

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Mónica Ramírez

JVN [00:00:00] Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and every week I sit down for a gorgeous conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that—you guessed it!—makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by returning guest, Mónica Ramírez, where I ask her: What's happening today in the Latine community? Welcome to Getting Curious. This is Jonathan Van Ness, we have one of our favorite people. Put your hands together for Mónica Ramírez, who, if you don't remember, is an attorney, an author, and an activist. And then also since we talked, you won a James Beard Award. You were named one of People en Español's Most Powerful Women. Get out of here with that title! And you're launching a festival celebrating Latinx politics, art, and culture. I'm excited to catch up, I miss you to pieces. And also, you know, because this is, like, a podcast and people don't necessarily see you. You got really cute reading glasses, too.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:00:56] Oh, thank you. I'm so happy to see you. And you know what? You've been on fire. You give me such joy. I follow along with what you're doing. And just so grateful for you. And also grateful for the fact that they have many cute reading glasses out there. So that's also a good thing.

JVN [00:01:11] You're such a dang solid person. You better work. Okay, but wait. So first off, I think listeners will be familiar with terms like "Latinx," but I wondered whether you could share what they mean to you, to start.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:01:25] Yeah, so I think a lot of people are confused because they're, like, "Wait, was it Latino? Latina? We're not sure." So Latinx is a term adopted really, you know, fairly recently in the United States. And the reason that that word was created was because people wanted to ensure that we are recognizing and showing that we are in community with and solidarity with nonbinary and LGBTQIA people. And the Spanish language is a very gendered language. So "Latino," "Latina," that doesn't include everyone. And "Latine" was actually the term that was created in Latin America because "X" isn't actually usually used in Spanish regularly, and so that, the *Latine* term kind of emerged around the same time, but it derived from Latin America and Latinx was a term here in the United States as being used. But but both of them are being used to make sure that we are embracing our nonbinary Latinx siblings.

JVN [00:02:25] I feel like I'm having to have a lot of those conversations of, like, why "birthing people" and, like, "people who give birth" is, like, a good thing and it's just, like, factual, inclusive language. Like, it's not being, like, an on fire progressive—

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:02:36] Exactly!

JVN [00:02:38] Well, I guess I am an on fire progressive, which I'm also proud of. But the point is that it's just using inclusive, factual language, and it's good to use. I love the development and the evolution of language. It's so cool.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:02:48] It is so cool. People should be able to choose how they identify. They should be able to, to have a choice of the terminology that they feel best represents them. You know, because I'm the co-founder of The Latinx House, people criticize and comment and question all the time. And, you know, myself and the co-founders, Olga Segura and Alex Martinez Kondracke, we feel really strongly that we have made a moral decision. It is of our values to be as inclusive as we possibly can. And the reality is that, as you know, language changes, and so in five years it might be a different word that we're using. But as far as we're concerned, as long as it is a word that is including everyone, not erasing people, not being exclusionary, then those are the terms that we want to adopt and we will continue to stand behind.

JVN [00:03:39] So we know that the Latine—which I want to say Latine! I don't want to say Latinx. Like, why are we conforming fucking English words for, like, Latine, honey!

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:03:48] You say Latine. We say Latine and Latinx. Latine actually emerged after Latinx. So when we've created the name for our organization, it was before people were using "latine," but we use both *Latine* and *Latinx*. So you use whatever you're most comfortable with.

JVN [00:04:02] I love that, that's so nonbinary. I love doing both, so yeah, Latine and Latinx. But we know that the Latine and Latinx community is not a monolith. Just like any community, there's a whole gorgeous spectrum of folks. So what is the range of backgrounds and experiences from within the Latine and Latinx community?

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:04:19] Yeah. Thank you for asking that question, because it's important for people to understand that there are 62 million plus Latine people in the United States. We are not a small number of people in this country.

JVN [00:04:31] 62 million?! Out of only 330 [million], right?

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:04:36] Yeah. We are 62 million people. And, you know, now in Latin America and the Caribbean, there's 33 countries. And in Latin America, there's 17 countries. So the Latine community in the United States, we're comprised of people from all over Latin America. We are U.S.-born. We are immigrants in the United States from Latin American countries. You know, if you talk to some of our siblings from the organization Cielo based in, in Los Angeles, they are an Indigenous rights organization and they identify as their Indigenous nations in Latin America. So Zapotec and other nations. And they are very clear in that they are part of our movement to win rights and dignity for Latine community members. But they also want to be recognized as their own nations. We speak different languages. You know,

there's this idea that we all speak Spanish. First of all, I'm third generation Mexican-American. Spanish was not taught to me as a child because my family didn't want to have us experience discrimination in rural Ohio. There are many people like me who didn't grow up speaking Spanish. I do speak Spanish now, but, you know, people in our community speak Portuguese. They speak their Indigenous languages. And some people speak English only because they have not had the opportunity to learn Spanish, Portuguese, or another language. So we are definitely not a monolith.

And the other thing I want to point out in terms of issues, there's this idea that we are a "one issue" community. People think that immigration is the only issue that we care about. But the reality is, and you know this, that first of all, we care about immigration. Immigration impacts our lives. It impacts our families. But part of the United States was Mexico before it was the United States. So there are people here who have been here for hundreds of years, who've been here for a long time. And so it's really, really important that we not put communities in boxes because we care about economic security, we care about climate, we care about reproductive health and justice. We care about many, many things, including immigration. And it speaks to the multitude of backgrounds and walks of life that we represent.

