

00:00:00	Music	Transition	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	Music	Transition	"Huddle Formation" from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:20	Jesse Thorn	Host	It's <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. John Leguizamo, the actor, works a lot. Like he has more than 150 credits on his IMDb. <i>Carlito's Way</i> , <i>The Pest</i> , the <i>Ice Age</i> movies, <i>To Wong Foo</i> , almost infinitely more. He recently starred in the Academy Award-winning animated smash, <i>Encanto</i> . He played Bruno. <i>[Music fades in.]</i> The Bruno that we don't talk about.
00:00:47	Music	Music	"We Don't Talk About Bruno" from the movie <i>Encanto</i> . <i>We don't talk about Bruno</i> <i>But! It was my wedding day</i> <i>(It was her wedding day)</i> <i>We were getting married and there</i> <i>Wasn't a cloud in the sky</i> <i>(No clouds allowed in the sky)</i> <i>Bruno walks in with a mischievous grin</i> <i>(Thunder!)</i> <i>You telling this story or am I?</i> <i>(I'm sorry, mi vida, go on)</i> <i>Bruno says, "It looks like rain"</i> <i>(Why did he tell us?)</i> <i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i>
00:01:15	Jesse	Host	But as great as all of those screen roles are, they're only one facet of Leguizamo's work. For 30 years, Leguizamo has also been working in the theatre making award-winning solo shows like <i>Mambo Mouth</i> , <i>Sexaholics</i> , and <i>Freak</i> . When I talked to him in 2019, he was in the middle of touring his most recent show, <i>Latin History for Morons</i> . The title kind of explains the show's conceit, with a chalkboard and a professor-y outfit, Leguizamo gives the audience a history of the Americas that you don't always see in textbooks. Stories about oppression, exploitation, disease, and war. And because it's John Leguizamo, he tells these stories with funny voices, recreating historical figures who have long since died. The show starts on a personal note. Leguizamo tells a story from a few years back, when his son was bullied over his heritage, at school. Leguizamo wanted to do something about it, give his kid something to be proud of. 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.
00:02:28	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.

00:02:29	Clip	Clip	<p>John Leguizamo: I leave my therapist’s office with an untreated chronic case of ghetto rage.</p> <p><i>[Audience chuckles.]</i></p> <p>And uh—time out. Urban Dictionary time. For anybody here who doesn’t know what “ghetto rage” is—well, 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... <i>[sighs and chuckles]</i> in this self-loathing, burning rage.</p> <p>But—but as a <u>Latin man</u>? As a Latin man, you can’t even get <u>angry</u>, ‘cause homeland security, the <i>[censored]</i>ing INS, or the police could decide you’re a threat. And the next person to be shot or deported could be <u>you</u>. Or me. ‘Cause Latin life is cheap in America.</p>
00:03:17	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:03:19	John Leguizamo	Guest	Mm!
00:03:20	Jesse	Host	That was a pretty intense intro!
			<i>[John laughs.]</i>
00:03:24	John	Guest	John Leguizamo, welcome to <i>Bullseye!</i> It’s nice to have you on the show.
00:03:30	Jesse	Host	Thank you for having me! Yeah, that’s one of the most intense moments in the night.
00:03:37	John	Guest	Yeah, mostly it’s you goofing around and, uh, waving a copy of the <i>Open Veins of Latin America</i> around.
00:03:40	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	Yeah, yeah! Or my underwear. Or, yeah, yes! Jesse: Yeah!
			John: Or with—
			Jesse: There’s an extended—
			John: —chalk in my hair. Yeah.
00:03:43	John	Guest	Jesse: There’s an extended underwear sequence. <i>[Laughs.]</i> Yes, yes, there is. For those people who are a fan of <i>Breaking Bad</i> and old men in their drawers.
			<i>[They laugh.]</i>
00:04:00	Jesse	Host	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.
00:04:03	John	Guest	You were born in Columbia, but you grew up in New York City. Jackson Heights, yeah. I was here when—since I was three.
00:04:05	Jesse	Host	Yeah. So, to what extent did you think of yourself as Colombian, when you were a kid?
00:04:11	John	Guest	Well, you know, you always feel like you’re American until— <i>[chuckles]</i> until somebody others you. You know? And I remember that, when I was about eight or nine, and I’m playing with some kids

and—and I beat them 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”—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—from an outsider’s point of view.

00:05:00 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?

