

Ben

You're listening to the Rough Draft Podcast, season 10, episode 2, where Kam sits down with Alexis Rivera, the president of the Sueño Latino club here on campus, to kick off Hispanic Heritage Month.

Kam

Welcome to the podcast, the Rough Draft Podcast. I'm your host, Kam, and we have a special guest today. Um, would you like to introduce yourself?

Alexis

Yeah. I'm Alexis Rivera. I am a fourth year student. I have— I'm an Early Ed undergrad and Applied Behavior Analysis Master's.

Kam

So I guess now, he said, introduce like—

Alexis

The club?

Kam

Yeah,

Alexis

I'm sorry, I forgot that part. I'm also the president and founder of Sueño Latino, um, the rebirth of the Hispanic cultural society, the Latin club on campus?

Kam

That's good. As everyone should know, it's Hispanic Heritage Month.

Alexis

it is! It is, starting September 15 to October 15.

Kam

That's great.

Alexis

Yeah

Kam

That is super great. So because we have you here so we can broaden our, let's say, ideas and understanding of just Hispanic culture, history, and everything else above the sun. So, I think the first question we should ask you is, what does Hispanic Heritage Month mean to you specifically?

Alexis

Um, to me, it's just the recognition of what we have done for the world and for the country and recognition that all minority groups deserve that we haven't had. Hispanic Heritage Month has only been a thing for not very long really, just a few years, about 40 years? 40-30 years? So it's pretty new. It used to be a week and it just recently got turned into a month, but I don't know, I feel like with Hispanic Heritage Month, with Black History Month, it's a band aid. So I feel like there's so much more that needs to be done in the world, in society in general.

Kam

Right, just to expand on that idea, you know, recently a lot of... you know, with everything going on political-wise and everything that's stressing when talking about immigration and everything else, it seemed to focus more on— I could be incorrect about this— It seemed to focus more on on Hispanic people, like it's other immigrants too, like people from the UK, Ireland, everything else.

Alexis

Yeah, Canada, there's like a huge amount of Canadian illegal immigrants, but that's never talked about and it is really Latin American countries. And it's really sad to me personally, like I'm second generation. So my grandmother is an illegal immigrant from the Dominican Republic. And it's just really sad, the, um... the hate that really goes on between Latin people like, in my eyes, there is no easy way to come to this country, and leaving your home and leaving everything you know, and leaving your culture to come here for a better life, then to be punished for it? You know, like a lot of these people are running away from things. So it just makes me sad, the entire thing makes me sad, the hate that there is against all illegal immigrants, not just Latinos. I feel like, that we should be more accepting. I feel like there's a better way. There's policies that need to be changed. If this is supposed to be a melting pot, like if America is supposed to be a melting pot, and we're here on stolen land, to then like reject people as hard as we're rejecting people is really sad.

Kam

That is, um... just to change it a little bit. So I just want— because personally, I think when we read books, watch TV, even film and all that stuff, where there is Hispanic people in there, they

always focus on the immigration story, the American Dream story, at least most films and books and everything.

Alexis

Yeah, honestly, and if it's not the American Dream story, it's about drugs. You know, you get your, like, stereotypical Hector. You know what I mean? Who's a game maker and so, yeah, I've actually never seen a Hispanic-based show or movie where it's just Latinos living their life. You know? It's regular, it's not something I've ever seen before. It's always, you know, my dad got deported, or something sad, like my father's in jail, you know? Like, and that's just like a stereotype that we continue to see because the media is— that's what's being put out there. So we're, as Latin people, we're going to continue to be seen as drug dealers, we're going to continue to be seen as illegals, we're going to continue to be seen as, like Latina women, like we're going to continue to be seen as sexual objects, if we don't change the narrative for ourselves.

Kam

And it's funny because I looked, I looked at more Hispanic things like artists, and writers and filmmakers. And all the work is so beautiful. I'm very passionate with it. And why do you think, more specifically, America is just trying to promote the immigration story? Would you like to see any other story get tackled in the Hispanic culture or just brought in?

