HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH, HISPANIC FUTURE MONTH: IT SHOULD BE BOTH!

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New York, NY - Will Hispanic Heritage Month 2020 – September 15 to October 15 – make any difference for America? Will it inspire needed introspection about the place of Hispanics in our nation today and tomorrow? Will it be more than the usual conferences and speeches, albeit virtual, and corporate ads and government proclamations? What meaning will it hold – if any – for all Americans?

For context, it is useful to consider these realities:

- Αт 62+ μιλλιον, Ηισπανιχσ αρε αλμοστ 19 περχεντ οφ τηε ποπυλατιον.
- Ιφ Ηισπανιχσ ωερε α νατιον τηειρ ΓΔΠ ωουλδ βε τηε ωορλδ σ ειγητη λαργεστ.
- Ωιτη 13.2 μιλλιον ελιγιβλε ϖοτερσ, τηεψ ωιλλ βε τηε σεχονδ λαργεστ ϖοτινγ σεγμεντ.
- Χοϖιδ–19 ηασ λαιδ βαρε τηε δισπροπορτιονατε ϖυλνεραβιλιτψ οφ Ηισπανιχσ.
- Ηισπανιχσ αρε φροντ–λινε δοχτορσ, μεδιχαλ προφεσσιοναλσ, εσσεντιαλ ωορκερσ.
- Ηισπανιχ υνεμπλοψμεντ ισ δισπροπορτιονατελψ ηιγη.
- Ηισπανιχσ αρε τηε μοστ σεγρεγατεδ χηιλδρεν ιν ουρ πυβλιχ σχηοολσ.

Despite these and other realities, many in our nation view Hispanics as “other,” as if they got off the boat yesterday. For many Americans bristle at hearing Spanish spoken and resent government and business communications in Spanish. Understanding heritage, therefore, assumes great importance

Here, too, it is useful to understand that Spanish was the first European language spoken in America, that it is spoken by more than 53 million people and that it is the second most used language on the internet. Strange, but Spanish-speakers are ridiculed, while around the world Americans are ridiculed for being largely monolingual.

Worthy of Reflection

General Bernardo de Gálvez, commander of Spanish forces in Louisiana, routed the British at the mouth of the Mississippi in the Revolutionary War. His actions denied weapons and supplies to the British in the Ohio River Valley, thereby helping assure their defeat. Galveston, Texas was named for him.

In 2060, Hispanics will number about 120 million – 29 percent of the total – so, nearly one in three Americans will be Hispanic. There will be growing numbers of Hispanic Members of Congress, governors, mayors, judges and other officials. More Hispanics will be running big businesses and helping to grow our economy. More will be using their cultural sensitivities to deal effectively with other nations, whether in trade, diplomacy, or multilateral organizations.

It is possible that a Hispanic will be elected president in a few years (two ran for the nomination of the Democrat and Republican parties in 2019).

Today, only 80 percent of Fortune 500 companies have no Hispanics on their boards, and only 10 companies have Hispanic CEOs. We wonder whether corporate America will do better in the face of growing diversity, whether corporations will reflect America and the people to whom many of them sell their products and services.

It is essential to improve educational opportunities at ALL levels for Hispanics, as doing so will be a sound investment in America's future (investing anywhere in education is a sound investment).

Hispanics have made rapid progress in educational attainment, including lowering dropout rates and raising college admissions. Hispanics – mostly Mexican Americans – are the majority of students at three California State System universities. Are the trends in California a harbinger for other states?

Will the George Floyd murder-inspired racial justice movement extend to Hispanics in the coming years. Will it take more tragedies?

Think about how long it will take Hispanics, including small businesses, to recover from Covid-19, and whether that recovery will redress health disparities and the lack of insurance and access to capital.

And what will be the fate of the "dreamers"? They number some 800,000 and the only country they know is the United States. The contribute daily to our society.

Heritage and Future

Hispanics numbered perhaps 8 million in 1968 when President Lyndon Johnson signed a bill that created Hispanic Heritage Week (in 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed a bill that made it a month). In the sixties, history books paid little heed to Hispanic contributions, the media largely overlooked what was happening in Hispanic America and the Hispanic civil rights movement was just getting its legs. At that time, and for decades since, it has been productive to reflect on the heritage, to inform and educate.

Yes, it is useful to recall that Civil War hero Admiral David Farragut (originally Ferragut) was a Hispanic, that his father fought for American independence. Let us remind ourselves that the first Medal of Honor recipient was Corporal Joseph H. De Castro for his actions at Gettysburg on July 3, 1863, that Hispanics have earned 60 Medals of Honor, and that 1.2 million Hispanics serve the Armed Forces.

Yes, heritage must be understood and valued. Today, however, and with the backdrop afforded by greater reflection on heritage, the month should also be about the future and the promising role of Hispanic Americans.

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