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TRUTH IN LOVE

Nuestros Celebremos Futuro Valioso *(We Celebrate Our Valuable Future)*

By Parris J. Baker
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First of Two Parts

Every 30 seconds a member of the Hispanic or Latino Generation Z becomes eligible to vote. Two citizens every minute, 120 new voters every hour, or 2,880 Latino voters every single day until the primary and general elections. Hispanic or Latino constituents represent the second fastest growing racial or ethnic minority in America (Asian Americans are first) and have the second largest racial or ethnic minority electorate in the nation.

In the decade between 2010 and 2020, the Hispanic/Latino population increase by 23 percent, from 50.5 million to 62.1 million.^[1] The future of America will be shaped, reshaped, and significantly transfigured, in part, by the growing numbers of Hispanics in the United States.



Each year from September 15 to October 15, the many noteworthy contributions of Hispanic and Latino people toward the enhancement and enrichment of the United States are commemorated. Hispanic Heritage Month venerates the historic and cultural contributions of people groups from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America.

Hispanic Heritage Month begins on September 15 because Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua all achieved their independence on this date. Mexico (September 16), Chile (September 18), and Belize (September 21) also celebrate the anniversary of their independence during this period.

Originally, the commemorative celebration of Hispanics was one week. In 1968, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Hispanic Heritage Week bill, Public Law 90-498. Hispanic Heritage Week was designated the week of September 15 to draw Americans' attention to the legislative, educational, social, economic, and human needs of Hispanic Americans as well as to acknowledge and honor the enormous endowments of the culture. However, House Representative Estaban Torres of California rightly observed that one week was an insufficient amount of time to acknowledge and "and properly observe and coordinate events and activities to celebrate Hispanic culture and achievement."

Representative Torres introduced H.R. Bill 3182 in 1987, which called for the establishment of Hispanic Heritage Month. On August 17, 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed Public Law 100-402 Hispanic Heritage Month into law.^[2]

With this newfound national attention after Hispanic Heritage Month was established, a conundrum followed about how to appropriately refer to the

celebrated countries. Hispanic and Latino, and more recently Latinx and Latine, are categories that have been used interchangeably. However, there are some important distinctions. Coined during the 1970s and 1980s, Hispanic is the oldest term used to describe and categorize pan-ethnic communities from the country of Spain, where Spanish is the primary language, or people of Latin American descent. Because of its strong association with Spanish colonialism, the term Hispanic was not always embraced.

A word about definitions: The classification Latino describes persons, male or a mixed group of males and females, who were born in, live in, or are descendant from Mexico, Central America, and South America countries. The term Latina identifies the person or group as female. Attempting to define a nomenclature that is gender-neutral or non-binary Millennials and Generation Z created Latinx and Latine. The gender-identifying letters of “o” (male) and “a” (female) are replaced by the letter’s “x” and “e.” Older members of Hispanic communities tend to reject, are less familiar with and therefore less comfortable with, or resist the attempts to change how the group is identified.

Erie City Council Vice President Jasmine Flores^[3] affirms that the distinctions are critically important. Latinos are not a monolithic group, notes Councilwoman Flores. There are 22 dialects of Spanish spoken in Erie County alone. It is important to know who you are talking to and recognize the differences in culture and the cultural linguistic nuances.

In his Proclamation of Hispanic Heritage Month 2023,^[4] President Joseph Biden said, “Latinos have helped chart America’s course since our start — as doctors and engineers; artists and entrepreneurs; and leaders in science, business, labor, government, and military and across grassroots movements. Their faith and drive have pushed our country to grow, prosper, and pursue its highest ideals.” Flores believes Latinos will continue to have that type of positive impact on the future of the United States, Pennsylvania, and here in the city of Erie and Erie County.

Every 30 seconds another Latino turns 18 years old. The Generation Z voting blocks of Latinx voters are the “sleeping giants!” They could make the difference in the upcoming election cycles. And this generation of voters may be changing the future of America.

[1] Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2022/06/14/a-brief-statistical-portrait-of-u-s-hispanics/>

[2] National Hispanic Month Celebration. <https://www.hispanicheritagemonth.gov/about.html>

[3] Jasmine Flores is the first Latina and youngest person ever elected to Erie City Council. Currently the only elected official of Latinx descent in the northwest PA region. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jasmine-flores-336089200>

David Gonzales was the Latino appointed to Erie City Council in 2006.

[4] A Proclamation on National Hispanic Heritage Month, 2023: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2023/09/14/a-proclamation-on-national-hispanic-heritage-month-2023/>

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