

Salsa, Soul, and Spirit



Leadership for a Multicultural Age

Second Edition

Juana Bordas



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Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
San Francisco
a BK Business book

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Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
235 Montgomery Street, Suite 650
San Francisco, CA 94104-2916
Tel: (415) 288-0260
Fax: (415) 362-2512
www.bkconnection.com

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Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bordas, Juana.
Salsa, soul, and spirit : leadership for a multicultural age / Juana Bordas.
— 2nd ed.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-60994-117-8 (pbk.)
1. Community leadership--United States. 2. African Americans.
3. Hispanic Americans. 4. Indians of North America. I. Title.
HM781.B67 2012
305.800973--dc23
2011053361

Second Edition

17 16 15 14 13

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

cover designer: Barbara Haines
interior design and composition: Seventeenth Street Studios
developmental editor: Kristi Hein
copyeditor: Laurie Dunne
indexer: Richard Evans

PART ONE



A New Social Covenant

THE UNITED STATES WAS FOUNDED on the values of rugged individualism and competition. In our review of the first three principles we see how these qualities fashioned a society in which people have a greater orientation toward their individual needs and desires than to the collective good. In the spirit of *Sankofa*, which beckons us to reconcile our past with our present, we question the historical belief that human nature is only driven by self-interest, competition, and acquisition. This notion of individualism replaced early collective and cooperative cultures and established a social covenant in which government or society was a safeguard against man's competitive and aggressive nature. In this worldview, leadership was the domain of the enlightened few, was competitively oriented, and focused on power and control.

This view is no longer suited to our world village, in which advances in technology and communication link us intricately together. Lance Secretan, in his book *One: The Art and Practice of Conscious Leadership*, reflects, "We have become aware that the world is smaller, more interdependent, and integrated. Community is growing in importance. The new reality is that we are one."¹

In response to this new environment, the old individualist form of leadership has been shape-shifting from a self-centered orientation to a *We* or *other-centered* orientation, a

cooperative, collaborative, and people-oriented form. This shift is in alignment with leadership in communities of color, which must be other centered because leaders derive their authority from the people they serve. Leaders are sanctioned by their communities by putting the collective welfare above self-interest.

Putting the common good first goes against the grain of individualism—*We* takes precedence over *I* and sustains a deep sense of generosity, sharing, and reciprocity. Leadership in this context is not a vehicle for individual advancement, but instead is based on social responsibility.

Principle 3, *Mi Casa Es Su Casa*, expresses the profuse generosity common in communities of color, in which wealth traditionally meant giving to others and assuming responsibility for community needs. To take more than one's share and to accumulate excessive wealth was a cultural anathema. Generosity encompasses a long-term perspective that includes the sustainability of future generations and the natural environment.

Today's interdependent and fragile world calls for a new social covenant centered not on every man for himself, but on caring for each other. This covenant was envisioned by Martin Luther King Jr., who believed that other-centered men could build a society that would restore "dignity, equality, and freedom for people's spirit"; a society in which "people everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds." King appealed to our morality and conscience: "What self-centered men have torn down, other-centered men can build up."²

An other-centered society would incorporate the core values of collectivism and generosity that emanate from communities of color. These values are the touchstones for multicultural leadership principles dedicated to building a benevolent and just society that upholds the well-being of all people and nurtures future generations.

In Search of Multicultural Excellence

MAINSTREAM BOOKS ON LEADERSHIP routinely emphasize organizations and companies that represent "the ideal." Books such as *Good to Great*, *Built to Last*, and *In Search of Excellence* put forth models that illuminate the possibilities when visionary leaders take the helm. Authors do not spend much time on topics such

as “In Search of Mediocrity” or “From Bad to Worse,” although there are plenty of examples of middle-of-the-road organizations and leaders who falter in their commitments. By stressing the ideal—the best of the best—and by having positive models to emulate, leaders and organizations expect to improve and move toward that vision.

Likewise, when Anglo values and cultural norms are discussed, the positive attributes are usually highlighted and even revered. Individualism is rarely discussed as a value that may lead to social isolation and personal discontent as one is constantly comparing oneself to others. Competition is seen as a positive force that brings out the best in people and organizations, not as a stance that sometimes rends the fabric of support in which everyone is valued. Youth is venerated and in alignment with the new and improved mentality of today’s marketplace; the youth cult is not presented as a dead-end street leading to a society with a short-term memory that disregards the wisdom of age and the lessons from the past.

Accordingly, in this book I present African American, Indian, and Latino cultures in light of the *highest standards* of these communities. This is not to deny the inconsistencies and undesirable aspects present in all cultures. In communities of color, however, oppression, slavery, and colonization are historical traumas. Remnants of these difficult circumstances endure in higher rates of poverty, low self-esteem, and low educational levels. We must strive to separate the gifts and positive attributes in these communities from the residues of discrimination and oppression that manifest today as lower economic, educational, and social status.

The leaders whose voices resonate on these pages are some of the most talented and committed people who have guided communities of color in the past decades. They represent the ideal. Their values, approaches, and dedication have laid the foundation for multicultural leadership. Concentrating on the ideal is intended to call forth the best in communities of color and construct a mental model of a desirable future state. As these communities step forward, embracing the leadership principles described in this book, they will embark on a bold and worthy journey to build a world that honors our human potential and celebrates our great diversity.

For mainstream leaders, recognizing this ideal is an opportunity to incorporate the best practices from communities of color into their repertoire and to acknowledge their promise and potential. Young and emerging leaders of color will expand their understanding

of the tremendous contribution our communities bring to America. I hope this inspires them to stay true to the values that have shaped their communities and to realize that their greatest contribution comes from being the architects of our multicultural future.

In 2008, young people voted in droves to elect the first Black U.S. president—an electrifying social transformation and the culmination of a long and arduous civil rights journey. The principle of *Sankofa* can instill in the younger generation an understanding of the historical struggles that led to this watershed event—and the wisdom and experience of the elders profiled in this book can inspire and guide them as they tackle the many social and political challenges of their times.

PRINCIPLE I



Sankofa— Learn from the Past

FILLING OUT MY FIRST U.S. Census form in 1970, I searched for a category that acknowledged my Latino roots. I felt a loud thud in my heart as I finally checked the Caucasian box. Latinos were not recognized as a group by the U.S. government until the 1980 Census. We all have a deep need to be accepted for who we are, but this is particularly so in communities of color, whose members have been relegated to a minority status and measured by a White ideal. As I filled out the form, I heard my grandmother's sweet voice, "*Aye mi jita, nunca olvides quien eres y de donde venistes*" ("Oh, my dearest little daughter, never forget who you are and where you came from").

This notion of remembering your roots and staying connected to your ancestry is of biblical import in Black, Latino, and Indian communities. Forgetting where you came from is known as *selling out*, becoming an Uncle Tom or an Oreo or a coconut (Black or Brown on the outside, but White on the inside). Staying connected to one's roots includes being in tune with the history and struggles of one's people. Communities of color relate to the past as the "wisdom teacher," the source from which culture flows.

Sankofa, the mythical bird who looks backward, symbolizes African Americans' respect for insight and knowledge acquired from the past. A legacy of their West African ancestors, *Sankofa* reminds us that our roots ground and nourish us, hold us firm when the winds of change howl, and offer perspective about what is lasting and significant. Although *Sankofa* rests on the foundation of the past, its feet face forward. This ancient symbol counsels us that the past is a pathway to understanding the present and creating a strong future. *Sankofa* invites us to bring forward the meaningful and useful—including the values and spiritual traditions passed from previous generations—to learn from experience and to avoid the dead ends and pitfalls of history. The song that is considered the Black national anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing," proclaims: "Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us."¹ The song also inspires hope, because despite past trials and tribulations, people survived and are now thriving.

Latinos connect to the past during *El Dia de los Muertos* by recognizing the gifts inherited from their *antepasados* (those who came before) and the wisdom their ancestors have passed on. On this day, many Latinos compose an altar with pictures of their family members who have passed on. Surrounded by marigold flowers, flickering candles, and perhaps a mantle embroidered by their grandmother, they play old songs and



Sankofa is a mythical bird with its feet firmly planted forward and its head turned to look backward. Sankofa means return, go back, seek, and retrieve. Sankofa urges us to reflect on and learn from the past.

tell stories about these relatives. Fried plantains, *arroz y frijoles*, rice pudding, or other special foods are made. Brandy, chocolate, strong coffee, and other treats are left on altars so that those who came before know they are welcome, loved, and remembered. Latinos also take flowers and food to family burial plots, and thus the roots of the past are affirmed and strengthened.

American Indians believe their ancestors, the venerable ones, walk right alongside them and are accessible even though they have passed on to the spirit world. They pray to the grandfathers and grandmothers, asking for their blessings and good counsel. The Navajos honor this connection each time they introduce themselves: "I am the grandson of . . . and the great grandson of . . ." Indian history, culture, morals, and values are passed on through the oral tradition in stories and fables that often enumerate the feats of ancestors. "Learn from the past," a former

slogan for the Native American College Fund, encapsulates the belief that by understanding history people will not repeat past mistakes and will create a better future.

