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## Romney's October Surprise

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As the candidates prepare for the first presidential debate on Wednesday, it is useful to note that the October Surprise actually came early in this election campaign -- or, rather, it came during National Hispanic Heritage Month, which runs from September 15 to October 15.

On Monday, September 17, *Mother Jones* released portions of a video in which presidential candidate Mitt Romney made reference to his Mexican heritage. Speaking of his father, George, who was born in Mexico, Romney noted:

**"Had he been born of Mexican parents, I'd have a better shot of winning this. But he was unfortunately born to Americans living in Mexico. He lived there for a number of years. I mean, I say that jokingly, it would be helpful to be Latino."**

Then on September 20, Romney appeared on a Univision presidential forum, promising to fix the immigration system, and sporting noticeably darker skin than his post-video press conference earlier in the week. Romney had become Latino! Pundit-comics everywhere skewered Romney for his notion that being "Latino" would be a political advantage in national elections, given how many Latino presidents we have had in U.S. history.

But something more pronounced went unnoticed: Romney's statement about his father presumes that "Mexican" and "American" are racially defined categories. While Romney's grandparents were U.S. citizens brazenly fleeing federal prosecution and setting up a "Mormon colony" in another country, his father was Mexican by birthright. And like a million other Mexicans, George Romney was part of a large-scale immigration to the United States as a consequence of the Mexican Revolution -- the first modern social revolution of the 20th century. Once in the United States, he was the beneficiary of "welfare relief" and, thanks to such support, one day rose to become a state governor and a candidate for the Republican presidential nomination. Today George's son Mitt, who qualifies for dual Mexican citizenship and has served as a state governor, is a candidate for the presidency. Our next president will most likely be determined by votes from the children and grandchildren of the million other Mexicans who immigrated to the United States alongside his father. Romney is wrong. It would not be helpful to *be* Latino -- although in some respects he already is -- but it would be very helpful to *understand* Latinos as integral to our nation. To do that would be an unprecedented October Surprise.