

**Columns ghostwritten for Huffington Post, ran under CEO's byline**

## **Before a Latino White House, Comes a Latino Leader**

The upcoming U.S. census will show that the American Latino population is now greater than fifty million, which surpasses the population of California, our largest state, as well as any other Spanish-speaking country in the world except Mexico. With this heft comes greater influence as corporations and politicians alike see Latinos as critical to their success, and scramble to secure their support.

Latinos, entrepreneurial and social by nature, have embraced this newfound clout by flexing their \$1 trillion purchasing muscle and invigorating the political dialogue by sending a growing number of their own to national office. However, despite this influence, a recent report by the Pew Hispanic Institute shows that Latino potential in the U.S. is stymied by a lack of unified national leadership—especially around key issues like education, public health and immigration reform—that affect Latinos disproportionately and remain stumbling blocks to full equality.

According to the Pew report, more than three quarters of Latinos surveyed drew a blank when asked to identify the most important Latino leader in the country today. The top candidate, Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, was named by only 7% of the respondents, with the other leaders—U.S. Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-Ill.) of Chicago, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Univision news anchorman Jorge Ramos—coming in each at less than 5%. This discrepancy, the report concludes, is the biggest challenge Latinos in the U.S. today face to forming a cohesive national identity.

These findings are somewhat troubling, but not surprising given that the Latino experience in this country, at least as a sizeable national group, is still relatively young. Those who comprised the first big wave of Hispanic immigration a generation or so ago remained silent, and insular, toiling diligently to build their own version of the American dream. Heroes abounded, but many of them were locally-grown leaders focused on issues specific to a particular region or national group, with little spillover into the mainstream. A few, like Cesar Chavez, are exceptions, but overall American Latinos have not to date experienced the same type of transformative struggle that can unite a group, inspire identity, and give birth to leaders like Martin Luther King.

While the Pew study is a reality check, I reckon that its results also reveal a tremendous opportunity, especially at this crucial point in history. The release of the census results this Spring can begin a new chapter in the U.S. Hispanic story, in the sense that much of the aforementioned

growth is being driven by second-generation Latinos who are likely to be more educated and middle class than prior generations. These young citizens, along with civically-active naturalized Latinos, are—intentionally or not—crafting a new, more assertive, and more integrated Latino identity, with the requisite social and political attitude to boot. More bluntly put: Latinos are becoming much more comfortable exercising their power.

There are already signs that a shift in Latino power is well underway. President Obama appointed a record number of Latinos to his administration, and in last year's mid-terms a number of young, high-profile Hispanics won spots in the new Congress. And as the 2012 presidential campaigns kick in this year, both parties will undoubtedly attempt to parlay the Census figures into votes by grooming leaders to come forth as spokespeople, potentially creating a new national platform upon which Latinos of all stripes can come together to share their stories, discuss the issues most important to them, and find new inspiration in the process.

There are already a number of established and rising Latinos who could emerge and consolidate leadership from this process: veterans like Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis and former New Mexico Governor and Presidential candidate Bill Richardson, along with newbies like San Antonio Mayor Julián Castro, Ford Foundation President Luis Ubiñas and freshman members of Congress Jaime Herrera (R-Wash) and Marco Rubio (R-Fla). But beyond this pool of the usual—and highly political—suspects, there are also a number of young Latinos in realms like media, entertainment and business who are using their influence to encourage awareness and activism around issues where Latinos still lag, like nutrition, the environment and education.

Many—like actor and entrepreneur Wilmer Valderrama, who is the spokesman for a national campaign to keep Latino kids in school—work in partnership with or are products of programs led by organizations like National Council of la Raza and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, among others. These groups have also worked tightly in tandem with Hispanic media to address crisis points like high rates of educational delinquency among Latino teenagers, and as part of their mission support a number of scholarship, mentoring, policy and civic development programs which are designed to give rise to the next generation of Latino leaders and influencers.

Latinos, in the moment, might be hard pressed to come up with specific leaders, but the landscape suggests that this soon will change. As a group, Latinos are still young, enterprising, gaining in numbers and, despite the current absence of a single unifying national figure, can still point to a number of inspiring individuals and committed organizations upon whose shoulders they can stand, and propel forward. Let the leaders emerge, and the countdown to the White House will begin.

