

AN INTERVIEW WITH NATHALIE MARTINEZ

An Oral History Conducted by
Rodrigo Vazquez & Barbara Tabach

Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada
Oral History Project

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The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews with permission of the narrator.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the *Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada*.

Claytee D. White
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PREFACE



Nathalie Martinez is one of the original members of the Latinx Voices project team in 2018 and remained a leader on the project which culminated in 2021. 2021 is also the year that she graduated from UNLV.

Nathalie was raised in a culturally mixed family: her mother, Rocio Rodriguez-Martinez, is from Colombia and her father, Leonardo Martinez, is from El Salvador. She shares the eye-opening educational experiences of moving from California to Las Vegas when she was in third grade. She talks about her personal identity and insights from working on the project.

To her teammates, Nathalie was known for her finely tuned ear and how she could use her extraordinary linguistic talents effectively during interviews—no matter if conducted in Spanish or English. She is fluent in French, English, Spanish and its various dialects.

Nathalie also contributed to a podcast series based on the Latinx Voices oral histories and was often a project spokesperson.

[*Note:* The oral histories of both parents are included in the Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada archives].

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June 24, 2021

in Las Vegas, Nevada

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Today is Thursday, June 24th, 2021. I am in the Oral History Research Center here at Lied Library. My name is Rodrigo Vazquez, and with me are...

Barbara Tabach.

And...

Nathalie Martinez.

Nathalie, will you please spell out your name for me?

Yes. N-A-T-H-A-L-I-E, M-A-R-T-I-N-E-Z.

I should start with your childhood. Where were you born?

I was born in Santa Monica, California, but I grew up in Mar Vista, which is kind of a suburb—not too far from Venice Beach within the Los Angeles area.

How long were you in Mar Vista for?

We stayed there until I was in about second grade, and then we moved to Downey and I stayed there a couple of months before we moved here in 2006. My mom and I lived in Downey while my dad moved out here first before us.

Why did your dad end up moving out here?

Because he was told by my aunt that business was booming in realty and it was the best route to take to make good money. It was also a lot more affordable to live here and it would be a great opportunity for him to thrive financially in that field.

Can you describe growing up in Mar Vista and then Downey for a little bit?

I grew up in an apartment complex that we still drive by every time we go to California. I have really fond childhood memories. Again, I'm really hesitant to know whether they're my memories or just stories that I've grown up listening to or pictures that I've seen. My parents and I, we'd always do something on Saturdays or on the weekend, Saturday or Sunday. There was

always an activity my mom had planned for us for that weekend whether it was a trip to the beach or to the library for story time in the morning, and so I was always very busy—swim lessons and I think I dabbled with ballet for a little bit. I grew up very close to my parents, and I would play with neighbors downstairs in Mar Vista.

I started going to private school. My mom was very adamant on making sure I had the best education, and she was willing to pay as much as she could for my education. I went to a private school, which had a dolphin in the front. It was always “the dolphin school” for me because it had this giant ceramic or concrete dolphin in front. I have some really good memories there. For some reason I just remember water days where there would be a little Dora that would just squirt out water and spin in circles.

And same thing in the daycare, kind of rewinding, the babysitter that my mom left me with, we still visit her to this day. She has known me since I was literally six months old. I remember growing up in there. That’s where I tried eggs with ketchup for the first time, and since then that’s always been the way to go with morning eggs. My mom tells me that the babysitter Abi taught my mom how to properly wrap me when I was a baby because before then she had just shuffled me in the blanket as a child. I remember running around the house because it was a large home where she had a bunch of other kids that she would babysit there.

I don’t recall speaking very much Spanish. Sometimes we would have birthday parties in Los Angeles from family members or friends of my dad or going to their kids’ birthday parties in Los Angeles. We would play in those parking lots outside of the apartment complexes. That was the extent of my exposure to the Latinx community was when we would go to Los Angeles, now that I think back on it, because it was the only time I would speak a lot of Spanish.

My aunt and my cousin moved from Colombia early on. I was probably four years old when they finally established themselves in California. Another aunt of mine, Lady, had been there prior and she was also very present in my childhood. Elsa and Marcela were the other two who moved from Colombia to the States. My cousin came first and then my aunt thereafter. My aunt Lady was always very present in my childhood and it's still very much the case.

That sums it up. I'm pretty sure I could elaborate more on some details, but that's the gist of what my upbringing was like and going to Montessori school, which is a whole different experience.

I'm curious and maybe you can explain. You spoke English primarily. Your parents both being native speakers of Spanish, they spoke English to each other at home and with you? How did that dynamic work?

They speak to each other exclusively in Spanish, to this day. If I hear them speaking to each other in English, I always have to do a double take to make sure that I'm hearing them correctly because I am so used to hearing them speak to each other in Spanish. They would speak to me in Spanish and English. My mom tells me that growing up I did not want to speak Spanish. I did not want to speak it because it was not what was spoken in the spaces I inhabited, in the swim classes, in ballet, at school. It just wasn't the language I heard. Even when I would go to Los Angeles, the kids I would be around with, we all spoke English to each other. My mom tells me that it wasn't until she told me that we were going to Colombia, when I was about four years old, she said, "Well, if you want to go to the bathroom and if you want to eat and speak to your grandparents, you're going to have to learn." I think even after that I still didn't speak the language very much growing up.

That's interesting because it's such a part of your nature that we all are in awe of. Let's follow that line of exploration of you, Nathalie, a little bit further. With language, talk about the timeline. Just one little caveat question, how old were you when you moved to Las Vegas?

I was entering third grade, so I had to have been seven or eight. I think I was seven because I was a year younger than the kids because in California the cutoff date was a little off, and I think also because I was in private school that always made me a year younger than the rest of my peers here in Las Vegas, and that was a huge transition for me culturally.

How's that?

Because in Montessori schools, private institutions both here and pretty much all over the country have a unique environment. I'm really glad and grateful that I had that opportunity to be in that space because it's a very individualized based learning. I would spend the whole year there because my mom was working all the time, again to make sure that I could have that education. Again, we would all speak English. I never encountered any—very few Latino students, maybe one or two. It would always baffle me a little bit and makes me think about how close minded I was. There was one Cuban friend that I had, and he would play a mariachi song called *El Mariachi Loco* and sometimes I think I would... not make fun of him, but start developing stereotypes and that's how it was for my family as well. "Oh, they're mariachi loco."

With the language, too. That was what I grew up with. It was a lot of me speaking in English and everyone talking to me in Spanish. Sometimes I'd speak in Spanish.

Then I moved here and I went to public school here. I went to Jack Dailey Elementary School, a Title One school which is off of Tropicana and Eastern, so not that far from here. I was going to say Hispanic-serving institution, but that's just for universities. But it was predominantly Black and Brown students. I was in a completely different environment. My mom

was super scared to leave me. I remember she made sure that she could volunteer so that she could make sure that her daughter was “safe”. It’s very sad to think that she couldn’t feel safe leaving me in that space, and I can understand where it comes from given the environment I was in before that was a very privileged area where these institutions were, with other students whose families were investing in their child’s education. Not to put down the education I got there, I think it was super important to me. When I started going there, my friends were Mexican, and that’s where, I guess, I wanted to really blend in as much as I could so I started speaking Spanish more. That’s where I really embraced the Mexican slang and dialect and it caught onto me super quickly. I remember telling my mom that I didn’t want to go shopping for clothes at the mall anymore because I knew that other students didn’t go to the mall to get clothes. My friends were always talking about shopping at Walmart to get their clothes. My family would always go to Ross, something we always did, and I know that’s something that’s a trademark of Latinos. “Oh, we went to Ross,” and the scenes of kids looking for your family at Ross and playing in the clothes and everything. There’re so many memes with that and I can relate to entirely. I remember telling my mom that I did not want to go shopping for brand names. I did not want that because that’s what I saw at school. Also, students receiving donations for clothes, free and reduced lunch—all of this was entirely new to me as well.