JVN [00:07:22] Yes. Yes! I do think that that's really important to think about. I think one thing that really blows my mind from that, that brief bit is 62 million is, like, this is a lot of people. And we really do a disservice, especially, like, non-Latine people, non-Latinx people, it just costs people their dignity when you don't think about all of the myriad of ways that people are approaching a situation.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:07:18] I'm from rural Ohio and so I consider myself a rural Latina because my experience growing up in rural Ohio is very different than a Latinx person living in Brooklyn, Miami or in L.A.

JVN [00:07:32] You know, we can't put people in boxes. And then in my brain, I jokingly said to myself, like, "Except for Republicans." But then I thought, there's so many Latinx and Latine Republicans, too. Which then made me think about, like, Florida and it made me think about, like, how Republicans have, like, weaponized the word "socialism" to, like, scare the fuck out of, like, Cuban people and, like, other people who have experienced, like, oppressive regimes. We've talked about it on Getting Curious prior about how, like, so many of the guns that, like, well, all the guns that flooded Central America are, like, because of us. Like, so many of the issues that have befallen Central America are, like, because of, like, literal actions of the U.S. And then, it's, like, the Postal Service is socialism, parks are socialism. I just think it's, it's so frustrating the way that, like, people weaponize, specifically, like, powerful Republicans, weaponize information to scare people into voting against, like, their own interest.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:08:34] I think that what you're talking about is, first of all, the power of narrative and the danger of misinformation. And both are at play. So as a culture and as a community, you know, we are naturally giving. We take care of each other. You know, we have

the big family meals. Jonathan, you are, like, one of my cousins now, right? Like, everyone is our family. That is who we are naturally as a community. And so this idea that taking care of people or taking care of each other is bad is actually contradictory to who we are as a community and a culture. So there's that piece. But then, you know, what you're talking about related to narrative, that's so much of the work that we're doing in The Latinx House: to combat some of these false narratives that are being generated. You know, we were watching so closely when the 53 migrants died in Texas who came in the semi-trailer. And that was so heartbreaking and so tragic. And now weeks later, we're seeing how that narrative is being spun in a way to say, "Well, that's why no one should be allowed to enter the border because we don't want them to die in a semi-trailer." When really, it's like, "Let's talk about fair immigration systems, fair immigration laws."

JVN [00:09:48] Yes! It's, like, why are people having to risk their lives to such extreme—because there is no way for people to access, like, immigration here.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:10:00] Exactly. So there's all this twisting that happens with the facts. And I think that what you do, what I do, what other people do is, like, our job is to make sure that the facts are clear and that the people understand what is the truth. And that to the extent there, that there are these false narratives or this demonization of certain people, our job is to combat that. And I think all of us who are in the work of trying to create a more just society, we understand that narrative can be a tool for good. And narrative, unfortunately, has been a tool for bad, including in politics.

JVN [00:10:38] That's 100% true. So what are some of the things that we are launching and we are growing? We're so excited to hear about it.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:10:45] Okay, so this is relevant to our conversation because two and a half years ago, during the pandemic, as you know, farmworker community members and so many Latine community members went to work as essential workers and were getting sick and thousands died. I don't think people across our country realize how many thousands of essential workers died during this pandemic. And, you know, the origins of the Latinx House, which is the organization that I co-founded with Olga and Alex. The origin of our organization was really focused on representation in entertainment and making sure that Latine/Latinx people had space at places like Sundance. And as we were building our house in 2019, the El Paso Massacre happened. And the El Paso Massacre happened, as you know, because of the demonization of our community that was happening in politics and other places. And so we organized something that was called the *Querida Familia Letter* that over 200 leaders across our country, Latinx leaders across our country, signed. It was published in The New York Times and five other publications in the span of two days that over a billion media hits.

And, Jonathan, in one day, after that letter was published, we were getting emails from people all around the country. And, you know, I'll never forget the emails because there was a woman who wrote and she said, you know, "I felt like I was in a desert and I found water when

that letter was published." Someone said that they felt like they could breathe after they read the letter. So this, like, outpouring of both pain and also this, like, togetherness, even though of course we didn't know these, these folks, they are responding. And so that's sort of the backdrop of the Latinx House. We officially did launch in January of 2020 at Sundance. And our idea was that we were going to show up in places and spaces of consequence. And then, of course, almost immediately after we launched. We all went into isolation because of COVID. And so we're doing the work and, you know, continuing to build virtually to create space and community for Latinx people and our allies to lift up the many positive contributions of our community.

And as we were in conversation, you know, there was so much sorrow because people in our community were dying and getting sick from COVID. And so I had this lightbulb, November of 2020 and I said, "We are not going to be able to accelerate change at the pace that is required to save Latine and Latinx lives by just showing up in places of consequence like the political conventions or at South By [SXSW]. We're not going to be able to do that at the rate that we're seeing the harm to the community. And if we're actually going to accelerate change to save lives, to close the wealth gap, to close the pay gap, to address some of these other systemic issues, we have to create places of consequence. And we have to create what I like to call a record scratching moment, that moment when we actually have a second to shift things." And that was how Raizado Fest was born because in my mind what we are creating for Raizado Fest, which will take place at the end of August in Aspen, Colorado, we are creating what I hope will be a record scratching moment so that people will understand that we as a community, the 62 million of us that are here, that we are not takers. People want to think that our community, that we take jobs, that we take benefits, that we take resources. That's what people say about us. But we are givers. We give jobs. We create opportunities. We create inventions. We create culture. That is who we are. And we give, we give in so many ways.

