

Episode 54: Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month & A Special Announcement
Released on September 30, 2021

[00:00:00.12] TORAL PATEL: The opinions expressed by the guests and contributors of this podcast are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Cornell University or its employees.

[00:00:10.75] Welcome to the Inclusive Excellence Podcast. On today's show, we'll be interviewing a very special guest on the topic of Hispanic Heritage Month. We'll be discussing some of the relevant issues related to the community and why our guest does not resonate with the term Hispanic as part of their cultural identity.

[00:00:28.18] At the end of the episode, we also have an announcement that you won't want to miss. My name is Toral Patel.

[00:00:34.08] ANTHONY SIS: My name is Anthony Sis.

[00:00:35.55] TORAL PATEL: And you are listening to the Inclusive Excellence Podcast.

[00:00:38.31] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:00:44.24] Welcome, everyone. Today, we are excited to switch up our roles a little bit for this episode. Instead of Anthony being my co-host today, I would like to introduce Bert Odom-Reed, who many of you know as our sound engineer. Bert, why don't you introduce yourself to our listeners again.

[00:00:59.99] BERT ODOM-REED: Yes, thank you, Toral. So I'm Bert Odom-Reed. My pronouns are he/him, and I'm director of the Cornell Broadcast Studios. And it's probably obvious to all of my colleagues and friends that I love playing with the multimedia production space. And my life has been better for being involved in this particular experience of the Inclusive Excellence Podcast.

[00:01:25.94] TORAL PATEL: Ours is as well. So thank you, Bert. And so the reason why Bert is my co-host is because our special guest today is none other than Anthony. So today we are excited to interview Anthony to talk about one of their salient identities, which coincides with the celebration this month.

[00:01:43.85] But as always, let's start with our question of the day. So Anthony, welcome as our guest.

[00:01:49.70] ANTHONY SIS: Hello, hello. Thank you. It's a very different place to be in.

[00:01:53.27] TORAL PATEL: Right? The shoe's on the other foot, I guess.

[00:01:56.30] ANTHONY SIS: Yes.

[00:01:57.17] TORAL PATEL: So I've been thinking about what kind of question I want to ask both of you today. And really, it's in the interest of getting to know Bert a little bit

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more. And so the audience gets to know Bert a little bit more. My question is, can you both of you or all of us talk a little bit about how you ended up in the career that you did? What's the little path that led to this role for you? Who wants to start?

[00:02:20.97] ANTHONY SIS: I think, Bert, you have a way more interesting story than I do.

[00:02:23.84] BERT ODOM-REED: Right. All right. Well, I'll start. And I think I've talked with Anthony about this before, but my grandmother, when I was younger, gave us money. And she said, go buy something, and do something with it. Don't put it away, but go find something you want to do with it. And so this is when I was maybe 11.

[00:02:48.14] I bought a Super 8 film camera, I bought a Super 8 projector and editor, and I started making films with my friends. And along that path, I also started to add sound and mix things. So I ended up in a long career of audio production and audio engineering. Because I just moved a little bit away from the video or film and a little bit back to the audio, because I loved the way that different sounds can come together and harmonize.

[00:03:20.39] TORAL PATEL: Yeah. I love it. I love how you're talking about the fact that it's an interest that you've had since you were 11. I think that's amazing.

[00:03:27.17] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah. It makes me think of that movie Super 8.

[00:03:29.12] TORAL PATEL: Yes. I was thinking the exact same thing.

[00:03:31.49] ANTHONY SIS: I think the story line is very similar. It's kids. They have a Super 8 camera, and they end up recording some monster or something like.

[00:03:38.54] BERT ODOM-REED: I still have it, so you know we could start a movie. We could do a movie.

[00:03:44.42] ANTHONY SIS: Start a documentary of this experience. Yeah, so it's so funny because I've actually been getting this question a lot lately, in terms of the DE&I space, and how I got involved. And I really didn't choose this career path, if that makes sense. I didn't intentionally go out of my way and say, I want to do DE&I work.

[00:04:04.92] So most of my career, I've worked in higher education, and really just had a passion for education. I also had a passion for public health and getting particularly young people educated with the correct information around sexual and reproductive health. So that's where I started initially when I was in college.

[00:04:20.93] Did a lot of activism, worked in a lot of different spaces. Still am involved in those spaces, but then that kind of translated into the education space. And in the education realm, I just really had a lot of opportunities to hone in on what does DEI look

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like in different capacities? So whether it's working with students or working with faculty or working with employees.

[00:04:41.84] And then, I would say over the past year and a half, as a result of the racial reckoning and injustices that happened last summer, in 2020, that that's when, I think, for me, I really started to kind of think more critically and look more broadly at, what does this work look like in different spaces and different organizational structures in particular outside of higher education?

[00:05:02.07] And so I think that's really where I've kind of honed in on. And just talking about, what does this work look like in those different spaces? Whether it's in the nonprofit sector, for profit sector. And ultimately coming to realize that it's really about the systems. And it's really about critically analyzing the structures that are in place to create a more equitable and inclusive environment for people in a workplace context.

[00:05:23.73] And so that's really, for me, what I would say I'm currently really passionate about.

[00:05:28.34] And how I got into it, honestly, is just because I just got tired of doing it for free, if I'm being quite honest. So there's a lot of companies and a lot of organizations that have task forces or councils.

