

Latinos, Today's Scapegoat

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OS24



Arguably the prejudices that the Spanish-speaking population in America are dealing with today has gone on since the colonization of the New World. Today “Hispanics” go through tremendous sacrifices all for the possibility of a better life for a number of different reasons. Instead of being able to move forward economically and socially in a community, Spanish-speaking immigrants are confronted with a harsh reality and find themselves trapped by the paradigms of stereotypes and racial profiling, and even persecuted for their presence and are seen as foreign invaders.

Immigration has fueled many of the racial attacks on Latinos/as. Many people of Latin descent come from different countries with their own cultures and traditions, and each have a different history, whether their family had settled hundreds of years ago or if they recently migrated to America for refuge. However the recent attack on immigration has caused all Spanish-speaking people in America to endure the same difficulties caused by racial profiling; in fact, many Latin identities are formed from only three Spanish-speaking groups Cubans, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans.

The terms used to describe Spanish-speaking people reflect the American misconception that they are all the same. The terms “Hispanic” and “Latino/a” specify or demonstrate “the connections to North and South American land struggle and the intermingling of Spanish-derived culture with Native-American cultures.” The line between different Spanish-speaking based cultures is skewed and scene as one Pan-Latin culture. Another issue with these terms is that its connotations suggest direct correlation with Spain, a part of the definition of Hispanic is “of or relating to Spain,” in reality these countries are now independent and have little connection with their former European conquerors. In the 1970 census. “Hispanic” was used to refer to “a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.” Many people didn’t like this because it “was artificially imposed” and people started campaigning against its use. “Since the 2000 Census the identifier has changed from ‘Hispanic’ to ‘Spanish/Hispanic/Latino’.” The term *Latino* is generally preferred because it is more open ended. Each Spanish-speaking country is unique, and their people prefer to be identified as such.

The Arizona Immigration Law feeds off of Latin misconceptions. The Arizona Immigration Law “requires officers to detain people who they ‘suspect’ to be here in America illegally and verify whether or not they are here legally to federal officials and it also makes it a state crime not to carry immigration papers, civilians are also encouraged to turn in undocumented immigrants.” The Immigration law thrives on racial profiling, with no other means to predict if someone is in America legally or not other than by assumption, Latinos/as have become a main target for police and officials because of past stereotypes and geographic proximity, with no regard for Latinos/as whom have called themselves US citizens all their lives. Opponents to the law have called it “an open invitation for harassment and discrimination against Hispanics regardless of their citizenship status.” Cardinal Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles “said the authorities’ ability to demand documents was like ‘Nazism’.” Results of the law has brought fear of police, community distrust, increased crime and jail population for all Latinos/as in Arizona.

The recent widespread attack on Spanish immigrants is fueled by the belief that they are responsible for lowering wages and causing the rising rate of unemployment. These statements are false; “there is little to no correlation between migrant labor and lower wages or unemployment.” It would be hypocritical to say the US doesn’t thrive on migrant labor; in fact our foreign policy has a direct effect with Latin immigration. We have supported dictatorships in Central and South America, initiated invasions, enforced the blockade against Cuban trade, and caused an economic displacement due to US economic development, all in the pursuit of money. We have always treated Spanish-speaking countries as a means for resources, constantly depleting them, and in a sense keeping them from achieving the full independence they want. Our disregard for these countries is evident in Cuba’s war for independence, America quickly joined the war, pushed aside Cuba, quickly defeated the Spanish, and demanded they hand Cuba to the US, “completely disregarding the Cuban’s fight for freedom. “

America has been using these countries for its own personal interest; in fact, most Latin immigrants are here because of US encroachment on their territories to expand their markets. And so these immigrants are then taken advantage of and are used for cheap labor, the same immigrants we claim to have stolen our jobs and lowered our wages actually scapegoats for foreign and corporate policies such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in order to push their markets further. So instead of blaming the free-trade policies that actually cause higher unemployment and rates and lowered wages, it is hidden behind the immigrant who is blamed for these catastrophes; as a result, the markets to continue to expand into and uproot the economic structures of Spanish-speaking countries.