It was definitely a huge privilege check for me in elementary school, and that’s where I started learning Spanish more and speaking the language a lot more. I sometimes think that if I hadn’t had that experience, I would have become a very different person than if I had stayed in that private school setting. I feel like I would have been what is known as *la niña fresca*. I feel like I would have been a very snobby person—the “private school” kind of vibe. I don’t know.

Who's to say? Maybe in an alternate universe that's what happened. It was a huge transition for me.

I remember trying to always help as much as I could, and I learned that from my mom, all credits to her. In the classroom my teacher could tell that I was definitely accelerated having gone to a Montessori school. I had learned my multiplications and divisions already by second grade, so I would try to help my peers. I would help them with their studies. We'd play games. I'd be in charge of flipping the cards to get multiplications. I worked with one of our students with a disability who used a walker in our classroom. I always remember spending time with him and helping him as much as I could and playing with him because he couldn't play on the playground like the other kids. I remember walking around during recess with him.

Yes, that's where I really was introduced to the Latino community, I think; it was coming here to Las Vegas.

Did your parents recognize that you were speaking Mexican dialect?

Oh absolutely.

Explain because we haven't touched on your background. You mentioned your mom is Colombian. Talk a little bit about your dad's background.

Yes, my mom is from Bogotá, Colombia. Even the way I say things now, I know I wouldn't have done that before. Before I would have been, "She's from Bogota, Colombia." Same thing with my name. Now it's not Nathalie Martinez; it's Nathalie Martinez [pronouncing]. I make sure to pronounce it the way that its origins come from and the way that sounds like me, and the way it sounds like me is to make sure it's said with that Spanish flavor, I guess.

Any who, my dad is from El Salvador, from Santa Lucía in La Libertad. Yes, that's my background there. I didn't get to meet my family there in person until 2016, so five, six years

ago. It was fairly recent. My mom's family, on the other hand, I met them early on. The first time I went to Colombia, I'm pretty sure I was two or four years old. My recollections only begin when I was four, and I don't remember prior. No, I did go when I was a baby because there is this story that I've heard that my mom lost the diaper bag in Costa Rica and she was having a fit about it. Yes, I was there. I went to Colombia when I was a baby.

I'm glad you don't remember that.

Yes, the diaper bag was a huge fiasco.

Talk about childhood trauma.

I went to Colombia when I was four, and I went again when I was about ten years old. By then I had been here in Las Vegas—it had to have been ten. It had to have been at least three years that I would have been here. I went there and I would speak to my family. The most prime example that I have is that I would say, *hijole*, all the time. I would say, "*Hijole esto; hijole lo otro*".

Whenever it was an exclamation of *oh my gosh*, it would be *hijole*. My cousins and my uncles would be like, "Why are you saying that? What is that?" It was a completely foreign term for them because it's not used in, quote-unquote, "Colombian Spanish". Some translating was needed on the part of my mom to explain that's what I grew up with. That's what I grew up listening. I would go to my friends' houses and that's what I would hear. When I was growing up and in elementary school here I would be listening to *RBD-Rebelde*. I was listening to other Mexican teenager pop kind of groups, and that was really interesting for my mom. She's like, "You want to buy this CD? What?" That was my dynamic with Mexican Spanish.

That's kind of interesting so that when you're a little girl and you're hanging out with these new friends in Las Vegas who most of them are Mexican ancestry, did they assume you were, too, just because you have dark hair or...?

Actually, I've always grown up here with people assuming that I'm Mexican. I speak from my own experience, but I've heard that that seems to be the case for many other Latinx groups. I grew up being very adamant about it. I was very much like, "No, that's not me." In my family there was sometimes conversations of like, "Oh, those Mexican people." That was the conversation, the mentality that I grew up with. I obviously don't have that anymore, but that's what I had at the time. I grew up thinking that being of Colombian ancestry was superior, and so there was definitely that cultural hierarchy. I see it in speaking with others, too. Cubans in the Caribbean or Argentines in South America that sometimes will think they're more prestigious. That's just in the gossip though. I can't speak for the whole community, obviously. I would always get very angry when people told me, "Oh, you're Mexican." I'm like, "No. I'm Colombian and Salvadoran."

Being so connected with my mom and also having gone there more often, I definitely leaned more towards the Colombian side. That's what I leaned towards and that's what I would always talk about, was my Colombian ancestry. In third grade I even did the talent show and danced to Shakira just to make sure that everyone knew that. I made sure that Nathalie is...that's Shakira, the Colombian, okay. Thereafter for the rest of elementary school, they would call me Shakira, and I didn't mind it. That's really nice to be compared with Shakira. She's really cool. That was kind of that dynamic.

I think that's interesting and really being honest.

Absolutely.

Today as an adult, how do you need to react in that similar dynamics of culture, racial identity that people throw at you?

Absolutely. Now as an adult, I'm very much aware of the fact of why I'm able to—or rather aware of the privilege that I have both linguistically to not have an accent and, also, the fact that I'm of a lighter complexion. I'm aware of all these different things that I wasn't aware of, which is I think why in Montessori school my Latina identity was not as central to me. Albeit I had a darker complexion growing up, but that's a separate story. I think when I came to Vegas, I don't know what happened, but I got lighter. I don't understand it.

How does that happen on the desert?

Exactly.

The sun exposure, you're lighter.

Actually it was weird. Yes, looking back on it now, I tried to not...I'm very much against hierarchies and whether one culture is dominant over another. Absolutely not. I look back and sometimes if I see family that brings it up, I'll be sure to correct them as much as I can, and be like, "No, this is just another way of living, another way of speaking, and they communicate fine, and it's an expression of the way they speak and their culture and their values, and I think it's beautiful." That's become a fundamental part of who I am and what I want to do with my life when it comes to expressing yourself linguistically. I look back and I can't blame myself. It's what I grew up with. Yes, it's what I was surrounded with, the conversations and the dialogue I grew up with. I'm glad I've had the opportunity to learn and grow from that, for sure, and that's how it goes. Especially with being with friends from Guatemala, Mexican descendants, Cuban descendants, I've just become more drawn to ask more questions just to try to understand. I will never fully understand another culture. I think that's impossible for me to do. I'm always seeking to understand other cultures and not to invalidate them in any way, but just to keep learning. I

think I'm just a lifelong learner at heart. I still have a lot more to learn, and I'm definitely not going to think that one is better than the other.

With this project, the Latinx Voices project, and being a student worker on that since its inception, how did this project—or did this project have any impact on those things that you just talked about, these topics and assessments?

Yes. I think what most resonated with me was hearing people's stories of how they came to be where they are. I remember people like—and you were here for this one—Stavan Corbett. I think it resonated with me because of the fact that he didn't learn the language, and so that was something that really resonated with me because for me speaking Spanish is what fundamentally defined it for me having a connection with my Latina identity. Growing up I'd hear that criticism among family members, too. "Oh, how can they claim that they're Latino? They don't even speak Spanish." Hearing stories like that really flipped the coin for me. You can't blame the individual for the context or circumstances they were under. Listening to stories like his about how he grew up in a household where his parents—stories where the parents equivocate their perception of success to learning English and assimilating, which is understandable given the context and the dynamics that we live in now, the systems that are in place. Listening to stories such as his impacted my view of language and identity.

