



# How Did You Get To Be Mexican

*Kevin Johnson*

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During an interview for a faculty position, a senior professor asked Kevin Johnson bluntly, "How did you get to be a Mexican?" And, a young woman at a Harvard Law School dinner party inquired, "Are you one of those people whose high school friends are all dead from gangs and stuff?" The son of a Mexican American mother and an Anglo father, Professor Johnson has spent his life in the borderlands between racial identities. In this insightful book, he uses his experiences as a mixed Latino Anglo to examine issues of diversity, assimilation, race relations, and affirmative action in the contemporary United States. Johnson also grew up in the borderlands between classes. He spent his childhood with his mother, first on welfare and then with a racist working-class stepfather. As an adolescent, he moved to his father's home in a predominantly upper-middle-class suburb. His educational experiences too extend from a racially mixed elementary school to an all-white high school, and from Berkeley to Harvard Law School. From this vantage point, he analyzes the intersection of race and class in the United States. This book looks not just at the question "Who is a Latino?" but also at the question of where persons of mixed Anglo-Latino heritage fit into the racial dynamics of the United States. Professor Johnson's mother was an ardent assimilationist who classified herself as "Spanish"; her failure to become a part of middle America led her into depression and eventually mental illness. Her son has woven not just her experiences and his own, but also those of friends and relatives, into a complex and moving story of one white/brown man's search for identity.

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