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Fabuloso: A Lavender Scented Call Back Home

A typical Sunday morning in the Reyes household included getting up at around 8 A.M., turning on the radio, and fully engulfing our house with the sound of Selena's voice and the scent of lavender Fabuloso. I was raised in a typical Mexican household, and even though I am half Japanese, I was raised as an undeniable Mexican-American, and I was always taught to cling to my culture in a country that historically has tried to drown it out. There is an enormous amount of Mexican and Latino Americans in the United States and California is home to a majority of the Mexican, Latino population. With that, Mexican and Latino culture blossoms within the state in form of celebrations, media, and social programs devoted to marrying Mexican and American culture. Despite the celebration of Mexican culture, there is a fixation on cleanliness to rid the negative image brought from years of mistreatment and portrayal in the public. The financial markets built upon Mexican and Latino immigration patterns are generally motivated by their popularized urge to have a clean and organized home. Businesses have been able to exploit this centralized fear of being ridiculed for being dirty by creating products that guarantee no trace of mess. The product Fabuloso manufactured by Colgate-Palmolive is a prime example of a product built from cultural fear. A multipurpose cleaner with an iconic scent and yellow cap is the result of decades of verbal abuse, humiliation, and fear of being less than. This essential in every Mexican household is much more than something to make a house smell like lavender, but rather the embodiment of a fight against an ongoing stigma.

A family home in the United States for many immigrant families is a concept that can sometimes only be dreamt of. The American dream for Mexican families, especially immigrants, is the ability to provide for your family, free of concern. Yet, it has been made prominent within American history, that this dream isn't possible without sacrifice and that's a commitment many Mexican and Latino Americans are no strangers to. The history between the United States and Mexico is filled with countless instances of degradation, exploitation, and deportation. Nevertheless, the appeal of new opportunities to provide for their families influenced millions of Mexican families to uproot themselves and bring their families and their culture across the border. As families came over, cultures and ideals began to shift and mold with the new principles of the country. One of them being the conservative view on image and expression. It is a common belief that what you portray on the outside is a true reflection of who you are as a person and how you were raised. Being a child of immigrant parents comes with an immense amount of responsibility because you have to be a shining example of what your parents dreamt of. Children are raised to be put together, achieve high success, and be held accountable to these standards that their parents made to convey to the world how successful their parents are in raising children. We as children are taught to fit this certain narrative and mold, and one of the qualities that are passed down to us is the clear devotion to the upkeep of a home.

In a confounding way, there is a correlation between individual success and the cleanliness of a home. This correlation can be inexplicably explained through Hispanic parents' emphasis on the importance of being clean not only physically but in every aspect possible. Throughout history, there have been certain stigmas portrayed onto the Mexican-American community that has become root causes of this fascination with cleanliness. In popular culture, the narrative of a housemaid has slowly morphed into the idea of a Mexican woman, who is

more often than not, unbeknownst to her, being taken advantage of. For many Mexican American children, this imagery in media is only a reflection of what they see in their home, further cementing their relationship with cleaning as a whole. In *Immigration and American Popular Culture*, Melnick and Ruben write, “traumas of race in American history undergird our study of popular culture and immigration”(Rubin, Melnick, 5). Big businesses recognize the struggles that many Mexican-American cultures had to go through. Yet there still continues to be ongoing exploitation of these struggles, one that corporations can bank on, as they now have a clear image of the demographic that they are going to reach. They have figured out that there is a market for Mexican-American families in cleaning supplies because of the stereotypes that are built around them. In essence, instead of changing the narrative, they have seized the opportunity to capitalize on it.

Many Mexican-American homes, including my own, fall subjects to this very intricate market manipulation, yet have been able to build off of that and create our own narrative. Fabuloso is nothing more than a simple bottle of household, lavender-scented multipurpose cleaner. Created in 1980, this yellow capped staple, not only acts as a household cleaner but rather a web that is weaved between every Mexican-American household. Time and time again, that cleaner gets pulled from off the shelf and is trusted with carrying the everlasting notion of a clean home. It promises a facade of responsibility because of its iconic scent. Mexicans and Latinos are very keen on certain scents, as are many other cultures. The smell appeals to the nostalgia for many people because they can clearly connect that iconic scent to those Sunday morning routines with their families.

Being Mexican-American, you become accustomed to hiding certain qualities of your culture until they are celebrated. The concept of your identity becomes challenged because you

are constantly reminded that you are a mixture of two cultures. History has shown us that certain things aren't accepted because they represent a part of history that powerful people want to cover. For instance, the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943, where kids were simply expressing what it meant to them to be Mexican-Americans. The suits they wore, were a connection to who they were and what they could be, something that Mexican-American kids in this day are trying to find. Especially here in California, there are thousands of Mexican-American kids, that have these experiences that make that stand out from that image of an average American. In the PBS American Experience documentary covering the Zoot Suit Riots, there's a particular viewpoint that I believe is something that still happens today. George Sanchez, a historian within that documentary, says, "...they simply couldn't choose who they could be; that this was not a society that allowed for that kind of freedom of expression for these particular youth" (Sanchez, Zoot Suit Riots, 41:25-41:46). We were never taught the way that we could connect to Americanness. In that, there is an innate sense to connect to one side of yourself only when cued. We are surrounded by people that don't accept the fact that your house and family are going to be a certain way because of what the culture itself has endured. You don't fully belong to one side or thing, and yet at the same time, there is no clear divide within yourself. What makes you American becomes an identity crisis because on one hand, no matter where you were raised in America, you will always have this connection to another country. You hear a song in Spanish from your childhood, or your coworker recommends a dish from a Mexican restaurant that you've been eating your entire life, or maybe, that signature scent of lavender on a freshly cleaned tile floor, makes you regress into the fact that you are different.

The Colgate-Palmolive company that manufactures Fabuloso has been able to understand the complexity that surrounds this iconic scent and can exploit this nostalgia. Not only have they

have broadened their market to Mexican-Americans as a whole, but take pride that they still maintain the connections to a clean home. They state on their company website that when you can walk into someone's home and, "...have it smell clean [is] extremely important in the Latino community to convey how well a woman took care of her house and her family"(Fabuloso®). By maintaining this connection to the simplicity of the product, they can distribute it as a clear symbol of the hard work one puts into the home. Mexicans and Latinos have endured decades of negative stereotypes tied to be dirty or lazy and to contradict that sentiment, they made it a mission to be different than what American culture tried to make them. It's much more than just a cleaning product, but rather the meaning that you were able to have a home to clean. Mexican immigration hasn't always been celebrated, we've had ancestors belittled and taken advantage of just because of the color of their skin and where they've come from. They broke their backs to make it known that they were hard workers and that they weren't going to settle for less than. Mexican parents spend their lifetimes making sacrifices for their families, and that iconic scent is just a representation that they were able to succeed. The scent of Fabuloso in my home is what makes it so worth it to my immigrant parents. With all the sacrifices they've made, they were successful enough to provide a roof over our heads, tile to clean, and money for cleaning supplies. Fabuloso is so much more than a bottle, it's a call home, a symbol of growth, and the achievement of the American Dream.

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