

THE PUBLIC POCHX: RHETORICS OF AMERICAN-BORN LATINXS

by

Edward Santos Garza, B.A.

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Committee Members:

Octavio Pimentel, Chair

Nancy Effinger Wilson

Eric Wallace Leake

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DEDICATION

For my family and friends en cada lado.

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The pocho identity is the site where the relations between nation-states (Mexico and the United States) are negotiated, where their conflicts are reinscribed over disparate Mexican bodies, and where contrary interpretations of national identities vie for attention. (147)

—Angie Chabram-Dernersesian, “Whiteness in Chicano/a Discourses”

[Octavio Paz] was wrong in assuming that the Mexican American had lost all his heritage. But he was right in noting that the *pocho*, living between two cultures, existed in a state of permanent crisis; and that the *pocho*'s search for identity was a state shared by all Americans, and perhaps by all the world. (47)

—Américo Paredes, *Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border*

I. THE POCHX SPEAKS SU LENGUA

1. Introduction

As with most major writing projects I have undertaken, I am not sure when I started writing this. Yes, these are the first words of my thesis, but the “writing” surely began years ago.

It probably began on September 25, 2013. Watching Major League Baseball (MLB) highlights that night, I saw that Carlos Gómez, a twenty-seven-year-old, Dominican-born outfielder for the Milwaukee Brewers, had run into some trouble with the Atlanta Braves. Leading off a game on the road, Gómez smacked a pitch over the left-center-field bleachers. He remained at home plate for a moment, let his bat collapse dramatically to the dirt, and then trotted around the bases, showing some hop in his step. By the time Gómez reached first base, the Braves’ pitcher and first baseman, both white, were yelling at him, letting him know they thought he was showboating.

That part of the story was hardly special; shouting matches among MLB hitters and defenders are not unheard of, especially if a hitter moseys around the bases after a homer. The scene escalated, though, when the Braves’ catcher, Brian McCann, also white, blocked Gómez’s path by standing in front of home plate, yelling at him as he approached. Like boxers promoting a match, the players stood nose-to-nose, on the verge of punches. By this time, both teams’ benches began converging upon the two men. One of the first arrivals was the Braves’ Reed Johnson (again, white), who quickly punched Gómez in the face.

The fight was diffused, fortunately, when other players began separating the combatants. In the end, only Gómez and the Braves’ first baseman, Freddie Freeman,

were ejected. For Gómez and Johnson, the game was followed by one-game suspensions. As MLB.com writer Adam McCalvy puts it, the Brewer was suspended for “inciting” the incident. McCann, Freeman, and the Braves pitcher, Paul Maholm (once again, white), were not suspended or fined.

While many MLB fans and players would like to de-racialize what happened that night, the visuals are definitely unsettling: white players policing how a Latinx player should conduct himself on the baseball field, telling him where on that field he is and is not permitted. Of course, many fans, players, and sportswriters would have reason to argue that Gómez got what was coming to him, that he broke MLB’s unwritten rules of emotionality, that he failed to play the game “the right way.” To this claim I would ask, as my graduate education in Rhetoric and Composition has trained me to do, “Who has legislated these unwritten rules? Whose ideologies do they serve? Who gets to enforce the rules, and under what criteria?” The answer to none of these questions is “a twenty-seven-year-old man from the Dominican Republic.”

That night, I more fully realized that, despite its diversity, MLB privileges a white, European-American rhetoric. The league’s long-held values—working stoically, minimizing the individual in favor of the “team,” blindly respecting elders—evoke the United States’ Puritan roots. These values contrast sharply with the, if you will, baseball rhetorics of central America and the Caribbean, where championship games are played in an atmosphere akin to World Cup matches, with more expressive crowds and players. (Web streams of international winter-league games illustrate this difference.) In addition to guarding a false image of baseball, McCann & Co. were enforcing nationalism much

like an English-Only teacher, saying to Gómez in so many words, “When you play here, you do things our way. We do not bend to your traditions.”¹

This all happened a year before I started grad school. I have continued thinking about how Latinx rhetorics are bound up with Latinx identities; the two at once result from and produce each other. In 2013, the word “pochx” was barely in my active vocabulary, but I began reflecting on the vexed existences of Latinxs such as me, first-, second-, and third-generation Americans (of which I fall in the second category).²

Though, as an immigrant, Gómez is not a pochx himself, in what ways does his conflict echo those of pochxs around the country? Just as he was being demanded to rework his behavior, if not his identity, to “pass” in America, how are pochxs prescribed to do the same in other spaces?³

These questions have comprised my personal/academic investigation, and this thesis is its pinnacle so far. In its middle three chapters, I look at the intersections of pochx rhetoric—which for my purposes includes not only rhetorics produced by pochxs, but also rhetorics that surround and focus on them—and identity, seeing how the two relate in public spaces: (1) the comment threads of a popular newspaper column, (2) the

¹ Commenting on the incident a few years after the fact, current Braves pitcher Bud Norris turned the racist undertones into overtones:

This is America’s game. This is America’s pastime, and over the last 10–15 years we’ve seen a very big world influence in this game, which we as a union and as players appreciate. We’re opening this game to everyone that can play. However, if you’re going to come into *our* country and make *our* American dollars, you need to respect a game that has been here for over a hundred years, and I think sometimes that can be misconstrued. There are some players that have antics, that have done things over the years that *we* don’t necessarily agree with. (Ortiz, my emphases)

² Note here and throughout this thesis that I do not write Spanish words in italics, a choice meant to convey their non-foreign relationship to my English.

³ As luck has it, last year Gómez was traded from the Brewers to my hometown team, the Houston Astros, for whom he is currently a starting outfielder.

fields of Little League Baseball, and (3) national political conventions, respectively. These chapters make cases that “pochx studies” are increasingly relevant to those in writing studies, as well as American cultural studies in general.

As to how exactly pochx studies are relevant to these fields, I address that later in this chapter and in the early parts of the following ones. But here is the short version: Pochxs (i.e., pochx men, women, and transsexuals) are occupying and will continue to occupy a larger role in “mainstream” America, be it in politics, television, film, music, literature, or the university. Given this trend, it is paramount that pochxs are understood better not only by themselves, but also by their educators and those who interact with pochx cultures via art. If this awareness takes place, pochxs might live in an America that truly embraces their complexity, not one that tries to “fix,” purify, or simplify it. In this America, their civic and artistic productions might not be seen as partially American or partially Mexican, but rather one-hundred-percent something else entirely. Modestly, eclectically, this thesis seeks to contribute to this rich, growing stream of pochx research.

2. Theoretical Foundation/Framework: Critical Race Theory

This project’s chief framework is Critical Race Theory (CRT). While another framework, LatCrit, certainly applies here as well, I prefer the broadness of CRT as a means of understanding identity. Just as importantly, I trust in and embrace, as this very chapter illustrates, CRT’s celebration of narrative as a way of foregrounding “the voice, experience, and realities that inform the consciousnesses of people of Color” (Willis, Montavon, et al. 36). The narrative creation of knowledge plays a prominent role in multiple chapters here.

Moreover, I draw heavily upon one of CRT's core assumptions, that race is never *not* in the picture. This assumption holds that movements to de-racialize people, spaces, and discourses, to essentialize them in the name of color-blindness, propagates racism as much as anything else. "To go beyond race," CRT scholar Eduardo Bonilla-Silva says in a 2014 interview with C-SPAN's BookTV, "we have to go *through* race" (my emphasis). Consequently, in line with what Daniel G. Solórzano and Tara J. Yosso assert in "Critical Race Methodology: Counterstorytelling as an Analytic Framework for Education Research," this project, like CRT texts in general,

1. foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process;
2. challenges the traditional research paradigm, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of people of Color;
3. offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination;
4. focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of Color;
5. uses the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, humanities, and the law to better understand the experiences of students of Color. (24)

These five functions capture the diverse tools of CRT, and each informs my chapters. This thesis's knowledges, methods, and sites of analysis are eclectic above all else, not divergent. Their unity results from their shared purpose of understanding race more critically, in this case with respect to American-born Latinxs.

