

Stereotypes of the puerto rican culture essay sample

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“ As of 2003, there were more Puerto Ricans living in the United States than on the island of Puerto Rico- 3. 8 million on the mainland and 3. 6 million in Puerto Rico” (Rohan, 2006). There was an abundance of Puerto Ricans that migrated from their mainland to the United States. Most were poverty stricken and lacked formal education. This lead them to be unemployed or on public assistance, causing other cultures to stereotype Puerto Rican’s. “ Stereotypes are belief systems or cognitions held by one social group about another social group. Stereotypes are often held by one race, ethnicity, or society about other groups of people who are from another race, ethnicity, society, or social group”, (Schaefer 2012).

A stereotype is a term that is used to define all different people of certain beliefs, into the negative category that reflect on all racial demographics. Stereotypes go hand in hand with discrimination, prejudice, and bias. Which is why, people should be more educated in what they speak of. All people of different nationalities have been victims of being stereotyped. Society may not understand a certain type of race, so they put them into classifications. Individuals that are suppressed financially or due to lack of education tend to be stereotyped. This may cause an individual to become further suppressed or encourages them to prove otherwise.

As I interviewed four people from different nationalities, I found a common observation with regard to the level of education of a Puerto Rican. Each interviewee from Italian, Spanish, Irish, and Puerto Rican background seem to agree that the highest level of education was High School. I further inquired as to why they thought this to be a accurate or fair observation and they were not able to justify their response. As of the year 2008, Puerto
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Ricans in the United States encountered one of the most extraordinary improvements in their educational standards. In 1980, about 60% of all Puerto Ricans, 25 years of age or older, had not completed high school.

This percentage dropped drastically in 2008 to 25%. Over that same period of time the percentage of Puerto Ricans who had completed a Bachelors' of Arts or higher increased from 5.6% to 18.6%, that represents an increase of 13%. As for the United States, 38.8% of people, ages 25 through 34, possessed an Associate, Bachelors, or graduate degree. Taking into consideration that the rate of college graduates in the United States is 20.2% higher than in Puerto Rico. The stereotype is further supported by the higher US graduate percentage.

The rate of college graduates as previously mentioned, is considered another reason why Puerto Ricans do not have the highest paying jobs. The Hispanic population is increasing in the low-skilled, low-waged workforce. This is due to the large amount of immigrants with low levels of education. In the 80s, it was estimated about 14% of Hispanic male workers were high school dropouts. Throughout the following years it increased to 44%, (as seen in figure left). "The " typical" Hispanic in America looks different today than in the past. Today, the typical Hispanic is increasingly more likely to have dropped out of high school and is earning lower wages," (Borjas, 2007).

Through various interviews I ascertained answers to the many questions I was curious to know. One of the questions that I asked was, what were the most common jobs Puerto Ricans have? Their responses were the following ... "Gardeners, retail, housekeeping services, cooks and waiters". Through

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numerous research and studies, it is now clearer to me why Puerto Ricans have been stereotyped is poorly. After conducting this research, I have profound sadness in identifying with people of my culture. I have noticed that many have difficulty associating with the Hispanic culture due to the poor stereotyping by others, but despite the negative stigmatism I continue to be proud of my heritage. I would love to be an advocate to the young Hispanic people of today to recommend, encourage, and advise them of the importance of continuing their education and being highly skilled in the work force.

Although the educational and occupation standards remain low, there are other positive aspects to the culture. Food is one of the positive aspects pertaining to the culture. Puerto Rican cuisine is well known and very popular in many parts of the United States. There is a famous saying, "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach". This is so true in the Puerto Rican culture. One of the most popular dishes is white rice and kidney beans also known as arroz y habichuelas, complimented with beef stew also known as carne guisada. Another dish used during the Christmas holidays is barbecued pig, lechon asado with rice and pigeon peas, arroz con gandules (As seen on left). Interestingly enough, all of the interviewees were familiar with the popular dishes however, but remained within the mindset of the other stereotypes.

Salsa is the music and dance that is recognized and accepted world wide as connected to the Island of Puerto Rico. It is said that the term salsa translates in English as "sauce" to denote music that spices and enlivens

things. It incorporates a range of several musical genres such as instrumental, bomba, merengue, plena and Afro-American jazz. All the many peoples who inhabited the island over the years have been heavily influenced by Puerto Rican music. Puerto Rico was born with many talented artists such as Daddy Yankee, Marc Anthony and Jennifer Lopez. With these artists Puerto Rican flare, they had great success in their music and industry.

The question that brought much fascination to the interviews was, "What are your feelings of Puerto Ricans in general". The annotations from the interviewees weren't seen as negative. I found this most interesting because throughout the interviews there was nothing but bad commentary about the Puerto Rican culture. Nydia Deyne was most passionate about her commentary I believe, because she herself is Puerto Rican. She brought up a very compelling argument on how New York "Ricans" came about. "Our identity is not clearly defined and confusing to other Americans. It is wonderful to be an American but at the same time, it feels like the forgotten stepchild. Puerto Ricans on the Island are more secure in their nationality, language and political affiliations; New York "Ricans" are constantly battling an identity crisis".

