

## HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

*15 September - 15 October 2022*

*25 September 2022*

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By the 1990s Spanish-speaking individuals constituted the fastest growing portion of America's immigrant population. Though Cleveland's Spanish-speaking community did not grow as rapidly as those in Florida or California, it was, in 1990, the largest linguistically-defined segment of the local population; 20,290 individuals in Greater Cleveland spoke Spanish. Composed of migrants from Puerto Rico and immigrants from Cuba, Mexico, South and Central America, and Spain, this segment of Cleveland's population has been referred to as Hispanic or Latino. Organizations such as the Hispanic Cultural Center, and special governmental offices, such as the Mayor's Hispanic Liaison, serve the needs of the overall community.

The overwhelming majority of the local Spanish-speaking population consists of Puerto Ricans. The Puerto Rican community of Cleveland is relatively new. Although a few Puerto Ricans settled in Cleveland following the Spanish-American War, and others arrived after World War I, the largest influx to northern Ohio occurred between 1945 and 1965. After World War II young, unmarried Puerto Rican men were recruited to work in the factories of Lorain and in the greenhouses of northern Ohio. When their contracts terminated many were attracted to Cleveland by its diverse job opportunities. Although most had not originally intended to stay in Ohio permanently many changed their minds and sent for friends and relatives to join them. In 1955 Cleveland reported a total of 1500 Puerto Rican residents. In 1960 Puerto Ricans accounted for about 80% of all Spanish-speaking residents in the city. Cleveland's Puerto Rican population increased dramatically owing to a high birth rate and migration from the island, New York, and Chicago. In 1983 approximately 25,000 persons of Puerto Rican descent lived in Greater Cleveland. As a group, Puerto Ricans were unique settlers in that they were already American citizens when they arrived in Cleveland, and they could easily travel back and forth to their homeland.

The majority of Puerto Ricans who came to Cleveland in the 1950s settled in the east side around Hough, Lexington, and later, Superior Avenues. These areas attracted Puerto Ricans because of their proximity to Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church and Saint Paul Shrine, where Spanish-speaking Trinitarian priests were located. In 1958 an exodus of Puerto Ricans from the east side to the near west side began. Inner city deterioration and a desire to be closer to jobs in the steel

and industrial mills in the Flats area prompted the large-scale movement. Approximately two-thirds of Greater Cleveland's Puerto Ricans live on the near west side, from West 5<sup>th</sup> to West 65<sup>th</sup> Streets, between Detroit and Clark Avenues. On the east side, some Puerto Ricans are still found in the original settlement, from East 30<sup>th</sup> to East 77<sup>th</sup> Streets, and from Wade Park to Saint Clair Avenue. A growing number are settling in the North Broadway area. Puerto Rican households are also scattered throughout Greater Cleveland's suburbs.

Historically, most Puerto Ricans are Roman Catholic, but unlike most Catholics, Puerto Ricans did not bring their own priests with them. In 1954 the Cleveland Diocese established a Spanish Catholic mission; Our Lady of Fatima Center on Quimby Avenue offered Masses in Spanish. Other parishes often opposed Spanish Masses and did not welcome new members from the Puerto Rican community. As a result of determined and sustained efforts by many of Greater Cleveland's Puerto Ricans, a church on West 32<sup>nd</sup> Street near Lorain Avenue was purchased in 1975 and became San Juan Bautista Catholic Church. Though it is primarily Puerto Rican, other Spanish-speaking people are in the parish. Several Protestant churches in Greater Cleveland also have Puerto Rican followings, and a number of Catholic and Protestant churches offered special services and bilingual education programs for Spanish-speaking persons of all ages in 1995. The first Pentecostal Assembly of God on West 11<sup>th</sup> Street was founded in 1952.

As a group, Puerto Ricans are fiercely proud of their traditions and customs. First generation parents have attempted to maintain island traditions in their homes and clubs, which often bear the names of native island towns. Puerto Rican social, cultural, civic, and service clubs exist in Cleveland. The Spanish America Committee, a well-known social service organization that serves primarily the Puerto Rican community, has been active since 1966. The Hispanic Community Forum sponsored the first annual Hispanic convention in Cleveland in 1984. Puerto Rican Friendly Day, an activity uniquely Puerto Rican, has been observed by Cleveland's Puerto Ricans each summer since 1969. It's purpose is to bring together the city's Puerto Rican residents and to educate the Cleveland community about Puerto Rican culture.