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The New Flavors of the Century: Salsa and Guacamole

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The New Flavors of the Century: Salsa and Guacamole

By Maritza Martinez
UCF Forum columnist
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Not too long ago, being Hispanic in the United States was...*no bueno*.

To many observers before the 1990s, the perception was that Hispanics were recent arrivals in comparison to immigrants from other parts of the world, oftentimes misunderstood and ignored, relegated to less-than-desirable jobs, and treated as second-class citizens in this first-class country.

But please, do not cringe. This column is not a pity session – but rather *fiesta*!

Thanks to recent census data, election outcomes, data on Hispanics' buying power and the constant appearance of Hispanic surnames on C-level suite doors, the public and private sectors of our country have become obsessed with all things Hispanic. Companies and other organizations want to know what we eat, where we shop, how many children we have, how we like to travel, whether we prefer "paper or plastic." We have even been the focus of recently conducted "autopsies" to determine corrective steps in terms of political campaigning.

What is there not to love about all this newfound attention!

According to the 2010 census, Hispanics – defined as people of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American heritage or any other Spanish culture – make up 16 percent (50 million) of the U.S. population, representing more than half the growth in the total population of the United States between 2000 and 2010. By 2015, one in every three newborns will be Hispanic. In addition, according to a Forbes magazine article published in January, by 2015 the purchasing power of Hispanics is estimated to reach \$1.5 trillion.

You need not be a demographer to surmise the impact of this data in terms of the potential to outperform countries with an aging workforce – think Japan, Germany and Italy; a younger workforce is a competitive advantage. In terms of social mobility, Hispanics are the largest minority on college campuses, representing, on average, 16 percent of the student body population. And as we all know, the more you learn the more you earn!

Also, Hispanic entrepreneurship outpaces that of other minorities, contributing to job creation. According to Fox News Latino, in 2012, Hispanic entrepreneurship accounted for 20 percent of total new entrepreneurship ventures in the nation.

So, whether you enjoy salsa and guacamole, choose *habichuelas rojas* over black beans, a burger over an empanada, a glass of sangria over merlot, or a piñata versus a goodie bag, all the media conglomerates, the automobile industry, search engines, Fortune 500 companies, institutions for higher education, political parties and Uncle Sam want *us*. They understand that their success is tied to that of this emerging market in terms of growing market share, and realize that establishing an emotional connection between their brand and our community early on is critical to their business model's longevity.

Let's bask in all this attention, for it will not be the era of salsa and guacamole forever – or will it?

Our Hispanic community's impact on the U.S. mainstream culture exceeds the consumption of goods and services; it is an upward trend that will define the future of our country. Coming to an office near you: CEOs, VPs, directors, elected officials, entrepreneurs, community leaders, teachers, firefighters, doctors, psychologists, scientists, military members, researchers, engineers, mothers, fathers, *primos*, neighbors, Americans.

I imagine some of my fellow Hispanics are rolling their eyes right about now in light of my overall positive views on our community's outlook. I recognize that much more learning has to take place; however, I also recognize that it is a process, and this newfound interest is certainly a step in the right direction, meaning a step in the quest to engage, understand and embrace our Hispanic community.

So, in the meantime, while the newer patches of the American fabric are sewn in, stand tall and proud as an American with Hispanic roots, represent our community well

within your circles of influence, roll those *rrrrr*'s frequently and sign your "ez-ending" last name proudly.

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