

Walls

Long before it became a U.S. state, the area known today as Texas was part of New Spain, a vast portion of land controlled by the Spanish Empire. Extending from present-day Mexico, all the way into California, then east to Colorado and south to Texas, New Spain took the land from Native tribes in a quest for riches—and in order to make the Natives into good Spanish citizens. One of the ways they accomplished this was to build Mission complexes that offered protection to the Native inhabitants in exchange for labor and conversion to Catholicism. Some Natives returned to their old ways of life, but others became part of Spanish society, learning trades like weaving and blacksmithing.

New Spain's reign lasted from 1519 to 1821, when Mexico fought for and won its independence. As foreign invaders from the north flocked to Mexico's northern-most



state, Mexico decided to ban U.S. immigration in an attempt to hold onto its territory. But in 1836, Texas won its independence from Mexico to become the Republic of Texas. Just over a decade later, Texas was annexed into the United States. But when Mexico refused to sell the rest of the southwest to the U.S., we decided to take it anyway—in the Mexican-American War. Suddenly, thousands of Mexican citizens became Americans.

Today, our government talks about building a wall along our southern border to keep out our Hispanic neighbors. But less than 200 years ago, all that land—and more—was part of Mexico. The people who lived there never crossed the border to get into this country—the border crossed them. Hispanic peoples are as much a part of our country and our culture as any other group. They contribute to society in meaningful ways; they love their families and want what's best for them. Perhaps it's time to tear down our walls and see them not as foreigners, but as people who belong.

Statistics:

- About two-thirds of Hispanics living in the United States were born here.
- Of Hispanics born elsewhere, almost 80% have lived in the U.S. for more than 10 years.
- 70% of Hispanics in the U.S. are proficient in English.
- 19% of Hispanics live in poverty in this country, compared to 13% of the U.S. population as a whole.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What incorrect assumptions or prejudices do people often hold about Hispanic people?
2. Why do you think Hispanic heritage has its own month?
3. Why do you think Hispanic history is often ignored in this country?
4. How does our lack of knowledge about Hispanic history influence current events?

Ways to Learn More

- Visit the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park: [nps.gov/saan](https://www.nps.gov/saan)
- Visit the Holding Institute: [holding-institute.org](https://www.holding-institute.org)
- Visit the *Walls* website: [westohioumc.org/walls](https://www.westohioumc.org/walls)