

# **Latino Youth: Today and Tomorrow**

Essay by Vincent Perez, *Founder of La Cima Leadership Camp*

Latino young adults ages 12-34 are the fastest growing youth segment in the United States. They are reinventing pop culture, acting as family facilitators of information and decision-making, and remixing their Latin heritage and values with those of their American homeland. Over the next 40 years, young Latinos will have a large impact on American politics, the economy, religious expression and culture. The next chapter in our American experience will largely be painted by young Latinos.

The US will grow by another 100 million people by 2040. Half of this growth will be Latino. By 2050 Latinos will make up 25% of the US population. As the US absorbs the growing needs of a Latino citizenry, La Cima Leadership Camp at Chewelah Peak will help educate and inspire the next generation of emerging leaders.

La Cima gives students an opportunity to see and experience the endless possibilities that exist for them in their schools, communities and choices regarding post secondary education. Through an interactive experience, students learn and practice tangible and essential skills such as teambuilding, negotiating, creative thinking, planning, and presentations. Our curriculum follows a four-part model that explores the themes of individual, relationship, community, and larger societal action. La Cima transforms our world's next generation of leaders by educating, inspiring and instilling in them ethical and principled leadership values, attitudes and skills. Students develop personal insight and leave equipped with more courage, compassion, and competence to serve their communities and make their dreams reality.

Young Latinos, however, carry liabilities as well as the possibilities of dreams. The no man's land of a second-generation immigrant experience can be a difficult place to grow up. The language barrier often becomes a weakness and Hispanics students may be 4 to 5 years behind in school and illiterate in their native language. Working parents are often swamped with work demands and disconnected as a result. Young people whose needs are not being met at home or school can become prime candidates for joining gangs. The necessity of young Latinos serving as interpreters for their families is a mixed blessing. These translators benefit from the introduction of legal, financial, and medical documents early in life, but the downside is in the psychological toll. Young interpreters are not yet contract literate so translations ultimately may be inadequate. The responsibility of facilitating important family decisions is a heavy burden. It can be extremely stressful to be the only conduit for a traumatic medical diagnosis or severe medication requirements. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's School of Social Work through a statewide survey found a young Latino population with emotional scars, uneducated parents and the pervasive feeling that they are not accepted by Americans.

La Cima values, nurtures, and promotes the bilingual and bicultural experience in America. La Cima believes that young leaders must nurture their own self-worth, ignite courage from within, and develop authentic interpersonal skills. We provide a safe container to obtain these competencies. We at La Cima know that success largely depends on our abilities to speak, read, and write well. Our message takes the idea one step further—to speak, read, and write well in two languages. Social justice, immigration, entrepreneurship, education, health-care, and a host of other issues will face another American generation. At La Cima, young Latinos are challenged to consider what they will bring to the American experience. The seat at the table is being set. What will our young people do?

I have been continually gifted with opportunities to witness young people find their voice, explore their stories and choose who they want to be. I look forward to working with others who wish to do the same.