

Latino's Who Identify as M'ricans

Written by

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There's a generation of Latino men — men like me, who were raised to believe that the safest way to succeed in America was to stop being Latino. Not entirely, of course. We could keep the tacos, the last name, maybe the music if it wasn't too Latin. But the culture? The language? The pride? The history? The complexity? In many families, those were treated as liabilities, things better left behind if you wanted to be "successful," which really meant "less threatening to toxic and entitled people."

If you want a more clinical-sounding term for that reaction, psychologists talk **about racial threat** and **social dominance orientation**, basically, members of a dominant group feeling threatened when minorities are "too visible," "too proud," or "too equal." There's also **respectability politics**, where marginalized people are pressured to behave in ways that make the dominant group comfortable.

Our elders didn't speak the language to us, so we grew up with a broken inheritance, a handful of Spanish words here and there, mostly slang and curse words, not enough to claim fluency. What we learned wasn't Spanish; it was Spanglish, patched together from whatever scraps we picked up along the way. A cultural duct-tape job. We weren't white, and we weren't Latino enough.

Outside the house, it wasn't any better. There were almost no faces on TV or voices on the radio like ours. The "mentors" we grew up with were the cartoonish giants of the 80s and 90s like Hulk Hogan. Oversized icons of American masculinity who looked like they were carved out of deli meat and dipped in baby oil. That's not what most people look like. For context, there are roughly 1,200 professional wrestlers in the United States compared to about 139,600 respiratory therapists, my former profession. So why were we told we needed to look and act like Macho Man Randy Savage (a rumored creeper in his own right), or Rambo, whose PTSD was weaponized and glorified, or Hugh Hefner with the abusive empire that was Playboy?

And then there were the villains: anyone with a foreign accent, darker skin, or a name that wasn't "John." Black, Latino, Arab, Asian, it didn't matter. Hollywood basically said, "If your melanin level is above SPF 15, you're probably the bad guy." If you're Latino, you're a drug dealer. If you're Arab, you're a terrorist. If you're Black, you're a thug. Whether intentional or not, the message was clear: whiteness was trustworthy, and everything else was a threat.

A stark contradiction to reality.

The fear wasn't based on facts, risk, or anything measurable. When you actually look at the numbers, the largest racial group in the United States, White Americans at roughly 59% of the population. This means they naturally account for the largest share of

everything: good, bad, ordinary, heroic, harmful, and everything in between. That's just math.

Hispanic/Latino Americans make up about 19%, Black Americans about 13%, Asian Americans about 6%, Indigenous people about 1%, and Middle Eastern/North African communities are counted inconsistently but remain a small single-digit percentage.

When a group is the majority, they will also be the majority of every human behavior, positive or negative. But racism doesn't care about math. It cares about narratives. And narratives are easier to believe than statistics, even when the narrative is completely false. People cling to the story that feels familiar, even when the numbers, the context, and reality itself contradict it.

I was probably a tween before it even occurred to me that I wasn't in the "white" category at all. Up to that point, I'd been raised to believe I was close enough, American enough, blended enough that the world would treat me the same. Then reality showed up early and slapped the fantasy out of me. I experienced hate aimed directly at me, not for anything I did, but simply for being Latino. I didn't understand what that old man meant when he called me a "wetback." I understood the blind hate in his voice.

And to make things even more confusing, my grandmother tried to comfort me by saying, "Don't worry, we're not that kind of Latino." That's respectability politics in its purest form: the belief that safety comes from distancing yourself from your own people.

In my 20s, I dated a family friend. Our relationship ended after her mother told her that, because I was Latino, I would never be able to give her the life a white man could. This woman spoke fluent Spanish and hated her own culture so much she basically became a white supremacist without even realizing it. She's completely naïve to her situation. She thinks she's "just being realistic."

And here's the uncomfortable part:

When you're raised to distance yourself from your own culture, you don't just lose connection. You start absorbing the stereotypes, the jokes, the biases. You start seeing people as categories because it keeps things simple, black and white, but people are not simple. We're complex. Our emotions make us predictable and chaotic at the same time. That's how internalized racism works: it's the internalization of racial oppression by the people who are targeted by it. It shows up in the mirror long before it ever puts on a red hat, a swastika, or a Confederate flag. It's the quiet voice that says, "Don't be like them," without ever letting you realize you are "them."

Even serial killer Ted Bundy saved lives working at a suicide hotline. Hitler launched one of the first major anti-smoking campaigns. None of that redeems anything they did, it just proves a point: even the worst people can accidentally do some good, and even

kind people can be manipulated into blind hatred. We can all become the very thing we think we hate.

