

Princeton Prize in Race Relations

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Personal Statement

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I'm Mexican. Therefore, I will be pregnant before I'm 18, never attend college and I'm in a gang. I'm "illegal" or "undocumented."

I lost count of how many times I have heard people whisper such idiotic comments about my friends and me at Hart Union High School over the years.

I tried joining ASB, a student government organization and it wasn't long before I realized that the only reason I was accepted into the club was because I was Hispanic and they were told they needed more minorities in there. I was asked to sit there and do nothing but be Mexican.

It angered me. It frustrated me.

Then came the riot.

On Friday, April 28, 2006 at 12:35pm, I was about to eat my lunch, when I felt my arm pulled with such strength I could have sworn I heard the flesh of my skin rip apart. I was being dragged into a whirlpool of suffering.

The "riot" had started.

I was on the ground. I had no idea how I ended up down there. When I finally regained some of my body's strength I got up on my knees and only a second later I felt a punch in the back of my head.

It was as hard as a rock and I felt as if my head would suddenly burst out in flames. I

turned to look behind me. With my eyes wide as an owl I had spotted who had hit me. It was a guy!

I didn't recognize him but as he ran away from me he yelled, "Go back to Mexico you stupid Mexican!"

The riot was race related. Hispanic students fought with white students that day, just because of race. Police came and locked down the school.

A week later the administration took measures to assure themselves that this was the first and last time such a tragedy occurred. I was so upset about what had happened that I went to Mr. Fullers' office (the principal) and volunteered to become part of the solution in working to improve race related issues on our campus.

I had a meeting with the administration and spoke my mind. I explained to them how there was too many of my friends that felt overpowered by the majority of the Caucasian population. I was speaking out, not only for myself, but for those friends of mine I would always hear complaining our school was racist.

We needed not just safety, but the ability to make decisions. We wanted inclusion and responsibility. We wanted a change.

This interest for change grew within the student population. We created a group called Change of Hart which now consists of 60 members, dedicated to creating a safe campus through creating conditions for equity. Part of this is organizing for change, and part of this is educating all of our campus about the histories and cultures that make up our community. That is the only way to erase the culture of racism that many of us feel when we are here.

That is when I became part of the Executive Board of Change of Hart. We have since been organizing activities that have never happened in the history of this school before,

events such as *Corazon Sin Fronteras* (Heart without Borders).

This day celebrated Hispanic culture- not just Mexican, but all of the Latin world. We had food set out for the entire campus to enjoy, traditional music and face painting of all the different Hispanic flags. It was amazing how this one day impacted the entire student body. An activity like this had never been done before. It was a first.

We have many amazing activities planned ahead of us. We have Black History month coming up and we're organizing public speakers, short films and bringing in musicians. There is an Asian American month, a Women's Rights month, and an International Week planned for the rest of the year. We also held a trans-gender awareness day, where the stories of victims of hate were read to the campus at lunch.

We are also asking why there are so few non-white students in the best classes? Why are the only failing students Latino? I have a 3.8 GPA, I have no intentions of having a baby soon, I have been applying to colleges, and no, I am not in any gang. Maybe if there were more awareness of who we latinos are, instead of all the labels and stereotypes, there would never be the kind of fighting that happened at Hart.

I have learned that to change these stereotypes, you also have to change other things: like getting all students into the best classes, like creating equity for all students in graduating, regardless of race, and having leadership from all groups in student government. It is the only way that us Change of Hart students can insure that those labels: "gang member, immigrant, low achieving" will disappear.







