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Clueless Mainstream Media Misses the Real Immigration Reform Story

The other day, as I tuned into MSNBC's *Morning Joe*, I was treated to a somewhat comical discussion of the federal government's lawsuit against Arizona and its now famous anti-Latino law.

There on my TV was the august panel discussing the supposed implications of the law for the border states, the Obama Administration's risk in suing Arizona and the potential impact to the mid-term elections. I also had the treat of hearing Pat Buchanan hoping that the federal suit would fail - so it would deal a blow to Obama's political fortunes and the "illegals."

I say it was a comical scene because of what was not seen or heard: the Latino perspective. I am all for "non-Hispanic whites" debating this controversy - but shouldn't there be someone at the table who can actually represent the Hispanic point of view on this huge issue that is roiling the country?

The mainstream media is almost completely Latino-free. As one senior television executive once told me: "There just aren't any Hispanics that can occupy the big chairs of TV journalism." Talk about a self-actualizing reality.

Aside from a few token Hispanic journalists sprinkled through the broadcast and cable networks like pepper on mashed potatoes, the country's largest minority group is basically invisible and silent on English-language television.

Who is making coherent, non-emotional arguments about the role of the 50 million Latinos in this country? Short answer, no one.

Politicians like Illinois Congressman Luis Gutierrez, who has built his career on telling

Latinos that we're victims, helpless and unheard, are trotted out every once in a while to make histrionic pronouncements that supposedly communicate the "pain" felt by Latinos because of the virtual collapse of the current immigration regime in America.

Gutierrez plays to all the worst Latino stereotypes. Emotional arguments about suffering pretend to stand for cogent analysis of the real role of Latinos in the present and future economic vitality of America. Moreover, the sly hints that vestiges of Jim Crow racism are driving opposition to comprehensive immigration reform close the door on any meaningful, fact-based debate.

And then there are the Spanish-language media journalists who sometimes sound like they are still living in Latin America and are reporting on the craven oligarchies of their native countries that devour resources and distribute poverty (all leading to increased migration flows to the north).

As if to make up for the glaring deficit of Latinos on serious political TV shows, every once in a while a Spanish-language journalist is paraded on mainstream television as a supposed expert of the politics of immigration reform. On a recent Sunday morning political talk show, one of Spanish-language media's most prominent anchors whined that he could not understand how "the world's most powerful country was repressing 11 million people." The other journalist on the panel just ignored his remark - of course, his comment was nonsensical and represented his own, profound lack of understanding of the American political discourse on this issue.

But this kind of argument for comprehensive immigration reform, if it can even be called an *argument*, totally misses the point. The case for a new immigration system has nothing to do with "justice."

It actually has everything to do with cold economics and projection of national power.

Do we want to continue America's global dominance or fade away from the world stage like a 21st century version of France or the United Kingdom?

None other than the right-leaning, libertarian Cato Institute has concluded, in the report "Restriction or Legalization? Measuring the Economic Benefits of Immigration Reform," that permanent legal status for the nation's undocumented immigrants will add to the GNP, help raise wages for native born Americans at the bottom of the economic pyramid and generally contribute to rising incomes across the whole of American society.

A declassified CIA report that projected the relative future populations of then United States and our key allies and rivals, shows that immigration flows into America will directly contribute to sustaining the United States' leadership vis-à-vis our global competitors throughout this century.

But of course you won't hear those arguments on national television. Instead we're fed a steady diet of comical half arguments, like my experience watching *Morning Joe*, and the emotional pronouncements of self-interested Latino politicians peddling victimhood and pity, and my colleagues in Spanish-language media sadly showing their ignorance of American politics.

Until the executives running the nation's premier news outlets cultivate modern, informed and articulate Latinos to sit in some of those big-time TV chairs we will never have a real debate about the strategic implications of getting immigration reform right.

Instead, we will continue to hear the extremes of the Nativist anti-Latino rants and the schmaltzy, tin-eared lamentations of the few Hispanics who are paraded as the voice of a giant community.

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