Alexis

To answer your first question, why do I think I see that, I think it's just racism and vicious hate, you know? I feel like, um, white America really just can't get past certain things in our history, we're still fighting for equality for all people. We're still fighting for, um... I can't think, sorry, we're— there's just so many things we're still fighting for, and it's taking us going to the streets and protesting to get to these places. So I don't know what, I don't know what I want to see, I just want to be equal. You know, I've experienced racism and prejudice on this campus, you know? So like, it's something you expect as a person of color, and it's something you expect as a person of color coming to a PWI. But it's always really surprising when it happens. Like you're always taken aback. You know, I am kind of a big face on this campus. I do- I am involved in a lot. So like, when it does happen, I'm like, I forgot. I forgot I was different, you know? So, and can you repeat your second question?

Kam

Oh, no, you pretty much answered, like, all my questions.

Alexis

Okay.

Kam

So that's really nice. So, um, let's just change gears a little bit. I just personally, I want to know, what is your favorite, like, example of like, Hispanic literature, or like movies or even artists? Like, who are you, like, listening to right now? Or watching or anything that has Hispanic heritage to it? You know, a Hispanic person to it?

Alexis

That is an awesome question. Um, I personally don't watch TV. Because I don't have time. So I'm not watching anything. Um, I listen to music all the time. And I'm- I listen to any Bachata artists ever because I love... That's my favorite form of music. Um, I feel like I'm really basic. I listen to Marc Anthony a lot. I listen to Prince Royce a lot. Um, anything that really pops up on Spotify, like I'll, like, put a Latin radio on on Spotify, and then whatever plays I'll listen to truthfully. I feel like that's a really bad question for me? Because I don't watch or really listen to anything.

Kam

Yeah, it's okay. Because, you know, this being about music— because I listen to a lot of rap. And I feel like what's, what's expanding right now is Hispanic rap. Like, I don't know if you've heard CJ Whoopity.

Alexis

Yeah, yeah.

Kam

That's, I'm being honest, that's amazing, right there. But... it's interesting because... it's so many, um, just Hispanic, like, how— because, you know, America is a melting pot, and everything. Culture is very tossed around and everything. So, I want to know, do you see any Hispanic cultures getting popularized? Or more socially accepted? If you can see any.

Alexis

I don't know if there's anything I see as being more socially accepted. I feel like if you speak Spanish out in public, you still get a look. You know what I mean? There's always, I feel like there's always a person that says, like, this is America, speak English. Even though there's no permanent language in America. You know, there's no set language, but I don't, I don't know if I really see anything that's like... It could also be where I'm at, you know, I live in New York. So you're either always around your own culture or, in Pa, where nobody else looks like me unless you're looking for the person who looks like you. You know, that's why I started this club, like, to

find people who looked like me, because I was the only brown girl in all of my classes. So, um, I don't, I don't know if there's anything that's like, recently been socially acceptable, like... I feel like people want to look like us, but they don't want to accept us. So everybody wants to look Latina. You know, everyone wants honey-colored skin. Everybody wants to be curvy. Everyone wants long curly hair. But nobody wants us. So I guess you could say, like, our look is being popularized, but like, that's not what we want.

Kam

Right

Alexis

I feel like this is getting, like, this is a downer. Like if you want to change the questions at any time we can. I'm sorry! I'm also really real, so...

Ben

They're important topics to know.

Catie

What's, um, the music thing you mentioned, the Bachata?

Alexis

Bachata is a certain, it's a dance, and it's also a certain type- certain music style. Um, a lot of people who don't listen to Spanish music say all Spanish music sounds the same. But people who have ear for it know, like, the difference. So there's various different styles. So there's Salsa, which most people are familiar with. Then there's Merengue. And then there's Bachata. And there's 100 different types of different dances and sounds and beats. Bachata is my personal favorite. It's what I've spent most of my life listening to. I listened to it a lot in my home growing up. Merengue is also really popular, it just depends on which island you're from. So I'm half Puerto Rican, I'm half Dominican; Merengue is very Dominican, Bachata is very Puerto Rican. So I just end up gravitating more to that side, sometimes.

Kam

That's really interesting. And it's more, the more we talk, the more I— even personally, I do forget that, and I think a lot of Americans forget that, it's more than just Mexicans coming over. It's more, it's so many more.