00:05:10 John Guest

Right, yeah. I guess, like, the typical actor’s sort of genesis is, you know, like, they’re almost—always army brats or like myself. You know, I moved every year of my life, ‘til I was about 15. And then I started replicating that pattern later on in my life.

00:05:25 Jesse Host

W-was that because of work or because of getting evicted or because of—why?

00:05:29 John Guest

[Amused.] It wasn’t—we weren’t—we weren’t on the lam. We weren’t in the—the witness protection program. It was—it was just—my parents were improving their lot in life, every year. Every year.

We started out in an apartment, where we all slept on the same bed. And then, the next year, we moved to another place where 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 stories 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.

00:06:28 Jesse Host

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

00:06:35 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, everything. Everybody was represented, there. So, I just felt Latin. You know what I mean? And so that—which was really nice, ‘cause I felt like—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.

00:07:08 Jesse Host You know, I was thinking about, as I was watching your show, that—you know—growing up in California, to be Latino meant, you know, for people in my neighborhood, it meant to be Mexican—

00:07:22 John Guest Right, right.

00:07:23 Jesse Host —to some extent, Salvadoran and Guatemalan.

00:07:25 John Guest Central American. Yeah.

00:07:26 Jesse Host Central American. And in New York, the Caribbean—

00:07:33 John Guest Is big.

00:07:34 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Jesse:** —Latino community is —

John: 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?

00:07:49 Jesse Host *[They laugh.]*

00:07:52 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 stuff.
[They laugh.]

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.]

00:08:10 Jesse Host We have so much more to get into. Stay with us. It's Bullseye, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:08:18 Music Transition Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

00:08:22 Jesse Host It's Bullseye. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is John Leguizamo. He is of course a super famous actor who's been in over 100 movies and TV shows, including *Encanto*—which just won an Academy Award. He's also written and performed in some incredible solo stage shows. When I talked to him in 2019, he'd just launched a national tour of *Latin History for Morons*. Let's get back into our conversation.

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 did sketch on TV.

00:08:59 John Guest I did all that. Yeah. I did—I did sketch, I did improv. I did—I did all that, and—

00:09:02 Jesse Host But—but you were a theatre—you’re a theatre dude. Like, end of the day, you’re kind of a theatre dude. Like...

00:09:07 John Guest Well, I don’t—I didn’t really love standup, that much.

[Jesse affirms.]

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 they’re old school, but *[laughs]*—but they’re my heroes and my idols and the people I aspired to be, you know?

00:09:27 Jesse Host Jonathan—Johnathan Winters and—and Pryor are both very—like, I can see their influence directly in your work.

[John agrees.]

00:09:40 John Guest Like they are about embodying other people in their comedy. And the personal sharing 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 rocket 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 did all the sound effects. He loved that and loved becoming so many different people in one scene. And nobody was doing that.

00:10:08 Jesse Host But, like, by the time you were—by the time you were a teenager or a young adult—like, the standup world was pretty dominated by the lane that, you know, Carlin and Cosby opened up. Which is like I’m a normal guy standing onstage telling you some ideas in a relatively normal voice, and it—you know—

00:10:27 John Guest Right, which is great.

00:10:28 Jesse Host Some sort of novelty acts, as well. But, like, nothing as theatrical as Jonathan Winters.

00:10:32 John Guest No, nothing as theatrical as Jonathan Winters and nothing as daring as Richard Pryor. And then I took it a step further, you know? I had—I had seen Lily Tomlin’s *Signs of Intelligent Life*. Eric Bogosian, *Sex, Drugs, and Rock & Roll*. And Whoopie Goldberg, and I was like, “Wh—wait a minute... I can create my own, brand new hybrid of everything!” And no one was doing that, like a autobiographical play of your life, on Broadway. *Freak*. And that was my contribution to it. To—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.

00:11:25 Jesse Host Which one of those shows was the first one that you saw?

00:11:28 John Guest Uh, Lily Tomlin was the first.

00:11:31 Jesse Host Did you see it in New York, onstage?

00:11:34 John Guest I second acted it, unfortunately, ‘cause I was broke. So, I only knew the second act. *[Laughs.]*

00:11:38 Jesse Host So, that means you walked in at intermission when, uh—nobody was guarding the doors.

00:11:42 John Guest Right, right, thank you for explaining to me. But yeah, yeah, you put on your best Sunday suit that you had and I always smoked, since I was thirteen, so *[laughs]* I had a cigarette, and then you grab a

playbill and then you run to the bathroom and then, when everybody's seated, and they do the chimes, [imitating] "Bloop, bloop." Then you run to an empty seat, and that's how I watched.

