

## Transcript: Hispanic, Latino, Latinx?

### **Courtney Jones Carney**

Over the past 50 years, the population living in the United States with ancestry from Spain, Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean increased from about 10 million in 1970 to more than 60 million in 2019. Once categorized by the U.S. government as 'Hispanic,' there has been pushback by artists, activists, and cultural thinkers who prefer to utilize the term Latinx to describe people from Latin America. So, what are the differences between Hispanic, Latino, and Latinx and how should we define one of the largest growing ethnic groups in the U.S.? Hello and welcome to The Table podcast where we unpack questions regarding race, ethnicity, culture, norms, and current events. My name is Dr. Courtney Jones Carney. That's right, y'all. I've joined the two percent of the world's population with doctoral degrees, what a journey.

### **Rosemary Ferreira**

That's right! That's right, Dr. Jones Carney. And my name is Rosemary Ferreria.

### **Courtney Jones Carney**

In this episode Rosemary talks to Dr. Isabelita Rambob, a faculty member at the University of Maryland School of Dentistry, to unpack this complex and ever-evolving identity, and to share their own personal experiences identifying as Latinas.

### **Rosemary Ferreira**

The term 'Hispanic' was first adopted by the U.S. government in the 1970s to describe people related to Spain or any Spanish-speaking country, particularly those from Latin America. Prior to the creation of this umbrella term, people of Latin American descent identified by their distinct nationalities, such as Mexican or Puerto Rican, and were classified as white by the Census. Activist groups, such as The National Council for La Raza, now known as UnidosUS, lobbied the Census Bureau and advocated for a universal term that could encompass all Spanish-speaking peoples. Many activists had witnessed years of discrimination experienced by Spanish-speaking immigrants, and yet, because there was no way of collectively capturing their experiences with housing, education, and other social institutions, their plight was often ignored and understudied. The creation and inclusion of 'Hispanic' in the Census was therefore a win for activists fighting for more inclusion to resources in Spanish-speaking communities.

So, when did the term Latino and Latinx show up and how are they different from Hispanic? There really isn't an exact date on when the term 'Latino' became popularized. For some, Hispanic and Latino have often been used interchangeably. However, for others, because the definition of 'Hispanic' emphasizes a connection to the Spanish language and to Spain, the

country responsible for colonizing most countries in Latin America, 'Hispanic' was rejected for a more inclusive 'Latino.' Emphasizing both geography and language, the term Latino includes groups typically excluded from being considered Hispanic, such as Brazilians and Haitians.

(record scratch)

### **Courtney Jones Carney**

Wow! I didn't realize that Haiti was considered part of Latin America!

### **Rosemary Ferreira**

Yeah, it depends on how Haitians choose to identify themselves. Haiti is located in Latin America, which refers to countries and territories in North, Central, South America, and the Caribbean where Spanish, French, and Portuguese are primarily spoken. So the term Latin America and Latino is connected to geography and language – specifically romance languages derived from Latin. Haiti played an incredibly important role in the liberation of Latin America from European colonization. And Haitian creole also derives from a mixture of African languages and French, which derives from Latin.

As I said before the term Hispanic excludes people from countries whose primary language is not Spanish, let's hear what Dr. Rambob has to say about this.

### **Dr. Isabelita Rambob**

I don't recall having to fill out a form in Brazil where I have to identify my race or ethnicity and then when I moved to US, I have to fill out those forms and I was looking for the Brazilian option and I realized that Brazilian was not a race or ethnicity, its a nationality and at the beginning there was no Latino option so I had to settle for Hispanic even though technically I'm not Hispanic because I don't speak Spanish. So then they included Latino, so I was very comfortable to check that, and now that they incorporate Latinx, I really like that because it's neutral and it's very inclusive. So I really embrace the Latinx term.

