

That's Right, Women Are Wiser

By Giovanna Negretti, founding executive director of Oïste, a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing the political, social, and economic standing of Latinos and Latinas

What would a “wise Latina” think of “A Woman’s Nation Changes Everything”? Since I couldn’t get ahold of Justice Sotomayor, here’s my perspective.

As a Latina, I am not surprised America has become a woman’s nation. As far as I am concerned, we have been a woman’s nation for a long time. Like many Latino families in this country led by single women, my family was no different. My mother was a single mom with three kids who worked full time. Same with my grandmother, who always said she had two full-time jobs—one at the office and one at home. Most of my friends growing up were the products of working mothers.

Recognizing we are a woman’s nation offers a tremendous opportunity to embrace a new outlook on what women can bring to decision making and problem solving. The reality is that women solve problems differently. I joke all the time that with \$20, Latinas can cook rice and beans for the entire block, take the kids to the movies at the local community center, get the tires fixed for free by one of their cousins down the street, get their hair done by their sister—and still have change left over. Latinas could be the perfect candidates to balance our nation’s budget!

The differences I envision are that traditional roles are transformed and that the way women exercise leadership is nurtured and valued. In the book *Why Women Mean Business*, authors Aviva Wittenberg-Cox, CEO of consultancy 20-First, and former *Financial*

Times journalist Alison Maitland, an independent journalist and commentator, suggest that companies led by women or those that recognize the work-life realities faced by men and women today do better financially. But all institutions must be at the forefront of this critical reconfiguration.

Knowing that 50 percent of the workforce is women should drive home this message. Yet challenges still exist. Women are still underpaid, and are not seen enough in board rooms or in politics. Furthermore, the notion of a woman's nation raises expectations and gives room for what I like to call the "Sarah Palin complex," where women can (and should) be everything for everyone: attractive, outspoken, professional, sexy, sporty, and love to cook and watch soccer.

The reality, however, is that work-life balances are difficult, if not impossible. They create lots of stress for women and families. America needs to renegotiate its values to accommodate a new reality where a woman's way of exercising leadership paves the way to a better society.

There is hope, of course. At a press conference recently during the Louis Gates ordeal in Cambridge, Massachusetts, one of the Latino officers scheduled to be at the conference could not attend because he had child care duty. Hmm. Priority on family. What a wise Latino.

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