

# Order the tacos, it's Hispanic Heritage Month

By: Veronica Cool | September 5, 2016



COOL TIPS

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Hispanic Heritage Month is celebrated Sept. 15 through Oct. 15 to honor and acknowledge the contributions of Hispanic Americans to the fabric of American heritage. Do not let the current headlines mislead you: Hispanics have contributed so much more than baseball, illegal immigration and crime. At the risk of having you flip to the next article or close the browser, hang with me for a bit.

From music, medicine, science, food to the government, Latinos are an integral part of the history of the United States. The contributions have been significant, especially in the military. Up to and including the Vietnam War, Hispanics had earned the Congressional Medal of Honor 43 times, far out of proportion to their numerical representation in the civilian population in the United States. And many Latinos were inaccurately tracked as Caucasian or African American; such is the case of Esteban Hotesse, a Dominican native who immigrated to the country as a child, enlisted during World War II, and served in the lauded Tuskegee Airmen brigade.

Hispanics have also influenced the systems of law as we know it today. The concept of community property in which the wife is considered a partner in wealth and holdings of the family, especially in income and property ownership, is derived, just like tacos, from Mexico and its system of law.

And there's so much more historical content, but how do you prepare? How do you avoid the empty gestures of taco night? Or potluck lunches? How do you acknowledge a significant portion of your clients and employees? How do you celebrate ME? (just checking to see if you are reading!)

Understand the Latino population in general. Here are the top seven things you must know about Latinos in the U.S.:

1. **We are not the same.** There are more than 20 countries where Spanish is spoken — that's the extent of our commonality. Cultural competence should be discussed and addressed in every organization, not solely in light of Hispanic Heritage month, but to foster an open and inclusive environment.
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3. **Acculturation is key.** The process in which an immigrant adjusts, or acculturates, to the local culture, language, customs, traditions, etc., varies. Where the individual lies in this spectrum drives how they respond to messages and outreach. If I'm still learning

how to read/write English, promoting your new widget in an English-dominant TV/radio/newspaper/website will be ineffective in winning me as a client.

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5. **Our language varies.** Do not make assumptions about our ability to speak English or Spanish. My name is Cool, yet I am fluent in Spanish. There are folks named Rodriguez, Juan, Maria, etc., who do not speak Spanish at all. Only 8 percent of Spanish speakers speak Spanish only, a worthy thing to note when determining whether your materials should be translated.
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7. **We can't be ignored.** The population is changing exponentially, with over 1 million Latinos turning 18 every year, and 1 out of every 4 kindergartens is a Latino. By 2050, Latinos will comprise approximately 30 percent of the population. Although the 2010 Census indicates the Hispanic population is approximately 10 percent in Maryland, there are neighborhoods with Hispanic concentrations upwards of 30 percent.
8. **We're not poor.** Yes, every group has pockets of poverty, but Latinos are wielding \$1.5 trillion dollars in purchasing power. The data indicates that this is a younger population, by at least eight years with larger families, so the expenditures on vacation and entertainment are higher, per family, than non-Hispanics. Additionally, the affluent Hispanic segment, those earning greater than \$100K, has grown by over 200 percent in the last decade.
9. **We're tech-savvy.** Whether through necessity or innovative desire Latinos seem to be ahead of most technological movements. Early adapters of all social media platforms, such as What'sApp, Hispanics had an average of 6.1 internet-enabled devices in their households (versus 5.3 for non-Hispanic households), and 65 percent of Hispanics purchased products/services on their mobile devices, driving the U.S. Hispanic spend via mobile devices to \$10.1 billion annually.
10. **Don't cut corners.** This is a very lucrative, yet untapped market. A tremendous new opportunity for most organization. Warning: Don't cut corners! As you strive to attract, engage and penetrate this market, whether as clients, students, voters, vendors or employees, please invest the time, energy and resources. This is not a one-night stand, but a long courtship, leading to a very fruitful marriage.

So do order the tacos, plantains, fries (Latinos eat fries too!), pupusas and the chips and salsa!

Use the food to kick-start Hispanic Heritage Month, since there's a lot to celebrate. Leverage the food to draw folks to the team meetings or huddles, have some fun and open the dialogue to encourage a more inclusive environment. Visit our [website](#) to get some additional ideas!

Finally, remember that Hispanics are still Hispanics the other 11 months of the year. Don't let this be a one-time event. Remain consistently involved, whether in the community, employee network groups, team-building activities. Be consistent, build trust, eat good food, be inclusive, increase retention, win more customers. See? All from ordering the tacos.

Till next time, amigos.

*\*This article was originally posted on The Daily Record.*

<http://thedailyrecord.com/2016/09/05/veronica-cool-column-hispanic-heritage/>