

BY MAHADEV  
DESAI

## In-depth Look At Latinos In America

*Latino in America: By Soledad O'Brien' with Rosa Marie Arce Penguin Group (USA) 144 Pages*

Award winning CNN Anchor, Soledad, after her groundbreaking series 'Black in America' in 2008 and 'Black in America 2' this year, has now written a companion to the critically acclaimed TV documentary 'Latino in America' which was aired on CNN on two consecutive nights in October. In this enlightening, entertaining and riveting book, Soledad takes an in-depth and exhaustive look at the explosive growth in the Latino community in the U.S.

Latino is an American identity. It is an ethnicity. It is a diverse and ever changing community of many different origins, history and traditions. There are about 28 million Mexicans, (about 69% of all Latinos) 4 million Puerto Ricans, 1.5 million Cubans. There are also immigrants from the Dominican Republic and El Salvador. There are 22 States including California where Latinos are already the majority minority, according to Pew Research Center. It is also interesting to note that the number of Latinos born here now surpasses the number of immigrant Latinos and the average age of this burgeoning community is in the teens.

Like other immigrants, Latinos too are confronted with the problems of identity, assimilation and integration. In general, they have strong family values, respect for the elders, strong work ethic, warm hospitality and warmth of their humanity. They have enriched the mainstream culture through their music, dances, cuisine and sports. Soledad travels to Miami and Orlando in Florida, Pico Rivera in California and Shenandoah, Pennsylvania to meet and interact with the Latinos.

In Cuba, Castro came to power in 1958. Between 1959 and 1962, most of the 178,000 Cuban refugees settled in Miami. According to Soledad, the Cubans have an enormous advantage over other Latinos. The U.S. has helped them to resettle and succeed. They get work permits, which can be converted into legal permanent refugee status one year later. They get job training, immediate economic assistance, welfare, health benefits and even qualify for subsidized housing. In 1980, Castro allowed 125,000 more to leave for the United States. To their credit, Cubans have contributed a lot to the economic growth of Miami. Spanish is more popular than English in Miami.

Soledad then visits Orlando. Puerto Rico is still a colony of U.S. In 1917, Jones Act granted Puerto Ricans U.S. Citizenship. The Puerto Ricans got a lucky break in employment when Disneyworld opened in 1971. Even those living in New York and Chicago moved to Orlando. The relationship of U.S. to Puerto Ricans is one of love & mutual need. But many mainstream Americans practice discrimination against them because out of ignorance they consider them Mexicans.

Shenandoah, Pennsylvania is a small town of about 6,000 residents. Because of economic downturn there is a growing resentment by about 97% whites against 2% Latinos, because of the fear that

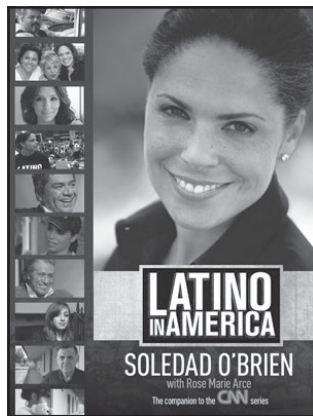
the latter are moving in, buying or renting cheap properties and grabbing all low paid jobs.

Los Angeles is quite the opposite. To quote Soledad, "It is the bright, sunny, vibrant capital of Latinos in America. It is the most Latino country in the nation. There are 4.7 million Latinos in L.A. Here Latinos have real economic and political power, where you have a sense that as a people you might just get a few things done" She meets Eva Longoria Parker (Desperate Housewives), one of whose charities is "Padres Contra El Cancer, the only program in the nation that assists and educates Latino families whose children face cancer." When she began with the Children's Hospital, 70% of the patients were Latino yet there were no translators on staff. Eva is not happy with the image of Latinos being reflected in movies, and film and television and music, so she now has her own production company. "She does believe that Latinos have to produce more content to truly increase and improve their image. If more

Latinos want to be in Hollywood, then more Latinos have to be the creators behind the camera, then write the Latin stories, then direct the Latin stories, then produce those Latin stories." Soledad next meets with 67 year old Mexican-American, celebrity actress and philanthropist, Lupe Ontiveros. She played the role of a mother-in-law in Desperate Housewives. Lupe lives in the City of Pico Rivera, California, with almost 92% Latino population. Here they do everything the American way. They celebrate 4<sup>th</sup> of July more than Cinco de Mayo, sweet 16 parties as well as quinceanera (15<sup>th</sup> birthday) parties, and young Latinos play Little League and Football more than soccer! She calls it her Latino Beverley Hills.

