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Latinos within Criminal Justice: Lawyers

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Author's Note

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Abstract

Latinos Within Criminal Justice: Lawyers

The United States has an increasing number of Latinos coming into the country, but Latinos seem to remain under represented in the field of Criminal Justice. According to the Hispanic National Bar Association (HNBA), the United States Latino population is 18 percent. Meanwhile, Latinos make up less than 2 percent of all lawyers in the United States. Does that mean Latinos are not becoming lawyers due to the high price of law school and/or discrimination? After researching sources such as NBC News, the ABA Journal, Equal Rights Advocates, and the Latin American Law Student Association (LALSA), Latinos have the opportunity to become a lawyer in the legal system. The problem that continues to arise for many Latinos wanting to pursue this career, is that it is lengthy process and the cost of tuition is high. It seems that this unfavorable factor of high tuition costs makes it challenging for Latinos wishing to pursue this career.

Keywords: Latino Lawyers, public defenders, LALSA, Latino discrimination

Latinos Within Criminal Justice: Lawyers

Is becoming a lawyer in the criminal justice profession something that Latinos can pursue and achieve? It is a profession that many Latinos want to pursue, but many face the difficulties that keep them from obtaining their dream. The purpose of this research is to explain that Latinos are coming into the United States at a high rate, yet there is a lack of representation by the Latino community in the Criminal Justice field as Lawyers. There is an extremely small percentage of Latinos currently in this field. The people who choose this career have the responsibility of representing their clients, taking legal actions as well as other legal procedures. That means that in order to work in this profession, Latinos need to be well educated. The economic outlook for Latino lawyers in the criminal justice field looks bleak. There will always be a need for lawyers in the future for Latinos who are interested.

As the population of the Latino community in the United States continues to increase, the number of Latino lawyers has not kept up with this pace. The Latino community in the United States make up nearly 18 percent of the nation's population. The lawyer population in the United States is at 4 percent. According to a data research from NBC News, less than 2 percent of lawyers in the United states are Latino. Erica V. Mason, who is the president of the Hispanic Bar National Association (HNBA), was very concerned with the low number of Latino lawyers. Mason stated, "It is a huge problem, and it has been a problem for a long time". She was referring to the number of the Latinos who are represented in the legal field as lawyers, attorneys, lawmakers, politicians, judges, prosecutors, and public defenders. Basically, every area is lacking the Latino representation. In California, the Latino population is nearly 40

percent. A study conducted in 2015 found that only 9 percent of the practicing prosecutors were Latino (Reyes, 2017).

Mason, president of the HNBA, thinks that Latinos have an uphill climb. Latinos already have a negative image, but that's not true. Since Latinos make up a small percentage of people working in the legal field, young Latino kids don't often see role models. With limited exposure to role models in the legal field, young children might not see this as an option for them. They do not see it as something that is obtainable. She knows that young Latinos are capable students. There are young Latino adults who are determined to pursue legal careers. Ericka V. Mason wants them to know that they have to go out and take advantage of the opportunities that are available. Nothing is going to be easy and it's not just going to fall into your hands.

Jennifer Rosato Perea, Dean at DePaul University College of Law said, "Since many of us are first-generation college graduates, there are issues of mentoring, preparation, and support." The meaning behind her saying this, is she knows about the low numbers of Latinos in the Lawyer Criminal Justice field. Perea believes that young Latino kids need to be exposed to law school as an option to get them thinking about what they want to do with their lives. DePaul University has a program called the LegalTrek Program. This program introduces students to the legal skills that are necessary to help the undergraduates prepare for what the Law schools are looking for. Law schools, through their recruitment, are trying to assemble a more diverse population of students.

Many Latinos want to have a career as a Criminal Justice Lawyer, but many obstacles stand in their way. One of the biggest obstacles is the cost. The average cost for graduate school at one of the top twenty law schools in the United States is \$136,707. That is in addition to the undergraduate cost of \$76,000. Altogether, the average cost of becoming a lawyer in the United

States is \$212,707. That takes the average to around \$45,569 per year. An income study was done in 2013. It showed that the median household income for Latinos was about \$40,963 annually. As you can see, with that income to tuition ratio, it makes it very difficult for Latinos to pay for school. If Latinos were to pay for the tuition, there would only be a little under \$5,000 to live off of for the rest of the year and that isn't enough to live off of (Rose, 2001).

Another research study was conducted on the next group of top twenty law schools. At these schools, tuition prices were a little better. The average cost at these schools were \$38,308 a year. Most programs take 3 years to complete. The overall costs for all three years would be around \$114,924. The study also mentioned that it didn't accommodate for the \$76,000 for the undergraduate degree. With that cost included, the average grand total was around \$190,924, but that all doesn't matter if the individual doesn't pass the Bar exam (Ross, 2011).

Finally, there was a third study conducted on the next top twenty law schools. After adding all tuition costs similar to the first two groups, the average total for these schools was around \$188,500. Regardless of what school a student attends, the high cost of tuition was definitely a major factor (Rose, 2001).

