

## Experience L.A.

# John Leguizamo: *Latin History for Morons*

Wednesday, September 11, 2019

Ahmanson Theatre, Downtown Los Angeles

### KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- ◉ *Latin History for Morons* is a solo show by John Leguizamo.
- ◉ Leguizamo is an Obie Award and Drama Desk Award winner who has created and starred in shows including *Mambo Mouth* and *Freak*. In addition to his theatrical work, he has appeared in films including *Carlito's Way*, *Super Mario Bros.*, *Moulin Rouge*, and *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar*, for which he was nominated for a Golden Globe. He has also been a recurring character on TV shows including *ER* and *The Kill Point*.
- ◉ *Latin History for Morons* opened off-Broadway in 2017 and moved to Broadway later that year. It was nominated for a 2018 Tony Award for Best Play.

### THE ORIGINS OF LATIN HISTORY FOR MORONS . . . AND THE ORIGINS OF AMERICA

John Leguizamo told the *New York Times* that *Latin History for Morons* was inspired by the aggression and disrespect directed toward Latinx people, which he believes relates to a deliberate lack of information about Latinx history in American textbooks.

“There’s a real aggressive effort to erase our contributions and to keep us out of history textbooks because we have been the contributor to the making of America since the beginning of time,” he said.

### LATINX HISTORY 101?

It’s always hard to do a “101,” or introductory survey, of a vast and complex topic like Latinx history, which spans so many centuries, cultures, nations, and identities—many things are inevitably left out, and every editing choice is meaningful. These are a few of the peoples, individuals, traditions, and events highlighted in *Latin History for Morons*:

- ◉ Today, about 6 million indigenous **Maya** people live in southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and Honduras, speaking about 30 Maya languages and representing multiple ethnic groups. Before the Spanish conquest of Mexico and Central America, Maya peoples created one of the greatest civilizations of the Western Hemisphere.



## VOCABULARY CORNER

### CHICANX or XICANX

A chosen identity of some Mexican Americans who identify with their indigenous ancestry and reject western colonization. The term was popularized during the Chicano Movement of the 1960s, and in the last few years has shifted to the increasingly used *Chicanx*, representing gender neutrality (as opposed to the singularly masculine Chicano or feminine Chicana).

### COLONIZATION

The appropriation of a place or domain for one's own use, often by a foreign power that settles people among and establishes control over an indigenous population.

### LATINX

A gender-neutral term to describe Latin American identity or culture.

### MANIFEST DESTINY

A nineteenth-century doctrine that justified expansion of the United States throughout the Americas as inevitable, or destined.

### MESTIZO

A term used in Latin America to describe a person of mixed race, especially a person of Spanish and indigenous descent.

### VICEROYALTY

An institution created by the Spanish monarchy in the fifteenth century as a structure for ruling over its overseas territories, or colonies.

- ◉ The **Aztec** peoples (comprising many different ethnic groups) ruled a large empire in what is now Mexico in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.
- ◉ **Bartolomé de las Casas** (1474 or 1484–1566) was a Spanish missionary and historian. He was the first to document European oppression of indigenous people in the Americas, and an early advocate of the abolition of slavery.
- ◉ **Simón Bolívar** (1783–1830) was a soldier and statesman born into an aristocratic Spanish-Venezuelan family in Caracas who led revolutions against Spanish rule in New Granada, a Spanish viceroyalty that included present-day Colombia, Panama, and Venezuela. Bolívar became known as El Libertador (The Liberator), and became president of Gran Colombia (a short-lived republic comprising what is now Colombia, Panama, Venezuela, and Ecuador) and dictator of Peru. He ended slavery in the nations where he held power. His legacy involves independence, liberation, and abolition as well as authoritarianism and militarism.
- ◉ **Santería** is a pantheistic Afro-Cuban religion that was brought to Cuba by people from the Yoruba nations of West Africa who were brought to the Americas as slaves. “The way of the saints,” it merges Yoruba tradition with some Roman Catholic elements, and has evolved and changed through migration and practice by diverse Latinx, African American, and other peoples throughout Latin America and the United States.
- ◉ **Emiliano Zapata** (1879–1919) was a Mexican revolutionary fighter and leader during the Mexican Revolution of 1910–20 and the peasant revolt in the state of Morelos. He is an inspirational icon of the agrarian liberation movement of Zapatismo.
- ◉ **Che Guevara** (1928–1967) was an Argentine-Cuban revolutionary and one of the most prominent figures in the Cuban Revolution. The communist leader and guerrilla fighter has become an icon of radical left political movements.
- ◉ The **Chicano Movement**, or El Movimiento, was a civil rights movement that arose among Mexican Americans in the southwestern United States in the 1960s. Looking at issues including discrimination, farmworkers' rights, and voting rights, the Chicano Movement occurred parallel to and sometimes intersected with the Black Power movement.

## CENTER THEATRE GROUP AND LATINX THEATRE HISTORY

The nonprofit Center Theatre Group is one of the largest theatre companies in the United States, offering year-round programming at the Mark Taper Forum, the Ahmanson Theatre, and the Kirk Douglas Theatre. The company has been producing theatre for more than 50 years, and regularly programs award-winning revivals as well as world premieres.