3. Methodology

As for my methodology, Chapters 2 and 4 are especially unified in that they both rely on rhetorical analysis informed by the coding of specific words, phrases, or motifs. Regarding that last bit, for example, in “Constructing Identidad in Latinx Politics: Julián Castro and Ted Cruz in 2012” (Chapter 4), I analyze Castro and Cruz’s identities in part by counting how many times they use “ethnic” self-identifiers such as “Latinx,” “Hispanic,” and Spanish words during speeches. Likewise, in “Prejudice Dos Punto Cero: Analyzing Racism in the Comment Threads of Gustavo Arellano’s *¡Ask a Mexican!*” (Chapter 2), I categorize select comments from website users according to the characteristics of Bonilla-Silva’s “frames” of racism, ending up with four texts I proceed to analyze rhetorically.

Regarding the close readings themselves, I conduct them by undertaking critical discourse analyses. I take as doctrine what Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) scholars Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak have asserted on this topic, that “any language text, written or spoken, is simultaneously constituting representations, relations, and identities” (275). Along these lines, I focus less on explicating rhetorical devices and more on the assumptions—racial, social, philosophical, etc.—that underlie the speaker or writer’s rhetorical choices. In the cases of Castro and Cruz, I perform this by also analyzing their shared motif of the immigrant narrative, noting how they present their families’ histories through distinct rhetorical lenses.

Conversely, “Chin Music: Latinx Youth and the Rhetoric of Little League Baseball in Texas” (Chapter 3) is more field-based than the other two chapters and, as such, demands a different discussion here. It employs a qualitative method of research, the interview. While this method limits the chapter’s sources of data, it allows for greater

detail and nuance. As John W. Creswell observes in the fourth edition of *Research Design*, qualitative methods lend themselves to exploration and understanding, as opposed to tidy problem-solving (4). With its embrace of subjectivity, the interview form serves an essential role in capturing a participant's memories.

4. Review of the Literature

4.1 A Caveat

When it comes to structure, this text is informed by scholarly collections I have read over the past few years. From race studies, for example, a key one would be *From Uncle Tom's Cabin to The Help: Critical Perspectives on White-Authored Narratives of Black Lives*, edited by Claire Oberon Garcia, Vershawn Ashanti Young, and Charise Pimentel. About half of the collection focuses on Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*, and the rest tackles a variety of texts, including *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the film *Django Unchained*, and the motion-picture adaptation of Michael Lewis's book *The Blind Side*, the chapter on which features an interview with Michael Oher, the National Football League player at the center of the narrative.

The beauty of collections such as *From Uncle Tom's Cabin to The Help* is that despite—or because of—their varied sites of analysis, they offer cohesive lenses with which to read other, similar texts (e.g., white-authored narratives of black lives). With my own varied sites of analysis, I aim for a similar effect here, drawing upon my ethos as a young Latinx scholar and the lenses I have acquired from academics whose work applies to poctx studies. This aim is in addition to the new knowledge I want to create with respect to poctxs on the Internet, baseball, and national politics. So, in a sense I am

writing a much shorter, pochx-centric, single-author version of *From Uncle Tom's Cabin to The Help*.

For the purposes of a literature review, though, this structure complicates things. Given their different emphases, my middle three chapters each demand their own, narrower literature reviews, three sets of texts that would be cumbersome to survey here. (By the same token, a few sources recur.) Moreover, as a young field within Latinx studies, pochx studies lacks a large body of literature. Therefore, in lieu of an expansive list of sources, I survey at length a few texts that demand currency in pochx studies, texts that both inform my lens and offer pre-existing knowledge to build upon.

4.2 Reclaiming Poch@ Pop: Examining the Rhetoric of Cultural Deficiency by Cruz Medina

While no one has said so to my face, I am a pochx. I am a second-generation Mexican American, meaning I will never be Mexican in the same way as Cantinflas nor American in the same way as Taylor Swift. I am literate in Spanish, but I feel uneasy calling myself “fluent.” I can pronounce Spanish words “properly,” but my accent has an inescapable American-ness. My Pandora app includes Romeo Santos, Drake, and the Deftones, a trio that, as much as anything else in this thesis, reveals my pochx-ness. Oh, and I teach first-year writing at a public university in a state that used to be part of Mexico.

So, in some ways I am an ideal reviewer for *Reclaiming Poch@ Pop: Examining the Rhetoric of Cultural Deficiency*, the debut book of Cruz Medina. What has it meant to be a pochx—historically a reference to a Latinx cultural traitor, a “coconut,” but increasingly a term of cultural complexity, of eclecticism—and how has the twenty-first

century changed the pochx's situation? How and to what extent might "pochx" be reclaimed, even celebrated, by those it refers to? What in pochx history would be worth celebrating most, and why? These questions guide Medina in this forward-thinking text. Analyzing pochxismo in film, music, and literature, he, more than maybe any scholar thus far, devises fresh ways of understanding pochx rhetoric(s). For an American academy seeing larger numbers of Latinx students, many of whom fit Medina's idea of a pochx, this text's project is much-needed, one that should serve rhetoricians and compositionists alike.

When it comes to the "pop" part of *Reclaiming Poch@ Pop*, Medina touches on several sites of analysis, including the films *La Bamba* and *Selena*. Both feature Latinx, English-speaking protagonists who at times "play up" their Latinx-ness by performing in Spanish. Medina analyzes an early scene in *La Bamba*, for example, wherein Richie Valens confronts the Spanish litmus test:

I return to the career-altering moment when Valens met his [white] manager... "My name is Bob Keene. I'm president of Del-Fi Records. ¿Podemos hablar?" Valens responds, "I don't speak Spanish." For Anglo viewers, this response by Valens on one level challenged the assumption that "all Hispanics *eh-spic* Spanish." For poch@s who grew up in the U.S. speaking primarily English and experiencing rejection for not speaking Spanish, this admission by Valens symbolized a positive representation of a poch@ with Mexican heritage, who does not speak Spanish. In a single utterance, Valdez's cinematic construction of Valens confronts the

implication that non-Spanish speaking poch@s have turned their backs on their culture. (35)

There is no doubt that Valens's lack of Spanish cast him as culturally deficient among Latinxs in his time, even among white Americans, but this scene suggests that Valens's success grew in part *because* of his pochxness, not in spite of it. His liminality, as Medina might agree with me, afforded him a larger audience than he would've had otherwise.

Likewise, Medina sees in *Selena*, both the film and the woman herself, another quintessentially pochx story. Born and raised in Texas, the English-speaking singer is best remembered for her Spanish-language hits. As Medina details, her journey to success typifies the pochx's overarching dilemma, distilled by Edward James Olmos in the film: "*We got to be more Mexican than the Mexicans and more American than the Americans*" (39, emphasis Medina's). Instead of measuring Selena's Mexican-ness and American-ness on opposing scales, Medina instead celebrates her as a figure who reflects the complexity of our times, a forerunner to today's pochx estrellas.

While, from a narrative standpoint, the stories of Richie Valens and Selena are ultimately dramas, Medina argues that the pochx's liminality also affords a profound comedic freedom. If the pochx is part Mexican and part American, then he or she can take jabs at both groups. Medina's poster-child for this freedom is Al Madrigal, a stand-up comic who recently made waves as the first Latinx correspondent on Comedy Central's *The Daily Show*. Medina views him as a sharp departure from the cultural flamboyance of stand-ups such as George López and Carlos Mencia. Rather than envisioning himself as an "ethnic" comedian, Madrigal embraces his liminality, his dual Otherness.

Of course, Medina has other concerns, too. There is his skill at using traditional rhetorical analysis and thinkers (Kenneth Burke and the concept of *kairos* both make appearances) to better understand nontraditional sites of analysis. One might consider, as well, Medina's use of details from his own pochs life, similar to what Morris Young does in *Minor Re/Visions: Asian American Literacy Narratives as a Rhetoric of Citizenship*.

But Medina's main achievement here, as Juan Velasco notes in his back-cover blurb, is helping take "Latino/a studies to the twenty-first century." Pochxs are becoming more visible in mainstream American pop culture, not to mention on college campuses, and the immigration of millions of Latinxs over the past few decades is contributing to this rich phenomenon. In this brave new pochs world, texts such as Medina's should prove useful not for only those in the business of studying culture, but also for those who will teach this rising generation in schools.

