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John Marshall marks a century since its first Latino graduate

BY **JERRY CRIMMINS**

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The John Marshall Law School will celebrate tonight the 100th anniversary of its first Latino graduate, who became Chicago's first Latino alderman.

That graduate, William E. Rodriguez, also was a Chicago mayoral candidate, a union activist, a house painter and a prominent member of the Socialist Party.

In the spring of 1912 when Rodriguez graduated from John Marshall:

- The Titanic sank on April 15;
- The Republican Party convention was to be held here June 18 to June 22 with a showdown between President William Howard Taft and former President Theodore Roosevelt for the presidential nomination; and
- John Marshall was in its 13th year.

The fact that Rodriguez graduated from the school so far back "tells us that a hundred years ago" the school fulfilled its mission "to open the door to Hispanics, African-Americans and anyone willing to put in the time to go to law school," said J. Damian Ortiz, clinical professor there.

"It's still true today," Ortiz

said. "Every year, the percent of Hispanic students either stays the same or increases."

Today, 8 percent of the school's total enrollment of 1,466, or about 117 students, are Latino, said Marilyn Thomas, director of public relations.

Today's celebration "is a very exciting moment for us because it really shows the dedication John Marshall has to diversity," said student Daissy Dominguez, president of the school's Latino Law Student Association.

In 1912, John Marshall was located in the old Portland Block Building, 35 N. Dearborn St., a building completed in 1872, one year after the Great Chicago Fire.

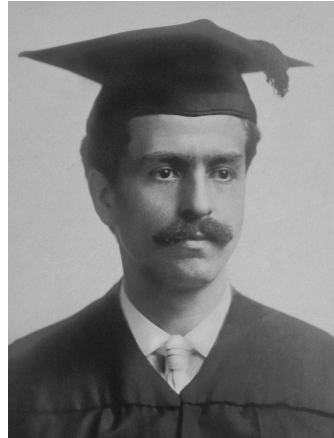
Rodriguez was originally from Naperville. His father, Emilio, was a Spaniard and his mother was a German immigrant reared in

Wisconsin, says a November 1981 biography of Rodriguez in Chicago magazine.

Rodriguez was 33 when he graduated from John Marshall.

He ran for mayor as the nominee of the Socialist Party the year before and was an experienced labor activist.

A Chicago Tribune article from February 1911 says Rodriguez was former president of the Painters Union Local 180



William E. Rodriguez

and was business agent of the Painters District Council.

The Tribune story quoted Rodriguez saying that if elected mayor, he would be concerned with "the problems of the working class," including "comfortable and sanitary dwellings at low cost" and "adequate street car service in the working-class districts."

He said workers also wanted an efficient health department, fair pay and the public schools to be open for public meetings.

Rodriguez got 24,825 votes, Chicago magazine reported, and came in third. Former Mayor Carter Harrison II won with

177,977 votes.

In 1915, Rodriguez was elected to the Chicago City Council as the first Latino alderman, John Marshall's biography says. He held office for three years.

"Rodriguez spent the rest of his years in the quiet practice of law," Chicago magazine reported. He helped found the local chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union and he ran unsuccessfully for a judgeship in 1933. He died in Phoenix in 1970.

Joan L. Pantsios, 64, a retired assistant public defender in

DuPage and Lake counties and a 1975 John Marshall alumna, said Rodriguez is a relative.

"Both my Aunt Sophie and her sister, Pauline (Engdahl), my grandmother, married men who were active in Socialist politics in the teens and the '20s," Pantsios said. "Growing up, my sisters and I were always aware that Will Rodriguez was elected to the Chicago City Council as a Socialist Party candidate."

Scheduled speakers at tonight's 5 p.m. celebration at John Marshall, 304 S. State St., include Ricardo Meza, executive inspector general in the Office of Executive Inspector General for the Agencies of the Illinois Governor; and Federico M. Rodriguez, president of Hispanic Lawyers Association of Illinois.