



## NEWS RELEASE

# DEOMI RELEASES 2022 NATIONAL HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH OBSERVANCE

August 30, 2022

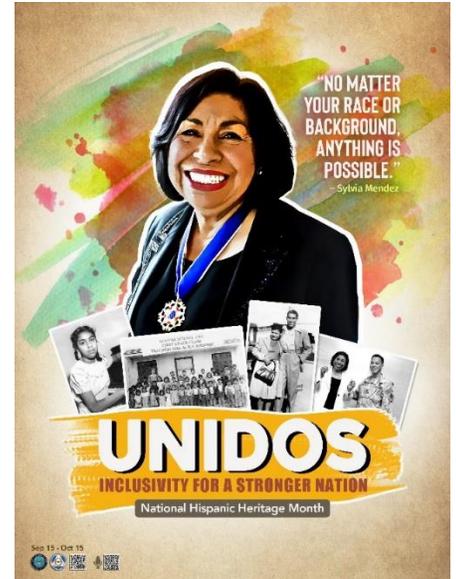
**PATRICK SPACE FORCE BASE, Fla.** — In observance of the 2022 Department of Defense (DoD) National Hispanic Heritage Month (NHHM), the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) proudly announces the availability of original artwork available for download on our public website, [www.defenseculture.mil](http://www.defenseculture.mil).

This year's NHHM theme is, ***“Unidos: Inclusivity for a Stronger Nation.”*** Unidos, roughly translated to mean united, connected, or close. The concept of deriving strength from unity is one that has long been upheld by DoD and why we chose to highlight American civil rights activist, Ms. Sylvia Mendez.

In 1944, when Mendez was 8 years old. Her family tried to enroll her at Westminster Elementary School which did not admit Hispanic students. After repeated appeals to the school's principal and the county school board Mendez's father sought legal action. He hired a civil rights attorney who filed a federal lawsuit against Westminster and three other school districts in Orange County which argued segregating children based on ethnicity was a violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. In 1946, the judge ruled in favor of the Mendez family and ordered the 4 school boards to stop segregating Hispanic children. A year after that, an appeals court upheld the decision and the state of California outlawed all segregation in its public schools. The racial equality the Mendez family fought for paved the way for the landmark 1954 Supreme Court case *Brown vs. Board of Education*, which signaled the end of legalized racial segregation in all U.S. schools.

Following the court case, Mendez attended the desegregated Westminster elementary school and set her sights on becoming a nurse. After earning a bachelor's degree in nursing from California State University at Los Angeles, she served for more than 30 years as a nurse at the Los Angeles County University of Southern California Medical Center. When she retired from nursing, Mendez focused her attention on teaching others about her legal case. In 2011, U.S. President Barack Obama awarded her with the Presidential Medal of Freedom for her efforts in civil rights.

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