I remember the first interview that I sat in on was Liliam Lujan Hickey, super fun. Another that I sat in was Peter Guzman and hearing his story of how his parents came from Cuba. I think my favorite is Jocelyn Cortez with the way that she talked about her identity shifting between the spaces that she was in, which I identified with very much so. I think also especially with the Spanish interviews hearing all the different varieties of Spanish was, for one, difficult at times. I cannot deny. I am not fluent in all varieties, so transcribing some of those was

a toll and I could pass it to Raul, and bless his heart he did it, especially with the Cuban interviews because they speak very fast. I think with those interviews, it really showed me...and I think it was the fact that they could tell me their stories in their first language, in their mother tongue, which allowed them to be really expressive and really tell the story they wanted to tell. That was something that I really, really liked about this project. It meant a lot to me just to make sure that their stories were given their due diligence and that they could be told and shared with as many as we could even though we couldn't translate all of them.

I don't know if I addressed your question. I've been hopping over left and right.

I think you have. I think it's really more a conversation. I'm restraining myself from bringing Rodrigo into that conversation because this is your interview. But I do believe it's one of those assets of this project that at least you guys will be able to hold onto. As a non-speaking person in this, the times that you would be talking between each other and trying to decide what a word was when you would be translating, it was like, this is great. I don't know what the answer is, but just the dynamics is invaluable. How in the world do we all learn to communicate?

My own research of heritage speakers is evidence of all these things. It's remarkable to see the significance of the East Side specifically.

Talk about that and what you did with that. I think that's really important.

My research? For my undergraduate thesis, this is actually what I was working on with the Michigan program, so I got to revisit that. I wanted to know if other heritage speakers—that is, speakers who learn Spanish in the household and in the community, similar to myself, no formal education, maybe in college, but other than that no formal exposure—had adopted the predominant dialect of the community: the Mexican variety. That's what happened with me, so I

wanted to see if I was the only one, or if this was a phenomena that was happening within this community. I focused on the East Side because it is where most of the Latinx community is. Hearing it come up time and time again, I never realized how significant it was to this city's history until this project. That's why I was like, oh. Especially with a guy like Laurents on the team who is East Side now and forever, it seems like, and the pride he has for it was something that I definitely wanted to capture in my research because I think language is such an identity marker, and I think that's what I wanted to show in my research. The way we, heritage speakers, speak or the way the community from the East Side speaks is an identity marker for not only where our parents come from, but also of the community because of the influence of the Mexican variety in their speech. The importance of validating that and not hindering it with "Oh, you're code-switching right now; you said three words in English and you switched back to Spanish. How dare you?" Instead of saying it's one or the other, why can't it just be both? I think it's a really cool linguistic tool to have. This last interview with Juliana...

Juliana Urtubey. How do you say her last name?

Urtubey. She talks about how it was "linguistically gifted," and now I've adopted that and I make sure to bring that up in conversation every time I can to make sure to not see students as ELL or ESL. It's really a tool to be able to switch languages left and right. It makes me think of Xavi and Stella [referring to Barbara's grandchildren] learning Portugues. That's really cool. There's a bunch of research that shows the value of that.

That was my research. I dedicated a year in doing that, and during the pandemic it was very interesting. I collected interviews, analyzed *ser* and *estar*, which both mean "to be" in Spanish, and also within the context of the imperfect or the preterite, which are two tenses in the past, so it's double cognitive load for us because we have to figure out whether to use *ser* or

estar according to the rules, “rules” in air quotes, that are imposed upon us. I learned about this two weeks ago, the standard language ideology that exists that this is the standard that you need to meet; if you don’t meet it, you are not communicating and don’t deserve to be in this professional or higher socioeconomic status because you don’t speak our language. It’s very much a gatekeeping notion. Putting my research into that lens has been very interesting these past couple of weeks in seeing that what I thought was just an experiment of me trying to see if other people had a similar experience as me has become a project that I know is the start of validating different linguistic experiences. It could also be a tool for teachers because Vegas being such a transient city, a lot of teachers aren’t aware of the history or the varieties that exist here. Having a record of these different varieties through the interviews I collected, as well as the oral histories because you can hear it in our oral histories, shows what exists here and you can hear that in the very language that’s spoken. It was a gruesome process at times and with Excel winning one too many battles against myself, but I think it was well worth it in the end. It turned out to be a really good project that could lead to many more opportunities for me in the future.

I had a question. You mentioned interviewing people, like Spanish-speakers, and often we deferred to them, if they spoke Spanish or English, that they could be interviewed in whatever language they preferred. With that, I think one of the things that we don’t really talk about is the fact that we present ourselves in a different way depending on what language we’re speaking. I’m just curious if you notice any differences in yourself in terms of personality or even your identity when you’re speaking Spanish versus when you’re speaking English?

Oh absolutely. Oh my gosh that’s such a good question. I think, *me siento más fresca cuando estoy hablando en español* [I feel more relaxed when I’m speaking in Spanish]. It’s kind of like I

just embody another version of myself. I think I've just aligned English with the academic and professional setting so much compared with Spanish being with friends and family that I kind of adopt that notion when I do that, and I kind of embody it with my whole being, almost. I think when I was in Costa Rica, when I got to the study abroad over there for that summer, I had to say it was one of the most incredible times of my life, genuinely. I felt like I was in community where I could completely be myself. It was an incredible experience I'd love to have the opportunity to have again. Do I see myself living in a Latin American country in the future? Absolutely. Will it happen? I don't know. I could see myself in academia, given how that works here in the States and how it works abroad, it does seem like a more beneficial system to be in here, but, then again, we'll see. The future, we can't tell. That's why oral history is the past, not future. Going back to your question, I definitely see myself aligning my behaviors with the connections that I make with the language and what context I'm in. I definitely bring a lot of Spanish into it when I speak English. I refer to everyone as *chicos*, *chicas*, *chiques*, to be gender inclusive, using the E instead. I make sure to try to express that, and using those little words here and there, definitely I use it as...I don't say political statement because it's not that, but as a statement. I guess I can just say it like, this is who I am and I'm going to insert myself because that's who I believe I am.

You're trying to integrate both of these parts, right?

Exactly. I do that with groups or gatherings that I do; I do my best to try to bring my two worlds together because they both mean so much to me. For example, with my experience in the Honors College, I was one of five other Latinx students in there. The minority community in the Honors College is very, very, very small.

I didn't realize that. That's awful.

Yes.

Why do you think that is? I'm interrupting your thought.

No, you're fine.

Go ahead and then somewhere, why that may be?

Absolutely. I intend to reach out to Dean Hanson, Dr. Hanson to let him know that there's very few of us here. When I would bring friends, like my friend Miguel, I brought him once to a Honors Rebellion workout, which is where I have my Tough Mudder crew who I do Tough Mudders with, I remember he's like, "Oh, there's so few of us here." He was the one that brought it up to me to begin with. I was not aware of it because I guess it was a space that I had been used to in the past whether it was from my Montessori time and then also being in a magnet program in high school and in middle school. Yes, it was Roy Martin and, yes, it was Valley, which are in predominantly Latinx spaces but I wasn't exposed to those students because they weren't in these programs. The students that were in that program, as well as here in the Honors College, are students whose parents are aware of X, Y, Z, and this information isn't exactly dispersed equitably within the Latinx community as much, again for reasons of linguistic barrier, or parents working, and so they don't have time to investigate other opportunities for their child's education, and so it's up to the child to do that and, again, a burden that I don't think that students should have. But that's just me going on an education policy rant. I think that the reason why is...again, I'm wondering what their marketing strategy is. The only reason I knew about the Honors College, again, is because I was in a magnet program, so they feed from the magnet programs. They go to Green Valleys. They go to Centennial or Spring Valley; that's the one I'm thinking of. Given that extra challenge of the Honors College, they don't exactly reach out or

seek out Latinx students, and I think it's come to that achievement gap that you see in high school students.

I had no idea.