Thus, these cultures keep the past alive and accessible so it feeds the present. Because their history is a tale of conquest, cultural oppression, and racism, reclaiming and remedying the past is crucial to recovering power and wholeness. For many, this is not about times gone by but about their recent family history. Ana Escobedo Cabral, former secretary of the U.S. Treasury, grew up in a migrant family in the Santa Clara Valley, listening to the stories of her grandparents and great grandparents. She says, “I feel very fortunate that I lived with several generations. I learned about the struggles they endured—losing children to disease and hunger, coming across the Rio Grande, and walking all the way from Texas to California with no money and then working in the fields.” Cabral believes this motivates her to improve the lives of others. “One thing that will always be culturally important is the connection to your own family history. Through that you’ll understand people’s pain, suffering, and struggle.”

Healing the Past

MANY PEOPLE MAY HAVE difficulty understanding why we need to reconcile the past in order to build a pluralistic society and fashion multicultural leadership. Yet the vestiges of the past and the inequities that existed for centuries continue to impede inclusiveness and equity. For example, embedded racism, which has its roots in slavery, is evident in school systems that “push out” Black students, graduating fewer than 70 percent in some urban areas.² Inequality has lingered long after emancipation. Similarly, five hundred years after the conquistadores slashed their way through this hemisphere, Latinos still struggle with the legacy of being colonized people. Latino wages are actually falling even as their labor participation increases; they are working more and earning less.³ Latino high school dropout rates hover at 40 percent, which is attributed to inadequate and poorly funded schools in high-density Latino neighborhoods.⁴ By understanding the historical systems that entrenched this type of discrimination, Latinos can remain resolute and stay the course.

Indian lands were snatched from them *way back* during pioneer times. After the Indians were rounded up and confined to reservations, Christian ministers baptized them and banned many of their religious practices. Children were sent to boarding schools

to learn the White man's ways. Stripped of their spirituality and land, they could have had their heritage wiped out like the bison that once grazed the open range. The movement to reinstate tribal lands took shape only in the 1960s when the first Indian lawyers examined the old treaties. The Indians' battle for tribal sovereignty and cultural preservation persists today.

These examples shed light on how history continues to affect people of color and how reconciliation is needed to create a truly inclusive future. Understanding and healing the past can move people beyond the vestiges of oppression and old transgressions. The South Africa reconciliation movement illuminates the past as a force for new beginnings. Leaders urged people who had suffered under apartheid to come forward and publicly acknowledge their grievances and transgressions so that the past could be healed and a new country could be born.

In practicing *Sankofa*, our starting point will be the genesis of America. The convergence of certain European philosophies drove the exodus across the Atlantic and made the settling of the western hemisphere a de facto conquest based on the oppression of indigenous people. This set in motion an exclusionary leadership form that denied the history and contributions of diverse people. For mainstream leaders, understanding



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the history that gave rise to ethnocentricity is perhaps the most difficult step in transforming leadership to an inclusive, multicultural form.


History recounts the events of the past, but not from an objective frame of reference. Depending on the particular view of the author, a certain perspective is espoused. Women in the last century, for example, realized that history was written by men, which affected women's current self-concept and col-

lective empowerment. *His*-story and not *her*-story revealed a past in which men were the great heroes and women's contributions were lost like etchings in the sand. Likewise, people of color know the prevailing history also is not *our*-story but instead reflects an Anglo and European philosophy and worldview; they see history in a different light. Sharing these perspectives can level the historical playing field. Constructing a future

that integrates the perspectives of all Americans must start with an inclusive historical foundation.

Sankofa beckons us to look at the past courageously and to learn from history, and it assures us that this will give us the clarity and power to construct a better future.

Whitewashing the Settling of America

 KAY, I'LL ADMIT IT. I am "old school." I was raised in the 1950s, when the settling of America was presented as a romantic adventure. "In fourteen-hundred-ninety-two," my classmates chorused, "Columbus sailed the ocean blue." I envisioned the first Pilgrims in their crisp white collars stepping off their boats, amazed at this vast and beautiful land, unspoiled and untamed. The first Thanksgiving was a wondrous feast, with helpful Indians serving up hearty portions of squash and corn. In my vivid child's imagination I saw covered wagons forging across the rugged plains to settle the wild, wild West. American history at that time was written *of*, *by*, and *for* the people who conquered this land; it described what happened from their viewpoint. And I believed every word of it.

What kind of trauma do persons of color undergo when the reality of what really happened to their ancestors unfolds like a jarring nightmare in the dark night? I remember my grandmother admonishing me, "Don't wear your skirts too short, like I did." As a Central American Indian she blamed herself, and did not understand that the ravishing of young native girls was a tradition carried over from the conquistadores, who took what they wanted. In fact, the mestizo or mixed race throughout Central and South America is the offspring of the forced integration between Indians and Spaniards. For Indian women, it didn't matter how long or short their skirts were.

The traditional story of the settling of America is a cultural construct. What really happened after Christopher Columbus set foot on the coast of San Salvador and the Pilgrims eagerly followed, landing at Plymouth Rock? Was the land free or stolen? The sugar-coating of history is a hard pill to swallow if it was your grandmother who was abused or your native soil that was lost. To build a multicultural nation, we must peer through a different glass. Are we going to refer to this as the *discovery and settling* of America or are we going to call it a *conquest, colonization, attempted genocide*?

Looking at the past from this frame of reference may be disturbing and seen as irrelevant, or, worse, may create resistance. Contemporary American culture lives in the *ahora*—the present. Getting things done now is imperative! The past is tucked away, mythologized, and certainly not seen as the backdrop for the present. Some may complain, “Do we have to revisit the antecedents of racism again? Haven’t we done enough of this? Besides, it wasn’t me!” The individualist nature of American culture makes it difficult to assume a collective understanding of—or responsibility for—how the past structures our current reality and affects us today. Cultural amnesia results, so people have no memory of the trials and tribulation of the past or how inequality and exclusion continue.

Can we go down a different road? Is it possible that, by getting right up in the face of historical whitewashing, we can heal the social disease that finds justifications for why one group is better than another? Can we uproot the mind-set that proclaimed that this hemisphere was here for the taking and its inhabitants were savages? When the past is reconstructed in the bright light of honesty—or at least when everyone’s story is told—we can begin restructuring leadership from a Eurocentric form to one that reflects and respects the history and culture of all Americans.

Bueno; to do this, our story must start before the Pilgrims and conquistadores. Estimates of the native population in the Americas in pre-Columbian times range from twelve and a half million to twenty-five million. Central Mexico alone, it is conjectured, contained almost ten times the number of people in England at that time.⁵

So why did Columbus sail the ocean blue in 1492, why did the inhabitants of this hemisphere stay home? The cultures of the western hemisphere, as we will explore, were rooted to their homelands, whereas Columbus’s landing in America spurred an exodus that would become one of the greatest in history.

The European Exodus

BEGINNING IN THE SIXTEENTH century, religion, politics, and economics converged in Europe, spawning a new worldview. It defined man’s nature as acquisitive and competitive, supported the advent of capitalism, and provided a strong rationale—even a religious mandate—for conquering the Americas. When Martin Luther, a devout Catholic priest and a purist, nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of

the Wittenberg Church, man's very relationship to God was turned upside down. The Protestant reformation took hold, and a central tenet of Protestantism was that the individual did not need an intermediary—a priest, a saint, or even *Santa Maria*, the Holy Mother of God—to communicate directly with God. This was heresy to the Catholic Church, which for centuries had controlled the pipeline to the deity through their black-clad priests and holy saints.

Fueled by Calvinism in Germany, the Protestant ethic promulgated industriousness, duty, hard work, progress, and the accumulation of wealth. This was a 180-degree turn from the partnership-oriented early cultures that had stressed sharing and living in harmony with nature. Furthermore, Protestantism ran a pretty tight ship. Rules, formal regulations, self-control, rationalism, and subduing of the “pleasures of life” reigned. A diligent person would be working too hard to have time for such frivolities.

It was the entrée of economist Adam Smith's idea of capitalism in 1776, however, that spelled doom for the mutually assisting early cultures. Capitalism compelled individuals to go in search of personal wealth. As the free-market economy proliferated, the belief in self-interest superseded public welfare or social good. The individual no longer had to consider the effects of his actions on the collective.⁶ The free market economy, competition, and “survival of the fittest” replaced early communalism. Now the operating words were looking out for *numero uno*—every man for himself.

Political theorist and influential thinker Thomas Hobbes capped this off by espousing that the fundamental motivation of human nature was selfishness—a perpetual struggle for individual advantage, power, and gain. Hobbes argued that society was simply a group of selfish individuals united to maximize safety and protect themselves from one another. His social contract was based on human beings wanting a moral authority to safeguard them from their own selfish nature.⁷ This is evidenced today in the mushrooming number of laws intended to contain and police human behavior.

One shift that altered humanity's entire cosmology was the Newtonian concept of the natural world as a machine to be engineered for humankind's benefit—a far cry from early



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societies' belief that the earth was a living being and humans one part of the intricate web of life. Hobbes and Newton provided a platform on which rugged individualism and materialism formed the matrix of the *individualist* culture. Changing man's relationship to the earth from steward to subjugator also set the stage for an economic system that allowed the using up and abusing of natural and human resources.

