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Hispanicity and Its Challenges

By Mario J. Paredes

At this time each year and through an act of Congress, we celebrate HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH.

Hispanic Heritage Month is dedicated to recognizing the presence of Hispanics and "everything Hispanic" in the life of the United States of America. It is an annual opportunity to congratulate ourselves as Hispanics and to recall our historical and cultural origins. Above all, it is a magnificent opportunity to reflect on the presence of the Hispanic community in the fabric of this great nation, a great opportunity for Hispanics to remember our past and review our present as we plan our future in the United States.

Hispanics now number 58 million in the United States, which makes us 20% of the voting population. Politically speaking, we are a community that should wield decisive power and influence in the course and destiny of this American society.

However, these figures do not correspond with an evaluation of our achievements of Hispanics in the United States. Despite our numerical strength, we still do not have laws that protect Hispanics in this nation. We have achieved neither laws nor institutional and state frameworks that advocate for the virtues and values proper to Hispanics, amid an increasingly materialist, consumerist, hedonistic, utilitarian, pragmatic, and individualistic culture.

It is, then, during HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH that we ask ourselves, dispassionately and honestly, about the cause of our shortcomings, the reasons why our numerical presence does not correspond to our relative importance, influence, and power in the broader framework of American society.

The causes of our low productivity, too-few accomplishments, and negative perceptions as an Hispanic community in America are not to be sought outside ourselves. Within our Hispanic community, we find disorganization, lack of political formation, a pronounced absence of leadership, divisions, and ignorance of ourselves and of the cultures of the countries from which we came – all of us who here are called, generically and globally, Hispanics. We find a lack of interest in the common good; a lack of identity or loss of



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identity; lack of a global Hispanic agenda; lack of knowledge of our essence, identity, or homogeneity and, in addition, a lack of knowledge of the cultural essence of those who are distinct from us, that is, of the American society.

These shortcomings aggravate the challenges we face as Hispanics in the United States. Add to these difficulties a new external challenge: the rethinking of immigration in general, and for Hispanics in particular, that comes from what we can call the "Trump Phenomenon." This rethinking is a genuine threat to our presence in this nation. And, because we are not properly prepared, we do not respond in solidarity, with one voice, or even correctly; instead we skate, babble, whine, or, as we say in our lands, we respond with "patadas de ahogado," or the kicks of a drowning man.

It is important that we address and resolve these challenges. It is very important that, living in and integrating ourselves into this society - without assimilating ourselves - we succeed in offering, here and now, the best of our origins and our past, the best of our history and our cultures as Hispanic nations. It is very important that - in an American society increasingly postmodern and increasingly exhibiting the characteristics described above - Hispanics rescue, for example, the value we place on family life and health care.

As Hispanics, against the 'absolutization' of pleasure, against discrimination and intolerance, marginalization, indifference, silence, and all forms of malaise that generate violence, we must offer and privilege love as the first human vocation; democratic forms of participation in societal construction; permanent efforts to build solidarity and peaceful justice; respect for the richness of those different from us; respect for human life over any other value and interest; the importance and primacy of people over things, of being over having, of ethics over technique, of the human being and his work in business and capital, of service over power; of the transcendent over the temporary, transitory, and transient.

Family and health are, here and now, potentially at risk of being subdued and devoured by the postmodernist principles of the dominant culture and against the principles of our Hispanic cultures. In the field of health, a utilitarian and mercantilist interest is evident rather than an interest in solidarity and human service.



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This present moment in humanity and, in particular in this nation, challenges the Hispanic community in the United States to marshal the strength of our numbers and, above all, acknowledge the magnitude of the issues within the Hispanic community itself.

Congratulations on this month celebrating Hispanicity. We wish you much encouragement and thoughtful, coordinated efforts in the task of effecting change in the United States, not only by our sheer numbers, but also in the beneficial effectiveness of our presence in North America. Onward!