

00:00:00	Music	Music	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
00:00:13	Jesse Thorn	Host	I'm Jesse Thorn, it's <i>Bullseye!</i>
00:00:15	Music	Music	"Huddle Formation" by The Go! Team plays. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:22	Jesse	Host	John Leguizamo, the actor, works a <u>lot</u> . I mean, his IMDb page is closing in on 150 credits. He was in <i>Carlito's Way</i> , <i>The Pest</i> , the <i>Ice Age</i> movies, <i>To Wong Foo</i> , a bunch of others. And he is an electric screen presence.

But that's not the only thing he does. Since 1991, Leguizamo has written and performed in a handful of theatre shows. Award-winning solo shows like *Mambo Mouth*, *Sexaholics*, and *Freak*. They're all deeply personal and touching and hilarious. Leguizamo finds a way to talk about himself and the people in his life—and sometimes even channel those people—with a remarkably sensitive touch.

His latest show is called *Latin History for Morons*. The title kind of explains the show's conceit: with a chalkboard and a professor-y looking outfit, Leguizamo gives the audience a history of the Americas that you don't always see in textbooks. But since it's John Leguizamo, there are dozens of funny voices. There are recreations of historical figures long since dead and it's all framed with a story about his life. A few years back, his son was bullied over his Latinx heritage, at school. Called a slur. Leguizamo wanted to do something about it, give him something to be proud of.

[Music fades out.]

00:01:46	Clip	Clip	He talks about that incident in the show: how it happened, how it affected his son, and as you're about to hear—how it affected him. <i>[Music swells and fades.]</i>
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John Leguizamo: I leave my therapist's office with an untreated chronic case of ghetto rage.

[Audience chuckles.]

John: And uh—t-time out. Urban Dictionary time. For anybody here who doesn't know what "ghetto rage" is—well, it's—it's—it's when the whole world keeps telling you that you're worthless and you fight these microaggressions daily, but when you start to lose that battle, you start drowning in this... *[sighs and chuckles]* in this self-loathing, burning rage.

But—but as a Latin man? As a Latin man, you can't even get angry, 'cause homeland security, the *[censored]*ing INS, or the police could decide you're a threat. And the next person to be shot or deported could be you. Or me. 'Cause Latin life is cheap in America.

00:02:36	John Leguizamo	Guest	<i>[Music swells and fades.]</i> Mm!
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00:02:37 Jesse Host That was a pretty intense intro!

[John laughs]

John Leguizamo, welcome to *Bullseye*! It's nice to have you on the show.

00:02:40 John Guest Thank you for having me! Yeah, that—that—that—that's one of the most intense moments in—in the night.

00:02:47 Jesse Host Yeah, mostly it's you goofing around and—and, uh, waving a copy of the *Open Veins of Latin America* around.

00:02:53 John Guest Yeah, yeah! Or my underwear. Or, yeah, yes!

00:02:56 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Jesse:** Yeah!

John: Or with—

Jesse: There's an extended—

John: —chalk in my hair. Yeah.

00:03:00 John Guest **Jesse:** There's an extended underwear sequence. *[Laughing.]* Yes, yes, there is.

[Jesse laughs in the background.]

For those people who are a fan of *Breaking Bad* and old men in their drawers.

[They laugh.]

But yeah, but that—that's an intense moment. And there's a few of them, but that one... is sort of a call to what it's really like to be Latinx in America.

00:03:17 Jesse Host You, uh, were born in Columbia, but you grew up in New York City.

00:03:20 John Guest Jackson Heights, yeah. I was here when—since I was three.

00:03:22 Jesse Host Yeah. So... to what extent did you think of yourself as Colombian, when you were a kid?

00:03:28 John Guest Well, you know, y-you always feel like you're American until—*[laughs]* until somebody others you. You know? And I remember that, when I was about eight or nine, and, uh, I'm playing with some kids and—and I beat them at—at stick ball and then, they—you know, and then they would, like, you know, "Why don't you go back to your country! You suck! You *[censored]!*"

And I was like, wow. I didn't realize, you know. And you go home, and you look at yourself, "Oh, wow. I'm... I thought we were all the same, but I guess I'm not." You know? And then you start to realize, you know, this—these interactions keep continuing to happen and you start feeling more other and othered. And you start realizing, "Oh, wow. I have a—I have—I—I"—it develops a different perspective of America, because you're not—you're no longer on the inside. You're kinda on the inside and the outside. So, it gives you a bird's eye view because you're forced to look at it in a—in—from an outsider's point of view.

