



Two Latina Activists on Latinos' Place in Anti-Blackness

This week we pause to reckon with the national call for justice that followed the deaths of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and countless Black Americans in what's become an epidemic of sanctioned violence. Alicia talks to veteran community organizer Rosa Clemente and Marisa Franco, co-founder of Mijente, an action hub for social justice, about anti-Blackness in Latino cultures, the colonization of identity, and what we must each do right now to make lasting change possible.

Alicia Menendez:

Hey, it's Alicia. I don't need to tell you about the moment we're in. You're living it. A series of tragic events, the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, deaths that continue a long history of violence against Black people have set off protests in this country and around the world. People are taking to the streets to demand justice, accountability, and sweeping change. We are all figuring out how to show up in this moment, so we start with our own.

I asked two Latinas who are doing the work, Rosa Clemente, an organizer and scholar of Afro-Latinx identity, and Marisa Franco, the director and co-founder of Mijente, to talk to us about confronting anti-Blackness in Latino culture.

So, Rosa, we were supposed to do this 30 minutes ago, and I got an email from you late last night saying that we needed to push it back, because this was the one chance you had to go to the doctor because you had pepper spray on your hands?

Rosa Clemente: Yeah. I live in Albany, New York. That's two and a half hours out of New York City. It's the state capital. I went to cover the protests. Let me just say I'm not a trained journalist, so I go to cover these things and I end up getting involved. But what happened is there were maybe 30 people left from the march, but there were 50 police officers. Right down the street, I went to cover it, and definitely first and foremost, they were definitely... I don't call them instigators. I call them infiltrators. And they were riling up the crowd in a very negative way, and at one point the officers on the roof started throwing rocks at us. So, as maybe young people were throwing rocks, they were throwing them back at us.

All of a sudden I could just see the crowd change, and the pepper spray got deployed, and I put my hands up, which is something you're not supposed to do, but you instinctively do. I didn't really realize until Sunday how bad my hands were burned. They were really swollen, so I had very, very mild degree first-degree burns. That's part of the work that we do. We have to expect it and be ready for it, and luckily I have healthcare and I was able to go to my doctor today. That was just like, "Take it easy for a couple of days."

Menendez: And more generally, how are you doing in this moment?

Clemente: Well, you know, I'm good. I'm proud. I'm happy. I've been in movement for a long time. I was not raised in a movement household. I became a movement organizer through going to college here in Albany, New York, so for me, I am heartened. In fact, last night I wrote a

post, because I've had so many of my comrades calling and so upset. I said, "The work we've done have led to this moment." Everybody needs to take a breath right now and see the bigger picture, and the bigger picture is that if you've been doing it for 25 years, you worked to get here. If you were doing it five years ago, you get to witness this. Because a lot of times, we don't look at anything we do in our community as a victory, and for me, this is a victory. Are there horrific things happening to protestors? Yes. Is the state infiltrating? Yes. All of that is true. But we as organizers need to look and say, "You know, I'm part of this." Even if I can't be out there right now physically, all the work we have done has led to this moment and like I said, I'm proud, especially all these young people all over the country right now. All over the world. You know, standing up.

Menendez: Marisa, how are you making sense of this moment?

Marisa Franco: I've found myself... I think there's certain times I just kind of feel like I get quiet. It doesn't mean I'm not talking, and it doesn't mean I'm not moving, but there's a part of me that feels very quiet. And I've just been reflecting on a couple things. One, just really the word is bursting with problems right now, and it's bursting with possibility, and it's pretty... It's just pretty significant when you start to look at all the different crises that are intersecting in this time, what may happen in November. I mean, just everyday it just feels like there's something else, and then you see such... Yeah, that bursting of... I just think of the thousands of people that this is their political awakening. I don't know if you've thought of that, Rosa, but like just seeing some of the young people, like this is gonna be a reference point.

And then I've also been thinking of the people that this is not their first rodeo. I've been thinking of the people that were really in the front lines at the beginning of the Black Lives Matter movement, and just... I just wonder how people are feeling, you know, that have been through this. Both in terms of pride, but also just exhaustion. I think what's being missed in this moment is that people are twisting themselves up debating if this is the right tactic, or the right way, trying to report on all this stuff, but what they're not seeing is just what a profound expression it is of pain, what a profound expression it is of rage, and just a profound desire to live, and really yearning, and seeing that there's no path forward. And so, people are just hitting, they're hitting the wall.