Alexis

It is, it's so much more. And it, to talk about it— every time I think about what's happening in our country with what was going on with the wall and what was going on at the border with people in cages and women's uteruses being cut out. Like, I don't know how you can hear that stuff happening, and think that, and still have the feeling that, like, these people don't belong here, these people need to be deported. And I understand there's cases where that does need to happen. But these are still people. You wouldn't treat a dog this way. You know what I mean? Like you, there's... there are laws against treating animals poorly, but we're treating real people so poorly. And it just proves to me that people of color are as valuable to America as... less than dogs, like less than animals. Like that's how, that's where we're valued. We're valued below a house pet. So like, I don't know, that just... that always, like, brings up emotion in me. Especially when, like, having family that's, like, illegal. So like, that can happen to my grandmother, you know, that could have happened to my grandmother. So like to think that people in their heads think that this is okay, or they deserve that? You know what I mean? Or like the law is the law, and they have their consequences? But at what point are the consequences too bad, because there's a difference between sending someone back to their home. And there's another difference between treating a person like dirt. So...

Kam

Yeah, it's... this conversation is awesome, imma be honest. Yeah, it's, you really, um, you've definitely broadened my mind. Yeah, it's hard to talk— well, it's not hard, it shouldn't be hard to talk about these things. But,

Alexis

It should be hard to talk about, but it shouldn't not be talked about.

Kam

I agree, yeah

Alexis

This is- it's a hard topic. And a lot of people choose to avoid it, because it's a hard topic. And people don't want to feel emotions? You know what I mean? People don't want to be sad. Um, but this is our everyday life. Like these are— I'm an elementary major. I have- I'm currently student-teaching in Hannah Penn. And all of these kids are brown. They are black and brown students. There is not one white kid in my class. And I can guarantee you at least five of them are illegal. So, and they know they're illegal. So I remember a kid, like, crying because they thought that their parents got deported. Like I have- like, imagine being a child, you know what I mean? And like, we're all running from something, you know? We're coming to this country because we do have this vision of what America is like, not knowing, you know? So... I don't

know, I just think of my grandmother. She was sold into, um, I don't even know what that's called, like, she was a sex slave. She was sold to a man by her father for cattle. Like, and she's alive. Like this is- she's young, she's in her 60s. Um, and... she came here, she ran away, you know. She bore two kids, um, in the Dominican Republic; she left them. And she ran here, you know, and these are these people's stories that are running to America. But people don't want to hear that. They see drug dealers and they see... I don't even know, drug dealers, I guess, you know all they see is gang members and the possibility, but they don't see hard working people who are working your fields for nothing, who are cleaning your, um... your horse stables, and, um, your cows and all that, like, the hard work that, like, really nobody wants to do, and for pennies. So, I don't know, I think there's just like a lot of work that needs to be done in the minds of most American people.

Kam

Yeah, um... Just hopping back to your educational site, I think that's important too. Um, I grew up near Baltimore, and all that stuff. And I went to Owings Mills, it was- it was split between Hispanics, blacks, and a little bit of whites. And... I just want to know how, I wouldn't say difficult, but just put perspective in my eyes on how hard was, like, let me ask you this first: Are you bilingual?

Alexis

Um, I would say yes; my Spanish isn't great. So I can speak Spanish. I speak Spanish comfortably with my family. But if I'm- if someone starts talking to me in Spanish, I kind of get, like, taken aback because I'm like, I don't wanna be made fun of or, like, laughed at, because when you don't speak fluent Spanish, like that's, you're not, like, real, you're not a real Hispanic, you know? And I get that. Like, I judge people who don't know any Spanish. And I don't know, I know half Spanish, so like people who know full Spanish, like it- it's such a weird environment to be in, like such a weird dynamic in the Latin community.

Kam

I have, um- some of my Hispanic friends can't speak very good English. But they can speak very good Spanish. And I was just wondering, can you put perspective in, like, how they would— Or maybe you know somebody like that, or just grew up near people like that? How do they feel about being in the primary educational system where so-called Standard English and prime English or whatever is so enforced, but they can't speak it? So I just want to know,

Alexis

Oh, my gosh, that is an awesome question. Like, that is like my favorite question. So because I do, I do have- I have five little kiddos, about eight years old. They speak no English. And they're