00:04:16 Jesse Host Growing up, you also... had, by circumstance, a inside-outside perspective because your family didn't stay in one place for very long, right?

00:04:27 John Guest Right, yeah. I guess, like, the typical actor's, uh—uh, sort of genesis is, you know, like, they're almost—always army brats or—or, like, myself. You know, I moved every year of my life, 'till I was about 15. And then I started replicating that pattern later on in my life.

00:04:42 Jesse Host W-was that because of work or because of getting evicted—

[John laughs]

00:04:46 John Guest —or because of—why?
[Amused] It wasn't—we weren't—we weren't on the lam. We weren't [stammering] in the witness protection program. It was—it was just... I—my parents were improving their lot in life, every year. Every year.

We started out in—in an apartment, where we all slept on the same bed. And then, the next year, we moved to another place where... w-we had two beds. [Laughs.] And then we—finally my parents had a room of their own, and we slept in the living room. Then, eventually, my brother and I had—shared a room. You know? It just—every year, it improved 'til we had a house full of, uh, renters. And they rented out every room in the house and made income that way.

But I—you know, it made me have to—it forced me to, you know, learn how to make friends real quick, real fast, and also—at the same time—since I didn't have... sort of, shared personal storage, with anybody, I always had this incredible urge to create my story with somebody. You know? And I guess that's what made me want to write one man shows and to share my story of my life, 'cause I—I missed that, so much, growing up.

00:05:46 Jesse Host You're listening to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest, John Leguizamo, is an actor and writer. His one-person show, *Latin History for Morons*, is currently touring across the country. You can also stream it on Netflix.

Did you have an identity as a Columbian American? Did you—was there—did that mean anything to you, in your life as a—as a teenager?

00:06:06 John Guest A little bit. A little bit. I mean, I mostly felt Latin. You know? I mean, 'cause I was in New York City and all my friends were all Puerto Rican, Dominican, Ecuadorian, Chilean, Arg—everything. Everybody was represented, there, so I just felt Latin. You know what I mean? And so that—which was really nice, 'cause—'cause I felt like—I—that felt like a community, you know? I felt like, "We all speak Spanish. We all have a little bit of different food, but it's all kinda [laughing] similar anyway. We all dig each other's food. We all dig salsa and merengue and cumbias, and we all dig house parties, you know?" So that—that was my sense of community.

00:06:39 Jesse Host You know, I was thinking about, as I was watching, uh, your show, that—you know—growing up in California, uh, to be Latino meant, uh, you know, for people in my neighborhood, it meant to be Mexican—

00:06:53 John Guest Right, right.

00:06:54 Jesse Host —to some extent, Salvadoran and Guatemalan.

00:06:56 John Guest Central American. Yeah.

00:06:57 Jesse Host Central American. And... in New York, the, uh, Caribbean—

00:07:03 John Guest Is big.
00:07:04 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Jesse:** —Latino community is —

John: All—all—all of the North.

Jesse: —so much more powerful.

John: Yeah.

Jesse: Like, I didn't know any Cuban people when I was kid. You know what I mean? Like, I probably knew ten Salvadorians.

John: The love of my life—

Jesse: And no Cubans.

John: —when I was 15 was a—was a Cuban Puerto Rican girl.
[Laughs.] Yeah. I remember her well.
[Playfully] You wanna tell me about her?

00:07:18 Jesse Host *[They laugh.]*

00:07:23 John Guest Your face is beaming, right now.
Oh yeah! No, it's *[stammering]* it was a highlight of—you know, it was a highlight of my life. It was—I'm not gonna say her name, 'cause she's probably married and—and stuff.

[They laugh.]

00:07:40 Jesse Host But, yeah, I mean, she was stunning, and she was, you know, she was... uh, uh, a—uh, above my, uh, my paygrade, so to speak.
[Laughs.]

00:07:50 John Guest I think one of the interesting things about your career is that you did not get into comedy and acting through standup, or through improv or sketch. Although, you—you did sketch on TV.

00:07:54 Jesse Host I did all that. Yeah. I did—I did sketch, I did improv. I did—I did all that, and—and...

00:07:59 John Guest But—but you were a theatre—you're a theatre dude. Like, end of the day, you're kind of a theatre dude. Like...

00:08:02 Jesse Host Well, I don't—I didn't really love standup, that much.
Right.

00:08:03 John Guest Yeah. There's only a few standups that I've loved, my whole life, and that's Richard Pryor... and Lenny Bruce and Jonathan Winters. Those are the three guys that I've—I know—I know they're old school, but *[laughs]*—but they're—they're my heroes and my idols and the people I aspired to be, you know? Uh...