And so yes, that's gonna be messy. Yes, it's not gonna be comfortable. Yes, it's not gonna be the way they want it. But they are directly responsible for why that is, because they are the ones that built the walls that people are trying to break through right now.

Menendez: Rosa, when we have a national conversation about anti-Blackness happening, what is the opportunity in the Latinx community? What is the conversation that we should be having?

Clemente: Well, it's funny we're taping this now, since Washington Heights in New York is trending over a lot of anti-Blackness we saw last night, particularly from Black Dominicans. The crux of my scholarship and a big part of who I am is because I have, when I was undergrad, I was exposed to Dr. Marta Moreno Vega, who to me is like the godmother of talking about Afro-Puerto Rican, particularly the history of Black people in Puerto Rico. So, all of my scholarship for 20 years has been around anti-Blackness. But within the historical era of the Black Lives Matter movement, it's been the first time where I saw a specific formation of an organization that had anti-Blackness as its model, and that is Mijente and the work that Marisa and them have been doing, as well.

I mean, honestly, if you look at anything, it's the only organization that right in its model says, "We are against anti-Blackness." You know? And I think that's incredible, because

eight years ago, even five years ago, people would have been like, “What are you talking about? Why do you call yourself Black? You’re not Black. You’re a non-Black person of color.” And all of this. And for me, the spaces that I have found the most embracement of me coming to my racial identity has been particularly the African American community. For a very long time, I’ve been exiled from the larger Latino-Latina-Latinx community because I always talked about race. And there’s been a lot of times where people like, “We liked you on the panel, but you brought up Blackness. We won’t... You’re not coming back.”

And I always get a lot of calls, especially from Latino women, like, “Why weren’t you here? Why weren’t you there?” I’m like, “I can’t control if people want to invite me or not.” And it took me a very long time to be like, “F it. You’re not gonna be invited into every spot.” And how do you internalize when you’re trying to do the work and you’re... You know, for a long time I was like, “Hear me. See me.” I’m beyond that point now. And part of it is because there is a younger generation of Afro-Latina-Latinx-Latino people first, that were not born in their homeland, have never been to their homeland, have been in working class communities, like I grew up in the Bronx, where it’s Caribbean, it’s Africans, it’s all of this mixture of global Black people. I love what’s happening around us as a broader community, those of us who are beginning to accept who we are, our racial identity and what that means.

I would caution that what I don’t like seeing is that a lot of the mainstreaming conversation right now around Afro-Latinx identity is only cultural. I’m gonna wear my hair naturally. I’m gonna have a beef patty, which is a empanada, or you know, all these kind of cultural things, music and stuff, which of course it’s important, but what still gets lost is you can have someone saying, “I’m Afro-Latina-Latino-Latinx,” and then say something anti-Black politically. So, what I tell people is not only do you culturally uplift who you are, but you also have to be part of the Black radical tradition in this country. Right?

So, you can’t be like bigging up your hair and your skin color to show phenotypically how Black you are, and then not supporting the larger Black struggle in this country and throughout the world.

Menendez: Marisa, you were nodding emphatically.

Franco: Yes, as I often do with Rosa. I think the moment, it’s a very difficult moment. I mean, I think for example, we ended up... One of the things we’ve been doing is we’ve been translating videos, or memes that are coming out of the movement, and translating them into Spanish. So, there’s a speech that... I think it was Tamika Mallory, that she made. We translated it with subtitles and put it on our Facebook page. I think last night I checked, it’d been shared over 20,000 times, and the comments were on fire. All in Spanish. Mad, mad, mad, like anti-Black, this is looting, destroying of businesses is not okay, and so we ended up squadding up, like a crew of members, and people were like, “Yes, yes, yes. I want to do it.”

