

A VIEW FROM THE FRONTERA: A HISPANIC-AMERICAN RAISED IN MEXICO
EXAMINES CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES OF LANGUAGE IN AMERICA

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis seeks to analyze and understand common social and political perspectives with regard to language in the United States at the beginning of the third decade of the new millenium. Providing supporting data points from my research along the way, I share different anecdotes and my interpretation of their significance. I explain how each of them added to my understanding of common American perceptions about language and its proper use in social and political settings. One of the more pertinent anecdotes described is an encounter with a Hispanic woman that openly discriminated against my use of Spanish at a political conference in Washington, D.C.. My research combined with my personal experience allows me an incredibly unique vantage point from which to explore how education and legislation have molded American perspectives on foreign language.

DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this to my husband Duell Lauderdale for helping me in every step of my master's education. A mi mamá y papá gracias por ayudarme a cumplir mis metas. I am also thankful for Dr. Mark Noe, chair of my dissertation committee, for all his mentoring and advice.

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I will always be grateful to Dr. Mark Noe, chair of my dissertation committee, for all his mentoring and advice. These are hard times in which we are living and it took extra effort to continue working on this project. Your patience and guidance have made the difference in my academic career and in my life. My thanks go to my dissertation committee members: Dr. Lyon Rathbun, and Dr. Maggie Shelledy. Dr. Rathbun I appreciate all your help since my undergraduate career when I struggled to find ways to write my thoughts in English.

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CHAPTER I
THE ENCOUNTER

“Why is she speaking Spanish?” asked a young Hispanic woman, Marina, who pointedly did not look at me from five feet away across a large round table. “Does she know where she is?” she demanded out loud, speaking to nobody in particular. There was anger, indignation, and unhinged tone in her words that made me immediately aware they was intended as an attack, of which I was clearly the target.

My immediate thought was that Marina felt superior to me because she had skin that was practically white. Her skin was considerably whiter than that of the average Hispanic. If a person’s only perception of racial ideas within the Hispanic community comes from modern Latinx progressive circles, they might not be aware that Hispanic communities across the world have their own harmful stereotypes and preferences favoring lighter colored skin. This has always been a distinction in the way Hispanic cultures created a social hierarchy.

My name is Perla Margarita Melendez de Lauderdale and my knowledge on that matter comes from personal experience. I was born in Brownsville, Texas and grew up in Matamoros, Tamaulipas in Mexico. As my father is a Mexican citizen, my parents decided I should be raised in Mexico to learn about our culture. Growing up in Mexico gave me the opportunity to observe

Mexican culture and understand it from the inside. It also shaped who I am today. One recurring Mexican cultural phenomenon that I have observed throughout my years there is discrimination based on skin color. When you live in Mexico, you quickly realize that there is a high preference for white skin or the lightest possible tone. These views have transcended wider Hispanic culture for generations. Historically, TV novelas mostly featured actresses that had blue eyes and blonde hair as their principal characters regardless of the fact that there were almost no Mexicans that looked like that in real life. The majority of viewers were of a darker skin tone, what Spanish speakers in Mexico would call moreno. These moreno viewers simply had to watch shows which portrayed people who looked like them as housemaid servants or they could watch nothing at all. One Mexican director recognized this unfortunate reality. In 2019, the same year in which Marina attacked my use of Spanish, Alfonso Cuarón, a famous Mexican director, gave a woman of indigenous descent the role of main character and protagonist in his movie Roma. In doing so, he worked to create a more insightful and accurate representation of the stereotypical morena housemaids that had long been represented by short-lived and non-important characters in Mexican TV and film. The movie radically questioned the long-standing racial and class discrimination that exists in Mexico to this day. Were Marina's ignorant statements just a modern incarnation of the traditional Mexican class system rearing its ugly head, or was there something else to it?

Marina knew that the way in which she was acting would seriously insult another Hispanic. I sense she felt superior to me in some way or another. Whatever the cause, her tone of voice clearly communicated her personal regard for me and those who were like me, which was low. She had made me uncomfortable earlier in the day when we met for the first time. My husband Duell and I were supposed to be touring Washington DC with our colleague Jack and

his date, who ended up being Marina. Jack, my husband, and I had gathered in the lobby of our hotel and waited for his date, planning to leave as a group. When she did arrive, she gave me a judging look over and quietly convinced Jack to change the plans; now we were supposed to meet later in the evening after going our separate ways. We didn't meet up again, not until the uncomfortable moment when this story began. It seemed like our colleague Jack, who wanted to enjoy a night on the town with us, had suddenly been pressured against doing so for some reason we couldn't quite determine. Ultimately, her commentary about my use of Spanish made clear why our encounter earlier felt negative. What she said, aloud and aloof, as if talking to everybody and nobody at the same time, was far more offensive than the simple snub from earlier. Let's step back for a second though. How had I ended up face to face with this young woman?

An annual conference of conservatives supporting clean energy policy had brought together bright young minds from across the nation to hear presentations and engage in roundtable discussions. The conference planners also arranged for attendees to have meetings with, and hear speeches from, members of the US Congress. At the invitation of our friend Jack, my husband and I were conference attendees. The topic was a cross-over of different interests of ours, so we were excited to be there. After many interesting conference events and panels, we ultimately attended a keynote dinner gala, which took place on the last night of the multi-day event. The location of the conference and gala were an upscale historic hotel just blocks north of the White House. The details of the room for the gala were beautifully ornate; It was adorned with artfully patterned carpet, appealing faux-stone wallpaper, large chandeliers, many soft bright lights, classically set tables with fine silverware, and fully staffed with traditional waiting services. An outside observer would recognize it as basically the true-to-life version of the

quintessential upscale, wine-and-dine, DC-politics type of event that everybody imagines. Throughout the conference, a secret but highly anticipated guest to the gala was rumored to be making an appearance. Ultimately, Republican Senator Lindsay Graham of South Carolina arrived to give a keynote speech on why he was a supporter of efforts to remediate the course of climate change. I found the idea itself ironic considering his public support for the current President, who had called climate change a hoax. The whole day we had listened to one presentation after another and this was by far the most captivating moment. From a rhetorician's point of view, I wanted to understand how he used his speech to make the issue of supporting clean energy more palatable for the mainstream of the conservative movement that polls show were against the idea. Unfortunately, my intellectual curiosity from having seen an actual US Senator for the first time, and one who was such an independent thinker at that, quickly faded away. The sound of his voice was impossible to hear because my racing mind was incapable of engaging in listening comprehension following Marina's ignorant remarks.

We return now to the genesis of this story, where I was openly harassed for speaking Spanish. Senator Graham had barely commenced his speech before Marina began trying to make me feel uncomfortable. She spoke loudly and clearly enough to be heard where I was at the other side of the table, even in a rather loud room. She was not trying to hide her disapproval of me, she was not being quiet as she spoke. The word awkward would be a brief but accurate description of the mood she created at the table. The strangest thing was that she was not speaking directly to me or anybody. I know she wanted to be direct her comments to me; but she probably knew that there would be consequences. It's not surprising that a person saying such things would not have the courage to be more direct. It was clear that her words were an attempt to garner support for her viewpoint at the table, although nobody responded in agreement. In

fact, sitting next to me was a woman with whom I had enjoyed a great conversation about the university where I was studying. I told her about a fellowship I had studying sustainability and what I was trying to learn at the conference. It was pleasant. She ignored Marina entirely. There was another couple at the table who were faking a smile at her, but I knew that they were uncomfortable because they did not particularly seem to enjoy being subject to the interaction. Her discriminatory commentary was ignored, or at least rendered functionally obsolete.

Marina kept repeating her complaints with increased anger. A thought suddenly popped into my head. Could her rage toward me have manifested, not from my skin tone, but from growing up in a part of America that punishes those who continue to maintain a non-English first language. I knew that historically in America, there were a number of cases in which Hispanics were forced to completely erase their first language. This might have happened to her. I tried to understand her hatred, as if an explanation would take away the humiliation I felt from her attacks. Maybe she was traumatized. Still, I asked myself “if she was treated badly for speaking Spanish, why would she continue the cycle of discrimination?” She kept yapping to our friend Jack, her unfortunate date, ranting her English-only ideas non-stop. Spouting off a few lines I will never forget, Marina exclaimed, “Hispanics are the worst. I mean, I am sadly one of them and that's why I can say this!”

In America, a predominant ideology of monolingualism equates native-like language usage with acceptable “social behavior” and “good citizenship” (Ayash 26). This explains why many Americans believe citizens and immigrants should only speak English. In Horner’s “Cross-Language Relations in Composition,” Horner encourages readers to recognize that “the U.S. policy of linguistic expedience encourages us to forget about the history of language use in the

territories of the pre-and postcolonial United States and its territories of influence" (7). The inclination towards expedience nonetheless does not necessitate that linguistic diversity should be prohibited in the United States, especially considering the many languages that have been spoken on American soil before the land even became part of the United States.

Historically, when new groups of immigrants came to the United States, they were encouraged, incentivized, and sometimes compelled to learn English. This was a helpful resource for achieving upward economic and social mobility in America, but many of them lost their first language in the process. Though migration is something common that has happened since the beginning of time, large migratory movements have consequences which can shape human history. In *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality and Colonization*, Mignolo observes that "human migrations imply migrations of the languages and memories upon which human communities are built, communities that may flourish within a territorial structure alien to the language and culture of the migratory peoples" (316). Immigrants leave many things behind when they move to a new place, but they always carry their identity to that new place. If they are allowed to, it is very natural for them to keep that identity. Logically it should be expected that some of them would keep their first language. Languages hold the key to communication and culture. For some immigrants, knowing their native language is the only guarantee that they will be able to maintain their familial ties and relationships with friends and family in their country of origination.