00:08:19 Jesse Host Jonathan—Johnathan Winters and—and uh, and Pryor are both... very—like, I can see their influence directly—

00:08:26 John Guest Yes! Absolutely.

00:08:27 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Jesse:**—in your work. Like they are about embodying other people

John: Right!

Jesse:—in their comedy.

00:08:32 John Guest And the personal sharing and—and the way that Jonathan Winters creates a whole world, like nobody else has ever done. Creates a whole world. You know? The—the—the spaceships!

[Makes wooing noises followed by rapid-fire lasers.]

You know? He'll create all that and he creates—you know, the—the guns.

[Mimics gunshot.]

You know? I mean, he—he did all the sound effects. He loved that and loved becoming so many different people in one scene. And no-nobody was doing that.

00:09:00 Jesse Host But, like, by the time you were, uh, by the time you were a teenager or a young adult—like, the standup world was pretty dominated by the—the lane that, you know, Carlin and Cosby opened up. Which is like—

00:09:12 John Guest Yeah.

00:09:13 Jesse Host I'm a—I'm a normal guy standing onstage—

00:09:15 John Guest Right, right.

00:09:16 Jesse Host —telling you some ideas from my relatively normal voice, and it—you know—

00:09:18 John Guest Right, which is great.

00:09:19 Jesse Host —some sort of novelty acts, as well. But, like, nothing as theatrical as Jonathan Winters.

00:09:22 John Guest No, nothing as theatrical as Jonathan Winters and nothing as daring as Richard Pryor. And then I—I took it a step further, you know? I—I had—I had seen Lily Tomlin's *Signs of Intelligent Life*. Eric Bogosian, uh, *Sex, Drugs, and Rock & Roll*. And—and Whoopie Goldberg, and I was like, "Why—wait a minute... I can create my own, brand new hybrid of everything!" And—and no one was doing that.

Like, a autobiographical play... of your life, on Broadway. *Freak*. And that was my contribution to it. To—to—not—not because I thought my life was so fascinating. Quite the opposite! I just felt like my life is so... average that I can create, sort of, a mirror to a lot of Latin people to see themselves. And to—and to enjoy the struggles that we go through, 'cause—to me—being Latin was like a superpower.

00:10:15 Jesse Host Which one of those shows was the first one that you saw?

00:10:19 John Guest Uh, Lily Tomlin was the first.

00:10:20 Jesse Host Did you see it in New York, on—onstage?

00:10:22 John Guest I second acted it, unfortunately, 'cause I was broke. So, I only knew the second act. *[Laughs.]*

00:10:27 Jesse Host So that means you walked in at intermission, when, uh—nobody was guarding the doors.

00:10:31 John Guest Right, right, thank you for explaining to me. But yeah, yeah, you put on your best, uh, Sunday suit that you had and—and—and I always smoked, since I was thirteen, so *[laughs]* I had a cigarette, and then you grab a playbill and you run to the bathroom and then, when everybody's seated, and they—they do the chimes, *[imitating]* "Bloop, bloop." Then you run to an empty seat, and that's how I watched.

00:10:58 Jesse Host So, that's what helped me write, too. *[Laughing.]* Because I saw so many plays on Broadway, but only the second act. I had to imagine the first act, so that's what taught me how to write. It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is actor and writer John Leguizamo.

00:11:05 John Guest The first show of yours I saw was *Mambo Mouth*.
00:11:07 Jesse Host Oh, 1990, yeah.
Yeah, and I—I think—I mean, I think, I saw it a few years later, on VHS.

00:11:11 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Jesse:** You know.

John: Prob—most likely. Yeah.

Jesse: 1994.

John: 'Cause it on HBO. Yeah.

Jesse: Or something like that.

00:11:15 Jesse Host **John:** Bootleg copy, pirated.
I definitely didn't see it on HBO. I can't claim to have had HBO, as a child.

00:11:19 John Guest Somebody filming it—and you see them bouncing up and down and people crossing your front.

00:11:23 Jesse Host I still—I definitely remember when I got basic cable. So, premium cable was not in the picture. *[Laughs.]*

00:11:29 John Guest Nobody could afford that nonsense, man.

[Jesse laughs in the background.]

00:11:36 Jesse Host Everybody was getting it illegally, and I remember trying to get all the illegal boxes, so you could watch HBO.
Uh, *Mambo Mouth* was a show that was... kind of vignettes from... one neighborhood?

00:11:42 John Guest Yeah, yeah, exactly. Very good, man.