And so, I affectionately called it like online hand-to-hand combat, or ninjas, online ninja, but like bring people in. It’s time. It’s game time. This is a time where we get to model. This is the time where we get to practice what it means to actually engage in dialogue, engage in conversation and make interventions as people who have... Whether it’s an embodied relationship to this, like an experience, or at least at the very least an intellectual one, this feels like a very important moment for people to be stepping in. And broadly, when you think about Latinos, which is a very... It’s a very complicated... In many ways, it doesn’t

make sense. But in so many ways, it does. And strategically as an organizer, I also do not see how it doesn't make sense to try to build across those identities.

I think that there is an unveiling, an unmasking, a way in which a story, a mythology that people in our community have repeated over and over again, that the way you make it in this country is you put your head down, you work hard, and don't ask questions. If someone gets caught up, well, algo hicieron. They did something wrong. You know, and that's the narrative, and that is very much, and it's obviously very much a rugged individual, American dream mythology. And I think that story, and the idea of a Latino is definitely not Black, definitely a dude, who's coming, who's essentially an economic refugee. You know, he wants to clean your yard and he wants... And he's not gonna live by you and feel sorry for him, but he's gonna work hard and then maybe his kid's gonna become a lawyer. You know, that is the story.

And I think that story is completely being challenged. That story is being upended. And people are seeing that it doesn't work like that, and so there's a tremendous opportunity to name that, to just walk people through, and how do we do that in a mass way is the task, but to name that that story is like, "Do you see that this isn't true?" And how do we make a new story? How do we actually root it in not rugged individualism, but interdependence, into collectivity, contesting the idea that oh, if I make it, my community made it. That's not necessarily true. That's not necessarily true, but we say it all the time.

Menendez: Absolutely.

Franco: And to actually contest this idea that ascension, right? Ascension is working hard. No, it's actually also stepping on the backs, in particular of Black people, and in particular it's a rejection of Blackness, and that when we do that, we reject ourselves.

Menendez: How did you come to that as an organization? To centering anti-Blackness in your work?

Franco: I'm from Arizona. Southwest. I'm from a barrio that is Mexican, Chicano, and Yaqui. Arizona does not have a lot of Black folks, but I, early on, after I finished university at Arizona State, I ended up going to the Bay, and I got introduced to a whole lot of people, and really that's where I learned a lot of organizing. And from there, I went on to do different types of organizing in different cities, states, and so my formation and my understanding of power, my understanding of systems was very much influenced. And the question of Black folks, the question of racism, the question of slavery was instrumental in how I started to understand organizing from the ground level up.

And so, many, many years later, in the immigrant rights movement, which I had historically really not liked because of the respectability politics and the idea that we gotta go on our knees, we gotta go on our knees to Washington, D.C., rather than on our feet with our heads held high. The willingness to throw people under the bus, particularly Black people again, the message that I am not a criminal when we don't ever say like, "Well, the criminal's over there. Go get them." And again, that's usually Black people. I was organizing in that movement and I think it just got to a point when forming Mijente, it was right after DACA, right after deferred action for parents of US citizens, so this was Obama years, and I really started looking at, "Well, what's next?"

There's been such amazing organizing in the immigrant community. Immigrants, undocumented people, diraron chingazos. You know? People really threw down hard. But the question was how do we build political power, and you know, the answer in the immigrant rights movement has historically been white people. Let's convince white

people that we contribute this much in taxes. Let's convince white people that we don't commit crimes. Let's convince white people to feel sorry for us, to like us, to anything, because they're the ones who are gonna ultimately decide. That may be well true, but what I was seeing was like we're not reaching out to our most closest allies, and that's other folks of color who live in this country, who understand that it goes far beyond having papers, despite that being an absolutely debilitating thing, to not have papers in this country.

And then I think the last thing I'll say is Mijente was born amidst the uprisings following Trayvon Martin, following the killing of Mike Brown, and when we think about what is it gonna take to really change that story in the Latino community, we don't do that... I think that victory, to me, when I think about Mijente or when I think about Latino organizing in this time is the question of what is our relationship to Black community, what is it? And because it's about reckoning with what is our relationship with ourselves.