Jack looked uncomfortable and his face showed signs of frustration. He was clearly embarrassed by her and wanted to tell her to stop, but he did not know how she would react. We had come to this conservative clean energy conference because he had invited us. Jack had

brought Marina, a person that was being disrespectful in front of other guests. I did not know how to act. Her ideas were essentially equivalent to segregationist ideas and she had the courage to direct them at me out loud, and in public. I wonder about what would have happened if I had the opportunity to confront her? Could there have been a learning experience or was it destined to be an insurmountable argument. If I should be honest, it was more for fear of my reputation that I didn't engage in a direct confrontation with her than a lack of courage. I was livid, but arguing with strangers in public runs the risk of dragging you down to appearing equal with the person you are engaging with. Regrettably, I think it would have been a fruitless venture anyway. The way she acted made me think she was unaware of those who had fought for her, as a Hispanic, to have equal rights to public education and other public resources. She was either unaware of the plethora of struggles Hispanics have engaged in to allow the generation of today to be in the same schools as other American citizens.

The Mexican migration movement has been an ongoing thing since the first hundred years of Mexico as an independent nation. The modern, documented movements of Latino immigration started in 1945 when immigrants started coming from Mexico and other Latin American countries in larger numbers. Schools with racist administrators tried their best to segregate the students of different ethnicities and, furthermore, acted on ideas that we now know to be completely unscientific. “California educator Grace Stanley asserted in an influential 1920 article that Mexican children had ‘different mental characteristics’ from Anglo children. ‘B. F. Haught did a study in 1931 that convinced him that the ‘average Spanish child has an intelligence quotient of .79 compared with 1.00 for the average Anglo child. [. . .] ‘The academic pundits agreed that students should be encouraged to give up Spanish and develop their

talents in industrial and vocational subjects” (Strum 310). Such education theories affected many students from many backgrounds. The first legal battles against these policies, which were steeped in racist thought, were attempts at ending public school segregation of Mexican-Americans whose use of Spanish was widely criticized by the nativist English speaking majority. The Mendez Case (1947) is known to have “successfully dismantled school segregation years before Brown [. . .] in Orange County” (Strum 324).

In the past, those who came from other countries simply adapted to school systems by learning English, often learning it in the schools. Initially, many Mexican-American families did not have this option, as their children were sent directly to a different school altogether. Things changed in 1945 when the Mendez family filed a lawsuit to desegregate schools and allow students of Mexican descent access to the same schools as white students in the community. In 1940’s California, the time and location the case took place, “the only groups of children who could be legally segregated by state law were Native Americans and Japanese, Chinese, or Mongolians” (Aguirre 324). The outcome of the lawsuit was in favor of the Mendez family, which provided an opportunity for children from different ethnicities to go to the same school. Ultimately, this was just the beginning of what would become a fight for equality in the classroom when it comes to language. Groups such as African Americans, Native Americans, Japanese, and Chinese were still segregated in 1954 with *Brown v. Board of Education*. Unfortunately, languages and dialects were still prohibited in classrooms as teachers focused on teaching “Standard English.”

Paradoxically, Marina had the opportunity to denigrate other Hispanics because Hispanics fought for her right to go to a school where she could succeed like any other student,

and that really bothered me. In contrast, I found the perseverance of Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez extremely inspiring. They understood that the world in which their kids were living was set up as a system that denigrates them. They did what any parent would do. To the benefit of all who believe in equality, the American Constitution and tide of social ideas trended toward that of justice in their case. They reminded me of my own parents, not only because my maiden name is Melendez but because they knew when to stand up for their children. Knowing all that I know about the Mendez family, the idea that a young Hispanic woman would criticize others' use of Spanish was truly incomprehensible for me.

The Mendez family changed the way schools were segregated in the United States. Mendez v. Westminster started what would become an important precedent in the Brown v. Board of Education case. I often reflect on why the Mendez parents decided to fight for their kid's equal schooling rights. The Mendez family lived in Orange County, California where there were two schools side by side. One of the schools was a "handsomely equipped school with green lawns and shrubs for the Anglo-Americans; and [one] a Mexican school whose meager equipment matched the inelegance of its surroundings." Their father, Gonzalo Mendez, "didn't like the idea of his Sylvia, Gonzalo Jr, and Geronimo, growing up with hatred in their hearts for the children who went to the beautiful school" (McWilliams 227). The outcome was favorable and helped the country to move forward to a new era.

In the Twentieth Century, Mexican-Americans had to challenge legal segregation through social advocacy and political participation in order to earn the right for their children to attend the same schools as white Americans. As earlier noted, later Mexican-American immigrants faced the prospect of inadequate resources for educating people like them. Even though there

were immigrants coming to the United States for many years, it was not until 1970's that it was determined that children who did not speak English should be assisted to overcome such barriers. "In *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), the US Supreme Court determined that public schools are required to assist children not speaking English to overcome linguistic barriers in order to take full advantage of educational programs; however, the Court did not specify the form such assistance should take" (Lawton 464). State laws simply did not, and often do not to this day, give adequate attention to the learning needs of students who are English as a Second Language learners.

Marina's behavior was an archetypal representation of the classic Mexican Malinche. Malinche, as is popularly known, was once called Marina. After multiple variations of pronunciation came into use from Nahuatl speakers and Spaniards, larger Mexican culture came to use the name Malinche. When I first met Marina, I thought of her as a Malinche. Why? The Malinche of Mexican lore was known to hate Aztecas, of which she was one. Marina was a Malinche because she was displaying hatred or otherwise betraying others who were like her, in this case Latino Hispanics. I heard others use the pejorative name Malinche or attack others for being so-called malinchistas many times as a child. I always imagined the real Malinche as a native Mexican woman who resented her brown color of skin, dark eyes, and everything else that was a feature of her native DNA. I thought she wanted to be like Cortez. The historical figure the Mexican Malinche archetype is based on was a native woman who interpreted for Hernan Cortez and eventually became his mistress. For many years, arguably to the present, she has been considered the anti-native that sold her soul to the foreign soldiers that destroyed the Aztec Empire. The modern Mexican view translates this into the idea of a person who is a traitor against their own people. Whereas the original betrayed her fellow natives, the modern

Malinche betrays other Mexicans and Hispanics. To be a Malinche is something despicable in Mexican culture. For me, a person who was deemed to be a Malinche was someone who had deep self-hatred or was unable to accept their own personal and cultural history.

Historically, with the real Malinche, this was not the case. The original Malinche had a considerably more complex story than what is disseminated in Mexican culture and it has largely been untold. When I studied the history of the Malinche figure, I learned things that made me believe the name Malinche was not an appropriate nickname for embodying the rude young Hispanic lady sitting at a table with me. My research showed that Malinche was once a young teenager taken as a slave by the Aztecs when they took her village. As a slave cannot actively make decisions, clearly an important aspect of common depictions about her is false: Malinche was not actively deciding to act against her own people. She later became the slave of Mayas and later by the Spaniard colonials. Malinche became an interpreter for Cortez because she was given the opportunity to stop being a slave. She would also have the power to facilitate communication between the Europeans and Mexican Natives, which might allow her to advocate for better outcomes for her people. It is not unfair to observe that she may have made the best out of her situation considering the realities she was facing at the time. “La Malinche is one of the most controversial figures in Mexican and Chicano literature. The historical facts about her life before and after the Spanish Conquest are largely speculative. What is reliably known is that she had a significant role as translator, which developed into something of mythic proportions” (Moriel Hinojosa 2). An obvious difference between fable and history was Malinche’s view of speaking multiple languages. Malinche was a representation of a person adapting and learning to interpret different languages. On the other hand, Marina found offense in the prospect of individuals being bilingual and exercising their speaking capabilities in public.

The real Malinche was powerful and tried her best to help the people who had once taken over her village. One historian, Camilla Townsend, didn't believe that Malinche rejected her skin or where she came from. Townsend explains that Malinche "knew that she could certainly continue in silence as the concubine and slave of Puertocarrero [...] or alternatively, she could speak aloud, earning the respect and gratitude of all the men present, and especially of their charismatic leader" (41). After learning how Malinche was an important factor in avoiding the death of many, I reconsidered ideas that I had grown up believing, ideas that were culturally ingrained stereotypes which were divorced from the facts. What I realized was that Marina could never be a Malinche because the true Malinche cared about her people and did not care what she had to do in order to help them. In the end, I have learned my own lesson about first perceptions and being aware of my biases while seeking to understand those of others. The views of how language could portray a person's social hierarchy seemed to have stayed through time. Marina's perspective seemed more accurate to the way colonizers thought of natives when they came to America.

From a colonizers' point of view, language is a way to suppress the lower group in the hierarchy. Bernardo de Aldrete was a writer who enjoyed explaining the importance of the Castilian language and how the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula had brought change to his language. In his writing he provided a perspective on language that is highly influenced by common modern social views on language. Aldrete mentioned "clothing and speaking were at the same time signs in which good 'policia' (civility), or the lack of it, could be identified, and they were signs whose reading allowed the construction of social identities by the perception of

social differences" (35). For Aldrete, clothing was as important as speaking a language. The importance of language was a way to show their polite remarks.

