

One Nation INDIVISIBLE

Stories From the Field

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We Are From Hazleton

A Baseball Celebrity Helps Bring His Divided Pennsylvania Hometown Together

STORY BY CHRIS ECHEGARAY & SUSAN EATON • PHOTOGRAPHS BY EMMA LEE

A few years ago, Tampa Bay Rays manager Joe Maddon returned to the former coal mining community of Hazleton, Pennsylvania, where he'd grown up. He sat on a child-sized folding chair at a holiday potluck party hosted by a Dominican mother of three who ran a day care out of her home. Spanish conversation flowed around him. Children ran about, weaving among adults who talked, laughed and shared cuisine from the Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Peru. Merengue music blared.

Joe Maddon is a colossal celebrity in the sports world and a sought-after spokesperson and benefactor. So, you might think he would want privacy most of all when he came back home to visit with family at Christmas. But he'd come to this particular party quite on purpose. Curious and concerned, he'd asked his cousin, Elaine Maddon Curry, to please introduce him to the growing Latino community that had been moving to Hazleton

since the early 2000s. A few years back, Maddon

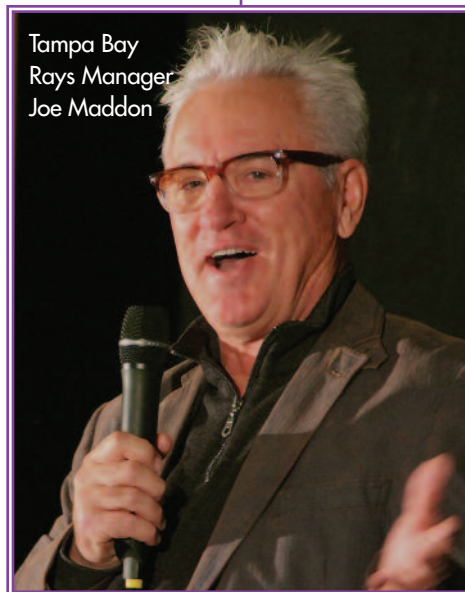
Curry and two Latino fathers had founded an organization called Concerned Parents that provides an array of services mainly for immigrant families.

"Where are the Latinos?" Maddon recalled asking his cousin back in 2010. "Because I don't see them."

Maddon Curry explained that the city's Latino immigrants had retreated in fear. Their social lives went on in small apartments and multi-family homes. Families did come out for church, and Maddon Curry said she had seen

more and more adults participating in Concerned Parents' English classes over time. But typically, Maddon Curry explained, Hazleton's newcomers were wary and distrustful of people outside their social circles.

Distrust was an entirely sensible reaction. In 2006, Hazleton had become the first municipality in the nation to pass its own anti-immigration law. On a 6 to 1 vote, the ordinance barred landlords from knowingly rent-



Tampa Bay
Rays Manager
Joe Maddon

In 2006, Hazleton had become the first municipality in the nation to pass its own anti-immigration law.

ing to unauthorized immigrants, required employers to verify their workers' immigration status, made it a violation to provide "services" beyond medical care to undocumented immigrants and declared English as the city's official language. The measure triggered praise from conservative talk radio hosts, and condemnation from national immigrant rights, civil rights and labor organizations. The city faced a costly lawsuit, brought by a coalition of civil rights groups. A federal court judge had struck down the law in 2007 but the US Supreme Court in 2011 determined that the court needed to re-examine its finding in light of the Court's ruling that allowed for some elements of Arizona's restrictive immigration law to go forward. Plaintiffs and defendants are still awaiting a decision from the US Third Circuit Court of Appeals. Regardless of whether it is enacted, though, most local observers agree that the proposed ordinance has already done plenty of damage.

During his visit home in 2010, Maddon was dispirited by conversations with local folks, some of whom were blaming immigrants for Hazleton's economic decline. But during the same visit, the potluck party with immigrant families had pleased him. The flavors and the music and the language may have been different from the Italian and Polish-centered celebrations of his youth. But the warmth of community and family and friends, the easy banter, the centrality of family and the ethnic pride expressed

through meals and music felt familiar. He turned to his cousin Elaine and said, "This is how we grew up. This is it, right here."

"That was my seminal moment." Maddon recalled during a recent trip back to Hazleton. "We're the same, just speak a different language....The Slovak, the Polish, the Irish, the Italians. We all started the same."

As he was leaving to head back to his life and his high-pressure job in Tampa, Maddon told his cousin Elaine and her husband, Bob Curry, that he wanted to "do something to repair what had been damaged here." Bob Curry recalled: "He was really very deeply concerned about this division that he saw in a community that he just loves so much."