I wanted to just talk a little bit about the pro-Blackness inside of Mijente and kind of how that came to be. So, one, Mijente was born amidst the uprisings and the formation of Black Lives Matter that in my lifetime, definitely the most profound at that time mobilization and movement of Black people. It was tremendously impactful, and it was very much a moment of what are we going to do? How are we going to relate to this? And what we're doing is not enough, and no matter what we think is enough, we still can do more. And so, that's one.

Second, I think that as we look at demographic, as that demographic change occurs across the United States, I think that there's a way to look at Latinos as a swing force. Not just a swing vote, a swing force. And there is an assumption made that Latinos, because of the statistics, or *que se yo*, they will swing progressive, and I think that is folly, and I think it is to all of our detriment to ignore the realities of what it's going to take to make it a swing force that is progressive, and I think the best compass for that is Blackness and is in relationship to Black communities. First and foremost, recognizing that much of the benefits that we enjoy in this country come from Black freedom struggle, Black liberation struggle, and Black people. I think that that piece is the other second reason.

Third, we were born in a time where when we looked around, we were seeing all these problems in the Latino community, all of these things happening, and all these things that were coming up in movements and social movements, and the organizations that existed did embody, like in many ways, did not talk about race. I think just recently there was a statement that LULAC put out about the protests, and in it, actually had the anti-looting, anti... I mean, just still to this day, it's 2020, and they're still putting out those kinds of statements. And in the immigrant rights movement, a lot of stuff around people feeling like they needed to check their queerness at the door, and just the ways that in Latino organizing, people have been exiled. Maybe because you're a woman, maybe because you're Black, maybe because you're trans, maybe because *lo que sea*, and so there was this very much like... That makes us less strong. It has made us weaker. It has destroyed our movements. And we cannot continue to recreate those mistakes.

And then I think lastly, and might be more importantly, it's we are Black. In the Latino community, there are many people who are Black, and that is who we are, and sort of in relationship to the external, the organizations and how people are exiled, we ourselves, there needs to be again a remembering that happens. And the more that... Like, if Mijente can be a place where someone who maybe hasn't felt comfortable saying they're Black or feeling they're Black, if that's the first place that they can come in, and then maybe it is.

Yeah, I'm gonna go to this all Black organization. It can be a bridge. It can be a place of... That's my deepest hope, that that could happen. And I think it's very complicated. It's very complicated, but at the very least, send a message and send a signal and do our best to create a space y dar la cara, in the best way.

And so, I think those are some of the reasons why pro-Blackness was so important to be in the kind of formation of the organization and something to communicate really clearly to people.

Menendez: Rosa, I mean, there are Black people in so many of our countries of origin. Black Cubans, Black Dominicans, you called the Dominicans out earlier for the fact that they are really having at it right now in this moment. Panamanians, Hondurans, I mean you go through the map. Why have we historically failed at having this conversation?

Clemente: Oh, I mean we haven't historically failed. I mean, we gotta look at Arturo Schomburg as really, and all he embodies. Schomburg was exiled from Puerto Rico in 1902 and moved to New York City. He was exiled for fighting for independence or being part of the Independista struggle in Puerto Rico, and so when he came to New York, at that time there were many Afro-Cubans and Afro-Puerto Ricans, but when you think about the breadth of who Arturo Schomburg was, who it's interesting, I always find my African-American students and younger people know Schomburg, and Puerto Ricans don't.

So, historically, he was part of the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance movement. The Schomburg Center is created because at one point, he was going around the world collecting any type of Black artifact to talk about Black people all over the world. He was one of Marcus Garvey's mentors. He was an internationalist. He was a teacher, a bibliophile. And the history is there, and we could talk about many scholars in every country that is "a Latino country," but something Marisa had said earlier about language, when I was in college, people were calling themselves Hispanic, right? And now, the intervention was in the late '90s to begin to use the word Latino, and now of course Latinx and all of that, but really, that doesn't speak to the diversity of who we are as 65 million people in this country.

