



Día de la Mujer Latina, Inc.

Venus Ginés, Founder/CEO

PH/Fax: 770-717-0034 Toll-Free 1-866-54Mujer

Email: [venusgines@bellsouth.net](mailto:venusgines@bellsouth.net) [www.dielamujerlatina.org](http://www.dielamujerlatina.org)

### Latino - Hispanic

It is difficult to make assumptions about Latinos since they represent a mix of racial and ethnic lines from 22 different countries of origin. This specific population has unique demographic characteristics and degrees of acculturation in addition to differences in history and cultural background. The terms **Hispanic** or **Latino**, used by many to classify the culture continues to be a source of contention because the former implies a connection to ancient Spain and its language while the latter represents a nationality, that of Latin America. The category term of **Hispanic** was first used in the 1980 Census and caused uproar among Latinos in the Southwest, Chicago and New York but accepted in Texas, and Florida. Originally the term **Latino** was considered but it sounded too closely to **Ladino**, the ancient language of the Spanish Jews who exiled in the 15th century. Several terms were used throughout the decades, such as Spanish speaking, Latin American, Hispanic, but today, with the influx of Latino superstars and superheroes; the most popular term is **Latino**, because it reflects the growing population who have migrated from Latin America.

There are various reasons Latinos prefer this term over Hispanic but if given a choice, many would still choose their country of origin, such as Puerto Rican, Mexican, Chicano, *NewYorican*, Colombian, Brazilian etc. One thing is for certain, Latinos come in different colors and don't all speak Spanish. There is no such thing as a Black Puerto Rican or a White Puerto Rican, just Puerto Rican. Furthermore, Brazilians are **Brazileños** and they speak Portuguese and can be considered Latinos but not Hispanics. Interesting enough, Filipinos were colonized by Spain and speak Spanish, yet they are categorized as Asian Americans in the Census. Linguistically, the term Latino has gender, following the Spanish rules while the term Hispanic follows the English rules. It is said that those who prefer the term **Hispanic** are usually middle class, and educated in the United States. To be politically correct, it is best to use both terms, i.e. Latino/Hispanic. Including the term **Latino** is a way of honoring the culture and contributions of our native people in Latin America. Likewise, the true Hispanics, those who have resided in New Mexico, Texas and Florida for generations (since the Spanish settlers) should also be included because they also experience specific barriers. In **Georgia**, the majority of our new residents are Latinos, who immigrated from Latin America and experience specific challenges with acculturation. However, as of January 2003, all federal programs must use both terms, according to OMB.

### Political Binds – A Historical Perspective

#### Identifiers

From 1820 to 1860, the three racial categories were White, Negro and Other. Due to the influx of immigrants into the country during the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, many health and government agencies began collecting data according to the place of birth. In California, for example, death statistics were classified as “White” and “Mexican” in 1916. Nationality became a racial classification during the 1930s Census when the term “Mexican” was added to denote persons born in Mexico or had parents born in Mexico, along with the other categories such as, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Negro and White. Ten years later, Mexicans were to be listed as White and the three major categories for the 1950 Census were White, Black or Other. 1960 Census takers were instructed to record people from Puerto Rico, Mexico or other persons of Latin descent as White, unless they were visibly either Indian or Negro. By the 1970 Census, people who were Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American were categorized under the new classification of Spanish Origin (Hayes-Bautista, 1987).

### The Origins of the term *Hispanic*

During the 1970s, the federal government, namely the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), under Richard Nixon's leadership, needed to find another classification to account for the existing Spanish-speaking population and the word “Hispanic” was born. The term includes persons from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuban, Central and South America or other Spanish culture or origin regardless whether they are Indian, Black, or White. The government assembled a committee, among them several Spanish-speaking individuals from the Southwest, who discussed this



## Día de la Mujer Latina, Inc.

Venus Ginés, Founder/CEO

PH/Fax: 770-717-0034 Toll-Free 1-866-54Mujer

Email: [venusgines@bellsouth.net](mailto:venusgines@bellsouth.net) [www.diadelamujerlatina.org](http://www.diadelamujerlatina.org)

Día de la Mujer Latina

issue for six months. Unfortunately, the decision to use “Hispanic” as an identifier was made under false assumption about the history, culture and geography of this specific population. According to Grace Flores-Hughes, a member of this committee, the challenge to categorize our group based on language and heritage was tumultuous. Some of the erroneous assumptions included that “Latino” sounded too masculine, whereby women would be excluded, and if taken literally, it would include Italians, Portuguese, and French. The final decision to be called Hispanic was based upon the illusion that since “we all speak Spanish” the term Hispanic would serve as the best identifier. Dr. David Hayes-Bautista, a noted historian, refutes that analysis in the following way. First, many dictionaries define the term “Latin” as belonging to Mediterranean Europe yet the term “Latino” implies the connection to Latin America and its culture. Secondly, the rules of the Spanish grammar utilizes the masculine ending when lumping both sexes in a category but the term “Latino” is sex neutral. Finally, there is a misconception that Spanish is the only language spoken by all when in reality, people in Brazil (in South America) speak Portuguese and many of the people from Central and South America are native people, who speak a different dialect (p. 61-67).

### Why include Latino?

The reason the term “**Latino**” is the best identifier is simply political. Latinos do not share a language, culture or race. The only commonality among all the Latinos is their nationality, i.e. Latin America. Most notably, for the last 30 years, Latin Americans have been migrating to this country because of their own country’s political upheaval, social unrest, destitution and yes, the American Dream. Comparing the industrialized European country of Spain to the impoverished countries in Latin America is like apples and oranges. In a QuePasa.com survey, some of the complaints against the term Hispanic stem from the fact that this is a government label and it embraces Spain, the instigator of the Conquest and Colonialism. Many prefer to name themselves using a Spanish word rather than an English-generated one. All other classifications are categorized by their nationality or roots, such as African American, Native American, Asian American, Pacific Islander but the term “Hispanic” is totally inconsistent. Although the **Spanish** language was first spoken in this country before **English**, language should not be a sole identifier for this population. Finally, the people of the U.S. pride themselves to be identified by their nationality, i.e. “**Americans**”- so do many of us who are proud of our Latin American roots.

#### Work Cited

- Acuña, R. (1981). Occupied America. New York: Harper & Row
- Hayes-Bautista, D, and Chapa, J. (1986). "Latino Terminology: Conceptual Bases for Standardized Terminology." American Journal of Public Health. January 1987. Vol. 77. No. 1.
- Shorris, E. (1992). Latinos. New York: Hearst Corporation.