

# To Learn, We Have to Unlearn



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For many years, Congress and the President have honored the Hispanic presence in this nation with an annual celebration called HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH. This national commemoration recognizes the great contributions that Hispanics—for many decades and generations—have made and continue to make to the development and progress of this country.

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH is an annual opportunity to reflect. Within the North American society and culture that receives us, it brings us an opportunity to consider how this society has welcomed us, how we have been received and accepted, and the ways we have been recognized, admitted, and favored. And, for the Hispanics who have come here, here we settle, here we live, work, love, and hope. This month is a propitious time for us to ask ourselves: How much have we integrated—not assimilated—into this society and culture that welcomes us or do we—seeking comfort or embracing disability—hide amongst ourselves and resign ourselves to ghetto life?

How much do we keep of our origins, our history, our traditions, our customs, religion, languages, and values? How and how much do we contribute to the progress of this nation or how much do we take advantage of—in the best way—its new and magnificent opportunities? Or, on the contrary, do we use the benefits that this nation offers us, in a utilitarian way and only as a springboard to achieve selfish and petty interests? How much do we embrace and think about the common good or do we think only about our individual interests and conveniences? This is the time to ask ourselves if we bring and contribute the best of our Hispanic values or the worst of the vices from our societies of origin.

This is a time to wonder, how much have we progressed in this Nation as Hispanic individuals, families, and communities? Is this progress merely economic, lucrative, and material or are we growing as people, in our studies, and in professional preparation in order to give back in the many and diverse areas of North American society? Let us ask ourselves if, as the Hispanic community, we have managed to get to know each other and dedicate ourselves to fulfilling our civilian duties and unite in our search for our common goals and in our shared struggles and conquests to claim our civil rights?

How much do we strive to integrate ourselves by learning the language, history, culture, ways, and customs of this nation, and how much is our identity diluted and lost because we allow ourselves to be absorbed and assimilated by our host society and culture? How much do we understand and respect the institutions and laws of this nation, or do we just arbitrarily try to coexist and subsist as best we can?

Let's ask ourselves if we have achieved the form and presence of a Hispanic leadership that represents us all, that seeks the good of us all. Let's ask ourselves if we can be proud of our Hispanic leaders in this nation because they exemplify the hard struggle of all Hispanics in achieving our ideals, those of our families, communities, and of all our loved ones who remained in our places of origin, beyond and outside the borders of this nation

These and many more are the types of questions that all of us who live in this country have to ask ourselves during this month and always so that the celebration of HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH is not reduced to a saluting of the flag but rather pushes us all to build better and healthier relationships, a better coexistence, and a greater degree of progress and well-being for all.

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH offers us the opportunity to recognize and be recognized for all the good and positive that we have brought, as a legacy, from our lands and that we have been able to offer for the common good and progress of this nation. But it is also a time to reject all the bad and negative that we live and show here and that belittles our being and our work, our identity and heritage as Hispanic men and women.

Well-educated Hispanics, living throughout the nation, must become the critical conscience of their own Hispanic communities and applaud, motivate, highlight, and point out all that is good about the Hispanic presence in this nation. But they must also, without waiting for others to do it first, reject and condemn everything that—within our own Hispanic communities—undermines the long history of our struggle to achieve, here and now, recognition and better living conditions than those we had to abandon in our countries of origin, just and equitable living conditions, achievements that allow us to feel proud of the Hispanics here in the United States today and of those generations who will follow.

It is a pride that does not only or solely exist in momentary and ephemeral demonstrations of stridency, noise, and color, but in the certainty that, for this nation and for the world, Hispanic men and women are valuable people because of the very good human beings that we are and for the well-being that we share and contribute to the places where we live. May we be good news and not bad news. May we Hispanics make headlines in the media for the best and greatest of our values and not for our shortcomings. That here, and everywhere, we represent our homelands with the best of our cultures and values and not with the worst of our ills.

What we cannot do is live here wanting to transplant the life we left behind. Our life here requires us to break the patterns and molds that we abandon so we can acquire, renew, or create new and better ways of being in the world and, in this case, in the United States. We have to unlearn to learn.

May the innate tendency of the Latin American man “to welcome people; to share what he has, for fraternal charity and generosity, particularly among the poor; to feel with his neighbor the misfortune in his needs, to value the special bonds of friendship, born of the patronage, the family and the bonds that it creates,” (Cf. DP 17) that represent the best of our Hispanic heritage always be our best legacy in America. Congratulations, and let's press onward into the future!