Marina was applying a modern view of what Aldrete had argued in his statement by thinking of me as a lower class. Marina was convinced that she could make me feel inferior if she attacked me for speaking Spanish. I thought that the way she acted was entirely unfair and inconsiderate. How could someone be complaining about what language others were using while they communicate? We are in the United States of America, the freest country in the world. The spirit in which the country was founded was on the principle of defending individual liberty. That constitutes freedom to choose what language to use as well. The Constitution that was written to provide the citizens of this country the means to defend their natural rights, which at the time were viewed as rights from God. I consider this document the beginning of a new era that allowed us to have freedom to choose who we want to be. To see that vision achieved in its fullest sense, America should be a nation that encourages the use of all sorts of languages according to whatever preference each free person desires!

CHAPTER II

HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

During that trip to Washington D.C. I toured the US National Archives. I had never seen the legendary US Constitution and its Bill of Rights before. The document that was the basis for modern democracies around the world lay right before me, which was a pretty epic feeling. Many Americans focus on just an amendment or two; stereotypically the 2nd Amendment Right to Bear Arms seems to receive outsized attention. I would guess that the majority of Americans, including myself, place special importance on the 1st Amendment. The 1st Amendment protects a number of rights involving speech and personal expressions, focusing on religion, ethics, and as I shall argue, even morality.

The actual paper the Constitution is written on is too worn to read after over 200 years, but I was able to read a copy of the text on a display nearby: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances” (US Const. amend. I). If you read closely, and consult with historians on the vision of the Founding Fathers, you’ll notice something peculiar that doesn’t really match up with our modern conception of rights. We often conceive of rights as being a thing which the government gives us, when, in fact, it is just the opposite.

The First Amendment prohibits the government from infringing on free human actions, it does not grant humans that right to allow them to be free. The underlying assumption, therefore, is that rights exist a priori to the government. This concept of a foundation for human rights based on inherent human dignity is known as natural rights. This is all very philosophical and admittedly long-winded, so what exactly does it have to do with my thoughts on the issue of language discrimination?

This view, carried to its logical conclusion, is that we essentially have the right to do as we like, so long as we do not infringe on the life, liberty, or property of others. This also creates a moral defense for breaking laws which infringe on those rights, or at the very least suggests that legality is not equal with morality. Furthermore, laws that impugn on those rights are illegitimate. No matter what the origin of those laws are, nature, or in the view of many of the Founders, God, the Constitution endows humanity with fundamental liberty. A secular conception of this framework for rights would simply say that rights are inherent because they are self-evident to the rational mind. The Constitution was created with the intention of enshrining this framework for human rights. Notwithstanding the many heinous examples of human rights abuses that have occurred in America since its adoption, the general spirit of the Constitution and the intention behind it is clear, admirable, and worth subscribing to. Besides being the actual law of the land in the United States, the Constitution is a philosophical document that embodies a spirit of advocacy for liberty and justice which citizens should endeavor to imitate in their duties as citizens in a modern democracy.

Considering the reality of widespread multilingualism and non-English speaking communities in the United States at the time of the Constitution's adoption, and using a little deductive reasoning, it is not to speculative to argue, and I admit, I see it as obvious, that the

Founding Fathers considered the right to speak any particular language as a component of free speech when they wrote, “Congress shall make no law [. . .] abridging the freedom of speech” (US Const. amend. I). In this Enlightenment framework of rights I contend that the Founders believed that humans are at liberty to do all but that which harms others directly. You have to stretch reality to argue that the simple act of speaking a language other than English in and of itself presents a danger so great that the natural right to free speech should be abridged.

These ideas about individual rights and limited government seemed intensely real as we were visiting a city that was as diverse as Washington DC. During our trip, I overheard numerous languages and noticed that people of every imaginable variety walked around every part of the city with a great sense of security. It made me feel comfortable, as though I was fitting in. It was hard to believe I was in the same city when Marina started babbling at the dinner gala the final night.

The liberties enshrined in the Bill of Rights were essential to the arguments put forward by the Mendez family in their case. The idea of having the freedom to choose how your family conducts itself, whether it be a matter of deciding religion or what language to speak, is deeply ingrained in the American psyche and transcends differences in ethnicity or country of origin. People come to America to be free.

It was with the goal of encouraging good governance in mind that America’s founders envisioned a system allowing states and localities to have different policies on language.

“Thomas Jefferson felt that the states themselves would best reflect the needs of their citizens and protect individual liberties against federal tyranny. Within the context of

language rights, this precept was true at least in the nation's early years. The states necessarily had to be responsive to the demands of their citizens and when a powerful language-minority group, like the Germans in Ohio or Pennsylvania, took control of the executive or legislative machinery, their interests were championed" (Del Valle 10).

This explanation allows us to understand how the Founding Fathers responded to the needs of the citizens in terms of language rights. The majority of immigrants at that time were from Germany, but the same theory should be applied today to other languages, such as Spanish.

The belief in freedom of language has roots in English tradition. America's Founding Fathers were inspired by the way in which "language choice and style was a matter of individual choice in England, something not to be legislated by the state" (Macias 38). They brought that same idea to the new nation they were founding. Many Americans believe the Founding Fathers were exceptional leaders that had near-prescient foresight regarding what policy was best for their new republic. Others believe that the writing of America's founding documents and the mainstream use of English in colonial American society reflects a self-evident truth that English is America's national language. While it is accurate that "Thomas Jefferson wrote the *Declaration of Independence* in English, [that] the debates in the Philadelphia Constitutional Convention were conducted in English, [and that] the Constitution and the laws were framed in English," (Ray 237) what the Founders envisioned for America was much more complex. The idea that English is self-evidently America's national language is a truism that is no more than an observation being reverse engineered, rather than an affirmative argument. Unfortunately, truisms about what constitutes acceptable speech in America can have real-life consequences.

A year before my encounter with Marina, I was in my apartment's garage with my mother. We were leaving our apartment in Brownsville, Texas, a few blocks from the International Bridge with Mexico. There was a man with a white van blocking our exit. My mother had numerous problems with the family living next door because they were incredibly disrespectful. She asked the man to move so she could leave. He said "ahorita, denos chance," translated as, "I will move, just give us a minute." It was quickly clear that he was going about responding to our request at his own extremely leisurely pace. This prompted her to demand he "Muevase, Ya!", translated as "Move now!" His appearance clearly portrayed his Mexican ethnicity, he looked like many Mexican men I knew. He had brown skin color, black eyes, and was not tall or short. He reminded me of my Dad and my uncle who was extremely proud of their Mexican roots. At that point, he got angry and started screaming in English. His face turned red and he looked like he was about to become violent, as if to purposely intimidate my mother. She told him that she did not understand English. His anger continued to rise and at one point he commanded me to translate on his behalf. Of course, I refused his rude request. This man did not have the right to harass me or anyone in my family, especially with demands that we speak English.

I was frozen in fear for the duration of the encounter. Until this day I am not sure if I was scared or I was just bewildered by surreal qualities of what was happening before me.

My bewilderment makes even more sense if you know the history of Brownsville and the larger Rio Grande Valley region. We lived just a few blocks from Mexico in a neighborhood that had spoken predominantly Spanish since early colonization and settlement of the area in the 1780's.

“We are in America and we speak English in America” he said with a sense of righteous authority. My mother was very calm, and said “Si quiere le traigo a la policía y que le traduzcan.” She glared at him, showing that she was not afraid. She had told him that if he did not understand her, she would call the police to translate for him.

I was still paralyzed with fear. That’s a normal response for me in high-intensity situations like that. The neighborhood where this occurred had a remarkable amount of ethnic and linguistic diversity; perhaps I had imagined this rendered me safe from these types of encounters. As usual, I couldn’t stop the parade of questions from crowding up my headspace. How could this individual find it appropriate to talk to my mother in this way? More important to my reflections, why did an altercation that began over parking spaces ultimately end in a heated argument over the need to speak English in America?

America is a nation with a history of incredible linguistic diversity. For nearly every language spoken on earth, at least one immigrant who spoke it is likely to have come to America seeking the opportunities offered. Perhaps if one took on the massive endeavor of researching all the languages spoken on American soil at one point or another, they would find that no other country has facilitated conversation through so many languages, particularly in the South West.

California, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico and Texas were part of Mexico until 1848. At the same time Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas and Oklahoma were partly territories of Mexico as well, and have a cultural link to the Spanish language. The Census of 2019 indicates that 29.2% of Texans are Spanish speakers (Texas). A number of other states had similar rates, with California at 28.8%, Nevada 21.6%, and New Mexico 26.5% speaking Spanish. The

Southwest region of the United States has a deep history, spanning from prehistoric native tribes to later territorial domination by the Spanish, Mexicans, and ultimately Americans that weaves a story leading to the modern day with beautiful cultural diversity. There are other states where Spanish is prevalent; in 2016 there were “approximately 250,000 Spanish-speaking people in New Mexico most of whom are native-born or of native-born parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents” (McWilliams 44). Those Spanish-speakers are multigenerational American citizens just like my mother.

I felt like I had to walk out of the dinner gala shortly after the confrontation with Marina. I was seriously angry. When my mother was harassed by the rude neighbor, I felt so bad that I could not stop crying after her confrontation; but this time it was different. I was not going to let anyone put me down. I remembered my mother's words. “No los dejes que te hagan sentir inferior, porque si los dejas ellos ganan.” “Do not let them make you feel bad. If you allow them that, they win.” The truth is that I had felt discomfort throughout the day, but not as extreme as this moment. I had spent a whole day experiencing more bittersweet situations. Marina's anger against linguistic diversity was not her only problem. She started calling Hispanics ignorant and uneducated with a look of disdain on her face that reflected her serious belief that she was a Hispanic of a superior variety. Her hatred did not come from unfamiliarity with Hispanics as in other cases of discrimination; her understanding of Hispanic culture did not come from biased media depictions. She knew Hispanics because she knew herself.

