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A Century of Latino/Hispanic Graduates

Thomas M. Haney

2017 marks the centennial of the law school's graduation of its first Latino/Hispanic students. For over 100 years, the law school has taken pride in the inclusion of diverse students in the law school community.

While African Americans and women were not enrolled at the law school until the early 1920s, Hispanics were there a half decade earlier – ever since Fernando Beiro Rovira (and perhaps others) started at Loyola in September 1914, joining the law school's 7th entering class.

Beiro came from St. Paul's College in Puerto Rico (probably Colegio de San Pablo in San Juan), a school which no longer exists. He returned to Puerto Rico in 1924, where he needed to get a degree from a local Puerto Rican law school in order to practice there.

At least two and possibly three other Hispanic students also received their law degrees from Loyola in 1917.

Francisco L. Rivera came to Loyola in 1915. He was also from "Porto Rico," where he had studied in Ponce at St. Bernard's College (perhaps Colegio San Bernardo), a school which also no longer exists today. He was almost 24 years old at his arrival. He remained in Chicago after his graduation in 1917, at least for a while; in the 1920 census he was listed as being a translator.

John Ignatius Morazzini Bosch also came to Loyola from St. Paul's College in Puerto Rico, but there is no more information about him in the law school's files other than receiving his law degree here in 1917.

There was another 1917 graduate named Augustine Henriquez-Gil, but the files contain no information about him at all, listing only his undergraduate college as Valparaiso.

The arrival, enrollment and graduation of these Latino/Hispanic students occasioned no particular notice at that time. They were apparently considered just one more ethnic group in the mix of Loyola's all-male law student body.

In 1926, Francisco Rivera's younger brother Sebastian received his law degree from Loyola. He had come to the mainland U.S. from Puerto Rico in the

year his brother had graduated. In October of 1926 he was the first lawyer of Puerto Rican descent to receive a license to practice law in Illinois.

Also in 1926 Angel F. Mercado, apparently also of Puerto Rican origin, received his LL.M. degree in Loyola's short-lived graduate program of that era. There are indications in his file that he returned to Puerto Rico after receiving his degree.

Since Latinos/Hispanics were not categorized separately and since the law school did not ask or record the ethnic backgrounds of its students until later decades, the full story of their participation in the law school can only be surmised, mostly from surnames. Unfortunately, while Fernando Beiro and his classmates inaugurated the enrollment of Hispanic students in 1917, it appears that only a small handful of Latinos were enrolled here before World War II.

The first student to identify specifically as being of Mexican heritage was David Mejia, who graduated in 1976. A few years later the law school welcomed its first student to identify as Cuban-American, Ricardo Sotorrio, who received his degree in 1981. Within a short time thereafter, the law school had students from Central and South America and the Caribbean as well.

At that same time, the law school was also welcoming Latina students: Wallesca Diaz-Lopez and Sofia Echeverria both received their law degrees in 1982.

There were soon sufficient Latino students at Loyola that they were able to begin organizing informally during the 1985-86 school year, led by Andrew Ramos ('87). By the following year, they were able to form an official student organization, which they called HOLA (the Hispanic Organization for Legal Advancement), under the leadership of Minerva Krohn ('87). With a few changes in the group's name over the years, LLSA (Latino Law Students Association) continues today to provide services and events for the Latino and greater law school communities.

In the 1993-94 school year, the law school sent a team to the Uvaldo Herrera Moot Court Competition sponsored by the Hispanic National Bar Association, a year after that competition had been established. Mario Correa ('96) and Paul Montoya ('94) represented Loyola at the competition in New York. Latinos continue to compete in that competition today, as well as other inter-school competitions.

In the late 1990s Latino students began to treat the law school community to Pachanga!, a social event each spring to celebrate the culture of Latin America – music, dance, food, customs. That event, now called Latin Nights, continues today.

The mid-1990s saw Latino graduates beginning to take their place and being recognized in the law alumni community. The first Latino graduate to serve on the Law Alumni Board of Governors was Alejandro Menchaca ('89), who joined the Board in 1993. Jorge Cazares ('90), Jorge Montes ('88), Kent Delgado ('96) and others later also served in this capacity for several years.

Robert H. Muriel ('93), who had formerly served as the president of the Hispanic Lawyers Association of Illinois, served as the president of the Law Alumni Association in 2012-13, the first Hispanic to hold that office.

In 1993, Gery J. Chico ('85) was awarded the Law Alumni Association's St. Robert Bellarmine Award for graduates who have been in practice for fifteen years or less; at that time he was serving as the Chief of Staff to Mayor Richard M. Daley, although he would later hold other significant public service positions in Chicago.

Latino graduates have made significant contributions to the profession as a whole – in law firms, in business, and in other endeavors. The law school is particularly proud of its alums who serve as judges of the Circuit Court of Cook County, including Mauricio Araujo ('93), Kent Delgado, Maritza Martinez ('89) and Raul Vega ('82).

There have been significant numbers of students from throughout the Latino/Hispanic world in the law school's large and growing LL.M. and other graduate programs, adding to the diversity of experiences participating in the law school life.

The law school's enrichment by the Latino community has been furthered by the addition of faculty members such as Steven Ramirez and Juan Perea, as well as by the law school's sister school relationship with the law faculty at Universidad Alberto Hurtado, a Jesuit university in Santiago, Chile. Since 2003 that relationship has resulted in Loyola law students visiting Hurtado and Hurtado law students visiting Loyola over their respective spring breaks, as well as faculty exchanges and other relationships.

Loyola hosted the Illinois Latino Law Student Association Forum in 2013, as well as the National Latina/o Law Student Association Forum in 2015.

For the past two years, *Hispanic Outlook on Education* magazine has ranked Loyola among the top 25 law schools in the country in the number of Latinos receiving their law degrees.

The law school continues actively to recruit, enroll, retain and graduate Latino/Hispanic students. The entire law school community benefits from the participation of diverse students in all of its academic, professional and social activities.

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