<b>descent</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	one's origin or background as related to family, nationality, or culture (p. 5)
<b>diverse</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	different or distinct from one another; made up of different or distinct people or things (p. 15)
<b>generations</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	spans of time, approximately 20–30 years, between when a group of parents and their children are born (p. 4)
<b>heritage</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a way of life, tradition, or characteristic that is passed down from generation to generation (p. 7)
<b>Hispanic</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	of or relating to Spanish-speaking countries, especially Latin American countries (p. 4)
<b>immigrants</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	people who come to live in a new country, especially for the purpose of settling there (p. 4)
<b>minorities</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	small groups within a larger population; less than half (p. 10)
<b>opportunity</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a chance to do something (p. 4)