**LATINOS IN WORLD WAR I**

Although a lack of records makes it difficult to precisely measure the role of Latinos in the U.S. military during World War I, documentation demonstrates their important, though largely unrecognized, contribution to the war effort. Many Latinos from states such as Texas and New Mexico served during World War I.

Because the United States was largely unprepared for war, the military had to induct and train soldiers quickly. Many of the new recruits spoke little or no English, including some Latinos. At first, these men were sent to development battalions at military training camps, where they were given little attention. Sometimes ridiculed by English-speaking soldiers, many Latinos and other ethnic minorities wanted to leave the military. In response, the military developed the Camp Gordon Plan, in which soldiers were separated into language groups with officers who spoke the language of the soldiers. Once this communications gap was bridged, their military training then continued in their native language. Most of the Latinos who received such training were at the Camp Cody, New Mexico training camp.

Some Latinos saw combat duty, and a few received honors. Nicolas Lucero, a nineteen-year-old soldier from Albuquerque, won the French Croix de Guerre. Marcelino Serna, an enlisted man in the army, fought on the front-line trenches of France, where he earned numerous medals. However, despite capturing twenty-four German soldiers, he never received the Medal of Honor. An officer told Serna that he would not receive such an award because he was merely a private and that he could never advance to a higher level because of his limited English-language skills.

At the same time, for many Latinos in Texas and other states, World War I represented their first experience with assimilation into mainstream U.S. society. For the first time, the government and society in general sought active involvement of Latinos in national life. Although some Latinos refused to register for the draft to protest being treated as second-class citizens, others hoped that active participation in the war effort would increase opportunities for them. Much discrimination remained, and Hispanic participation in World War I can be seen as the start of a struggle for equal rights in the twentieth century.

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