[00:05:40.01] And for a number of years, even when I was in graduate school, all the way up until I got to Cornell, I was a part of those councils at an institutional level. And I just got really tired of doing it for free. And I just kind of said to myself one day, if I could just do this full time, that would be great.

[00:05:55.60] And then, this position opened up at Cornell. And I was like, perfect. If I could just do trainings for a living. And then, of course, over the past 2 and 1/2 years, that role has evolved, too, to incorporate many other aspects of DE&I.

[00:06:07.57] And so for me, it happened as a result of just realizing that people are willing to pay to do this work, particularly companies and organizations. And I think people should, because this is a very time consuming effort. It's not something that you can task a committee of people who are passionate about doing it to do.

[00:06:24.75] Because they might be passionate about it, but they may not actually know how to implement it. They may have really great ideas and really great ways in which to create change, but to actually implement it? That's where the real work comes in, and that work should be compensated.

[00:06:37.59] So that's how I got into this field, honestly.

[00:06:41.73] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, and for me, it's so funny because hearing both of you talk, I think my career path is a combination of both of yours. In the sense that it's something my childhood has impacted the path that I've taken. And at the same time, I

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took a very long winding path to get to the career that I currently have. So it wasn't a straight line. It wasn't a decision saying, this is what I want to do. And I worked my way towards that.

[00:07:05.22] Both of you know, as well as, I think, members of our audience know, that I moved to this country when I was eight, almost nine years old. And so my entire childhood was spent migrating into a new culture. And learning about this new culture, not only for myself, but as the oldest child. I had to not only teach my siblings but also teach my parents. Because my parents were not attending school, so they weren't learning about this new culture that we have now become a part of.

[00:07:31.78] And so my interest has always been in learning about people. How do I learn about what's going on around me? Make friends? Learn the language? Learn that culture?

[00:07:41.02] And so that expanded to my education, which my undergrad major was psychology, where I learned about one particular person. It's learning about an individual. I minored in sociology and multicultural studies, where we learn about a particular society.

[00:07:56.67] And then when I furthered my education in terms of my master's degree, I debated if I wanted to continue down the psychology path. And I realized very similar to some of our other guests in the past, it's going to lead me towards a path of research, in terms of psychology. And I don't know if I want to do research for the rest of my life.

[00:08:14.83] And so then I took this path of human resources management, which led me to a long term career in recruiting, which is what I had been doing before my foray into DE&I space.

[00:08:26.49] And even recruiting. It was the one job in HR where it was all about learning about somebody. It's learning about them at a professional level, of course. But it was still focused on that individual and learning about them.

[00:08:38.71] And so that ultimately led me to, like I said, a circle path that I took around and around and around. Ultimately led to this DE&I space that I hold now. But it's funny because it's kind of a combination of both of your paths.

[00:08:50.76] BERT ODOM-REED: Well, I'm glad you talked about a circuitous path because I was in banking for a while, by the way.

[00:08:57.03] TORAL PATEL: Oh, OK.

[00:08:58.44] ANTHONY SIS: You were in banking?

[00:08:59.67] BERT ODOM-REED: Yes. Good gracious. And it was not my thing.

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[00:09:04.85] TORAL PATEL: No. So there you go. You finally found your niche. For sure.

[00:09:08.64] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah.

[00:09:09.69] TORAL PATEL: So in terms of what we're here to talk about today, Anthony, do you want to kick us off by sharing a little bit about Hispanic Heritage Month and its significance to you?

[00:09:19.29] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah, so Hispanic Heritage Month, it's really important to me. I think about, one of the things is, I personally don't identify as Hispanic, but I recognize the importance of this month in celebrating the accomplishments of people who identify as Hispanic or Latino, Latina, Latinx, Latine, which we'll talk about a little bit. So all of these different identities.

[00:09:38.52] So I think for me it's important to celebrate the historical figures and folks who have really led the way for more representation. So I think it's important to honor and recognize that.

[00:09:49.26] And I really didn't celebrate it until I was in college as an undergraduate student, where they had specific programming for this month. And I got to learn more about just the importance of this month for the greater community at large.

[00:10:01.90] And so when we're talking about Hispanic Heritage Month, it typically happens between September 15 and October 15 each year. And it's really just to celebrate the different cultures, histories, and contributions, really, of Americans who essentially have ancestors from Spain, from Mexico, the Caribbean, Central and South America. I myself am Guatemalan and Puerto Rican, so that's a combination of Caribbean and Central American identities.

[00:10:28.41] And it started in the 1960s as a week, and then in 1988, specifically, is when it became a full month between September 15 and October 15.

[00:10:38.76] And so I think for me this month, it's just important to really take a moment of and reflection and think about just the progress that we've made as a community in so many industries and in so many aspects of American culture, however one defines that.

[00:10:53.47] BERT ODOM-REED: I mean, it's interesting that the celebration is scheduled beginning in the middle of September to the middle of October, versus most of the celebrations or recognitions are the beginning of the month. Is there a reason for that?

[00:11:09.35] ANTHONY SIS: So the reason that's the case is because a lot of countries in the Latin America region celebrate their Independence Days between that particular time period.

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[00:11:18.32] And so, for example, September 15 is the Independence Day for Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. So those are all countries that are in Central America. And so a lot of the Independence Days coincide within that particular time frame.