The moment that set Marina on her angry rant was a conversation I had with a Hispanic member of the wait staff, Mr. Gomez. Earlier in the year, I had moved to Missouri after marrying Duell. After months of living in Missouri, where the predominant language was English, I had

missed having the opportunity to simply talk with others who spoke my first language. As I mentioned earlier, I grew up in Matamoros, MX and Brownsville, TX, where the vast majority of conversation was in Spanish and it was generally presumed to be the first language of any person you might meet. Now, my conversations in Spanish were reduced to occasionally calling or texting my family. For this reason, I had spoken with the most wonderful excitement to our Hispanic waiter upon realizing he knew the language. I am not sure if he was Latino, I didn't ask him where he was from. Though his accent told me he came from a different Hispanic nation, we were united by the language we shared. This is exactly what being Hispanic means in terms of personal identity. There is something about the Spanish language that encourages a sense of camaraderie among its speakers simply for the fact of their shared language. We are all together because we speak Spanish. I think the fellowship is more intense and warmer than a similar sense speakers of other languages might get from speaking with others of their own. No matter if one is Cuban, Puerto Rican, Mexican, or Argentinian, we have a shared identity and often similar conceptions of the world. I noticed that Mr. Gomez, the waiter, had an intonation of the singing way of pronouncing words that was common in Mexico City. This reminded me that my "Norteña" Mexican Spanish accent was considered scary and impolite by others. In the North of Mexico, it is known that we speak with a strong voice and others often misperceive that we are angry for that reason.

Mr. Gomez was probably unaware that he had made me feel more included as a participant in that night's events and reminded me I was among people who accepted my identity as a Hispanic. If anybody else could have understood our conversation, they would have recognized it as considerably simple. I'd actually met him at the breakfast they hosted in the morning. The initial reason I talked to him at the dinner gala was to ask if the chef had used

cinnamon in any form in the dessert since I was highly allergic. He remembered that he had spoken to me earlier in the day, when I had asked the same question about breakfast options. While I was talking to him, I noticed in my peripheral vision that Marina was having trouble hiding her disgust of our Spanish conversation.

As a minority, there are times in which you see things differently from others. Depending on the context, those in privileged categories can be minorities themselves. For example, my husband is a minority as a white American when he is in the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas. I am a minority as a Mexican-American in Missouri and also as a member of the larger American population. Most people have a positive bias towards groups of people like themselves and they tend to be more comfortable among members of those groups. One of the strangest places that I never would have presumed would have left me in such a state of comfort was Idaho Falls, ID, where there was a large community of Hispanics.

During my three week honeymoon, I started feeling homesick somewhat early on. As we were doing a grand tour of the American West, we stopped to stay somewhere after driving several hours a day. For this reason, we ended up in Idaho Falls without any particular plan to go there in advance. When we went to Walmart to buy some food and snacks, I realized that the majority of the products offered were marketed for Hispanics. Then I noticed that most of the people in the store were speaking in Spanish. In the northern American states, I had never felt more at home than I did in that place. It felt like the closest thing to the Rio Grande Valley, even as I was significantly closer to the border with Canada than the one with Mexico. The simple open use of Spanish by those who lived in the city is ultimately what made me feel welcome, similar to the way I felt touring Washington, D.C.

My visit to Washington, D.C. was full with odd little coincidences and symbolism that was potent for reflection. Near our event, in the same hotel, at the same time, in neighboring conference halls, a Latina Business Summit took place. I had noticed the event advertized on a sign earlier in the lobby.

When I stormed out of the dinner gala into the halls of the hotel with a sense of indignant anger towards Marina for her actions against me I honestly thought to myself that maybe the Latina Summit was the place I was supposed to be. I would be more at ease around other people like me, Spanish speakers and Latinas who were proud of their roots. By participating with this conservative group that included people like Marina, I felt like I had become something that I was not proud of. However, I thought participating in the event might influence more conservative thinkers toward understanding that Spanish speakers were equally intelligent as speakers of other languages.

Due to words from our current President, I also felt the desire to convey the reality that we are not all criminals, something I believe I display with my words and actions on a day to day basis. Discrimination starts with ignorance and continues due to lack of experience or familiarity. I wanted to change that by acting as a positive example of a member of my Hispanic culture. While I was aware of the possibility I could be judged or mistreated by others for my ethnicity or language, I never expected it would occur at the hands of somebody hailing from my own culture.

What happened to me and my mother was on my mind while I was sitting at that dinner table with conservatives in DC. Yet, at this moment was different. My anger was not only at Marina, but at the movement of hatred towards people speaking Spanish in America. This type of xenophobic discrimination was everywhere, be it a few blocks from the border with Mexico or in

a cosmopolitan metropolis like Washington D.C.. Her ignorant jingoism had irked me to the point of no return. I still carried so many feelings from the first instance. You can make peace with your feelings about the past, you can rationalize them, but they don't go away. I didn't know how to act, what to do, or where to go to feel safe in that moment with Marina. Her irate aura of dislike for me had started to make me as mad and uncomfortable towards her as she was towards me. Why should I accept such classless commentary? I tried to calm down while I looked around the table hoping to get some friendly support. My loving husband was peacefully eating the last part of his cheesecake and had not even noticed the situation.

As I walked out of the dinner room, I realized that this lady had been mad the whole day because of my fluent use of Spanish. As a bilingual Mexican-American who spoke Spanish and English, I have always expected I might have a hard time being with Trump supporting conservatives. I never really had many actual experiences being among them though; the Rio Grande Valley being a solidly Democratic area. President Trump already had a history of using his platform to attack Mexicans constantly. I considered being at the summit an opportunity to learn about the diverse views within American conservative politics.

I had just finished my first semester in a sustainability fellowship and I wanted to learn more about clean energy. My initial perception was that, of all the possible conservative-oriented political conferences I could have attended, this might have been attended by the most liberal, open-minded conservative types. Not that I am or was then completely against every conservative viewpoint. After all, I grew up in a Mexican Catholic household; we are socially conservative people by and large. When Trump started his campaign for president he gave a speech exclaiming that Mexicans coming to the United States were rapists and criminals. This message became a popular talking point and agenda-setter in the Republican Party. The wall

and other bigoted messages continued to resonate throughout the party as a talking point in campaign events. For example, one of the candidates in the city that I lived in Missouri used the talking point of fighting immigration, even though she was not even in a border state. In America, many feel that because a person is president, they must have been right. The President automatically commands that much respect and authority. These xenophobic views made it harder to deal with working with the Republican Party as it always seemed that they all supported it. Ironically, in my case no one in the Republican Party had ever been disrespectful. I worked in the Missouri State Capitol during the 100th General Assembly as a district staff member. I was in charge of helping manage an office for two state representatives that were Republican, but they always respected me for being bilingual and my views on issues.

My problem with conservative ideas actually more to do with the direction the mainstream of the ideology has trended recently. I do believe there are many conservative thinkers that make reasonable arguments in American politics; however, as with many other topics, immigration and language laws have become hyperpolarized. They were always politicized topics to some degree, but never had the issues been so potently weaponized for use as a campaign issue. After Trump won, powerful politicians who were allies to the President didn't necessarily attack Mexicans themselves, but were almost entirely complicit with any attacks made by the President himself. The President's rhetoric stoked a nationalist sentiment among a huge swath of his supporters and ultimately much of the Republican Party. The truth is that campaigning on plans to save Americans from the boogeyman of some specific minority group is nothing new in American politics. More recently, In World War I, there were movements against the immigrant groups coming to the United States and many states legislators took the lead to create laws against them.

Sandra Del Valle, a lawyer at the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund, a non-profit organization that specializes in language rights wrote a book based on her knowledge of language rights. She explains in *Language Rights and the Law in the United States: Finding our Voices* how

“Immigration from other European countries, and by people resistant to relinquishing their native language and culture, threatened that perception of iron-clad homogeneity. The World War I era was marked by the national hysterical response to that perceived threat. As often occurs, legislators responded to the national mood by passing, amongst other things, language restrictive legislation that, in an attempt to force conformity of the newest immigrants, sought to blot out languages other than English from usage”(30).

The use of nationalism to stir up people’s emotions was the first step toward creating restrictive laws against immigrants who did not speak English. Over the course of the 20th Century, many laws were passed which restricted immigration in various ways using similar justifications.

How can I judge them when the system is set for this?

For a moment, I thought about standing up and telling her to shut up. I wanted her to know that I was an educated Hispanic. I thought she needed to know that I had excellent employment qualifications. Maybe she’d be surprised to learn that, while my parents did not speak English, they were educators who successfully raised a woman who was able to achieve a Bachelors in English. Perhaps Mexican immigrants will learn English on their own without

insensitive public goading; and, perhaps, they could speak whichever language was most pertinent to the situation they were in at the moment. I had received a fellowship to pay for at least half of my Masters in English, but I'm sure that didn't matter. Even though she might have thought that every Hispanic was a criminal, I wanted her to at least hear she was wrong and that many of us worked hard to do something good for this country.

