

Cepeda: Hispanics' sunny spirit is a reminder of what made America great.

Esther J. Cepeda says Hispanics are staying positive even when they are targeted for abuse or discrimination.

By Esther J. Cepeda | July 30, 2017



CHICAGO - News headlines are screaming about how fearful Latinos are due to moves the Trump administration is making toward stepping up deportations. These are valid concerns for many Hispanics, a majority of whom have acquaintances or family members who could be at risk.

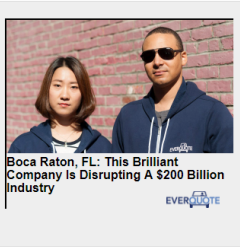


Photo: Internal
Esther J. Cepeda

Yet Hispanics always seem to look on the sunny side of life when things are tough. Countless research studies have found they feel better about the economy, their potential to be healthy and their family's long-term financial health than either whites or blacks. This even when they are targeted for abuse or strident discrimination by people with hatred for anyone who they think could be an immigrant.

And there's plenty of those incidents, that's for sure. The very latest I've found was in Lansing, Michigan, where a 47-year-old Hispanic man was allegedly beaten by two white men who stapled a note to his back. The incident is being investigated as a hate crime.

These types of crimes - and lesser abuses, as evidenced by videos of Hispanics getting yelled at to "go back to Mexico" or to "speak American" that have gone viral in the past few months - have increased since Donald Trump's election as president.

Writing in *The New Yorker*, the novelist and journalist Hector Tobar nailed the zeitgeist this way: "Today, Trumpism hangs over all things Latino. We seek to be, as W.E.B. Du Bois wrote of African-Americans, 'a co-worker in the kingdom of culture.' But whether we like it or not, the accomplishments of our valedictorians, our mayors, and our veterans are weighed against the crimes that Donald Trump and Bill O'Reilly attribute to our 'alien' fathers and sons."

And still, Latinos hold their heads high.

According to a new national survey by Pew Research Center, while most people find it stressful and frustrating to talk politics with those who differ politically, Democrats feel more negative than Republicans do about talking with people who hold opposing opinions about Trump.

Even more interesting, however, is that white Democrats and Democratic-leaning are more likely (74 percent) than black (56 percent) and Hispanic (61 percent) Democrats to say it is stressful and frustrating to talk to people with different opinions of Trump.

Among Democrats and Democratic-leaning, whites, college graduates and liberals are among the most likely (40 percent) to say knowing a friend voted for Trump would strain their friendship. Only 28 percent of black Democrats and 25 percent of Hispanic Democrats said the same.

Incredibly, the people who are most affected by the ugly, abusive rhetoric that Trump has inspired in some - and here I can only refer to Hispanics, since the Pew Research Center did not break out numbers for Muslims - are the least likely to carry around the fear and bitterness that can alienate those who don't share their politics.

How can this be?

It's pretty simple, actually.

Immigrants from Latin America have, on the whole, escaped desperately poor or violent conditions cultivated by failing or corrupt governments that provide no hope for a decent future for themselves or their children.

Here, if they get the worst, smelliest, grossest, most humiliating jobs but are able to eke out a living that includes a home with bare necessities and a decent education for their children, things are looking up.

Those who are U.S.-born have seen their parents overcome unbelievable hardships, work miserable hours and toil with little respect to provide the basics of the American dream. Mindful of their parents' sacrifices, they know their lives amount to far more than the pettiness - and even evil - that occasionally comes their way from misguided souls who think Latinos are to blame for their own unrealized potential.

Hispanics have been a thriving part of the American tapestry since the country was founded. We've served in wars, contributed to the economy and helped shape popular culture, so we're not going to let post-election anti-immigrant rhetoric, the wall or Trump's executive orders get us down.

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We're looking forward.

According to Florida Atlantic University's most recent quarterly Hispanic Consumer Sentiment Index, more than three-quarters of Hispanics (78 percent) said they expect to be financially better off over the next year compared with 60 percent in the previous quarter. When asked about the economic outlook of the country in the next five years, 51 percent said they expect good times, up 8 percentage points from the previous quarter.

Sounds like old-fashioned American optimism, and that can-do spirit that is precisely what made our country great.

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