### **Rosemary Ferreira**

The term Latinx came into fruition within the online LGBTQ+ community in the early 2000's. The term is gender neutral, encompassing those who fall outside of the gender binary of man and woman. Although steadily becoming mainstream in academia and popular culture, the term has received heavy opposition by those who believe that the placement of the 'x' is difficult to pronounce for Spanish-speaking natives and corrupts the Spanish language. For trans, non-binary, and gender fluid individuals and their allies, the acknowledgement of a queer existence in the 'x' is more important than their allegiance to the Spanish language. Others, such as Camilo, a two-spirit and non-binary Cuban include an 'e' as in Latine for easier pronunciation for Spanish-speaking people.

### **Archived Recording**

I much prefer the 'e' at the end, Latine, you know, instead of e-yah or elle. I think its much more accessible, especially to our mothers and our fathers and our grandfathers who hear this 'x' thing and they're like 'what the- what the hell is that?' You know what I mean?

### **Rosemary Ferreira**

That was a clip from Buzfeed's Pero Like's YouTube video, "Struggles of Being Non Binary".

Although it's gaining popularity in the media and in the academy, Latinx is still a contentious term. The labels an individual from Latin America uses to describe themselves really depends on what they know and what they value. Dr. Rambob and I speak to this when we talk about what terms we use to identify ourselves.

### **Dr. Isabelita Rambob**

I don't mind if people address me as Hispanic, Latinx, or Latina and I still struggle with this need to really put someone in a box and label people. And I think sometimes we get so concerned about the terminology that we miss the core-the main thing that is really being inclusive and accept people as they are. So for me, It's just terminology and I just try to just treat people nicely regardless.

### **Rosemary Ferreira**

I think for me, if someone were-so it depends, because again in New York City some folks where I'm from, where I'm originally from-some folks might still use Spanish, even within the Latinx community, they'll be like oh I'm Spanish and sometimes I have the energy to be like but I'm not Spanish though, like, I'm not from Spain that's the language that we speak. And sometimes I don't have the energy to correct that person and I'm like if that's the language that they want to use to identify themselves or the community that we are both a part of, that is their choice. Cause I think there could also sometimes be like an education component to it, like a class component to it, and I don't want to, like, have to force or believe that what I identify is the correct way. But I do feel uncomfortable with the terms Spanish or being called Hispanic because I feel like it is more tied to the language and to the history of Spain as the colonizer for many countries in Latin America. And that's why I identified more as a Latinx individual. I mean, so for me, I'm a cis-gender woman, using Latina to identify myself. I am appreciative of the communities, like, using Latinx more because I feel like it is an intentional inclusion of people who are non-binary or transgender which is a community that is often excluded. And so I really appreciate that intention within the term but there is a lot of pushback as well with the term Latinx. And I've seen it with older generations, not understanding, like, why we're using that term. But I'm hoping, like, with younger folk really realizing the importance of including folks that identify as nonbinary into our community.

### **Dr. Isabelita Rambob**

Rosemary, so interesting that you mention about the usage of the term Latinx. I just came across this information and this date is recent, back in August a peer research that only 3% of Latinos in the US use the term. So 76% they don't even know about the term, and out of the people who do know about the term only 3% is actually using and usually its females between 18 and 26 year old.

### **Rosemary Ferreira**

Dr. Rambob is referring to a report released this past August from the Pew Research Center. It found that 23% of U.S. adults who identify as Hispanic or Latino had heard of the term Latinx, and of that 23%, only 3% actually use the term to describe themselves. Younger, college educated U.S. born Latinx are more likely to have heard of the term. And Dr. Rambob is right, the usage of the term is the highest among 18 to 29-year-old women.