Fortunately, my mom had taught me to speak with my actions and doing so prevented me from unleashing a verbal tirade of unknown proportions that evening. My mom said I should never argue against someone who was speaking with malice to make me feel uncomfortable because to do so was giving them what they wanted. As all these thoughts came to my mind while I stood in the hallway outside of the ballroom. One of the guys that came with the Missouri delegation to the conference was also in the hallway outside. I assumed him to be just another conservative political wonk, probably oblivious to any issues faced by Hispanic people. I didn't think it was a good idea to talk with anybody in such an angry state of mind, but I guess I was displaying my mood in full color, unable to hide it. So he injected himself into my situation, I'm sure out of friendly concern.

"What happened?" he asked me.

"There is this woman at the same table I am, complaining about me speaking Spanish and insulting Hispanics and it is really annoying."

His face changed as I spoke and I realized that he was not aware of the problem that I was facing. He listened to me with an expression of outrage which was not typical of him. The other times I had seen him, he was always smiling. He said something I have not been able to forget.

“Do not let anyone make you feel inferior because of who you are.” This completely shocked me since my gut perception of this man was that he appeared egocentric and quite selfish when I first met him during the trip. His serving as a Chief of Staff for a Republican Senator also made me question him. This made me reflect on how racism can come from those from who we least expect it and yet at the same time support can come from those who would never expect. I wondered if he was maybe a third-generation immigrant. His last name was Germanotta which sounded Italian. I thought of the many Italians who were judged because they preferred speaking in Italian. He was able to tell me this since we were alone; but no one at my table had stopped this lady from speaking. Nobody chided her and told her to listen to the U.S. Senator giving his speech or at least pretended that she cared about what the Senator wanted to say. She basically ruled the table due to everybody’s apathy.

Even with xenophobic anti-Hispanic views gaining popularity, I had found myself working with conservatives for the last couple of months. I had moved to a highly conservative state and found myself in more contact with those with conservative views. For a moment, I felt tired of it all. I walked out and stood on the stairs. I felt divided and forced to find who I was. I again noticed that on the floor in the room next to the ballroom, there was a Latina conference. Empowered women from all over the United States had come together to talk about the struggles they overcame as Latinas. Outside of the room, there were several magazines with information about Latinas in leadership. I was impressed to see that the cover of the magazine featured Jovita Carranza. She was the Treasurer of the United States of America. She was the highest ranking Latina in the United States Government at the time. It was impressive to think that next to the meeting of a movement with politics that included so much hate towards my language and

heritage, there was a summit next door celebrating the power of Latinas with that language and heritage. I took the magazine and read through it.

As I opened the magazine, I got to the part about Jovita. It read “she narrates how she would take the road that was the most difficult because no one else would take and if she could overcome that particular obstacle, would be less intimidating.” This made me think about how I had chosen one of the hardest career paths. I had in mind all the steps that had to be taken in order for me to be where I am today. As a Spanish speaker, I had tried to get a Bachelor’s in English. My dyslexia has always made it hard for me to be as good of a writer as I wanted to be. Jovita’s perspective of working hard for the things we want, even if we find them intimidating, was one I also believed in myself.

In Washington, I never felt like a minority. I heard people speaking different languages. I had heard people talking Spanish while they were walking around the monuments. I even remember going out of the hotel and finding a newspaper in Spanish, which was something I had not been able to do since I had moved to Missouri. I felt home even being away from everything I knew. Language is a way for me to come back home. Marina was simply disrupted by my way of communicating and her anger was only her own since no one was mad at me; however, no one was there to defend me either. There was never a direct attack. I blame her fear of starting a real fight where she would have no allies, since no one else was following her lead. Her indirect comments towards me kept creating a sense of discomfort in the rest of the people, but not enough for someone to completely stop her. This feeling of loneliness in a place full of Hispanics somehow made me feel like I could not bear to be at that same table for any longer. I was proud to know that I had stood up, stared at her with anger, and I walked away. There is loneliness that comes from living in a state in which there are not a lot of people who speak Spanish. I was used

to walking around campus and hearing people speaking Spanish. I used to be able to buy goods and groceries and talk with cashiers in Spanish. I wonder how this might affect other Spanish speakers in states in which they are a small minority?

Reviewing the percentage of Spanish speakers in the two different states in which I have lived in the past couple of years provides a great example to help us understand that there are big differences in the number of Spanish speakers depending what state or region you look at. According to the Census, Missouri has a 2.9% rate of Spanish speakers (Census). In comparison, Texas has a 29.2% rate of Spanish speakers, or ten times more. If more people already openly speak a language in one place, those who speak that language will find it easier and more comfortable to do so. In that way, there is a real difference between the experience of Hispanics in both of these states and the role of their language. Even though they have the legal freedom to use any language they are most comfortable with, Spanish speakers might not feel as comfortable speaking their language knowing that it is only used by about 3% of the population. For some Hispanic people or families, it feels like a better decision to speak English and prevent confrontations.

CHAPTER III

SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

My recently new life in Missouri made me think about the experience of non-English speaking immigrants in other parts of America. After the encounter at the conference, I came back to Missouri revitalized with the intention of learning more about language and language discrimination. On that journey, I found many stories of how language discrimination was actually part of American culture. I was shocked because the mainstream view is that generations of immigrants developed the United States of America to be what it is today. My husband, Duell, always told me about how his ancestors came from England, Scotland, Ireland and Germany. His family has been here for centuries, which makes them forget their immigrant background. I wanted to understand more about American immigrant culture and their relationship with language. Missouri will always be linked with Germany because of the huge number of immigrants that settled in this state. Duell had told me that there were some in Missouri who still spoke German and wanted to keep their language for future generations. Wondering about similarities between the past and present made me focus on learning more about German immigrants in Missouri.

German was an important language in American culture. In the 1900's many small towns had their own schools that taught English and German (Wright). In 1919, Nebraska passed a law

called the Siman Act, making it illegal to teach foreign language to anyone younger than 13 years old (Wright). “Language restrictionist policymakers sought to close the loopholes in the law and fined Robert Meyers \$25 fine for teaching Bible stories to 10-year-old children in German. The case, *Meyers v. Nebraska* (1923), went to the Supreme Court, which consolidated this case with similar cases from Ohio and Idaho” (Wright). This case created a new era for the protection of language diversity in the United States.

The Meyer’s case was the first step creating an American culture of preserving, rather than erasing, the first language of immigrant communities. Sandra Del Valle explained that

Implicated in the deceptively short decisions are issues of the status of language-minority parents and educators, the value of native language retention and foreign language learning; essentially giving language-minority parents the right to retain their native language for themselves and for future generations. Although public opinion may not agree, the Court at least found nothing inimical to the health of the nation for foreign languages to be sustained if not flourish (38).

The court’s decision allowed parents to decide what it was best for their children, finding that such freedom was given to American citizens by the US Constitution

German immigrants brought their culture as well; thus, there were newspapers that wrote everything in German. “In the 1880s, the 800 German-language newspapers accounted for about 4/5 of non-English publications, and by 1890, more than 1,000 German newspapers were being published in the United States” (Grohsgal). It is thought provoking to know that German language was once so important in the United States and that there were newspapers written in something other than English in the United States.

Another important factor was the content of such newspapers, which were highly aligned to German culture. They had current news translated in German, but they adapted to their reader's needs in other ways too. "Journals appeared dealing not only with news and current events, but also addressing a wide range of special interests and hobbies, from brewing to building, from shooting to sowing, from planting to praying" (Dolmetsch 188). The use of newspapers allowed the plentiful German groups in the United States to not only continue with their customs, but to grow their knowledge of other customs that they might not be familiar with.

Influential figures in American history were often highly involved with the process of non-English newspapers because they understood how important they were to culture. "Ever since 1732, when Benjamin Franklin printed the first German language newspaper at his tiny Philadelphia printing establishment, the German language press can be said to have played a significant, if not at times vital, role in shaping American society and culture" (Dolmetsch 188). Later on, Abraham Lincoln took interest in German newspapers because he also saw their importance. "In one little-known event of 1859, for example, then ex-Senator Abraham Lincoln went so far as to purchase outright the faltering Monatshe" (Dolmetsch 188). It is clear that American politicians saw the value in the circulation of such newspapers, which allowed German immigrants a sense of old-world familiarity as they read about topics that matter to them.

Back in Missouri, I thought about why most people feel a need to read and listen to things in your first language. As someone who moved to a place where there are not many people who speak my first language, I have to admit that I have been and often still am homesick. I do understand I've been lucky to live at a time in which direct communication with family is just a call away. I've had access to all the newspapers, books, and magazines that I could want to read

in Spanish online. Electronic forms of communication are wonderful and provide opportunities to have a deep connection to family and friends. Thinking about what others faced, I know that I am fortunate. Those who came to the United States in the 1800's needed to have access to physically published materials like newspapers. This was their most direct connection to their culture and roots. I'm sure German immigrants felt something special the first time they read a newspaper in German and shared it with others.

Even though the use of non-English language couldn't be banned by law, cultural ideas created obstacles to the continued use of German speech in America. Multiple newspapers disappeared as America entered the 20th Century and the trend continued to the present. The association of German language with the nation of Germany created hatred towards German-language newspapers. The involvement of Germany in the Great War became key to the extinction of newspapers written in German.

They were accused of being too sympathetic to Germany—and disloyal to the United States. In fact, anyone using the German language was regarded with suspicion. States banned the teaching of German in schools, which had been commonplace in earlier decades. Many German Americans, seeking to prove that they were neither spying for Germany nor endorsing the German war effort, stopped speaking German and bought war bonds to show their patriotism (Grohsgal).

