

Women's History Month Historical Facts

Sonia Sotomayor - First Latina U.S. Supreme Court Justice



Photo: Allison Shelley/Getty Images

The Honorable Sonia Sotomayor was born in the Bronx, New York in 1954. She grew up in a very challenging family circumstance. She loved visiting Puerto Rico where her family was originally from, but her New York home life was not a happy one. Her father was an alcoholic and died in his early 40s. Sotomayor's mother kept her emotional distance from her daughter. Sonya was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at around age 11. The family lived in the housing projects, which was overrun by gang violence.

Her mother did push her children to take their education seriously, and Sonia knew by age 10 that she wanted to be a lawyer. Despite conditions that were not ideal for a young girl in New York, Sotomayor won a scholarship to Princeton University and graduated summa cum laude in 1976 and went on to receive her law degree from Yale.

Sotomayor successfully became a U.S. Supreme Court Justice in 2009. She has become known for criminal justice reform and women's rights.

Rita Moreno - First Latina PEGOT Recipient



Photo: © John Springer Collection/CORBIS/Corbis via Getty Images

Rita Moreno was born in 1931 in Puerto Rico. Her career has spanned over 70 years in film, both in television and theater. Famous for her supporting roles in the film adaptations of the *King and I* (1956) and *West Side Story* (1961), Moreno earned an Oscar, making her the first Latina to achieve such a feat.

In the 1970s, Moreno became a regular cast member of the PBS children's show *The Electric Company* and would later be cast in a supporting role on the HBO hit drama *Oz* (1997-2003).

An actress, singer and dancer, Moreno is the first Latina to be elevated to PEGOT status, a small group of entertainers who have won a Peabody, Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony award.

Isabel Perón - First Latina Female President



Photo: Keystone/Getty Images

Despite her lower-middle-class background and her fifth-grade education, former nightclub dancer Isabel Perón became Latin America's first female president.

Born in Argentina in 1931, Isabel Perón's rise to power would be through her husband, Argentinian president [Juan Perón](#), who was previously married to the late and beloved [Eva Perón](#) (aka Evita). As the third wife, Isabel, known to her countrymen as "Isabelita," would serve as her husband's vice president and First Lady during his third presidential term, starting in 1973.

However, just a year in office, Juan suffered from a series of heart attacks and died on July 1, 1974. Isabel took over as president, and while her nation and political allies and even some of her husband's enemies initially showed support for her, she quickly fell out of favor after she issued a government-run suppression campaign against her adversaries, including a string of political murders and anti-left-wing policy measures and purges.

In 1976 Isabel was forced out by a military coup and remained under house arrest before being allowed to move to Spain. In 2007 an Argentinian judge issued an order for her arrest for the disappearance of an activist in 1976, but Spanish courts refused to extradite her, citing the charges didn't fall under the category of crimes against humanity.

Ellen Ochoa - First Latina Astronaut



Photo: NASA/Liaison

Born in Los Angeles in 1958, Ellen Ochoa immersed herself in the sciences, graduating from San Diego State University with a bachelor's degree in 1980, later from Stanford University with a master's in science in 1981 and a doctorate in electrical engineering in 1985.

As a doctorate student, she focused her studies on optical systems involving high tech space exploration, which eventually led her into the NASA space program in 1991. Two years later, Ochoa became the first Latina woman to fly into space, which occurred aboard the shuttle Discovery.

Ochoa would complete a total of four space missions during her career at NASA and would make history once again when she became the first Latina director of the agency's Johnson Space Center in 2013.

Evangelina Rodriguez - First Dominican Female Doctor



Photo: <https://opinando79.wordpress.com>

Despite being born into poverty and discriminated against for being born of African descent, Afro-Dominican Evangelina Rodriguez became the first woman from the Dominican Republic to earn her medical degree.

Born in 1879, Rodriguez was raised by her grandmother and diligently worked her way through school and earned her education, despite the social and cultural challenges of being a poor black female. She received her medical degree from the University of the Dominican Republic in 1909 and began building her career in small towns and giving medical care to the poorest citizens.

After scrounging her earnings for many years, Rodriguez furthered her expertise by studying gynecology and pediatrics in France in 1921 and graduated four years later. She returned to her country and cared for her patients, while also becoming a political firebrand, advocating for women's rights and issues, such as birth control.

Isabel Allende - First Latina Author Dubbed as Most Widely Read in the World



Photo: Leonardo Cendamo/Getty Images

From Chile, Isabel Allende, became the world's most widely read Spanish-language author.

Born in Peru in 1942, Allende would gain international recognition for her magical realism in novels such as *The House of Spirits* and *City of Beasts*. Drawing from historical events and her own experiences, Allende honors the stories of women in mythical fictional fashion and is credited to have transformed non-fiction literature.

Among her many awards, Allende received Chile's National Literature Prize in 2010 and was honored by President Barack Obama with a Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2014 as well as an honorary degree from Harvard that same year.

Eulalia Guzmán - First Mexican Female Archaeologist



Photo: Mujer Latina

Born in 1890 in San Pedro Piedra Gorda, Mexico, Eulalia Guzmán was an educator, feminist and philosopher best known as Mexico's first female archaeologist. She helped develop the Ixcateopan. Ixcateopan de Cuauhtémoc is a town in Ixcateopan de Cuauhtémoc Municipality located in isolated, rugged mountains in the northern part of Guerrero state. Guerrero composed an archaeological project which was an archive of Mexico's history, and the National Library of Anthropology and History.

Although some of Guzmán's archaeological work became controversial among Mexican scholars for lack of authentication, namely her claim that she discovered the remains of the Aztec Emperor, Cuauhtémoc, she was popular among indigenous populations who celebrated her accomplishments.

Citations for articles: [biography.com](https://www.biography.com)