4.3 Code-Meshing as World English: Pedagogy, Policy, Performance, *edited by Vershawn Ashanti Young and Aja Y. Martinez*

In 2011, when I was an undergrad at the University of Houston taking a class on Mexican-American literature, "code-switching" still seemed to be the academic term of choice to describe a writer's mixing of English and Spanish, at least in literary circles. That spring semester I was assigned to read, among other works from the code-switching canon, Sandra Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek* and Helena Maria Viramontes's *The Moths and Other Stories*, each featuring protagonists like myself: young, American-born Latinxs tilting between two languages, and even more dialects. The value of "code-switching" as a term seemed appropriate, even ironclad. When I interned at Arte Público Press a year later, it remained the go-to word for the bilingual manuscripts we received.

But as I developed a keener eye for code-switching in both others' writing and my own, the term showed some limitations. Consider, for example, these lyrics from Prince Royce's 2010 bachata remix of Ben E. King's "Stand by Me":

When the night has come,
And the land is dark,
y la luna
Es la luz
Que brilla ante mi
Miedo no,
No tendré.
Oh I won't,
Te asustaré.
Just as long as you stand,
Stand by me.
And darling, darling stand,
By me.
Oh, stand by me.
Oh, stand,
Junto a mi, junto a mi. (delineation mine)

Does "code-switching" capture what is going on here? Is either English or Spanish really flipped "off" at any point? Indeed, the two languages are working in concert, as they do when many bilingual Latinxs speak and write. "Code-switching" is far too neat a term to

describe this passage. Royce is braiding his languages, his dialects; the listener cannot tell what tongue is coming next.

My professors, peers, and I were hardly the first or only Latinxs to yearn for a better term for what bilingual folks, including those who use different dialects of the same language, do with words. This pursuit is at the core of *Code-Meshing as World English: Pedagogy, Policy, Performance*, edited by Vershawn Ashanti Young and Aja Y. Martinez. The collection admirably champions the use and teaching of code-meshing among compositionists and their students. Its authors accomplish this not only through case studies and qualitative analyses, but also through personal narratives and, at least in one case, Anzaldúa-esque pastiches. The result is a big step forward for translingual pedagogies, at once a culmination of and divergence from the code-switching studies that precede it.

For a collection that seeks to cement “code-meshing” as an indispensable term in these conversations, one of its first orders of business is to distinguish it from similar terms. For starters, what exactly is the relationship between code-meshing and code-switching? As David A. Jolliffe, Donnelley Hayde, and Jeannie Walker put it in “A Tale of Two Regions: Politics and Language in Belize and the Arkansas Delta,”

If we are to hold up code-meshing as an equitable, effective approach to language education, we must understand that the meshing of two codes often makes them inextricable; even at the sentence level, elements that seem linguistically different constitute the voice of a single speaker.

Moreover, code-switching is something that nearly everyone does.

Whether we change the level of formality we use to accommodate our

audience's expectations or we actually move between languages, the concept of switching one's voice from one sound to another is part of performing a range of tasks involving a range of participants. (68)

While it is tempting to argue that “code-meshing” should simply replace “code-switching,” Jolliffe, Hayde, and Waller take a more nuanced approach, iterating that both have a place in the translingual, transcultural person’s toolset. Impressively, they do not view code-switching as some halfhearted or half-formed version of code-meshing, but rather as a legitimate part of translingual speech. (Though, as some of *Code-Meshing’s* authors might agree with me, code-switching is more likely to reveal prejudices on the part of a speaker’s society, if not also him- or herself, since “appropriateness” in different settings is at times fraught with prejudice.)

Of course, some readers of the collection, writing instructors perhaps, might be wary of going “overboard” with code-meshing. They might point begrudgingly to the dominance of Standard American English (SAE), to the professional necessity of mastering such a tongue. After all, not all departments on campus are as progressive—as empathetic—as Young, Martinez, & Co., and they are still the ones who grade students’ writing after first-year composition. And how about the corporate world, where SAE still holds sway?

These are legitimate, if lamentable, concerns, and the collections’ authors do their best to balance the ideals of code-meshing pedagogies with the realities of institutions. As Asao Inoue notes,

First, agents in control of education and the assessment of learning need to adopt different listening practices [toward their students]....And, second,

educators should expect and accept code-meshing language practices that bend the rules but do not get folks kicked out of the game....Academics should “lead by example,” [Richard Westbury Nettell] says, particularly those of us with “sufficient cultural capital to minimize the risk.” (97)

Inoue suggests that, even within the rigid structures of institutions, there is room for at least some form of code-meshing, even if it is between the “languages” students use at home and at school.

As a Latinx who teaches first-year composition at a thirty-eight-thousand-student university, I am heartened by these prescriptions and *Code-Meshing* as a whole. Since reading it, I have considered ways in which I myself might “lead by example.” A useful method has been teaching texts—texts I actually enjoy as a transcultural person—that convey poignant, rigorous ideas via “languages” my students are already familiar with, showing them that their tongues hold as much eloquence as any academic’s. One site of analysis, for example, has been a famous Tumblr post by the rapper Frank Ocean, a “coming-out” piece that exemplifies the concepts Joseph Williams prescribes in *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, such as getting to the “main verb” quickly (145–7) and controlling “sprawl” (151–7). Ocean displays these concepts, though, while staying true to his own vocabulary, to the codes of his communities. My students had never been more eager to discuss style in writing.

Such classroom moments are exactly what collections such as *Code-Meshing as World English* should foster. Its authors aim, sometimes through theory, sometimes through practice, to affirm code-meshing as a living, breathing tool, not just another buzzword.

4.4 Racism without Racists: Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States by *Eduardo Bonilla-Silva*

I mention above how a few scholarly texts recur over the middle three chapters of this thesis. The most relevant and ubiquitous is Bonilla-Silva's *Racism without Racists*. Like other sociological texts about contemporary race issues, such as 2008's *Generations of Exclusion* by Edward E. Telles and Vilma Ortiz, *Racism without Racists* addresses the covert forms racism has taken in the twenty-first century. (In fact, Aja Y. Martinez draws upon it heavily in her 2009 *College English* article "'The American Way': Resisting the Empire of Force and Color-Blind Racism," which I in turn draw upon in Chapters 2 and 4.) As the author puts it himself in the aforementioned interview with Book TV,

[Contemporary] racism goes beyond the traditional views of those who believe that racism is just about the Klan and the neo-Nazis...[W]e need to understand that we all participate in racism one way or another, and that there is what I call a new, dominant form of prejudice out there, color-blind racism, in which people don't use the idea and tropes of the past, but new ideas, new language, [and] new jargon to defend the contemporary racial order.

Racism without Racists is vital to this project because, as dissimilar as my sites of analysis are, they each call for a nuanced, modern understanding of racism, even—especially—racism circulated within the same race, an issue that arises in my second and fourth chapters.

5. Overview of Thesis

Chapter Two: “Prejudice Dos Punto Cero: Analyzing Racism in the Comment Threads of Gustavo Arellano’s ¡Ask a Mexican!”

In Chapter 2, “Prejudice Dos Punto Cero,” I use Bonilla-Silva’s frames to read and categorize the online comments of a newspaper column. That column is Gustavo Arellano’s *¡Ask a Mexican!*, which began in the *OC Weekly* and has since been syndicated in other periodicals around the country, resulting in a readership numbering in the millions (“Biography”). Looking through the column’s archives, I rhetorically analyze comments that exemplify Bonilla-Silva’s frames, showing how they translate to an online forum, a space not highlighted in *Racism without Racists*. I take the chapter a step further by developing an action plan drawing upon research from technical communication, offering concrete ways that both media professionals and their readers can control hateful discourse online. I finish by making concrete recommendations as to how one can elevate the discourse on his or her local *¡Ask a Mexican!* syndicate.

Chapter Three: “Chin Music: Latinx Youth and the Rhetoric of Little League Baseball in Texas”

In this chapter I consider as a rhetoric the style with which someone plays baseball. In 2013, Carlos Gómez certainly exhibited a different playing style than his Major-League-Baseball peers; to what extent, though, does the same hold true for young pochs ballplayers in Texas? In what ways might they inherit and exhibit different baseball mannerisms, different rhetorics, than their white teammates, and what, if any, consequences might result from these mannerisms? Keeping my scope narrow, I investigate these questions via the oral history offered by my father, one of the few Mexican-American players on his Little League team during the 1950s in Texas City,

Texas, about forty miles south of Houston. I analyze not only his negotiation of different cultures vis-à-vis baseball, but also how this negotiation mirrors the language-related obstacles pochs students encounter in composition classes.

