

Latino Sailors Finding Community on Board

GRADES 6-12



Overview

This activity is geared toward participants in grades 6-12. The estimated amount of time to deliver this lesson is 60 minutes.

Latino sailors have a long and successful history in the US Navy. They fought valiantly in all of the wars in the 20th century. A defining characteristic of the experience of Latino sailors was their tendency to form social groups with fellow sailors with similar backgrounds.

Although Latino sailors were never formally segregated in the Navy or in civilian life, they would spend time together on board and on liberty. In this lesson, participants will discuss the history of Latinos serving in the U.S. Navy and the ways that they were able to find community on board.

Through the oral histories of two Latino Navy veterans, participants will understand the ways that racial discrimination in the Navy and broader Nation facilitated the development of tight bonds and connections formed between Latino service members.



Objective

Participants will analyze the ways that discrimination in the Navy and broader Nation affected Latino sailors.



Materials

- Oral history compilation of Agustin Ramos and Jose Morales
- "Americanos Todos Luchemos Por La Victoria!" Propaganda Poster, National Archives
- Agustin Ramos' Puerto Rico liberty cuff



Inquiry

Display the World War II propaganda poster: “Americanos Todos Luchemos Por La Victoria!” The poster was designed by artist Leon Helguera during World War II, who was hired by the Office of War Information to create posters in order to appeal to Latinos, especially those of Mexican descent. Discuss the following questions:

Suggested questions for all participants:

- What symbolism does Helguera use to appeal to Latinos?
- What is the significance of the phrase, “Americans All?” What is it conveying to readers of the poster?
- Why might the U.S. Military have wanted to recruit more Latinos?

Suggested questions for grades 9-12:

- Why did the Office of War Information want to design recruitment materials aimed at specific groups of people?
- What was the political and social climate of the United States like for Mexican Americans and other Latinos in the years leading up to World War II?



Investigation

Listen to or read selected [oral histories](#) of Agustin Ramos and Jose Morales. Agustin Ramos enlisted in the Navy in 1962. Ramos was not able to graduate from high school due to his language skills, so his options were to join the service or go to work. He chose to join the Navy. Jose Morales enlisted in 1981. Morales’ experience was in the post-Vietnam era, but he describes his experiences with racism and community on board his navy vessels. Discuss the following questions:

Suggested questions for grades 6-8:

- What was similar about the experiences of Agustin and Jose? Different?
- How did Agustin and Jose’s backgrounds impact their social time and other experiences in the Navy?

Suggested questions for grades 9-12:

- How did Latinos distinguish themselves on board Navy vessels such as *Intrepid* and *New Jersey*?
- What was the relationship between Latinos and other racial minorities in the Navy?

- Agustin and Jose served at different times during the twentieth century. What was going on in the United States during the 1960s and 1980s that may have impacted their experiences?



Activity

Liberty Cuff

Introduce participants to liberty cuffs. Provide background information on the origin of the cuffs and show images of them or examples from your collection. Share oral history transcripts and Agustin Ramos' liberty cuff featuring the Puerto Rican flag.

Participants will design their own liberty cuffs using the Liberty Cuff worksheet. These should be rectangular strips and represent something important to the participants that they would want to show off on their few days of free time. The worksheet also has space for participants to explain their design.



Lesson Connection

Explore Navy recruitment posters and their use in times of high personnel need with our lesson **Exploring Demand**.



Background

Latinos in the U.S. Navy

Latinos served in the military in large numbers during World War II, including 350,000 Mexican Americans and 53,000 Puerto Ricans. In the Navy, hundreds of Latina women joined the WAVES and nurse corps. Latino service members were especially valued in the Pacific Theater for their Spanish skills, as they could communicate with Spanish speaking Filipinos.

Latinos faced discrimination in the service and at home. Despite the valiant service records of many Latinos, and the thirteen Latino medal of honor recipients, many veterans came home to

the same state of *de facto* segregation as before. Although most Latinos were considered “white” in the legal segregation system, their skin color, class, and language skills led to discrimination in all parts of daily life. In the service, Puerto Ricans in particular were kept in non-combat roles.

Latinos continued to serve in the Navy and broader military throughout the 20th century. They served in the Korean War, continuing to be classified as “White” on official documents but facing discrimination from other service members and the general public. Many Latinos, especially Mexican Americans, served in the Marines. Mexican Americans have a tradition of patriotism and warriorhood that may have led to this decision.

In the Vietnam War era, Latinos made up approximately 10% of the US population, but about 20% of Vietnam deaths. This can be blamed on a few factors. A person could defer the draft if they were still in high school or had pursued college. Many Latinos at the time, however, did not finish high school or go to college. Unlike members of other racial groups, the majority of Latinos would not be able to defer the draft.

Liberty Cuffs

“Liberty Cuffs” were strips of fabric that would be sewn on the inside of the cuffs of uniforms. When sailors were on liberty, or had free time in port for a few days, they could roll up their sleeves and show off their cuffs. Many sailors chose a flag or design as a way of representing their heritage and family. Agustin Ramos chose the Puerto Rican flag to represent his Puerto Rican culture.



Additional Resources/References

Latinos in World War II: Fighting on Two Fronts:

<https://www.nps.gov/articles/latinoww2.htm>

Los Veteranos Fact Sheet:

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/sites/default/files/2017-07/los-veteranos-fact-sheet.pdf>

Hispanic Americans in the Korean War and Vietnam War:

<https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/museums/nmusn/explore/photography/diversity/hispanic-americans/korea-vietnam-1970s.html>



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Documents and Images



“Americans All: Let’s Fight for Victory” by Leon Helguera

Credit: National Archives and Records Administration



Liberty Cuff used by Agustin Ramos

Credit: Collection of the Intrepid Museum. Gift of Agustin Ramos, Jr. 2018.81.02

ACTIVITY: LIBERTY CUFF

Directions: “Liberty Cuffs” were strips of fabric that would be sewn on the inside of the cuffs of uniforms. When sailors were on liberty, or had free time in port for a few days, they could roll up their sleeves and show off their cuffs. Design your own in the space provided below!



Why did you choose this design for your liberty cuff?