After consultation with the Currys and other community members, Maddon decided he would not only help to fund, but, most importantly, would lend his voice and celebrity to start the Hazleton Integration Project, known now as HIP. Since then, Maddon has played a central role in fundraising, attracting the Cal Ripken Jr. Foundation to

provide donations, soliciting funds from other donors, and joining up big-name baseball greats including Yogi Berra, Tino Martinez and Carlos Peña as active spokespeople for the cause. Maddon has been outspoken during several packed public events where he has urged members of the Latino immi-

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Eugenio Sosa & Elaine Maddon Curry

grant community and the white community to get to know each other and figure out, together, how to foster prosperity in the economically challenged city they share. Most recently, Maddon backed the purchase of a former Catholic school to house the Hazleton ONE Community Center, which will be HIP's headquarters. After renovations are complete early this summer, the Center will host social events, cultural celebrations, potlucks and a wide range of sports and recreation and homework help for children. English classes and citizenship classes currently offered through the Concerned Parents organization will continue here, as will a popular Saturday story-telling program for children. Educators will also offer Spanish courses for residents, educators and other professionals and will involve members of the immigrant community in the venture.

Many municipalities have community centers. An increasing number of cities have even opened immigrant welcome centers in recent years. But Hazleton ONE is something else entirely.

"This is not a place that is only for immigrants. And it is not just an open gym either. The very explicit goal of this place and of this effort is clear: It is to bring two currently much separated communities

together," said Bob Curry, HIP's board president. "Yes, we will provide particular services. But the larger mission of integration will guide us in everything that we do. Services are one thing. Integration is quite another....It's a longer range goal."

Late last year, Maddon flew up from Florida with some of his ball players to announce Hazleton ONE's opening and to let local folks know about the programs HIP will soon be offering.

"We want to get kids off the street....We want sports, culinary, drama clubs.... Everything we can imagine and afford, that's what we want to do. We're opening this for the entire community,"

Maddon said at the crowded December 2012 press conference where he shared the stage with the former first baseman Tino Martinez, who had played for the New York Yankees and Tampa Bay Devil Rays.

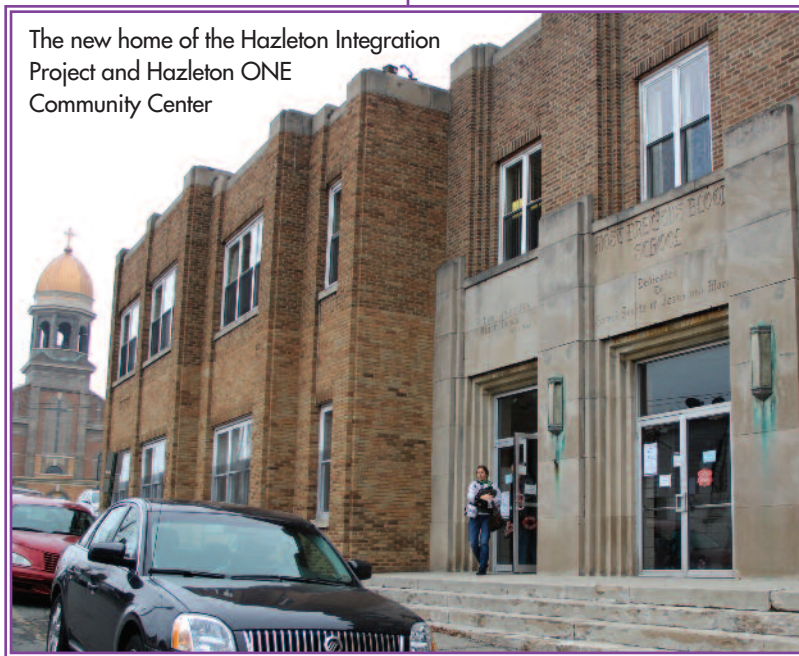
"This is for everybody," Maddon told the crowd, many of them holding baseballs

they hoped to get signed. "For all our brothers and sisters."

Sports celebrity philanthropy is often generous. But the good causes our athletic heroes champion are rarely controversial. They tend more toward helping children who have cancer or donating sports

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—Bob Curry, Board President, Hazleton Integration Project



The new home of the Hazleton Integration Project and Hazleton ONE Community Center

equipment to the poor. Racial and ethnic healing and expanding services for people, many of them undocumented, do not usually make the list. That said, Maddon has faced what Bob Curry characterizes as “only some minor complaints” in his public quest for unity in his fractured hometown.