Chapter Four: “Constructing Identidad in Latinx Political Rhetorics: Julián Castro and Ted Cruz in 2012”

In Chapter 4 I study the rhetorically constructed identities of two pochs emerging on the national political scene: Julián Castro and Ted Cruz. The former is Mexican-American while the latter is Cuban-American, but each got his political start in Texas and has become a key Latinx voice in his party, with Cruz vying aggressively for the 2016 Republican candidate for president. (Similarly, Castro is a not-so-dark horse for the Dems’ vice-presidential candidacy.) I take as sites of analysis their speeches at their parties’ respective national conventions in 2012, moments in which they transitioned from Texas-focused politicians to ones with national ambitions. I am interested in how their political transitions are reflected in the rhetorics they use to identify themselves, how their rhetorics shift to appeal to a larger, mostly non-Latinx audience, often at the expense of what makes them unique. Both men draw upon not only immigrant narratives, as mentioned above, but also English-Spanish code-switching. Each handles these resources in a way that reveals his, and his party’s, preferences when it comes to racialization and identity-building.

After this segment of the chapter, I further develop my understanding by drawing upon reactions from social media. I look at several texts, mostly tweets about the speeches, from both Latinx and non-Latinx analysts, gauging how “authentic” the

politicians' Latinx-ness comes off in their speeches. I use these sources to affirm my own analysis, shore it up.

5.4 *"A Más Pochx Writing Classroom, a Más Pochx Academy"*

Lastly, I discuss the implications my findings have for pochx studies with respect to composition studies. (The implications for other fields are discussed within the relevant chapters themselves.) While, as in the Castro-Cruz chapter, some of my findings might seem unrelated to pedagogy, I argue that all of them can be translated to actual assignments, an example of which I offer. Of equal importance is my discussion of how the middle three chapters might inform the ethos of a compositionist teaching pochx texts, especially if that compositionist has Latinx students and/or is a Latinx him- or herself. I use these applications to unite my chapters under practical conclusions.

II. PREJUDICE DOS PUNTO CERO: ANALYZING RACISM IN THE COMMENT THREADS OF GUSTAVO ARELLANO'S *¡ASK A MEXICAN!*

1. Introduction

In this essay I analyze the online comment threads of the newspaper column *¡Ask a Mexican!* I apply a racialized theoretical framework to them, helping me identify four “frames” of racism throughout the comments. I later make brief suggestions about what actions one can take to curtail racist discourses. In short, I argue not only for a fresh, specific way of reading/understanding the comments on *¡Ask a Mexican!*, but also that such an online text merits this kind of scholarly attention, both theoretically and practically.

2. *¡Ask a Mexican!*: What Is It?

I first became familiar with *¡Ask a Mexican!* in 2007. I was an avid reader of one of my hometown’s alternative newspapers, the *Houston Press*. The column was published every week, complete with its comically stereotypical logo. I enjoyed Arellano’s wide knowledge and satirical humor, but, until the column was made an online-only feature, I was never sure whether many people read it. Impressively, there was an uproar over the column’s permanent removal from the print edition of the *Press*, culminating in a popular local radio host’s proclamation that the measure was a way of moving Latinx writers to “the back of the bus” (Connelly). While the uproar failed to reverse the *Press*’s decision, it made it clear that *¡Ask a Mexican!* had attained some notoriety, and not just with Latinxs. This event informs my conviction that the column has been culturally impactful, thus meriting this kind of study.

Originally published in 2004 in the *OC Weekly*, *¡Ask a Mexican!* is a weekly column authored by Gustavo Arellano, a Mexican-American journalist based in California. Published in over two million copies across thirty-nine newspapers (“Biography”), the column features Arellano’s responses to readers’ questions about Mexican-American cultures and Latinx cultures in general. As one would surmise, the questions are submitted by readers of all backgrounds and range from the genuinely curious to the explicitly racist. Like other Q&A columnists, Arellano entertains a variety of questions, combating the prejudiced ones with a sharp wit and a wealth of knowledge. (Selections from the column, in fact, have been compiled into a book by the same name.)

Indeed, Arellano’s personal and professional backgrounds enhance the ethos of *¡Ask a Mexican!* Aside from being a California-born Chicax himself, Arellano is versed in the past and present issues of Latinxs, having earned a master’s degree in Latin American Studies from the University of California, Los Angeles. He is unafraid to take tangents into alternative histories of the Americas, especially the United States, along the way lamenting that such histories are considered “alternative.” (Fittingly, Arellano moonlights as a lecturer in Chicano and Chicana Studies at California State University, Fullerton (Cruz).)

Aside from these credentials, though, what most distinguishes *¡Ask a Mexican!*—i.e., what likely best explains its popular success—is Arellano’s writing style, one characterized by multiple languages and tones. He not only draws upon Spanish(es) in his responses, but he also blends the conventions of academic writing with more colloquial elements, creating an engaging pastiche. Consider this exchange from the column’s 30 April 2015 edition, which I quote in its entirety for full effect:

DEAR MEXICAN: Why do Mexicans make up such glaringly obvious lies? Such as this *galán* who had his sister call me and said it was really him, with a cold. Or my friend who pretends to be traveling around the world, but is really sending emails from his mother's home computer. Or the random person on the street who tells you he knows how to give you directions, and then just makes them up. Do they have something against reality, or do they really believe themselves on some level?

Clara la Dudosa

DEAR CLARA THE DOUBTER: “There is nothing new about Mexico’s tradition of lying, of course,” wrote Andres Oppenheimer in his 1998 book, *Bordering on Chaos: Guerrillas, Stockbrokers, Politicians and Mexico’s Road to Prosperity* [269]. “Since as far as historians could remember, double talk and deceit had been part of Mexico’s culture” [269]. This line has been used by Know-Nothings ever since as proof that Mexicans are never to be trusted—never mind that Oppenheimer is an elitist Argentine *carajo*. Mexicans lie for the same reason anyone says *mentiras*: to protect oneself, to try to gain an advantage over someone else, and to ultimately come out on top. And if you think that’s somehow a uniquely Mexican characteristic, then you must also believe President Barack Obama when he says the gov’ment ain’t spying on you, or that he has the best interests of Mexicans in mind while deporting us in record numbers. (Arellano)

Arellano shows each of his writerly strengths here. He starts a bit academically, critiquing a flawed text. Stylistically, he also sprinkles in some colloquial words—e.g., “Know-Nothings” and “guv’ment”—as a way of keeping his prose conversational. (There is even a strategic use of “us” toward the end.) Lastly and most powerfully, though, Arellano draws upon informal Spanish words such as “carajo” and “mentiras” to advance his argument, the former to draw distinctions among Latinx cultures and the latter to illustrate his knowledge of Chicanx cultures. Together, these blended discourses make for a hybrid prose that is as unique as it is entertaining, separating Arellano from his peers.

3. Review of the Literature

Perhaps due to the ongoing nature of *¡Ask a Mexican!*, almost no scholarly attention has been paid to it. Rhetoric and Composition could benefit from studying *¡Ask a Mexican!* because it concerns itself with language, resisting binaries and hierarchies. Moreover, Arellano exhibits the consciousness of Critical Race Theory, wherein race is foregrounded “in all aspects of the research process” and the focus is on “the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of [people] of Color” (Willis et al. 57). Indeed, such a framework characterizes the essence of *¡Ask a Mexican!*

In lieu of a literature on this column, then, I look to composition pedagogy and sociology for ways of reading *¡Ask a Mexican!* The latter text is Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. In it Bonilla-Silva devises four “frames” that often underpin racist discourses. As summarized by Aja J. Martinez in “‘The American Way’: Resisting the Empire of Force and Color-Blind Racism,” they are,

—**Abstract liberalism**, which “involves the use of ideas associated with political liberalism such as choice and individualism” (588). It sees [policies such as affirmative action] as opposed to the principle of equal opportunity” (588).