Writing in the 1950s, historian Max Weber accurately described the Protestant ethic as the seedbed for the capitalist economy. Its proponents reason that making money is an expression of virtue and one's purpose in life; thus, becoming wealthy is an end in itself—and even a moral imperative!⁸

Yet while Adam Smith was writing about the benefits of free market politics, approximately twenty-six million peasants in Europe were unemployed and starving. In France, the widespread famine led to peasant revolts and the destruction of feudalism. People became more autonomous and separate, as the Industrial Revolution lured them to factories in urban areas. There people became, of necessity, more self-reliant. In addition, the means of production were consolidated into fewer hands. Factories were organized hierarchically, with owners at the top, then bosses, managers, supervisors, and workers. This replaced the age-old, more collaborative orientation of agrarian communities, intensified inequality, and laid the foundation of today's social class structure.⁹

This Land Is My Land

The European exodus spanned almost four centuries. The conquest and colonization of the western hemisphere was fueled by overpopulation and the broken promise of the Industrial Revolution, which left many people in Europe earning meager wages and living in squalor. Armed with a strong Protestant work ethic, a competitive drive, and an individualist spirit, thousands crossed the Atlantic seeking land, wealth, and prosperity. In the expanse of the American frontier and its wealth of natural resources, the Europeans saw a bonanza that fulfilled and sanctioned their thirst for material gain, ordained by the Protestant God.

While their northern European counterparts came to homestead and profit, the Spanish conquest was couched as a holy crusade. The Catholic Church sent priests to save the souls of the heathen savages—which didn't preclude enslaving them and profiting from their forced labor. Unlike North America—which, despite the extensive inhabitation by thousands of native tribes, was essentially still a natural wilderness—

the city of Tenochtitlán (now Mexico City) was larger than any city in Europe, with more inhabitants than London or Seville. Hernán Cortez found a radiant island metropolis laced with canals, beautiful palaces, and accumulated treasure.¹⁰ A different kind of exploitation followed: mass quantities of gold and silver were plundered and sent to the Spanish crown.

In *The Rediscovery of North America*, Barry Lopez proposes that the conquest was from the outset a series of raids and irresponsible and criminal behavior, a spree whose end was never envisioned. Timber, land, gold, precious ores, as well as indigenous people, were bountiful and there for the taking. He notes that the conquerors' belief in their imperial and unquestionable right, conferred by God, was supported by a belief in racial and cultural supremacy. Sanctioned by the state and the militia, and fueled by the Protestant ethic, the assumption that one is due wealth became justification for exploiting the land, water, and people.¹¹ This acquisitive mentality meant there would never be a time when one would say *Basta!* ("This is enough"). The new frontier was seen as boundless.

The indigenous cultures in America could not understand or withstand this avaricious and acquisitive behavior. They had no frame of reference for dealing with a worldview so divergent from their own. Pre-Columbian cultures were tightly interwoven. The group took precedence over the individual. People shared what they had and cared for one another. Cooperation, not competition, nurtured the collective and group harmony. Many tribes had creation myths in which their homeland was bestowed by the Creator. Everyday life was punctuated with rituals and celebrations to mark the passing of the seasons. People strove to live in harmony with nature, which they regarded as sacred. These cultures honored the wisdom of their ancestors. The idea of getting on boats and crossing to another continent to find more land or resources was as foreign to them as the conquistadores on their large, swift, and powerful animals. The native peoples felt blessed to live in a place that was both beautiful and rich in the resources needed to sustain life. Why would anyone leave one's family, tribe, the comfort of community, and the sacred land that contained the bones and stories of one's ancestors?

The clash between these two worldviews is illustrated by the story of the Aztec emperor Montezuma. Knowing the Spanish wanted gold, Montezuma took Hernando Cortez to his palace, where mounds of the precious substance were kept. He told Cortez, "Take what you want," thinking Cortez would be satisfied. The emperor did not

realize that the lust for gold was endless and this would only whet the Spanish appetite. Similarly, the Indians who taught the Pilgrims to survive their first winter and shared Thanksgiving dinner with them could not fathom that their new neighbors would soon declare them savages, devastate them with war and diseases, and gradually herd them onto reservations.

Out of over a thousand distinct pre-Columbian cultures in the western hemisphere, only three can be described as acquisitive—the Aztecs, Mayans, and Incas. Although these cultures built empires that might be considered akin to the European model of expansion, they were also decentralized and, historical studies suggest, often preserved the cultures and languages of subjugated people. It is safe to suggest, then, that the cultures in the western hemisphere were overwhelmingly collective, lived in harmony with nature, and valued cooperation.

Perhaps it is fitting that this hemisphere bears the name of Amerigo Vespucci, the Florentine explorer, because he saw the western hemisphere as a utopian world: “The people live in agreement with nature. They have no property; instead all things are held in common.” Without the concept of private property, there was no need for the strong tethers of the individualist culture. “They live without a king and without any form of authority. Each one is his own master.”¹²

Work and Individualism Become an American Ethos

WHEN I SHARE the preceding perspective on the “settling” of America with young students of all races, they are usually captivated by the fact that although they learned about the discovery of America and may have studied Thomas Hobbes, Adam Smith, and the Protestant Reformation, they never connected these to current issues of racism or exclusion in America. Other readers may be discomfited by these revelations. Yet the recent designation of months to honor women’s contributions, Black history, Hispanic heritage, Asian American and Pacific Islanders culture, American Indian traditions, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender pride underscore the need to broaden the ethnocentric funnel of American history.

Looking at history from different cultural perspectives is quite relevant for young people as they prepare to craft the future. How can they ensure that the past is not

repeated without understanding how history frames the present? How can they partake of the cultural gifts of the myriad peoples that built America if they are ignorant of their history and contributions?

Another incentive for examining the past is “fast forwarding” to today and taking into account how unfettered individualism, the Protestant work ethic, and capitalism may be impairing our quality of life. One benefit of multicultural perspectives is that they allow us to tap a wider range of choices and potential benefits. The next section, Principle 2, looks at the societal downsides of the Protestant ethic and individualist values and discusses the benefits of balancing these values with more communal ones from communities of color.

The Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville, in his astute observations of our young country in 1835, noted that the characteristic he most admired was our individualism. He clearly warned, however, that if not continually balanced by other habits that would reinforce the social context and fabric of community, it would inevitably lead to separation and division.¹³ Sociologist Robert Bellah and his colleagues, in their book *Habits of the Heart*, argue that the time warned of by de Tocqueville has come—unchecked individualism has led to emotional isolation and fragmentation.¹⁴

In his acclaimed book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Harvard professor Robert Putnam identifies the phenomenon of withdrawal from community as both the cause and the result of larger social changes. The title reflects his research showing that although the number of people bowling increased in the last twenty years, bowling leagues have declined. As Americans become more isolated, civic engagement, social involvement, and volunteerism are declining. Even entertaining at home has dropped 45 percent since the mid-1970s.

Putnam ascertains that mobility has also contributed: nearly one in five Americans moves each year. It's been demonstrated that these new arrivals are less likely to vote, join civic organizations, or build lasting ties with neighbors. He surmises, “For people as for plants, frequent repotting disrupts roots systems.”



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Putnam also notes the increase in commuter time, estimating that every ten minutes spent in the car cuts civic engagement by 10 percent.¹⁵

As suburban sprawl widens the distances between people, we are losing familiar community meeting grounds and a sense of place. Community connection points have been replaced by festively decorated shopping malls and bustling airports where our lives intersect in transit. People buzz around, shopping, drinking lattes, but the crowd is made up of strangers. These mass commercial spaces are designed not to connect us but to move us from place to place or from store to store. We are among others, but the sense of belonging, community, and relatedness that was once the core of human identity is not being nurtured.

Researchers skeptical of Putnam's conclusions conducted a major national survey, only to find that although people are networking on MySpace, text messaging on cell phones, and blogging at all hours, they are less up close and personal than they used to be. One-quarter of those responding indicated that they have no one with whom to discuss the most important personal issues of their lives. The researchers reported that in the past two decades, based on comparison data from national surveys conducted in 1985, the average number of close friends of an individual has dropped from three to two. This powerful evidence supports Putnam's research, indicating that we are becoming increasingly isolated even as cell phones, the Internet, and technology make us more interconnected.¹⁶

The good news is that the trend toward community disintegration and social isolation is being reversed by younger generations who use technology to build community, act collectively, and stay connected (almost constantly).

Balancing Individualism with Community Good

THE PROTESTANT ETHIC, which equated wealth with virtue coupled with capitalist economics, forged a country with once-unimaginable wealth. Through their industriousness, Americans became some of the richest people on the planet, boasting the ninth highest per-capita income in the world. However, has the drive for materialism mutated into obsessive consumerism? The drive for more and more material consumption is apparent when we note that in 2009 the world's average per-capita income was \$8,732¹⁷—and the average credit-card debt in the United States was \$8,329.¹⁸

The emphasis on industriousness also instilled a propensity for overworking. Americans are the most workaholic people in the industrial world, working 30 percent more hours each year than their European counterparts. In 2007 43 percent didn't even take a week of vacation, while the British enjoyed six and a half weeks of holidays and the French topped out at almost twelve weeks. The United States, unlike 127 other countries, has no law specifying that workers must have vacations. It is difficult to enjoy the fruits of one's labors when working without respite; this also jeopardizes family life, community involvement, and health. Imagine how fulfilling life could be with a stretch of weeks of vacation each year to enjoy family and travel, to read and learn, and to take up a hobby, exercise, or engage in community service!¹⁹

Does focusing on ourselves and our material acquisitions at least make us happy? Isn't materialism a fulfilling trip to nirvana? In their book *From Me to We: Turning Self-Help on Its Head*, Craig Kielburger and Marc Kielburger, two Millennial brothers who are Canadian altruists, dispute the assumption that "no money equals no happiness." Citing a Roper Organization poll of 1,500 Americans, they concluded that unless you are desperately poor and do not have basic necessities, money has little bearing on how happy you are. Seventy-four percent of those earning less than \$25,000 a year reported that they were somewhat or very happy with their lives. Interestingly, among those with incomes of \$50,000 or more, this dropped to 10 percent.²⁰

