Perseverance and the Power of Ancestral Strength

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Hispanic Heritage Month is a monthlong opportunity for people to recognize and celebrate the cultures, contributions and history of Americans who trace their roots back to Latin countries. Their stories are ones of perseverance, especially for the entrepreneurs amongst them. According to an article in *USA Today*, "…despite the opportunity gap between Latinos and other Americans, Latinos have become the fastest-growing small business owners across the U.S." Results from a recent study from Stanford University show that the number of Latino business owners grew 34 percent, compared to 1 percent for all business owners in the United States, and these businesses contribute about $500 billion to the US economy in annual sales.

I had a call with Cesar R. Hernandez, the founder and managing director of Omni Public, to gain deeper insight into his story in observance of this month. Omni Public is a strategy, public affairs and public relations consulting firm. They specialize in civic innovation and technology deployment and help aid in the deployments of new concepts and ideas into the marketplace, while also helping to navigate media, government and industry. Some of the clients and candidates he has worked with include the likes of Tesla, Ford, Hyperloop Transportation Technologies, Bird, Scoot, Immertec, and most recently, one of America's brightest emerging political stars, Tampa Mayor Jane Castor.

Hernandez proudly states the fact that the Hispanic culture is

unique as it is an amalgam of races, ethnicities and cultures that produced its people. “To me, Hispanic Heritage Month is a time to celebrate and reflect on where we as a people have come – regardless of racial, social or political issues these past 500 years,” he says.

“The Incas had roads four-times longer than any Roman road. An engineering marvel at the time, the Aztec capital numbered one million people. The Mayans had a very sophisticated calendar and the Caribbean Taino’s engaged in the first revolts against indigenous and African slavery. Today, their ancestors are still some of the brightest engineers, mathematicians and social justice leaders in America. This month is a time to reflect on the struggles our ancestors endured in their battle to build a more perfect and safer world.”

At first glance, one might assume that Hernandez’s current success may have more or less been handed to him, but that is far from the truth. Here’s what he had to say about his climb to the top as a Hispanic American man that had countless obstacles thrown his way, and a rich culture to fall back on as his strength and motivation to overcome it all.

The struggle of the lion’s den teaches appreciation

One does not need to be an entrepreneur to know that what doesn’t kill them makes them stronger. Those amongst us who have a rich family history that is full of battle scars can similarly gain inspiration from it.

In the case of Hernandez, his parents are from Guatemala of the indigenous Mayan K’iche’ tribe. His great-great-grandfather fought for indigenous people’s rights in rural parts of the country, and his great-grandfather was orphaned and given up as a slave in Guatemala City. His grandmother was a political refugee after her democratically elected party was

ousted in Guatemala City so she decided to leave the party and come to the United States. “I like to think she went from the jungles of Guatemala to the Brooklyn jungle when she brought my mom over to NYC when she was only 17,” says Hernandez. “I was born and raised in South Brooklyn, New York in a one-bedroom apartment living with my grandmother, mother and little sister. I have seen gangs, crimes, suffering and life’s reality. I have lost friends to murder or prison and at one point faced homelessness, sleeping in a NYC train station and having nothing, but hope to survive.”

Today, through his public affairs firm Omni Public, Hernandez represents some of the top tech companies in the world and some of the finest political minds in the United States. He knows not to take anything for granted. “For the first time in many generations, I am in a position to think about more than just survival. I am now in a position to thrive and positively impact society.”

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Plowing through the opposition will leave them in the dust

In the United States, Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) are more likely to be arrested and/or land in prison than any other demographic group. Although the Hispanic and Black population make up about 32 percent of the total population in the U.S, 56 percent of the U.S incarcerated population is Black or Hispanic.

“As a Hispanic male growing up in the United States, I faced a one-in-six chance of being arrested or going to prison. So, it comes to no surprise that by the age of 21 I had been arrested six times on wrongful charges and encountered police brutality firsthand,” says Hernandez. “I am persistent in my mission to

prove that a BIPOC entrepreneur from Brooklyn N.Y can survive, make it out alive, and thrive. I am persistent because I am a catalyst for change and serve as an example to young BIPOC entrepreneurs that our future is not defined by statistics or our current environment, but instead by our ambitions."

The source of Hernandez's motivation is the deeply ingrained knowledge of the struggles that his family endured in the face of persecution and mass generational migration. "I refused to be a product of my environment, and instead became a product of my motivation," he says. That is also a large reason why Hernandez is one to face all challenges head-on.

"I have been faced with an immense amount of adversity in my life and strongly feel you should live in your truth," he says. "If the truth in that moment is struggle, then I face it head-on. I don't let it linger, ignore it or table it. Typically, challenges have a tendency to balloon or bleed into other aspects of your life if they go unchecked. So, I prioritize the challenge, go into suspended thought as to how I can assuage the issue, create a strategy, and execute. If my original game plan didn't work and things go south, I redirect my focus and come up with a new game plan. With that in mind, regardless of the challenge, I immerse myself in the process and shield the most vital aspects in my life so as not to affect them."

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Goals are met when life is lived forward

Hernandez graciously accepts all the hardships of his past and knows to take all his experiences as a lesson in life in order to push forward and live forward. As he looks into the future, he wants to continue to build Omni Public and create more impact for others to make their futures brighter. "I aim to be

a part of building the future of cities and communities through the work of my clients," he says. "I strongly feel that there is no shortage of good ideas, but a shortage of individuals that can support those entrepreneurs to bring their ideas to fruition. And who knows… maybe one day I will run for office."

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