[00:11:36.20] And so it's a celebrated beginning of September, but then omit some that also fall in October, it kind of feels a little weird. And so I think from my understanding and just from the research that I've seen, it's done intentionally in the middle of the month to honor and recognize all of those celebrations. For example, Mexico, Chile celebrate their Independence Days on September 16 and then September 18, respectively.

[00:11:57.95] And then, Columbus Day in Latin America, it's also known as Dia de La Raza. So that falls on October 12th. And just knowing that the influence of colonization in the region, and the fact that that particular event is honored in October. Between September 15 and October 15 is the reason why we celebrate it then.

[00:12:16.75] TORAL PATEL: Yeah.

[00:12:16.99] BERT ODOM-REED: Thank you.

[00:12:17.53] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, definitely. Thank you for sharing that. I think that all of those things are important for everybody to know.

[00:12:22.33] You mentioned earlier that you don't identify as Hispanic, yourself, right? And so in my research for this discussion, I was looking at all of these articles, and there are many terms that can be used to describe this heritage, whether it's Hispanic, Latino, Latinx, and probably others that I'm not including.

[00:12:38.89] You and I've had this conversation before, when we have forms that we fill out. There are racial categories, and then underneath the racial categories, there is a secondary checkbox that essentially you have to check, which is are you Hispanic or not Hispanic? Can we talk through some of those terms, Anthony? What do they mean?

[00:12:56.35] ANTHONY SIS: Oh. How much time do we have? No. So for me, I'll start with the personal piece. So I don't identify as Hispanic. I identify as Latino or Latinx. For me personally, the Hispanic identity focuses on the colonization and the impact that it's had in Latin America.

[00:13:17.65] And so I think for me, when I think about Hispanic-- even though it may not be correct. I'm just saying this is my personal understanding of it. Is that, it focuses on that, as opposed to acknowledging the fact that my ancestors and my family and-- yes, there are obviously a lot of connections to Europe in that regard. But it doesn't acknowledge the Latin American identity and ancestors when I hear the word Hispanic for me personally.

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[00:13:41.11] Now, for each and every person, it's different. And I think it's one of those things that, when we talk about inclusion in general and more broadly, it depends on the individual and what they want to use or how they identify themselves as.

[00:13:52.54] So I don't want people to take what my understanding of it is to be that, oh, because I feel this way about Hispanic, I shouldn't use the word Hispanic. Because some people use Hispanic as an identity, and they feel very closely to that. And I think it's important to acknowledge and respect that, as well as other iterations of Latinx, Latino, Latina.

[00:14:11.77] And so I'll kind of break that down a little bit in saying that Hispanic typically is kind of seen as essentially an identity that refers to somebody from a Spanish language background, which also encompasses Spain, even though it's not in Latin America.

[00:14:27.35] Now, Latino or Latina. So one thing to note here, too, is that Spanish is a very gendered language when it comes to particular words. And so Latino, Latina is one of them, where Latino, you would typically refer to for somebody who identifies as a man, and Latina as somebody who identifies as a woman.

[00:14:45.97] But also, Latino more broadly is typically used to also signify the entire community, which is very interesting. It's interesting. I say that in that it's the masculine version, not the feminine version.

[00:14:59.98] But I say that to say that when we say Latino, Latina, it's typically used to refer to people who are from Latin America specifically, is the traditional understanding of these terms.

[00:15:12.22] Now, there's also a term called Latinx, which is something that I think most people are probably familiar with. But in terms of its usage, it's not really popular within the community.

[00:15:22.39] So Latinx came out of a need to find another term to help identify one's Latin background without it being gendered. And so that's where the x comes into play, where it's Latinx. There's not an O, there's not an A, and so it doesn't signify any masculine or feminine characterization, and it's meant to be gender neutral.

[00:15:43.47] Now it's interesting, because there's been a lot of conversations within the community about the inclusivity even of the term Latinx. Because say you're a Latin American who only speaks Spanish, doesn't speak English. And you want to use a gender neutral term. To say Latinx, it'll sound, essentially, in Spanish, Latin-equis, which doesn't sound the same as Latinx. You can even tell, even if you don't speak Spanish, they don't sound the same. So then it creates confusion, and then there's this greater conversation around, is Latin even inclusive enough?

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[00:16:16.98] So now there's an emergence of another term that's called Latine. So Latine is essentially a gender neutral term that is less commonly used than Latinx, but it arose specifically out of a need to use a term that is actually more flowy in terms of the language and the translation, both in English and in Spanish. So Latine, anyone can say it. And it's just a matter of ending it with an e.

[00:16:44.04] And this has also happened with other words, too. So amigo or amiga, for example, which translates to friend. Amigo is the masculine version. Amiga is the feminine version. So there's also a similar usage for this e ending that most people use as a gender neutral way to say friends, is amigue.

[00:17:02.55] So I know I just threw a lot out there for folks who are listening. But I think the one thing that people forget about language, in general, is that language is meant to change over time. So even when people ask questions about they/them, now in terms of the formal definition of it, it is considered singular and plural. But even when I was growing up in school, it was only considered to be plural.

[00:17:25.83] So language is meant to change and evolve. We read Shakespearean English, and it's definitely not the same as the English we read today or understand today, but yet we still find the value of it in reading that text.

[00:17:35.79] And all of this to say that even everything I say right now could change in another year from now. And that's OK because language is meant to change and evolve.