Over the past fifty years, the terms used to define people of Latin American descent have changed as younger generations demand more inclusivity. Today, there is a growing demand from Black and indigenous artists, scholars, and cultural thinkers from Latin America to cancel Latinidad or Latinx identity. They argue that Latinx is a false ethnicity that erases rather than unifies the wide diversity of racial and ethnic groups that exist in Latin America, particularly Black and indigenous people who experience more discrimination and inequities than white and mixed-race groups. Multimedia journalist Janel Martinez identifies as a Black woman and as Garifuna, an Afro-indigenous group in Central America and the Caribbean. Here she is explaining her critique of Latinidad in an interview with The Root titled, "Breaking Down the Anti-Blackness of Latinidad."

### **Archived Recording**

So the thing about Latinidad, right, as noted in the piece, is that it definitely serves a very narrow audience. It doesn't necessarily ID us around nationalities, our racial and gender identifies, our status. And for me, Latinidad ultimately serves white, cisgendered, straight, wealthy men, right? And I am none of those. I am at the margins of the term.

What gaps exist within Latinidad?

Talking about 33 Latin American and Caribbean nation, Haiti, doesn't get included in the conversation. And being Garifuna, even, right, like, my culture's native tongue is not even Spanish, its Garifuna. Often time when people speak to this this, sort of again, monolithic, unified term to encapsulate all these identities, there's a lot of holes in that.]

### **Rosemary Ferreira**

With the points brought up by Janel Martinez, Dr. Rambob and I discussed what we believe the future of Latinidad or Latinx identity is.

I'm not sure, to be honest. I think that a lot of people who identify as black and as indigenous from Latin America are saying like hey this term does not include me. Like, this term, when you look at who is Latinx its often people who look like me, who is like- so I am very light skinned, the texture of my hair is like loose curls, wavy hair. And that's kind of, often, what you often see like with America Ferrera or Gina Rodriguez, right? This kind of like ambiguous look for Latinidad which often excludes people who are darker skin or who are indigenous. And so for me I am, I support the idea of, like, lets cancel it because if this is a term that is not being inclusive or is like violently erasing black people and indigenous people from Latin America, then I'm not for it. And that's why I am kind of, like, transitioning into just being like yeah I'm a Dominican New Yorker [LAUGHS] you know that's very much my experience of being Dominican but also growing up in New York City, it's a very unique experience and I feel like that's how I show up and I also understand that I do look ambiguous, right, and there privileges that come with that. And also like we mentioned before this interview started there's also these microaggressions of 'where are you really from?' right? Because obviously, you're kind of brown, like you're not, you can't be American, like where are you like- American, as in white American. So this question of where are you from is definitely undermining my identity. So yeah, I'm not sure of where that Latinidad is going, I do think that as a community we need to continue thinking about how are we including and censoring, not just including black and indigenous voices from Latin American but censoring their voices, censoring the fact that they experience more discrimination in Latin American and in the US than non-black Latin folks from Latin America. So it's complicated but I'm also really excited about the conversations that are being had.

#### **Dr. Isabelita Rambob**

Rosemary I really share your views on this matter, and it is problematic because the projection is the Latin community will even increase in recent years/the near future. And I know that we need to come up with a term and I am very sympathetic with Latinx because it is very inclusive but it is problematic in a manner that it just put all different cultures from Latin America in one monolith block. So we have so many different countries although most of them speak Spanish, they have, although they share the same language they have so many different culture differences, and customs, and so, and history. And this is problematic because it just puts everyone in one big pot. So I don't have the answer for this question but I think it's definitely things for consideration.

#### **End Credits (Producer, Angela Jackson)**

The Table is a production of the Intercultural Center in the Division of Student Affairs at the University of Maryland Baltimore. It's hosted and produced by Courtney Jones Carney and Rosemary Ferreira. This

episode was also written by Rosemary. The show's executive producer and editor is me, Angela Jackson, senior marketing specialist in the Division of Student Affairs. A big thank you to our guest, Dr. Isabelita Rambob of the University of Maryland School of Dentistry for joining us at the table. For more information about the Intercultural Center, including events where students can learn more about race, ethnicity, culture, norms, and current, visit [umaryland.edu/ile](http://umaryland.edu/ile). See you next time.