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Olmos' challenge

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Actor speaks at NKU Hispanic Heritage Month

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

Emmy-winning and Oscar-nominated actor Edward James Olmos spoke to a packed Greaves Hall Thursday as part of Northern Kentucky University's National Hispanic Heritage Month celebration.

While many students may have attended to see the stern, commanding Admiral Adama from the TV series "Battlestar Galactica," Olmos greeted his audience with a relaxed humor.

His presentation, "We're All in the Same Gang," focused on ways to bring people of all races and cultures together.

ADVERTISEMENT "This country has a tremendous amount of love and understanding," Olmos said, "but also a tremendous amount of lack of understanding."

He said there would be more acceptance in the world if more people were educated about other languages and cultures.

"By getting to know me, you'll know more about yourself," said Olmos.

Olmos interacted with his audience. He spoke English most of the time, but peppered his talk with joking asides in Spanish.

"If you're not laughing, then ask someone who is," Olmos instructed those who didn't understand Spanish. After another exchange: "If you're Spanish impaired, it's OK, we're in an English-only country."

Turning serious, he said the need to learn multiple languages is key to understanding others.

"I love English - it's very difficult to speak - but I love it," said Olmos, who was born and grew up in East Los Angeles. "Not speaking a language (that others around you are speaking) makes you feel less than who you are. USA, beware: We are not less than who we are. We deserve the right to speak other languages."

Olmos said his 40-year journey of reaching out to people began when, as a struggling 21-year-old actor, two teachers asked him to speak to their classes at Los Angeles' Roosevelt High School.



THE ENQUIRER/PATRICK REDDY

Actor and activist Edward James Olmos speaks at Northern Kentucky University. The Academy Award nominee promoted understanding different cultures to promote acceptance.



THE ENQUIRER/PATRICK REDDY

Edward James Olmos looks over a Northern Kentucky University sweatshirt presented to him after he spoke there as part of National Hispanic Heritage Month.

"They wanted someone who is struggling and trying to do something with his life," Olmos said.

The satisfaction he got from those talks with students fueled great performances later that evening, he said, and it's a practice he continues four decades later.

"The reason I am here is the amount of time I have given of myself to others," he said.

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