[00:17:43.63] But when it comes to these terms, as I mentioned, I think the most important thing to remember is that if somebody says they identify as Hispanic, we have to respect that. And I will never go to somebody and say, oh, you shouldn't use Hispanic. I think that's so disrespectful. And even though I feel a particular type of way of how it applies to me and my identity, it doesn't mean that it translates for every single individual, even within the community.

[00:18:07.29] But I also think that that's a good thing. I think that's something we should celebrate as well.

[00:18:11.38] BERT ODOM-REED: So how does being Latine?

[00:18:15.39] ANTHONY SIS: Latine, yeah.

[00:18:16.50] BERT ODOM-REED: Yeah. How does that heritage shape the person that you are? I mean, I have Creole, which is, there's quite a bit in the woodpile in Creole, and part of my heritage is Hispanic.

[00:18:29.36] How does that shape the person that you are today?

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[00:18:31.99] ANTHONY SIS: So when I think about my heritage though, it just played such a huge role in terms of how I view the world, how I navigate the world. Because quite honestly, people see me, and they see. Depending on who you talk to, it changes.

[00:18:48.90] So I'm originally from Chicago, born and raised. There's a huge Mexican, Puerto Rican population. But when people see me, they don't assume I'm Puerto Rican. They just assume I'm Mexican. And then when they hear me talk Spanish, they hear my accent, and it's very influenced by the Mexican accent because I went to school and studied Spanish.

[00:19:05.31] And my professor, my teacher, she was Mexican. So she taught us the accents, the words that are typically used in Mexican culture, which I was OK with.

[00:19:13.80] But then, also, coming home and then hearing words that my mom would say or hearing words that my dad would say. And then saying them in other spaces, and people would be like, wait, where are you from again?

[00:19:24.21] So I think for me, it's just something I've never been able to escape, but it's also something I've had to embrace. Because I've heard a lot of people talk about throughout my life just how they wish they would have spoken Spanish, or they wish they would have embraced their cultural heritage more.

[00:19:37.46] Why? Because the message that they received from their parents who might have been first-gen or immigrants themselves was that you have to assimilate into this country in order to survive, in order to thrive, and in order to succeed.

[00:19:50.76] And you can't blame them for that. That narrative is consistent across many immigrant communities, even outside of Latin America. But for me, when I think about my heritage, I just think it's a blessing. It's awesome. I love it.

[00:20:03.63] I love being Guatemalan, I love being Puerto Rican, and I love how closely attached I am to both because of my parents and the way they grew us up. That was something that was part of our life. And it wasn't until I left that environment when I went to school that I then realized, oh, not a lot of people know about their background. Or not every Latino or Latinx, Hispanic person knows about their heritage and where they come from.

[00:20:28.06] And so when I think about, for me, how it shaped my life, I just think, my parents didn't have to do that. But they intentionally did it because they wanted us to remember where we came from.

[00:20:36.87] And it's a little bit emotional thinking about it now, because with the loss of my dad and my grandma, what I think about my Guatemalan side in particular, they were my roots. They were the connectors to that heritage for me. And so to have lost not just one but both of them due to COVID, it's like, wow, I have to remember every

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single thing that they taught me about the heritage now. Because those lines are gone. Those lifelines are gone in terms of that connection.

[00:21:04.32] It's so important to just know where you come from, and I've just been fortunate to know that I had that connection. And I continue to have those connections to the culture, to my ancestors, and to people long before, knowing where I even came from. Which is still kind of a mystery, to some sense, but at least I know some names and at least can pinpoint a specific location.

[00:21:27.45] Where, for some people, even within the Hispanic, Latino, Latinx community, they don't know that. And I don't blame them because they were just taught differently from their families and elders and so on. So.

[00:21:38.64] BERT ODOM-REED: Wow. Having lost two of your anchors who kind of held up your culture. I mean, are you now empowered to be the person that keeps up those family traditions or other things that are important to you?

[00:21:53.23] ANTHONY SIS: Absolutely. So for me, it's cooking. And this is a little bit more personal, but on my dad's side of my family, the Guatemalan side, it's just my aunt. She's the only one who's alive now. So I just feel like her and my sister, and of course, my mom, too. I feel like there's a sanctity around them that I have to go above and beyond now to really protect them, and to really make sure that we don't lose them for whatever reason.

[00:22:21.06] Or that I need to like up my skill set of, OK, this is what my aunt knows about how to make Guatemalan tamales. So I need to learn. Or my sister knows how to do it, so I need to learn from her because, worst case scenario, something happens to any one of them, I can at least pass that tradition on to my family.

[00:22:39.45] And so yeah. So there is this very interesting kind of sense of, they're sacred now. Before I just saw them as family, but now, to me, they're sacred. And I don't see them as elders because in terms of age, they're really not. But there is this kind of sacredness around them of, I need to make sure nothing happens to them or that whatever it is that they learned that I have the capacity to learn it myself, so that we don't lose that connection to our heritage and to our culture.

[00:23:03.51] BERT ODOM-REED: Yeah.

[00:23:04.05] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, Anthony, there are so many things that you're sharing that are resonating with me because, though not part of the Latine culture, we've had similar conversations and similar concerns.

[00:23:13.92] You talked quite a bit about the dual identities that you hold in terms of your heritage. You have the Guatemalan side and you have the Puerto Rican side. When you talk about that. And some of the research that I've done, where I've actually

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listened to people talk about having multiple identities in what essentially is one heritage.