—**Naturalization of racism**, which “allows dominant culture to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting that they are natural occurrences....[I]t is ‘just the way things are’” (588).

—“**Cultural racism**, [which]...relies on culturally based arguments such as ‘Mexicans do not value education’ or ‘Blacks are violent people’ to explain the standing of people of color in society. These [cultural] views...are just as effective in defending the racial status quo” (588).

—**Minimization of racism**, which “suggests that discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting marginalized people’s life chances (e.g., ‘It’s better now than in the past’ or ‘There is discrimination, but there are still plenty of jobs out there’)” (588).

Concise yet wide-ranging, these frames permeate the comment threads of *Ask a Mexican!*, offering a tool with which to organize and think about many commenters’ racist remarks. (I should emphasize that, thankfully, these frames apply only to *some* commenters’ remarks; racist discourses do not overwhelm the *OC Weekly*’s comment threads, at least with respect to Arellano’s column.) Moreover, the remarks are prevalent enough so as not to be the exclusive territory of non-Latinx commenters. Indeed, these frames are often deployed by commenters who identify as Latinxs, a pertinent phenomenon here as well.

Looking to composition pedagogy, I definitely find value in Martinez’s ““The American Way.”” Fittingly, Martinez applies Bonilla-Silva’s frames to the “race literacies” of first-generation Latinx college students in her composition class at the University of Arizona (589). (Martinez collected this qualitative data while she was a PhD candidate at UA. She is now Assistant Professor at the State University of New York–Binghamton.) She finds that, instead of showing a heightened sensitivity to the academic and professional obstacles faced by Latinxs, her Latinx students subscribe, if only at times, to the very frames of racism against which Bonilla-Silva warns. Consider, for example, an excerpt from this student’s narrative, which illustrates the concept of cultural racism:

In most Mexican families, not all but most, education really does not play as big a factor as say working. Especially the families who come to the country to make money and live the way they want. They could care less about the education their children receive as long as they are bringing home the money. On the other hand white families strive on their kids being successful in school. (qtd. in Martinez 590)

Indeed, Student 1 makes some hasty generalizations about multiple groups of people. Not only is he or she inaccurate in these generalizations—it has been found, for example, that Latinxs are actually *more* likely to believe that college is important for “getting ahead in life,” making this an issue of access rather than desire (Pew Hispanic Center)—but he or she also mistakes a lack of opportunity for a lack of ambition. Student 1 fails to consider that Latinxs might have a work-first reputation since, due to America’s lopsided education system, immediate work indeed seems like many Latinxs’ best option after

graduating from high school.

Like Martinez, I apply Bonilla-Silva's frames in order to develop my analysis, discussing examples of each one. I then move beyond this mere categorization and into a plan of action, action meant to curb the threads' racist discourses and, thus, elevate the rhetorics of the column overall.

To formulate the action itself, I appeal to "Community Guides: Disrupting Oppression in Comment Threads on Social Sites," an article that straddles Rhetoric and Composition and technical communication. In it Stephanie Vie, Deb Balzhiser, and Devon Fitzgerald Ralston do a critical discourse analysis of online comments (e.g., comments from YouTube and *Jezebel*, a popular feminist blog) regarding "fat shaming" online. Imagining ways of addressing the uncivil discourses surrounding this phenomenon, they espouse the values of community guides for sites, who can control and minimize offensive comments:

Together and within an understanding of identity as socially and discursively constructed, 'community guides' are those elements (largely textual, but oftentimes multimodal) that influence norms in a specific online environment...[C]ommunity guides for this analysis include technologies—the social sites we examine, with their interfaces, features, and structures; documentation—especially terms of service and community guidelines; and users. (6)

While Vie, Balzhiser, and Ralston direct their attention to "fat shaming," their methods of analysis and endorsement of community guides are applicable to my analysis of racism. By providing concrete tools—both a set of community guides and the act of comment-

moderation—with which I can address the comment threads’ frames of racism, they shed light on how a critical consciousness on this issue can be put to practice, producing more vivid results.

4. Analysis

4.1 Abstract liberalism

With Latinxs playing greater roles in higher education as students, instructors, and administrators, one need not look far for abstract liberalism in the threads of *¡Ask a Mexican!* Consider this December 2014 response to the edition entitled “How Can Professors Deal With Anti-Mexican Students?”: “How do [college] admins deal with [defiant Latinx students]? They give them their own student groups like MECHA [*Movimiento Estudiantil Chican@ de Aztlán*, Chican@ Student Movement of Aztlán]” (downtownbrown). As Bonilla-Silva attests, such comments typify abstract liberalism. Before even setting finger to keypad, the writer seems convinced that Latinxs enjoy an unfair advantage when it comes to institutional attention, here embodied in MECHA. He or she does not account for the possibility that Latinx college students *need* such an organization, since otherwise they would be hard-pressed to find their identities and struggles expressed in other campus groups. This is because, as those on college campuses know, non-ethnic groups are usually color-blind groups, a trait that almost always privileges white culture(s).

4.2 Naturalization of Racism

Looking for an example of the naturalization of racism, there is Arellano’s 11 September 2014 edition, “Do Illegal Immigrants Harm Chicanos the Most?” (Almost all editions of *¡Ask a Mexican!* are titled in the form of a question.) “How does the Mexican

immigrant assimilate,” writes a user named Rodz, “aside from learning English? Just about everything in this country is ethnic, so what is assimilation? Mexicans are Westerners, they have the same ideology as you and me.” This example may not fit as cleanly as the previous one, but it nonetheless exemplifies the core prejudice of racial naturalization. It takes as fact that assimilation is simply “part” of living in America, “just the way things are” (Martinez 588). The commenter resists the idea that a multilingual America is just as “American” as an English-only one. Moreover, he or she lumps Latinxs into the nebulous category of “Westerners,” an essentializing gesture—does the word “Westerners” conjure images of brown people?—that characterizes various types of racism. Indeed, essentialization, the aren’t-we-all-just-Americans argument, inevitably favors the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant swaths of America, not its brown, mestizo, Catholic ones.

4.3 Cultural Racism

As with abstract liberalism, examples of cultural racism in *¡Ask a Mexican!* often take place amid conversations about education, especially regarding matters of autonomy. “It’s the Mexicans keeping themselves dumb,” writes one user (gregbpc). “Americans bend over backwards (at their own peril) funding education, after school programs, etc. Many mexicans [sic] don’t value education.” As with Student 1 from Martinez’s study, this commenter assumes that Latinxs already possess access to America’s gamut of academic and professional opportunities; they only need to work harder. Moreover, it also makes a generalization that is at best unprovable and at worst inaccurate: that Latinxs lack the drive to succeed. (See Pew Hispanic Center citation above for an actual

refutation.) Consequently, it falls just as flat as Student 1's response, revealing only its author's assumptions about (in)equality in America.

4.4 Minimization of Racism

The last example is perhaps the subtlest of the four, since it takes a self-deprecating stance: "We [middle-class Latinxs] aint [sic] as 'oppressed' up here and take our somewhat honorary whiteness too seriously" (urbanleftbehind). Light-hearted as it is, this comment still harbors some troubling assumptions. First, it implies that enough professional or financial success simply relieves one of having to deal with racism, when what often happens is that the racism becomes more covert. Moreover, it also draws a correlation between these types of success and "whiteness," showing an inability to see how "success"—i.e., the materialistic, individualistic, American idea of it—might be synthesized with Latinx-ness. Perhaps most troublingly, though, the commenter seems to accept a racist hierarchy of "success," with whiteness at the top, an "honorary" status for which all non-whites naturally strive (in the commenter's mind, anyway). These assumptions illustrate how racism exists at all levels of society, shifting in its levels of nuance.

5. Conclusion

Having identified four frames of racism in these texts, what might a reader actually do to curb their frequency? For perhaps the greatest effect, one can volunteer for a syndicate of *¡Ask a Mexican!* to become a writer of community guidelines, setting or revising specific standards and parameters for comments. If brought aboard, one might even advance the argument that every commenter must digitally agree to the community guidelines before registering on the site. This measure would establish accountability, as

well as provide grounds for possibly banning someone from the threads, assuming they consistently violate the guidelines after warnings. While community guidelines should not infringe on commenters' freedom of speech, they should help turn the threads into more civil conversations.

