

OCHOA, ELLEN (1958–)

Ellen Ochoa became the first Latina to travel into space. When the space shuttle Discovery (STS-56) ascended into the sky in 1993, the thirty four year old astronaut was on board. Ochoa was born and raised in California, earned an M.S. and a Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering from Stanford University. She became a research engineer at Sandia National Laboratories specializing in optics. She applied to the NASA space program but was initially rejected. In 1987 Ochoa made the cut and became chief of the Intelligent Systems Technology Branch at the NASA/Ames Research Center. Following her first flight into space, Ochoa flew again on the Atlantis shuttle (STS-66) as the payload commander, and in 1999 she was a mission specialist and flight engineer on Discovery's mission to dock with the International Space Station. Among the many honors she has received, are the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Medallion of Excellence (1993), and the Hispanic Heritage Leadership Award (1995). Ochoa's achievements are found in hundreds of textbooks used in the schools today.