As a native of Puerto Rico, Mrs. Deyne helped to educate some individuals that have stereotyped the Puerto Rican people. She is able to identify first hand on the struggles of the Puerto Rican lifestyle and has been able to overcome these problems by obtaining a better education, being productive and recognized in the workforce. Joseph Mayer response to the same question, "What are your feelings of Puerto Ricans in general", was the most

stereotypical although this reply was expected. Mr. Mayer stated, " I have mixed feelings of Puerto Ricans, depending on where they were raised shows how successful they can become". Proven by Jennifer Lopez, being raised in the poverty-stricken inner city of the Bronx does not necessarily mean that one cannot be successful.

Instead of WHERE they were raised, the emphasis should be on HOW they were raised and the path they choose. Her mother's parents were Europeans who settled in Puerto Rico. She says that it was her parents' work ethic that made a difference in her life. How about Judge Sonia Sotomayor's in the Supreme Court. Her personal journey started from a single-parent home in the Bronx projects, to then being accepted into Ivy League and then later produced an impressive legal career. She has brought a strong pride in many other Puerto Ricans who see the reflections of their own struggles but her still succeeding. Jennifer Lopez, Sonia Sotomayor, and many others who chose to lead productive lives, are one of the many examples that have proven this stereotype to be incorrect.

As a female descendant of strong Puerto Rican's, it is important that we continue to strive to advance in education and in the general work force and look beyond the stereotypes. There is nothing wrong with working in the retail or hospitality business, but it is important that we are respected for our strength of character and perseverance. Puerto Ricans were also part of the immigrants that have made some contribution to the United States. Even if we are only recognized for our music and food, it should continue to be a positive recognition. All hail to the future Supreme Court Justice, Sonia

Sotomayor, NY Council woman, Nydia Velasquez and last but not least, music superstars, Daddy Yankee, Mark Anthony, Jennifer Lopez and Ricky Martin. May we continue to conquer! As Walt Disney once said, " All our dreams can come true - if we have the courage to pursue them."

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Interviews:

Interviewee Number 1: Nydia Deyne

Nationality: Puerto Rican

1) Where do most Puerto Ricans live? Which borough?

Although Puerto Ricans are dispersed throughout the entire state of New York, the main concentration is in the borough of the Bronx.

2) What type of music do Puerto Ricans mainly listen to?

Salsa.

3) What type of food do they eat?

A typical meal consists of rice, beans and fried chicken.

4) Which holiday do they appreciate the most?

In New York, Christmas is widely celebrated however, on the mainland of Puerto Rico, it is Three Kings Day in January.

5) What is the common occupation of a Puerto Rican?

In NY, retail sales and hospitality business.

6) What education level does majority of Puerto Rican reach? In NY, high school and in PR, 4 year college.

7) What are your feelings of Puerto Ricans in general?

As a Puerto Rican born on the Island and brought up in NY, we are torn between our natural American citizenship and our Hispanic roots in the Caribbean. Our identity is not clearly defined and confusing to other Americans. It is wonderful to be an American but at the same time, feel like the forgotten stepchild. Puerto Ricans on the Island are more secure in their nationality, language and political affiliations; New York " Ricans" are in constantly battling an identity crisis.

Interviewee Number 2: Jonathan Mesoraca

Nationality: Italian

1) Where do most Puerto Ricans live? Which borough?

The Bronx

2) What type of music do Puerto Ricans mainly listen to?

Salsa music

3) What type of food do they eat?

Arroz con pollo e habiculas

4) Which holiday do they appreciate the most?

Christmas

5) What is the common occupation of a Puerto Rican?

Housekeeping

6) What education level does majority of Puerto Rican reach? High school

7) What are your feelings of Puerto Ricans in general?

Puerto Ricans are very outspoken; they have strong family ties similar to that in my Italian culture.

Interviewee Number 3: Bryan Johnson

Nationality: Irish

1) Where do most Puerto Ricans live? Which borough?

Bronx

2) What type of music do Puerto Ricans mainly listen to?

Reggeton

3) What type of food do they eat?

Mainly chicken

4) Which holiday do they appreciate the most?

Christmas

5) What is the common occupation of a Puerto Rican?

Gardener

6) What education level does majority of Puerto Rican reach? High school

7) What are your feelings of Puerto Ricans in general?

Puerto Ricans care way too much about their looks

Interviewee Number 4: Joseph Mayer

Nationality: Spanish (Spain)

1) Where do most Puerto Ricans live? Which borough?

Bronx

2) What type of music do Puerto Ricans mainly listen to?

Reggaton

3) What type of food do they eat?

Chicken and beans

4) Which holiday do they appreciate the most?

Easter

5) What is the common occupation of a Puerto Rican?

Restaurants, cooks, and waiters

6) What education level does majority of Puerto Rican reach? High school diploma

7) What are your feelings of Puerto Ricans in general?

I have mixed feelings of Puerto Ricans. Depending on where they were raised shows how successful they can become.