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### El Futuro es Hoy

J. Clay Smith Jr.

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MR. J. CLAY SMITH, JR.  
ACTING CHAIRMAN, EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION  
before the  
NATIONAL HISPANIC HERITAGE WEEK OBSERVANCE  
COLUMBIA PLAZA COMPLEX AGENCIES  
WASHINGTON, D.C

SEPTEMBER 14, 1981

EL FUTURO ES HOY

Good morning. Welcome to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission where we, in conjunction with the National Endowment for the Arts, the Office of Revenue Sharing and the Bureau of Mines, are here to observe National Hispanic Heritage Week under the theme: El Futuro Es Hoy.

As we focus on peoples of Hispanic origin this week, it is important that we have an understanding of why we are here. The Hispanic population of the United States is comprised of persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American and other Spanish origins. This diversified group is the second largest minority in the United States.

Chicanos

The ancestors of today's Chicanos have a long history in what is now the continental United States. Present-day residents of the state of New Mexico come from families that colonized the Southwest some 75 years before the Pilgrims landed in Massachusetts. When East Coast Americans began their journey across the continent, Mexicans living in Texas and New Mexico already enjoyed a well established society.

While the roads and cities of the Southwest show signs of a Spanish and Mexican past, it is less known that eastern and midwestern industrial states like Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Indiana were also populated by Mexicans. In a 1929 study of postal money orders sent from the United States to Mexico, sociologist Manuel Gamio found records of transmittals from every state of the union. This study is proof of the fact that Chicanos have deep ancestral roots throughout this country.

### THE CUDANS

Cuban migration to the United States predates the Castro regime. Indeed, Cuban migration to America began before this century. By the late 1800's there were about 100,000 Cubans concentrated mainly in New York City, Tampa, Key West and other Florida cities. Fleeing the Cuban wars of Independence, 1868-1895, this first massive exodus established the tobacco industry in South Florida. Since then, historical events have interwoven the lives of the people of Cuba and the United States. After the Spanish-American War, scores of political exiles sought asylum in this country and gained knowledge of American institutions and culture. In fact, developments here have steadily reached Cuba's urban population by means of consumer products, machinery, the arts, and the media. Given this historical perspective and the geographic proximity of the two countries, it is not surprising that a new Cuban exodus to the United States ensued upon the establishment of Castro's communist regime.\*

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\*/ One of my historical heroes is Antonio Maceo, an Afro-Cuban who rose to the rank of Deputy Commander of the Cuban Army during Cuba's ten year war with Spain in the 1800's. So popular was Maceo that he appears in all references authored by Afro-Americans at the turn of the century.

THE PUERTO RICANS

Although it is generally accepted that large scale Puerto Rican migration to the United States is chiefly a Post-World War II development, Puerto Ricans have been coming here for some 150 years. Puerto Rican merchants were among the founding members of a Spanish benevolent society in New York in the 1830's and, by 1910, the U.S. census was already noting the presence of more than 1,500 Puerto Ricans in the United States.

The Depression hit the commonwealth of Puerto Rico severely as the population there rose from about one million in 1900 to nearly two million by the late 1930's, with few occupational opportunities other than menial work and poorly paid jobs in the sugar industry. Puerto Ricans have been U.S. citizens since 1917. The ability to move freely between the island and the United States along with the advent of commercial air transportation gave rise to Puerto Ricans leaving their home in search of economic opportunities on the mainland. A sustained annual net outflow was maintained from 1943 to 1960 peaking at more than 74,000 in 1953. The last two decades, however, have registered a marked trend towards return migration, or net immigration, with more Puerto Ricans returning to the island than have been leaving it in recent years.

The notion that Puerto Ricans are concentrated almost exclusively in New York City is widespread. Yet, official U.S. figures show that although in 1940 New York City was home for nearly 90 percent of the migrants from Puerto Rico, by 1970 only 57 percent of the Puerto Ricans lived there. Today, Puerto Ricans are found in substantial numbers in

upstate cities such as Buffalo and Rochester and in New Jersey. Their presence is felt in New England, Philadelphia, Chicago, Cleveland and Lorain, Ohio, and Gary, Indiana. They are also found in substantial numbers in Miami, Los Angeles and San Francisco. Moreover, at least 30 other U.S. cities have Puerto Rican communities of 5,000 or more. There is hardly a state where Puerto Ricans are not present. I will now read the 1981 National Hispanic Heritage week Proclamation issued by President Ronald Reagan:

The Hispanic peoples, their traditions, language and culture are a vital part of the American heritage. Their influence on our nation began with the Spaniards long before our revolution brought independence from England. This heritage can today be found almost everywhere in our daily lives: the arts and music we enjoy, the architecture of the homes and buildings in which we live and work, the history we read, and the language we use.

The Hispanic peoples today add to our strength as a nation with their strong devotion to family, deep religious convictions, pride in their language and heritage and commitment to earning a livelihood by hard work. Outstanding Hispanic men and women have advanced our nation in science and technology, business and public service. From the Southwest to the Northeast of the United States, they carry on their tradition of service to the communities in which we all live. This year, San Antonio has joined Miami

and other American cities in electing a prominent Hispanic citizen as its mayor. Hispanic Americans bring to us, as well, a tradition of respect for the role of women both at home and in the workplace. Hispanic Americans serve with distinction in our military services today as they have served with leadership and courage on the battlefield in defense of this nation in the past.

Their contributions all too often go unrecognized. It is, therefore, fitting that we set aside this week to honor the Hispanic peoples that are among us as a nation of Americans.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim the week beginning September 13, 1981, as National Hispanic Heritage Week in honor of the Hispanic peoples who have enriched our daily lives, our traditions and our national strength. In this spirit, I ask all of our citizens to reflect on the sense of brotherhood that binds us together as one people.

IN WITNESS WHEREBY, I have hereunto set my hand this fourth day of September, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eight-one, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and sixth.