## **Political Novelas, Rock Star Miners and Record Growth: A Latin American Year in Review**

What a difference two centuries can make. As many Latin American nations marked their bicentennial in 2010, there was more to celebrate than just independence from Spain. The motherland may have brought home the World Cup, but in the face of a tanking economy that's about all the Conquistadors had to celebrate. In the meantime, Latin America is on the rise with solid growth, stable democracies, an expanding middle class, and a digital explosion that looks set to allow the region to finally reach its long-latent potential. Sure, challenges still persist -- as evidenced by the catastrophic state Haiti finds itself in after a devastating earthquake -- but Latin America, for the most part, still produced its share of stories no less impressive or entertaining. A look back:

**Telenovela Diplomacy.** More than anywhere else WikiLeaks in Latin America read like the politics of the high school cafeteria, starring Hillary Clinton as the resident mean girl, spreading rumors that her rival Cristina Kirchner is on meds; Hugo Chavez as the blowhard bully at head of the Axis of Mischief, pulling pranks with his sidekicks the conniving Castro boys; and Brazil as the popular new kid on the block, who simply stands back and plays it cool.

**The Rise of the Digital Class.** Technology is wiring previously poor and remote areas; emerging pockets of Class C consumers are snapping up smart phones and living more and more online; and in the super competitive digital coupon space, local start-ups like Peixe Urbano in Brazil and BuzzUrbano in Mexico are giving North American leader Groupon a run for their money. When it comes to the underlying psychology behind digital consumption, Latinos simply seem to have the cultural edge: they are more social, community-oriented, spontaneous, and always ready to respond to a good bargain.

**A Mine Collapses, A Country Shines.** You think Barack Obama had a challenging first year? Last spring Chilean President Sebastián Piñera ascended in the aftermath of a devastating earthquake, and soon afterwards found himself orchestrating the Hollywood-style rescue of 33 miners trapped underground for more than 60 days. In the glare of the world's spotlight, Chile was cast as the little country that could, and displayed a level of organization, efficiency and professionalism that shows its status as the first Latin American member of the OECD is well deserved.

**The War on Drugs Gains Ground.** The battle is far from over, but Brazil and Mexico made some major advances this year against the organized drug cartels that had long held certain parts of its major urban areas hostage. Crime in Mexico City has decreased overall, due in large part to beefing up security and routing out corruption, while the Brazilian army won a major victory last month and regained control in one of Rio's most notorious slums. Of course more remains to be

done, but just look at how far Colombia has come after a decade of enhanced enforcement: the world's once most-dangerous nation is now a most-desired destination, and steady job growth has offered former traffickers an excuse to go legit.

**Not Just Her Hips Speak the Truth.** The World Cup in South Africa, the floor of the United Nations, sold-out arenas across the U.S.: brand Shakira was everywhere in 2010, and with good cause. As the head of her own foundation supporting early childhood education in Latin America and beyond, she has graced the world stage with politicians ranging from Barack Obama, Bill Clinton and Nelson Mandela, elevating her to the ranks of global superstar with an influence that extends beyond the arts.

**Peru Finally Gets Some Respect.** It's nice to see Peru gaining recognition for some of its less-ancient creations. First, there's Lima's sophisticated culinary scene, innovating new dishes with unique blends of Asian, European and indigenous flavors. Next, a thriving independent film community producing festival favorites like *Undertow* and *Milk of Sorrow*, which snagged an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Language Film. And to top it off, a Nobel Prize in Literature for native son Mario Vargas Llosa, a writer and former conservative political candidate who has come to be regarded worldwide as one of the most respected voices of the modern age.

**The Rainbow Flies South.** It's ironic how gay civil unions would be legalized in a region where the Catholic Church still holds sway before places like, say, New York City. But *asi es*. Buenos Aires started the wave a few years back -- perhaps to honor the fact that gay couples helped revive the city by snatching up real estate bargains and starting a raging design craze -- but this year legalization was extended nationwide. Most others in the region are quickly following suit recognizing that, religious politics aside, it's simply good for business.