People don't just grow up anti-Black because they're born that way. They are taught. They are colonized. If I go down South right now, I'm sure I can find African American, native people, all other people that are also anti-Black, but as Latinos, Latina, and Latinx, we have an extra responsibility because most of us are either African descendant or indigenous descendant. But for a long time and till this day, we are told that our race is one third indigenous, one third African, one third white. And I'm like, "Well, how do you even do that DNA wise?" But okay, let's just go with this one third theory. What then does that mean? So, you leave out enslavement and colonization from that conversation, so then you get to the point where people will say all Dominicans, all Puerto Ricans, all Mexicans are anti-Black. So, we have to keep pushing as organizers, fight against that narrative, but also show the scholarship of 100 years of those who've been doing this work. You know?

Menendez: Marisa, as someone who is not Black, how do you have conversations about anti-Blackness without centering yourself?

Franco: I think you have to... Those conversations... I think the most simple, radical thing that could happen en masse in Latinx communities is for people to learn their own histories. There are such deep survival mechanisms that are passed down generationally, and one of them is amnesia. One of them is forgetting, so one of the things we talk about Mijente is there's

things we need to unlearn and there's things we need to remember. And when people start having conversations about who are your people, where did they come from? What work did they do? It starts to really counter, because I think one of the things, one of the biggest things we have to contest and push against in the Latino community in the United States is this idea that salvation will come through assimilation.

And so, in order to do that, people have to tell themselves a particular story, and simply looking one, two, three generations back starts to really kind of be that little voice in the back, that wind at your back with your ancestors saying, "Is this who we are? Is this who you are?" And it's not about you shouldn't be this kind of job or whatever, but it's about position and stand. Where do you stand? What side are you on? And so, I think it's not... Like for me, it's like, "No, it's not about always centering yourself, but I think relationality and like how do you relate to this? Do you see yourself in this," is very important. And I would really... I reject this idea that Latinos just have to do a bunch of anti-racist trainings. That's not actually the way forward.

I think one, that's failed with white communities. That's failed with white people, and then people trying to get Latinas to do this when it's a very mixed bag. There's something that Rosa said to me. I was like shaky nervous, at Mijente's convening, when we launched in 2015 in Chicago. We organized this panel on pro-Blackness, and there was a lot of talk at the time about anti-Blackness, and like for me as an organizer, I was like, "We should talk about anti-Blackness in the Latino community, but as an organizer, to me it's like how do we actually talk to people about what it means to be pro-Black?" Because we don't want just people to stay in that place. How do you get people from outside of their head, into their hands, into their heart, and moving?

And I remember the panel, we couldn't even prep, because it was just so tumultuous in terms of how to talk, and I was nervous. I remember Rosa called me. She was gonna get there. And just, I think you just wanted to check in, and she was like, "Girl, you sound real like... You sound in a way." And I was like, "Yeah, I'm hella nervous." You know, this is scary. And you know, I explained the situation, and I'll never forget what she said to me. It always stuck to me. And thank you for that. And she said, "You cannot have a conversation about race. You cannot have a conversation about anti-Blackness in the Latino community without talking about colonization and what people have had to do to survive." And it's very complicated, and that's a very painful conversation to have across movement, as well. But when I think about the conversations we need to have in our family, I think that starting point of story of self, story of lineage is very important.

Clemente: I remember this story. My father told me when he came from Puerto Rico, he was driving a cab in Brooklyn. He got pulled over by the police and he said, "No, no. No soy negro, yo soy puertorriqueño." And they said to him, "Well, we don't care what kind of N you are." And later on in my life, I asked my mom and dad, "Why did you guys never teach me about race?" And they said to me, "Well, Puerto Ricans were just all Puerto Ricans." And that is part of the history of Puerto Rico, because as Puerto Ricans, our national identity has always been taken from us, and as a larger Latinx community, we are taught around our ethnicity or where we come from, so it's always like, "I'm Puerto Rican. I'm Dominican. I'm Peruvian." That is very important. I would never take that away from anyone. But then, because we live in a racialized country, I teach my daughter to this day, she would have grown up, as Malcolm said, he has this great quote, "Who taught you to hate yourself?" Right?

And I would have been doing a disservice I think as a mother and as a family to not instill in that, and seeing her own political fruition at 15, and understanding that she is part of the Black Lives Matter movement, and that daddy may get stopped, and abuelo may get stopped, and titi may get stopped. Well, how do we deal with all of that? But how do we center Blackness as a form of pride? That's very, very important, especially for our children, when so much is taken away from them.