00:11:44 Jesse Host Can you tell me a little bit about where it came from?

00:11:47 John Guest Well... I was in my acting career and, uh... Kind of, like, very disappointed in Hollywood—or, Hollywouldn't. And the fact that... I never saw Latin people in any positive way, even though we—*[laughing]* we were almost equal to white in—whites in population size, in New York City, there was never anything on us, anywhere. And I was going, "Wait a minute, what is going on, here?" There is—there's—

00:12:13 Jesse Host You had done, what? Like, you had done, like, an ep—a—a few episodes of TV, or something.

00:12:15 John Guest I'd done some *Miami Vice*. I did some, um... uh, I did a movie, *Casualties of War*, with, um... uuuh, Sean Penn and—and, uh, Brian de Palma and Michael J. Fox. I've done some other—some other movies, at the time. But it was all, like, *[stammers]* it was always, like, so—uh, you know, the drug dealers and—and—and I was so tired of that.

You know, it's crazy, 'cause look—we're... it's a—it's a—I mean, even right now, it's a cultural apartheid. I mean... we're... 35% of the population in New York City, and white people are 35% of the

population of New York City. We're the same exact population size. Less than 1% of the positive stories in *The New York Times*, or any magazine—*The New Yorker*, *New York Magazine*, *The Post*—are about us. And yet, we're doing tons of incredible things. [Laughs.] We're—we... Latin music, is #1 in the world, right now. J Balvin is the most played musician on Spotify.

00:13:44	Jesse	Host	[Stammering] Uh, six or seven of the top ten hit masters are all Latin. Uh—J Balvin, Ozuna, uh, Rosario, uh, Camila Cabello, uh, Cardi B, Bruno Mars, J-Lo. I mean, it's crazy. And yet, in Hollywood, where we're 50% of the population and less than 3% of the faces in front of the camera, behind the camera—that's cultural apartheid. And we—and we <u>buy</u> 25% of the United States box office. So, we were talking about <i>Mambo Mouth</i> . So, this is like your—you're a—you're a... young man. You're, like, in your late 20s, or something like that? When—when you do <i>Mambo Mouth</i> ?
00:13:52	John	Guest	Ah—yeah, yeah. 26.
00:13:54	Jesse	Host	Yeah. So, uh, where did the show come from?
00:13:57	John	Guest	[Delighted] Ah, you wanna go back to that! Okay!
00:13:59	Jesse	Host	Yeah.
00:14:00	John	Guest	[Giggles.] Staying on point. Uh... well, I was—it was—it—I just felt the lack of representation of Latin people and what I started to see, personally, sort of... sort of the exclusion of us. I wanted to—to talk to everybody I knew—I grew up, and I started this show for every—myself, and everybody I grew up with. You know, just to see ourselves and to spoof the media and to spoof what was going on and how the media saw us.

And, uh, so I did this show. And then, you know, it was in the—you know, nobody—people believed in it, but not really. They didn't know what to do with me, so they put me in the hallway of The American Place Theatre, and—I went up at seven. I had to be done by nine, when the real mainstage show would go on in—in the real theater. I had 70 fold-up seats.

But then the reviews came out and there was Al Pacino in the house and—and Sam Shepard and Arthur Miller. Olympia Dukakis. George Plimpton. I mean [laughing] here were all these illustrious people in this tiny hallway of—in a makeshift platform stage. And then they would remove all my stuff and—and I would make sure—I'd run around it real quick and shake hands with, you know, Sam Shepard and talk to him and Arthur Miller. And that was the beginning of what I wanted to do, but—not 'til it was on HBO, did it really reach the audience I was dreaming of targeting, you know?

When it hit HBO, [laughing] everybody had their bootleg copy of *Mambo Mouth*. And—and people started recognizing me, in the street, and—and—filled with so much joy... that—I—I could represent them, in a way. You know? It was very interesting for them to feel seen. To feel seen is such an incredible feeling for a Latinx person, when you don't see yourself seen except negatively, constantly.

00:15:46	Jesse	Host	[John agrees intermittently as Jesse speaks.] I feel like the thing that was moving, to me, at the time when I saw the show—when I was 13, or whatever, was: was... while I grew up
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in a, you know, West Coast city—completely different from New York City.

I still felt very deeply this thing about living in the city, which is—the number of people that you see every—in every action that you take. Every time you go to the corner store or bodega—

[John laughs]

—um—every time you go to the corner store, you know, the people that you interact with—and every single one of those people is a human being with a full life. And, you know, maybe you have windows into little pieces of their life, but w-what I loved about the show was that it felt like it was an attempt to... show the humanity of all these people that surround us in a place like the city.