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.

00:12:09 Jesse Host
00:12:12 John Guest
00:12:13 Jesse Host

The first show of yours I saw was *Mambo Mouth*.

Oh, 1990, yeah.

Yeah, and I—I think—I mean, I think, I saw it a few years later, on VHS. You know.

00:12:17 Crosstalk Crosstalk

John: Prob—most likely. Yeah.

Jesse: 1994, or something like that.

00:12:22 Jesse Host

John: 'Cause it was on HBO. Yeah. Bootleg copy, pirated.

I definitely didn't see it on HBO. I can't claim to have had HBO, as a child.

00:12:25 John Guest

Somebody filming it—and you see them bouncing up and down and people crossing in front.

00:12:29 Jesse Host

I still—I definitely remember when I got basic cable. So, premium cable was not in the picture. [Laughs.]

00:12:35 John Guest

Nobody could afford that nonsense, man. Everybody was getting it illegally, and I remember trying to get all the illegal boxes, so you could watch HBO.

00:12:42 Jesse Host

Mambo Mouth was a show that was kind of vignettes from one neighborhood?

00:12:49 John Guest

Yeah, yeah, exactly. Very good, man.

00:12:50 Jesse Host

Can you tell me a little bit about where it came from?

00:12:53 John Guest

Well, I was in my acting career and 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—You had done, what? Like, you had done, like, an ep—a few episodes of TV, or something.

00:13:19 Jesse Host

00:13:22 John Guest

I'd done some *Miami Vice*. I did some, um—I did a movie, *Casualties of War*, with, Sean Penn and Brian de Palma and Michael J. Fox. I'd 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 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—the most played musician on Spotify.

Six or seven of the top ten hit masters are all Latin. J Balvin, Ozuna, Rosario, Camila Cabello, 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 buy 25% of the United States box office.

00:14:51 Jesse Host So, we were talking about *Mambo Mouth*. 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 *Mambo Mouth*?

00:14:59 John Guest Oh—yeah, yeah. 26.

00:15:01 Jesse Host Yeah. So, uh, where did the show come from?

00:15:04 John Guest [*Delighted.*] Ah, you wanna go back to that! Okay!

[*Jesse confirms.*]

[*Giggles.*] Staying on point. Uh, well, it was—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 talk to everybody I knew. I grew up, and I started this show for every—myself, and everybody I grew up with. And it's to see ourselves and to spoof the media and to spoof what was going on and how the media saw us. And 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 the real theater. I had 70 fold-up seats.

But then the reviews came out and there was Al Pacino in the house 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 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 people started recognizing me, in the street, 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.

00:16:53 Jesse Host

[*John agrees intermittently throughout.*]

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 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 chuckles.*]

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 what I loved about the show was that it

00:17:53	John	Guest	<p>felt like it was an attempt to show the humanity of all these people that surround us in a place like the city.</p> <p>Yeah, yeah. I'm sure that that was my purpose. I wanted to show people how funny we are and to celebrate our culture. And yet, but yet I had a dark side, so it was—always had a dark element to it. You know, I always felt like American comedy was kind of light and glib and 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?</p>
00:18:27	Jesse	Host	<p>It's <i>Bullseye</i>. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is John Leguizamo. Let's listen to a clip from Leguizamo's first Off-Broadway show, <i>Mambo Mouth</i>.</p> <p>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.</p>
00:18:51	Sound Effect	Transition	<p>Music swells and fades.</p>
00:18:52	Clip	Clip	<p>Manny the Fanny: When I caught wind—and I did!—Sleeping Beauty awoke! <i>[Manny snaps.]</i></p> <p><i>[Audience laughs.]</i></p> <p>And I came home early one night, and I unscrewed all the bulbs in the house, and I hid in the closet with an iron in one hand and crazy glue en la otra.</p> <p><i>[Audience laughs uproariously with scattered applause.]</i></p> <p>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 <i>[censored]</i>—trying to the lights on and calling my name all lovey-dovey and such. <i>[Breathily]</i> "Oh Manny, baby, I got something for you. I got something for you." I got something for you, too <i>[censored]!</i></p> <p><i>[Audience laughs.]</i></p> <p>And I just held my breath, 'cause this girl wasn't about to let his magic wand cast a spell on her again.</p>
00:19:43	Sound Effect	Transition	<p>Music swells and fades.</p>
00:19:44	Jesse	Host	<p><i>[They laugh.]</i></p>
00:19:56	John	Guest	<p>I think I, like, my memory was vividly triggered by crazy glue—crazy glue en la otra—en la otra.</p> <p><i>[Laughing.]</i> Crazy stories, man. I mean, yeah, they're all, like, sort of compilations of things that I had heard people tell me and urban legend and just—and just personified it, you know? Gave it a body and a—and a voice.</p>
00:20:10	Jesse	Host	<p>There's kind of a sweetness to it. 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.</p>
00:20:21	John	Guest	<p><i>[Amused.]</i> True—true that. <i>[Chuckles.]</i></p>