This hatred against German culture and language affected the United States in such a way that one of the most commonly spoken second languages in the country was practically eradicated.

When these communities tried their best to keep some of their German language and teach future generations to keep their cultural history, nativist policies were enacted against them. Ballew explains that “anti-German legislation during the period after World War I and the super patriotic political push to cleanse public and private education of all foreign influences” acted to remove nearly any hint of German language history in America (15). As noted earlier, many of the reasons people migrated to America eventually became a target for attacking them, resulting in use of their native language being used to discriminate against. Since immigrants often came from countries with war, poverty, and violence, nativists would use those qualities to justify their problems with the immigrants.

I found it hard to understand why anyone should be forced to lose their first language considering all the benefits of being bilingual. Research often asks thought-provoking questions that helps citizens question their own preconceived notions, so I decided to expand my research in an unusual direction. Americans look up to celebrities, politicians, and business moguls, so I wondered how many famous figures I could find that communicate in more than one language fluently. Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg studied and became bilingual in English and Chinese after marrying his wife Priscilla Chan, who is from China, in 2012. Sergey Brin, co-founder of Google and President of Alphabet, is fluently bilingual in English and Russian. Shakira is reportedly fluently multilingual in Spanish, Portuguese, English, French and Italian. I thought about the benefits I would derive from having a representative that spoke my first language and would be able to understand my mother’s thoughts. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a well-known Hispanic Representative in Congress, spoke about how she felt about speaking Spanish. She mentioned “growing up, Spanish was my first language—but like many first generation Latinx

Americans, I have to continuously work [to keep my language.]” (@AOC). Ocasio-Cortez stated a reality for many immigrants. It is not easy to maintain proficiency in non-English languages in America without continuous use or practice.

Even though Ocasio-Cortez’s Spanish vocabulary was simple and imperfect, she used it to the best of her abilities. When she was doing an internship with Ted Kennedy, she used her first language as a helpful skill. She mentioned that she “was the only Spanish speaker, and as a result, as basically a kid — a 19-, 20-year-old kid — whenever a frantic call would come into the office because someone is looking for their husband because they have been snatched off the street by ICE, I was the one that had to pick up that phone.” She even mentioned that she was “the one that had to help that person navigate that system”(Joyce). As the daughter of two parents who don’t speak English, I appreciate anyone who will go out of their way to help Spanish speakers because they are someone’s parents.

Why should kids be forced to learn English and lose their first language? Counter to my gut feeling, I found some of the arguments in favor of English-only curriculums came from immigrants themselves. Many immigrants have thought that in order to create prosperity for themselves and future generations, they must quit their first language and learn English. As I learned more about the diverse obstacles that were created in the United States for those who spoke a first language other than English, I came to realize that sometimes the sons and daughters of immigrants are the ones who decided to adopt an English-only view.

The first official move made by the modern English-only movement on the national level was in “1981, marked by Senator Hayakawa’s (R-California) proposal to amend the United

States Constitution to specify English as the official language of the nation” (Gershon et al. 1523). This moment started what has been an ongoing battle to define the official language in the United States. Many states later followed in the footsteps of Senator Hayakawa’s *English-only* ideas. In the modern era, “the debate over Official English remains highly salient at the state level, as evidenced by the recent passage of constitutional amendments in the states of Arizona (2006) and Missouri (2008) making English the official language” (Gershon et al. 1523). Arizona made such a change: “in 2006, 74 percent of Arizonans voted for Proposition 103, a constitutional amendment making English the official language of the state” (Gershon et al. 1523). Voting in this case was not a representation of how the community felt in Arizona during that time. According to the Latino National Survey “less than 40 percent of Latinos in the state supported the initiative” (Gershon 1523). *I was surprised to see any number of Latinos supported the initiative, let alone around two out of five.*

Others like Marina have tried to prove that use of the English language is an unalterable factor that makes United States great. When I read more about Senator Hayakawa, I was surprised to learn he was the son of Japanese immigrants. I thought that he would have more empathy on the issue considering his parents probably did not speak English when they got to Canada. Senator Hayakawa, surprisingly, was a college English professor. I thought about how similar my background was to his. I grew up with parents that spoke another language than English and yet were influenced by another country’s culture because they were so close to it. I had also chosen to become an English major who studied language and its usage. I choose to be an English Major because as a writer I could have a larger audience, since English is the second language taught and used most often in the world. I thought that if I wanted to connect with readers, I would have a better chance to do it while writing in English; however, I always

considered my Spanish to be an asset. Knowing two languages I was able to communicate with two different communities.

In an op-ad remembering Hayakawa, J.Y. Smith notes that Hayakawa claimed “command of English was ‘the fastest way out of the ghetto,’” and, “...opposed bilingual education in public schools and bilingual ballots as ‘foolish and unnecessary’” (Smith). I thought about how different we were and how we saw the world from different perspectives. Those who have immigrant roots are not automatically teamed up in one big group that thinks the same. Each one of us considers different perspective based on our experiences. I thought of how Marina’s perspective was so different from mine. It was hard to believe that the son of immigrants was the person who started the Official English movement in the United States.

The truth is that there are countless different perspectives on language in this country. In the United States, the term foreign language, “carries a history of sociocultural implications rooted in nationalist ideology which defines those who are inside and those who are outside the sociocultural body of the political nation” (Herman 2). In many people’s view, speaking English is an essential part of being American. To them, a foreign language is something that cannot be part of American culture. This pushes young Americans in the direction of believing there is no reason to learn languages other than English. This is the same nativist ideology that made German newspapers disappear or that segregated Mexican descendants from Americans in the school system in Orange County.

The bill introduced by Hayakawa might not have become a law, but it started a debate around the country about language . Del Valle noted that, “from its compromised legislative beginnings to today where programs are being threatened around the country, bilingual education

has fallen probably more quickly and more steeply than any other civil right” (55). As we shall see, the loss of bilingual education clearly makes students feel demotivated. In 2002 Massachusetts passed a law that prohibited teaching in any language other than English. However, the need to teach ESL students in their original language created a movement that led to the law being revoked. In 2017 the legislature enacted a major change. Boston Public School Superintendent Tommy Chang explained that “the Legislature has taken an important step forward in recognizing that students’ cultural and language identities are assets and not deficits to their education” (Morales). The change helped many students feel more welcome than the previous year when, “the dropout rate for ELL students statewide was 6.6 percent, the highest rate of any subgroup of students and three times higher than the rate for all students” (Morales). The change was accepted because it would improve the likelihood of ELL students staying in school.

I thought about how Mexican parents who immigrated to America wanted the best for their kids. They wanted to give them a better future than they ever had. Many parents thought that learning English was more beneficial than holding onto their first language because teachers advised this. For example, Jaime Escalante, an admired teacher from California, considered bilingualism useless. “It’s good to have bilingual teachers who speak two languages. But if you teach the kids in Spanish, you’re not preparing them for life. In this country, we negotiate in one language and you have to master that language to be successful. And it’s English” (Skelton). If a parent listened to him they would think that the best thing to do was to take their kids out of bilingual education classes and make them focus on learning English. In reality, it is not so simple or obviously true that English-only education is superior to the bilingual variety.

In contrast to Jaime Escalante's beliefs, students who keep their first language have a better chance for success in the future. According to Sandra Del Valle, "there is information that newly-immigrated students who retain their native languages and cultures are more likely to see higher academic achievement than those who quickly attempt to assimilate" (261). This could be in correlation to the skills or mental health benefits provided by being bilingual. Recent scientific research indicates that "the frequent use of more than one language, helps us to make more rational decisions and to stave off dementia"(Stein-Smith 5). While it may present unique challenges, the use of more than one language has proven not to be a barrier, and is possibly even helpful to student success.

I think that one of the things that worried me the most in my studies was the idea that many kids lost their first language completely because they were told it was the only way they would learn English. I was lucky that I was able to keep my first language. I learned English when I was little but I didn't master the language until I started my education in the United States when I was 18 years old. It was difficult to learn English at a professional level that could be used in college. When I first started I had to take a remedial class that allowed me to learn and overcome some of the issues I had as a writer in English. That class inspired me to choose my career path. Even though the instructor I had did not know any Spanish, she showed her ESL Spanish students so much compassion and always encouraged us to improve our writing. After I met the instructor of my remedial class, I realized that I wanted to be just like her. I wanted to help students succeed by giving them skills and confidence to share their ideas in their writing, no matter what their first language was. Skilled teachers have the ability to help students in multilingual communities to learn English without feeling like they have to abandon their first

language. My instructor in my remedial class focused on my ability to learn English, and never felt like knowing Spanish was an issue.

To this day, educators who have tried to apply the use of different languages and even dialects in a curriculum have noticed that many students reject the idea of using them. Haller explains that “this rejection is usually motivated by the economically and emotionally negative experience of forced emigration from the homeland, and it results in the psychologically damaging repression of social and cultural roots” (195). Some students focus on the realistic economic benefits of linguistic integration. Many others feel like these languages are inferior or are not needed for their academic future. Marina and Senator Hayakawa thought something similar. This idea has been cultivated by continuous educational practices which have rejected any language or dialect that is not Standard English.

Some instructors have tried to show that they are willing to accept the use of other languages in the classroom. Implementing a multilingual or translingual approach doesn't give any languages the appearance of being more important than another. Instead, it presents all languages as tools for advancement, each with its own value. Min-Zhan and Horner explain that translingual pedagogies "honor the power of all language users to shape language to specific ends" (Min-Zhan and Horner 305). A translingual pedagogy portrays an equality between languages in their pedagogy and shows that none of them has a higher value. Another perspective is that teaching in multiple languages can help students recognize the benefits that result from multilingualism. Multilingual speakers can easily be a resource in a variety of jobs, especially in a globalized market.