[00:23:31.20] What I've heard from people say. So for example, I watched the video of a female who was a Black Cuban female. And so she says sometimes what she faces is that having these dual identities that she's not Cuban enough for the Cuban side of her family, and not Black enough for the Black side of her family.

[00:23:49.89] And so do you experience that in holding kind of the dual identities that you hold in your heritage?

[00:23:55.29] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah. I definitely do. So I think for me, it comes out in language more than anything, where I feel that duality. Where I'll speak Spanish, and my Guatemalan side will say, you don't speak with a Guatemalan accent. But then I go to my Puerto Rican side, and they're like, you don't speak with a Puerto Rican accent. So like, what? Are you even Puerto Rican? Or even Guatemalan?

[00:24:14.67] And then, of course, when I start, then, throwing these different cultural references, then my legitimacy test and card gets given to me.

[00:24:22.63] TORAL PATEL: You passed.

[00:24:22.92] ANTHONY SIS: A pass. Right. I passed the culture test.

[00:24:26.19] So that happens to me often. But I think what's important in the story that you just shared is the combination of that and skin color. Because I don't think there's a general understanding that Hispanics, Latino, Latinx folks. We literally come in all shapes and colors. Very Black, very light-skinned. So many people that I've come across in my life where I'm like, I'm sorry, you're from where? And you speak Spanish?

[00:24:53.28] There's one example I can think of I remember when I used to live in Cuba. So I studied abroad in Cuba. And I remember one time. So I remember reading a little bit about the history of Cuba and understanding that there were a lot of Chinese immigrants that were brought to Cuba. So I remember reading about that history.

[00:25:09.19] And yet one time, I remember, I think we were coming from the beach or something. And I remember seeing this older couple that looked Asian. They were darker. And they only spoke Spanish, and they were Cuban.

[00:25:21.36] And I had such a culture shock moment of, oh, wait a minute. That history that I read in texts, this is what it looks like. I think that intersection piece of going back to what you were talking about how Hispanic, Latino, Latina, certainly not a race.

[00:25:35.49] And I think the reason why that is also true, partially, aside from the politics piece of it, is because we literally come from all races. We're Black. We're Asian.

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We're all of these different races. So you can be Latino, Latina and Black. You can be Latino, Latina and Asian. Those identities exist.

[00:25:56.11] And when you really look at the history of each of the different countries in Latin America, you then can understand a little bit more about why that is the case.

[00:26:03.90] And also on a side note, there are countries in Latin America that don't even speak Spanish. Belize is one of them. French Guiana, Suriname. These are countries in Latin America that don't even speak Spanish. But yet you look at the demographics and the populations in these countries. They're Black. Because of the influence of the Atlantic slave trade route in Latin America is so heavy and so prevalent. And that history still exists.

[00:26:28.56] And I can go on and on about it, but I'll just end it there in terms of this particular question.

[00:26:33.21] BERT ODOM-REED: Well, I can personally attest to the significance of that trade.

[00:26:38.53] TORAL PATEL: Yeah.

[00:26:39.00] ANTHONY SIS: I think here in the US, when you grow up with a US centric history or lens, you assume that they came directly to here, but they actually didn't. Only a small number of people came directly to the US. A majority-- and when I mean a majority, millions. I want to say it's 11 million-- I want to say somewhere around that number-- enslaved Africans actually came to the Caribbean and actually came to Latin America.

[00:27:00.54] And of those 11 million, I want to say 4 million, if not more, went to Brazil alone in Latin America. And you can still see the influences of it today in terms of the culture, in terms of the food, in terms of the music. Oh my goodness, the music. Don't even get me started with the music.

[00:27:14.85] I love to dance. I used to be a dancer in high school. And when I started reading up on the history of dances like cumbia, salsa, merengue, bachata, reggaeton. Reggaeton is so commonly known now globally.

[00:27:27.48] But reggaeton started as an underground genre of music among Black folks in Puerto Rico. And they had to be underground because the police and the establishments saw that particular genre of music at the time as radical and as something to be fearful of, and as kind of the Black people music, as if it were a negative thing, in the very derogatory sense.

[00:27:48.87] And now what has happened? You have lighter skin artists in this genre of music, and now it's seen globally as a legitimate genre. So I think there's something to be said about that. And also its correlation when you look at US history with certain

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genres of music, like hip hop and rap as well. That those same influences have also inspired how dance and food and culture and things that we celebrate in different countries.

[00:28:11.08] So we celebrate the music. We celebrate that dance. We celebrate that food, but without actually understanding where it came from. And all of it. I'm just going to say all of it. I don't know all the history, but I know enough to know that the African diaspora and the African roots in Latin America are so heavy and prevalent, that it astounds me sometimes when I hear certain conversations within the community of racism and specifically anti-Blackness.

[00:28:37.62] So the idea that Black is a negative thing, being Black is a negative thing. It just astounds me. Because when we look at our history and we look at the things that we celebrate now, they come from that history. So why are we not celebrating and embracing it as a collective? As opposed to meeting it with resistance and with these racist ideas and anti-Black actions, thoughts, beliefs.

[00:29:01.81] And even, I'll just kind of add this caveat here, too. When it comes to language, there are certain phrases that are said in Spanish and a lot of Latin American countries that are extremely problematic and contribute to this anti-Blackness as well.

[00:29:13.84] So there's a phrase that is used called pelo malo. Pelo malo is bad hair. So if somebody says that to you, it's because you have a different hair texture, a Black hair texture.