00:20:23	Jesse	Host	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.
00:20:33	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.
00:20:49	Jesse	Host	When you wrote <i>Freak</i> , it was one of the first times you had really written about yourself.
00:20:55	John	Guest	Right. That was the first—that was the first time, 'cause <i>Sp-c-O-Rama</i> was kind of me and my family, but it was all fictionalized—which is <i>[laughs]</i> —it's what people usually do. And then, by <i>Freak</i> , I was like, "You know, there's a lot of stuff that I need to talk about that happened to me personally, that I hope gives other people inspiration." You know?
00:21:26	Jesse	Host	Just growing up in New York City and just how aggressive, <i>[chuckles]</i> you know, my situation was—at home and outside—and how you survive it. And humor was what saved me. 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 <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:21:39	Promo	Clip	Music: Bright, chiming synth.

Speaker: Max Fun Drive is just around the corner.

Echoing Voiceover: 2022.

Speaker: Starting April 25th, it's the best time of the year to support your favorite shows by becoming a Max Fun member or upgrading your membership.

Echoing Voiceover: In just two weeks!

Speaker: We've got some great episodes and amazing thank you gifts in store. And who knows? Maybe a few surprises!

Echoing Voiceover: Don't forget bonus content!

Speaker: So, make sure to tune in starting Monday, April 25th, to get all the juicy details on what each show has in store.

Echoing Voiceover: Actually, wait. What are the details, anyway? And why are they juicy? That's kind of a strange adjective to describe details.

00:22:23	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> Thumpy rock music.
00:22:27	Jesse	Host	It's <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is John Leguizamo. He's the star of <i>Encanto</i> and the solo stage show <i>Latin History for Morons</i> .
00:22:46	John	Guest	There's a moment in the new show where you are portraying yourself in therapy with your therapist, who—
00:22:49	Jesse	Host	My new therapist of the—of the time. Yeah. Which I love. Dr. T. Your now—your <u>now</u> therapist.

00:22:50 John Guest
00:22:51 Jesse Host

My current therapist.
Who you describe as talking like Tim Gunn.

[John laughs.]

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, "Well, if you're looking for a Latin hero, what about your father?"

[John affirms.]

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 *[laughing]*, "Thanks—thanks for the inside Dr. T."

[John laughs and agrees.]

And that was a lot of what—a lot of what your—you know, *Freak* and your other autobiographical work has been about. That's a significant thing.

00:23:50 John Guest

Right, I mean—yeah, I mean, *Freak* was all about my coming-of-age and my relationship with my dad. And, uh, I felt like 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.]*

00:24:12 Jesse Host

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.

00:24:19 John Guest

Right. Because cut to 2012, 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 can't be happening to my son. It cant."

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 arm himself with. Ammunition to defend himself without using his fists. Without having to resort to the way that I grew up. And, 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 were crazy! Like 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 had. 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 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.

00:26:24 Jesse Host

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 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.

00:26:51 John Guest

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 feel their pain, I feel their joy. And I just think a little bit of an accent and 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 see them come to my shows: people from all walks of life. Because when I start doing the South American maps, Central American, Caribbean, you hear everybody.

[Jesse agrees with a chuckle.]

00:27:33 Jesse Host

It's their shoutout time. And it's beautiful.

Yeah, it's just like—in the audience, just, somebody's just going, *[yelling through cupped hands]*, “Mofongoooo!”

00:27:36 John Guest

Yeah, yeah, yeah. *[Laughs.]* When you get to Dominican and I go, “O tigre, o tigre”—which is my Dominican shoutout, and 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 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 small. And Dominican Republic's small. And it's like, “Oh wow, it's so interesting.” But they still shoutout in the same sort of proud, powerful way to be heard and seen.