**A Rock Star Steps Down.** No wrap up would be complete without a last shout out for Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the outrageously popular president of Brazil who is finishing up his final term and abdicating early next year to the country's first female leader in history. In less than a decade Lula whipped Brazil into tip-top shape to score the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics, and also set the stage for the country to start effectively competing in the global economic games.

**A New Generation of Leaders Take the Stage.** 2010 saw a swath of new democratically-elected leaders -- Piñera, Dilma Rousseff in Brazil, Juan Manuel Santos in Colombia -- and next year will bring elections in Argentina and Peru. Regardless of where these leaders fall politically, what they share is a pragmatic, measured approach to how to continue advancing globally without ignoring the domestic issues that could still potentially derail progress. But consider where most countries were just a few decades ago, and it's hard not to marvel at the leaps the region has made. Going forward, Latin America has its destiny firmly in hand, and looks more than ready for its close-up.

## America's Chief Immigration Officer?

Harry Reid should have just called Mike Bloomberg to tell it to the Senate straight last week about The DREAM Act. Why? Because the Mayor of New York knows more than most how, without immigrants, his city would hardly even be on the map. As Bloomberg stated quite forcefully last fall when, with Fox News Chairman Rupert Murdoch in tow, he addressed a House Judiciary Committee: "(when it comes to immigration reform) we're urging members of both parties to help us shift the debate away from emotions and towards economics, because (on this issue) the economics couldn't be any clearer."

Among the statistics the Mayor went on to cite: in the past decade immigrants in his town have contributed more than 5% to national GDP growth, and immigrant-owned companies in New York have created 400,000 new American jobs. Currently 40% of New York's 8.4 million people are immigrants, and the vast majority of them pay social security without ever receiving benefits from the program.

The rallying cry has been made often enough: The American story is one created by immigrants from all parts of the world, and from all walks of life. Open borders, entrepreneurial spirit and a nimble, diverse work force are areas where the U.S. has traditionally excelled, and they remain crucial to our ability to maintain a competitive advantage globally. The long-term, positive impact of immigration on the country—socially, culturally and economically—has been shown time and time again, and without it we could have fallen long ago into the same cycle as Europe of negative population growth and an aging base.

But as Bloomberg well knows, the U.S. may now have reached a population tipping point, and that's where basic economics come in. Just consider this: if the 2010 census had been conducted without counting the effects of immigration—as in those who emigrate and first-generation children born to immigrants—the population of the United States would for the first time in history have been weighted towards those over 50. When this fact is cast alongside the country's looming deficit, strained Medicare system and nearly bankrupt Social Security, the net effects of an aging population can become downright detrimental to our very fiscal survival.

Additionally, certain "softer" byproducts of immigration—like imagination, optimism, and a DIY ethic—can also sustain local pockets of the economy during times, like now, when job creation lags nationally. Bloomberg's aforementioned support of immigration reform includes the DREAM Act, as well as a number of other initiatives like encouraging work exchanges for entrepreneurs from other countries, or relaxing visa restrictions for foreign students in American universities who wish to stay and work after graduation. A large chunk of New York's immigrant community

are here as students. Spending time and money to educate talent here, only to see that talent snatched up by other countries hungry for their skill sets soon afterwards is a waste of resources, and bad business.

Bloomberg's stance is more than just political posturing. As a smart businessman, he recognizes that the New York immigrant community's work ethic and willingness to take a risk with small business have played a large role in the fact that the recovery started here ahead of other parts of the country. If progress is to continue it will require that this energy is captured and channeled into economic activity at all levels, not just the corner bodega, and not just in New York.

Immigration reform is not about amnesty, and neither is it about giving widespread clemency to all who are in the country illegally or to treating citizenship as a panacea. In the world as it exists today, it is crucial that we not only continue to nurture the talent and innovation immigrants can inject into our businesses, but that we also work to retain workers who are bilingual, bicultural and have a unique understanding of how other parts of the world which are rapidly moving ahead function. Quite simply, immigration reform is about our country's economic survival.