00:16:46 John Guest

Yeah, yeah. I'm sure that—that that was my purpose. I wanted to... to show people how funny we are and to celebrate our culture. And yet, but yet I—uh—I had a dark side, so it was always—had a—a—a—a dark element to it. You know, I always—I always felt like American comedy was kind of light and—and glib... and, uh, I think I helped change that, in comedy, to add a lot more darkness, a lot more edge, a lot more aggressiveness and a lot more sexuality to it. You know?

00:17:20 Jesse Host

It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is John Leguizamo. Let's listen to a clip from Leguizamo's first Off-Broadway show, *Mambo Mouth*.

In the show, John plays seven different characters from his past, growing up in New York City. Manny the Fanny is one of them: a sex worker with a sharp wit and a good heart. In this clip, Manny's telling a story about being cheated on and getting revenge.

00:17:43 Clip Clip

[Transition music swells and fades.]

Manny the Fanny: When I caught wind—and I did—Sleeping Beauty awoke! *[Manny snaps and makes a whooshing sound.]*

[Audience laughs.]

Manny: And I came home early one night, and I unscrew all the bulbs in the house, and I hid in the closet with an iron in one hand and crazy glue en la otra.

[Audience laughs uproariously with scattered applause.]

Manny: And I waited. Nine o'clock. Ten o'clock. Eleven o'clock. I thought he was never gonna come, right? But at exactly midnight, in sashays the Judas hijo de *[censored]*—

[Audience laughs.]

Manny: —trying to the lights on and calling my name all lovey-dovey and such. *[Breathily]* “Oh Manny, baby, I got something for you. I got something for you.” I got something for you, too *[censored]*!

[Audience laughs.]

Manny: And I just held my breath, 'cause this girl wasn't about to let his magic wand cast a spell on her again.

00:18:35 Jesse Host *[Transition music swells and fades.]*
[Both of them laughing] I think I—I—uh, I—, like, my memory was vividly triggered by crazy glue—crazy glue en la otra—en la otra.

00:18:47 John Guest *[Laughing.]* Crazy stories, man. I mean, yeah, they're all, like, sort of compilations of... things that have—I had heard people tell me and urban legend and—and just—and just personified it, you know? Gave it a body and a—and a voice.

00:19:02 Jesse Host *[John agrees intermittently as Jesse speaks.]*
There's kind of a sweetness to all—like, I know that you're—I know that you're telling us about how edgy and dark you are, and that's true, sure. Yeah. Very sexual, etc.

00:19:13 John Guest *[Amused]* True—true that.

00:19:15 Jesse Host *[He laughs.]*
But I—one of the things I remember is, you know, some of these characters are big, but they all have a real—like you have a real regard for all of them.

00:19:25 John Guest Right. A respect and a—yeah. I mean, I respect their lives, no matter how different they are from mine. I feel like we all share this planet and we're all otherized so... I gotta give them some heart, you know? I mean, I felt—I always felt like I connected to everybody.

00:19:42 Jesse Host More with John Leguizamo still to come. After the break, we'll talk about how he deals with racism nowadays, both as a writer and as a father. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:19:54 Music Music Jazzy music plays.

00:19:55 Jesse Promo This message comes from NPR sponsor: ZipRecruiter.

Hiring can be a slow process. Café Altura COO, Dillon Miskiewicz, needed to hire a Director of Coffee. So, he went to ZipRecruiter, posted his job, and found the right person in just a few days. Find out why four out of five employers who post on ZipRecruiter get a quality candidate within the first day. Try ZipRecruiter for free at ZipRecruiter.com/bullseye. B-U-L-L-S-E-Y-E.

00:20:27 Promo Promo *[Music fades out.]*
[Upbeat music plays in the background.]

Speaker: Think of NPR's *Life Kit* as that friend who always has great advice about everything from how to invest to how to get a great workout. We bring you tools to help you get it together. New episodes every Tuesday and Thursday. Listen and subscribe to *Life Kit: All Guides*.

00:20:45 Promo Promo *[Music fades out.]*
Music: "Money Won't Pay," by bo en, feat. Augustus. Upbeat, cheerful music.

Rachel McElroy: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy!

Griffin McElroy: Hello, this is Griffin McElroy!

Rachel: And this is *Wonderful!*

Griffin: It's a podcast that we do as—uh, we ma—we are married—

[Rachel laughs.]

And... How's the ad going so far? 'Cause I think it's going very good.