Menendez: So, Marisa, most of the people who listen to this podcast aren't organizers, so they're not necessarily familiar with story of self, story of us, story of now. That framework may be completely foreign to them. I can just tell you based on my own Instagram, there are like clearly a lot of people working through it, trying to figure out how to just show up in this moment, without any of the skills that you have. So, for those folks who are outside of the movement, where do they start?

Franco: One I think is just... Obviously, it depends on what people's interest is, and where kind of their... What their estilo is, right? So, in some ways, actually having Latinx voices online really putting out, really echoing the right messages, and standing up, and raising the issue, and kind of echoing, passing it on to their own networks is very, very important. I think second, joining mobilizations. I think most of the people actually on the streets right now, they're not seasoned people. They're not organizers. In fact, there's a lot of young people. And so, people are clearly being drawn to just being in the street, being with each other, and holding space, and I think people will continue to do that.

I think third, there's definitely a mobilization of resources and donations. Obviously, local grassroots organizations are critical. Organizations that are gonna keep up the fight in between these moments and try to figure out the relationship between mobilization and different types of tactics. I also think that just thinking about... I don't think it's critical, nor strategic, to center this just like, "Oh, well this is why you need to vote out Trump." But I do think there's an option in terms of looking at what is it gonna take to do some meaningful reforms that will have impacts on the criminal justice system and the system of policing. There's been really tremendous work recruiting and running progressive and abolitionist in some cases even district attorneys, and so there are several of those races that people can support.

You know, it's funny you're asking me this, because my nephew, who is in his early 20s, he texted me and was like, "Tia, I really want to do something and I don't know what to do. Can I run some ideas by you?" You know, and I called him, I was like, "What are you thinking, mijo?" And he's like, "I don't know. Me and my friends are just seeing what's happening and you know, we want to do something." You know, and then I think it's a really simple question, but sometimes it's like what do you do when you don't know? And you know, at the end of the day, we kind of talked about different ideas and I was giving him a sense, and then I said, "Mijo, like at the end of the day, like whatever, you need to think about who are you bringing with your or who you're going with, what's the message you want to send, and where's the best place to deliver that message?" If you want to do something kind of in person.

You know, so I was like, "Start there. If you can answer those questions, call me back and I can walk you through it again from there." But I was also like follow online and start to kind of figure out what's happening, and then show up. But it's actually the jumping off and show up, and then once you show up, that's what kind of takes you to the next step, and

the next step, and the next step. But I also think a lot of people are gonna do stuff online and that's also really important, as well.

Menendez: I have to tell you, as a doer, I'm appreciating both of your calls to consume and reflect, because I think very often we jump over that as part of the work. We don't imagine action to be sitting, reading, learning, confronting what we don't know, it's much easier to just put on your sneakers and go. We think of that as like... I've seen a lot of people post lists of books, or books online, and people be like, "That's nice. I want to do something." And it's like, "No, no, no, no, no. I need you... This is part of the doing. You gotta learn this." This is just a question that I see come up a lot, which is what is the conversation we need to be having within our own families when there are overt acts of racism, when there are racist expressions, when there are things that might be more subtle, like someone posting and all lives matter meme? How do you start that conversation?

Franco: It depends. Sometimes it's kind of popping back and like there needs to be a counter to this, and it needs to be as emphatic as the bullshit that's being spewed. And that's definitely righteous. We're all experts on our families, right? And so, you can kind of navigate when that's the option, and I think that's really like... Think of it like when do you just need to do a counterpoint, to polarize it, and then it's like the what side are you on approach?

The second approach I think is one where you kind of put your little, like your family organizer hat, so you know, you talk about like not everybody knows the skill of organizing, but I think all of us are experts in terms of building relationships and navigating power dynamics. We do that in relationships, in romantic relationships, in family relationships. If your children go to school, you know, like all these different, in your workplace, and so, it may not be like... Hey, I don't know how to construct a whole campaign and do all this stuff, but I think we all have some at least experience in that, if not expertise.

