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# STEREOTYPES AND POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS OF LATINO 1 IMMIGRATION

## Stereotypes and Popular Misconceptions of Latino Immigration

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### Author's Note

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Abstract

The focus of this research paper is to briefly address the scenarios behind Latin American immigration into the United States, as well as its effects on American culture. With the use of peer reviewed sources and scholarly articles the research conducted directly reflects current issues in the media today. This work explores three main areas including: government intervention in an era focused on Latino Immigration to the United States, the cultural misconceptions conveyed by a naïve American public, and a debunking of negative stereotypes regarding Latino Immigration.

Key words: Latino immigration, stereotypes, government intervention, naïve American public

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Week after week, year after year, hundreds even thousands of trivial decisions are made to move all, in search of a better life. If that aspiration means leaving a loving family behind or taking the risk of bringing them along, that is the price a determined immigrant faces. The vast majority of stories start with a coyote planning an expedition to a better place. With the cover of nightfall 5, 10, 20 undocumented immigrants gather in a central location to impede on a long and dangerous journey to the United States. Often times, the disturbing anticipation of what is to come is enough to cause many to turn back, but if the new life means happiness and better fortune, then it is worth the struggle. As many people have been made aware, (through political debates, news reports, social media, cultural influence, etc.) undocumented immigrants cross the United States boarder all the time and it is with no insight, or psychological understanding that Americans (The white majority to be more specific) judge their decision to do so. This is an idea that seems to not get the attention that it deserves. As a privileged, unappreciative culture, there is a blind eye turned to the truth behind what is media driven, what is perceived as truth, and what the reality of the problem actually is. A vast majority of U.S. born citizens cannot relate to the everyday struggles of Undocumented immigrants. The mainstream American population doesn't want to know, and they don't care to know because that would mean making a difference in the cultural barrier. In addition to that idea, without going into abysmal detail one could observe that a change in the general public's view of undocumented immigrants could result in something as indirect as a rise in food prices. Therefore, to keep the public's attention away from the negative connotations associated with undocumented immigrants, the media and structured corporate firms (with all there "power"-money), spread false rumors and stereotypes. These fallacious claims force the public's eyes away from the truth, but it is time that the truth behind these corrupt ideologies be relinquished. Using factual evidence from peer review sources, this

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research will discuss the push and pull factors in regards to Latino migration, expose negative stereotypes about immigration from Latin America, and factually disprove the vicious myths involved with immigrants contributing to the United States.

The word stereotype refers to a simplified and standardized conception or image associated with specific members of a group, religion, race, culture, etc. (Dixon & Williams, p.1)

This word is important because many of the misconceptions regarding Chicanos have something to do with a stereotype or media driven view of undocumented immigrants. The fact that Latinos and Chicanos make up many ethnicities other than Mexican is one of the biggest misunderstandings of all. In fact, “Latinos are an ethnic group comprised of Blacks, Asians, Whites, and Native Americans. They are recognized as the single largest ethnic category tracked by the U.S. census and the fastest growing demographic in the United States” (Dixon & Williams, p.3). It has to be frustrating associating with a culture, being a part of that culture, recognizing yourself as that ethnicity, and not being portrayed with those characteristics in anything besides home life or minute cultural atmospheres. From a reverse perspective, of the “stereotypical” Mexican immigrant, the fight for Latino recognition in the non-Mexican/Spanish speaking cultures is real. In the naïve American point of view, a Mexican is a Mexican, a Black person is black, and a white person is white, there is no in between (Dixon & Williams, p.3).

Being so inconsiderate as to think that there are only 10-15 different ethnicities in this world is beyond being naïve, it is flat out ignorant. Unfortunately, the government has made an attempt to narrow down the choices of ethnic origin, leaving many children as well as adults wondering where they belong. It is a sad truth, and it is a direct reflection of a line out of Ray Gonzalez’s poem titled “These Days”. In the poem it talks about immigrants crossing the borders, what happens to them, and what is to come for them, and he cannot relate because he does not identify

with any of the things going on around him. Assuming he is Mexican-American from his insight into both cultures, there is a line where he says, “The English and Spanish don’t belong to me” (Ventura, 2005, p.18). The quote is so powerful. Giving insight to a culturally challenged individual, this reference directly portrays the struggle a person can go through with identifying as a specific ethnicity. Metaphorically stuck between two closing walls and not knowing where to escape. Is this do to the ridiculous depiction of undocumented immigrants in the media? It is a question based on the fact that people do not want to associate themselves as Mexican, Chicano, Latino, Puerto Rican, etc. because of the reputation given to them through the media, and particularly the news stations. In a study conducted by the Department of Communication at UCLA, they found 53% of the stories about criminal activity and immigrants were falsely reported (Dixon & Williams, p.28). As a result, what does that say about the news stations, where are their sources coming from, how are they trying to portray the Latino community, and lastly what are they gaining from all this? In *Latinos Beyond reel: Challenging Media stereotypes*, they go into depth as to why television shows and broad casting Medias rid out the Chicano actors and have white people play the Hispanic roles. In the documentary, they explain that in an effort to increase viewer attention, they play to the extreme stereotypes about Latino immigrants, Chicanos, and Mexican-Americans. Such as, villains, gangsters, hood rats, thieves, murderers, farm workers, etc. All of these unappealing, non-heroic characters make way for the news stations and American people to unintentionally think about Chicanos, Latinos, Mexicans, and just about every Spanish speaking individual as antagonists, not just in films and cartoons, but in real life as well. However, despite all the negative attributes the media tries to give this strong willed group of people, they continue to migrate to the U.S. and push for equality. The growing Mexican American population in the United States continues to attract scholarly attention across