Rachel: *[Laughs.]* We talk about things we like every week on Wednesdays!

Griffin: One time Rachel talked about pumpernickel bread. It was so tight; you cannot afford to miss her talking about this sweet brown bread.

Rachel: We also talk about music, and poems, and... you know, weather!

Griffin: There was one—weather?

[Rachel laughs.]

One time Rachel talked about "Baby Beluga," the song, for like 14 minutes, and it b—ooh, just really blew my hair back.

[Rachel laughs.]

Rachel: So check us out on MaximumFun.org.

Griffin: It's a cool podcast with chill vibes. Amber is the color of our energy! Is what all the iTunes reviews say.

Rachel: *[Chuckles.]* They will now!

Music: *[Fading out]* You could end up on the street...

00:21:30 Jesse Host

It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is John Leguizamo. He is, of course, a super famous actor who has been in over 100 movies and television shows. He's also a writer who created and starred in a handful of powerful and hilarious one man shows, over the course of his career. His latest, *Latin History for Morons*, is on tour across the country and on Netflix.

00:21:58 John Guest

When you wrote *Freak*, it was one of the first times you had really written about yourself.

Right. That was the first—that was the first time, 'cause *[censored]*-*O-Rama* was kind of me and my family, but it was all fictionalized—which is *[laughs]*—it's what people usually do. And then, by *Freak*, I was like, "you know, there's a lot of stuff that I need to talk about that—that happened to me personally, that I hope gives other people inspiration. You know?"

00:22:27 Jesse Host Just growing up in—in New York City and just how... aggressive, *[chuckles]* you know, my situation was, at home and outside. And how you survive it. And humor was what saved me. There—there's a moment in the new show, uh, where you are portraying yourself in therapy with your therapist.

00:22:37 John Guest *[Jesse interjects with several affirmatives as John talks.]*
00:22:40 Jesse Host My new therapist of the—of the time. Yeah. Which I love. Dr. T.
00:22:42 John Guest Your now—your now therapist.
00:22:43 Jesse Host My current therapist.
Who you describe as talking like Tim Gunn.

[John laughs.]

Um... and... your, you know, sort of the through-line of the show is that you're looking for... you're looking for a Latin hero for your kid who's writing a history report, right? And... there's this moment where you're sitting in therapy and your therapist asks you—in his Tim Gunn voice *[John chuckles]*, "Well, if you're looking for a Latin hero, what about your father?"

[John makes a noise of agreement.]

00:23:41 John Guest And... you don't... do much, with that, in the show. You kind of let it lie. You kind of move in a different direction, from there. But it's very powerful, because... you don't reply with *[they laugh]*, "Thanks—thanks for the inside Dr. T." And that—that was a lot of what, uh, a lot of what your—you know, *Freak* and your other autobiographical work has been about. That's a significant thing.
00:24:02 Jesse Host Yeah, I mean, *Freak* was all about my coming-of-age and my relationship with my dad. And, uh, I felt like I—I had dealt with it and I was hoping that, you know, the people coming to see me already had the history, the backstory—and if you didn't, you know, you can look it up or you can make it up in your mind, you know, as to why he's not my hero. *[Chuckles.]*
00:24:09 John Guest I mean, it's—I think it's particularly consequential because of the fact that the reason you're looking for a hero is for your own son. Right. Because... he—cut to 20... uuuh... 12, and my son is being bullied at school the same way that I was bullied, and it's like—how is this happening in the modern world? How is this happening in New York City, in this private school—and you're like, it—it can't be happening to my son. I can't...

And so, that's why—that was kind of the genesis of the show was my trying to give my son... facts and Latin heroes and Latin contributions and things he could fight and—and arm himself with. Ammunition to defend himself without using his fists. Without having to resort to the way that I grew up. And, uh, I wanted to an involved dad. And what ended up happening was, like—oh my god, I'm the one that's being unmoronized. I'm the one that's being destupified and shown... that... we Latin people made America. You know, the facts that I started come up with—with were crazy! Like we're—we're the second-oldest ethnic group in America, after Native Americans. We're the only ethnic group that has fought in every single war America's ever have. That we're the most decorated minority in each and every single war.

And I'm talking about American Revolutionary War, where 10,000 unrecognized Latino patriots fought and where we had Cuban women—in the American Revolution, in Virginia—sell their jewelry, their hoop earrings, doorknockers, and gold teeth, to feed the patriots and Gálvez, who had an army of misfits. Of, like—the, like, the Matzav armies. He had 3000 Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Mexican Americans, freed slaves, and Native Americans, and they kicked their—he was like the George Washington of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Pensacola. He kicked the British out. Then he donates 70,000 dollars' worth of weapons to George Washington.

