

# LATINO DESTINO: CREATING A MULTICULTURAL AMERICA

*Juana Bordas*

**W**e are living in a fluid period in history. A colorful, multicultural bazaar where many cultures intersect is replacing the Eurocentric dominance that has shaped the past five centuries of United States history. The emergence of a multicultural nation containing the jewels of many traditions will be a defining characteristic of the next 25 years. The Latino community in the United States will be at the forefront of this change.

By the middle of this century, the face of American leadership will be more multicultural, youthful, and international. The Latino population will triple in size and account for most of the nation's growth through 2060, when they will be *one in three* of the population. Whites will no longer be a majority.

This article looks at the influence Latinos will have in guiding the transformation to a multicultural and equitable society. I refer to this as *Latino Destino*—the unique contribution Latinos will make in creating our inclusive future. By history, heritage, and culture, Latinos are already a mixed people and can serve as the prototype for the multicultural age.

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## Latinos Are a Fusion People

Latinos are hybrids—a fusion between the indigenous people of the Western hemisphere and European colonizers—mainly the Spanish, but many have other ancestry such as German or French. Today, according to a study by the Pew Latino Research Center, 25 percent identify as Indigenous, as shown in Figure 1.

The mixing of African slaves in such countries as Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, the Caribbean coast, and the subsequent migration of these populations has resulted in 24 percent of U.S. Latinos reporting African ancestry. This is augmented by Afro-Latinos in the United States who have mixed heritage.

There is also the fact that 42 percent of Latinos say their racial background includes white due to their European ancestry. I might add successful U.S. Latinos have had to learn the white cultural system. Latinos call this *crossing over* or the ability to be adept in another culture. This article offers a way for non-Latinos to *cross over*—by becoming Latino by affinity or *corazón* (heart).

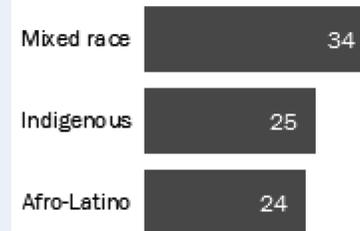
Latinos represent the four human races, many cultures, and nations. In fact, *34 percent identify as multicultural*. Because of their inherent diversity, Latinos can be the nucleus for people to come together, forge a multicultural identity, and honor many traditions, races, and cultures.

## Bienvenido: Latinos Are a Culture Not a Race

Since the Latino family tree has so many branches, one might ask, “what holds this conglomerate of people together?” Latinos are an ethnic group much like the Jewish community and are a culture, not a

### Large Minorities of Hispanics Self-Identify as Mixed Race, Indigenous or Afro-Latino

*% of Hispanic adults who say they consider themselves ...*



Note: Hispanic is based on self-identification of Hispanic origin.

Source: Pew Research Center 2014 National Survey of Latinos, Sep. 11-Oct. 9, 2014 (N=1,520 Hispanic adults)

PEW RESEARCH CENTER NSL Q54,56,58

FIGURE 1.

race. They are united by a history of colonization and discrimination; the Spanish language; a shared spiritual tradition; and a dynamic set of core values.

Unlike racial identity, *culture is learned*, offering people the opportunity to become part of the culture. Furthermore, as a fusion people who embrace differences, Latinos have a *bienvenido* or welcoming spirit. My family, for instance, is a sundry variety of Latinos. My German brother-in-law, Karl, my friend, Donna, or my niece’s husband, Howard, can attest that if you are around Latinos long enough, you will become *Latino by affinity or by Corazón*.

This is amplified by the ever-expanding elastic *familia* that includes honorary aunts and uncles, *madrinos* and *madrinas* (Godparents), *compadres* and *comadres* (close amigos), and the loosely defined cousins or *primos*. Most Latino have “relatives” connected through kinship and affinity, not blood. People become Latino by *Corazón* through affinity, by adopting cultural mores, and incorporating Latino values.