And so this festival is an honoring of the many contributions of our community. And it is in some ways a prayer that we will finally be able to change the narrative about who we are as a community so that we don't have to have the mass suffering that we have experienced for years and years and years. And we're taking over Aspen in a very symbolic way because, as you know, Colorado was Mexico. Spanish is the dominant language there. Latine and Indigenous people have helped to build what is Aspen, a community where, you know, the biggest thought leaders, very wealthy people, very prominent individuals gathered throughout the year for different things, for festivals and other things. And we said this is the community in a place, in a space that we have built over years and years and years and continue to sustain, but we're not visible there. And so it was with much intentionality that we chose Aspen to be the place where we would launch Raizado Festival.

JVN [00:15:48] That's so cool.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:15:51] It is. There's so much love and so much heart in this festival and, you know, such big goals for it. And thank you for being excited about it.

JVN [00:15:59] When is it going to be?

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:16:00] It's August 30th to September 1st.

JVN [00:16:03] What are we doing? Is there, like, panels? Is there activities? Like what's happening? Is there food? The people want to know if there's food!

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:16:10] Everything, the food! So, so Chef Grace Ramirez, who you might know, she's curating our entire menu for the festival and she's bringing in some other amazing chefs to be part of that experience. The food is going to be so, so yummy and representative of our community. So it won't it won't just be Mexican food. We want to make sure that we're having food that represents other parts of our community as well. So I'm really excited about the food. There will also be music. We're going to be screening some movies and we're going to be having fireside chats and panels and these flash talks. Like, I can just give you a little peek. There's this incredible, incredible activist in our community. Her name is Nalleli Cobo. She's a 19-year-old activist. She started as an activist when she was nine, and she just won the Goldman Award, which is essentially the equivalent of the Nobel Peace Prize for the environmental movement.

JVN [00:17:08] Shit.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:17:09] Yeah, because when she was nine years old, she alongside her mother and her neighbors in L.A., they began to organize because she and other people were getting sick, and it was because there was oil drilling that was happening in their neighborhood and they were all getting sick. So she and her mother and others created the campaign "People Over [Not] Pozos" – pozos are holes. So they, they created this campaign and they won. And so now she's 19. She's amazing. And she's going to be giving a flash talk about her vision for the future when it comes to the environmental movement and climate change, so that's just one.

JVN [00:17:44] We obviously need to do, like, an Erin Brockovich feature about her, like, she needs her own movie.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:17:49] Right?! I know!

JVN [00:17:50] That's, like, hello!

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:17:52] And her mom! Her mom went and they, like, found the resources—one hundred percent.

JVN [00:17:57] C'mon! It's fully Erin Brockovich but, like, mother daughter, it's, it's so major. I'm, like, obsessed. What's the story behind the title, like, "Raizado Festival?" What does *raizado* mean? I don't know this word.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:18:12] So *raizado* means "deeply rooted" and it took us forever to choose the name for this festival. You know, it's, like, our baby.

JVN [00:18:19] [CLAPS] It's so good!

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:18:21] So *raizado*, for us, is, like, our community is deeply rooted in this country and we wanted to convey that. But the thing about roots, and I know you know about roots because you care about the vegetables and the gardens, like, I know that about you.

JVN [00:18:34] I do.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:18:35] And roots? Roots grow and they merge. And so we said the symbolism of a root and us being rooted like that, there's so much meaning because with roots there's also the opportunity for continued growth. And so that's how we chose *raizado*.

JVN [00:18:52] Ah! So, okay, I love that. How does the festival honor Aspen's Latine and Indigenous communities? Is that, like, by prioritizing, like, what speakers and, like, what storytellers? How do you translate that into the festival?

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:19:05] Yeah, thank you for asking. So essentially, this year's festival is a proof of concept. We needed to be able to prove that we could do this. And so we're only inviting 250 people, Latine community members and our allies, for the majority of the festival. There will be an afternoon on September 1st that's open to the public. So we're doing a number of things to make sure that we're honoring the community. First, a certain number of tickets have been set aside for Latine community members from Colorado. We are creating this really beautiful special video, including the voices of different Latine community members that will show at the beginning of the festival, we have a local host committee where we've gone to local leaders to help us build this because we didn't want to just fly into a community and do a thing and then leave. We wanted to make sure that the local community was helping us to build it. And so we have this local committee. The Aspen mayor is part of it, and we have some other incredible leaders who were part of that committee. Making sure that we're acknowledging the land that we're on and acknowledging the leadership of the Ute people from Aspen is really important to us. So we'll have some Indigenous leaders with us to, to ensure that we are properly honoring the land that we are being allowed to use for this festival. We'll have some speakers from Colorado who will be integrated into the program.

And then it was really, really important to me to make sure that we were including vendors. So most people might not realize, but the Latine community members who are working in

restaurants, they're working at Aspen Meadows Resort, cleaning rooms and doing any other number of jobs. You know, many of them live an hour to two away and they're commuting two to four hours every day to do their jobs because they cannot live in Aspen. It's cost prohibitive. And so we wanted to make sure that we're bringing those community members in as participants in the festival, but also thinking about, "Who are the local vendors, who has the food truck two hours away, who are the local mariachi singers in the area?" You know, so we've really tried hard to figure out who those folks are to make sure that they can be part of this and that we're supporting them and their businesses as well. And the last thing, you know, The Humans Who Feed Us is a campaign that I created through my other organization, Justice for Migrant Women. That's the project that we won the James Beard Award for. And that project highlights immigrant food workers along the food supply chain. And so for Raizado, our team has identified and interviewed immigrant food workers in and around Aspen. And so there will be a special exhibit of "The Humans Who Feed Us" at the festival that is highlighting the Latine community members who are working in the food supply chain in Aspen and in the nearby cities. So we've thought of lots of ways of trying to bring folks in.

