

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

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Mexicans constitute the second largest Spanish-speaking ethnic group in Cleveland. The first Mexicans settled in Cleveland during the early 1920s and a slow but steady stream of immigrants increased the city's Mexican population to 679 in 1920. During the following decades, the Mexican population fell to 162 as a result of the Great Depression, which caused many Mexicans to return to Mexico.

During the 1940s the steel industry in Cleveland and Lorain recruited large numbers of Mexican immigrants for war work. Some of those in Lorain eventually moved to Cleveland because of greater opportunities for employment in the large city. Many Mexican immigrants decided to stay permanently in Cleveland. By 1983 approximately 4000 people born in Mexico, or of Mexican descent, lived in the city. The early Mexicans were from rural areas. They came seeking economic opportunity and freedom from political instability and religious persecution. These early arrivals did not form ethnic settlements, as did many other immigrant groups. Instead, they settled in various parts of the city. In 1995 the majority of Mexican-Americans lived on the west side around Lorain, Detroit and Randall Avenues, and West 52nd Street. Others scattered throughout Greater Cleveland.

One of the first cultural and social clubs started by Mexicans was the Club Azteca, founded in 1932. In 1951 the club purchased a store and suite at 5606 Detroit Avenue (which was razed in 2021), to serve as the center of social and cultural activities for Cleveland's Mexicans. In 1990, 320 Mexicans resided in Cleveland.

Most of Cleveland's Cubans came to the

city following Fidel Castro's seizure of power in 1959. Prior to this time, only 200 Cubans resided in Cleveland. The Cuban Refugee Resettlement Committee, composed of Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish organizations, helped relocate refugees of the various faiths. Most of the new arrivals were families who intended to return to Cuba as soon as Castro was ousted. After the Bay of Pigs failure, many decided to stay permanently in Cleveland. In 1980 there were about 650 Cubans in Cleveland. The population within the city declined to 140 in 1990. The majority were well-educated, experienced business people. Some American industries that had operated plants in Cuba offered jobs to the refugees. The Cubans quickly became self-supporting, acquired well-paying jobs, and moved into suburban neighborhoods. The Cubans of Cleveland organized the Circulo Cuban Association of Cleveland, a cultural club for the purpose of preserving Cuban traditions, strengthening Cuban brotherhood, and preserving the dream of a free Cuba.

In 1980 roughly 5000 Clevelanders hailed from various countries in Latin America other than Cuba, Mexico, and Puerto Rico. Most were fairly well-educated men who came after World War II. Some sought to continue their education in the Cleveland area; others sought jobs in the export and import business. Eventually many decided to stay in Cleveland permanently and married Clevelanders or sent for their families to join them.

The new arrivals initially settled near each other and near the Mexicans and Puerto Ricans with whom they shared bonds of culture and language. However, the immigrants never formed permanent settlements because there were few people from any one national group.

They are now scattered throughout the suburbs of Greater Cleveland. Many of the Latin American immigrants have become members of various professions. The only club that serves all Latin Americans is the Cleveland Pan American Cultural Society, an affiliate of the Pan American Union in Washington, D.C. The club was organized in 1960 by night students at Case Western Reserve University who felt a need for formal expression of Latin American culture and for programs to familiarize Greater Clevelanders with the distinctive culture and history of the various Latin American republics.

Part of this effort is the annual folk festival in conjunction with the inter-hemispheric celebration of Pan American Day.

Relatively small numbers of Greater Cleveland's Spanish-speaking people trace their heritage to Spain. In 1983 there were approximately 900 Greater Clevelanders of Spanish descent. Most Spaniards came to Cleveland by way of Cuba; others migrated from the U.S. Southwest. They began arriving in Cleveland around 1910. Most came with the intention of staying here permanently. The immigrants tended to settle together. Initially, the English language posed a major obstacle, but once they learned the language they integrated quickly and are now scattered throughout the area. Many new arrivals labored in the city's steel mills, factories, and foundries. Although the Spaniards readily adopted American customs, they preserved many of their social and cultural traditions. A society for Spaniards, Club Galicia, was established in 1926. It was active for many years until it disbanded as other associations took its place in the local Spanish community. Several media services are designed for the Spanish-speaking peoples of Cleveland. Spanish-language broadcasts for several hours a week are heard on local radio stations. Various newspapers and periodicals, including Latino magazines in Spanish are available; the Cleveland Plain Press, a neighborhood newspaper, writes a few news articles in Spanish for the Hispanic community.