

HISPANICS: ETHNICITY AND LANGUAGE IN ELECTION TIME

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In many ways the 2020 elections fixed the spotlight on Hispanics. With 32 million eligible voters, large numbers in key states and Hispanics of all political stripes actively supporting the causes of their choice, they significantly rose awareness of Hispanics on the political stage.

The rise in awareness of political might, however, has not been matched by a necessary examination of Hispanic culture, historic contributions, the power of the Spanish language and the realities of the lives of nearly 63 million Hispanics – yes 63 million, nearly one in five Americans. Many among us, however, believe that Hispanics are “other,” that they arrived yesterday, that they are not Americans like everyone else.

Last summer, Actress-activist Eva (AY -vah, not Ee-vah) Longoria introduced the Democratic Party Convention. A native of Texas, Longoria, rebuking President Trump, said she is a ninth generation American and that her family “did not cross the border, the border crossed us.” She did her job – proudly! Since then, especially since the Biden-Harris win, the media have sought interviews with her about the power of the Latino vote. She speaks Spanish.

María Teresa Kumar, president and CEO of Voto Latino, is regularly featured on MSNBC and other media as an expert – not just in the Latino vote, but in the entire political landscape. That includes the economy, foreign policy and more. Her command of so many issues has won her a prestigious spot as substitute host on MSNBC. Of Colombian heritage, she speaks Spanish.

María Hinojosa, daughter of Mexican immigrants, founded and leads the Futuro Media Group, a supplier of programming to NPR and PBS. She focuses on immigrants, Latin America and Latinos and turned her life experience into a recent book, *Once I Was You*. Hinojosa takes care to say “Latinos and Latinas” rather than “Latinx” which discards proper Spanish usage to try to be “inclusive.” María speaks Spanish.

The Democratic National Committee head, Tom Pérez, is of Dominican origin, and is also a Spanish speaker. Rarely, it seems, does he use his Spanish language skills to communicate with Hispanics, and he does not correct his media interlocutors who call him Tom Puh-REZ, instead of Tom PEH-res.

Ambassador Bill Richardson, former Member of Congress, former Governor of New Mexico and President Clinton’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations, credits his bilingualism and Hispanic heritage for his success in engaging world leaders. He speaks Spanish.

Now, readers will detect a Democratic bias here. That is the result of the Democratic Party having far more Latino leaders than the Republican Party. That is simply a reality. Not invented here.

Pride in ethnicity and the Spanish language are indelible values that distinguish

Hispanics. As these few examples illustrate – and as the electoral season has pointed out – Hispanics are not monolithic. They are descendants of Spaniards whose presence here pre-dates that of the British in Jamestown. They are immigrants from Spain and Latin America. Notably, however, whatever their national heritage, what they have in common is their identity as Hispanics.

Hispanics will number 120 million by 2050. Spanish speakers, including non-Hispanics, number about 54 million today. Spanish is the de facto second language of the United States. After Mexico, our country is the second largest Spanish-speaking country in the world. After Mandarin, Spanish is the second most spoken native language in the world.

Many Hispanics who do not speak Spanish lament that circumstances have not allowed them to speak it try to learn it. They recognize its value, as do countless corporate executives and other professionals who daily rely on Spanish to excel in their jobs.

Donald Trump tapped into a reservoir of what he regarded as concern – maybe fear – that the centuries when minorities had to adapt to the majority will soon mean that the majority will have to adapt to the new majority. It is an emerging majority comprising first Hispanics, second Blacks, then Asian Americans (the fastest growing cohort) and American Indians.

Hispanics and their fellow members of the new majority do not aspire to displace today's majority. They seek only to have their voices heard, to find their rightful place in a multicultural society and to continue to contribute in many ways to our nation.

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