[00:29:23.79] So those things still continue to exist, but the way I see it is, we should really be embracing that diversity. And that's part of the reason why I love being a part of this community, is because we do come from all races and backgrounds. And we have that history that still influences what we celebrate to this day.

[00:29:40.90] So when you think about resistance, and you think about resilience, the fact that hundreds of years later, people were really doing anything and everything they could to eliminate the fact that these things exist. But yet we still celebrate them, and now they're ingrained in our culture, I think that's a beautiful thing.

[00:29:58.47] BERT ODOM-REED: Yeah.

[00:30:00.15] TORAL PATEL: Wow, Anthony, that's deep. Thank you so much for sharing.

[00:30:03.03] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah. Sorry.

[00:30:03.73] TORAL PATEL: All of that. No.

[00:30:04.65] BERT ODOM-REED: It's all right.

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[00:30:05.31] TORAL PATEL: It's giving our audience members a lot to think about, and I'm hoping that we will all reflect on things that you said and shared and how our culture becomes what it is today. And using it as a means for celebration, I think, is a great thought.

[00:30:19.53] ANTHONY SIS: And I just want to give special credit here to Hei Hei also. So Hei Hei Depew, she's been on a couple of episodes on the podcast. And so shout out to her. Really appreciate just her advocacy, but I also really appreciate just everything that she's been vocal about when it comes to Asian identity, Asian-American identity. Of not seeing it as a monolithic group.

[00:30:37.65] And I think similarly with Hispanic, Latino, Latinx identity, the most important thing to remember is that we are not a monolithic group. And when you look at the history of our region, compared to other regions and other countries and even continents, it's a unique one that, quite frankly, we embrace in one way, but we also don't celebrate it enough. Or we don't embrace it enough.

[00:31:00.47] And so I want to give a special shout out to her in terms of just introducing that notion on the show of not being a monolithic group, because that was transformational for me in understanding about Asian, Asian-American identity. And I think similarly can be applied for this identity as well.

[00:31:16.34] BERT ODOM-REED: Yeah. That's true with the Black community also, where I am not my own brother. I do not represent all of the actions of every other African-American on the planet. And we have to embrace that also. And I think this past year, 18 months, whatever it is, has let people know how diverse we are and can be.

[00:31:40.18] ANTHONY SIS: For that point too, Bert, I think it's just sad and unfortunate, though, that it had to come at the cost of Black and brown bodies.

[00:31:47.48] BERT ODOM-REED: Yeah.

[00:31:48.77] ANTHONY SIS: And I don't think that in the future and doing this work, we should be looking at incidents like that and then finally coming to an awakening. It's really about really embracing the diversity of experiences within a particular community when they're alive. When they're able to thrive and succeed. And when they're able to speak for themselves about their own experiences, not after the fact. Not after it becomes a hashtag, and not after it becomes a part of a movement about a greater systemic issue that's at play.

[00:32:18.15] BERT ODOM-REED: Well said.

[00:32:18.83] TORAL PATEL: Well said. And what a great message and action that we can put in place and look forward to together working towards that vision, I think. Something we can all play a part in.

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[00:32:27.62] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah.

[00:32:28.13] TORAL PATEL: So Anthony, I want to thank you for this conversation today. However, I just want to let our audience know that our episode is not over yet, because we are transitioning slightly. Anthony has an announcement that they would like to share with our audience. Anthony I'm going to hand the mic over to you.

[00:32:44.81] ANTHONY SIS: Oh, the moment I've been dreading. So I've been in this role here at Cornell for 2 and 1/2 years and definitely loved doing this podcast with you, initially working with Sherron. Sherron taught me so much. Bert, you've taught me a million and one things about podcast editing and things to really pay close attention to, which I think has only contributed to the success of this series.

[00:33:12.83] But I will be transitioning out of this role at the end of September. So by the time this episode is released, it will be the end of September. And yeah, so this will be my last episode.

[00:33:27.74] And so there's so many feelings and emotions about it, so I haven't even fully begun to process it. But to just see the growth and evolution of this show has been awesome. And just to see the impact that it's had, especially on the Cornell community, but also listeners who are not part of the Cornell community. I think it's been just amazing.

[00:33:46.44] And I think all three of us have just made an awesome stellar team and helping contribute to that success. And I just hope that episodes like this will continue to be episodes that people listen to a year or two years, three years from now. Because yeah, I just think all of these stories. I think back to all of the guests.

[00:34:04.28] And I really take this particular role seriously of being a co-host, because I just think it's such a unique opportunity to be able to ask people questions and to be able to elevate their stories. And to provide that platform in a way that's meaningful and engaging and lets them take the microphone, as I like to say.

[00:34:26.33] If you have the platform, don't speak over a community or a person. Just pass the microphone to these individuals. I think for me, has been just so amazing, so inspiring, and so humbling, quite honestly. And so yeah, it's been an amazing journey is the best way I could describe it. And a humbling one as well.

[00:34:48.11] TORAL PATEL: Yeah. And I'll say that I know that you think Bert and I, and Sherron as well. But you've obviously been a huge, huge component here in terms of the success of this podcast.

[00:34:56.95] So I think I know the answer to this next question, but in reflecting on your time here at Cornell, can you talk a little bit about, maybe, an accomplishment or a series of accomplishments that you are the most proud of?