## **The New Mami-ism: A Victory for Women in Brazil**

As expected, Dilma Rousseff easily won Brazil's run-off presidential election this past Sunday, surpassing her more politically-experienced (and conservative) opponent, José Serra, by more than 10% of the vote. This is not terribly surprising: Ms. Rousseff was a close advisor to popular outgoing President Luis Inácio Lula de Silva, serving as his chief of staff and energy minister, and her win is also seen as a positive referendum on his progressive policies, which for the time being have successfully managed to marry economic growth with social innovation.

Dilma's win is also being heralded as a further triumph for Latin American women, the continuation of a precedent first set back in 1990 when Violeta Chamorro of Nicaragua became the first-ever female president elected in the Western Hemisphere, years before the U.S. could even consider a woman as a viable executive candidate. More recently, Chile, Costa Rica, Panama and Argentina have all elected women leaders, and throughout the region the percentage of women holding cabinet positions and local office has more than tripled in the past two decades. But this particular victory stands apart for its timing, not just in Brazil, but in the world overall. If progress continues apace, Dilma Rousseff has the opportunity to emerge as the leader of a new global superpower -- by the time the Rio Olympics roll around in 2016, Brazil is projected to be one of the top five economies in the world -- and she could feasibly by then be considered one of the most influential presidents on the planet. Concurrently, in the United States -- especially during the recent round of midterms -- female candidates and influencers are emerging to control the political discourse. Yet, ironically, this is also happening at a point when American dominance as the world's leading superpower is beginning to topple.

This past weekend, *The New York Times* magazine published an essay on "The New Momism" tracing the evolution of motherhood in America as political clout. Gone are the days when trailblazers like Hilary Clinton felt the need to publicly distance themselves from those who "stayed home to bake cookies." The strategy now among women on both ends of the spectrum is to accentuate their motherhood as an asset that will only serve to protect a nation at risk of everything from terrorism to illegal immigration to obesity. Sarah Palin calls herself a "Mama Grizzly," wielding her maternal instinct to mask her ignorance of foreign policy. Sharron Angle tried to unnerve Harry Reid's quarter century of liberal leadership in the Senate by claiming grandmother status. Even Michelle Obama seemingly shucked her storied academic and professional pedigree to peddle herself on behalf of beleaguered Democrats as "Mom-in-Chief," concerned about fixing the country for the sake of her daughters' futures, not necessarily to preserve American strength in the world.

The motherhood narrative, of course, is one of the oldest ploys in advertising, and female politicians in every culture will use it: it can be the trump card that humanizes them in a nasty game. And machista stereotypes aside, Latin American culture, in particular, is extremely matriarchal, and women are revered as maternal even when they don't necessarily have children of their own. "Mami" is not just what young Hispanic children call their mothers: in many Latin countries the word is also used as a term of endearment for a sister, cousin or close girlfriend, and savvy Latina politicians have been casting themselves as mother-leaders long before Hilary Clinton decided to capitulate and start baking cookies.

Dilma has children, and grandchildren, but she didn't need to prove herself as a multi-tasking Mom, rest on rhetoric about family values, or even downplay a more radical youth. (Which, for the record, entailed being jailed and tortured by a repressive military regime for her involvement with an underground revolutionary movement, and did not at all entail experimenting with witchcraft).

Dilma won the presidency because she was part of a government that has already effectively improved the lot of families across Brazil, by addressing those very issues that directly impact the daily lives of women and their children: education, public health, day care, access to technology and the environment. She won because she promised to adhere to the same progressive, center-left plan that has so far lifted tens of millions of Brazilians out of poverty, creating a new class of small business owners and consumers who also happen to be overwhelmingly female. And—like so many of her fellow female politicians in the region—she won not by sheer force of the Mom card, but simply because she had the chops to play it smart.

This is significant because, in a region so often painted as "traditional," the women who lead Latin America have shown themselves to be anything but. Apart from her past as a revolutionary, Dilma is twice divorced and supports gay civil unions. Michelle Bachelet—the former President of Chile and also a survivor of torture under the Pinochet regime—never got around to marrying the father of her three children, publicly declared herself an agnostic, and one of her first official acts as President was to lift a ban on the morning-after pill and contraception to teenagers. Compare

their stories, and compare their socially progressive politics, with the flock of American Mom candidates whose visions seem to barely extend beyond their own narrow definitions of Main Street, and it's hard not to see on which side of the Hemisphere the future may belong.