Becoming a Latino by Corazón is also possible because Latinos self-identify. American Indians, for instance, must validate blood lineage to enroll in a tribe. Latinos, on the other hand, were only designated a group in the 1980 U.S. census and have multiple identities and nationalities. Today, the U.S. Census Bureau's code list contains over 30 Hispanic or Latino subgroups.

Inclusiveness is integral to the Latino DNA, so you might surmise Latinos are an open enrollment culture where people are invited to partake in the benefits and assets. Let's delve into the concept of Latino Destino to understand why people might find this such an intriguing invitation.

## Latino Destino

Latino Destino will encompass a cultural revolution where values of inclusiveness, generosity, honesty, respect, service, and a collective WE orientation offer a new social construct that can advance our multicultural transformation.

Sheer demographic numbers, historical antecedents where more than a third of continental United States was Mexico, immigration, and international connections, point to a new phenomenon—Latinos can influence and change mainstream society. I refer to this as Latino Destino. Let's review four factors that will make Latino Destino a reality.

### 1. Latino Destino will cultivate a humanistic society that takes care of its people

The Latino culture has a humanistic orientation where people are valued over material gain or money. People come first is a cultural motto. Today's economic inequality; the growing gap between the rich and the poor; half of Americans working in low paying jobs indicate that profit is valued over people. Contrast this with a study done by Nationwide Insurance, which indicates that Latino-owned businesses are 23 percent more likely to offer benefits to their employees than non-Latino companies.

The Latino golden rule: *Mi Casa es su Casa*—my house is your house—frames a culture where generosity and

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## *Inclusiveness is integral to the Latino DNA.*

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sharing are central. Accumulating great wealth is not the measurement of success, particularly when this is often at the expense of others. Today, Latino families have less than one-sixth the wealth of Anglos, and other people of color fare likewise. This is the result of racism, white privilege, and marginalization. Latino leaders work to ameliorate these discrepancies and promote equity for their people. Since equity is an embedded value, Latino Destino will level the economic playing field by replacing excessive accumulation with more generosity.

*Leadership Lesson:* The Anglo saying, “how much are you worth?” might conjure up assets and wealth. Latinos, on the other hand, determine people's worth on how they treat others. Are they honest, respectful, fair, and generous? Do they keep their word? This determines leadership credibility. Leaders demonstrate their worth by being generous, sharing their time and resources, helping those in need, and empowering others.

### 2. Latino Destino will celebrate an inclusive multicultural society

The United States was founded on *exclusion* where slavery, discrimination, racism, and colonization created an inequitable and segregated society. White immigrants were encouraged to assimilate—forget their heritage, cut ancestral roots, become homogenized and part of the melting pot.

Latino Destino, on the other hand, is founded on *inclusion* and intrinsic diversity where identity is intersectional and multifaceted. The vibrancy, variety, and vigor of the Latino culture exemplifies the beauty and power of *inclusion* and synthesis. Fortunately, becoming multicultural is an *add on process*—that

grows people's choices and capacities. Thus, they can acculturate, benefit from new and blended cultural patterns, and be more adaptable.

*Leadership Lesson:* Inclusive leadership integrates the values and preferences of many cultures in a respectful and productive manner. This vision of leadership will create a society that welcomes differences and brings forth the best of different cultures, races, and ethnic groups.

Realizing Latino Destino will require mobilizing a critical mass of people dedicated to creating a more equitable and humanistic society. Latino leaders are engaged in this type of social change and offer a tried-and-true form of leadership that focuses on people's well-being, promotes participation, and encourages cultural synthesis.

### 3. Latino Destino will bring together our global community

Latinos have an international identity and are connected to 26 countries. They are the unifying force of the Western hemisphere integrating North, South, and Central America and represent an economic engine—in 2019 U.S. Trade with Central and South America surpassed trade with the European Union and Japan combined. Mexico is the United States' largest trade partner. While many people in the United States refer to themselves as Americans, Latinos understand that this designation spans the entire hemisphere and can be a harbinger for expanded inclusion and unity.