In lieu of volunteering to create or rewrite community guidelines *carte blanche*, one can instead volunteer to moderate the comments of his or her *¡Ask a Mexican!* syndicate. Doing so would require a more sustained span of work, but comment-moderation can definitely produce considerable results. As Vie, Balzhiser, and Ralston describe in the case of Kinja, an online news aggregator, “[t]he technology [of the community guide for *Jezebel*] will be redesigned so that moderators—some staff and some user representatives—will approve content. These actual controls (versus symbolic or naturalized) will mitigate incivility” (33). Perhaps the core assumption of this technique—i.e., that some users will always find ways to “break” the community guides—lends it a greater usefulness than creating or rewriting community guides under some platonic ideal. For those at the helm of different online communities, the work of comment-moderation seems to be worth it.

At the same time, we have Bonilla-Silva's frames to be especially thankful for, since they offer a critical method of understanding not only the comment threads of *¡Ask a Mexican!*, but also the column itself. They form the foundation atop which an action plan may be built, helping one identify and combat prejudice of various degrees. The frames make one a more knowledgeable, responsible reader of discourses surrounding race, one who always thinks through his or her assumptions—in other words, the type of audience member that socially conscious columns deserve.

Speaking of audience, my conclusions should lastly shine a light on *¡Ask a Mexican!*'s relationship to its readers. The column serves, I would argue, as an interlocutor between a white audience and a Latinx one, albeit with more accommodations made for the former. (Consider how, though Arellano uses plenty of español in his prose, he favors Spanish-English cognates and commonplace nouns such as “hombre,” “chica,” and “problema.” His code-meshing is meant to be decipherable by a non-Spanish-speaking audience.) While it could be claimed that Arellano's writing privileges a white reader, it does so only to create a discourse of understanding between two cultures, an admirable project for any text read by millions of people per week. If anything, the columnist's skill at speaking to two cultures gives Latinx readers (myself included) a view into what white America wonders about them, fostering some trans-cultural awareness. Such a two-way street is a hallmark of good rhetoric, and pochx texts such as Arellano's must continue to command scholarly attention.

III. CHIN MUSIC: LATINX YOUTH AND THE RHETORIC OF LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL IN TEXAS⁴

1. Introduction

Praised as America's pastime, baseball has often embodied and disseminated values such as citizenship, even-mindedness, and an understated work ethic—so-called American values. Baseball in America privileges a stoic, almost Puritanical temperament, a notion some writers have discussed (Lopate, Rios). The game merits scholarly attention for numerous reasons, but its illustration of national values is one of the most pertinent.

If baseball indeed illustrates such principles, though, what are its effects on those who play it as first- or second-generation Americans—pochxs—especially children? Among Latinxs in particular, in what ways might baseball function as an enculturating, even colonizing force, suppressing their more familiar styles of play, and, thus, elements of their identities? Research has been done on the experiences of foreign-born Latinxs in Major League Baseball (MLB) (Arangue, Jr.; Hayhurst; Weick and Witte), but little emphasis has been placed on the experiences of U.S.-born Latinxs playing at the amateur level, let alone in Little League. Such an emphasis would help scholars, not to mention the parents of young peloteros, further understand baseball's cultural implications, ones that affect players of all backgrounds.⁵ Equally important, such an emphasis might lead to an understanding of how young Latinxs can enjoy the sport while successfully negotiating its cultural prescriptions.

⁴ "Chin music" is a baseball idiom referring to a pitch thrown intentionally near a hitter's face. Its intention is not to injure the batter, but rather to persuade him or her stand farther away from the plate, giving him or her less contact coverage.

⁵ "Pelotero" is a colloquial Spanish word for a baseball player. It is derived from "pelota," "ball."

This chapter explores the experiences of a second-generation Mexican American who played Little League baseball in Texas City, Texas, during the 1950s and early 1960s. It considers the subject's memories of being a Latinx on predominantly white teams managed by white coaches—in a largely white town during the Eisenhower era, no less. Moreover, it analyzes the participant's reflections about succeeding as a member of his team(s). Finally, this study compares the enculturating effects of American baseball with writing principles promoted in college composition courses. In this vein, it suggests that, for multicultural students, college composition can be navigated with a mindset similar to this study's participant's.

2. Research Method, Process, and Discourse Framework

Due to its experiential focus, this study employs a qualitative method of research: the interview. While this method limits this study's sources of data, it allows for greater detail and nuance. As John W. Creswell notes in the fourth edition of *Research Design*, qualitative methods are conducive to exploration and understanding, as opposed to tidy problem-solving (Creswell 4). With its favoring of the personal, the interview form serves an essential role in capturing the subject's memories.

The actual process of the interview, which certainly shapes the data, should also be noted. After agreeing to be interviewed, the participant, James Garza, received three open-ended questions through text message. This process allowed Mr. Garza to reflect on the questions and take a few days to compose thoughtful, thorough responses. As for the questions themselves, they read:

1. How, if at all, did you or your Latinx teammates' style(s) of play differ from that/those of your white counterparts?

2. Separate from fundamentals, were you or your Latinx teammates ever reprimanded for playing baseball a certain way? If so, which examples come to mind?

3. According to your white coaches, what did it mean to play baseball the “right” way? How were you satisfied or dissatisfied with this concept?⁶

After typewriting his responses on printing paper, Mr. Garza texted photos of them to me, and then I transcribed them. Though this process was unorthodox, it fit Mr. Garza’s technological preferences, leading presumably to more data than would have otherwise been collected, not to mention better data overall.

Such a process shapes the data in a couple of ways, each positive. First, by appealing to the participant’s preferred response method, it leads to a freer flow of thought, since the subject writes from a space of comfort. Second, it gives the subject freedom to explore the questions as if they were themes for elaboration, not strict prompts (which they may have seemed to be in the context of a phone call, for example). Indeed, Mr. Garza takes the “questions” as points of departure, delivering his unexpected yet illuminating anecdotes. For the purposes of this qualitative study, such anecdotes, as tangential as they seem, greatly enrich the data.

Before proceeding to the data itself, it is also important to mention the theoretical perspective with which it will be analyzed. Since this study is primarily interested in the experiences of Latinx youth, a marginalized population in American Little League, it will deploy a racialized lens. Such a lens is defined here as it is in Creswell’s *Research Design*; the lens will “raise important questions about the control and production of

⁶ From Little League to MLB, playing the game the “right” way is a common idiom. It usually denotes playing with “hustle,” modesty, and stoicism.

knowledge, particularly about people and communities of color” (65). This lens will help the reader further understand the issues and dynamics Mr. Garza details.

3. Data

To the first question, Mr. Garza responds:

Baseball is baseball is baseball; this is not always the case. For a young Latino player such as me, baseball was a diversion from daily chores. It was a respite, a reward for a job well done around my home of four siblings. First, I would mow the yard with a true push mower, one without a Toro three-horsepower motor. Second, if the mowing was too laborious because the grass was too high, I would grab the sickle and swing away to lower the grass’s height to a manageable level. Finally, I would ask Dad or Mom if there were any other tasks. Then and only then would I go “play” baseball. Once on the field, I actually would volunteer to play the outfield. I would appreciate, if not marvel, at a well manicured lawn. I didn’t know that the outfield at the Little League level was relegated to the less-than-mediocre players. It wasn’t long before my particular talents were recognized and I was assigned an infield position, usually shortstop or third base. I was told by my All-Star coach that I was one of the few players who could throw the ball to first base in the air. I’m sure that particular skill was achieved by the repetitive nature of swinging the sickle.

Regarding styles of play (Question #2), Mr. Garza writes:

I remember one particular game. While playing third base, I was tracking down a short pop fly. I positioned myself on the foul line between home plate and third base. As the ball quietly landed in my outstretched glove, I was literally run over by the runner heading home from second base. As I recovered from being bowled over, I saw the opposing baserunner lying on the ground with some silly smile as he looked at me. I instantly determined that what he did was both intentional and “in the spirit of the game.” Without hesitation, I officially said it was “pure reflex” and tagged him out. I was ejected from the game because I “tagged” him with all my might in his face. Looking back, I now know that my nature is to play fair unless you, the opponent, draw first blood. That same competitive nature has served me well throughout my life.