And so, if you want to go the route of actually maybe not just kind of like... kind of the counterpoint what side are you on moment, I think really asking questions about and really understanding, and sometimes it's helpful, like where did you gain that perspective? Really having people talk it out.

Menendez: Where are you seeing it pop up the most right now? Because if you look at the conversations that people are having online, it seems to be popping up largely around... Well, I appreciate that people can protest, but I don't condone violence.

Franco: Yeah. It's people, the entry point that I think is safe, that people think is safe, is that's wrong, what happened to that dude, I feel really bad, but they shouldn't be burning stuff, or looting is not the answer, or the people that are out there aren't actually... They don't actually care about George Floyd or the other people that have been killed by the police. Let's call it for what it is. It is actually rooted in anti-Blackness, because underneath, and that's why it's important to say, "Where did you get that? Why do you think that?" Keep asking why, because underneath it is this idea like... And this is something that needs to be confronted and really contested and called out inside the Latino community, is this idea that Blackness is criminal, and that... Well, what was that guy doing? You know, and that is all the stuff that's been ingested, and so I think that's been the most common thing I've seen, is that that's not the right way to do it.

But yet if you go to a lot of these people's... Look at their Facebook page, or look at, and this is where you can actually get into the family thing, going back to that, is like, "Hey, I

haven't seen you, though, before any of these protests started, you weren't actually speaking about the injustice of this person that was killed or that person that was killed. You haven't actually... Are you familiar with all the efforts to reform the police system?" Right? It's not that this is how people deal with it all the time. In fact, the vast majority of the time, people are trying basic reforms. We've gotten to the point we call training cops or these civilian review boards that don't have any teeth as victories, when they are just operating with impunity.

And so, really kind of naming, like why do you think this? And then asking them, why haven't you talked about it before? Before any of these protests started? And just get... Engaging people, I think that sometimes can give you both a chance to either at the very minimum, better understand where that person is coming from, so then you can come at them better the next time. Maybe put a little seed in their mind that they're gonna start to rethink it, but it's also for the people that are watching and listening. But I think the last thing I'll say, because this is real, too, it's also okay to put out boundaries within your family. And to say, "You know what?" Because today it's about Blackness, tomorrow it's about queerness, the next day it's about... You know, because it's all these things, right? It all kind of comes down to what is the right way to be, and that, at the end of the day in the Latino community is super deep, because there is this very much like, "How do you have to act?" Like we are all in the damn theater of what it takes to perform to be able to get to the next level, and that's about gender, it's about gender identity, it's about class, it's about race, it's about ethnicity, it's about language, all these things. And so, if it's not about race, it's gonna be about something else, and it's also really okay to name a boundary and just give people a sense like, "You know, also, this is not okay, and this is..." And that's I think really important for people to hold, as well.

Clemente: I think for me, that's the most important thing. I got to a point, maybe too late in my life, but I got to a point where I was like, "Yeah, you're cut off." At my abuela's funeral almost three years ago, when we all gathered afterwards, one of my cousins tried to come up in our family house with his friend, who was wearing a MAGA hat, and obviously a white supremacist, right? I was like, "Yo, you're not coming up in the crib." And then my dad, he walks out and he's like, "You tell him to leave or I'll tell him." I'm like, "I already told him to bounce."

And I say that because the boundary thing is so important, because you cannot keep exposing yourself or your family, I mean the family that you're living with, to other parts of your family, because it's emotionally unhealthy and it's unsafe emotionally, you know? So, I have put very big boundaries in my family, and I may not talk to a lot of my family ever again, and I have to deal with that, and I also had to say, "This is why I have a movement family." Right? It's not all about blood, and I guess I should be more patient sometimes, but at 48, I don't have time to be patient with people in my family who are racist, because my parents did not raise me like that.