So, we too are the sons and daughters of the American Revolution. These facts changed me. I can no longer be the John I used to be before these facts. I have been transformed... No one can make me feel less, anymore.

00:26:15 Jesse Host You're listening to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with John Leguizamo. He's currently starring in his one-person live show, *Latin History for Morons*. It's touring the country now and on Netflix.

[John interjects with various agreements as Jesse talks.]

How important is it to you that your identity encompasses... as you said, being Latin, right? Being Latino or Latinx... rather than being Colombian or Puerto Rican—or in addition to being Colombian or Puerto Rican. That there is—that there is a commonality with—with people who are in, you know, people who are in Peru and people who are in the Dominican and people who are in, you know, Chihuahua.

00:26:55 John Guest I—I just feel like they're my brothers and sisters. Just, like... Americans feel like... Californians and New Yorkers are brothers and sisters. I mean, we're all... I—I—I feel their pain, I feel their joy. And I just think a little bit of an accent and a bit—a different spice in your food is not gonna make me feel different than you. It's not enough to differentiate me from you.

We—and I—and I see them come to my shows: people from all walks of life. Because when I start doing the ... the South American maps, Central American, Caribbean, you hear everybody.

00:27:30 Jesse Host *[Laughing]* Yeah.

00:27:31 John Guest It's their shout-out time. And, uh, it's beautiful.

00:27:35 Jesse Host Yeah, it's just like—in the audience, just, somebody's just going, *[yells]*, "Mofongoooo!"

00:27:39 John Guest Yeah, yeah, yeah. *[Laughs.]* W-when you get to Dominican and I go, "o tigre, o tigre"—which is my Dominican shout-out, and, uh—it's beautiful to see it and you know—here, I'm in the West Coast. Obviously... it's so interesting, because when I'm in New York, when I say Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, and South America, you know, they—the—the—the place, you can't even hear, 'cause it's so loud. And here it's the opposite.

When I go to Mexico it's, boom, you know? It—and then the—and then Puerto Rico's a little smaller. Colombia's *[laughs]* small. And Dominican Republic's small. And it's like, "Oh wow, it's so interesting." But they still shout out in the same sort of proud, powerful way to be heard and seen.

00:28:17 Jesse Host There's two—there's two moments in the show where the audience has that reaction. One is when you're drawing a map on the blackboard, as you described and—and talking a—a little bit about the different places in Latin America.

00:28:29 John Guest And the populations of the—of the empires, yeah.

00:28:31 Jesse Host Yeah—

00:28:32 John Guest That's how you know Incan, Aztec...

00:28:35 Jesse Host And there's—uh, another moment where you just list dance beats. Like, you're like, "Okay cumbia."

00:28:42 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** Right, right.

Jesse: You like—

John: Tango.

Jesse:—go through the list. *[Laughs.]*

00:28:46 Jesse Host And, like, you can tell where people's loyalties lie. *[Laughing.]*

00:28:49 John Guest Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. 'Cause there's a certain music—you know, like, I know a lot of Puerto Rican people say, "We're salsa." But I—have it in the—it's a closing song, is—is salsa.

00:28:57 Jesse Host Yeah, 'cause you very carefully—you—I was—

00:28:59 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Jesse:** It was conspicuous enough to me.

John: I couldn't dance anymore. *[Laughing and stammering.]* I would end up being like KD.

Jesse: I know people are serious about their salsa. If you're not—if you're not the right salsero they're gonna—they're—they're gonna get up in your business about it.

John: Oh yeah, they're gonna—they got up in my business and I was like, "You're right!"

[Jesse laughs.]

I just couldn't do—I couldn't weave it in correctly and I just couldn't do more because I'm already exhausted.

00:29:19 Jesse Host *[In mock frustration]* Like, "Ugh, I'm trying to—I'm still working on that cha-cha."

[John cackles.]

[Jesse huffs an exhausted breath.] "Oh boy."

00:29:22 John Guest But I got the cha-cha, I got the mambo, I got the samba, and I got the cumbia and the—uh, what was the opening one? Tango. So, I covered a lot.

[Jesse laughs.]

And then I got merengue in there. I got merengue later on, when I—when I—when, uh... uh, I'm doing the—talking to the policeman and *[laughs]* trying to pass for white. And then he puts on the merengue and I can't stop dancing.

[Jesse laughs.]

00:29:47 Jesse Host And then I—so I out myself.
Do you think your son has a different relationship to being Latino than you do?