During her interviews with a cross section of the Latino community, Soledad learns of the daunting challenges facing the Latinos. She emphasizes the need for Latinos to be bilingual. The National Campaign to prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy estimates that 53% of Latinas will be pregnant at least once by age 20. Because of high percentage of depression one in six Latina girls end up actually attempting suicide. Because of lack of facilities and oversized classes in portable classrooms, there is an alarming drop out rate among Latino students. Due to ignorance and prejudice there is a tendency to demonize illegal immigrants. There is an ambivalent attitude. On the one hand Latinos are regarded as source of cheap labor but on the other hand they are accused of stealing jobs, and burdening the social and welfare system. Despite all these challenges, the aspiration to succeed and realize their American dream remains high. So every effort should be made to help them integrate and assimilate in the mainstream America.

Soledad paints a rich and fascinating portrait of a vibrant and evolving community trying hard to change and be changed by the mainstream America. 'Latinos in America' is bound to resonate well with all immigrants who have gone through similar challenges in settling down and being a part of this great nation.



## Kurbaan: A Different K-Brand Of Cinema

*Cast: Saif Ali Khan, Kareena Kapoor, Vivek Oberoi and Om Puri; Director: Rensil D'Silva REVIEW BY JYOTHSNA HEGDE*

Karan Johar sure has come a long way from his K brand of cinema where everyone lives happily ever after. Dharma Productions is exploring new territories with a coming of age movie like Wake up Sid and Kurbaan, an intense love story with a backdrop of terrorism. With story idea from Karan Johar and screenplay by Rensil D'Silva the debutant director, Kurbaan attempts to dig deep into the mind of Islamic fundamentalists and moderate Muslims while being careful never to take sides or get preachy in the process of the narrative. However a few glaring oversights by the director get in the way of taking the movie to the heights it was intended to reach.

for the scene is for Avantika to get the names of the stations that are supposed to be blown up by Ehsaan's group. Rensil D'Silva puts in his effort to create scenes that make sense and add to the story line such as the classroom scene where the students discuss about Muslim fundamentalists and America's role in the rise of terrorism.

Kareena Kapoor as Avantika impeccably portrays a wife oscillating between love for her husband and her stand against violence that is part of her husband. Saif Khan as the charismatic and suave Ehsaan reminds us that he can carry off a negative role, be it a terrorist in Kurbaan, or Langa Tyagi in Omkaara with equal ease as

he does cool dude Jai in Love Aaj Kal. Vivek Oberoi as Riyaaz portrays his part with ease. Om Puri and Kiron Kher fit in well. Dia Mirza and Kulbhushan Kharbanda add life to their brief roles. The climax though kind of predictable is built up well.

The story is however is not without faults. In dealing with a sensitive subject matter, attention to detail is the key force to drive the movie. Unfortunately for Kurbaan, the various glitches are too blatant to be overlooked. For example, when Riyaaz enters into the terrorist group, no one bothers to check his background and just take his word. And when Avantika is told by her neighbor about some terrorist activity she tries to peek into her neighbor's house instead of informing the



The movie begins with Avantika (Kareena Kapoor), a professor returning to Delhi University from New York to take care of her sick father. Ehsaan Khan (Saif Ali Khan) who also teaches there asks her for coffee and in a rushed 15 minutes proposes to marry her when she gets an offer to return to New York. So the couple land in New York and Avantika soon realizes in a well made, gripping scene that Ehsaan is not who he claims to be and that he is part of a terrorist group. In fact he is not Ehsaan at all, but Khalid Anwar, a wanted man by the FBI.

Ehsaan cannot allow for his wife to be killed even though she has discovered their plot because she is pregnant with his child and somewhere in the process of scheming to penetrate into the US legally he fell in love with his pawn, his wife. A prisoner in her home, Avantika finds help in the form of an undercover journalist, Riyaaz (Vivek Oberoi), who infiltrates into the group under the pretext of being an extremist Muslim. He lost his girlfriend to terrorism and wants to take matter in his own hands as he puts it.

The much talked about passionate scene between Avantika and Ehsaan is bold by Indian standards, yet aesthetically shot. And the reason

police, same logic applies to Riyaaz who takes it upon himself to deal with terrorists instead of alerting the authorities. And when Avantika asks to spend the night with Ehsaan whose beliefs she openly disagrees with and is house-arrested, Ehsaan willingly agrees without any hesitation. And you wonder why the Police don't paste Khalid Anwar's (Ehsaan's) posters all over New York if they already have his picture and how is it that he freely gets around New York?

Kurbaan's strong point is the music from Salim-Suleiman. Title track, 'Kurbaan Hua', 'Shukran Allah' and 'Ali Maula' blend well with the theme of the movie. Dialogue by Anurag Kashyap and Niranjan Iyengar are well written. Technically, Hemant Chaturvedi's cinematography be it Delhi or New York, especially the underground stations is captivating. With all its flaws, Kurbaan is a well intentioned movie with exceptional performances by the actors.

There is a sincere effort to strike balance between extremist and moderate Muslim view points about terrorism and its origins. This K-brand cinema surely is different from the otherwise candy flossed movies from this banner, so venture out only if you not in the mood for fairy tale endings.