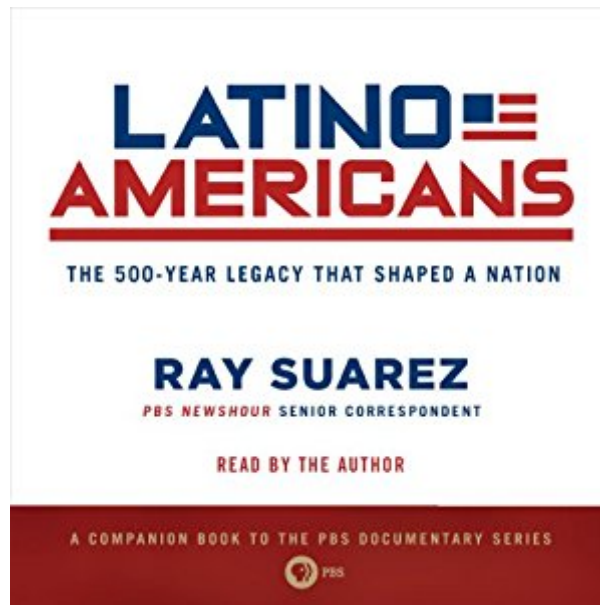


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# Latino Americans: The 500-Year Legacy That Shaped A Nation



## Synopsis

As the largest minority in the country, Latino Americans make up an integral part of American history and continue to make major social, cultural, and political contributions. Latino Americans, vividly and candidly tells how the story of Latino Americans is the story of the United States, revealing the personal struggles and successes of immigrants, poets, soldiers, and others who have made an impact on history. Author and acclaimed journalist Ray Suarez explores lives of Latino American men and women across a four-hundred-year span, encompassing an epic range of experiences from the early European settlements to Manifest Destiny; the Wild West to the Cold War; the Great Depression to Globalization; and the Spanish-American War to the Civil Rights movement.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As a senior citizen American who was given a white-man-is-supreme dose of history in public school--Native Americans being "Indians" who took scalps of the "good" white guys--I knew so little about the real America. For the past many years I have lived in south Florida, in a county where 80% of the people speak Spanish as their native language. So this book, written by one of the NewsHour journalists, Ray Suarez, of Puerto Rican descent really interested me. I had no idea that Latinos have been here and part of our culture in ways that should have seemed more obvious. The book is very clear and filled with fascinating little pieces of information including the difficulties

citizens of Puerto Rico, for example, had when their island became part of the United States after the Spanish-American War. They couldn't enter the mainland even though they were technically American citizens until one woman took the case all the way to the Supreme Court. And here's another, one that is somewhat personal for me. My 9th great grandfather, William Bradford, was the leader of the so-called first settlers, the Plymouth Colony ones. But well before 1620, St. Augustine, Florida, was settled by the Spanish and would remain a Spanish-speaking city well into the 19th century. The name Florida, of course, comes from the Spanish word for flowers: flora. So when Span-o-phobes (my term) speak about preserving English as the only language, they should be reminded that in Florida Spanish was spoken well before the English arrived to settle it. That is a little piece of history that, in my opinion, should be used more often when discussing immigration issues, for example. For a person who would like to learn more about this important element of American history, this is just the book for you. So readable. And by the way, PBS is doing a documentary series based on this book. It is just a wonderful book to read--and Mr. Suarez is a really good writer.

Despite the ridiculous title chosen by the clueless publisher and which the author has repudiated or should, this book serves as a supremely useful foundation for understanding the contributions, the breadth and the growth of the multiple Latino national and cultural groups that have been part of the USA for more than 500 years. Further, assuming they will read this excellent work by Ray Suarez, Puerto Rico's most important contribution since Roberto Clemente (and maybe Yadier Molina) to our culture, journalists might better understand and treat the significance of the Latinos in the USA rather than simply seeing "the Latino vote" as a monolithic voting bloc. Suarez's crisp writing and concise explanatory style does not suffer from a lack of passion or academic torpor. This is a tome that informs, entertains, stimulates and inspires. One can only hope that Suarez continues to produce work like this in media that appreciate his talents.

This volume richly deserves the excellent reviews published here. The author's passion is social justice and his scenes and characters emphasize the struggles of the Latinos among us. Suarez eloquently reminds us who was here first. And he peoples his wide panorama with remarkable men and women of whom few but Latinos are aware. I am a white, fourth generation Californian and a graduate of the University of California whose library is named Bancroft for a respected scholar who would have had us believe there was no culture here before Manifest Destiny (and gold) shoved all else aside. Suarez notes that a large Spanish/Mexican presence stretched from Texas to the Pacific

long before any but ship captains from around the globe stopped on California shores to provision ... and later trade. With the folks who were here. Latinos. (the Native Californians were subsistence hunter/fisher/gatherers who had no understanding of commerce.) Suarez also highlights the ambivalence with which New Spain and then Mexico viewed the new United States. Consider the old refrain, variously attributed, "Pity poor Mexico ... so far from God and so close to the United States". Texas was a bitter beginning. The Spanish rulers of Mexico warmly invited western moving "Americans" into their sparsely populated northern fringe. Folks who brought cattle to the open ranges and cotton to the wide river plains. But when Mexico won its freedom from its vassal status to Spain, it outlawed slavery. This was their reaction to the old, Spanish "encomienda" system which pretty much bound all the natives to labor for life at the wishes of Spanish overlords. In Mexico, that system was overthrown by a bloody revolution which resulted in independence in 1821. Early on, Suarez recounts the story of Texas because it illustrates the plight of a whole culture caught not at the edge but in the middle of monumental change. As he notes, Mexicans often remind us that the United States created a border which once didn't exist. Santa Fe, New Mexico, is an older community than New York or Boston ... or even Jamestown. This is a book about the birthright of people, like the Native Americans, who were already "here". Who were a part of the fabric of this country from long before the Alamo and discovery of gold in California. For Suarez' book, that is only a preamble to the remarkable achievements of the "Americanos" among us. Living for decades in Southern California and for ten years teaching (history) in high school classrooms which Santa Ana Unified School district called 93% "Hispanic" (I prefer the author's word, Latino), I wish Suarez had published this insightful book a few years ago. I would have had even more respect for the trials faced by my Americano students.

The title says it all: How Latinos became Americans (they were always Americans in Spanish, but not supposedly in the "American" (as in US) sense of the word. I LOVE this book (and I have not yet finished it) but I have learned so much already! Nuggets of information that I never even imagined and many of which happened not too far away from where I live. It is written in a manner that educates as well as entertains and makes one want to delve deeper. One fact that amazes me is that Isabel de Tolosa was the grand-daughter of Hernán Cortés and the great grand-daughter of Moctezuma, which demonstrates just how Cortés took advantage of the people he "conquered." A perfect example of the blend that is LatinoAmerica, like it or not. Get the book and the DVD of the PBS program and settle down to appreciate some facts that will blow your mind! I purchased both!

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