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ASK A MEXICAN!

BY GUSTAVO ARELLANO



Dear Mexican: Where I recently started working at, Latinos make up about 95 percent of the work force. We are, however, prohibited from speaking Spanish. Our supervisor tells us that if we can so much as speak one word of English, we cannot speak in Spanish. We are constantly being threatened about it. My manager constantly makes racial remarks about all cultures and always says that we live in America, and we should only speak English. Is this illegal? Is it against the law for employers to prohibit employees from speaking Spanish? If so, then what can be done about it? – Spanish Speaking and Proud

Dear Wabette: The racial remarks are illegal; the ban on Spanish isn't — with a caveat. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has consistently filed lawsuits over the past 15 years against companies that require workers to speak only English on the basis that such a policy violates Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination based on race and national origin. The strategy hasn't always worked — in 1994, the Supreme Court declined to hear *Garcia et al. v. Spun Steak Co.* a case in which the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled a company *could* ban employees from speaking their native tongues at work. What you can do is contact the EEOC and file a complaint, but why bother with that? Let your employer keep such ridiculous rules — I betcha they don't allow Casual Fridays, either, huh? Have a Spanish speak-in with your fellow wabby workers. Since you say that the vast majority of your co-drones are Mexicans, they'll probably join in solidarity. And since your employer hires so many of your kind, I'll make the easy assumption that you're either living in Aztlán or homeboy likes to pay cheaply and probably illegally. Either way, he's *chingado*.

Other than the infamous Tijuana bibles and now Memín Pinguín, I don't know much about comics from south of the border. How about a short history of comics in Mexico? Do our neighbors share our love of superheroes in spandex? – The Amazing Gabacho

Dear Gabacho: Before I delve into a short history of Mexican comics, let's get your references straight. Memín Pinguín is a comic book series about a noble *negrito* who unfortunately looks like a gorilla; Tijuana bibles — cheap pre-television-era porno comics skewering celebrities — had nothing to do with Mexico except act as an easy repository for perverted American fantasies. "How perfect, expected, and fortuitous (not to mention profitable) that 'Tijuana Bible' evolved as the go-to moniker for pornographic mod-texts," says Dr. William Nericcio, the *muy-loco*, *muy-smart* head of the English department at San Diego State University who blogs at textmex.blogspot.com "Not that you need catchy names to move porn, but anything sexual with the name 'Tijuana' attached to it assured that the consumer would be confronted with some beastly, swarthy, over-the-top sexual witnessing that would leave them ready to empty their gonadic 'profits' onto sheets, tissues, sheep, or worse!"

As to your *pregunta*: Mexican *historietas* started with the Aztecs and Mayans, both of whom used pictographic writing systems for their codices. You can see this legacy in the popularity of epic, largely wordless murals in both Mexico and American barrios, and in the continued popularity of comics. For an examination of sexy-violent comic books, I recommend *Not Just for Children: The Mexican Comic Book in the Late 1960s and 1970s* by authors Harold E. Hinds and Charles M. Tatum; for a more wholesome figure, try Kalimán, a turbaned man with the nonfantastical powers of Batman and a wholesome wussiness to rival Little Nemo who has been popular since the 1960s. But the ultimate tights-wearing paladins in Mexico, of course, are *lucha libre* fighters and immigrants — Google "Dulce Pinzon superheroes" for the latter if you don't believe me.

Get all your Mexican fun at myspace.com/ocwab, youtube.com/askamexicano, or send your questions to [themexican@askamexicano.net!](mailto:themexican@askamexicano.net)

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