



A Note from the Office of Dean Leonard M. Baynes

In mid-September, we began the celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month, a time to recognize and honor the rich histories, cultures, and contributions of Hispanic and Latino communities. Officially established by Congress in 1968 as Hispanic Heritage Week and later expanded to a month in 1988, the observance runs from Sept. 15-Oct. 15. These dates are significant because they coincide with the anniversaries of the dates of independence for several Latin American countries, including Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua on Sept. 15; Mexico on Sept. 16; and Chile on Sept. 18.

Hispanic Heritage Month is an opportunity not only to celebrate the vibrant traditions and achievements of Hispanic communities but also to reflect on their profound impact on American society. From business and politics to arts, science, law, and education, Hispanic leaders and innovators have shaped our nation's past and continue to shape its future. For UH Law, Hispanic Heritage Month affords us the opportunity to celebrate Hispanic/Latino culture and the success of our alumni.

Here in Houston, one of the most diverse metropolitan areas in the nation, Hispanic culture is an integral part of our City's identity. Nearly half of Houston's residents identify as Hispanic or Latino, and their influence is visible everywhere: language, food, neighborhoods, civic life, and the professions including law.

Legal trailblazers such as Gus Garcia and Carlos Cadena, who successfully argued *Hernandez v. Texas* in 1954 before the U.S. Supreme Court, ensured that Mexican Americans and other groups were afforded equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment. Judge Reynaldo Garza became the first Mexican American appointed to the federal bench and later was appointed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. In 1994, UH Law alumnus Fortunato Benavides, who passed away in 2023, joined Judge Garza on the Fifth Circuit, and to date he remains the only UH Law graduate to serve on a federal circuit court bench. Today, Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the first Hispanic and Latina justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, continues to inspire millions with her story and her service.

This Hispanic Heritage Month, I would like to recognize Judge Raul A. Gonzalez, Jr. who was a member of the UH Law Center's Class of 1966. Born in 1940, Judge Gonzalez was raised in the Rio Grande Valley, where he helped his parents, migrants from Mexico, harvest crops.



Judge Raul Gonzalez

Called to public service Gonzalez began his career with the Houston City Attorney's Office and later the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Texas. He went on to later serve as a justice on the Texas 13th Court of Appeals.

In 1984, Gonzalez became the first Hispanic justice elected to the Texas Supreme Court, where he served until 1998 when he retired. In recognition of his trailblazing career, the Justice Raul A. Gonzales Elementary School in Weslaco, Texas, proudly bears his name. With two decades on the bench, he built a legacy of judicial service that continues today. In recognition of his trailblazing career, the Justice Raul A. Gonzales Elementary School in Weslaco, Texas, proudly bears his name.

Judge Gonzalez as well as all UH Law judicial pioneers opened doors for future generations of Hispanic jurists as well as all UH Law alumni who are considering a seat on the bench.

As we commemorate Hispanic Heritage Month, I invite you to [click on the slide show](#) to see more Hispanic UH Law graduates. Let us celebrate the achievements of our Hispanic/Latino alumni, students, faculty, and staff who make lasting contributions to the legal profession and to the broader community. Their perspectives and experiences strengthen our institution and prepare us to serve an increasingly global and interconnected world.

Sincerely,

Leonard M. Baynes
Dean, Hugh Roy and Lillie Cranz Cullen Distinguished Chair, and Professor of Law
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