Additionally, 40 percent of population growth for U.S. Latinos in the last century was through immigration. Unlike other immigrants who assimilated, Latinos are acculturating and continue identifying with their countries of origin and heritage. This has the effect of uniting people across cultures and countries. Latinos' international influence includes Europe, two countries in Africa where Spanish is spoken, the Philippines, and the United States, which has more people of Hispanic descent except for Mexico and Brazil.

*Leadership Lesson:* Leaders in the next 25 years will work in a global context and must be culturally adept and adaptable. The 2020 pandemic, the daunting climate

changes, and economic globalization require leaders to understand our interconnectedness. By participating in and respecting cultures across the globe, leaders can learn and benefit from many traditions. Additionally, the younger generations, which we will discuss below, are international and are forging a global culture.

Latinos are an international force that can weave together our global community. One important avenue is language: the United States is the fastest growing Spanish-speaking country. Spanish is the second most spoken language globally, and the one spoken in the most countries. (Mandarin, the most utilized language, is only spoken in China.) Being bilingual is a great asset in our multicultural world.

### 4. Latino Destino will prepare a new generation of leaders

Millennials and Generation Z are the most diverse generations. Millennials are 20 percent Hispanic; Generation Z weigh in at 25 percent Hispanic. Moreover, Zs are the first generation where a majority are non-white, heralding that this is the multicultural era.

Furthermore, young Latinos are identifying with their culture at a higher rate than their parents. This makes sense since Latino identity only emerged after the 1980 census. Since in 2020 six out of ten Latinos are under 18, grooming the next generation is a leadership imperative!

The younger generations are global in scope and report they have more in common with young people their age in other countries than with older people in their own. Young Latinos have an advantage because they are connected to the many countries that birthed the Latino phenomena. An indication of their influence is the emergence of the term Latinx, which reflects younger generations' desire for a gender neutral and nonbinary way to describe themselves.

*Leadership Lesson:* The Latino culture is intergenerational, valuing the wisdom of elders and the promise of youth. Most Latino organizations have programs that train younger people. Leaders understand that the younger generation must continue the work for equity and inclusion if Latinos are to continue advancing.

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*Latinos determine people's worth on how they treat others.*

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The coming youth revolution where the Millennial generation is larger than Baby Boomers, and Generation Z is even more populous, requires leaders to engage in intergenerational practices such as serving as allies; cultivating circular not hierarchical relationships; promoting meaningful participation; and passing on their knowledge and experience. Young Latinos need advocacy tools that foster social change and promote an equitable future.

## Conclusion

Great demographic and cultural shifts are occurring—by the middle of this century the United States will be a multicultural nation. Latinos will be one in three people. Latino Destino offers a prototype for this transformation creating a society that is humanistic, equitable, and represents our great diversity.

While Latinos can serve as a prototype for the multicultural transformation that is taking place, becoming an inclusive leader will require addressing white privilege and how certain groups have benefited from inequality and racism. Dismantling structural racism and taking responsibility for the past is necessary to truly become an inclusive society where all people are valued, respected, and celebrated for their unique differences. This is the concerted and collective work we must engage in for the next 25 years.

Building an inclusive nation also requires an understanding that the next step in human evolution

is the emergence of a multicultural people. Since Latinos are a culture and not a race, and a key value is *bienvenido* or a welcoming spirit, people can become Latino by affinity or *Corazón*. The ability to synthesize cultures, nations, races, and ethnic groups is a defining characteristic of the Latino soul—and is precisely the attribute needed to craft our inclusive future. Latino Destino holds the promise of building this future and creating a multicultural America!

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*Juana Bordas authored two award-winning books: The Power of Latino Leadership and Salsa, Soul, and Spirit: Leadership for a Multicultural Age. She served as advisor to Harvard's Hispanic Journal on Public Policy and the Kellogg National Fellows. Juana was a trustee of the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership and the International Leadership Association. She was the first Latina faculty at the Center for Creative Leadership. A Colorado Women's Hall of Fame inductee, she was also the first Latina to receive the Lifetime Achievement Award from The International Leadership Association. Juana is currently president of Mestiza Leadership International. Her new book, Latino Destino, will be published in 2022.*