

Exhibit with POW! Photographer captures immigrants - as superheroes

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Body

POORLY PAID Mexican immigrant workers who battle valiantly to feed and clothe and shelter their families in New York City - while also sending cash to loved ones south of the border - are the great unsung "superheroes" of America.

That's the message of a captivating new photo exhibit at Columbia University that pays homage to the strong-willed women and tough-as-steel men who overcome long odds, bad bosses and lousy labor conditions to survive and prosper.

Titled "Superheroes: Latino Immigrants Who Make New York," the show, which opened Thursday at Columbia's Center for the Study of Ethnicity & Race, features ordinary people in their workplaces - clad in the costumes of extraordinary superheroes.

The photos of 38-year-old, Mexico City-born U.S. immigrant Dulce Pinzón portray a laundromat worker dressed as Wonder Woman, a window washer as Spiderman, a cabbie as Batman, a waiter as Mr. Elastic, a deliveryman as Superman, a nanny as Catwoman.

"This is a time of increased demonization and stereotyping of Latino immigrants who are typically excluded from all kinds of heroic narratives," said Frances Negrón-Muntaner, director of the Columbia center and curator of its gallery.

"These works should redefine our idea of what a superhero really is - and show the enormous sacrifices and enormous contributions these workers make to the wellbeing of New York City and America and their home communities."

A fast-growing presence in upper Manhattan over the past decade, Mexican-Americans by the tens of thousands have been flocking to East Harlem, a traditionally Puerto Rican area, and Washington Heights, which is historically Dominican.

It's tough enough for the new arrivals to eke out a decent living for their families in high-rent New York, but here are a few of the worker/superheroes do so much more:

l Bernabe Méndez, a window washer who poses as Spiderman, sends \$500 a month home to his family in the Mexican state of Guerrero.

l Federico Martínez, a cabbie who dons a Batman cape, provides \$250 a week to loved ones in Puebla.

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¶ Maria Luisa Romero, a laundermat worker also known as Wonder Woman, wires \$150 home every week, also to Puebla.

They may lack the supernatural **powers** enjoyed by their comic book counterparts, but they're **superheroes** all the same.

And to see them in action - or at least their photos - go to the fourth-floor gallery at Columbia's Hamilton Hall, 1130 Amsterdam Ave., near the 116th St. Gate. The **exhibit** is free and open to the public, Monday to Friday, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., until May 15, 2013.

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Graphic

Maria Luisa Romero, a laundermat worker, poses as Wonder Woman (l.), Sergio Garcia, who works as a waiter, poses as Mr. Elastic (r.), Alvaro Cruz works as a cook and dresses up as Flash (bottom l.) and Noe Reyes, a deliveryman, does his rounds as Superman (bottom r.). Photos by Dulce Pinzón

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