put in the back of the classroom to fend for themselves, you know? And part of it- part of it is the teacher's fault, but how much can you blame on the teacher if they're not given the correct tools they need for equity in their classroom? You know? So these kids are being left behind. They're in second grade. By first grade, you should know your alphabet, you should know all your letters and all your letter sounds. There's certain milestones that aren't being met in their education. So I'm sitting here working with these kids trying to get them to learn their alphabet in second grade. And so like, to some people, that's not a big deal, but to me, that's a huge deal. Because if you don't know your alphabet, you can't read. You know? You can't write. That's a huge setback. So now what happens when you're in fifth grade, and you still can't read, and you still can't write, and you're still struggling learning English because you go home and all you speak is Spanish? You know? So... and then we're wondering why minority communities aren't getting to college. And we're wondering why minority communities are falling into gangs and are, like, being delinquents, you know? How can we set these kids up for success if we're not giving them what they need? So you're not changing the curriculum into Spanish, you're not educating them, and they're sitting in the back of the classroom talking amongst themselves. And I've seen that in every classroom I've been. I've seen it in Jackson Street Elementary School, and I've seen it at Hannah Penn. And a majority of these Spanish-speaking kids are all put in the back of the classroom, sitting by- sitting with each other, like in groups with each other, all talking amongst themselves. And I get there, and they're doing "work." Quotes, I'm putting, you can't see me. And, um, but they're not doing anything. So then they don't know their numbers, they don't know their letters, they don't know how to read, but nobody's teaching them. So who can you blame? You know, who is to blame for this? Is it the school system? Is it the teachers? Is it society? Like, it's a big problem, and we're going to continue to get English language learners, it's not just Spanish, you know, it's all languages. It's people who come over from Haiti and only speak French, people who come over from the different Asian countries and only speak their own language. What are we doing to help these kids who don't know English? And why isn't there a curriculum change? Why aren't they— if there's enough students who speak Spanish, who can all be in the same classroom, why aren't they all in the same classroom? Why isn't there someone consistently teaching them English, if that's what they need? Like, where are the resources? And I feel like that's so much higher than the school board and the teacher and the superintendent. That goes up to policy. And that's, like, a huge thing that needs to be changed, because people are going to continue coming over, and these kids are gonna continue being left behind, and these classrooms are going to continue being unequitable... And this is gonna continue to be a pattern if something doesn't change soon.

Kam

Yeah

Alexis

And this is something I'm really passionate about, because it makes me so mad. So then I take it amongst myself when I get into the classroom, to get all the Spanish kids, put them in a group, and work with them one-on-one. And like, get them to where they need to be, as much as I can, whether I'm teaching them their letters in Spanish, because at least they know something, or I'm teaching them in English the best that I can.

Kam

That was a lot to take in.

Alexis

Yeah

Kam

So we hear it so much, so, probably the last question, but I have to ask you. Um, we talked about America, we talked about this, we talked about that. I just want to know, in your personal perspective, what is the American dream? And if you feel like there's no such thing as the American dream, or something like that, what should it be?

Alexis

I feel like, um... I'm sorry, I'm getting the words. I feel like there should be an American dream, but there is not one. I feel like it is made by Hollywood and the media to build what is this beautiful, perfect country that we're not. And I'm not saying that we can't get there, because we can. We have— we're the richest country in the world, like we have the resources to get there. We have the education to get there. Um, it's- it's really the question of why are we not there? You know? So I feel like the American Dream is what we all know it to be, is to come to this country and to be free. And it's all about freedom and- and pride. But who's free in this country, you know? Like, that's really the question. If you're German, you're free. If you're, I don't know, Canadian, you're free. If you're European, if you're- if you have European features, and European skin tone, and- you're free, you know, but what about those of us who aren't free and aren't- and end up getting put in cages. Like, the idea of America is freedom, but most of us aren't free. So... or half of us aren't free. You know? So is it equality and freedom and justice for all if you have to work 10 times harder than me because you're a black man in America, and I happen to be a Latin woman? You know, like, is that freedom? Why do you have to work so much harder than me and why are you- why are you put a step below me? You know, so, I don't know. I feel like there is this idealistic of an American dream that has been put out there and that people believe, but they come here and they're— It's a rude awakening.

Kam

Mm, yeah. Um, well, that's about it. Alexis, would you like to say anything before we get out of here?

Alexis

Um, join my club, Sueño Latino. Um, this is who I am in a nutshell. I'm very real. I'm very to the point, and I don't like to water things down. Um, and these are the types of conversations that we do have in the club. Look out for our flyers, join our GroupMe, email me. Just type in my name in the email- in, like, the little email thing. You'll see it, arivera26@ycp.edu. Um, and yeah, have a great night.

Ben

Thank you for listening to this week's episode of the Rough Draft Podcast. We hope you enjoyed, and we hope you tune in next Monday, where we sit down with York College's visiting writer, Melissa Faliveno, to talk about her book, *Tomboyland*.