a variety of disciplines. “As of the 2010 census, 32 million people identify themselves as being of Mexican descent, making up two thirds of the larger Latino/a population of over 50 million people” (Fernandez, 2013, p.1). With further research into the 2015 population census that number has risen to 55 million people with approximately 65% identifying as Mexican descendants.

Stereotypes are not yet the least of the Latino immigrant’s community’s concerns. With so many odds stacked against their favor, the Latino, Chicano and Mexican Immigrants has more than enough to worry about as far as American interjection and racism goes. For over a decade, public response in respect to Latin American immigration has been an advocate of racism and fear (Delgado, 2010, p.1). This is no surprise, because with respect to immigrants, it is always a sketchy situation when a group of immigrants come into the country. In a journal article of the book *The New Americans*, Theresa Delgado states, “Since 9/11, moreover, the immigration issue has been firmly linked to questions of national security in the public imagination, in this recent period, the state has asserted extraordinary controls over immigrants and citizens that affect the discourse of immigration and the very notion of citizenship” (Delgado, 2010, p.1). The very notion of letting in foreign entities is now a huge debate because it is assume that the immigrants are dangerous. Currently there is decline population of undocumented immigrants, currently at 8% of the total population of Latino immigrants (Data. 2016). Unfortunately, the government’s perspective on specific matters regarding national security directly reflects the public views and it is evident in the American media outlets today.

So many factors involved with Undocumented immigration to the United States lead to an overall demonization of the culture. Which also results in multiple myths and fallacious ideas of Latino involvement in American society. What the public needs to be aware of is the fact that

these myths are disrespectful representations of the Hispanic community. Of the three major mythologies associated with undocumented citizens, them not paying taxes is probably one of the most embellished and heated topics circling in the media today. It simply is not the truth, in fact, the Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Criminology found that “2002 Census Bureau data revealed that in that year roughly 3.8 million households headed by illegal immigrants produced \$6.4 billion in Social Security taxes” (B.G., et al. pg.37). This is an unarguable fact that the majority of Americans are too naïve to research and learn for themselves. The argument is that these immigrants don’t have social security numbers and therefore, they are unable to pay their dues. However, the truth is, these undocumented Latinos acquire fake social security numbers and as a result pay into the system while getting nothing back (B.G., et al. pg.38). They don’t get health care, they don’t get future funds from the social security administration later in life, and they don’t get federal aid whether it be financial aid, or welfare (B.G., et al. pg.38). Nonetheless, that is the price they pay for being undocumented, and as sad as it is, only government intervention and political awareness can fix the problem. “In regard to crime, media reports grossly misrepresent the criminality of undocumented immigrants. For instance, less than 6% of prisoners are foreign-born and only a small fraction of that group is in the U.S. illegally” (B.G., et al. pg.37). The public’s opinion on the matter is much different. The majority believes that this category of ‘illegal immigrants’ is dangerous and out to ransack homes and steal their possessions. For the most part, this group of people are hardworking, inviting, kind, and all around very generous people. So, for people to state the legitimacy, and moral rectitude of this culture to be illegitimate is nothing short of disrespect. The third major myth regarding these negatively portrayed individuals is the idea that they take advantage of public services such as welfare, financial aid, healthcare etc. However, when it comes to this accusation, “A 2000 Health

Affairs study found that illegal immigrants are far less likely to use any health-care service for fear of being discovered and deported” (B.G., et al. pg.37). In addition to their fear of these public services, there are laws in place to disable them from even acquiring access. The public’s perspective of Undocumented citizen’s involvement in the United States is ultimately a lack of attention and care. The media only makes matters worse with their negative portrayals of immigration. Consequently, there are millions of people who are in a state of complete hatred for these undocumented people, when they are essentially only seeking a better life.

All in all, the topic of undocumented involvement and interpretation in the United States boils down to a complete feeling of disregard in the minds of the public. Through research, one could conclude that the negative stereotypes portrayed by the media involving Chicanos and undocumented citizens are real. Bringing with them a wide spread of racist, unsupportive, dehumanizing ideologies in the general public. The research provided undoubtedly denies four very prevalent myths associated with many undocumented citizens. Hence, in due course, these misconceptions between lies and fact will be brought to light. Hopefully in the near future, government intervention and passing of productive laws will allow current and future undocumented citizens to become recognized, appreciated members of society. There is no room for American culture to be unaccepting of a group of people who do nothing but respect and better the nation as a whole. There is a call to action in affect, with so many non-supporters of Latino culture out there today, the mass majority needs to stand up and change the way they think about these minorities. With this change, there will be resolution and hopefully a complete improvement of American culture in its entirety.

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