Yes. You can thank my friend Miguel for bringing it up to me, and also last year with some personal reflections with just all of the systemic racial injustices that our community has been facing for years and then finally being discussed openly allowed me to reflect a little bit more on that with departments releasing statements left and right last year. So when I received one from the Honors College, I thought, huh, *pero like* what? I think it's definitely something that we need to fix.

I think that there are very few of us there in those spaces, and so that's why, for example, at workouts that I would lead, oh, you're sure to hear a cumbia or reggaeton in the playlist that I have ready for us to do a workout to because I want to expose them to those cultures they don't hear from that often. If I'm here as a representative for a whole community, I want to try to expose them to all these things. There were times, for example, for recognitions that I received, I really question whether it's tokenism or whether it was from the achievements I have being that I was one of a few Latinx people in these spaces.

Really?

Yes, that's been something that I've felt. These last couple of years of my college career, for Honors College events reaching out to me, I really question that imposter syndrome that I'm still learning to deal with especially going into grad school, *especially going into grad school*. At institutions like Michigan, talking with the grad students they would say, "Oh, when they [the university] say diversity, *we* [graduate students] are the diversity," just grad students, because

that's what they're trying to cater to. Is it whether you're a statistic that they need, or is it actually validating the work that you achieved? It's a double-edged sword, it really is.

That is something as you were in the editing process, and I'm reading some of the oral histories that I wasn't there, I'm hearing that. I don't think you're the first person to experience that or wonder about that. I don't know how to minimize that, but if it is, go for it. If it benefits you with your philosophy, it's going to benefit others. Is that a bad thing to say?

No. I think it's just the world we live in presently. I tell my mom as well from the workshops I attended on grad school, "This is the system; the benefit is that I'm well aware of it." And I know that power is a game. It's a game you've got to play, and so if we want to implement change—and I even told her this—if I want to make a change in the system for future generations, I need to play the system while I can so that I'm in there, and then I can make decisions at the table for others who look like me and sound like me. That's my goal, as well as making sure that—yes, I'll play the system while I can because that's the only way we can actually get in there to make change. I had family members who were like, "Oh, I won't submit myself to this. I'm going to move elsewhere and start my own thing because everything else is you falling into the system." I'm like, "No. You can do that, yes, and you could also see how you can, I guess, clap back at the system and really try to make a change in it. You might be thinking of the greater good of you and your direct contact, but you're not thinking about the bigger picture here." I feel I'm going on a rant here, but that's my philosophy. I say this with an open heart, I'm still learning and I have much to learn. I feel like I've learned a lot already. Sometimes when I talk like this, I'm like, wow, I sound like I'm thirty years old. I'm twenty-two. My aunt telling me, "What if you could be a life coach?" I'm like, "I'm only twenty-two. I can't."

You just have an old soul.

Yes, I do. Yes, I'm pretty sure a couple of lives, my parents told me all the time. They joke around between the two of them sometimes, and I was like, "Niños, I'm going to put you in timeout, stop it. Papi, stop poking and messing with my mom." We just joke around. They call the shots. The other night we were watching the Olympic trials in swimming, and I was working on my computer on something for the conference, which is also a pivotal experience for me. My dad went to go get popcorn for her. She was like, "She's watching. Don't eat too much popcorn because she's going to get mad at you." My mom is like, "If you have kids in the future, they can come with me and I'll finally give them something that comes from a packaged source." I'm like, "Okay, okay, that's fine."

I think it's interesting that you've constantly been at, really, these intersections. With language, you were between your Salvadorian heritage, your Colombian heritage and, of course, a predominantly Mexican community at school and then these various dialects within that same Spanish language, and then, at the same time, you've constantly been inhabiting really predominantly White spaces even within predominantly Black and Brown communities. Valley is the only IB program in Las Vegas.

At the time it was.

At the time, yes. I'm just curious as to, one, how you've learned to navigate these spaces, and if that had any contribution into why maybe you hadn't noticed that the Honors College had this lack of diversity? If I'm completely honest, I had no idea, but it's not as shocking as I thought it would be. Then also if you could kind of describe these spaces that you've inhabited a little bit more.

I remember in high school I had a friend that referred to me as *mi Colombiana*. Again, it goes to that, oh, Colombian sounds a lot more exotic than El Salvador. There was always that notion that

I grew up with, too. Again, also being the fact that there is just a more popular culture that comes from Colombia with Shakira, Juanes, now J Balvin, Maluma, so there is that, going back to that conversation, cultural hierarchy that I'm not a fan of. It was just really interesting. I think going to the Latin Youth Leadership Conference in high school was, I guess, another wake-up call outside of going to public school here, because I went to public school in elementary school and then I shifted into magnet in middle school and high school, so I was in that space that I was in before with Montessori, but within another context. I definitely did the community service that you do in middle school and the community service you do in high school, again for applications and to look good. It wasn't with a lot of meaning to it. It was just to do it to get another check to fulfill my requirements for the National Junior Honors Society or the National Honors Society because we need to fill out a little resume for applications, which I learned is completely different to what we do here with the work I did with Alternative Breaks and the importance of service versus social justice of, one, we're going to actually implement change in policy versus I'm going to work in a food kitchen today. Both necessary, I'm not going to lie. Immediate need, long-term need. But I'm going to a service rant now.

I think in high school when I did the conference in 2015—my face immediately lights up right now because I feel so connected to it, and I'm back in that space again this year. That's what I've been doing this past week; I've been calling families to remind them. I'm hosting the parent orientation this weekend for parents and I'm back in that space. It's been a minute since I've been there. 2017 was my last year involved, so a big jump from then until now. In conference I was hearing stories of fellow participants because we get in *familias*, and each *familia* has a color. I was blue *familia* and that's where I met my dear friend Miguel who pointed out the Honors College to me because he called it out to me. Again, that was my exposure to the

Latino community, and I think from then on is when I really started speaking Spanish more in high school because I found myself going back to previous habits. Again, in the areas I grew up with, my parents were working all the time. We didn't have a church community. My dad's whole friends and life and youth was in Los Angeles, and he left that. My mom interacted with other moms, but hadn't developed a community there that we met regularly. For the most part, the neighborhoods I grew up with were not predominantly Latinx either. Doing that conference I was really exposed, finally again, reintroduced to the Latinx community because I didn't have that, and so that was super fun to be able to connect with that on that level. That's when I learned some of the lessons of *Hispanic* and the history of that term that came with the Reagan administration and, also, learning about the importance of having friends and family that you could count on, that you could share your story with.

We would have debriefings at night that are within our *familia*, my brothers and sisters would share very traumatic experiences that they had growing up and experiences that their families had gone through. It was incredible to see the connection we made with each other within just the week that we were together for. It really was illuminating. It was the first time that I brought up to others some of the experiences I was going through in high school, which I minimized. I immediately minimized because I had the topic "academic issues," and they're speaking of troubles keeping lights on at home or stories of sexual harassment or abuse that they'd experienced. I definitely felt like an imposter in those spaces at times, too, because of, again, the privileges that I had that didn't put me in the...I don't want to say typical, but rather, didn't allow me to relate with a predominant traumatic narratives that you hear within the Black and Brown communities, and so that was very illuminating. I'm still learning to manage that even as an adult helping organize this conference, I still sometimes feel like I can't resonate with

these stories, but I will definitely be there to support and listen and understand as best I can. That's what that space was like. I made a lot of really deep connections.

I stayed for the conference. I was a parent the next year. It wasn't that good of experience for my first year, I'm not going to lie, but that was just me learning. Then the second year I came back and had a great partner and we had a great group of kids. Now they have come back and they've been parents, and so I have grandkids in the conference. Yes, the family tree for LYLC is a little twisted. It's like "Game of Thrones" almost; it's just all over the place. That was a pivotal experience for me, absolutely. I still stay connected with two of my siblings, Cindy and Miguel. Miguel has been a rock in my life ever since 2015. Belinda, too, has become my best friend.