So, my experience that I also had to confront lastly, is that... my privilege in class. Because my parents were able to create I guess what you would call a line to generational wealth right now, i.e. our college was paid for and we ate every day, and we had great vacations, and any time I was in trouble, my parents have bailed me out. Literally bailed me out and bailed me out. You know, and that, for me, has been the struggle that I had to really continue to confront. I have privilege. I am still light skinned. I can eat every day. I have healthcare. I can call my friends. I can get on the internet. And I really didn't start dealing with that class privilege till probably a decade ago, because for me it was race, gender, race, gender, and I'm like, "Girl, the reason you're out here doing whatever you want is

because you have privilege.” You know? And I to this day confront that. Part of confronting that is also like, “Okay, who am I gonna give my money to now? I need to shut up sometimes. I need to not maybe be in every space. I need to listen to young people and also give up sometimes the privilege of thinking you’re wiser and more knowledgeable than everybody else around you.”

Especially people in the hood. Because for me, people in the hood are our grassroots intellectuals. They know exactly what’s happening. They’re just using a different language than the academy uses. So, even words and the way we use words can be a privilege. So, those are things that I continue to interrogate on the larger picture.

Menendez: Is there anything I missed and you want to add?

Clemente: All I would add is I think we have just to keep evolving. You gotta have a crew around you that will be like, “Yo, your ass needs to stay home.” Like, you know, already everybody was like, “Why were you even out there? You know you’re not just trying to report.” And I was like, “Oh, you’re right.” You have to have people in your life that you know will challenge you. You have to have people in your life that will let you see things from a different lens. And lastly, I want our people to really understand that our history does not begin with oppression. In the larger context of world history, we’ve been somewhere for 400 years, yes, but what about those thousands of years before? What about the fact that white young kids aren’t even taught the history of white radical anti-imperialists in their lives? So, I always like to tell young people, yes, understand the oppression and the system, but also understand there’s a reason why we’re still here and exist, and that we cannot just look at our history through the lens of colonization, imperialism, and oppression, because that is not healthy emotionally at all.

Franco: One of the things we’ve found in dialogue around pro-Blackness and anti-Blackness, Blackness in general, inside of Mijente, is that there’s also a lot of need for conversation around indigeneity, and there’s a parallel in terms of... It’s been interesting that in a lot of the conversations around Blackness, it always, and I think being from the Southwest, which is... Rosa, you’re in the Northeast. It’s very... It’s different. And I think that’s also a thing with Latino organizing is regions really matters. And like, there’s almost been like this, at least in the Southwest, and in some of the dialogues I’ve been in, like it almost has been a bridge to engaging conversations about indigeneity, like talking about Blackness, and anti-Blackness, and how it manifests in our families often has kind of arrived at a bridge, because there’s a very similar experience there, and it’s very buried. Very, very buried, and I think particularly the Southwest. And there is this real not knowing where you come from, not knowing who your people are, having no idea, it’s all very buried, and so I think that’s one thing that just I wanted to note that comes up and I think it’s important to name that, that that is just as much something that we need to remember, right? And as a people, because that’s who we are.

And then the second thing I wanted to say is just in terms of people who are grappling with what do I do in this moment, what does this mean for me? Again, the Latinx community is a very varied, very diverse, very mixed, very scattered community. For a bunch of different reasons. I think that very quickly we can kind of fall down a rabbit hole of who should do something, what’s your role, you’re not this enough, you’re not that enough because of that alienation that exists, and I think that one thing I always try to think about is I always try to remember there are people who are way more privileged than me, and there are definitely a hell of a lot of people who are less privileged than me, and to that point around being aware of that, that Rosa was talking about, that’s like a little

exercise I do. And I do it to place myself, and the worst thing we can do is hide what those privileges are. Because it doesn't allow us to be authentic, it doesn't allow us to really show up. There's a way where that is harmful. And it's also disingenuous and it doesn't allow us to meaningfully connect.

And so, I think if we can hold that, if you think about it that way, no matter how light skinned you are, no matter how rich, no matter how Black, no matter how poor, no matter how all this stuff.

Menendez: Rosa, Marisa, thank you both so much.

Thank you as always for joining us. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua-Williams and me, Alicia Menendez. Cedric Wilson is our sound designer. Manuela Bedoya is our intern. We love hearing from you. Email us at hola@latinatolatina.com, and remember to subscribe or follow us on RadioPublic, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, wherever you're listening, and please, please leave a review. It is one of the quickest and easiest ways to help us grow as a community.

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