How does the "American happy quotient" compare to the rest of the world? According to the 2009 Happy Planet Index, the country with the highest number of happy citizens was Costa Rica, followed by the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and Guatemala. America ranked 114!²¹ Even worse, happiness levels have been declining in the U.S. for decades, having peaked in 1957. Even though Americans consume twice as much as we did in the 1950s, it has not made us happier.²² *Apparently, we were happier when we had less stuff to worry about.*



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Obsessive U.S. consumption is well documented in *The Story of Stuff*, a book that inspires people to change their keep-on-buying-and-accumulating pattern. Author Annie Leonard laments that the U.S. makes up 5 percent of the world's people but consumes 30 percent of the world's resources and generates 30 percent of the world's waste. Meanwhile, almost half the world lives on less than two dollars a day. Unchecked and rampant expansion of production, consumption, and disposal is jeopardizing our happiness, health, and communities, and the very survival of our planet and upcoming generations.²³

Returning to a We Culture

The next section, Principle 2, continues in the tradition of *Sankofa* by reviewing the change from first cultures that centered on *We* to the individualist or *I* culture. *Sankofa* reminds us that for most of human history, people lived in *We* or collective cultures, in which the collective superseded individual gain. The strong hold of the *I* culture in America has weakened the support systems and relationships that once existed in extended families and communities. It's telling that more than one out of four Americans now lives alone.

Author M. Scott Peck, after searching for the keys to human fulfillment in his classic best seller *The Road Less Traveled*, turned his attention to the role community plays in people's well-being. Peck found that people thirst for a sense of place and belonging. He envisioned a world in which a "soft individualism" acknowledges our *interdependence*. Rugged individualism demands that we always put our best foot forward, hide our weaknesses and insecurities, and don a mask of self-sufficiency. This leaves people feeling inadequate, exhausted, and alone. Peck believed that humanity stands on the brink of annihilation if community and interdependence are not rewoven, stating, "In and through community lies the salvation of the world."²⁴

This longing for community reflects the collectivism of early *We* cultures, which remains the essence of African American, Latino, and Indian people. *We* satisfies our need to belong and have meaning in our lives. *We* values generosity and taking care of one another. As collective cultures were the cradles of humankind, *We* is an intersection and connecting point that can bring people together. *We* means remembering that our mutuality ensured our survival, and it holds the promise to our future existence.

Developing a collective *We* orientation can heal much of the social malaise that unbridled individualism, overwork, and materialism have spawned. Thus, in the spirit of *Sankofa* in which we learn from the past, we can heed the good counsel given by de Tocqueville almost 175 years ago: balancing individualism with the collective good will reinforce the social context and fabric of community.²⁵

PRINCIPLE 2



***I* to *We*—From Individualism to Collective Identity**

I WAS BORN INTO a *We* culture in which seven people lived in a tiny house with one bathroom. There was no concept of private space—a person never went to his or her room; the whole house was common ground. A *We* culture meant my mother, Maria, dressed us up on Sundays and marched us to church, where we took up the whole pew. She watched over us like an eagle circling the morning sky. She only had to give us that look to scare us into perfect piety. *We cultures have a strong sense of belonging and sticking together.*

A *We* culture meant my mother hurried home from church, took off her black mantilla, and then cooked the Sunday chicken, which was carefully divided so that every other Sunday, for example, I got a leg. *We cultures share everything.* A *We* culture meant that on Saturday mornings everyone scrubbed doors, walls, and windows, shook rugs, took out the mattresses for a good airing, and washed down the sidewalks. *We cultures work together so everyone benefits.*

The preparation for a *We* orientation starts early in life. Latino babies are never left at home with a babysitter. At Sunday gatherings or *fiestas*, babies are passed around like precious treasures. People anxiously wait their turn to sing to the baby, pinch its cheeks, and make it laugh. Babies are called *preciosa* and told over and over how *linda* (pretty) they are! At parties, they are bounced from lap to lap. When the music starts, they are sashayed onto the dance floor and rocked to a ranchero or salsa beat. Latino babies get accustomed to people at an early age; that is how they become *We*. *We cultures center on people.*

One time when I had a bad tooth, my mother took me to the dentist and then we went to see the movie *The African Queen*. It is a vivid memory, because it is the only time I remember one-on-one time with my mother. *We* meant I was almost never alone or with just one other person. *We cultures are collective and relish togetherness.*

No one gets left out of a *We* culture. Uncle Huey showed up on a sweltering August day to the warm embrace of my father. He would spit brown tobacco off the front porch and aggravatingly clear his throat ten times a minute. His trousers hung off him like the laundry on my mother's clothesline. We pleaded with our Papi, "He is embarrassing, *pleeeze* send him back home." This was to no avail. No matter how obnoxious he was, he was part of the *We*—he was my uncle. *We cultures are impeccably inclusive.*

For Latino Catholics, first Holy Communion is a solemn and festive day, one's first encounter with the heavenly host—a baby step into spiritual maturity. As the big day approached, I was worried. We didn't have any money and all the young girls would be kneeling before the holy altar in fancy white dresses. From an old trunk, my mother took out the precious cotton brought from Nicaragua that she had been saving for herself. She measured me here and poked me there. After working all day, cooking the family dinner, and putting her children to bed, she would sew late into the night. A week later she proudly held up a simple white dress with lace stitched around the collar, on which she had pinned a cotton flower from Woolworth. The other girls had store-bought dresses with lace and taffeta, but my dress was the most beautiful because no one else's mom had sacrificed so much. *We cultures put benefiting the whole before the individual.*

I still can't imagine how my mother, with her broken English and limited resources, figured all this out! It was her total dedication to the *We*, that unbroken promise that

her family and children came first. *We* was all she knew. She passed on that sense of a family and culture of togetherness to me. *We* was embedded deep in my soul. I didn't understand it then, but it sustained me when I left my family to go to college and live in the strange land of the *I*s. *In We cultures the I exists only in relationship to others, not as a separate entity.*

I and Individualism or We and Collectivism

ANTHROPOLOGISTS WHO STUDY and categorize cultures make broad distinctions between collectivist or *We* cultures, such as American Indians, Latinos, and African Americans, and those that are more individualistically or *I* oriented, such as modern North Americans and western Europeans that are considered individualist. In *Managing Diversity: People Skills for a Multicultural Workplace*, Norma Carr-Ruffino comments that most of the world's cultures, as well as women in all societies, are collectivist.¹ This is understandable, as individualism is a historically new phenomenon that grew out of the Protestant ethic and European intellectualism. Of course, these cultures are not rigidly separate; in today's rapidly changing and interdependent world, cultures are blending aspects of both. For instance, to function successfully in dominant culture organizations, people of color have learned the individualist orientation.

In our discussion of the previous principle, *Sankofa*, we reviewed the roots of the individualism that dominates in the United States today; we will now take a closer look at collectivist or *We* cultures. To integrate the best of each viewpoint into a multicultural leadership model, we must understand the nuances of both orientations and how these have influenced leadership.

It is important to clarify that the term *collectivist* refers not to today's political concept of socialism, but rather to an ancient, tried-and-true form of social organization. Collectivist *We* cultures have been on the earth for a very long time; their traditions and histories go back many millennia. These are stable cultures with highly defined rules, and they change more slowly than individualist cultures. Collectivist cultures are usually tightly woven and integrated. As noted previously, these cultures cherish group welfare, unity, and harmony. To maintain these, people behave politely, act in a socially desirable manner, and respect others. The family, community, or tribe takes precedence over

the individual, whose identity flows from the collective. People work for group success before personal credit or gain.

Individualist cultures, on the other hand, appeared relatively recently in history, and they are more loosely integrated. Change and risk taking are embraced. Individuals are *highly differentiated* from others. Self-identity and self-interest are keystones. To grow up means to become independent, autonomous, and responsible for one's own life. Individual freedom and choice are highly valued. In these cultures, individual needs supersede collective ones. This is not considered selfish. The individual serves society by living up to her or his potential. Achievement and getting things done take priority.

Whether a culture is individualist or collectivist depends on the degree to which individuals' beliefs and actions are independent of those of the group. *We* cultures emphasize group opinions and actions, and they stress psychological closeness. Individual goals are integrated with those of the collective. Individualist cultures, on the other hand, emphasize personal opinions. Being able to think for yourself signifies intelligence and competency. Competition with others is considered healthy, motivating, and beneficial. One advances by calling attention to oneself or standing out from the group.

The extent of one's individualist or collectivist orientation determines how much control one assumes in life. The individualist focus says, "To a very great extent, I control my life, determine my reality, choose my experiences, and shape my destiny. I am the captain of my own ship." Collectivist cultures are more in tune with natural cycles and believe in a life power that is external to them. These forces influence their lives. They also take into account what other people think, want, and need. These lessen individual freedom of choice.

People from collectivist cultures, therefore, have a greater belief that things happen to them. The Spanish language contains a passive tense in which innate objects or others assume responsibility: "The glass fell"; "The taxi left me"; "It didn't call my attention." Similar verbal constructs, found in languages of African tribes such as the Zulu and



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Culture, the lens through which a group of individuals defines reality, has been described as *collective programming*. Cultural determinism proposes that a person's values, beliefs, and worldview are riveted to this early conditioning. Today's diverse society and global marketplace require leaders to free themselves of this type of conditioning in order to attain

a broader cultural perspective and repertoire. Cultural adaptability and flexibility have become essential leadership skills.