I always thought that knowing Spanish would help me inspire students to not give up and see that anyone could achieve their academic and career goals. I've used my story to help students understand their own possibilities for success when I was tutoring. I remember one of my students could not believe the fact that I had lived in Mexico until the age of 18. He would talk to me in Spanish and ask me questions about writing in English. I always told my students, "if I can do it, you can do it as well." Some of them thought that since they had done high school in the United States, they had a better chance than I ever did. Sometimes a little change in perspective can make a student feel more confident in continuing their effort.

Both the Spanish and English languages are part of my personality. I use Spanish with my family; it is the language we create our bond from. If I had not spoken and read Spanish, my father would have been so sad as a parent. He is an avid reader and while my mother and brother do not share his love of reading, I do. To this day, he sends me a link to every newspaper article he finds interesting because he knows I will read it and we can have a conversation. How different our lives would be if I had only focused on learning English and not kept the language of my heritage. On the other hand, English brought me to the love of my life. I have the best debates with my husband, who also enjoys making me read different articles from politics. Knowing both languages allows me to connect with people that I love and grow intellectually. Both languages made me who I am and I would hate to lose any of them. I think about those who lost their Spanish and were unable to talk with their parents or grandparents. I had friends that struggled using their Spanish and felt like they were unable to portray their ideas and thoughts to their family. I am truly lucky.

CHAPTER IV

HOPEFUL FOR THE FUTURE

While living in Missouri I missed my hometowns of Matamoros and Brownsville. I was lucky enough to grow up in the Rio Grande Valley where languages were interchangeable and there was a feeling of freedom to choose how to speak. I grew up going to school on the Mexican side of the border and ultimately graduated from a Mexican high school, along the way taking all my classes in Spanish. I took some courses on English, but did not become proficient enough to speak in English all the time while in Mexico. Eventually I tried something nobody in my family had tried before by applying to attend a small community college in Brownsville and working my best every day to speak English to whoever I was able to.

A factor that is associated with the continued use of Spanish by Spanish-speaking immigrants is receiving a bilingual education. The State of New Mexico teaches a second language in the early years of schooling. Rosina A. Lozano considers their bilingual curriculum to possible good example as a model for primary education around the country. She explains that the state has the best program and would be great “national model for bilingual education at its most basic level—teaching a second language in the primary grades—which state leaders advocated for while also seeking national recognition as a Spanish-speaking state of political, economic, and social use to the nation’s hemispheric relations”(Lozano 272). This approach

might be effective for border cities like Brownsville because the students are in constant interaction with those who speak Spanish and education.

When I started my education in the United States, the goal was to become fluently bilingual. One time at the community college I was sitting in the lab of my anatomy class. I turned and spoke to the girl sitting next to me. She had brown skin and black hair. For a second, I thought, “well, I can speak Spanish with her.” I remember telling her, “También tomas la clase con el Dr. o solo el laboratorio?” She turned around and, with a face that showed confusion, mentioned, “I don’t speak Spanish.” I froze. I was shocked to learn that someone in the Rio Grande Valley did not speak Spanish. In my own naivety, I assumed that someone who appeared to be of Latin descent would speak the same language as me. I think when it comes to language, it is easy for our perceptions to include bias toward that which is easier for us to comprehend.

However, that encounter did not stop me from speaking with others in Spanish much of the time. I had a group of friends who came from different parts of Mexico and welcomed me to talk in Spanish with them. When I worked as a tutor, I had a group of coworkers that would get together because they preferred speaking Spanish. I think they are the group I miss the most after having moved to Missouri. I had spoken some English almost daily before, mostly when speaking with professors or staff from the University, but the majority of interactions in my everyday life were in Spanish. My friends, my coworkers, my family, they all spoke Spanish.

My mother was born with the luck of having a parent from the United States. Having American citizenship is something important for those who live on the border because it affords them the nearly unlimited opportunity provided by the ability to visit, work, and live in the United States. When an American citizen crosses the border, border agents just ask if we brought something back from Mexico. Growing up with Mexican friends and family, I used to see the way

Mexican citizens were treated when they came to the United States to spend their money in American stores. When Mexican citizens with visas cross the bridge, they are intensely questioned.

As an American citizen, I had the freedom to live on either side of the border. Many have asked me why I did not live in Mexico and go to school in the United States like many students do every day. The truth is that my parents made a choice for me and I am grateful for that. Since my father was Mexican and my mother had lived most of her life in Mexico they decided to stay in Mexico and raise me as a Mexican. I lived on the border and for that reason I was able to visit the United States as often as it was needed. I got all my vaccines and doctors appointments in the United States, but I went to kindergarten in Mexico where I learned Spanish as my first language. Neither my mother or father spoke English, so I had no place to learn or practice English in any way.

My mother's siblings moved to the United States as soon as they were able to. They all learned to become conversational in English. All my family moved to different locations in the United States, so it was always an unspoken truth in my family that I would have the chance to move to the US if I decided to as well. My parents were told many times by uncles and aunts that they were hurting my future by not allowing me to study in the United States. My father always said that I would be able to decide when I was 18 years old. When the time came, I remember telling him that I was going to apply to a school in Brownsville, Texas. I still remember his look; he was proud of what I was about to do, but somehow a little disappointed because I was never going to live in Mexico again. As I have grown up, my parents chose many aspects of my future for me. I admit that I resented them sometimes because I felt that my English was never going to be as good as a native speaker's. As I worked to complete my Associates, I had the realization

that they were just doing what they thought was best for me. They wanted to give me the language in which Don Quixote was written and to allow me to appreciate the words that they used in their everyday life.

The truth is that there is such an intense connection between cities that it has been shown that those who live near Mexico keep their language with more frequency. Living in a border city provided a better opportunity to continue using Spanish and not losing opportunities to use it. According to Thomas Wilson, there is a connection between language and border cities. He describes that “linguistically, border proximity to Mexico – not just physical proximity but direct, daily interactions – reduces or reverses Spanish language loss among second and deeper generation migrants” (Wilson 58). Those who grow up in border cities like Brownsville had more experiences that allow them to use their first language and keep them.

Charro Days. Those words recall the name of an event that has allowed myself and many others of American and Mexican heritage to honor and celebrate both our cultures. It takes place where I grew up, on the border between Brownsville, Texas and Matamoros, Mexico. These cities have an incredible bond that transcends national borders. During the Great Depression, citizens in Brownsville decided that they wanted to allow Mexican citizens to come and spend a day in the United States. They called this day Charro Days. There would be events highlighting the history of the area and culture of the peoples that lived there historically. The visiting Mexicans could spend their money, the organizers thought, and they could create friendships with those living on the American side as well. While there was an economic incentive for hosting this event, I believe the underlying idea was to support peace and harmony among citizens of the Rio Grande Valley on both sides of the border by fostering interaction between those from either country who knew little about the other. This is important because I

believe many bigoted ideologies that remain in the world comes from members of groups of people maintaining unfamiliarity and walling themselves off from members other groups Doing so allows for them to more easily dehumanize the others. My grandmother told me that, on that date alone, the border agents would allow Mexicans citizens without visas to cross. She thought some of them probably took the opportunity to move to the United States, too. The general freedom to trade and travel between both cities has truly created a single community that is simply divided by territorial claims. To think about how free the people in those early Charro Days were, crossing international borders without any documentation, seems almost unimaginable to me today. I have spent many hours of my life standing on the bridge, waiting for officers performing background checks on everyone who tries to visit the United States.

Life on the border has given me a different perspective that many Mexicans or Americans do not have. The shared ideas and purpose of both countries are clear when you realize the great connection between the families on both sides of the border. Many from the Mexican side cross every Thanksgiving Day to have dinner with their families who are waiting on the American side. I know this because I did the same thing many times. I saw many families wait to reunite with their families for the night and give thanks for the year. The connections between Mexican and Mexican-American families in border cities shows something that I believe on large scale could someday be the United States. In some places in America, this is already true. I know that border cities like El Paso and San Diego also have communities that are as connected as Brownsville to the Mexican side. Citizens of both cities choose what is best for them from each side. English, Spanish, and other languages which are dominant in American immigrant communities can coexist and work in conjunction with each other to meet the cultural and economic needs of communities, rather than be seen as in competition and creating a disadvantage. The shared

culture and identity of citizens in border cities, as well as the fact of their relative success as safe, prosperous, and vibrant communities, has made me enthusiastic about bilingual education and not forgetting about one's roots. A person's roots are their connection to this world, past, present and future, and hold the key to understanding ourselves and those around us.

From its earliest days, America was what was known as a melting pot of culture and ideas. Being bilingual is a part of the very fabric of America in that sense. According to Sandra Del Valle "Bilingual education in its richest sense is about helping all language minorities be fully bilingual and bicultural, 'shared by two equal languages' in the belief that diversity that begins from within is the only kind that can inspire the kind of societal evolution of the soul necessary for respecting the greater diversity of all people"(Del Valle 217). To be the City upon a Hill that America was planned as, it is worth considering a return to the type of society that the modern nation sprang from, one in which there was a true diversity stemming from a multitude of freely spoken and disseminated languages, which created a spirit of free inquiry and fostered tolerance among the people.