Mr. Garza’s response to the third question, concerning playing baseball the “right” way, falls into two parts. The first involves a general principle he adopted from his coaches:

I did not have a Latino coach throughout my baseball career. The most satisfying concept I personally derived was to never give up. I learned—and it is now engrained in my psyche—to be a grinder. I can be relentless in any activity, either professional or personal, to the point of achieving and accomplishing my goal.

The second part focuses on how he adapted his Little League experiences into his personality, decades later, as a youth baseball coach:

After a loss, I would gather the team for a critique. I let them know how disappointed I was in their effort. I pointed out mental mistakes and, especially, their lack of effort. As parents always do, some gathered within earshot. One mom in particular opted to minimize my talk by offering her bit of it's-okay parental wisdom. She said, "Don't be so hard on the boys. It's okay—we still have a good record." Without pausing, I looked directly at her and said, "Ma'am, I'm an attorney. If you were my client and I lost your case, what would you think if I just said, 'It's okay—I still have a good record.'" Silence! The moral? If you the play the game, play to win.

4. Analysis

Overall, Mr. Garza's responses contrast insightfully with the expectations of this study. For example, whereas I expected an account of how he and his Latinx peers were reprimanded for playing baseball differently, Mr. Garza opens by boldly declaring, "Baseball is baseball is baseball." The sentence suggests that the sport is ultimately impervious to major cultural influence. Refreshingly, it divorces baseball from cultural baggage, placing it in a vacuum where even its white creators cannot rhetoricize it. Such a notion—depoliticizing baseball—might seem idealistic, but understanding it might offer as good a way as any for Latinxs to demarginalize themselves as players.

Of course, Mr. Garza follows this sentence by writing, "This is not always the case." Though it seems contradictory, this second claim serves to describe baseball's status as a reward in Mr. Garza's youth, not a mere recreational activity, as it probably was for many of his peers. Note, for instance, how Mr. Garza soon follows this assertion

with an in-depth description of mowing his family's lawn, a requisite chore before playing. Note also how this activity shaped his appreciation for the game itself, leading him to "marvel" at a manicured outfield. This relationship gave the sport a distinct context for Mr. Garza. In other words, "This is not always the case" seems to refer not to the style(s) of the game itself, but rather to its role(s) in the lives of its players, an interesting wrinkle.

Moreover, it is difficult to interpret racism from Mr. Garza's anecdotes. His placement in the outfield, for example, could have simply resulted from his skill-set. In our preliminary discussions, Mr. Garza describes himself as a speedy, compact player, a description suggesting a prototype centerfielder (Garza). Moreover, even if his coaches discriminated against him initially, they eventually moved him to the key positions of shortstop and third base.⁷ This detail in particular suggests that Mr. Garza found acceptance, even prominence, on his team.⁸

Similarly, baseball conventions could explain Mr. Garza's collision on the base paths. While the baserunner (whose race is not identified) surely displayed some malice, he acted well within his bounds as a player, since the base paths are the territory of runners, not third basemen. In this vein, Mr. Garza admits that the runner acted "in the spirit of the game." What ultimately makes the incident rich, though, is Mr. Garza's reaction. By "tagging" the runner in the face, he demonstrated his fortitude as both a

⁷ Shortstop is an especially important position, since it receives a high percentage of balls hit in play. Some writers have argued that shortstop is the most important position for building a successful team, pointing to recent MLB stars such as Derek Jeter and Alex Rodriguez (Rymer).

⁸ It should be noted, if only in passing, that Mr. Garza is a light-skinned Latinx. While this trait likely spared him some discrimination, he still had to negotiate English, which he did not begin speaking until kindergarten (Garza).

player and a Latinx, squelching the chance of such an event occurring again. Most insightfully of all, the incident portrays a Latinx using a precept of American baseball, being a “grinder,” for his own purposes, asserting his legitimacy in a game that might have otherwise marginalized him.

What emerges from the interview, then, is a Latinx whose brashness and assuredness fended off sources of potential discrimination, each related to the rhetoric(s) of baseball. The young Mr. Garza earned the best of both worlds; he cultivated the conventions of American baseball while maintaining the tenacity he brought to the game. Such a feat suggests that, as enculturating as America’s pastime can be, its prescriptions can serve as additions, not substitutions, to a player’s identity. Put another way, Mr. Garza’s responses suggest that, rhetorically, American baseball is not a zero-sum game.

What could this analysis suggest for marginalized students in college composition? To start, one might draw a parallel between the nature of American Little League baseball and that of the rhetoric taught in lower-division English courses. Both are infused with American ideas of order, method, and explicitness. (Consider the dogmatism that governs the ordering of both a batting lineup and a five-paragraph essay.) By these ideas, each is capable of colonizing the identities of marginalized individuals.

With such issues at hand, the value of this analysis lies in its suggestion that, with a mindset similar to this study’s participant, marginalized students can successfully negotiate the politics of American composition. Grounded, critical, indomitable, Mr. Garza internalized the gestures of American baseball without conceding his qualities as a Latinx player. In a classroom, such a synthesis might be observed in a second-generation American who uses Westernized essay structures while maintaining his or her subversive,

racialized writing style. Such a moment would show a student blending their course material with their needs as a marginalized individual. Indeed, with open-mindedness from faculty and administrators, such moments could add yet more valuable change to composition, helping to countenance the growing diversity of America's colleges and universities.

IV. CONSTRUCTING IDENTIDAD IN LATINX POLITICAL RHETORICS: JULIÁN CASTRO AND TED CRUZ IN 2012

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In 2006, the office of Texas's comptroller found that "Hispanics" accounted for 35.7 percent of the state's population, more than twenty percent above the national average at the time (*Texas in Focus* 6). Moreover, the office calculated that Texan Latinxs' numbers would continue to grow in both the immediate and intermediate futures, surpassing those of white Texans by 2020 (*Texas in Focus* 9). With similar if less dramatic trends occurring across the country, Texas's changing identity is anticipating that of the U.S. at large (Brown and Lopez). In other words, at least in one sense, America is becoming more Texan.

For these reasons, to understand the current political landscape of Texas is to understand a dimension of the U.S. political landscape overall. This assertion rings especially true when considering the rhetorics of Latinx politicians in or from the Lone Star State, politicians who must navigate multiple audiences. This bipartisan group can reveal much about how to succeed politically within a multicultural environment. Moreover, the group's rhetorical decisions, especially in speeches, show how poctx identities interact with political interests.

1.2 Scope, Argument, and Methodology

In this chapter I focus on two Latinx politicians, each with national notoriety: Julián Castro and Ted Cruz. Both are in their early forties and both have been cast as the futures of their parties. Castro, the Democratic Secretary of Housing and Urban

Development, has been described as the “next great hope” of the American left (Lizza), and Cruz, a Texas senator currently running for president, has delivered speeches earning him monikers such as the “Republican Barack Obama” (Murphy). Both men seem primed to assume even bigger leadership roles.

That said, Castro and Cruz illustrate two similar yet divergent ways of succeeding nationally as a Latinx politician. While both deploy immigrant narratives, Spanish, and other appeals to affect their audiences, Castro appears to embrace a hybrid notion of self, one in which his family’s immigrant history permeates his present identity, whereas Cruz prefers an essentialist view of Latinx identity, focusing on the overlap between his father’s immigrant values and those ascribed to the United States, such as individualism and “grit.” His (Cruz’s) simplifications suggest a Republican party that is culturally rigid, forcing its Latinx members, even those as powerful as Cruz, to change *for* it, not vice-versa.