JVN [00:22:00] I love that. I also— the commuting thing, right? So gas has been so expensive and I was reading that Shell just reported their profits today. They made \$11 billion in the second quarter, \$11 billion. And I know that Biden, like, suspended the federal gas tax, like, a couple of months ago, but, like, if you look at state taxes on gases, the idea that people who are undocumented don't pay taxes and don't contribute to the economy, like, are paying actually, like, disproportionately more.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:22:39] That's right.

JVN [00:22:41] Like in so many ways because of the way that the economy is, like, made to punch down. Like, it doesn't punch up on the people with more money, it punches down. And if you're confused about what I'm talking about when I say that we did a really good episode about that which we'll link in the episode notes here, but it's, like, how banks charge overdraft fees, and those billions of dollars that get raised off of overdrafts go to then be given to loans to, like, rich people.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:23:05] It's such an important point. The other thing is that, you know, during the pandemic, people who had wealth and were privileged enough to be able to go somewhere other than their home, like Aspen, they were, they were able to relocate during the pandemic so the work in those areas is actually greater, if you think about it, because there's more people that have been there either temporarily or decided to relocate. But the benefit to the workers hasn't changed. You know, they're still being paid minimum wage or maybe more. But if you're having to drive four hours a day to go to your minimum wage job, like, how do you ever get ahead? Like how do you ever have enough to be able to sustain yourself and your family?

JVN [00:23:45] And I mean the answer is: is that you really don't.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:23:48] You don't.

JVN [00:23:50] It reminds me of another episode of Getting Curious that we did where it was about family separation. And people were really upset about family separation. And our guest said, "You know, family separation hasn't only been happening at the border. We've been separating families for years in mass incarceration systems." And then when you think about when families come up against incredible financial hardship, a lot of times then you get into, like, crimes of survival and, like, poverty-related crimes, which is either, like, inability to pay for an old ticket. It can be literally anything from, it can be getting involved in sex, it can be, like, shoplifting. It can be your kid doesn't go to fucking school. It can be so many things. It can be, like, you get sick so you can't take your can to school. And then there's just so much stuff that can happen when we run into financial hardship and it's, like, people don't care. And then you think about \$11 billion that Shell just reported. We authorize billions and billions and billions and billions to like foreign wars to all of these things. And then that income gap, we don't have any affordable housing resources for folks. No, like, guaranteed, like, access to food, shelter. We do have power to affect these things not only at the ballot box but, like, right here, right now. And actually, speaking of, how can people get more involved in your organization that are allies to show up and help these, like, more mutual aid-y side of things more immediately?

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:25:07] First of all, for folks who won't be attending the festival, there's actually going to be some stuff that we're going to be live streaming. But when you go to the festival website, we set up a giving platform. So I don't know if you know this, but only about 1% of all philanthropic giving in the entire United States is invested in the Latine community. So 62 million people in this country and actually it dipped during COVID, so it went to .8%, of all philanthropic dollars are invested in the community. That's nothing. How do you even begin to address some of the, the systemic harms that exist? Like how do you even begin to address some of these big issues that you're talking about, like, housing and income inequality, when, when the resources don't exist, to be able to support the organizations that are doing the work on the ground? We don't want to just get people together just to celebrate and to talk about problems. We are about action. So we have created a giving platform alongside the festival. When people go to our website, there will be a donate button and when they donate they will be supporting organizations who have actually chosen a few organizations that we grant, which that means that when you give money to them, they'll give money to other organizations. And these organizations that they're regranteeing to are smaller Latine organizations around the US. So we want people to give. That's how people can show up as allies. And that giving will go to organizations that are doing things like mutual aid, that are helping with things like economic injustice.

JVN [00:26:42] And where is our website?

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:26:44] The Latinx House dot o-r-g. They can go there and they'll find a link for Raizado and it'll take them to the information.

JVN [00:26:53] And if you're listening to this right now and you're feeling frisky, you can do \$5, \$10, \$15, \$20. You don't got to be a coinsy bitch and do \$1000, like... but if it's not super duper abundant right now and we don't really have the extra coinsy to be donating. Is there a way that people can volunteer time or, like, show up in that way to help out the organization?

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:27:12] So people can contact us about volunteering. But I think that one of the other ways that is going to be the most impactful is for every session that we're doing on every issue. So for example, Nalleli, who will be talking about climate and environment. Every single session that we've created for this festival, there will be four immediate actions that people can take on that issue.

JVN [00:27:31] Mm.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:27:32] And they'll be on our social media @thelatinxhouse. That's our social media handle on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. They'll be able to go to our social media and you'll be able to see "Take Four On Climate" and we'll tell you exactly—like, "Support this organization. Sign this petition. Tweet this sample post." And so on every issue that we're addressing, because we wanted people to not only know about the problems, we wanted people to have something actionable that they could do to address the problem. So we need to do that, because what we need to do is show philanthropy, the government, political leaders. We need to show them that this idea that no one cares about what is happening to our community or the future of our community, that's wrong. We have an activated base of people, Latine community members and our allies, who are poised, positioned and ready to take action. So that is what people should do to really support our effort. And this festival is happening this year for the first time, but our vision for the festival is a minimum of a ten year run because that's about how long it takes to shift culture.

