

Use of the Term LatinX: Cultural, Racial, and Gender Considerations

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Ed Morales, author of *Latinx: The New Force in American Politics and Culture*, argued that the term LatinX can be to Latin Americans what African American was for African-descended individuals in its replacement of “black” as a racial identifier¹. LatinX as a term may be even more impactful as it is laden with considerations of gender, race, and sexual orientation. On the surface, LatinX is intended to be a gender-neutral way of saying Latina or Latino, gender-specific identifiers of Latin American descent². Its origins can be traced to sexual orientation and gender specifically as it emerged in queer communities among people who did not believe that the masculine Latino nor feminine Latina captured their ethnic-gender identities³.

People have varying opinions on the use of the word as an ethnic identifier. Some say it is part of a linguistic revolution that is repurposing Latino and Latina for inclusion⁴. Others believe it is an aberration of the Spanish language. Those on this side of the argument hold that the use of the term interrupts the traditions of the Spanish language and infuses too much American influence on a language that did not originate in the United States^{5,6}. In *The Case for Latinx*, Scharron-del Rio and Aja questioned the defense of the Spanish language on the basis of the nature through which it was introduced to both indigenous people and African slaves. Through genocide of indigenous people and enslavement of Africans, Spanish language amounted to an attempted erasure of both African and indigenous languages. Scharron-del Rio and Aja also framed the resistance to LatinX as a form of within-group stratification. The rejection of a more inclusive term as an identifier would be analogous to structural barriers that hinder the progress of Latin American in a White-dominated society through structural racism.

¹ Ed Morales, “Why I embrace the term Latinx,” *The Guardian* (January 8, 2018), retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jan/08/why-i-embrace-the-term-latinx> on February 12, 2019.

² Tanisha Love Ramirez and Zeba Blay, “Why People Are Using The Term ‘Latinx’: Do you identify as ‘Latinx’?,” *HuffPost Latino Voices*, retrieved from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/why-people-are-using-the-term-latinx_us_57753328e4b0cc0fa136a159 on February 12, 2019.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Morales.

⁶ Maria R. Scharron-del Rio and Alan Aja. *The Case FOR ‘Latinx’: Why Intersectionality Is Not a Choice*,” *Latino Rebels*, retrieved from <https://www.latinorebels.com/2015/12/05/the-case-for-latinx-why-intersectionality-is-not-a-choice/> on February 12, 2019.

Finally, when considering whether to embrace LatinX, it is also important to highlight how the terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” once drew similar contention. Hispanic was adopted as a racial identifier in the 1970s by corporations and government leaders to simultaneously encourage American cultural assimilation and promote ethnic pride⁷. The term “Hispanic” was opposed by scholars and community activists on the West Coast who felt that “Latino” better reflected the mixed ancestral origins of people from Latin Americans while “Hispanic” was a European ethnic label⁸. This is to be noted because defenders of the term LatinX are leveling the same argument as those who created the term Latino in the 1970s, and the defenders of Latino as an ethnic identifier appear to be ignorant of the term’s origins. A careful examination of the history of Latino as a descriptor would likely lead one to at least consider LatinX as a term that can combat today’s gender stratification as Latino contested the American cultural assimilation goals of the 1970s. Thus, LatinX should be embraced because it reflects the very nature of race as a social construction that is subject to change over time and the interaction between race and gender. At the same time, conversations must be had around the origins of ethnic identifiers for people of Latin American descent and how gender-specific identifiers may either privilege or exclude some individuals within the community.

⁷ Morales.

⁸ Ibid.