Many of us were raised to be the “good kind” of Latino, the one who doesn’t make waves, doesn’t speak Spanish too loudly, doesn’t act “like those people.” We learned to laugh at the jokes so we wouldn’t be the target. We learned to downplay our culture so we wouldn’t be “other.” Some of us even learned to hate the very culture and people we came from. And in that process, a lot of Latino men ended up identifying with the most mediocre, entitled version of American masculinity. The kind that rises to prominence on the backs of better human beings and calls it “hard work.”

The first person that comes to mind is Elon Musk. He’s widely treated as the “genius founder” of companies like Tesla, when in reality he bought into Tesla after it was started by Martin Eberhard and Marc Tarpenning, then later took over and became the public face. Same pattern with other ventures: buy, absorb, rebrand, take credit. Acquisition is dressed up as heroism. And that’s what these Latino men aspire to be. They aspire to be Andrew Tate, Joe Rogan, Jake Paul, men who mistake loudness for wisdom and dominance for strength.

For many Latino boys raised in the U.S., the model of manhood we were handed wasn’t Latino at all, and it was toxic on top of that. It was white, suburban, patriotic, stoic, and suspicious of anything that smelled like “ethnic pride” or “diversity.” We were taught that success looked like blending in, and blending in meant taking pride in sacrificing ourselves to the corporate meat grinder. I know this because I lived it. I was the guy working 90-hour weeks between my job as a respiratory therapist and an educator. I sacrificed my life to corporate healthcare, and I was proud of it. There’s nothing noble about being a cog that brags about how fast it spins, especially when you’re promised that hard work brings success, but the deck is stacked against you in every way.

We learned to admire whiteness, distrust our own cultural markers, distance ourselves from other Latinos who were “too Latino,” and see our own people through the lens of stereotypes. Not because we were hateful. Because we were trained. We were taught that we needed to fit the cookie-cutter mold of toxic masculinity, which included a form of self-imposed slavery that we wore like a badge.

When you’re raised without the full scope of your culture, you grow up hungry without realizing it. You feel the emptiness but can’t name it. You feel disconnected but can’t explain why. You feel defensive when someone calls you Latino because you don’t know what that means for you. And sometimes, that hunger turns into resentment toward the culture you were never allowed to fully claim. It left me feeling out of place, not fully part of any group. And being further isolated by child abuse and neglect only deepened that fracture. I now have a complex relationship with my culture, one I’m still trying to understand.

And I'm willing to bet I'm not the only one. Some Latino men channeled that confusion and resentment into political identities that positioned them against their own communities. Some aligned themselves with movements or leaders who framed immigrants as threats. Others entered institutions like ICE, where Latino officers have been involved in high-profile cases that raise painful questions about how internalized bias plays out in real life. For some men, the hostility they direct toward other Latinos isn't just political, it's personal. It's the kind of wound that festers when you've spent your whole life trying to outrun your own reflection. It gives them a chance to abuse, and sometimes even kill the part of themselves they hate, over and over, in a violent reenactment of a fractured sense of self.

I feel fortunate that I knew early on that diversity is one of the greatest strengths of human beings. Biology backs this up: genetic diversity reduces the risk of certain inherited disorders and makes populations more resilient to disease and environmental stress. It literally produces healthier outcomes over time. And yes, I'd die on the hill that mixed-heritage kids are often some of the most beautiful, not because they're "exotic," but because they're living proof that lines we were told to fear can actually blend into something powerful and whole.

I've learned to appreciate beauty in all cultures. You can love America for its beauty, its cultures, and some of its ideals while acknowledging its shortcomings. America was built on racism; that's not an opinion, that's documented history. The Skeptic's Guide to American History from The Great Courses lays this out clearly. Loving a country doesn't mean lying about it.

It's easy and comforting to sort people into boxes when you don't know them.

It gives a false sense of control: "Those people are like this, those people are like that." But if your only experience with a group is one bad encounter or whatever pop culture fed you, that's not insight, that's laziness. You can't judge an entire culture off a movie villain or a news headline and call it truth.

And you see this play out in real time. After the Bad Bunny halftime show, social media was full of posts dripping with stereotypes and coded hostility. Yet the people posting them were offended at being called out. They insist they're "not racist," but here's the uncomfortable truth: supporting racist narratives, defending racist framing, or amplifying racist ideas still contributes to racism. You don't need a robe or a burning cross to uphold a harmful system. Silence, denial, and "I didn't mean it like that" do the job just fine.

I've learned to appreciate beauty in all cultures, including my own. But like most things, nothing is purely black or white. Everything falls on a spectrum. You can love the beauty

of something and still struggle with the parts that hurt. You can reclaim what was taken from you without pretending the journey is simple.

And maybe that's the point.

Latino, African, Asian, European, Middle Eastern, and every culture under the rainbow has touched American culture. We are the United States of America, not "M'ricans." We are a nation built from many histories, many languages, many identities. And the more we embrace that truth, the more whole we become.