JVN [00:28:41] Which is such a good thing to think about because Republicans have actually been really smart about that, understanding that it takes decades to shift. And we've just learned about some of that with Sister District. Like you've got to think in decades, not in little bits. And so what you were saying is so brilliant because we do need to show leaders that there is, like, a positive, active, engaged base. And there is, and you can, and we can. And so, yes, there's way more good stuff. I mean, there's a lot of bad stuff, but there is good stuff, too.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:29:09] There's good stuff, too. We are a (c)3 organization, so we're not engaged in politics or supporting candidates. But our lives are political, like, we show up and we're in the middle of a political debate. In our work that we've been doing for so many years, we've said, like, "There is a true information gap that exists in this country." You know, in small towns across this country, newspapers are closing.

JVN [00:29:33] Yeah.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:29:34] We have a real broadband issue where, like, in small communities like rural America, people don't have the same access to broadband. So to the extent that people are getting their information from the Internet, they're not getting it. When you look at civic engagement and who's, like, getting the word out to people about voting for one candidate or another, just pure, who's getting the information out about voting? In poor communities, and in rural America, we have civic deserts. So it really is about who has put the dollars, cents, and time into educating community members about whatever it is they want to educate them about, including misinformation. Right. So, like, educating them about the other side or what have you. So that goes back to the importance and the need to ensure that philanthropy is equitably investing in communities. Because when communities can't even get basic information, how are we supposed to be best positioned to fight for our lives?

JVN [00:30:32] I'm going to sprain my neck. I'm nodding so hard. I want people to know. What you just said strikes home so personally, my family owned newspapers for, like, I was a sixth-generation, like, hundreds of years. Like I grew up in a newspaper, like, I grew up in newsrooms and, like, marketing and art departments and ad departments, like before there was computers, when you were using like rubber cement and like scalpel, like exacto knives to like lay out papers. Like I was in dark rooms with, like, our local photographer, like, helping her, like, hang, like, her work and, like, her photos. And actually in my hometown of Quincy, which, by the way, like, has a Latine population. There really is a huge information gap and there is also an Internet gap. So that really is a huge thing and thank you for bringing that up. So we were saying earlier how, like, a huge goal of The Latinx House is representation and that's kind of where we started. One thing I thought about a lot is that, like, as representation for queer people has increased in the media, we have not seen the same correlation in, like, increasing of rights. In fact, I almost have been, you know, positing that, like, is it almost making it worse in some ways because like we're more visible than ever, but then, like, we have, like, more anti-trans bills and more anti-gay bills passed and being debated than ever. How do you see us bridging that gap of, like, representation and having more human rights?

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:31:57] You know, I think that what we're seeing across the country is we're seeing more people who have the lived experience of whatever community—of our community, of the trans community, of women, etc.—who are running for office and that matters so much. I mean, there's research that shows that, like, when women are holding office, there are more bills that are introduced that relate to women and girls.

JVN [00:32:23] Yeah, we just saw it in Nevada, first legislator in history that had more women. It had a female majority and, like, so many incredible laws came out of that legislature.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:32:33] That's right. We've got to make sure that the people who are representing us understand the lived experience, can firsthand vouch for it and then are going to fight for it. I spent years and years talking to members of Congress about what farmworker

women need or what the farmworker community needs. And there was a point at which I said, "No, you know, the answer isn't talking to these members of Congress to try to explain to them what farmworkers need." I mean, ultimately, the answer is we need farmworker women to run for office, to be the lawmakers. Right. And so that's on the horizon. You know, I'm an attorney, as you said at the beginning. And when I became an attorney, only 1% of all attorneys in the entire United States were Latina. Now we're 2% of all attorneys in the United States.

JVN [00:33:19] But isn't that a 100% increase or a double increase?

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:33:23] That's an increase. We need more. We need more.

JVN [00:33:26] We need more.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:33:28] Right. Because then lawyers become judges who are making decisions about how the laws should be applied.

JVN [00:33:34] Yes!

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:33:35] You know, we need more organizers on the ground who are able to meet face-to-face with their neighbors to talk about their experiences and what they need. We need more of all of that. And, you know, Jonathan, one of the big underlying goals of our festival Raizado is we need more social capital. There's two books, one's called *Our Kids*, and the other book is called *Bowling for Columbine*. And the premise of both books is essentially, like, what it means, to a community or even a family, to have social capital. Meaning, you know, the *Our Kids* book is about a community here in Ohio. It touches on different communities. But the author, who was actually my teacher in grad school, he's from a little town near where I live in Ohio. And, and in the book talks a lot about, like, you know, what it means to be in a community where everyone is your kid. They're all our kids, right? "The kid riding their bikes down the street. That's my kid. I'm looking out for my kid."

There was a point in our lives when people looked at you and me and other people, we were *their* community, even if they didn't know who we were. And now, over time, what we've seen is there's less and less social capital. There's less and less of this extension of belonging and welcoming and embracing people as community. There's more isolation, there's more exclusion, etc.. And one of our goals for this festival is we need to build more social capital. We've got to be creating community where we're looking out for each other, where we have each other's backs, where we know that we're going to speak up, stand up when needed, if needed, for someone across the country. We need to do that. But certainly for the Latine community, where we've seen these racial attacks against our community, we definitely need more of that. And it can't be us by ourselves doing it. It needs to be alongside our allies. And so we're going to see more of that. And that to me relates to what we're seeing in politics.

That to me relates to what we see around people building power on the ground. It's all related.

