

More Than a Monolith: The Advancement of Hispanic and Latino/a Talent

Glossary of Terms

Hispanic vs. Latino/a

“Hispanic” and “Latino/a” are pan-ethnic terms that emerged in the US in the twentieth century.¹ Both are US-based terms, with “Hispanic” generally referring to those of Spanish-speaking ancestry, and “Latino/a” referring to anyone with roots in the geographic region of Latin America.² “Hispanic” and “Latino/a” are often inappropriately used interchangeably in policy and practice

Hispanic

“Hispanic” refers to people with roots in one of the more than twenty countries and territories impacted by Spanish colonization and where Spanish remains a common language.³ The US government first used the term “Hispanic” in the 1970s after various organizations lobbied the Census Bureau to collect data on this population.⁴

Latino

“Latino/a” refers to people with roots in one of the 30-plus countries and territories in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean.⁵ This term can be more inclusive of “non-Hispanic” origin groups, including those who trace their roots to Brazil, Belize, the non-Hispanic Caribbean (including Haiti, Jamaica, Guyana, and the Virgin Islands), and Mexico.⁶

The term “Latino,” short for “Latino Americano,” has existed since at least the early 1800s, but “Latino,” and the feminine form “Latina,” found popularity in the 1990s amidst a political movement to create distance from Spanish colonization.⁷

Latinx, Latine, and Latin@

“Latinx,” “Latine,” and “Latin@” are gender-neutral variations of “Latino/a.”⁸ Despite noble aims, these terms are not common within the community.

For instance, a 2019 survey found that 76% of H/L participants had not even heard of the term “Latinx.”⁹ While some participants embrace the term for its inclusive intent, we heard repeated frustration that it is forced upon the community from academic and corporate circles. While “Latinx” might not be the best path forward into a more inclusive future, these terms are a testament to the fluidity of language, with new terms constantly emerging, receding, and changing with the times.

Regional terms

Members of this community use a wide variety of regional terms to refer to themselves. Some people of Mexican descent primarily living in the southwest US identify as “Chicano/a,” a still contested term with origins in California and New Mexico during the civil rights movement of the 60s.¹⁰

“Boricua” is used by some Puerto Ricans to emphasize a sense of pride in their cultural identity over any national affiliation and, therefore, carries with it some political undertones.¹¹ Individual identities are unique and layered, and people may identify as belonging to these categories in addition to other racial, ethnic, and other labels.

Race, ethnicity, and nationality

Coqual believes that race, ethnicity, and nationality are socially constructed categories that, while valuable for self-identification and efforts to measure life experiences, do not have fixed, biological foundations. For this study, we define these terms as the following:

Race

Race is a social construct by which people are categorized primarily on the basis of their physical features.¹²

(race continued) While it is not grounded in scientific reality, race has evolved beyond a social construct to become embedded within the economic, political, and institutional fabric of our world. Racism—or the process in which certain populations are systemically oppressed due to their race—continues to influence our lives.¹³ In Coqual’s research, we disaggregate our data along racial categories as a means to help identify how race and racism continue to influence professionals’ lives in social and structural ways.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a socially defined group of people connected through a shared understanding of culture, ancestry, nationality, geographical origin, language, religion, race, color, or a combination thereof.¹⁴

Nationality

Nationality refers to the ways in which people can identify with or “belong to” a certain politically or socially recognized nation across the world.

Deeper modes of measurement

Street Race

If you were walking down the street, which race or ethnicity do you think strangers would assume you to be? The answer to this question could be considered a person’s “street race,” a measure of racial identity formulated by Dr. Nancy López, Professor of Sociology at the University of New Mexico. In contrast to self-identified race, street race directly challenges the persistent myth that race is a scientific fact rooted in our genetics.¹⁵ It centers the idea that the way others “race” us, not just how we internalize race, matters in our lived experiences. For H/L professionals uniquely positioned across racial and ethnic identity, it can help us interrogate the way whiteness is valued and how “passing” as White, regardless of how one self-identifies, may confer societal advantages.

Afro-Latino/a

“Afro-Latino/a” is a term that refers to individuals who are racially Black or of African descent and who identify with an ethnically Hispanic or Latino/a heritage. According to the Pew Research Center, 12% of the adult H/L population in the US identifies as Afro-Latino/a when asked directly.¹⁶

However, the current US census applies a two step approach that asks about race and Hispanic or Latino/a heritage separately, yielding a substantial undercount of this population in recent estimates. As a result, the Census Bureau has been critiqued heavily for their reporting on Afro-Latino/a identity.¹⁷

This suggests that asking directly about one’s Afro-Latino/a identity will yield a more accurate sampling representation than using a two-step question separating race from ethnicity like the one used by the Census Bureau in the decennial census and other surveys.¹⁸

In this report, we decided not to label this group “Afro-Latino/a” because we took a two-step approach as provided to us by our survey vendor. We instead use the term “Black Hispanic or Latino/a” (abbreviated as “Black H/L”) when referring to this group, except in circumstances where individuals directly self-identified as Afro-Latino/a.

Endnotes

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