NAFTA was a free-trade policy implemented in 1996 between the US, Canada and Mexico. The policy was meant to “eliminate barriers of trade and investment between the US, Canada and Mexico.” NAFTA has negatively impacted Mexico in a number of different ways: farmers in Mexico experienced food prices fall because of cheap imports from U.S. agribusiness. And it also brought “negative impacts on U.S. workers in manufacturing and assembly industries that lost jobs.” The blame for those negative impacts on the US was of course blamed on immigrants who had come to the US after the effects of NAFTA. “Critics also argue that NAFTA has contributed to the rising levels of inequality in both the U.S. and Mexico.” Mostly likely because of the blame game free-trade policies are playing.

Because of these attacks, Latinos/as endure social obstacles, which prevent them from moving forward. Many Americans don’t understand the sacrifices and tribulations these immigrants had to undergo simply to have a better life, some physical and others emotional. Many leave behind family members to come here in order to create a better life for them, and undergo great measures to get here, such as hiding in piñatas, modified vehicles, sailing in the night to make it on American soil or crossing the border, and confiding in *coyotes*, paid smugglers, to bring them across the border, whom usually turn on their passengers and take advantage of them. Many of these immigrants start a new narrative, one that would allow them to cope with living in America. But they’re immediately stifled by racism and stereotypes that have put Latinos in a box, they are expected to act a certain way and believe the same thing. The common stereotypes for Latinos is that they are all immigrants (assumed to be illegal), they can only get blue collar jobs, they are drug dealers or part of the drug cartel, they have large families while living in small spaces, believe in Catholicism, and don’t know any English. And to an extent, many Latin

families are impoverished and therefore can not afford the living space for their families. Latin immigrants can not get better jobs because the education they get in their home country usually isn't seen as sufficient and isn't recognized by U.S. institutions, many doctors, teachers and mathematicians quickly turned into maids, cashiers and custodians as a result. We thrive on their cheap labor. One example of many:

Any Garcia, a legal immigrant from Dominican Republic experienced this same situation. Any had come when she was in her mid-twenties, graduated valedictorian in her high school in Dominican Republic at the age of sixteen and proceeded to get a bachelor's degree in mathematics. She worked in a computer company as a professional until deciding to come to the US with her daughter hoping for a change. After about a year and half of waiting for authorization as a resident in the US, she had come to America. Expecting to continue working as she did before her cousin, whom she was staying with, told her the only way she could make it in America was an immigrant was by "cleaning hotel rooms". She attempted to take English courses in order to continue with her profession but was unsuccessful and in turn worked on and off as a cashier or maid.

When Latinos/as come here and then realize the reality of the situation, they are likely conform to it and the paradigm continues; they are almost told they can only do so much, and America takes advantage of them. Many Latinos/as are trying to assimilate, hoping to avoid prejudices by acting American, but in the process, they are choosing to hide some aspect of their culture. An example of this would be learning English and working to lose the accent. At times some Latinos go even further than ceasing to speak Spanish: they stifle their child's ability to learn the Spanish language as well, hoping it will cause their child to be more "American". The irony of this being America has no official language, yet English is considered the correct language. In fact there have been campaigns against foreign languages, especially Spanish, by politicians such as Tim James, whose campaign slogan read: "This is Alabama – We speak English". Nowadays the Spanish language is associated with ignorance and frustration, many immigrants come here and find they are not welcomed to speak Spanish, the mere accent is enough to be branded as another ignorant Latino if it isn't taken care of, as opposed to say a British accent which is seen as a sign of intelligence or a French accent, usually associated with the idea of classy, bourgeois Europeans.

Latinos/as are at the bottom of the social hierarchy today, along with African Americans, Asian-Americans and Arab-Americans. But Latinos/as are being wrongfully blamed for something they have no responsibility in. They are also persecuted for large amounts of immigrants coming into the US, but what must be said is that they are coming because they're looking for a better life and it's most likely related to America's foreign policy that has caused their displacement.

Latinos/as have a rich background that has been scorned yet commercialized by industry. Latinos/as are now the scapegoats to free-trade policies that are actually responsible for the problems they are blamed for. The prejudice caused by the blame has caused major social and economic consequences for Latinos/as. While US corporations are making billions of dollars based on migrant labor and free-trade agreements but at what cost? The US is banishing Latin immigrants to the fringes of society, disallowing them to move forward.

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