JVN [00:35:39] So if you're listening to this and you haven't had a chance to listen to our first episode, we discussed last year about the labor conditions for farm and migrant workers in the United States. Can you remind us of those conditions and what these workers face, as, like, a little recap in case people didn't listen to our first episode.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:35:58] Yeah, in case you didn't listen to the first episode. Well, I'm sorry to report that not much has changed. So you're picking up where we left off. There are 2 to 3 million farm workers across our nation. About a million of them are women. Farmworkers have been excluded from the most basic labor protections for more than 80 years. You know, sexual harassment, pay discrimination, gender steering. Those are all major issues that farmworker women face. Farmworkers continue to be sprayed with dangerous pesticides. Women have huge reproductive health issues because of the chemicals they're being exposed to. We see children that are born with birth deformities as a result of being exposed to those chemicals and while they're in utero. There's so many issues we see that there's an increasing number of guest workers who are being brought into our country. And in some circumstances, those individuals have been victims of human trafficking. There's just a whole range of issues. And the exclusion of rights for farmworkers in our country literally dates back to slavery and the mistreatment and harm against our Black siblings, whose family members were once slaves. Because once slavery ended and there was an attempt to try to win rights for agricultural workers, domestic workers and restaurant workers, the groups of workers who were excluded were specifically excluded because the people that held those jobs at that time were Black community members. And so those exclusions and those racist exclusions have carried forward until today.

JVN [00:37:38] So how the fuck can we fix that?

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:37:45] So here's what has to happen. First of all, we have to be conscious consumers. We are buying products from companies, some of whom are involved in exploitative practices.

JVN [00:37:56] Is there a website? How do we find out?

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:37:59] You know, so there's different websites like the United Farm Workers, for example. On their website, they have a, a list of who is approved by them. [CROSSTALK].

JVN [00:38:08] Okay I love that, positivity. Yes, yes.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:38:11] Yes. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers for years and years have done work. And if you go to their website, you'll see who are the, who are the growers

they're working with, what are the campaigns that they have against other people. The organization FLOC, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee.

JVN [00:38:25] Oh, we're getting all up on there, we're putting all these links on this episode!

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:38:28] So as consumers, every single day we have that opportunity and we need to support small farmers in and around our communities. So I don't know where you live in the country, but you probably live within an hour of a farm or in an hour of rural America, I would guess. Right. Even in New York, on Long Island, there's, like, one of the oldest farmworker organizations in the country. And there are local small farmers, some who, who have farm stands, some of whom ship their produce and product. But we need to support those small farmers.

And to the extent that we have a relationship with them, like, because we go and we buy for them, I'm part of a local CSA. I buy from a particular farmer every single week. We create relationships with them. We ask questions, "How is it going? How's it going for their workers?" That's important. The other thing is to your point, yes, vote. We need to vote with people who values are aligned with our values, who believe in treating people with fairness and dignity, 100%. But between now and voting, we need to be taking it seriously. You know, I don't know how many times you see on social media when people say, you know, "Pick up your phone and call this member of Congress or sign this petition or, you know, meet with your local political leaders." Do it! Because people like me are putting out those calls to action because we need people to take action. So when you see those calls to action, if it's something that you care about, do it. Because it isn't, it isn't just about voting. It's also about holding our political leaders accountable every single day because they work for us. So I would say, like, there's always an opportunity to be active. The question is, what do you care about and what do you want to be involved in?

JVN [00:40:14] So one thing we didn't really get a chance to talk about last time very much was climate change. And right now we're in the midst of, like, a just gigantic heat wave that's taking over so much of the country. How has this extreme weather made workers even more vulnerable?

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:40:27] Because in our country we don't have federal heat laws. So what that means is, you know, in places like California, there are heat stress laws. So workers are required to have shade. There are federal laws that provide workers the opportunity to have breaks. They're supposed to have water available to them in their fields when they're working. They don't always – most times they don't. And so we need to have more laws like this at the federal level to make sure that there's shade protection and that if it's too hot, that people shouldn't have to work for 14 hours, you know, in 100 degree weather. We've seen more heat, heat-related deaths across the country for workers. And so that goes back to legislation. But legislation is only as good as it can be enforced and we have to remember that. So we need members of Congress to also appropriate or give the right amount of money

to the federal agencies whose job it is to make sure that there's shade and that there's water and that there are other protections in place.

JVN [00:41:28] So how has this extreme weather affected, like, migration, like, in terms of migration patterns and in terms of, like, conditions. Like, it's obviously not made it better or safer.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:41:38] Yeah. So, you know, you don't really like to use this terminology, but there is a group of people that some people coin, quote unquote, "climate migrants." And what they mean by that is that there are migrant community members who are being forced to leave their homes because of climate disasters that are happening. So, for example, there was a mudslide that happened in Guatemala. And so people could no longer live there. They had to move. You know, even within the United States, when all those fires were happening, you know, in California and in other parts of the country, Oregon and Nevada, when those fires were happening, people had to move. They couldn't stay in their homes. And that included workers who had to move. But in other cases, it's things like, you know, extreme drought where things won't grow anymore, where some of these community members, their families for generations have been farmers, but they can no longer, you know, yield crops where they're living. And then a lot of them were people who are growing food for their own families, it wasn't even food to sell, but it's no longer viable. And so they have to go to another place in order to find a way to be able to sustain their families. So we're seeing more of that. We'll continue to see more of that as the climate crisis continues.

JVN [00:42:51] In one of our last episodes, we got to talk to Dr. Steven Thrasher, who is incredible, an incredible author. And he was talking a lot with us about boundaries and what the idea of, like, these artificially drawn boundaries mean and the fallout from these. So he said that boundaries that quote, "try to say who is safe and who is not end up hurting people on the margins." Does this idea resonate at all with you and your work?

