



## **Book Review: Juana Bordas' (2007) *Salsa, Soul, and Spirit: Leadership for a Multicultural Age***

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*Salsa, Soul, and Spirit: Leadership for a Multicultural Age* by Juana Bordas (2007) was written to provide an inside perspective on leadership practices and traditions practiced within Latino, Black, and American Indian communities. The principles that Bordas described in her book can be used to bridge cultural gaps in the United States and in other countries where there may be misunderstandings between different cultural groups. The main themes throughout Bordas' book focus on building communities and organizations that emphasize relationships that are established on mutual respect, understanding, and an appreciation for different cultural traditions. Bordas eloquently described how the Latino, Black, and Native American communities do this and recommended ways for leaders to apply them in their organizations.

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Leaders in the United States are faced with a unique challenge and opportunity to engage and embrace people from multiple cultural backgrounds. Although there are immigrants from every nation who have adopted the United States as their home, Latino, Black, and American Indian cultures are three of the largest communities besides Anglo Americans. *Salsa, Soul, and Spirit: Leadership for a Multicultural Age* by Juana Bordas (2007) was written to provide an inside perspective on leadership practices and traditions that are practiced within Latino, Black, and American Indian communities in the United States. In this book, the author eloquently described the sacred traditions and patterns of interrelatedness among these communities that have been intricately woven into the fabric of the United States for centuries, though often unappreciated or unrecognized by the Anglo American population. Bordas presented readers with a deep understanding of these communities and their leadership principles to be applied to organizations and the broader society.

As a Latina herself, Bordas (2007) started each chapter by providing a personal story from her background such as the challenges of immigrating from Nicaragua and integrating into a multicultural society dominated primarily by Anglo Americans in the United States. She courageously overcame many obstacles and currently serves as the president of Mestiza Leadership International which focuses on leadership, diversity, and organizational change. As

both a scholar and practitioner, Bordas draws from her work with the Center for Creative Leadership and her experiences as a U.S. Peace Corps volunteer. In her quest to build bridges of understanding among diverse cultures in the United States, she has developed personal relationships with leaders from the Latino, Black, and American Indian communities.

Bordas' (2007) primarily wrote *Salsa, Soul, and Spirit* to inform organizational leaders and practitioners about leadership practices and cultural values that are prevalent within minority cultures in the United States, specifically Latino, Black, and American Indian cultures. This book is a particularly useful reference for Anglo American leaders and practitioners who may not have a complete understanding of the underlying cultural dimensions of these communities. Bordas provided a fresh perspective of ways to effectively communicate with people from Latino, Black, and American Indian communities and integrate them into organizations and society by recognizing their unique attributes. Throughout the book, she highlighted the contributions of leaders from Latino, Black, and American Indian communities who have made an impact in society and brought a new appreciation for these leaders and their cultures.

The main premise throughout *Salsa, Soul, and Spirit* (Bordas, 2007) is that diversity can lead to transformation in relationships between people, organizations, and the larger society. As diversity in the workplace is a challenge for many leaders in the United States and around the world, Bordas provided a refreshing perspective of the contributions of Latino, Black, and American Indian cultures that can be applied to many organizations. In particular, she described eight principles practiced within Latino, Black, and American Indian communities that can be replicated within the United States and other nations: (a) sankofa, meaning learn from the past; (b) I to we, meaning move from individualism to collective identity; (c) mi casa es su casa, meaning embrace a spirit of generosity; (d) a leader among equals, meaning demonstrate community conferred leadership; (e) leaders as guardians of public values, meaning carry a tradition of activism; (f) leaders as community stewards, meaning work for the common good; (g) all my relatives, meaning incorporate the family, the village, and the tribe; and (h) gracias, meaning share gratitude, hope, and forgiveness. While each of these principles are expressed differently among Latino, Black, and American Indian communities, their common thread seems to be the appreciation for diversity, the importance of relationships, and the awareness of and dedication to spirituality.

Many of the principles described by Bordas (2007) are similar to the themes found in the transformational leadership (Burns, 1978), servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2002), and spirituality in leadership (Fry, 2003) literature. Bordas referenced these theories and described how they are practically applied and innately present in Latino, Black, and American Indian communities. Several times, she highlighted the concept of *ubuntu* which emphasizes the interconnectedness of humanity and the collectivity so prevalent among communities of color and so different from the emphasis of individuality often found in Anglo communities. This comparison is similar to Hofstede's (1980, 2001) and House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, and Gupta's (2004) study of individualism and collectivism among people across nations. One early study of cultural values in a small geographic region of the United States provided the foundation for the study of cultural values among people from different nations (Kluckhohn & Strotbeck, 1961). The researchers observed that cultural values include relationship to nature, beliefs about human nature, relationships among people, nature of human activity, conception of space, and orientation to time. The themes in *Salsa, Soul, and Spirit* are similar to those found in this early study.