If the day ever arrives when immigration flows start to reverse, I suspect Latin American women, mothers or otherwise, would be open enough to accept even Sharron Angle without prejudice.

## **The Brazil Stimulus: Tapping into the Giant to the South for Inspiration and Growth**

Brazil has long been derided as the country of a future that has yet to arrive. At various points throughout history, Brazil has seemingly been on the brink of realizing its vast potential, only to see progress stymied by political instability, corruption, economic mismanagement and poverty to the extreme.

That history is now a distant memory, as Brazil today has unequivocally hit its stride. In less than a decade, Brazil has managed to not only catch up with its future, it now looks set to surpass the futures of so many others in the region and beyond. Much of this can be attributed to the cunningly visionary leadership of President Luiz Inácio Lula de Silva (Lula) a former leftist Labor leader who grew the economy, eliminated debt, earned the country its first investment grade, and won competitive international bids for the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics. With a population of over 200 million, an abundant supply of natural resources, and a progressive energy policy, Brazil has set its sights on being the next China, yet true to form remains ready to party as the host of not just one, but two of the world's largest sporting events, nearly back to back.

Next year, Lula will step down. He will be succeeded by either Dilma Rousseff, his handpicked successor, or Jose Serra, an established politician and former mayor of Sao Paulo. But regardless of who wins the run-off election this Sunday, one thing is clear: the presidency may change, but the country's brand -- cultivated locally, but refined by Lula in his mission to expand Brazil's influence beyond its borders -- will remain intact.

What is the Brazilian brand? Just think of the country's signature dance, the samba: cool, sexy, worry-free, yet performed with subtle skill to a highly intricate and incredibly sophisticated beat.

The Brazilian economy this year is projected to grow more than 7 percent, outperforming the U.S. and Europe and leading the Western Hemisphere overall. There is no reason to suspect that growth will slow anytime soon: the labor force is young and aspirational; the small business sector is booming; the middle class is expanding; and much-needed social improvements are thoroughly underway. Fueling all this activity is a cadre of Brazilian multinationals and brands that are competing successfully on the world stage, and dismantling whatever misconceptions lingered about Brazil as a mismanaged backwater.

And for those cynics who think this current version of Brazil's future is just a mirage: look even further ahead. Brazil did not become the first South American country awarded the Olympics by default, or simply on the basis of Lula's politicking. Rio won after a smart, progressive and innovative plan that addressed not only the strategic elements of how the city would effectively host the world's highest profile sporting event, but also how the event itself would become the touchstone in an ongoing sustainable design and planning revolution that started at the national level decades ago. Brazil's bid contained a number of elements that could make Rio the world's first "Green Olympics." As any architect, entrepreneur or brand manager can tell you, the Green Stamp of approval, these days, is worth its weight in gold.

Sounds pretty appealing, right? But what does this mean for the U.S, our companies and our homegrown brands?

In short, Brazil's young population and thriving middle class is a market we simply cannot afford to ignore. Aligning ourselves with its energy and opening ourselves to its innovation is more than just a good opportunity, it is by now a necessity. Some, like Nike, discovered this a while ago, and by aligning themselves with the national passion -- football (soccer) -- the brand has tapped into the vigor of local youth culture and created its very own Brazilian identity. Another success story is Azul, Brazil's first low-cost airline, a domestic brand shaped in the image of JetBlue by its founder David Neeleman and now one of the world's rock-star new brands. But it's not just market-driven players who can benefit: the U.S. may still be stressed by the effects of the Great Recession, but the history of Brazil will tell you that they have faced far worse, and survived, by sheer force of their culture of cool and creative imagination.

No economy is immune to disruptions. Like all emerging areas, Brazil still has obstacles to overcome and may hit a few bumps along the way. But the country and its brand are on the right track, and have plenty of things to teach the world. Not only should we be open to its lessons, we should also quickly get hip by developing ideas, products and campaigns that both engage this dynamic audience and leverage their lifestyle for our own benefit. With everything that Brazil has to offer at the moment, that should not be a difficult task.