

WHY HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH MATTERS

As the recently elected president of the Hispanic Bar Association of Michigan (HBAM) and as Hispanic Heritage month comes to a close, I have used this time to reflect on my own experience of being a Latina in the United States and how it has shaped the person and advocate I have become. Hispanic Heritage Month is a month of pride, celebration and education; the month allows us to unite around shared values and the American Dream. It's a time of taking stock of who we are and where we are today. As such, it is critical that we collectively use this month as a platform to educate and help set the record straight, so that we are accurately represented as positive contributors to the United States.

A study by Pew Research indicates that the Hispanic population in the United States has increased by 23% over the past 10 years, now numbering 62.1 million. By 2030 the projected Hispanic population is anticipated to be 74.8 million out of a total U.S. population of 325 million: 21.1% of the total population, and the largest and fastest growing ethnic group in the country. This has enormous consequences for our culture and our country. Political representation and clout are on the table as is our representation from the C-Suites to the jobs on Main Street. From sports and entertainment to educational opportunity and the freedom to achieve.

And as we celebrate this growing impact and our right to fully-participate in all that America has to offer, we must redouble our steadfast commitment to our values of equality, respect and partnering, particularly with our Brothers and Sisters in other communities of color. In speaking of his bond with Cesar Chavez, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. so eloquently said, "Our separate struggles are really one – a struggle for freedom, for dignity and for humanity." Our mission today must be to nurture this spirit of kinship.

At a time when the economy is foremost in many people's minds, Hispanic Heritage Month and our representation in America matters. We are the largest and fastest growing "blind spot" of the American Economy. The economic output (GDP) of Latinos in the United States in 2020 was \$2.8 trillion, surpassing the GDPs of the U.K. India, and Japan.¹ Likewise, our purchasing power is \$1.9 trillion dollars and has the potential to increase to \$2.6 trillion over the next three years.² Any company doing business in the U.S. is remiss if it does not have a defined Hispanic strategy as a part of its critical future growth model.

We are entrepreneurial and possess the grit required to launch and own new businesses. According to a recent report by the Stanford Graduate School of Business, a staggering 86% of all new American businesses launched between 2007 and 2012 were started by Hispanics.

1 <https://www.latinodonorcollaborative.org/>; <https://www.axios.com/2022/09/22/gdp-latino-2020-pandemic-uk-india>

2 Purchasing Power of Hispanics in the U.S. Has 'Clear Impact' on Economy
<https://www.bloomberglinea.com/english/purchasing-power-of-hispanics-in-the-us-has-clear-impact-on-economy/>

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Likewise, our cultural belief in hard work and success contribute to our upward mobility. With income growth of 77% and a new home ownership rate of 48%, we lead all other groups in terms of upward mobility. The number of adult Hispanic's earning higher education degrees has increased to 73%, leading to higher skilled occupations. We not only work hard but we are loyal employees. Hispanics account for 40% of all workforce growth. This is particularly relevant because Latino employees entering the labor force are offsetting declines from the outgoing Baby Boomers.

Moreover, we play an important role in the election process because we turn out to vote. Contrary to some notions, over 80% of our community are citizens, and many more are in the citizenship process. Our community believes in the responsibility that comes along with being an American. We pay federal, state and local taxes that most recently was tallied as \$308.5 billion, which is up \$94 million dollars from just a few years prior. Our love of this nation is evident by our participation in the military as the fast-growing population in the military accounting for 16% of all active-duty military personnel.

Despite such resounding numbers, Hispanics are among the most undercapitalized and under-resourced in the U.S. For example, Hispanic businesses were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and 50%+ less likely to receive government relief under the Payment Protection Program. We, however, are resilient by nature. Even though studies show that the Covid pandemic took a toll on Hispanics personally and financially, the report found that Latino economic output went from being equivalent to the world's eighth-largest GDP at the start of 2020 to the fifth largest when the year ended according to Pew Research Center.³

We have made substantial progress, however, we still have a long way to go. Specifically, the legal profession has been very slow to diversify by ethnicity over the past decade. We are disproportionately represented in the legal field and the judiciary. According to the ABA National Lawyer Population Survey, Hispanics make up almost 19% of the U.S. population, yet only 4.8% of the all U.S. lawyers are Hispanic. In private practice, we make up only 1.8% of law firm partners. Likewise, we are also disproportionately represented on the bench. According to the Federal Judicial Center, the research and educational arm of the U.S. court system, from 2017 through 2020, the U.S. Senate confirmed 229 federal judges. Of those, only nine (4%) were Hispanic. Consequently, the composition of the federal judiciary does not reflect the various perspectives and experiences of those who are served by our nation's courts which is a serious issue that needs to be addressed. Last week, the Hispanic Bar Association of Michigan educated the bar and bench on such issues during our program "Pathways to the Bench" and we will continue to educate our community. Part of our mission during Hispanic Heritage Month should be to broaden awareness of these facts. I invite you to join me in spreading the word. In the wise words of Roberto Clemente, "[i]f you have an opportunity to make things better and you don't, then you are wasting your time on Earth."

³ <https://www.pewresearch.org/race-ethnicity/2021/07/15/for-u-s-latinos-covid-19-has-taken-a-personal-and-financial-toll/>