The next section reviews early *We* cultures that have existed since prehistoric times. Considering these antecedents provides insights for understanding how leadership in Anglo society is different from leadership in communities of color.

Our First Culture Was a We Culture

BEFORE THERE WAS an *I* culture, *We* ensured our continued existence. Those who trace man's evolutionary heritage from anthropoids—the great apes—can witness even today their cooperation, strong sense of family, and mutual care. Genomics has confirmed that fully 99.4 percent of our DNA is similar to that of the anthropoids. Much early human behavior was patterned on the great apes and their communal behavior.³ Obviously, no “lone wolf” survived and evolved alone. (The idea of the lone wolf is actually a misnomer; wolves are wedded to their pack.) Our evolutionary journey has been a collective one. Even today we live through a long, dependent childhood before we can live on our own: someone feeds us, cleans us, and makes sure we are safe, warm, and dry. *We is the reason we are alive.*

Primitive times were brutal and treacherous, with wild terrains, hunger, predatory animals, and exposure to tempestuous weather. Early humans had to be constantly alert—ready to defend themselves or to take rapid flight and flee the threat. Alone, a person would die from the elements and a multitude of dangers. The tribe was the warm

bear robe essential for protection. Whether for hunting, taking care of domesticated animals, raising children, planting or harvesting, or preparing medicinal and herbal remedies, the tribe brought people together for preservation, safety, comfort, ritual, and celebration.

Through tribal living, human beings developed complex and mutually beneficial ways of working together, including the differentiation of roles based on one's abilities or lineage—which today is still the basis of organizational development. The herbalist, the potter, the fire keeper, the weaver, the warrior, the chief, the ruling council, and the hunting party, all first came into form when humans lived in tribes. Just as important, the tribe uncovered and explained the meaning of the universe and man's place in it. In times when the mysteries of life were stupefying, humans looked to the medicine man, the chief, or the wise woman to explain events in the natural world and provide guidance.

Tribes were the vehicles for a collective human identity or the sense of *We* to evolve. Even today, many tribes dress in identical clothes, wear their hair the same, adorn themselves similarly, and follow the daily rituals that give meaning to their lives.

Individualist cultures would have us believe that survival of the fittest was an every-man-for-himself instinct in a dog-eat-dog, competitive environment. In actuality, the collective lifted humans to the top of the evolutionary pyramid. In her notable book *Calling the Circle*, visionary author Christina Baldwin uses the term *first culture* to refer to the time when humans lived in tribes or small communities in which everyone was needed and included and everyone belonged. Baldwin points out that human beings survived and thrived because of their ability to care for each other, work together, and help one another. *We* was our “competitive evolutionary edge” over other species. Survival of the fittest was a cooperative and reciprocal experience.⁴



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Riane Eisler's landmark work *The Chalice and the Blade* documents early societies across Europe, Asia, and the Americas in which people worked in partnership, living in harmony with nature. She notes that human survival was largely due to the cultivation

of highly sophisticated ways of working together that included collaborative decision-making structures. Eisler describes many Neolithic cultures as ones in which “social relations are primarily based on the principle of linking rather than ranking, [and] may best be described as a partnership model where both men and women worked together for the common good.” First cultures by necessity were tight as a drum, and their foundation was *mutual assistance* and *loyalty*.⁵

To understand the deep groove that “the tribe” or collective existence has made in our memory banks, consider that humans first appeared about 195,000 years ago.⁶ For over 80 percent of this time span, humans lived in caves, surrounded by a tribe that provided protection, love, warmth, food, family, and a sense of identity.⁷ Human beings are social animals; *We* have always lived in groups. Through our long evolutionary journey, our reliance on each other was linked directly with the need for survival—the strongest instinct we have. First cultures, therefore, are humanity’s home base.

We Is the Tribe, Community, and *Familia*

The mutuality of early cultures has survived in its most vibrant forms among indigenous people and in the Indian, Latino, and Black communities, in which sticking together has been a survival tactic. Their collectivism, which centers on group identity and the common good, is still evident today.

American Indian leadership, for instance, is based on a great deal of introspection and work on identity—both individually and collectively, for the two are intertwined. Individuals are like the reeds making up a woven basket that is decorated with traditional designs and colors. The basket is the tribe, holding individuals in place and giving them a sense of unity, identity, and sustenance.

LaDonna Harris, president of Americans for Indian Opportunity, observes how this works: “In Native cultures, *strong personal identity and collective identity stand side by side*. A good tribal person must have self-worth, positive qualities and skills, and be as healthy as possible so they can contribute to the community. The collective is only as strong as the individuals who give it life.” Benny Shendo concurs: “The tribe and community are central, then the extended family, the clan, and then perhaps the individual. Yet, people are secure in their personal identity. In the Anglo culture, individualism is stressed. The reality is you can be collective *and* still be an individual. You can be totally yourself, a real character, but you are yourself within this spectrum of community and tribe first.”

Shendo reflects on the collective identity: “For Native Americans, who you are depends on what tribe you belong to. Your rights, like the right to live on our lands, for example, come from your tribal membership. It’s not about the individual. In all Indian cultures, the tribe is paramount because it’s that community, that group of people who create the collective identity, the songs, traditions, and culture . . . When I meet Indian people, the first thing they say is ‘what tribe are you?’ That’s how we establish our initial relationship, and it is a collective identity.”

The first premise of the American Indians for Opportunity Ambassadors Program reflects this point of view: “The strength of the Indian peoples, both collectively and individually, is the tribe. It is our culture, family, community, and tribe that define our role in society and our self-identity.” Collective identity is in sharp contrast

to individualism, which touts personal achievement and competition. There is no concept within each American Indian tribe of winning at the expense of others.⁸

Similarly, a core belief in Hispanic culture is that other people come first. The Latino tendency toward collectivism is evident in the treasured value of *la familia*, which broadly refers to groups with a special affinity who provide assistance and support. Latinos cherish belonging, group benefit, mutuality, and reciprocity. Interdependency, cooperation, and mutual assistance are the norm. Unlike the Anglo nuclear family, the Latino *familia* is elastic and grows to include *padrinos* or *madrinas*—godparents for baptisms, weddings or confirmations—and “*tías*” or “*tíos*”—honorary aunts or uncles.

A person who is simply walking down the street with a close friend may be suddenly introduced as a *compadre* or *comadre*, indicating that he or she is now considered family. Even sponsors for *quinceañeras* (the ceremony presenting a young woman to the community), wedding anniversaries, or baptisms become part of the family. Latinos have an open-door policy when it comes to *We*. *Bienvenido*—welcome, hospitality, and inclusiveness—makes for a dynamic and expanding family much like a tribe.

This tradition has roots in both the indigenous and the Spanish cultures that are the ancestry of Latinos. The large extended families in Spain ensured that a relative or



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—Benny Shendo Jr.,
Jemez Pueblo

close friend was contacted when a need arose. The Aztec culture was organized in multiple family groups who governed themselves and worked as a unit. The growing of crops, building of homes, trading, and caring for children were all collective *We* endeavors.

African Americans ancestors came from tribal cultures that mirror a similar sense of connectedness, interdependence, and reciprocity. Dr. Jim Joseph, in his insightful book *Remaking America*, termed this the *cosmology of connectedness*. “The idea that a person cannot be fully understood apart from the community which determines his or her personhood was fundamental to the African view of moral duty and social obligation.”⁹

African Americans carry on this collectivist tradition. Under slavery, everyone suffered under the same yoke. Black people faced discrimination and racism by “sticking together.” The *We* in the song “We Shall Overcome” indicates an understanding that solidarity is their source of strength and salvation. Indeed, since the practice of slavery tore families apart, African Americans don’t know if someone is a blood relative or not, so they refer to each other as brother, sister, or cuz (cousin). On a first encounter, although Black people may not know each other, they feel their common history, faith, and culture.

Dr. Joseph believes the large-family patterns that Black people develop, which include stepparents, peer group members, community leaders, meeting brethren, teachers, and special friends, is also a legacy from the African world: “While the bonds of the



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extended family were severed by the massive transcontinental displacements that brought Africans to American shores, the spirit of community not only survived but took on new forms and meaning.”¹⁰

This immutable group identity endures. In 2005, Kanye West, the controversial rap singer, was chosen by news columnist Barbara Walters as one of the most fascinating people of the year. When asked to describe himself, his first word was “*Black!*”¹¹ Likewise, when I am working

on identity with African American youth, I give them a sheet with the question “Who are you?” For almost every teenager “Black” is the first choice. The White culture does not have that kind of centralized identity with people of their race or color.

The highly developed sense of We—community, extended family and tribe—has kept communities of color intact for the past five hundred years. That strong sense of We was their survival, hope for tomorrow, and anchor of mutual protection, support, and celebration.

I Is Contained in We

I AND WE ARE NOT A DICHOTOMY. *I* is intrinsic to the *We* orientation—individuals must be strong for the collective to thrive. *We* do not have to choose one or the other. This concept of *both and* rather than *either or* is a thread that runs through collectivist cultures. Because they are more tightly woven, there is a wholeness in which many things, including differences, can exist at once. Just as the corn stalk grows tall on its own, but only fully matures when many are planted and cross-fertilization occurs, the *I* is nourished in the rich soil that has been cultivated by many generations.

