

Hispanic Heritage Month Address
Saint Ignatius College Prep
October 26, 2016
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I extend my apologies for my absence this morning. I am in south Texas with my family today. My prima hermana Santa Maltos Garcia died on Friday night in south Texas. I find it insightful that the Spanish language captures the emotional connection to a first cousin that the English language cannot convey. I've always felt that I speak and think in English, but my heart feels in Spanish.

Why should or do we celebrate Hispanic heritage month? I believe that there are two compelling reasons. First, we should celebrate all the ethnicities and racial groups that have and will continue to make our nation great. That includes Hispanics. Second, Hispanics are an integral part of our nation's history.

As we all know, the Hispanic presence in the USA dates to the early 1500's. Large parts of our nation were once Spanish or Mexican territories. Equally important Hispanics have been loyal Americans for many generations. My own family has an extensive history of military service. My great uncle Victor served during the First World War by fighting in the trenches of France. My younger great uncles Santiago and Frederico served in Europe during the Second World War. My Uncle Saul was part of the invasion force that retook the Philippines under General MacArthur. There are too many Hispanic families to count that have a similar history.

Beyond this broad historical context, it's particularly appropriate that we celebrate Hispanic Heritage month here at Saint Ignatius. Our School has always been a school of immigrants. It was founded in 1869 to serve Chicago immigrants. It has served wave after wave of immigrants, immigrants from Europe, Latin American, Africa, Asia, the USA's South and even Texas.

The history of Hispanics at Saint Ignatius is important to acknowledge and remember. We were just a small presence for many decades. In 1969 when I was a freshman, there were probably less than 30 Latinos in our School. In the Spring of 1972, Fr. Jack Kramer S.J. encouraged a group of us to create the Latin American Student Organization. We called ourselves LASO. I was elected its first president. Over the years, LASO eventually became ALAS. There are many distinguished Latino alumni throughout Chicago and USA who proudly represent Saint Ignatius and were members of LASO or ALAS.

It was challenging to be Latino in the '60's and '70's. It was challenging to be Latino here at Saint Ignatius. Our School is a special place, but it's not a magical place. The challenges and issues of our society unfortunately do not magically disappear at our School's threshold. Saint Ignatius provided and provides today however an environment in which we can discuss and address these challenges and issues. We address in them in a Christian, Catholic and Jesuit context. There were many fellow students who treated me poorly because I was Latino. There were however many others who embraced me as a friend. I have today many lifelong friends whom I know only due to Saint Ignatius. I embrace some of them as brothers. Our School is a place for change and personal growth. We should always be open to that growth and support our School in its mission to address our society's challenges in order to help us better serve others.