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### Overcoming Racial Stereotypes

“You are only viewed as hard-working laborers, not a thinker, but a person built for manual labor.” These are the words spoken by my father, a Mexican who immigrated to the United States over twenty-nine years ago, about the picture many people have in mind about Mexicans.

The biggest struggle for my father immigrating to the United States was “being part of a stereotype and having to show everyone that you are more than just the Mexican stereotype.” He believes people only saw him and all the other Mexicans as “bound for manual labor” whether it’s stacking countless boxes in an agricultural packing house or picking fruits in a field on a hot steamy day. He, however, saw himself as bound for more than just manual labor as he studied hard during his time in college like myself and all other Yalies. He even went to the best university in all Latin America-- Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. After four hard years of countless all-nighters, stress, and exams, he graduated with a bachelor's degree in Biology. Shortly after graduation at a young age, he took a plane to Miami, Florida where he embarked on a new adult life filled with high hopes and dreams, especially in achieving the coveted “American Dream” everyone talks about. But instead, his degree was seen as nothing more than random letters on a single piece of white paper and had to end up stacking boxes in a packing house, even though he knew he had the intellect to contribute more to the agricultural packing house by using his brain and not just his body.

I was shocked to hear his story, especially as a student myself. I have high hopes and dreams after college and God knows I do not plan on working in manual labor stacking boxes

after all my sleepless nights studying for different classes. But for my father, a person who highly values his ideas and worked hard had no other option just because of him being a Mexican, where he was supposedly destined to do manual labor according to many in American society.

“It puts double the work on you as you need both to survive with little money and you need to work even harder than everyone else, especially white people to show that you are different and did have the intellect to think and do more.” To him, that meant working extra hours, learning the agricultural business beyond what his position required, and always preparing to do anything extra. My father then told me a story about how in the packing house he worked in, there was a board of directors and one of the board of directors named Philip detested him. He recalled overhearing a conversation where he referred to him as a “wetback” behind his back. Regardless of Philip not liking my father and vice versa, Philip was my dad’s boss and he had to follow orders for him. It was a moment of feeling powerless for him especially since he knows his boss had racist sentiments towards him. One of the things Philip would make my father do is to make his presentations for the Board of Directors meetings and my father would do it, without any credit for it. He spent countless hours creating the content of the presentations, making all those bar graphs and line graphs and all the other five million graphs used in company presentations, on top of his actual job of just stacking boxes. Philip would then use my father’s presentations for his Board of Directors meetings and Philip would get the credit despite not typing a single word or thinking of his own ideas.

Eventually, Bill, the president of the Packing House company, with whom my father is still good friends to this day after nearly three decades, found out that Philip did not create any of the presentations, but rather it was my father. Bill then requested that Philip personally invite my

father to the Board of Directors meetings and have him give the presentation, not Philip. My father recalls how red Philip's face was, being embarrassed and humiliated when he had to invite him to the Board of Directors meeting and watch my father give the presentation that he was supposed to be doing. It was a moment of triumph for him and a little more than a month later did my father became the boss over Philip.

I had never imagined my father going through experiences like those. I knew my father had gone through some struggles in coming to the United States, but never like this.

My father then laughed for a second stating "But, I do remember the shock in all Board of Directors at that meeting when I was giving the presentation." As a Mexican, he always saw that no one, at first, would turn to him to solve any problem or think that he would have the solution to any issue, whether that be a problem in the company or a problem in the real world. He was just seen as a hard worker in manual labor and nothing more. But he described when he did show people that he did have a solution to different problems, especially around the agricultural packing house and at that first Board of Directors meeting he went to, then his peers would be surprised. My father explained with a cold and straight face how "they were surprised because they just did not expect that level of thought from a Mexican." Afterward, my father would then gain the respect of his coworkers, especially those in administrative positions and they changed their opinion on him. But it was then that my father had realized that "these people do really stereotype of every single Mexican that way." They had only seen all Mexicans in the lens of the single story--a generalization of an entire race in the lens of one narrative, stereotype, or portrayal.

In my mind, I could only imagine how it would have felt like to be in my father's shoes. In my lifetime, I have had some experiences of being part of a single narrative as a Mexican,

such as deportation and ICE jokes, but for the most part, I would brush it off. After hearing my father's story, I wonder about what I could have done myself in those situations to dismantle these stereotypes about Mexicans all being "illegals." I have tried to some extent to dismantle Mexican single stories myself from my hard work to get into Yale to the amounts of energy I put into everything I do. But I only hope I can have the courage to do what my father did, especially since never have I had an experience where my livelihood, survival, and dignity was at stake as a result of a single story. Nevertheless, my father was not just part of a single story, but also a story of overcoming it as he is now the owner of his own successful agricultural packing house over twenty-nine years later. However, I had to remember that his story is just one story of overcoming the single-story, but that is not the case for everyone.

"Unfortunately, the only way to get rid of those stereotypes and generalizations about Mexicans is to prove others wrong about who you are, which will require more work." Mexicans and other minorities are always burdened with doing this extra work and they must make a larger effort to strive for success and go beyond the single-story. He then continued by asserting "and right now in the United States, it is more obvious that people have more stereotypes about Mexicans, especially with the President. It's more toxic." He feels that even though he has "found comfort" in his community and the United States, he is "being attacked every day" by people like the President who truly believe Mexicans are much worse things like rapists and drug-dealers.

When our conversation was done, I could think of nothing more to do than to thank my father for talking to me about these issues and giving him a long hug. The type of hug where it feels like time stops for a moment and nothing is happening around you. I do see my father's point though that Mexicans in the United States are in pressing times right now, especially with a

President who has fueled many people in the public to buy into these awful stereotypes of Mexicans. I too do feel attacked when the President makes these claims about Mexicans on national TV because I know it's not just him saying that, but also the twenty thousand screaming fans at every rally he does and all the people who feel liberated by every word he says. But I see people like my father and many more of my family members as people who are dismantling the single-story by working their hearts out every day to show that Mexicans can be hard-working, not just in manual labor, but in every aspect, and that we are not criminals, but rather contributors to society at large. I see my family as inspiration to me where they have shown courage, resilience, and strength in times of hardship. Their stories give me the motivation to work harder every day not just a better future for myself, but also to show everyone what Mexicans are capable of. We are more than a single-story, but rather a group of diverse and uniquely talented people.