



ABRAHAM LINCOLN CARRIER STRIKE GROUP

PENNY PRESS

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An Opportunity in Perspective

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PACIFIC OCEAN — The United States Navy is comprised of Sailors from all walks of life, backgrounds and nationalities. The Navy prides itself in drawing strength from this diversity of cultures and viewpoints which allows it to continue improving processes and efficiency.

From leading fire parties in charge of protecting the ship out at sea, to serving as departmental leading chief petty officers, heads of department and as command master chief, Hispanic-Americans fill several key roles aboard USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72). For all of them, there exists a common goal: to show their junior Sailors that if they set a goal, they can achieve it, strengthening both themselves and the Navy in the process.

Coming from a small town in Lubbock, Texas, Damage Controlman 1st Class Jade Perez recalls there being an order to life that seemed eternal; if you were a certain color or spoke a certain language and you performed certain jobs, you could expect a certain future. Now, as the

leading petty officer of the Aft Damage Control Shop aboard Abraham Lincoln, she reclines in her chair and thinks about what has brought her to this point.

She recalls her father's words, "No matter what your skin looks like, no matter what language comes out of your mouth, you can be whatever you want to be. No exceptions."

"I try to portray that to everybody," says Perez. "You can be who you want to be, don't let society determine your story. You control your future and your identity."

Being that Perez is a Mexican-American, the meaning of identity has evolved significantly over the course of her life, from growing up in a small Texas town to sailing out on the open sea, and serving with Sailors from around the world.

"Where I grew up, it was a very small community," she said. "So, when I joined the Navy, it was like my little bubble had been popped. There was all this diversity, all of these new cultures, and I loved it. It's such a beautiful thing to be a part of."

For Perez, part of the beauty of this diverse environment was an opportunity to connect with others who shared similar features in their backgrounds and who have endured difficult situations due to discrimination.

"We've come so far," said Perez. "It used to be so discriminatory, but we've come a long way. Now, we can meet and celebrate people of different cultures and different walks of life. We get to share childhood memories of growing up, whether that's eating great food, listening to incredible music or sharing tales we heard as children."

Although Perez is known for her skill as a damage controlman, it wasn't always that way. She had to live the words of her father, and carve out her own path.

"People have told me since the first day I joined that I wasn't going to get anywhere in life," said Perez. "My rate is heavily focused on the use of tools and mechanical processes.

Before I joined the Navy, I knew nothing about tools. I couldn't even change my tires or my oil. But when I joined, I said to myself, forget about them, I'm going to do what I want to do. I hope that when people see me, they see that my background is not my current specialty, that there was a lot of struggling and growth involved in this process."

Perez, who was unfamiliar with the engineering sciences before she joined the Navy, now leads a team of Sailors on the in-port emergency team, which fights the ship by extinguishing major fires, stopping flooding and ensuring compartments are free of toxic gases after casualties. Perez is one of only ten Sailors qualified to ensure that the air in damaged spaces is safe to breathe, a rare and demanding position aboard Abraham Lincoln. She traces her determination and drive to succeed back to her father who inspired her to follow her goals and achieve whatever it was that she wanted in life.

"That's something I link back to my dad," said Perez. "He told me, 'Hold your head up high, chin up even higher, and you can be whatever you want to be, no matter what'. He's definitely my core role model."

Master Chief Hospital Corpsman Brandon Carrillo, departmental leading chief petty officer for Abraham Lincoln's Medical Department, also attributes his success in his career and appreciation for his culture to his father.

"For me, Hispanic heritage is a large part of my culture," said Carrillo. "It's where I came from, how I grew up. When I was younger, I spent two years living on my dad's ranch in Mexico. It made me very curious about my culture and where we came from."

Much like Perez, Carrillo says his father, who worked long hours in a vineyard to support his family, is one of his most influential role models.

“I grew up with my dad, who cultivated grapes in a vineyard,” said Carrillo. “It was hard work, and he would get up at three in the morning. He still does to this day, on his own ranch, and he’s in his 70’s now. I’ve always carried that with me, especially when I was going through boot camp, medical schooling and various other challenging times in life. I would think to myself, sure, this is tough, but my dad gets up every morning and goes into the fields. That’s how I tie it together. I saw my father work for what he cared about, and I aim to do the same.”

As the enlisted head of the medical department aboard Abraham Lincoln, Carrillo oversees the day-to-day business of a group of people whose primary task is to save lives. As a Mexican-American, he embodies the diverse and essential roles that Hispanic-Americans onboard Abraham Lincoln play. When it comes to finding a solution to a problem, whether in the office or the operating room, he appreciates the assistance that different perspectives can provide.

“When you have multiple perspectives, you’ll approach things in different ways,” said Carrillo. “The cultures that we’re raised in allow us to have so many different perspectives. Diversity isn’t about having a checklist and saying, ‘Alright, we have one person from every background,’ it’s about what everyone brings to the table. When you’re trying to solve a problem, sometimes it isn’t a matter of schooling. Sometimes, it’s just a matter of thinking of something you’ve seen back home, and applying it to the current issue – and it works!”

Carrillo, who is a prominent member of the Hispanic American community aboard Abraham Lincoln, regularly attends events that celebrate the various cultures aboard Lincoln. In recent years, he has cherished the opportunity to talk about his experiences in Abraham Lincoln’s Hispanic American Heritage observance, where he connects his service, his family and his heritage.

“To me, it’s an opportunity to share our culture,” said Carrillo. “It’s not simply about being Hispanic American. It’s speaking about what we’ve gone through. People from all cultures can relate they've experienced similar struggles and successes.”

For Carrillo, the opportunity to give his speech strikes an especially personal note, as he pays tribute to his father, who continues to be a role model for him.

“For the past few years, I have given a speech at the celebration,” said Carrillo. “Every time, I get about halfway through, and I begin to tear up. It’s hard for me, because I always reflect on my dad, and the struggles he went through to give me the opportunity to be here.”

It is this spirit of determination and achievement that is celebrated during Abraham Lincoln’s annual Hispanic American Heritage Month observance. This year’s observance, slated to be held on October 14 and hosted by Abraham Lincoln’s Multicultural Committee on the aft mess decks, will include a cake cutting ceremony, displays of music and dance from several Hispanic cultures, and remarks by members of the Hispanic community onboard Abraham Lincoln.