

▶ 70% of U.S. Hispanics are under 35 years old

▶ The median age for U.S.-born Hispanics is 18 years old vs. 35 years old for foreign-born Hispanics

▶ Hispanics represent the majority of the under-18 population in Los Angeles (57%), New York (56%), Miami (50%)

▶ Under-18 Hispanics' growth rate is 85% vs. 18% for the total U.S. population

Riding the urban Latino wave

Last year, 20-year-old Melissa Giles founded Miami's Urban Latino Music Festival. Now she's helping turn the vibe into a cultural movement nationwide.



TOP PHOTO BY CHARLES TRAINOR JR./HERALD STAFF

RAPID ASCENT: Melissa Giles, top, is using her Miami Urban Latino Festival last year, above, as her springboard to nationwide music events and a fashion line.

BY CHRISTINA HOAG

For Melissa M. Giles, urban Latino is much more than her favorite Spanglish hip-hop rhythm. It's the sass-and-spice culture of young U.S. Hispanics, a style with here-I-am attitude — and a burgeoning business empire.

"I see urban Latino now as where hip-hop was 30 years ago," said the poised 20-year-old entrepreneur who founded Miami's Urban Latino Music Festival a year ago. "In 10 to 15 years, this is going to be as big as mainstream hip-hop."

Giles plans to ride that swelling wave to its crest, using the festival as her springboard to nationwide music events, a fashion line and an arts movement, all aimed at the exploding New Generation Latino — teen age and twenty-something U.S. Hispanics who grow up speaking Spanglish and chowing down hamburgers with salsa.

"I want to create a movement to display our culture — it's a vibe really," said Giles, whose mother is Venezuelan and father British. "We travel easily between one culture and another. We have two sides to us."

That mixture was the pivot for last October's first Urban Latino Music Festival, which featured an array of Latin musical genres, from hip hop and reggaeton to merengue and bachata,

with some R&B thrown in. It was a formula that seemed dubious to some.

"We [young Hispanics] like salsa and merengue, but we also listen to hip-hop. It occurred to me that it would be great to have a festival that had both," said the Miami Senior High School graduate who now heads her own company, Misto L.E.S. Marketing and Promotions.

"A lot of people, especially from radio stations, told me it would never work," recalled Giles.

That was before 10,000 fans flooded into Bayfront Park for the eight-hour music marathon. The event even managed to turn "a small profit" on its \$150,000 cost, which was principally fronted by her father, David Giles, president of Awesome Global Events and a former South Beach nightclub owner. Giles also guided his daughter in organizing the concert.

Now promoters want to take the festival to Texas and California, and others are catching on to the same idea of mixing different Latin music genres in the same venue.

Urban Latino magazine, one of Giles' marketing partners for this year's Columbus Day event, is planning to hold its own Urban Latino Day music spectacular in New York's Central Park this summer.

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