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Hispanic Heritage Month 2021 Attorney Spotlight: R. Zachary Torres-Fowler

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Editor's Note: Hispanic Heritage Month, September 15 through October 15, recognizes the contributions of Hispanic and Latino Americans. September 15 is significant because it is the anniversary of independence for several Latin American countries. Throughout the month, we will be speaking with a few of our Hispanic and Latino attorneys and sharing their stories.

[Zach Torres-Fowler](#), a Philadelphia and New York-based associate in the firm's Construction Practice Group, discusses what he would like people to understand about Hispanic/Latino culture and more.

What is important to you about your Hispanic/Latino heritage?

Very few realize that I grew up with an Ecuadorian father and Cuban stepmother and have been surrounded by Latin American culture for most of my life. As a result, I view my heritage as a much more personal facet of my life. It is a connection to not only a culture and language, but also a family in Ecuador (that I see far too infrequently) and a legacy for my children.

What challenges did you face growing up as a Latino?

By no means can I claim that I faced a particular challenge as a result of my heritage. However, I suppose the biggest challenge has been the act of straddling both Latino and American cultures. My father is Ecuadorian, and my mother is from eastern North Carolina — where I spent most of my childhood and young adult life. While this background has afforded me a connection to both Latin American and U.S. culture, it has also been something of a barrier to completely assimilate within either group.

Who do you look up to in the Hispanic/Latino community?

My father. He emigrated to the United States in his twenties with relatively little support and spoke very little English. The cultural and language barriers notwithstanding, my father was able to graduate from college and dental school and made a life for himself in the United States, far away from his family in Ecuador.

What would you like people to understand about your culture?

Speaking from my own personal experience, few appreciate just how many individuals grow up in households with parents from Latin America and the United States. While the children of Latino and American parents assimilate into U.S. culture, they still have a connection to Latin America and an upbringing that is culturally distinct.

How can we support the next generation of Latino attorneys currently in law school?

The definition of what it means to be “Latino” is subjective but inclusive. As a firm and individuals, we need to encourage law students to be proud of their heritage and to take advantage of the unique insights and qualities their backgrounds afford them. Doing so not only helps law students to advance their careers, but also enriches the lives of their friends and colleagues.