If students are determined to go to law school, many have to take out loans. This creates another issue. Many students graduate with large loans to pay back. The average cost of law school tuition study took a look at how long it typically takes a law school graduate to pay back their loans. On average, a student graduating from a top twenty school would take an average of 43 years to pay back their loans. Law students graduating from the second group of top twenty law schools would typically spend nearly 39 years paying off their loans and the last group of schools, 38 years. Depending on the salary or income once working, it may not take that long.

No matter, it puts quite a burden on someone who wants to become a lawyer and is dependent on loans to make it happen.

There are also some people who think that discrimination against Latinos is on the rise. Dating back to Benjamin Franklin, he was worried about the large number of Germans that came into the country. Americans tend to find a way to discriminate against people coming into America. Just like the concern Benjamin Franklin had about the Germans, some are concerned about an increase in the Latino population that's starting to come into the United States. An example of discrimination against Latinos is that when they succeed, whether it be financially or professionally, they still come across discrimination. It's so engrained into people's heads that Latinos are bad people with bad intentions. In a 2011 survey done by Pacific Lutheran University in Washington state, Latino lawyers were asked two questions. They were asked if they felt ethnicity has caused them difficulties in their profession. A startling 46% of the Latinos who took the survey said yes. They did feel discrimination. The majority of people who said no, also stated that they had heard decimating comments, but didn't really let it bother them. Latino lawyers have said, "People don't take you seriously," or "presumption of incompetence," as well "negative stereotypes: lazy, affirmative action" (Chavez, 2011).

There are many ways for a lawyer to practice law. Some lawyers choose to practice solo, or alone. Others may choose a firm, ranging in size from small to medium to large. In a solo practice, the lawyer works all by themselves. Around 22.7 percent of Latinos working as lawyers, work in a solo practice. About 16.5 percent of the Latino lawyers work in small firms, 10.3 percent in mid-sized firms and 9.3 percent in large firms. Although these are the top 4 types of practices Latinos work in, there are also other kinds of firms as well. Regardless of where they

work, Latinos still get discriminated against no matter what they do or how successful they become (Chavez, 2011).

The numbers shrink even more for Latinas working as criminal justice lawyers. Latinas make up 7 percent of population in the United States, yet only make up 1 percent of the lawyers in the United States. As you can tell, these number when compared to the Latinos are very much smaller. The Hispanic National Bar Association conducted a study about how Latinas face unique struggles in pursuing a legal career. The majority of Latinas that attempt this career path come from areas that have limited educational opportunities. Also, many do not have someone they can look up to or follow in their footsteps. In other words, they do not have someone that is by their side helping them through the journey when things get tough. The NHBA found that over the last 15 years, the percentage of minorities only rose three percent while for white people, the percentage rose nearly 20 percent. The NHBA article stated that Latinas had it harder trying to chase a career as a criminal justice lawyer. Latinas seem to be more discriminated against than Latinos because of the fact that they are women. The stereotypes of Latinas are that they aren't seen as the "working kind." Therefore, having those stereotypes, people aren't going to want to work with people they don't think are capable of doing their job. But realistically, they are more than capable of doing their job.

The Latina Lawyers Bar Association is an organization that gives Latina women, who are going to law school in California, a chance at a scholarship to help with costs. This scholarship is given to law students who show they are highly capable and outstanding students. The student who wins this scholarship can either use the money for school tuition costs for a California law school or they can use it to prepare for the California Bar exam. In order to be eligible for this scholarship, the student must have completed the five requirements needed. The five eligibility

requirements are they must be currently enrolled at a California law school or current applicant for the California state bar, demonstrated community service, demonstrated overall commitment to the Latino community, demonstrate potential to succeed, and financial need. Applicants who apply for this scholarship have to explain in 1,000 words why they deserve this scholarship and they are allowed to use information regarding their personal background, reasons for furthering their education, challenges they face outside and inside school, and obstacles they had to overcome. They are asked for their financial information and it tries to get a better understanding of their life and where they come from. The latest scholarship of this kind was for the 2017 school year, they have not yet released the application for the next upcoming 2018 school year. This scholarship has been around for 17 years and they host a scholarship dinner for the recipients of the award.

As a result of reading many different resources on Latinos looking to make a career as a Criminal Justice lawyer, it is evident that they face many different challenges. The two major obstacles are the high cost of tuition to attend law school and the continuing factor of discrimination. After looking at surveys, over half of the Latino population can't afford to get into law schools because of the high undergraduate and graduate costs. These prices are not only expensive for Latino families; they are even expensive for all students looking at attending law school. Discrimination has been around forever, but in today's time when people discriminate against Latinos, it can make them think they are less than what they are really worth, therefore making it more of a challenge to fulfill their dreams. The research question that I started with was is a lawyer in the criminal justice profession something that Latinos can pursue and become? After doing research and reading other people's articles, the conclusion that was reached is, yes. Latinos can become lawyers in the Criminal Justice profession but it's not going to necessary be

easy. As with every job and profession, you will have to try hard in order to achieve a goal.

There are hundreds and hundreds of scholarships you can apply for in order to help you out with all the financial troubles. Yes, Latinos can become lawyers.

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