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[00:35:12.27] ANTHONY SIS: So definitely the podcast.

[00:35:14.06] TORAL PATEL: I was going to say, I think I know the answer already, but yeah.

[00:35:18.44] ANTHONY SIS: So definitely the podcast. And I think coming into this, I didn't really know much about audio editing or even podcasting. I actually tell this story quite often where, when I found out I was going to get the position and I was going to do this podcast, I reached out to one of my best friends. And I said, hey, can you send me like your top five podcasts that you think I would like? Because she and I have very similar tastes, and she knows what I like, too.

[00:35:40.88] And I said, just send them to me, because I just need to understand the structure of a podcast. I need to just start becoming more familiar with it so I know how to embed it into this show. And so definitely the podcast for me has been a huge highlight and success.

[00:35:53.66] I think another thing for me. There's so many programs that I've done and whatnot. So it's hard for me to pinpoint a specific program. But I think the most successful thing that I've done in this role, and when I reflect back on it, is just the relationships that I've built.

[00:36:10.43] I think I greatly underestimated before this role like how important relationships are in actually fostering systemic change and fostering sustainable change in this work and DE&I efforts.

[00:36:22.04] And so it's hard to leave this position. It's hard to transition out. It's the hardest one I've ever had in my career because of that, because of the relationships that I've built and continue to have. Even with people who aren't here at Cornell, but I've had the privilege to work with in different capacities. And so still being able to leverage those relationships and build upon them.

[00:36:40.86] And so I honestly think that's my success. And people being able to have those difficult conversations with me, as I like to say, as an expectation, it's, feel free to ask those difficult questions you don't feel comfortable asking in other spaces. Because I will be able to answer them and break it down for you in a way that will make sense. And so I think that's like my biggest accomplishment.

[00:37:00.64] BERT ODOM-REED: Well, you are very adept in defining the DE&I space in a way that is consumable and personal and inviting. So I definitely appreciate that about you. And we hope there will always be more people coming into this space, and especially in this space here at Cornell.

[00:37:25.37] Is there any advice you might want to give someone getting in to the DE&I efforts? And if it's not just Cornell, or even more globally.

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[00:37:36.80] ANTHONY SIS: If there's any bit of advice, I would say lead with empathy. I know it sounds pretty cliché. But lead with empathy and lead with respect when it comes to DE&I work.

[00:37:49.58] I know one of the things that we talk a lot about is looking at the specific tangible thing you can do in your capacity, in your role, wherever you are, position at Cornell. And I think that's honestly one of them. And you don't have to necessarily know everything about a person to know that you should still treat them with respect and still showcase empathy to that individual, especially if they're a colleague of yours.

[00:38:11.00] And so if you know somebody identifies as trans or gender queer or so on and so forth, and it's an identity that you're not familiar with, being able to take the initiative to do a little bit of research. Not extensively, but just do a little bit of research to maybe understand a little bit more about that community or that identity or experience.

[00:38:30.77] And just knowing what it takes to just lead with that empathy, lead with that respect of the individual for what it is that they're bringing into the environment. And doing everything you can to ensure that in everything that you do, that it's led with that respect, but also inclusivity, too.

[00:38:49.67] I think the thing that's most important with this work is just to know that inclusivity matters. Equity matters as well. Diversity matters. And so just being able to lead with that everything that you do is so important.

[00:39:03.51] And so yes, you could do it through a training, but what's going to create more of a change is being able to identify the things that you do in your day to day, and being able to modify those behaviors. And leading with those practices that do foster more equity and inclusion.

[00:39:20.40] And also understanding that that could change in a year from now, or six months from now. So also kind of having that mentality of just being open to new ideas, new perspectives, new things. That's really what's going to help create the change that I think needs to happen here at the university.

[00:39:36.14] TORAL PATEL: Anthony, what an amazing message to end your last episode on. So, like you've been dreading this portion of the podcast, I also have been dreading it. I've been putting it off for as long as possible. I don't think I've talked to you about it at all. I think it's been like, no, we're going to just function as normal. We're going to work like normal. We're not even going to talk about your last day.

[00:39:58.34] So for me personally, I want to say thank you for all that you've given to Cornell. I don't think you realize, and I think this is one piece that I have shared with you, probably in different ways. I don't think you've realized the impact that you've made across the University, and even in the short time that you've been here. And I think we will take a lot of the messages that you're going to leave us with and hopefully continue down those lines.

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[00:40:24.50] And then personally, oh, goodness. In the podcast space alone, I can't tell you how much you've helped me grow. Bert, too. But definitely without your confidence in me, there's no way that I would have ever been your co-host.

[00:40:39.80] I think when Sherron first announced that she was transitioning out of Cornell, I just said, oh, yeah, let's go find somebody for you. Never ever thinking that that would be me. Because from the very beginning, I've told you that's not a space that I feel comfortable in at all. And you've actually created that comfort for me, so I completely appreciate that.

[00:40:59.82] Not only in the podcast, but also in training sessions. I've gotten to be a little bit more comfortable in that space, as well, that, OK, I can have this conversation. And I can lead these kinds of trainings. And I think a lot of that comes from your confidence in me. And not just your, confidence but also your guidance. And you've taught me a lot.

[00:41:17.67] So I'm going to kind of leave it there. But I'm going to hand this off to Bert to say any last things.