The challenge is to balance communal good with individual gain—to reach the higher ground of interdependence, where personal gain is not achieved at the expense of the common good. Today, the widening gap between the haves and have-nots and the lack of regard for the well-being of our children and our grandchildren's economic security indicate that the pendulum has swung too far in the *I* direction. Balancing individualism with collectivism may sound easy; however, it proposes a new *cultural equilibrium* that runs contrary to the social conditioning and historical antecedents of the dominant culture.

When competitive and acquisitive individualist cultures have clashed with collective ones, the *We* has always been relegated to the underdog position. Individuals from collective cultures may feel exploited or ripped off when they sacrifice for the group or organization and are not recognized for their hard work or are passed up for promotion. The question is: How do we balance the *I* with the *We*? If we can accept that human beings have an innate drive for connectedness and taking care of one another, then returning to a *We* perspective is a natural homecoming.

Einstein once remarked that our sense of separateness was “a kind of optical illusion.” To live in a mutually caring world, he continued, we must undertake a deliberate change in perspective. “Our task must be to free ourselves . . . by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all creatures and the whole of nature . . .”¹² Einstein's unified field

theory runs contrary to our individualist and autonomy-focused culture; it resonates instead with the holistic worldview of indigenous communities.

We sustains the Future

THE WE ORIENTATION values the common good and safeguards the community's long-term welfare. In *We* cultures it is the solemn responsibility of leaders to ensure that children have the resources and preparation to live a good long life. The *We* identity encompasses ancestors, present-day people, and those who will follow—a vision in sharp contrast to the economic inequality, corporate greed, fiscal irresponsibility, and environmental crisis ravaging our nation today.

Principle 3, *Mi Casa Es Su Casa*, explores how people in communities of color are expected to treat each other with a generosity of spirit and have passed this trait from one generation to another. Almost unanimously, collective cultures understand that the excessive accumulation of wealth or power by a few hinders the well-being of the society as a whole. In collective cultures generosity allows people and the community to thrive. Deep sharing is a cultural touchstone and wealth is defined as being able to give to others.

PRINCIPLE 3



Mi Casa Es Su Casa— A Spirit of Generosity

MY SISTER MARGARITA was thirteen when we arrived in Tampa, Florida. Since she was raised in Nicaragua, she is culturally more traditional than I am. When I was in my thirties, she was visiting when my next-door neighbor dropped by to meet her. He casually admired a handwoven poncho hanging on the wall. “Thank you,” I smiled, remembering its origins. “I got it in Chile.” When he left, my sister scolded me: “Have you forgotten everything you were taught? You were supposed to give him that poncho!”

I flashed back to a fiesta I had attended with her a few years previously, when she lived in Guatemala. The hostess had flung open the door and gave me a big *abrazo* (embrace)—even though I had never met her and hadn’t “really” been invited. Somewhat stunned at her generous welcome, I managed to gasp, “What beautiful gold earrings!” “Here,” she smiled, “you must have them—they’re yours.” She took them off and handed me the treasured gift without a moment’s hesitation.

The Latino saying *Mi casa es su casa* reflects a sprawling sense of inclusiveness and generosity. It encapsulates a joy in sharing and implies “What I have is also yours.” In collectivist cultures, possessions are more fluid and communal than in individual ones. This pleasure in giving things away can present a cultural conundrum. As I joked to



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my sister, unless both cultures value reciprocity, when I say “*Mi casa es su casa,*” they will have the deed to my house. Then where would I live? Look at what happened to Montezuma or the Indian tribal lands, or still happens in the U.S. tax system in which some rich people hire lawyers so they don’t have to pay their fair share.

In collectivist *We* cultures, generosity is not a two-way street, but a busy intersection where everybody meets. A good illustration is the way strangers are always made to feel welcome. The

host can rest assured that this kindness will be returned. Even though a particular individual may never be able to reciprocate, one day someone else will surely return the kindness. Until people from individualist cultures have experienced this contagious generosity, they may find it difficult to understand or to aspire to this level of sharing. From a *We* perspective, because the self emerges from the collective, generosity toward others is actually giving to oneself. *Cyclical reciprocity means people are continually giving to one another.* This is beautifully captured in the saying of the South African Pedi tribe, “Giving is to dish out for oneself.”¹ Generosity is the glue that holds *We* cultures together. The community fiber would be torn if some were to take more than their share or to accumulate great wealth at the expense of others.

You Are Invited; Please RSVP

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE Americas had many community celebrations and festivals that honored the changes in nature, rites of passing, or special feats of individuals. Everybody was invited and shared what they had. This strengthened people’s bonds and added to their trove of communal memories. In traditional African societies,

there were open weddings to which the entire village was welcomed. People did not arrive empty-handed; in the spirit of generosity, they brought gifts, food, and drink. Inclusiveness and sharing are two quintessential values for collective culture. The *We* cannot thrive or continue to exist if people are excluded, take more than their share, or do not replenish the communal treasure chest.

Many years ago, when visiting friends in Spain, I relished their *dias de fiestas*—a one-week community party where all in attendance eat, drink, and dance together. The main streets are closed, and people promenade dressed in the traditional colors of red and white, which adds to their sense of camaraderie. *Dias de fiestas* are like a community vacation in which everyone is off at the same time. Every year a substantial part of the budget or public funds is set aside to pay for bands, parades, fireworks, and special events so that everyone can participate. Bread, sausages, wine, sardines, and coffee are also free on special days. Since each town has its own *dias de fiestas*, some of the folks attending have come from other places. *No importa*—if you are there then you are welcome to share in the food and festivities.

Because of the high value placed on harmonious relationships and inclusiveness in collectivist cultures, its members may find the notion of RSVP—that some people would be invited and others excluded—to be a disconcerting concept. The Latino culture's elastic concept of *familia*, for instance, extends to an open door to special celebrations, meals, and *fiestas*. If Latinos are invited to a party and have friends or family visiting, it is good manners to bring them along. (It is not necessary to call ahead, although it is considered helpful.) The unexpected guests are not a problem, because of collective generosity. At a Latino *fiesta* or event, all who attend bring gifts, flowers, food, wine, special treats, and desserts to share with their hosts. This is something akin to the parable of the loaves and fishes in the New Testament, in which there is more food and drink at the end of the gathering than at the beginning.

Generosity is also evident in one of the Latino golden rules: if everyone contributes and pitches in, no one bears the burden and there will be more than enough to go around. At Mexican weddings, there is the tradition of pinning money on the bride's dress or paying to dance with the bride and groom. People line up, and it is great fun as one guest after another steps onto the dance floor for their short twirl with the honored couple. Sponsors for baptisms, weddings, and *quinceaneras* gladly pay for the dress,

photographer, *banda*, cake, or bar. In the Anglo culture, it might be embarrassing to ask people to pay for things in this manner. For Latinos, it is an honor that strengthens ties as well as encourages sharing which is the heartbeat of the culture.

Latino hospitality is effusive. People always reserve the best for their guests, serving special food and treats. The Mexican saying *Hechalé agua al caldo* (put another cup of water in the soup) means that no matter how little a person has, there is always enough to go around. Being generous also means showing a genuine caring and concern for people's needs, listening, and giving of one's time. In traditional families, it is embarrassing to have more or to advance ahead of the group. Success is evidenced by one's ability to take care of others and assume greater financial responsibility, as well as by one's willingness to help with special needs. Having more means being able to give more.

Giveaways, Throws, and Potlatches

THE ANTECEDENTS OF LATINO GENEROSITY can be found in the indigenous culture of the Americas. In early Indian cultures, people often competed with each other to see who could give away the most. No one wanted to be seen as a person who had more than others. Giving was seen as a way to honor people and to strengthen



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collective ties. LaDonna Harris illustrates how this generosity is still structured in Indian cultures: "The emphasis is not on accumulation, but on sharing what a person has. Everything is reciprocal, so possessions are more fluid and shared. Things are redistributed. There are many formal mechanisms for redistribution. Giveaways, throws, and the potlatch ceremony are three of the methods that demonstrate how integral these values are to Indian culture."

A striking difference between a materialistic culture and one based on generosity can

be seen in the birthday celebration. In Pueblo cultures, when someone has a birthday, instead of receiving gifts, the celebrator might give back to the community by having a *throw*. After buying food and gifts such as blankets and shawls, the person goes up on the roof and throws the stuff out to the community. The celebrator is recognizing that many of the good things that happened in her or his life are largely due to the care others have provided.

Indian cultures also emphasize achievement as a collective feat rather than just a personal one. In the mainstream culture, when someone graduates from college, people bring gifts to acknowledge this person's achievement. But in the tradition of the Plains tribes, a person might have *giveaways* on such occasions. LaDonna explains, "A young Comanche woman might be recognized by her tribe when she graduates, with song, dance, and a ceremony. However, the young woman understands she didn't accomplish this by herself. Many people contributed. In return, she might have a *giveaway* to thank people. She would give them valuable things, like blankets, household goods, or jewelry."

The potlatch, at which people share prized and beautiful possessions, is another way material goods are redistributed. These offerings are placed in the center of a circle where people can admire them. After a thanksgiving is offered, people talk about what they brought and why they are worthy gifts. Slowly and deliberately, people go to the center and choose an object to take home with them. It is a joyous sharing and celebration; people leave with a treasured item given in generosity—"richer" than when they arrived.