The Hazleton ONE Community Center is also the new home of Concerned Parents, the five-year-old grassroots effort that Maddon’s cousin Elaine Maddon Curry founded in partnership with Eugenio Sosa (now HIP’s executive director) and Ignacio Beato, now a city councilor. It offers English and citizenship classes, homework help for children and guidance through the citizenship application process. It also offers translation services for parents attending meetings with teachers and school officials. With the help of Concerned Parents, more than 40 Hazleton residents became naturalized citizens over the last year. Joe Maddon is clear that his job is to provide whatever financial resources, credibility and attention that he can, but is equally clear in his mission to “entrust” the on-the-ground work and the vision to “people who know what they are doing.” This includes Eugenio Sosa, HIP’s executive director.

Originally from the Dominican Republic, Sosa came to the United States in 1989 and to Hazleton in 2006. The father of three children in the city’s public schools, he worked with Elaine

Maddon Curry to establish the volunteer translation, ESL and citizenship efforts that grew into Concerned Parents.



Two boys hope to get baseballs signed during a press conference about the Hazleton Integration Project

“This is following our dream,” Sosa said of HIP’s efforts. “We are starting with the children because you know, children do not have prejudice. They are going to be spending time together, playing together, learning together, going to each others’ houses, learning about different cultures, how different people celebrate. It is just a great opportunity.”

The children who spend time at Hazleton ONE Community Center, Sosa said, will end up bringing their parents along “on this journey...sharing that space and over time these perceptions will be gone. We know it may be a longer process with some of the

adults, but with the children, it happens so fast if you give them the chance and that space, which we have now.”

Joe Maddon, who is Italian (formerly Maddonini, on his father’s side) and Polish (on his mother’s side) had over the years developed an affinity for Latin culture through his relationships with baseball players he’d gotten to know from Latin America and the Caribbean. As a coach, of course, he had no choice but to get players from different countries and cultures and linguistic backgrounds to work as a team. These days, Maddon, who grew up in a small apartment over his father’s plumbing shop, is known as much for his quirky intellectual curiosity as for his jocularity and love of

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Hazleton Integration
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Preparing the buffet for a community dinner hosted by Joe Maddon

mountain biking and fine wines. Back in the late 1970s and early 1980s, he learned his nearly fluent Spanish from his friend, the Puerto Rican shortstop Dickie Thon, when they were both with the California/ Anaheim Angels organization. (Maddon had been a bench coach for the Angels and interim manager there in 1996 and 1999.)

The down-on-its-heels city Hazleton sits in northeast Pennsylvania's Luzerne County, about 50 miles north of Allentown in what used to be coal country. The unemployment rate here—14 percent—is nearly twice the national average. Shuttered buildings and storefronts are common, as is nostalgia about Hazleton's prosperous past. Hazleton has long been a gateway city for immigrants. Following the Civil War, jobs generated by the coal industry and railroad expansion attracted people from all over the world. Irish and Germans arrived first, in the 1850s. Later, immigrants arrived from Poland and Italy in a migration that continued into the early 1920s. In coal's heyday, which ended by the late 1950s, Hazleton's

population was more than twice what it is now. (Joe Maddon's paternal grandfather, an Italian immigrant, worked in the nearby coal mines). As the nation moved toward oil, decent paying jobs moved away as did the younger generations and commercial investment. Low-wage jobs in meatpacking and big corporate warehouses have more recently replaced the higher-wage work of the greatly diminished coal and railroad industries. The low-wage work attracted a new wave of immigrants, mostly from the Dominican Republic, and also from other Spanish-speaking countries.

"It is not as expensive as New York," explained Maribel Hernandez, owner of a small local restaurant, Mi Casa, which opened in 2012 and features American staples like pizza and chicken nuggets alongside Latin dishes such as rabo encendido (oxtail stew). Hernandez moved to Hazleton in 2005, she says, because of its relatively lower rents and because it seemed safe.

For the first time since the 1940s, Hazleton experienced growth in the last decade. From 2001 to 2011, the population grew about 9 percent to 25,300 residents. In that same period, according to the U.S. Census, the share of Hazleton's Latino population also grew—from 5 to 38 percent of all residents. This means all of the city's population growth is due to its Latino population. Without Latinos, the city would have most certainly continued to lose population as older residents died. It would have undoubtedly suffered even more than it already has, since diminishing tax bases and commercial disinvestment nearly always accompany population loss.

Jamie Longazel, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Dayton, grew up in Hazleton and has conducted intensive research on the city's anti-immigrant ordinance, its origins and aftermath. His work reveals that in the midst of an economic downturn, Hazleton's Latinos were unfairly blamed for a complex mix of powerful negative forces visited upon the city. Hazleton officials in recent years did what other similarly situated desperate urban leaders did: They offered tax breaks to corporations that offered low-wage jobs in return. The jobs could not lift people out of poverty. Tax breaks diminished revenues for city services.