[00:41:24.23] ANTHONY SIS: Wait. Hold on. Hold on. Can we share the story quickly of how we got you onto the podcast as a co-host?

[00:41:29.97] TORAL PATEL: Yeah. It wasn't Anthony asking. It was not Anthony asking me at all.

[00:41:36.13] ANTHONY SIS: So the story behind it is, because I knew if I asked you to be on the podcast, you would say, absolutely not.

[00:41:42.69] TORAL PATEL: No way.

[00:41:43.53] ANTHONY SIS: You would say no. Hard no. Non-negotiable.

[00:41:46.29] So I went to our previous supervisor, and I said, hey, I think Toral would be a great co-host. We have great conversations on the side. The only thing that I need you to do is I need you to tell her that she's going to do it.

[00:42:01.41] TORAL PATEL: It's mandatory. Yes.

[00:42:02.91] ANTHONY SIS: Coming from her. So that is how we got Toral on to the podcast as co-host, because she wasn't necessarily. As she was told by our former supervisor that that was something she was going to be doing.

[00:42:16.09] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, because until that point, I'll be honest and tell you that I had a list of people who could be a co-host. And I was not on that list. I did not put myself on that list at all. So here we are two years later.

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[00:42:28.41] BERT ODOM-REED: Wow. And thank you for sharing that Anthony. I mean, honestly, being on this other side of the board, as it were, the interaction between both of you has been magic. It is beyond friendship. And it's beyond the academic nature of what you do in the space. It's beyond colleagues.

[00:42:50.76] And I have been so blessed to have been able to listen in on these conversations. And I'm glad that it happened. And it's nice that you did the little push, Anthony, because she sure needed it.

[00:43:06.09] And to Anthony, your voice and leadership has been an anchor not only in the DE&I space, but to, I would say, general humanity. Because you share in a way. And I love your phrase of leading with empathy. You can feel that even without saying it.

[00:43:28.02] And as, let's say, the technical teacher that I was to show you some of the ways to work, in our interactions, I could see your development. But also as the student, there are things you've taught me, too, which is a great way to interact. Where just open to the ideas of what you want to talk about or the techniques to get the best voice out of people.

[00:44:00.00] Even as we talk Toral off the cliff of, yes, you can do this. Just to give that encouragement for people to share their true selves. And I admire that in you. And I really appreciate that I've had this opportunity to just be part of that experience. And so thank you. Thank you very much.

[00:44:26.67] TORAL PATEL: Yeah. The empathy piece reminds me of-- I'm not going to quote it properly, but it's this Maya Angelou quote. I think it ends with, people will never remember what you did, but they will always remember how you made them feel. And that's something that I take away from all of our interactions and conversations, Anthony.

[00:44:44.34] I think you and I have had some conversations about the emotions that I've gone through over the past month or so since you've shared your news with me. And I think it's everything from anger to, how dare you leave me? To acceptance, sadness, for me as a colleague, for Cornell.

[00:45:03.06] But also excitement for you. I'm so excited for you and what you're going to do. I've heard this from other people, but we're going to follow you and your career. I think you're going to do amazing things out there. And it's going to be one of those people, oh, I knew Anthony when. You know, it's going to be that kind of a conversation.

[00:45:22.60] So I'm so excited for you. So that's the emotion that I think I'm going to leave this with, is it's the excitement for you, and what your career, where it's going to take off from here.

[00:45:32.65] So let's leave the last word to you. Anything else you want to share with our audience?

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[00:45:37.45] ANTHONY SIS: The last word. Oh my goodness. I'm shedding some tears. The only thing I can honestly say is that it's been an amazing journey. This role and just the work that we've been able to do alone on this podcast has just been amazing, transformational.

[00:45:54.97] And I think the only thing I'll just say is that I've been extremely humbled to be in both of your presence. And look forward to just seeing the growth of the show with future episodes and future topics. I know it's not going to reside only with me. I know the conversation will continue going.

[00:46:11.85] And so I just continue to send you all lots of love. And thank you. Thank you to both of you. Thank you to the listeners. Thank you to Cornell.

[00:46:22.14] But as I always like to say, it's not really goodbye. It's more so see you later. Stay connected. And just remember that there really is no end goal in sight on this journey. That it's really about the process. So continue to stay educated and learn more and be curious. Lead with curiosity. And yeah. Let's continue doing the work.

[00:46:45.06] TORAL PATEL: Thank you for listening. Be sure to subscribe to us wherever you listen to podcasts. And rate and submit a review on Apple Podcasts. It helps new listeners find us and the show.

[00:46:54.86] For the latest updates on diversity, equity, and inclusion at Cornell, be sure to visit diversity.cornell.edu.

[00:47:02.65] My name is Toral Patel.

[00:47:04.49] ANTHONY SIS: My name is Anthony Sis. Thank you for listening to another episode of the Inclusive Excellence Podcast.

[00:47:10.88] TORAL PATEL: This podcast is a production of the Department of Inclusion and Belonging in collaboration with the Cornell Broadcast studio.

[00:47:25.03] So we typically end our episodes with thanking Bert. But Bert and I actually have a different way that we're going to end our episode today. [TOGETHER] Thanks, Anthony.

[00:47:34.15] ANTHONY SIS: You're very welcome.

[00:47:36.58] BERT ODOM-REED: Oh, and please accept my friend request.

[00:47:42.76] ANTHONY SIS: Yes. Of course. Of course. I will gladly accept the friend request.