LaDonna sees these forms of redistribution as ways in which communal societies keep different economic and social classes in balance: "There isn't as much ranking. People save up for giveaways for years. Redistribution ensures that no one accumulates so much wealth or material things that it sets that person above others, thereby disrupting the circle of relatedness so pivotal to Native American philosophy."



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—LaDonna Harris, Comanche

Dr. Joseph, describing American Indian tribes in his book *Remaking America*, admired this profuse generosity: “The early Indian tribe was by its very nature a benevolent community in which sharing was a primary virtue and selfishness a primary vice.” He observed, “In the Native American tradition, wealth is generated for its distribution, not its accumulation. The good of the community takes precedence over the good of the individual . . . This produced economic as well as social benefits by distributing goods widely throughout the community.”²

Sharing Is the Soul of Community

FROM THEIR AFRICAN ROOTS, Black people inherited the concept of *the village*, meaning people regarded themselves as an ancestral group who tended their land and livestock communally, with little regard for individual ownership. The care and nurturing of children was everyone’s responsibility. This same sentiment surfaced in the slave quarter communities that functioned as a family. The hardships of slavery necessitated sticking together for mutual protection and survival.

Throughout slavery, African Americans demonstrated a deep sense of taking care of one another and sharing what little they had. Assisting others was a moral obligation that extended beyond the quarter community into a network of mutual aid that encompassed all slaves. Even in the face of need, lack, toil, and trouble, people shared whatever they had with others who were in need. Dr. Joseph believes the benevolent actions of slaves who cared for people who were sick and in need, whether they were White or Black, is reminiscent of tribal society. “The capacity to express sentiments of generosity for those outside the group, the ability to love the enemy is an African American trait . . . there were evidences of a *universal compassion* within the community of Africans in the Americas that embraced both the near and distant relative.”³

This tendency remains essential to Black culture. When people succeed, they are expected to help others and to give back to the community. Based on their interviews with over a thousand Black leaders in corporate America, Ancella Livers and Keith Carver found a deep sense of responsibility—a *moral obligation* to help other African Americans succeed—reported by 95 percent of the people surveyed.⁴

Moreover, the African American community trumps other groups in its generosity. A Northern Trust 2010 study showed that affluent Blacks were more charitable and felt a greater responsibility to contribute to people in need than non-Blacks. This confirms a 2003 study by the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* that found African Americans who give to charity donate 25 percent more of their discretionary income than Whites.^{5, 6} Even though their economic rungs are substantially lower, giving to and taking care of others is an enduring practice of the Black community. Their deep faith and Christian tradition, observes Joseph, reinforces this tradition. “There is an overriding belief among African Americans that service to God is linked to service to humanity. Thus, feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, and providing educational opportunities, social liberation and economic empowerment are viewed as part of the *moral imperative* of religious faith.”

Community Celebrations: Generosity in Action

IN ALL WE CULTURES, generosity strengthens social bonds. Sharing is not limited to material possessions alone; it includes listening, visiting, and spending time with people; storytelling, singing, and dancing; participating in rituals and celebrations; and working for community advancement. *We* cultures create a collective spirit in which sharing and generosity permeate the social fabric.

The African American adage “Make sure people are *singing from the same hymnal*” expresses the need for unity and like-mindedness before taking action. Singing is a spiritual tradition that reinforces Black people’s emotional connections and often describes their common journey. Singing lifted people up during hard times and strengthened resolve during demonstrations or political tribulations. Singing energized the civil rights movement.

This tradition reaches back to the African soil, for which Dr. Joseph identifies a quality he calls *homo festivus*: “The idea that individuals and communities have both a capacity and the need to celebrate life even in the midst of tragedy.”⁷ In Nelson Mandela’s autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, he speaks to this quality as sustaining the South African freedom movement. He recounts the difficult years on Robbin Island

doing physical labor in the limestone quarry: “Singing succeeded in turning our suffering into happiness. We sang revolutionary songs as we worked and we deliberated matters of national importance. Singing made us overcome the pain of the work we were doing.”⁸ Singing builds the collective sense of *We*, allowing people to support and share with one another even under dire need.

The many ceremonies, celebrations, and community traditions in Indian tribes provide opportunities for deep sharing. Everyone brings food and gifts to share and offers to house people. At annual celebrations such as the powwow, dancers wear bright jingle dresses or fringed shawls passed down from their grandmothers. Drummers hammer out a primal beat and sing traditional songs. Each tribe has unique ways of gathering. In September, when autumn floats its cool air, the Comanche come from the four corners of the country to their land in Oklahoma for a Comanche Fair. Through prayer, storytelling, recounting of tribal history, horseracing, games, and special ceremonies that recognize community achievements, the strands of the collective tribal basket are tightly woven.

For generations, the Jemez Pueblo have run over the blue sage hills where the river ambles by on the way to the plains. Benny Shendo explains how running is part of their ceremonial way of life and brings people together: “Everybody runs, from the young boys to the old men. It’s not about competition or winning. You are racing for the people and everybody has a place and a responsibility. The literal translation of one of our races is ‘praying with the clouds or running with the clouds.’ So you are running to bring rain or moisture to the land and to benefit the people.”

From both their own indigenous traditions and those of the gregarious Spanish, Latinos have inherited a love of music, dancing, and celebrations. *Gozar la vida* (“enjoy life”) is a deep-rooted philosophy: sharing good times with family and friends. Consumer studies show that Latinos spend more money on food, entertainment, and music than other market segments.⁹ Regardless of obstacles or limited economic resources, there is a belief that while life may be difficult, it should be enjoyed. “Canta No Llores”—“sing, don’t cry”—is a much-loved traditional song reflecting this philosophy. Imagine how this good counsel uplifts people when they are poor, work at menial and backbreaking jobs, or face the social obstacle of racism!

The venerated salsa singer Celia Cruz echoed this in her last popular song: “*Aye, no hay que llorar, porque la vida es un carnaval*” (“There is no reason to cry, because life is a carnival”). Latinos will find any excuse to host a fiesta, a celebration given for visiting relatives, births, baptisms, birthdays, anniversaries, Holy Communion day, a young girl’s turning fifteen, a new job, moving to a new place, a promotion, or a retirement. Certainly Anglos also celebrate such life events, but for the Latinos’ large extended family—not just blood related but more like a tribe—the fiesta is not a small intimate dinner but a community celebration. Furthermore, *bienvenidos* signifies the pervasive hospitality of the Latino culture, an open-door policy that makes people feel at home. Like their American Indian relatives at their celebratory events, everyone contributes; the fiesta is an opportunity to share.

Latinos, with the highest percentage of participation in the U.S. labor market of any subgroup, are great contributors at work and have an admirable work ethic—another reflection of their value of generosity. Work is an opportunity to give of their talents and contribute to the welfare of the group and organization. Latinos strive to balance working, taking time for people, spending time with their families, and enjoying life through fiestas and celebrations. This philosophy is woven into their religious practices and was upheld by César Chávez in the “Farm Workers Prayer”: “Bring forth song and celebration, so that the Spirit will be alive among us.”¹⁰

Generosity Benefits You and Others

By enumerating the benefits of building a benevolent society that values generosity and mutual care, leaders from communities of color can help people remember why it is better to give than to receive. Although many people profess to believe this, the actions of our materialistic culture indicate that they are only paying lip service. But are communities of color who practice generosity onto something? Not only did they survive more than five hundred years of racism and economic oppression, but they kept their values of faith and dedication to the collective good intact—and they are still singing, dancing, and celebrating every chance they get! Perhaps we should look at why generosity is such a healthy prescription for nurturing community, cultivating relationships, and celebrating life.

Let us start by revisiting the “survival of the fittest” theory—the idea that human nature is intrinsically competitive and acquisitive. Earlier, we surmised that our ability to work together and to look out for one another helped humans finish first in the evolutionary ascent. Most people believe (and were taught) that Darwin originated the “survival of the fittest” theory—which fortified the dominant, individualist, and



“Love” appears in
The Descent of Man

some ninety-five times, whereas only two entries address the “law of mutual struggle,” as Darwin termed it. Darwin argued that more crucial than this is the “law of mutual aid” and human solidarity.

competitive paradigm. But his work on the origin of species presents a more cooperative view.¹¹ Darwin found in animals admirable examples of reciprocity, cooperation, and even love. In *Darwin’s Lost Theory of Love*, author David Loye points out that “love” appears in *The Descent of Man* some ninety-five times, whereas only two entries address the “law of mutual struggle,” as Darwin termed it. Darwin argued that the “law of mutual aid” and human solidarity—in other words, *cultural selection*—is more crucial.¹²

Over a hundred years after Darwin, Jane Goodall, the renowned primatologist, observed similar behavior in chimpanzees, who aided the weak, shared their resources, showed great affection, and comforted those in need. Like these evolutionary predecessors, human beings are social by nature and have a profound longing for connection and community. Can love, reciprocity, cooperation and mutual aid, and generosity be the core of our true nature? Can it be that the individualist and self-centered view of human nature proposed by our society has overshadowed that generous and communal spirit? The underpinning of any society is its concept of human nature; modify this and, like toppling dominos, other concepts begin to fall.

Again, the early *We* cultures were based on people take caring of and looking out for each other. *Being able to share and be generous was, indeed, a survival tactic.* When a hunter brought back game, the entire tribe partook. When another had good fortune, everyone would eat again. The tribal fire gave warmth to all its members. In a crisis, the tribe would come together to provide for those in need. Traditional African societies

followed in this tradition, and Indian tribes have never swerved from this communal pathway. Latino values of mutuality, cooperation, and generosity also mirror the collective values of early cultures.

