

A Point of View © 1996

Another Prescription for Success. Yes, one more!

By Paul V. Montesino, Ph.D., MBA.

Several years ago, former Speaker of the House Dr. Newt Gingrich, gave our Spanish speaking community a forceful, I dare to say a mouthful, prescription to better ourselves by leaving the ghetto language behind. He was talking about a ghetto both literally and figuratively, the former in the barrios, the latter in our minds. The incident happened in 2012, and it is hard to conceive that seven years have elapsed without much improvement in the conversation between the speakers of both languages.

I took offense at the time and wrote a point of view against his condescending and discriminating expression and attitude because I found it offensive, exclusionary and unfair. Messages to minority communities to clean up our act are not new. They are excellent means to awaken the political righteousness lying in the minds and hearts of the prejudiced who always welcome them and use it in the ballot box. At the time, Dr. Gingrich was considering a run for the highest office in the nation and I warned that we would remember his insensitivity come the elections. In the end he did not run, we did not have to exercise our electoral anger and Dr. Gingrich was never heard again about the subject.

Prejudice is practiced in many different shapes. When it comes to the African-American population, skin color is what separates them from us and unites them. For us of Spanish speaking ability, color of the skin is not what unites us, it is the language that we speak. Given particular exceptions introduced in our vocabulary by the native cultures encountered in America by the Spanish conquistadores or a different flora, we use the same dictionary and are able to talk to each other without any problem. As long as we keep silent, we are ignored. As soon as we speak, we are a target of those who take offense by a language most don't understand or care to understand.

Now, as though the issue had remained alive in the minds of some of our most illustrious personalities, we have received a new prescription for success, this time from Tom Brokaw, a well-known television anchor and journalist. Mr. Brokaw, now seventy-eight years old, claims that he has been saying for a long time that Hispanics need to work harder at assimilation, something I obviously have missed every time I watched him on television. "They ought not to

be just codified in their communities but make sure that all their kids are learning to speak English, and that they feel comfortable in the communities," he said.

"And that's going to take outreach on both sides, frankly," added Mr. Brokaw. He seems to have realized that "It Takes Two to Tango," a phrase made popular in 1952 by Al Hoffman and Dick Manning and interpreted in different versions by Pearl Bailey and Louis Armstrong. All Hispanics I know are willing to dance, tango, salsa or even cha-cha; whether the same is true of the non-Spanish speaking members of the community is beyond me.

I get the sense that Mr. Brokaw is, as they say in a famous song, "Looking in all the Wrong Places." I don't know about you, but most of the kids I know who started their lives speaking Spanish are also English language literate. They are bilingual and root for the Patriots, the Boston Red Sox, or whatever teams play in their patios. Whether they understand what Mr. Brokaw means when he says that our kids "ought not to be codified in our communities" is another matter.

If we define the word "codified" as a legal adjective, we find that it means "enacted by a legislative body." Codified in our communities probably means in Mr. Brokaw's words and worse, his mind, that those kids become members of communities by edict not by choice, by some disturbing socialist state sponsored decision, not because they mingle freely with society or society with them. In other words, an untenable anti-American position.

It is time for those who are in public positions to look at the Spanish speaking population experience for what it is, a rich source of melting pot leaders in a new United States that love their country as much as those public figures claim to do, and not as little as they fear. So next time someone sitting next to you in a bus says "Hello," don't hesitate to respond "Hola."

Dr. Gingrich did not win the presidential candidacy after his criticism, I am sure Mr. Brokaw won't win an Emmy for his either.

And that is my Point of View today.