In my first years in college, I came to have respect for those who had a strong command of both the English and Spanish languages. During that time I was learning from personal experience just how difficult it was to become skilled in multiple languages. Some friends had gone back and forth studying between American schools and Mexican schools. Some of them were Mexican citizens trying to find better opportunities in the United States. When I talked with them about these issues, they always reminded me that I was lucky to be born in Brownsville. My experience with these students meant I was constantly aware of my luck. My mother had taught me that I had the freedom to speak in any language because I was born in the United States and no one could question my citizenship. She never really learned English. She tried to learn at

different schools and she even went to the University to give it a try, but nothing really stuck with her. Instead she has learned to deal with an all English system as a Spanish speaker. She got her first license by filling a form that was all in English and she had to ask her sister to help her fill it out. Luckily her test was in Spanish. Interestingly, it was an Anglo man who tried his best to administer her driver's exam in Spanish.

In Brownsville, I used English and, without noticing or doing so on purpose, began to use English as my language du jure for all professional situations. I would use it when speaking to someone from the graduate office in school or while I was trying to get my driver license. However, I understood my true strength to be my command of Spanish and used it in my favor. I took both of my tests for my driving license in Spanish since I knew that I would understand things better in my native language. I never felt knowing Spanish was a limitation because I completed a Bachelors and am now completing a Masters in English. My relationship with language is something that I cannot expect others to understand because I have had my own unique experiences, which have made me grow in my own way. I was also forced to see things differently from my mother, who has the peculiar circumstance of being an American citizen that does speak English.

My mother has said that she regrets not knowing English. With the help of family members and social workers, she has been registered to vote in the past. She was disappointed when she noticed that there was no option for a Spanish ballot the first time she voted. This is the reality of many who have not learned English. She has mentioned that she feels bad because not knowing English has left her out of many experiences. She has been called to be on a jury, but was disqualified because she did not speak English. My mother has hoped that someday she can learn "The Star-Spangled Banner" and be able to sing it with her grandchildren and I. She

considers her citizenship an important part of her identity but feels unable to fully experience what it means to be American. She was once called, “a gringa that does not know English,” by a border patrol agent and she always felt that was an appropriate euphemism.

I compare my mother’s experience to what immigrants must feel when they come to the United States. If my mother, a person who was born in the US, feels left out because of her lack of English skills, I imagine that anyone who moves to the United States feels a need to learn English in order to blend in.

Marina’s feeling regarding learning English is fairly common among Hispanics. According to a study made in 2017, “fully 85% of foreign-born self-identified Hispanics say that when they were growing up, their parents often encouraged them to speak Spanish. But that share falls to 68% among the U.S.-born second generation and to just 26% of the third or higher generation Hispanics” (Lopez and et.al). With time, it is clear that future generations of immigrants decide to no longer prioritize speaking their first language. *It concerns me that we are faced with this difficult question: If the Founding Fathers supported freedom of speech and their guidelines were a blueprint for the future of a successful United States, why is there a movement with the explicit goal of limiting speech?*

In the time since the initiation of Donald Trump’s campaign for the Presidency, hate crimes and xenophobic encounters against Latinos, who are entirely Hispanic except for those from Brazil and a few select locations, have grown in number. According to the FBI, “the number of victims in anti-Latino or Hispanic hate crimes rose over 21% in 2018” (Brooks). It is also true is that many have suffered forms discrimination not related to race, but simply for speaking a different language than English. In 2018,“ the Pew Research Center found that 22 percent of Hispanics said someone had criticized them for speaking America’s most popular

foreign language [Spanish]. Twenty percent said they had been told to go back to their home country” (Mathews). *These numbers scared me because they show growth of hatred for people who look or even just speak like me. However, I have hope that as a society we can and will find ways to reduce this xenophobia.*

Something that made me realize that I was not alone the night of Marina’s verbal attack was that many Republicans have made me feel hopeful for the new path for the party. One thing that I remember from my trip to Washington D.C. is Jack apologizing to me on the way back home. The morning after the dinner party, my husband and I woke up and got ready to take our airplane back home. When we went outside, we realized that Jack and the other guys that came with us during the trip were getting their bags in a taxi as fast as possible. Jack was totally ignoring Marina, who was hovering over him as he loaded his bags. She was crying and telling him she needed to talk with him. It was the classic example of a female’s sobbing breakdown after learning their feelings of love are unrequited. At the sight of the scene, Duell and I looked at each other confused. We did not know that Marina’s actions the night before had any consequences. Jack simply turned around and told Marina, “This is not going to work. I am leaving. Goodbye.” Jack got in the taxi and left for the airport. Duell and I caught a cab that took us to the airport. Once we were there, we got all in line to get checked by the TSA. After retrieving all our belongings from the x-ray baskets, we were reunited with Jack at our plane terminal. “I am sorry Perla. I did not know she was crazy,” Jack mentioned to me with shame. “It is okay,” I told him. He did not know how much power he was giving her by being silent at the moment, but I believe she learned that her behavior was not acceptable when he ended their relations. Later, during the flight, the other guys who went to the trip with us started teasing Jack. Apparently, he had met Maria in a political conference and kept meeting her in other

conferences throughout a number of years; however, he had never seen her act like she did during the dinner gala. Jack truly made me feel better afterwards. In my experience, the views of many conservatives and Republicans are contradictory to what is portrayed in the media. After my ordeal with Marina, I have been told on two different occasions by young conservatives that they thought speaking a foreign language was good.

Two months after the conference, I was able to visit Brownsville for the first time after some months away. I have to say that I felt such freedom to speak Spanish with so many people in my everyday interactions. When I was in Missouri, I felt different about speaking Spanish. After my experience in the conference in D.C., I have to say that it took me a while to speak Spanish again with strangers. In response to a question from somebody who I thought had an accent, I would say “mande” quietly hoping they would respond to me saying “¿Hablas español?” I think that one of the most exciting things I have ever felt was the joy I have given other Spanish speakers when they learn that I speak Spanish too. It feels as if we’re members of a club that’s open to the public, even if everyone doesn’t join. When Spanish speakers find one another among speakers of other languages, it is a great moment in our day, or at least I know it is for me.

After living in Missouri for over a year, I have not been able to find a space in which I am comfortable speaking Spanish. I am still looking for a place in which I feel safe speaking my first language, not worrying about making some people angry. I have offered to interpret for free for those who need a tour of the Capitol. I hope by working in the Capitol of Missouri or in places where there are not many Spanish speakers, I can provide a resource to people like my parents. My bad experiences have made me who I am, as well as my good experiences. Since my encounter at the event in D.C., I been more aware of the discrimination that Spanish Speakers

suffer. I have looked for cases like mine in which people had been furious at hearing people speaking Spanish and I am thankful that my experience was not as bad as many.

As of November 7th of 2020, I've felt more confident that our country is moving forward to a more acceptable society. The defeat of Donald Trump in 2020 has shown that Americans did not accept his views on certain topics. I am not sure of what the future holds for us, but I do know that things will be different with a different President. My first thought about Joe Biden's victory was that I remember seeing his picture with President Obama's while I crossed the border every day to take classes in the United States at a time when I still lived with my parents in Mexico. For me, his win is symbolic hope for the possibilities of a better future that reminds me more of those times.

With all my life experiences in mind and knowing the relevant, contributive, and groundbreaking accomplishments fellow Hispanics have made throughout history, I can only feel proud and hopeful for the next accomplishments that fellow Hispanics will be able to achieve. This point is buttressed by the reality of major innovations that benefit us all originating from other types of bilingual American citizens. Seeing all the opportunities that bilingual Americans have created and engaged in to make themselves prosperous, in a system that often has barriers to their success, gives me hope for the ability to turn opportunity into reality. As a proudly bilingual Mexican-American, I have many role models to look to: Mexican film directors who tell our stories and have won Oscars, entrepreneurs who created mediums for communication like Zuckerberg with Facebook or Brin with Google, and a Supreme Court Judge who speaks Spanish, among an endless list of others. Bilingual Americans stand on the shoulders of those who fight for our rights, like the Mendez family who gave it all for equality. I will not allow the sacrifices of those who came before me to be in vain because myself and others in my generation

choose to live in fear or apathy. For me, at the end of the day, the experience in Washington D.C. emboldened that belief, and cemented in my mind clearly that I deserve to speak freely in the country I was born in.

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@AOC "I'm really proud of this interview! Growing up, Spanish was my first language - but like many 1st generation Latinx Americans, I have to continuously work at it & improve. It's not perfect, but the only way we improve our language skills is through public practice. #Palante" *Twitter*, 5 Sep. 2019, 9:05 PM.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Perla M. Lauderdale graduated from Texas Southmost College in 2015 with an Associate's Degree in General Studies. She later achieved a Bachelor's Degree in English with a focus on Rhetoric and Composition from University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in 2018. She was selected as a Fellow for the Inaugural University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Sustainability Fellowship Program in 2019. Mrs. Lauderdale has published an essay and a short story in the *The Chachalaca Review* She was awarded with Exemplary Creative Works Oral Presentation in Engaged Scholar 2018.

She also served as a Spanish Language Editor in the *The Chachalaca Review*. She also worked in the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Learning Center for two years which provided her experience working with students in the writing process. As a researcher she was awarded second place for her presentation "Postcolonial Literacy in the Age of Social Media" which took place at the Engaged Scholar Symposium in 2018.

Her legislative experience comes from working as a district staff in the Missouri State Capitol during the 100th General Assembly.

Earned a Master of Art in English from The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in December 2020. She specializes in Rhetoric and Composition. Her primary interests include the use of narrative as a rhetorical tool.

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