This, again, is something we heard a lot in oral histories, is the lifetime friendships that were made through that conference, how important that has been.

Yes. That's why we keep doing it. We all volunteer our time. We're not paid. It's been a different perspective in the adult setting versus when I was a facilitator as a high school student and college student, to see what goes on and what the nitty gritty looks like of last-minute organizing because that's legitimately what I'm doing right now.

Why did you get involved again this year?

I came back last year. I came back as the Parent Engagement Coordinator last year and COVID hit, so we couldn't do the conference anymore. To be quite frank, I was kind of relieved because they had done little to nothing within my role because of school and everything that I was involved with, and so I was pretty relieved that we didn't do it. I came back because I felt disconnected. I wanted to do something that goes back to my roots. I always align my roots with the conference because it was such an impactful experience for me, and I wanted to help make sure that other students could have that experience. I joined back in 2019. Also, coming back to

the conference through the oral histories I was hearing, too, was like, okay, I want to go back and come back in a different role for sure. I didn't want to be a parent again because I didn't have the time commitment for that with trainings every single weekend, which is what I did in 2016 and 2017. The retreats, we'd go camping, too.

I wanted to come back and I thought that Parent Engagement Coordinator was the right place for me. My mom working with CCSD FACES, it just made sense. I think my communication skills with English and Spanish were in the right spot for me to be able to serve in that role. I'm an advocator for resources. I want to make sure that it's as equitable as possible for students and support parents who support their children because I think families are needed for students' success. Just the way Vegas works with our hotel industry, it makes it difficult for families to be in that place for their students. That's my next step is trying to create... We have LYLA, which is Latino Youth Leadership Alumni, and I want to make LYLP, which is Latino Youth Leadership Parents, so they can have each other and support each other because I think community...has so much opportunity. I heard a quote from a speaker in class that was like, "We have self-help areas. But why does it have to be yourself when you can be in community and have help from other people? It doesn't have to be a lone wolf journey." I think that's something that I definitely have embodied and want this new step to take as well because I really think parents can help each other and be like, "Hey, did you do FAFSA? No. Okay, let's go do FAFSA. Is it only offered in English? Yes. All right, so what do we do? We can text Nathalie." Okay, that's fine. Just find that network, build a network for parents to help each other out to support their kids. That's what I want to do with that. Being back has been really nice in speaking with parents these past couple of days even if it's just to answer a couple of questions, like, are my kids going to be safe in the dorms? For most of them it's their first time leaving the

home, as it was for me when I did the conference. There was hesitance for my parents, too, which I tell them. I tell them, “It was the first time for me, too and I’m here to answer your questions.”

One of the things that I’ve been thinking about is you went to this conference in high school, right?

Yes.

What grade does it usually happen?

This is the way it goes. We accept students that are juniors or seniors in high school. We prefer seniors because it’s their last opportunity to do the conference, but in this case we’re being special because we did do a virtual conference last year, and we want to invite those that got to do it virtually last year. Even if they are graduated, we’re allowing it this year, but typically it’s juniors and seniors with maybe one or two sophomores, but that’s very rare.

Essentially at the end of your high school experience, you had this conference, right? And at the same time you were in the IB program at Valley. How did both of these experiences—and, really, more than anything, the Latino Youth Leadership Conference was really probably the newer experience that you had in terms of your academic career. How did that kind of color or influence how you went into college or how you started college?

That’s a really good question. I also should mention that—to touch on your previous question of predominantly white spaces—I was a swimmer, and I was a swimmer in Henderson, nonetheless, and that was in the older part of Henderson as well. That’s a predominantly White and Mormon area. That was another space where I was also with that dynamic of being the only one with a

Latinx last name in that space as well. Any who, that was another huge part of my life that I almost completely forgot about. Would you repeat the question? Sorry.

Yes. I do think that's important. I was actually thinking about that; you being a swimmer.

It's an extremely important space.

Yes, it is.

Who has access to a pool? No, it's true. I view that as some of those spaces that you inhabited the most. You had the Montessori school. Sure, you took a break from it in elementary school. But then you were in the magnet program, in the IB program. But then you had this Latino Youth Leadership Conference. How did that change, I guess, not necessarily how you performed in college, but the things you thought of in college, or how you thought of yourself, even, as a student?

I wanted to start anew with college. High school it was all about IB, getting the best grades. I was like, I'm going to take it easy in college; it's going to be fine. My first semester I got a C in Math 127. It still haunts me because I can still remember it, and I took that class with Miguel, too. He got me through. He's been there, amazingly. That first week of college we made a group chat with students from the conference, so that was the group I was with predominantly through my first semester of college. We had study groups. I realized that they all liked to talk a lot more. I was definitely more of the academic mind—I mean, I was in the Honors College, too—compared with my friends I had in the conference. For them the social part of college was a lot more important than it was to me, and that's not to discredit their academic abilities. They were able to study in louder spaces. Power to them. I could not. That was the dynamic I was growing into. “Oh, we're going to party.” They would go out to have house parties. My parents would not let me go, so I was still navigating that with my parents. “I'll be home by ten; by nine.” That was

still a dynamic I was dealing with as a single, only daughter with a very protective and loving father. That's the best way I can phrase that. It was definitely something they were learning along with me.

Going into college I was still involved. Through my senior year of high school, because I did the conference as a junior, and through my senior year I was training to be a facilitator. I was a facilitator with my first *familia* in 2016, and then through 2016 I was also training to be a facilitator for 2017. I stepped away because I studied abroad, and the next year I studied abroad again so I could come back again, and then I came back and the pandemic hit, and we're still here. It was still a major part of myself. My activities outside of college were predominantly involved with conference, trainings every weekend, hanging out with friends. I was also involved with the alumni. I was the Vice President of Service, so organizing service events for alumni of the conference for all years. I think my first year of college was definitely shaped by that.

I like to say that my first year of college was nonexistent because I wasn't involved on campus. I was not involved at all because all of my time was with them, with alumni or the conference itself. I didn't do anything on campus. I would literally come here to take classes and then find a corner in the third floor of the library and watch *Grey's Anatomy* and eating way too many bagels and going to the gym and pretending that—"Oh, I'll just move around a little bit, and then I'll eat a bagel; that's fine." I wasn't swimming anymore, and so that was something that I was still trying to understand. Oh wow, I have all this available to me and can buy food now. I don't have to bring a packed lunch and it's fine, so that was a whole experience. Again, we learn to balance and that was a journey in itself. I wanted my time here to be away from the studios in high school and I wanted to explore a different facet of myself. Now I've learned that I can be both. I don't need to be one or the other. It's really so much fun to surprise people every

time I do it. If you put me in one space, I'm very academic, analytical, theoretical. I can have great conversation. "Let's talk about capitalist structures and all these different influences in our system and in society." But if you crank on a cumbia, I will. . . it's off the wall, no bets. Credits to my mom for teaching me how to take a rhythm since I could barely walk. I really love surprising people in those spaces. They're like, "Wow, she actually moves." I'm like, "Yes, she can move her body and her brain." Wow, it's a thing that she can do. I think that's something that I've learned to embrace, is trying to—not trying, but know that it's possible to have those different identities and balancing in those different areas, so I think that's what I wanted college to be, and I've learned it doesn't really matter.

Where did you study abroad the first time?

France.

Why France?