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:43:16] It completely resonates with me. And I think that even beyond me, I think the people who it resonates with most in our country is our Indigenous siblings. You know, Turtle Island is theirs. Today, our siblings allow us to be on this land, but there has to be recognition that it's because of violence and loss that we are here. Right. And so people made the decision to draw lines around what was the United States, even though it already belonged to other people. Right. And so that resonates with me from the perspective that I've had the great honor of spending time with, with Indigenous siblings who have taught me a lot about their history and the sorrow, the mourning that they still are suffering from. But for the community that I am from and that I serve, migrant women and in particular farmworkers, you know. There's so many artificial lines that have been drawn between countries, between states. And there are all these processes that have been created. And they're not fair processes. Right. Because why is it that there are thousands and thousands of people from India and from Mexico who are, quote unquote, "waiting in line" literally for more than a decade, ten, 13 years, to try to bring their family members into the United States with visas?

And then there are other countries that have, they have no process at all. They can come and they don't even require the visa. And those countries tend to be countries that are white people. Right. That's racist. There's racism in our law. And I've said this for a long time. Our immigration system is racist. Our immigration system is sexist. And our immigration system was built broken. And so the result of that is that there are people right now living in tents on our southern border trying to get into the United States who have viable asylum claims, who cannot get in because of what has happened with our law and the way that our law has been applied and that harm is... it then results in generational harm. When you think about that episode that you're talking about family separation, when you think about the children that have been separated from the families who've been put into detention. When you think about the fact that now small children are making the decision to migrate as unaccompanied minors because they think it might be safer for them to come than adult parents, where we said we do not know the extent of the harm that has been created, the trauma that has been experienced. We don't know what that is yet. We won't know for years and years. But that is something that our country is going to have to take responsibility for at some point in time.

JVN [00:46:01] So one thing that I've been so fucking frustrated and pissed off about, and I know that you've been very outspoken about SCOTUS and the overturning of Roe v Wade, but a lot of people say, "Well, it's still legal in 22 states. So if you want to go get a fucking abortion [TRAILS OFF]," you know, people love to say that. And it's as if everyone has, you know, the hundreds and hundreds of dollars to either get a plane ticket or rent a car and then drive across to another state, especially when gas is \$4.50 and whatever. And if you have other kids and whatever, it's just the whole thing. What even more challenges now do migrants have when they have to probably access quality health care across state lines? What challenges did these individuals face even before the ruling?

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:46:46] So I'm on the National Board of Planned Parenthood, proud board member. And one of the reasons I made the decision to join the board was because for migrant women Planned Parenthood and clinics like Planned Parenthood, they're the only place that they could get care, right, and the whole range of care. For many migrant community members, you know, they don't have health insurance, care is cost prohibitive. Many times, they don't go to the doctor until it is an acute situation, right, they're not getting preventative care. They didn't have providers that spoke their language, there were all sorts of barriers. Thankfully, some of these clinics have outreach workers. They have bilingual *promotores*. They have people who are going into communities to get people care. They have mobile health clinics in some cases to find the community members where they are, especially because in, like, the *colonias* in Texas, in South Texas or in some of the farmworker camps where we work, people don't have cars to be getting to the clinics.

JVN [00:47:46] Because now if you're in South Texas. You're, like, that's, like, five, 6 hours of a drive to get to New Mexico or...

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:47:53] But Jonathan, the one thing you didn't mention, it's so important to name for migrant women, especially undocumented people or people who come from mixed status families. There are checkpoints all along the way. There are immigration checkpoints.

JVN [00:48:07] So you're literally risking ever being able to see your family again if you get caught. If you did get caught, wouldn't you have to go to, like, an ICE place? And then you would definitely have to have that baby.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:48:18] Actually the Biden administration last week came out with a statement, it was about migrant girls because, you know, sometimes when migrant children are apprehended or even when women are apprehended, they do a physical exam. And sometimes they determine that they're pregnant because as you know, sexual violence in migration is a major problem. Some people are fleeing domestic and sexual violence when they come here. And so some people, when they get put into detention, they are pregnant. Right. And so this administration last week said that if individuals are apprehended, that they have to be put in a detention center in a state that allows, still allows for abortion.

JVN [00:49:02] But isn't Abbott going to probably sue them over that? Like won't Abbott want to keep anyone who he catches, like, in Texas?

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:49:11] Well, I'm sure that that will be the case. But as of now, this is what the administration has said.

JVN [00:49:16] That's so chilling when you think about how many more Border Patrol people were hired, like, under Trump and how many of them are, like, policemen who got fired, ex-military people, like, hardcore PTSD. And if you catch someone alone in the middle of the night, like, a young girl or a young person, I don't even care what their gender is, because, like, all sorts of shit can happen.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:49:40] Exactly. That's right. That's right. You know, and actually, this is something I've really been upset about and cared about for a long time, because there is sexual violence that is happening against migrant community members by border patrol.

JVN [00:49:56] A hundred percent.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:49:58] By other people and by people in detention, etc. And, and I recall speaking to somebody years ago about this because I really feel like there needs to be more work done on this issue. And the individual who I was speaking to was a Border Patrol agent, and he told me that there was a policy that was created that requires that from the time an agent apprehends a person, they're supposed to call it in, and there's a certain period of time from which they're supposed to take that person to the border holding center. There's actually a policy on that.

JVN [00:50:33] Because there's so much that went down that they had to make a policy because it was such a widespread problem.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:50:38] I'm sure. I'm sure. Right. And that's not what the person told me. But I'm sure that's the case. But that's a faulty process also, because, like, who's to say they're going to call it in as soon as they find the person? Right. Like, who's to say they're not going to delay?