00:28:15 Jesse Host

I felt like they had that—there were—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 talking a little bit about the different places in Latin America.

00:28:29 John Guest

And the populations of the—of the empires, yeah. Taíno, Incan, Aztec.

00:28:34 Jesse Host

And there's another moment where you just list dance beats. Like, you're like, “Okay cumbia.”

00:28:41 Crosstalk Crosstalk

John: Right, right.

Jesse: You like—

John: Tango.

00:28:46	Jesse	Host	Jesse: —go through the list. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:28:48	John	Guest	And, like, you can tell where people's loyalties lie. <i>[Laughing.]</i> 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 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.
00:29:02	Jesse	Host	John: I couldn't dance anymore. <i>[Laughing and stammering.]</i> I would end up being like KD. But 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.
00:29:09	John	Guest	Oh yeah, they're gonna—they got up in my business and I was like, "You're right!" <i>[Jesse laughs.]</i> I just couldn't do—I couldn't weave it in correctly and I just couldn't do more because I'm already exhausted. <i>[In mock frustration]</i> Like, "Ugh, I'm trying to—I'm still working on that cha-cha." <i>[John cackles.]</i> <i>[Jesse huffs an exhausted breath.]</i> "Oh boy." 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. <i>[Jesse laughs.]</i> And then I got merengue in there. I got merengue later on, when I—when I—when I'm doing the talking to the policeman and <i>[laughs]</i> trying to pass for White. And then he puts on the merengue, and I can't stop dancing. <i>[Jesse laughs.]</i> And then I—so, I out myself. Do you think your son has a different relationship to being Latino than you do?
00:29:47	Jesse	Host	
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 a mixed kid. And he's, you know, half Jewish. So, yeah. It's a little bit different. It's a little bit different. He—you know, 'cause he presents Whiter. You know? So that—that has a lot to do with it.
00:30:10	Jesse	Host	Does he present as White? Like, do you think he—do you think he passes if he—if nobody says anything?
00:30:14	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 of color. So, that's all good.

00:30:32 Jesse Host *[Laughing quietly]* How do you think—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?

'Cause part of this show is about you trying to teach him something about what it means.

00:30:48 John Guest Right, because... yeah. I mean, he was racially profiled mostly, I guess, because of his... relationship to me. So...

[John takes a few deep breaths.]

[Quietly.] I mean, I guess it hasn't been, uh, that long, yet. You know? That's the 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's a way to... it's a—he's says it's like you play god with your own trauma. By putting it 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. You know, I mean, 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—

00:31:54 John Guest Yep. It's a way of dealing. All art—all art is dealing with—I mean, back then I used to say just fixations or obsessions, but a lot of is really trauma or the issues 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.

[John confirms.]

00:32:35 John Guest And not a source of pain or a stumbling block or whatever. Right. I mean, I definitely wanted them to feel pride about themselves. And their Jewish-side, as well. And of their White side. You know, I'm not—I'm not anti-White. That's crazy, you know. I want them to be proud of being White and Jewish as much as they are Latin, Indian, and Black in them, you know? *[Beat.]* I want it all to be equal. I'm just asking to be equal, that's all.

00:33:04 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.

00:33:13 John Guest Thank you, my brother.

00:33:15 Jesse Host John Leguizamo. *Latin History for Morons* has wrapped up its US tour. You can watch the show on Netflix. *Encanto*, the Academy Award-winning animated movie in which he starred, is available to rent or stream on all different kinds of platforms, right now.

00:33:30 Music Transition Chiming synth with a steady beat.

00:33:35 Jesse Host That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye*, created from the homes me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Here in my office, I just got one of those Dr. Pepper 10-2-4 clocks. I've always wanted to have one. I found one that was broken at the flea market. I went and got it fixed with the clock repair guy. It's up on my wall right now. I'm loving it.

10, 2, and 4 is when you're supposed to have a Dr. Pepper to pep up your day.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. It is not sponsored by Dr. Pepper. *[Laughing.]* Although, we would accept such a sponsorship. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio, Valerie Moffat and Richard Robey. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is called "Huddle Formation", by The Go! Team. Thanks very much to them and to their label, Memphis Industries, for sharing it.

Bullseye is on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Find us there. Give us a follow. We'll share with you all of our interviews. And I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

00:34:41 Promo

Promo

Bullseye with Jesse Thorn is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by *NPR*.

[Music fades out.]