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Fifteen point eight percent of Americans, or 48,365,760 people, are Hispanic. I should know because I'm one of them. My mother was born in Puerto Rico before coming to the United States as an infant. My grandparents, and my great grandparents, and even the ones before them, came from Cuba and Puerto Rico. My heritage is part of who I am, and I would never want it any other way.

My mother might have, though. When she was eleven, a little younger than I am, my mom moved to Florida, which has the third largest Hispanic population, with one in five Floridians being Hispanic. This, however, did nothing to stop the blatant racism that pervaded the state in 1978. Schoolmates would ask my mother if they used forks and spoons in Puerto Rico, or if they lived in trees, like savages. They would trip her or knock her down stairs, and call her racial slurs. The country club had to "screen" my grandparents, seeing if they would let Hispanics (the first) in.

In 1980, a law was making the rounds in Dade County, Florida, prohibiting Spanish from being spoken in public. Delusional bigots apparently thought the best way to get rid of Hispanics was to take away their language, their culture. The law, thankfully, was never passed, but "helpful" strangers would still occasionally stop to inform my mother and grandmother, happily chatting along, that Spanish "wasn't allowed." Once, a man even entered the house to tell my grandmother, who was speaking Spanish on the phone. It is disturbingly similar to a law that is currently pending in Arizona, allowing police to racially profile anyone they think is Hispanic and ask for their immigration papers on the spot.

I advocate that my school hosts an annual service day for SPANAM, or the Spanish American Committee. They help Hispanics all over Cleveland with social and employment services, as well as education and advocacy for Cleveland's Hispanics, which I feel are an underrepresented and often forgotten minority, though they are the second largest in the U.S. They also host training and housing seminars for the unemployed, and volunteers would be invaluable. When I was little my mom would always tell me to treat others how I wished to be treated. I want to be treated with respect, and known for whom I really am, not categorized or dismissed because of my ethnicity. If I want these things, I have to give them to others, not just Hispanics, but any race, religion, or ethnicity. We all do, because we're all people, really. We are all part of the human race.