JVN [00:50:52] And even body cam isn't even, like, a safe thing. So this is just, like, rife with abuse.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:50:56] Just rife with abuse.

JVN [00:50:57] Just Border Patrol. ICE. It's like all of that. It's just, like, rife with human rights, full on abuse.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:51:03] Yeah. And back to where we started talking about the Dobbs ruling. You know, I think people don't consider, first of all, that not everyone has a vehicle to be able to go to a different state. Not everyone has gas or money to be able to do that. Not everyone can take time off of work to go someplace else, like all of those things. Right. But if you're a migrant community member who is undocumented, wherever you are in the country and in particular in Texas, you have border checkpoints along the way. And now, like, even in Ohio, where I live, there are Border Patrol cars that, that are just like police cars that are kind of roaming around. So if that is the climate that you're in, what is the possibility that you're going to go for care because you can't even get beyond the checkpoint and whether the care is for yourself or for someone else in your family. I've heard people talking about, you know, the fact that in Mexico, abortion is legal. And so people could go to Mexico. And I'm, like...

JVN [00:52:02] How do you get back to the border? So just to, like, double down on this idea, too, especially with border patrols, like, immigration laws are racist. Remember, like, in the eighties and nineties that policy that they used to talk about that was, like, the "this type of foot versus that type of foot policy," you know?

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:52:20] Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JVN [00:52:21] Like, isn't that, doesn't that still exist?

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:52:25] It does still exist. And I mean, I mean, I think we should be clear because you and I are both people who love deeply and who feel deeply. I think we should be clear that there are many allies, there are many people who agree with what we're saying about the humanity and dignity of migrant people and of other people across our country. And we understand that we, like, we as a community, are going to make things better. We are

making things better. But the hard work that we have is to change the hearts and minds of the people who are vilifying people that they actually know nothing about and who they've completely stereotyped and who have the best intentions and the biggest dreams. And they want to do the hardest work to make things better for themselves and for our entire country. Like that's the work that we have is to figure out how we can break through to change the hearts and minds. And that's the work that we're committed to doing. So I don't want to give the impression that it's like that "We believe that, that no one is on our side." Because I do believe that many people, many people are on our side.

JVN [00:53:27] Oh, for sure. Yes, 100%. Allies need to do better about understanding what the systems are so that we can have these conversations with people. Because I think most people are good, even people who are on the other side and, like, who don't seemingly share my same values on, like, loving deeply and, like, wanting to, you know, honor the humanity of people.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:53:45] So I want to say something just because I think it's really important. And here's a learning opportunity. I think most people in our country don't realize that in our immigration system and our immigration laws, there's something called visa caps. There's, there's caps, country caps that our government has said, like, "Okay, if you're from this country. You can have, you can have this many visas. If you're in this country, it's this many." And there's literally a lot of people who do immigration law regularly and they represent clients. They'll go and they'll look and they'll say, like, "Okay, what year are they up to? What year's applications are they up to?" And it's, like, ten, 13 years later, they're, like, super behind them for certain countries. And I think people kind of have this false impression that everyone files the paperwork and then after they file the paperwork, then they quote unquote "just wait in line" and then when it's their turn, they get the application. But what's, what's inequitable is that the lines are different and the costs are different. And, you know, the standards are different. Some people get temporary protected status. Some countries don't. Right. Some people are able to get a certain kind of special visa depending on their status, like if they're special skilled immigrant individual saying there's a special visa. And I just think there's like a lot of misinformation and lack of education around what that quote unquote line is that everyone's talking about.

JVN [00:55:15] But how can we support you in your work and how can people get involved? For me, some of the things that really stuck out from this is that less than 1% of all philanthropic money goes into Latine and Latinx organizations, we got to get it together with that. So that's one thing. Also, like, lack of transparency and awareness around, like, speaking to the systems of immigration and, like, what this so-called line that we talk about is. And then the other thing is, is how can I be more involved in getting more support to the Latine community? Those are kind of my biggest takeaways. But how can we specifically support The Latinx House and you and your work and stay up to date with you?

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:55:57] Well, first, please follow The Latinx House on all of our social platforms.

JVN [00:56:02] Doing it literally as we speak, you guys.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:56:03] At “thelatinxhouse” on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. You can find us there. We also have a YouTube channel. Follow us, celebrate this festival, August 30th to September 1st. We'll be releasing content coming from the festival, and we'll be telling people what to take action on. So all of those things are things you can do to support the work that we are doing and to support the organizations that we are in community with and walking alongside in this journey. And the other thing I would say is talk to your friends and your neighbors and your family about our community and the positive contributions that we're making and the local organizations that you can support. We're going to change the narrative about the 62 million people in our country who, who identify as Latine. Story by story. Person by person. And we need you to join us in that effort.

JVN [00:56:58] Ah! Mónica Ramirez, we love you so much. And Getting Curious, thank you so much for coming and sharing your time with us.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:57:04] Thank you for everything.

JVN [00:57:05] No, thank you for everything. You're just the best of all time and we love you so much and things are coming on Getting Curious.

MÓNICA RAMÍREZ [00:57:10] Love you so much.

JVN [00:57:13] You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. Our guest this week was Mónica Ramírez. You'll find links to her work (and our first episode together!) in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. Our theme music is “Freak” by Quiñ - thanks to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend - show them how to subscribe. [SINGS] Because that is how we keep the lights on in operation! [STOPS SINGING] Follow us on Instagram & Twitter @CuriousWithJVN. Our socials are run and curated by Team Getting Curious. Our editor is Andrew Carson. Getting Curious is produced by me, Erica Getto, and Zahra Crim.