Because I studied French since I was in middle school, and I thought, hey, I would really like to go to this place that I've been studying about forever. I really wanted to master the language. I haven't spoken it in a year, which makes me very, very sad. I really want to find a speaking partner that I could keep practicing with. It was such a meaningful part of my college experience, studying abroad that first time. I got really close with my host mom. Because, again, I think those reservations, I brought those with me when I studied abroad, so I stayed home a lot. I did not go out and explore. I took one solo trip. My dad just found out about that recently. During that time, I just didn't want to go out. I was scared. Again, my dad watching movies like *Taken*, and where does that take place? In France. That didn't help me at all. That was something that I told my parents, too, before I even went to college. "I'm studying abroad; that's happening." There was little to nothing that I know my parents could have done to argue the contrary. Little

did they know that I would do it twice—that is, little did I know that I would do it twice as well. It was super important for me because I really wanted to master the language and travel. I wanted to go to Europe. I also wanted to go there. I thought it was really fascinating to connect with someone in another language that wasn't my own.

When I was over there, my host mom and my host sister, “You're not like the other students we've hosted. You're not American.” I'm like, “I'm not. I'm Latina.” My passport says one thing, but you ask me and I'll tell you another. That was super interesting. They had not hosted a Latina student before. They had hosted...the previous year was an African American girl, and before then it was mostly U.S. girls, blonde U.S. girls. I was the first one that came with language skills; that had training; that had studied it before. Most of them had maybe one or two classes in college. I had been doing it since middle school, so I was able to manage the language a little bit better.

In high school I had one French teacher. She really challenged me, and I'm very grateful for that. If it wasn't for that class, I probably wouldn't have majored in French. But I really loved having the chance to communicate and express myself in another language. I think it's so fascinating how I can embody a whole other part of myself by speaking another language. I think it goes back to your question, how do I change when I speak English to Spanish? It's the same with French. I find myself trying to be more philosophical. Just the way the words come out, it just has that stereotypical nuance to it, and especially because one of the last classes I took was existentialism in French. Speaking on philosophical concepts in French was definitely enlightening. Raul took that class with me, and according to our professor we were the most existentialist in the class.

I just really... I don't know what it is about languages that just awes me. I think it's just because of the dynamics that come with it and the history that is reflected through it.

I think it's interesting how language has always been kind of this thing navigated on.

You've almost always understood the power that it kind of has both negative and positive, which you've talked about both in your interview. What are you planning to do next in terms of grad school? Are you trying to continue studying language? Is that something you want to essentially base your career on?

Yes. This is actually a great bookmark just to read this interview later on in life and be like, oh that didn't happen, or crap that did happen. My next steps are...I'm taking this gap year right now to focus on my grad school applications and take a break from academia because I think seventeen years of defining myself from that space has been a lot, so I'd like to make sure to explore the other facets of Nathalie as well. I'm going to grad school. I'm looking at linguistics, anthropology, and linguistic anthropology departments. My research interests are aligned with two different realms. I'm trying to see if it's possible. These are PhD programs. A dissertation on just one...I would hate to have to choose one. I think I eventually will. But right now I'm fascinated with endangered languages, I've always been captured by it since high school when I first learned about it. It had been a concept that had not even crossed my mind. I learned about it in high school and how English has become the world's language. I still have that article that my eleventh grade English teacher gave to me. It's still on my desk. I have it there with my annotations in three different colors because that was Nathalie doing the thing. Since then it's been a reoccurring theme of something that really captures my interest, the importance of capturing these languages and making sure they're still spoken. History is passed through in communities, as well as cultural values, because language is...it's overused, but language is

cultural. That's the generic phrase that you hear often: Language is culture. And it's true and that's why you hear it because it really is a manifestation of history, contact, individual experiences, and so I am a hard core believer that we need to not just preserve them and document them, but make sure that they're still revitalized, so spoken. I think of Indigenous groups and Indigenous languages that are at risk in Latin America. I think I'm always drawn to Latin America because of my own personal roots there. I don't know if I have Indigenous roots. I've never done Ancestry.com or anything. I just keep hearing stories of how the insurance companies buy that information, so I'm a bit reserved there. Whether I have actual ties or not, I think just the regional connection is enough for me. My goal, in my fascination of social movements and theory, is to explore language activism as a social movement, which has not been done before, and how it is that we can learn from social movements that have been successful in implementing policy change into language activism because it's just an underground thing that's rarely talked about, language activism. What is that?

What does that mean?

It's activism that's geared towards revitalizing languages, Indigenous languages. You have figures, such as Yásnaya Aguilar, who is Mixtec in Mexico, and her Twitter was actually taken over. She has a new account now. She was publishing in her own language. She was speaking in her language and ensuring that there were conversations discussing the problems of Spanish-only language pedagogy and all the systems in place that draw students away from speaking their languages, such as referring to them as the *dialectos*, which is "not a real language." She was calling all these things out. Those are examples of language activism and other programs that are making, for example, Firefox as software available in other Indigenous languages. Because there's just those little pockets, there is no collective movement or organizing that I've been

aware of or is talked about. Because social movements are so romanticized, I think that if we try to romanticize it and feed into the public, make it a marketable thing, then I think there is opportunity for there to be some change and success, and, again, playing into the system where we can, so we can make change for the future. I see a common theme in that regard. That's that. I don't say that in a mean way, but that's one part of where my interests lie, and then also with my own research with heritage speakers. Again, this vein that I see with those two fields is validating different linguistic experiences and making sure that that hierarchy of difference doesn't exist. For heritage speakers, sometimes in communities we're so corrected, and I grew up with that, too. "Oh, you conjugated this wrong." I don't have an example off the top of my head, but if I use the predicate instead of the imperfect, or I don't properly use the subjunctive, I get called out for it. Sometimes that can lead to students not even trying because they get corrected all the time, so they never get to embrace that other part of their identity if they want to in their language because they're being policed all the time. Obviously that's a lot of stress on students that they don't need to have, I think. They're just trying to communicate with their family members.

Those are the two different paths that I want to take with that research, policy, if I really want to make change especially with language activism. That would mean law school in the future for international law. Again, at the end of the day, when it comes to that field specifically, I definitely don't want to be—in my research, too—I don't want to speak for these communities, absolutely not. I want to be completely community based. I'm not here to tell you what you need to do for your community, absolutely not. I want you to tell me what you need and what you think, and I will tell you what it is that we've seen, and we can find a happy medium. I'm a collaborator at heart, always have been. That's the goal for that. I don't want to be taking space where I know those communities have not been given, so that's what I hope to do is definitely

amplify versus “silence and listen to me” kind of thing; be the, quote-unquote, expert when really it’s not my lived experience. That’s what I hope to do in that regard. It’s a big goal, but I think I’ve taken the steps to get there. My parents are always very “oh gosh.” They’re like, “Oh, what if you spoke for the UN?” I’m like, “No. They can have the mic. They have not been given the mic. I am not doing that, no. That would be a disservice to my philosophy.”

I just want to go to something completely different. One, I don’t think that the two things you’re interested in are unrelated, and the reason I don’t think that is because it’s Yásnaya Aguilar, right?

Yes.

She wrote this article about how in Mexico, because there’s so many Indigenous communities in Mexico and they’re extremely mixed now, obviously, like the majority of the population is like *mestizo*, or a lot of the population, anyway. She starts talking about the way that—essentially the way you’re kind of like considered Indigenous or if you’re a part of this community, it’s through language, like a lot of customs don’t survive a lot of things. I think the article that she wrote was talking about that; about how language is really the one thing that differentiates a lot of individuals, a lot of Indigenous communities from Mexican community at large or society at large. Just from personal anecdotes that I know, friends of mine, they talk about how their grandmother was Indigenous, but because of this whole concept of assimilation that kind of ends and they integrate fully into Mexican society.

Absolutely.

I was curious about what maybe you think about these spaces and how you would want to interact with these communities and these spaces.

