

Diversity Thoughts: Beginning of Latino Diversity exploration

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Yesterday, a Salvadorean patient expressed suffering to me in regards to her treatment by staff of Mexican ancestry at an Immigration attorney's office. This reminded me of the tremendous diversity within the Latino world.

Consider the following just a micro-intro of this vast arena, and a conversation starter--and please email insights or experiences to the group or to me to further the conversation.

A. Who is Latino?

- Europeans of Spanish descent consider themselves Hispanic, though not Latin American. Not sure about US born descendants of Spaniards--technically, yes but some may feel mostly Euro-American.
- Latino refers (as far as I know) to persons of Latin American descent. Whether Brazilians are included, depends on the US agency that determines ethnicity [Portuguese, which is the main language spoken there, is a Latin language]. I have not heard the term used for persons from French Guyana, French speaking Antilles like Guadeloupe and Martinique (I have heard them call refer to themselves as French, though, which is their nationality). Dutch speaking South Americans or people from the Dutch Antilles like Curacao should likely not be considered Latin American. First or other recent generation immigrants from other parts of the world to Latino countries, such as Italian or German immigrants to Argentina or Brazil, are considered Latino. A blonde and blue eyed friend whose first generation Argentinian father immigrated to the US counts her Hispanic identity among her several identities.
- Haitians speak French and Creole and are usually considered to have an identity of their own, unlike Dominicans, who share the Island of Hispaniola, speak Spanish, and are Latino/Hispanic.
- Oddly, Indigenous people from Central or South American countries who are 100% of native descent and may speak no Spanish are still considered Hispanic by us here in the US. I was doing an assessment for a Mam speaking asylum applicant a few weeks ago, and he needed a Mam to Spanish interpreter to communicate with me.

B. Latino Diversity in the United States is great

- Puertorican Latinos are US Citizens even when born and residing in Puerto Rico; however, they lack certain political privileges that the residents of US States enjoy, though they achieve these rights if they become residents in a US state.
- A large percentage of Cuban Americans came in response to Cuba becoming a communist country as they did not want to live under a communist regime [and some wealthier Cubans also feared the Communist confiscation of private wealth]. The United States granted special status until recently to persons leaving Cuba. Cuban Americans tend to be politically conservative in greater numbers than other Hispanic residents and citizens of the US.
- Remember that much of the US South West and California used to be part of Mexico. Some (though now a minority) of Latino residents' families of these states have been on present day US territory for longer than Euro-Americans who arrived in the late 1800s and after. From Wikipedia: "Spain colonized large areas of what is today the [American Southwest](#) and [West Coast](#), as well as Florida. Its holdings included present-day California, New Mexico, Nevada, Arizona and Texas, all of which were part of the Republic of [Mexico](#) from its independence in 1821 until the end of the [Mexican-American War](#) in 1848."
- 30 years ago, when my husband and I lived in California, there were a lot of Chicano studies departments starting at colleges. Chicano is a self-identified (pride) term made out of an older derogatory term and refers to Mexican-Americans. Chicano identity honors the large Mestizo

component of Mexican heritage. It is estimated that 60% of Mexicans have mixed Spanish-Indigenous heritage, 30% Indigenous, and 10% European and other (small percentage of African for example). I am not sure if the Chicano movement is still as influential now.

- Alas, I have heard racist remarks said by Latino clients or reportedly directed at them which consider indigenous heritage as lower class than mestizo or European heritage. It is even an insult to be called "Indigena" (Indigenous) even between mestizos, or even members of the same family.
- I don't know the degree to which there is prejudice between peoples from different Latin American countries but I have heard that some Mexicans or immigrants from Mexico (and their descendants) perceive their own status as higher than that of Guatemalans or persons from Central America (like Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua).
- Panama and Costa Rica seem economically and gang-wise not as badly off as El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. I do not know about Nicaragua. (Do any of you?)
- Belize is also a special case. I had the fortune of visiting the coastal area around Belize City which is English speaking (!) and Afro-American; however, the back-country and highlands are more Indigenous, Spanish-influenced, and Mayan language and/or Spanish speaking.

So Latino and Hispanic are terms that are an umbrella over tremendous diversity. Make no assumptions. Ask more questions.