Communities of color offer rich examples of the benefits of generosity and mutual aid, which are in alignment with the biblical example of the Good Samaritan and the counsel to “love your neighbor.” The New Testament warns against being greedy and cautions that wealth can damage one’s soul (Matthew, Mark, and Luke all recorded Jesus’ words: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God”). The Bible encourages us to be generous and to assume social responsibility for others. “The American way,” discerns Benedictine monk Thomas Keating, “is to first feel good about yourself and then feel good about others. But spiritual traditions say it’s the other way around—that you develop a sense of goodness by *giving of yourself*.”¹³ Perhaps it is better to give than to receive because we bring forth our higher self, connect with others, and infuse our communities with generosity.

The Generosity Gap

YET DESPITE all the religious mandates, much of mainstream America today is more concerned about personal accumulation than the welfare of their neighbors. The gap between the rich and the poor has become a chasm. Catastrophic events like Hurricane Katrina in 2005 shockingly remind us of a growing poverty normally hidden from us by the major media. The number of people in the United States living below the poverty line recently hit forty-six million, or 15.1 percent of the population—an increase of more than 2.6 million in a single year.¹⁴ America’s poverty rate is the highest in the developed world and more than twice as high as those of most other industrialized countries.¹⁵

There is also a direct correlation between poverty and race: only 9.9 percent of Whites are poor, compared with 26.6 percent of Hispanics and 27.4 percent of African Americans.¹⁶ Many experts report that the primary economic reason for the increase in poverty is low wages for workers of all races. The value of the minimum wage has eroded, despite increases. Adjusted for inflation and the cost of living, the \$7.25 minimum wage of 2011 has less buying power than the \$4.25 minimum wage of 1995.¹⁷ The one place

wages are soaring is at the top. In 1980, CEO earnings were only 45 times higher than that of the average worker. By 2000 CEO wages had skyrocketed to 525 times that of the average worker. At least by 2011 that factor had fallen to “only” 343 times.¹⁸

However, the Institute for Policy Studies listed twenty-five U.S. corporations whose CEOs earned more in compensation in 2010 than their firms paid in taxes!¹⁹ This included General Electric, Capital One Financials, Verizon, Coca-Cola, Honeywell, Boeing, and eBay.²⁰ Many of these companies have taken federal tax dollars through subsidies, contracts, and even bailouts!

Greed at the top has led to high unemployment, depressed salaries, slashing of worker benefits, loss of jobs, and the end of secure retirement. The income gap shows no sign of closing. A healthy workforce is the wellspring of a healthy economy and vibrant nation, but in this, the only developed country without the basic security of government-sponsored medical care, 50.7 million Americans, or 16.7 percent of the population, were uninsured in 2010, including 8.3 million (about 6.5 percent) of children.²¹ Finally, even the American dream of owning a home is evaporating. In the overheated real estate market of the 2000s, speculation and predatory lending practices led to runaway housing prices, subprime interest rates, and cash-out financing incentives, culminating in 2008 in the biggest housing meltdown since the Great Depression. Foreclosures rose 63 percent that year, and in 2010 one million Americans were still in jeopardy of losing their homes.²²

America's rich resources, entrepreneurial approach, and business and capitalist acumen have unfortunately led to a national crisis. The individual greed of many of our leaders has overcome concern for the common good and for supporting a society in which people can meet their basic economic needs. A safe and sustainable society is not possible with our resources so unequally distributed. *Dealing with the social structures and revitalizing public morality so that an equitable and compassionate society can thrive is a critical leadership issue of our times.* Raul Yzaguirre urges us to follow a new course: “Embracing the Latino values of generosity and helping one another would heal many of the divisions in America. Latinos are taught not to take more than their share. Many of the social ills facing this country today are the result of an unequal distribution of resources. Perhaps the solution is for the rest of Americans to become more courteous, community-minded, and generous.”

Connecting to the Purpose of Leadership

AS A PIVOTAL VALUE, *generosity* is a key leadership trait in communities of color. On a personal level, leaders give to community causes, help those in need, share their time and resources, recognize the contributions of others, and empower people. At the community level, these leaders focus on *collective sustainability* rather than individual gain or personal advancement. As we will explore more deeply in the next section, leadership committed to creating a more compassionate and equitable society implies generosity and working for a more equitable distribution of resources.

This brings us to a critical juncture. Before looking at the next three leadership principles in communities of color, let's consider the purpose of leadership. Renowned leadership expert James MacGregor Burns aligned closely with communities of color when he defined leadership as a *collective process* linked to *social change* with the purpose of enhancing the *well-being of human existence*. He noted that leadership implies the ability to *mobilize people* and engage them in a process in which both leader and followers raise one another to *higher levels of motivation and morality*.²³

Leaders in communities of color receive their legitimacy from the people they serve, by exhibiting a high level of morality, including being honest and humble, and by serving. As they model these behaviors, they lift up the morality of their followers and community as well. With limited resources, leaders must be adept at mobilizing people to address critical issues, including an examination of the social structures that limit equal participation. The purpose of leadership in communities of color is in step with Burns' description—to promote the collective well-being by creating positive social change through a collaborative process; leaders secure opportunities that develop and uplift people. Dr. Antonia Pantoja, the great Puerto Rican activist, stated this well: "I want to live a life of commitment to the human community for the betterment of all people."

The crisis in American leadership today is a failure to provide the high moral ground and morality that Burns describes as critical. If leaders are to enhance people's well-being, then surely they must nurture a social, political, and economic environment in which people can get their basic needs met, including decent housing, work,

education, and health care. Inspired leadership implies societal guardianship. The emphasis on wealth accumulation by many corporate leaders and the lack of socially responsible action by government leaders contradicts the fundamental purpose of society: to take care of our own and to ensure that our children have a fair chance to prosper.

Leaders are also guardians of the social contract whereby people willingly follow the rules, laws, and structure of society in return for the benefits received. When these benefits begin to unravel, there is social disengagement, alienation, and increasing economic need, as well as more violence and crime. Statistics presented in the previous section indicated that civic participation is on the decline; people feel overworked and are withdrawing from community. Furthermore, America has more people in prison as a percentage of the population than any other country, the greatest number of laws to follow, and the most lawyers. It appears that the social contract is withering and people no longer see our society as ensuring the means to satisfy their basic needs. We are losing the spirit of generosity whereby leaders are stewards and responsible for tending to people's well-being.

Leadership in communities of color, as described in the section that follows, offers a number of remedies that can heal these ills and reengage people in society. This is not to imply that all leaders in communities of color follow these high standards. Some may have swerved from traditional ways. However, as previously noted, the leaders interviewed for this book represent the ideal, offering the best practices from communities of color—practices we can emulate to create our multicultural future.

Leadership That Reflects the Spirit of Generosity

THE IROQUOIS TRIBE'S GREAT leadership rule—considering the impact of their decisions unto seven generations—compelled them to work for tribal sustainability, including nurturing future leaders. To ensure this, *one generation could not take more than their share*. (This commitment to continuity is explored in our 7th principle on Intergenerational Leadership. Safeguarding the prosperity of the community implies an expansive generosity that reaches into the unforeseen future.

Adhering to the seventh-generation rule creates a different leadership perspective. Our *now*-oriented society and results-driven leadership consumes resources and uses

people without considering the ramifications. American Indian leadership, on the other hand, is based on ancient traditions that include continuity and stewardship. John Echohawk explains, “Tribal leaders don’t see land as a piece of real estate to be bought or sold, but as their homeland where their people will remain for all time. The land has to sustain the people. Leaders are stewards of the land for their tribe.”

Echohawk sees a sharp contrast with the way Anglo leaders think. “In the American way, land is bought and sold and its value is monetary. We look at our earth as our homeland. We need to take care of it so it will sustain us in perpetuity. Tribal leaders think long-term, considering the impact on future generations. This view oftentimes gets lost in a busy America that thinks in short-term profit and gain. Tribal philosophy puts things into a holistic and visionary perspective.” On most reservations, for example, one rarely finds rich individuals or entrepreneurs. There the purpose of economic development is creating *community wealth*, not wealthy individuals.

Generosity, mutuality, and helping one another held Blacks, Latinos, and Indians together through oppression and economic scarcity. These qualities continue nourishing and sustaining these communities today. Generosity runs contrary to a few accumulating so much excess wealth that the well-being of society is threatened. Generosity is the antidote to the rampant materialism that reinforces individualist gain over the common welfare. It is the basis for a more compassionate and caring society—the rich soil from which a benevolent community can grow.

The three leadership principles that we’ll explore in Part Two build on the tradition of *Sankofa*. They have emerged from a historical context that was fueled by the civil rights movement. Principle 4, A Leader Among Equals, reflects the *We* or collective orientation in which leadership is shared, rotated, and reciprocal. Principle 5, Leaders as Guardians of Public Values, defines leaders as those who safeguard the values our country was founded on: justice, equality, and the common welfare. Leadership in this context has a moral imperative to exhibit social responsibility. Principle 6, Leaders



Tribal leaders think long-term, considering the impact on future generations . . . Tribal philosophy puts things into a holistic and visionary perspective.

—John Echohawk

as Community Stewards, builds people's capacity and ensures continued progress. As leaders serve people by encouraging their participation and nurturing empowerment, they foster a community of leaders and build the critical mass needed to create positive social change. These principles lay the foundation for a leadership model in which generosity and serving the common welfare is the bedrock of an equitable democracy.