And thank you for the question. That ties directly with the work that I'm doing right now as an intern for Cultural Survival. Cultural Survival is a nonprofit that works with Indigenous grassroots activism. I think I'm so drawn to activism because of my experience with Alternative Breaks here on campus being so involved with service and going to other communities that are making impactful change whether it's Border Angels in San Diego for immigration policy or...their org is slipping my mind, but they're in Los Angeles and working on mass incarceration policies. To go back to your question, I think another thing that I'm curious to investigate and I started, but didn't get IRB approval, so I can't exactly share those interviews yet, I started learning Zapotec over the pandemic, basically. This was with an organization in UC Santa Cruz.

Zapotec is?

It's an Indigenous language from Mexico. This is the variety from *La Xopa*. The way Indigenous languages work is—at least Zapotec; I'll only speak for Zapotec because that's as much as my knowledge extends to—is that each pueblo has their own specific dialect, similar to how we have in English. If you go to Boston that's very different from Philadelphia. If you go to Philly, they'll have terms that you don't hear in California at all and you need some translation. But the difference is very much between how we see that regionally; it's English and Spanish, completely different, almost, the system that they have in place, but it's all under the umbrella Zapotec. We were learning the variety from *La Xopa*.

I wanted to know what it was that led these students to want to learn their language. What is it that they wanted to connect with? What is it that they wanted to reconnect with? What drew them to learn the language? I did interview two individuals about that experience. It is tied to them as heritage speakers of these Indigenous languages of where their heritages are from. That's kind of tied with both worlds a little bit because with Cultural Survival again funding

projects that are spreading traditional knowledge systems. I wrote a piece on an organization in Chile that used the funding from the organization to start—and I saw pictures of how they were teaching the younger generations how to make essential oils from the trees and the forest that they live with. They showed the almonds and, I guess, the tools they were able to purchase. They were all doing them in a group and family. I think there's just something so beautiful in the values that you see in Indigenous communities that a lot...I won't say lost, but are not seen in our society, and so I think there's something beautiful there that I want to explore and celebrate. Again, there is this danger that comes with that, too, because it brings a dual pathway of cultures blending and globalization being a double-edged sword. I think that's where I see those two things connecting, if I answered your question.

Yes, you did. The last question I have for you is...It's to say you've explored multiple languages and apparently continue to add new languages to your exploration, but also different communities, different societies at large. Like you said, I think you've pointed out, as so have many of our narratives though not as explicitly, because your father is from El Salvador and your mother is Colombian, I think you probably know better than most people just how distinct each individual country in Latin America is, even culturally, right?

Yes.

Just by how much they may share with each other, also how little they really share with each other culturally. How has, one, having parents from distinct countries and being brought up in a predominantly Mexican Latino community, and then obviously expanding that as you aged, and then now engaging in Latin America through Indigenous communities, how has all of that shifted or shaped how you identify?

Wow.

That's a big question.

That is a big question. It's crazy because the more I learn, the more I question how to put a title to how I identify because the more I learn, of Latin America; that's adopting the fact that Spanish is the most predominant language and it derives from Latin, which comes from Europe, and that's not exactly who we are because we have Indigenous roots here that have been here for years prior, before we were colonized, and so is Latin America the right way we want to call ourselves? I'm not sure. I've used the term *Abiayala*, which is also referred to all the Americas in the Western Hemisphere, and that was a name given and used by Indigenous groups who have been here since...forever? I can't put a date on it. As we keep learning...Latinx is the perfect example. We weren't being inclusive with Latino and Latina, so then we changed to the "@" so they're both there, but that doesn't include non-binary, so Latinx. My identity is still changing, so, hi, I'm Nathalie. It might be my go-to. Right now it's still Latina. Again, not to say that that won't change, but it's the best option I've got right now to embrace those two sides of me of Colombia and El Salvador. It's very fascinating to be in those spaces. Every time I go to El Salvador, I'm the tallest one in my family. It's impossible to not see me in photos. It's just, well, there she is. It's very different to be in that space compared to the spaces of my family from Colombia, and it's just a more humble upbringing. Again, the bathroom there, we have one bathroom that has a plumbing system; the other is literally a hole in the ground in the back. For the shower, we use a hose. They're always in awe of the fact that I don't mind drinking water from the faucet. I don't get sick. Apparently others who come there have gotten sick from doing that. I've taken a shower with the hose. They tried to get me to use the other bathroom, but I use the other one. "It's fine. Please don't cater to me. I'm here to embrace. This is my family. I love you. There's nothing wrong with the way you live." They say, "*Es todo terreno*". It means she

can handle anything; she can do anything. I'm like, okay, I can't do everything; don't get me wrong. The mosquitos don't bite me there. It's very, very weird.

Then I go to Colombia and it's very different. They own a home that they rent out apartments. They own a whole apartment building that they rent out to. That's something that my grandfather built from the ground up when he came from *el Huila* to Bogotá. That's something that my uncles and my mom inherited. Now they own the building and they rent it out. Right now the situation is not that great with only having one or two tenants, but they have that. That's income that they have from something my grandfather worked hard for and now they have.

It's not the case for my family in El Salvador. They own the land they live on and they're happy and that's all that really matters. Going to those different spaces and, also, having those different perspectives has been very illuminating for me growing up, I think. In El Salvador, we don't use very many utensils either; we use the bread to grab our food. I say "our" because it's part of who I am, it's part of my people. I'm not embarrassed by that at all. I'll go here and that's how I eat a *pupusa*, with my hands, because that's just how we do it and that's how I learned. Sometimes I'll catch some levels of assimilation in my family, and I'll call them out on it. "Hey, why are we doing this?"

I think there is still a lot to learn. I'm a lifelong learner at heart, and I think that's why I still want to keep going to school, keep learning. I'll never know everything; I'm aware of that. It's just about interacting and conversing with as many people as I can and traveling. My next goal is to go to a country in Asia because I really want to know what it's like to be in a space where I don't know the language at all. Most people would be super scared, but that's what I want to experiment with because that's how it was with my parents when they came here to the States.

Well, don't you find that anywhere you go in the world that eventually you're going to find someone that speaks one of the languages you speak?

Yes, I know. That's why I need a little town somewhere that's very secluded.

It's sort of impossible these days to not find some common language that we can get by with for at least a moment.

I know.

Even if it's sign language. It can be that.

Yes, it's true. Nonverbal.

Yes, nonverbal.

That's the goal. Looking back it's just been a really...I can't believe it's been...I don't want to say a wild ride, but it kind of has, sort of. I don't know.

Follow up to what Rodrigo brings up and you addressed it indirectly. You brought it up with the Latinx; that term with this project. So often you became the spokesperson for that because you seem to—well, we did that one webinar that gave us the theory and background and history of it. You often were a student explaining that to whomever asked. Can you reflect on that for just a little bit about what you might have said in that explanation, and then what you really say today? Has that modified in any way?

I always go back to, and it still is the fallback and easy way to explain it in my mind, and it's the fact that it's all-inclusive. It includes people that identify as non-binary, who are intersex, and the like. Again, I'm not including everything because, again, I'm still learning about all the different ways people identify, but that's always the fallback for that. Going into how the history of the term evolved, *Hispanic* used and adopted by the Reagan administration to describe all Spanish-speaking communities, and it was a name that was imposed upon the community versus one that

was created by the community. The clap back at that was Latino—no, no, no. It was Chicano—no. That was before. There's so many.

Yes, that says it all.

I was shocked. *Chicano* came mostly from LA.

It's all up here. Hispanic, Latino, Latina, slash, o. How do you describe that anyway? Latino with the ampersand—how is that?

Yes, with the “at sign” A and the O inscribed

Not ampersand, but, yes, the “@” sign. Then Latinx is 2014.