00:29:52 John Guest Yeah! You know, ‘cause my son is half. You know, he’s half white... and half—you know. He’s—he’s a—he’s a—a mixed kid. And he’s, you know, half Jewish. So, yeah. It’s—he’s a little bit different. It’s a little bit different. He—you know, ‘cause he—he presents whiter. You know? So that—that has a lot to do with it.

00:30:09 Jesse Host Does he present as white? Like, do you think he—do you think he passes if he—if nobody says anything?

00:30:13 John Guest Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. But you know—but he’s got his deep heritage, you know? He always listens to hip-hop. Hip-hop is his—is his jam. You know? He tried to speak Spanish. *[Laughs.]* You know. Uh. He loves girls o-of color. So that’s all good.

00:30:31 Jesse Host *[John agrees emphatically as Jesse speaks.]*
[Laughing quietly] What—how do you think, uh—how do you think his experience is different? Other than just being half. Like, what do you think it means, to him, that’s different?

00:30:48 John Guest ‘Cause part of this show is about you trying to teach him something about what it means.
[John pauses and thinks.] Right, because... yeah. I mean, he was racially profiled mostly, I guess, because of his... relationship to me.
[Beat] So...
[John takes a few deep breaths.]
[Quietly] I mean, I guess it hasn’t been, uh, that long, yet. You know? That’s a problem with using your traumas in your work.
[Laughs.] ‘Cause it—you know, you’re talking about stuff that’s really, really painful and, uh... as my therapist says, it—it’s a way to... it’s a—he’s says it’s—it’s like you play god with your own trauma by—by putting into your art—then you have control over it and it doesn’t control you.

00:31:41 Jesse Host *[Beat.]* It’s a—such a beautiful way of putting it.
[Beat.] You know, I mean, I—I know a lot of comics and I often think that... doing comedy is a way of... controlling your relationships, in the same way. Like...

00:31:53 John Guest Yep. It’s a way of dealing. All art—all art is dealing with... I—I mean, back then I used to say just fixations or obsessions, but a lot of is—is really trauma or... the issues that—that—that demonize you, that control you.

00:32:14 Jesse Host I imagine that you... wanted your kids... to feel like that part of them that came from you was... great and beautiful.

00:32:29 John Guest Mm-hm.

00:32:30 Jesse Host And not... a source of pain or a stumbling block or whatever.

00:32:35 John Guest Right. I mean, I definitely wanted them to feel pride about themselves. And—and their Jewish-side is—enough—enough—their white side—I’m not—I’m not anti-white. That’s—that’s crazy, you know. I—I want them to be proud of being white and Jewish and as—as much as they are Latin, Indian, and Black, in the—in

			them, you know? <i>[Beat.]</i> I want it all to be equal. I'm just asking to be equal, that's all.
00:33:01	Jesse	Host	Well, John Leguizamo, I'm grateful to you for taking the time and I'm grateful to you for doing this work for yourself and your family and for everybody that sees the show.
00:33:09	Music	Music	Calm, chill music begins to fade in.
00:33:10	John	Guest	Thank you, my brother.
00:33:20	Jesse	Host	John Leguizamo. <i>Latin History for Morons</i> is currently in the middle of a <u>massive</u> national tour. It wraps up in LA on October 20 th , with more dates to come. You can also watch the show on Netflix. We'll have more on all that on our website: the <i>Bullseye</i> page at MaximumFun.org .
			<i>[Music fades out.]</i>
00:33:48	Music	Music	Calm, jazzy fades in.
00:33:50	Jesse	Host	That's the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> is produced at MaximumFun.org world headquarters, overlooking MacArthur Park in beautiful Los Angeles, California—where my producer Kevin has noted the question of the week: Can pigeons swim?!
			You been doing research into that, Kevin? <i>[Beat.]</i> He says <u>no</u> . He has not been doing research into that. Just—just something that he's been—he's been mulling over while he looks out the window.
			Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our producer is Kevin Ferguson. Jesus Ambrosio is our associate producer. We get help from Casey O'Brien and our production fellow is Jordan Kawling. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. Thanks to them and to their label, Memphis Industries, for letting us use it.
			And we have two decades of past <i>Bullseye</i> interviews. You can find them all at MaximumFun.org . We're also on Facebook and Twitter. Just search for <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> . You can keep up with the show there, as well. All of our past episodes also available in your favorite podcast app.
			I guess that's about it. Just remember: All great radio hosts have a signature sign off.
00:35:00	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by <i>NPR</i> .
00:35:13	Music	Music	Music fades out.