Meanwhile, ordinary people in Hazleton, Longazel said, "sensed more of a general decline, feeling as though the city is suffering in some way." He added: "People were not talking about this. Immigrants were made the scapegoat."

The 2006 murder of a white Hazleton resident, Longazel said, "blew everything up." Initially police charged two Latinos, though later they dropped the charges. Longazel's interviews with Hazleton residents show that growing anti-immigrant sentiments infected the community, and helped lead to the passage of the anti-immigrant ordinance. As is true generally across the United States, though, immigration had not increased crime in Hazleton.

Longazel has noted that between 2001 (the year Latinos began arriving in high numbers in Hazleton) and 2006 (the year the ordinance passed) undocumented people accounted for just .25 percent of arrests.

Longazel stresses that demographically changing communities like Hazleton would indeed benefit from efforts that focus on relationship-building and stronger cross-cultural alliances among working people who, he writes, "can withstand anti-immigrant scare tactics."



Local business owner Rafael Polanco speaking at a recent press conference

Moving recently from the Bronx, Rafael Polanco, who is of Dominican descent, owns a small grocery supply business in Hazleton. He welcomes the opportunities for integration that HIP is making possible.

"That is the step needed to get us all involved, all together," said Polanco, who attended Maddon's press conference. "We can't operate pulling for one community or the other. It has to be one. I think this gets us closer to that."

Sitting in an English class at the local YMCA, Rafael Castillo discovered Concerned Parents' services the

way most immigrants do—through word of mouth on the streets. He sat among five women: one from Colombia, another from Mexico and several, like him, from the Dominican Republic. Drawn to the city two years ago by family and a job in a chocolate factory, Castillo heard about long waiting lists for English classes. But he added his name anyway.

“I have to learn the language, it’s only right,” Castillo said during a break in volunteer instructor Beth Turnbach’s class. Turnbach said she wanted to be a counterforce to the negative comments she has heard her fellow Hazleton residents make about Latinos. She decided that teaching was the best way for her to do this. HIP now offers even more opportunities for her to channel these positive impulses.

On an old overpass, a spray-painted (and misspelled) slur, Spick, is fading. Not long from now, it will barely be visible. Signs of progress along Hazleton’s

Wyoming Street, downtown, feel more enduring. A several-generations’-old sporting goods store sits across the street from the newer Dalia’s Salon and other Dominican-owned stores.

Not too far from downtown, Maddon and his wife Jaye sat down recently to eat in one of Hazleton’s Mexican restaurants. Recognizing Maddon’s celebrity, a cook came over and greeted the table. Maddon, familiar with Mexico’s geography, asked him, in Spanish: “Where are you from?” The cook seemed perplexed by the question. “I’m from Hazleton,” he answered.

Maddon sees great possibility in the miscommunication. Prominently placed billboards with pictures of culturally diverse groups of Hazleton’s residents, he decided, would be a constructive step in the healing process. The billboards will go up soon. They will carry a simple message: “We are from Hazleton.”

On an old overpass, a spray-painted (and misspelled) slur, Spick, is fading. Not long from now, it will barely be visible. Signs of progress along Hazleton’s Wyoming Street, downtown, feel more enduring.

Hazleton’s Wyoming Street



Chris Echegaray is a freelance journalist based in Nashville. A former staff writer for several daily newspapers, he has talked his way into the midst of youth street gangs and buses filled with immigrant laborers rolling across the U.S. border. Specializing in stories about migration and Latino issues he has reported on laborers from Florida returning to visit their families in Mexico and written a profile of the superstar Shakira. Chris' writing has appeared in numerous publications including *The Tennessean*, *The New York Daily News* and *Latina Magazine*.

Susan Eaton is co-director of One Nation Indivisible and research director at the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice at Harvard Law School. Susan's journalism and scholarship has appeared in popular and academic publications including the *New York Times*, *The Nation*, *Harvard Law and Policy Review*, the *Boston Globe Sunday Magazine*, *New American Media* and *Virginia Quarterly Review*. Her most recent book is *The Children in Room E4: American Education on Trial* (Algonquin).

Emma Lee is a freelance photographer based in Philadelphia. She began her career at the *Trentonian* newspaper in Trenton, New Jersey. She is a frequent contributor to *NewsWorks*, the website of WHYY radio in Philadelphia. She also provides photographs for the National Public Radio website, npr.org.

One Nation Indivisible is a joint project of the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice at Harvard Law School and the Poverty & Race Research Action Council (PRRAC), based in Washington, D.C. "Stories from the Field" is an occasional publication of One Nation Indivisible. To share your story, write to Susan Eaton at seaton@law.harvard.edu



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