I was actually speaking with a librarian about this, was that you will not hear that term south of Texas. Oh, that's a U.S. thing. There is a privilege that comes with that, and we talked about this, too, about how it's mostly used in academia. You don't hear it in the community, so why should we adopt it?

And now the media is using it. I hear White people saying that; trying to push back on it, saying that it's elitism for academics and White media to use it.

Interesting.

It has been interesting. I'm not even sure how to think about that, processing.

Yes. I think there's just a dynamic that comes with that; the fact that that's a debate in White spaces about how it should be used in those spaces without including the other party, or maybe it includes the other party, I'm not sure. It's just a dynamic. I think we'll never all agree on one term. I think it's to each their own and each person has their own story, if this project has shown anything, and my own experiences as well. Each person has their own story for why they experience the world the way they do. We'll catch one thing. What's very significant for one is just a scratch off the back for another in terms of what offends people and what doesn't offend

people. I think it's about being as humble as you can. Yes, I still get the question of like, "Hi. How are you? Where are you from?" "Oh, I'm from California. I'm Latina." Leaning in to essentially ask further to describe your ancestry briefly. Then I just say, "Yes. My mom is from Colombia and my dad's from El Salvador, and I identify as Latina right now." I don't usually say that right now, but I feel like after this conversation that will be what I have to say because it's true.

I think that I've learned from this project that the older narrators talk about, well, I used to identify this way and now I identify another way, but that's an interesting nuance to this project. I don't know. We identify different ways. Why do we have to have an identifier?

Yes, yes.

Why do we have to explain your ancestral roots?

I think it's because we seek to know what our histories are. I think with just how diverse we all look physically, we seek to understand why. Because we have those physical markers, we want to know the why as to why we are the way we are, and I think having a name to it allows us to explain it. I think that's just human nature to want to understand. Whether that is the same way across history, which it isn't, or not that's just a reflection of the times we're in and a reflection of, again, our personal histories and our society at large as well. Again, that's what I love about language, because it's a reflection as much as the way humans communicate, but also of our own personal histories. I'll use myself as an example. You put me in a space long enough with a bunch of *costarricenses* when I was in Costa Rica, I adopted the R. I'll catch that. I'm pretty sure if I go to Argentina for a while, I'll start <sh>, with the *shh, shh, shh*, all the time. There will be times when I'll use *hijole*. It's a reflection of my own personal past. I think with identifiers, as much as our language, because language is an identifier, that's something that will keep

changing because we keep having new experiences and growing. It's a bookmark in our book of life. I guess our identifiers could be the different chapters in the story of our lives in a way.

That's an interesting perspective. I like that.

I have nothing else for you. Is there any other story you want to add or anything you want on the record?

I can't think of any other major stories. We covered the main things. I think swimming was one thing that was such a big part of my identity, my athletic side. My identity as an athlete has definitely been a significant role for me from doing synchronized swimming to swimming and now just doing CrossFit Tough Mudder things. That's always an interesting conversation with my dad. It's like, "Wow, you voluntarily will crawl under mud and do these drastic things when those are things that I actually had to go through for boot camp and training and that was imposed upon me." It's like, "When you put it that way...it is true." It's the same thing when we have our conversations of, "You want to go camping? I thought we were moving away from that kind of lifestyle." It's always an interesting conversation in that regard.

I'm still learning and I think the pandemic allowed me to have a lot of reflection and come to terms with these different experiences I've had, too. I've been very reflective. Yes, I think it's accepting the past.

How did this pandemic affect you?

Oh, it was a hard time. I learned that there were some things in the past that I thought I had come to terms with that I had not come to terms with. I fill myself with activities and fulfilling the needs of other people—not needs, but the desires of other people, a people pleaser, has been a quality trait of mine for as long as I can remember. Probably not a quality, just a trait. That has definitely been a pivotal part of who I am. When I was not with people anymore, there was no

need for me to serve, so that was definitely a kind of existential moment for me because I would always orient the conversation away from myself. “How are you?” No. “I’m fine. How are you? Tell me.” I found out that I have a way of making people feel comfortable with sharing literally almost anything with me, and I’m very supportive. I’m always trying to be there for people all the time. I just never made that space for myself, and so maybe I’ve lost my purpose. What happens now? It was definitely a pivotal point for me to want to find out who it is that I am since I felt myself trying to define myself off of what other people wanted all the time; hence, the gap year, but that was the plan all along, to take a break from school. Yes, this pandemic really allowed me to reevaluate my values and what I wanted my life to look like. It showed me the importance of what community means to me, and it also really opened my eyes to all the things that I hadn’t noticed. There was a sense of guilt that came with that, too. It was like, wow, this was happening and I wasn’t aware of it because I was so concerned about getting an A and being on student government even though I didn’t like student government. It was like being in high school all over again. I’m not going to do that ever again. I say that now and then I’m talking about policy. Yes, I think it was definitely an eye-opening experience and it allowed me to connect with my mom a lot because it was just the two of us in the office all the time, working. It made me aware of who was really there friends-wise and who was only there because “Nathalie was having a party and Nathalie can throw a nice party every now and then” in comparison to who I could actually have a conversation with. That was definitely an eye-opening experience as well. It was definitely difficult, I’m not going to lie, but it allowed me to have the time, too. I say the time, and it’s relative because it was still a lot of work. But to be reflective and to see what was of value and service to me.

It’s a strange time just to be, just to be.

Yes, and trying to be comfortable with slowing it down. That's what I did this morning. I had other things on my agenda to do before today, but instead I sat down and ate breakfast with my dad and I didn't send another email, which will get sent later on, but it will get tended to. Taking it slow has been very hard for me. I'm so used to racing.

*I think it's appropriately been referred to as **The Great Pause at the early stage**, and even now a year and a half later I believe even more strongly that that's a really good term for this event and why we named our project **The Great Pause**, colon, with a full long title if we do one of these epidemic projects.*

I appreciate both of you, everyone that worked on the project. I want this on the record. You helped facilitate the bilingual part of it tremendously. It was in your wheelhouse, but it definitely was something I grew to depend upon and I appreciate it a lot, all of you. Great strengths individually and collectively. Talk about collaborator, this was the greatest example of collaboration between student workers and whatever I do, project manager, coordinator, whatever they want to call me. It's great. I'm glad you came in and did this interview.

Yes, thank you. I'm glad I found the Rebel News link that led me to find this project to begin with. I came here on a limb. I was really just tired of my lifeguarding job and I was like, okay, I'm done with this; I need to do this. This really was what opened the door for what became my college life. I became much more involved after because I'm like, I'm working here; I guess I've got to find my niche here, and that's what happened. Yes, I'm glad I found that link, came in here and met you and Claytee for that meeting. I'll never forget the question y'all asked me. "For Spanish, how would you choose which Spanish to use?" I was definitely not expecting that question. I remember I gave some kind of throw-off answer. "I would just choose settings and

words of whatever the speaker speaks; that's the Spanish I would use." Which is actually what I do now, so to my own credit I think I got it right.

That we knew to even ask that question.

Thank you.

Yes, thank you so much. **[End of recorded interview]**

APPENDIX



Nathalie (red dress) with Latinx Voices team at a community event in 2018. Also in the photo, l-r, Maribel Estrada Calderón, Nathalie, Elsa Lopez, and Laurents Bañuelos-Benitez.



In the Oral History Research Center.



Latinx Voices team receives recognition from Historic Preservation, City of Las Vegas in 2019. (L-R): Nathalie Martinez, Monserrath Hernández, Laurents, Barbara Tabach, Rodrigo Vazquez, Elsa Lopez, Maribel Estrada Calderón, Marcela Rodriguez-Campo.



Nathalie as a co-moderator interviewing Jose Melendrez for a project forum (2019) at Greenspun Hall.