The Center Theatre Group played a notable role in Latinx theatre history. In 1978, a play called *Zoot Suit* opened at CTG's Mark Taper Forum. The play's writer and director, Luiz Valdez, says: “When the character of El Pachuco, memorably played by Edward James Olmos, swaggered onto the Taper stage, Chicano theatre became American theatre.” Within two years, *Zoot Suit* was a major movie. Valdez calls the play the “great-grandfather” of Latino theatre. *Zoot Suit*'s path to the stage started when CTG's founding artistic director, Gordon Davidson, asked Valdez, the



Bartolomé de las Casas



Statue of Simón Bolívar in Panama City



Emiliano Zapata



Che Guevara

artistic director of El Teatro Campesino—a theatrical company founded on the picket lines of the Delano Grape Strike in 1965—to write a play that would reflect the history of Los Angeles.

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- ◉ Is there an under-told history that you would like to tell? What genre or medium would you use to tell it?
- ◉ There is currently a debate going on about requiring ethnic studies curriculum in California’s public schools. What do you think? How important is it for students to learn about the histories and cultures of ethnic or other minorities? Why are some groups overrepresented in history education while others are marginalized or not represented at all?
- ◉ The telling of history often focuses on individual leaders and leaves out the lives of the majority of the people. How does this affect your understanding of history?

## IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

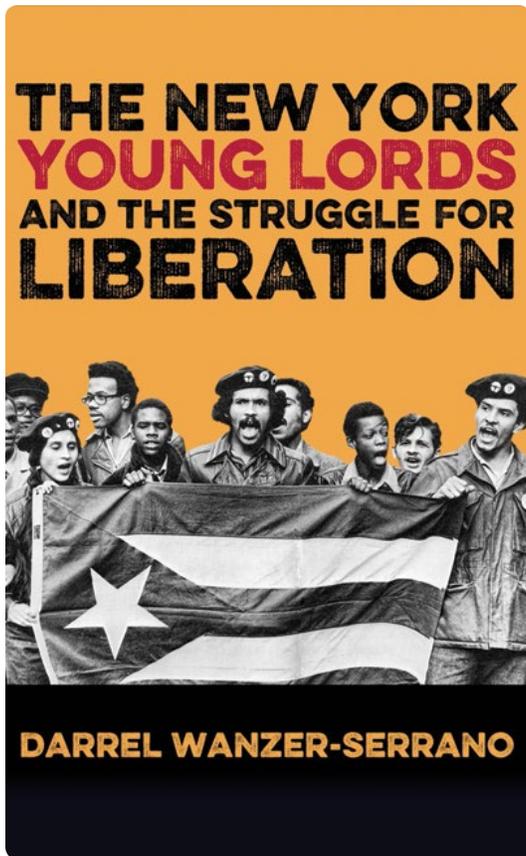
- ◉ Other productions at the Center Theatre Group venues  
[www.centertheatregroup.org/tickets](http://www.centertheatregroup.org/tickets)
- ◉ The Latino Theater Company at Los Angeles Theatre Center  
[www.thelatc.org](http://www.thelatc.org)
- ◉ El Teatro Campesino  
<http://elteatrocampesino.com>
- ◉ CASA 0101  
[www.facebook.com/CASAO101Theater](http://www.facebook.com/CASAO101Theater)
- ◉ Company of Angels  
[www.companyofangels.org](http://www.companyofangels.org)
- ◉ Teatro Luna West  
[www.teatrolunawest.org](http://www.teatrolunawest.org)
- ◉ Hero Theatre  
[www.herotheatre.org](http://www.herotheatre.org)
- ◉ OnStage LA  
<https://onstage.la>

## DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

**EIMMY SOLIS** of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about Leguizamo and this event. Those with a call number (e.g., books) are physical items which you can find in our campus libraries. Those without a call number (e.g. journal articles and databases) are electronic resources, which you can access through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at [libraries.usc.edu](http://libraries.usc.edu).

### BOOKS

- ◉ Leguizamo, John. *The Works of John Leguizamo*. New York: Harper, 2008. Doheny Memorial Library: **PS3562.E424 A6 2008**
- ◉ Malavé, Idelisse, and Giordani, Esti. *Latino Stats: American Hispanics by the Numbers*. New York, NY: The New Press, 2015. Doheny Memorial Library: **E184.S75 M363 2015**



- Mann, Charles C. *1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus*. New York, NY: Knopf, 2005.  
Doheny Memorial Library: **E61 .M266 2005**
- Rosales, Francisco A. (Francisco Arturo). *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*. Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 1996.  
Doheny Memorial Library: **E184.M5 R634 1996**
- Wanzer-Serrano, Darrel. *The New York Young Lords and the Struggle for Liberation*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015.  
Doheny Memorial Library: **F128.9.P85 W36 2015**

#### DATABASES

Chicano Database  
Ethnic NewsWatch  
Latin American Women Writers

#### JOURNALS

*Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* (Online). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000.

*Journal of Latinos and Education* (Online). Philadelphia, PA: Taylor & Francis, 2002.

#### DVDS

Leguizamo, John, and Roger Croucher. *Conversations: John Leguizamo*. DVD. Los Angeles, CA: Screen Actors Guild Foundation, 2005.  
Cinematic Arts Library: **VIDEOS DLWDVD182**