Most studies on cultural values have been conducted across nations such as Hofstede's (2001) study on cultural values, the World Values Survey (Inglehart, Basanez, & Moreno, 1998; Inglehart & Carballo, 1997), the Schwartz Values Survey (Schwartz, 1992, 2004), and the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) Study (House et al., 2004). There have been several books addressing the challenges of leading people from diverse national backgrounds and team building (Lewis, 2006; Marquardt & Horvath, 2001). However, there have been limited books addressing leadership in Latino, Black (Walters & Smith, 1999), and American Indian communities.

The most prevalent ideas throughout Bordas' (2007) *Salsa, Soul, and Spirit* are the importance of appreciating diversity and the value of embracing a new form of leadership in a multicultural age. Bordas invited the reader to "join in the dance of our kaleidoscope world" (p. 21) and presented ideas that are idealistic but deeply woven into communities of color in the United States. The Anglo American reader may become desirous of the traditions within these cultures and the emphasis on relationships that are portrayed in Latino, Black, and American Indian communities.

Many of the ideas that Bordas (2007) presented are novel, yet they align with current theoretical research on transformational leadership, servant leadership, and spirituality in leadership. The book is divided into four sections that reflect the ideas that are embraced by Latino, Black, and American Indian communities:

1. *A New Social Covenant* includes learning from the past, moving from individualism to collectivism, and embracing a spirit of generosity.
2. *Leadership Styles in Communities of Color* emphasizes egalitarian or community-based leadership, a tradition of activism, and working for the common good.
3. *Creating the Circle of Leadership* focuses on the roots of the family, village, or tribe and embracing gratitude, hope, and forgiveness even in the midst of difficulties.
4. *Leadership for a Multicultural Age* is a call to action and appreciating diversity and the unique contributions of different communities.

The author presented practical examples of current theoretical research and challenged people from other ethnic backgrounds, such as the Anglo American community, to embrace these principles in the current multicultural age.

Bordas' (2007) *Salsa, Soul, and Spirit* is a well organized book that clearly maps out the themes and ideas discussed. While there are a few spelling errors towards the end of the book, it is a generally flawless and engaging study. Although Bordas provided many practical examples of the leadership principles that she discussed, many of the ideas were based on personal interviews and were not fully documented as references in the bibliography. The reference list is quite limited and documented as notes rather than a complete bibliography.

Bordas (2007) has enlightened the discussion of leadership perspectives from different cultural backgrounds to include the often overlooked Latino, Black, and American Indian communities in the United States. Although researchers have begun to question if Western leadership principles are appropriate or transferable across other cultures, the author's fresh approach reminds leaders that new methods of leadership may also be necessary within Western cultures such as the United States. The tone of the book is bold as Bordas challenged and provoked the Anglo American community for their lack of understanding and implied that values within the dominant Anglo culture are shallow and selfish compared to Latino, Black, and American Indian communities. It is important to note at this point that many of her statements pertaining to Anglo as well as Latino, Black, and American Indian communities are

generalizations and may not be true for all communities. Although she addressed how relationships are developed and leadership principles are practiced within Latino, Black, and American Indian cultures, Bordas did not provide specific evidence of the effectiveness or appropriateness of these leadership principles outside of these communities or even between these communities. Further studies on integrating subcultures within the United States should also include the Asian American community, which she did not address.

Overall, Bordas (2007) successfully challenged the current methods and traditions of leadership that are used in the United States and encouraged leaders to implement practices from Latino, Black, and American Indian communities into their organizations and society. Her book provides a timely, important, and deep understanding of the accomplishments of minority cultures that have contributed to the shaping of this nation. The time has come for leaders and practitioners to implement the principles found in *Salsa, Soul, and Spirit* to fully appreciate, respect, and understand the kaleidoscope of cultures in the United States and around the world.

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### About the Author

Melissa McDermott received a Ph.D. in organizational leadership from Regent University in 2008. Her dissertation focused on the effects of social, economic, and political changes on leadership preferences and cultural values across generations and cultures, specifically in Israel, South Africa, and the U. S. She is a member of the International Leadership Association and is primarily interested in bridging gaps between people from different cultural backgrounds. Email: melimcd@regent.edu

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