I focus my critical discourse analysis on Castro’s 2012 Democratic National Convention speech (that year’s keynote address) and Cruz’s 2012 Republican National Convention speech. These texts serve as foils to one another. They were delivered around the same historical moment and for similar purposes: to boost party morale and raise awareness of a fresh voice within their contingents. Each marked a new high-point for its speaker, a kind of national coming-out event.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 Rhetoric Studies

Due to the developing natures of these politicians’ careers, there is a dearth of academic work on them, let alone research in rhetoric. The best approximation comes

from work on presidential rhetorics vis-à-vis immigrant experiences. In this area one would have to consider 2006's *Who Belongs in America?: Presidents, Rhetoric, and Immigration*, edited by Vanessa B. Beasley. This collection broadly investigates how "the immigrant of yesterday [can] be lionized as the very foundation of the [United States'] character, while the immigrant of today is often demonized as a threat to the nation's safety and stability" (3). Impressively, it looks at rhetorics that have surrounded various immigrant groups—Latinxs, Italians, and the Chinese, among others—as well as rhetorics in the age of the Founding Fathers.

While the lionization of past immigrants certainly plays a role here, the scope of *Who Belongs in America?* serves only as a touchstone for this paper, not a precedent. Some of its inclusions, such as Anne T. Demo's "The Class Politics of Cultural Pluralism: Presidential Campaigns and the Latino Vote," address rhetorical relationships similar to those here (Vemo 247-71). However, due to the volume's focus on presidents, it concerns only scenarios in which a non-Latinx speaker addresses a multicultural audience, not those in which a Latinx politician speaks. Moreover, it focuses on the rhetorical machinations of these scenarios, not on how they relate to identity, let alone Latinx identities.

2.2 *Composition Studies*

Thus, I turn to composition studies and texts within this field that have produced insights into what it means to be a Latinx in America, rhetorically and otherwise. They include in their discussions such complex topics as code-switching—switching between Spanish and English—and the myth of color-blindness.

One notable text is Michelle Hall Kells's "Understanding the Rhetorical Value of *Tejano* Codeswitching." In it Kells advances a useful notion of codeswitching, asserting that

[C]odeswitching is a poignant metaphor, a fluid emblem representing the languages, literacies, and localities [of Latinxs]. Codeswitching reminds us that there are no 'pure' codes. Language is always a *mezcla*, a feast of shared and borrowed ingredients....Equally significant, codeswitching reflects the inevitable *fronteras*, margins of locality—the implicit borders inherent to membership in multiple discourse communities. (36)

Kells's nuanced understanding provides a brilliant framework, one I use to analyze code-switching's role(s) in my sites of analysis. Her embrace of complexity makes my comparisons richer and easier to track.

A similarly helpful text is Aja Martinez's "'The American Way': Resisting the Empire of Force and Color-Blind Racism." In it Martinez analyzes the "race literacy" narratives of her composition undergrads at the University of Arizona, including first-generation college students from Latinx families (589).⁹ Tracing the intersections of writing and color-blindness, she explores how the latter serves "a dominant ideology"—an assimilation into "mainstream" academic culture—that seeks to oppress [first-generation Latinx college students]" (587). In short, Martinez elucidates how color-blind ideologies are actually white-privileging ideologies, since they assume a "white" voice as

⁹ This study is set at the University of Arizona largely because at the time (2009) Martinez was completing her doctoral studies there. (She is now an assistant professor at Binghamton University, State University of New York.) Given UA's considerable Latinx presence, it is indeed an inviting site for this kind of data collection.

their default discourse. Using this premise as a guide, I analyze the speeches' loyalties in discourses—i.e. voices—reading them as “race literacy” narratives themselves.

2.3 Mass Communication

Since I draw upon tweets to supplement my critical discourse analysis, it is instructive to briefly discuss work from mass communication that touches on the relationship between social media and societal structures. As the authors of “Social Media Analytics” (SMA) concede, using social media to understand information systems, for example, entails “a number of research challenges,” including the hazards of generalizing from limited samples (91). Above all else, though, social media vis-à-vis politics are powerful tools of participation and collaboration for “political actors,” a term that for my purposes includes not only politicians, but also those who have the power to vote (Stieglitz, Brockmann, and Xuan). I align with some mass communication scholars in my assumption that social media do more than just show how people are influenced by political rhetorics; they in turn can help scholars parse what elements of those rhetorics “have legs,” what elements of them seem “authentic” to their targeted audiences. In this way, social media can indeed determine which political rhetorics are successful, “legitimate.”

2.4 Other Literature

Finally, writers outside the academy have also touched on political rhetoric's relationship with Latinx identidad. One relevant text would be Richard Rodriguez's “The Invention of Hispanics and the Reinvention of America,” delivered as part of 2003's Bradley Lectures series. Its main application here is its analysis of “Hispanic” as a

demographic term. As Rodriguez points out, the word was not coined by “Hispanics” themselves, but rather by demographers during the presidency of Richard Nixon:

[I]t was in 1972, in a document called Statistical Directive 15, that Richard Nixon invented Hispanics. Richard Nixon in that same year also invented Asians. And Pacific Islanders. And he described America as no longer a dialectic, but rather a pentagon, something closer to a circle, as Columbus imagined. (Rodriguez)¹⁰

Rodriguez’s mention of Columbus is particularly instructive. Indeed, “Hispanic,” in its evocation of Hispaniola and, thus, Spain, privileges the European, lighter-skinned dimension of Latinx identity. In doing so, it willfully ignores Latinxs’ Mesoamerican heritage, essential to a proper understanding of *identidad*. (In his third book, *Brown: The Last Discovery of America*, Rodriguez actually refers to Nixon as “the dark father of Hispanicity” (xii).)

This premise underpins my interest in how Castro and Cruz name themselves in speech. Tabulating quantitative data, I examine if they refer to themselves as Latinxs, Hispanics, or some other term entirely, interpreting what these markers say about their identities and parties. Here I look as much for terms that are *not* used as for those that are. My analysis affirms the premise that such choices do not merely explain identity, but rather form identity itself.

Finally, one might look at related writings from newspapers, political magazines, and websites, if only to contextualize Castro and Cruz within public discourses. Cruz, for

¹⁰ One assumes that the pentagon Rodriguez imagines here would have as its five points “White,” “Black,” “Hispanic,” “Asians/Pacific Islanders,” and “Native Americans,” with “White” at the topmost point.

example, has attracted interest for his brash speaking style, which has been described as “tough talk” (Barrett and Walsh). Some have explored the “hell-bent” tone of his speeches, while others have connected Cruz’s rhetorical success to his status as a Republican “messiah” (Nelson, Bradbury).¹¹ Such descriptions, though, usually offer only a surface-level understanding of the senator’s rhetoric, overlooking its motifs, assumptions, and racial contexts.

Castro has received a similar treatment. As with Cruz, most articles about him have focused on the topics of his rhetoric, not its means. In “Julián Castro’s Impossible Task,” for example, Ryan Lizza of the *New Yorker* argues that the Latino’s keynote speech at the 2012 DNC is “a fairly forgettable one” (Lizza). He concedes that the former mayor’s anecdote about his grandmother creates a “poignant” moment, but then claims that many will fail to remember it in coming years (Lizza). Lizza’s vague analysis typifies such writings on Castro. One must ask, for instance, what rhetorically makes the moment “poignant,” how precisely, perhaps syntactically, the speech is “forgettable.”

3. Analysis

3.1 Immigrant Narratives

The men’s speeches support multiple focuses of analysis. They both feature immigrant narratives, a mix of English and Spanish, as well as revealing identifiers such as “Hispanic.” Moreover, their similar occasions allow their content to be foregrounded. In this section I analyze each of these angles, drawing interpretations to support my arguments about Castro, Cruz, and their parties.

¹¹ When understanding Cruz’s impassioned rhetoric, it is worth noting that his father, Rafael Cruz, is a pastor (Dias). While this detail lies outside this study’s scope, it is enriching nonetheless.

Cruz establishes his heritage early and effectively, delivering his father's immigrant narrative in the first third of his speech. In what seems to be a conventional gesture, he emphasizes his father's rugged individualism, connecting him to American values:

It's the story of my Dad, who was imprisoned and tortured in Cuba, beaten nearly to death. He fled to Texas in 1957, not speaking English, with one hundred dollars sewn into his underwear. He washed dishes making fifty cents an hour to pay his way through the University of Texas, and to start a small business in the oil and gas industry. My father is here tonight.

When he came to America, él no tenía nada, pero tenía corazón. He had nothing, but he had heart. A heart for freedom. Thank you, Dad.

As modern and truthful as Cruz's codeswitching seems, it fails to counterbalance what is subtly excluded from this passage. The first exclusion would be a sense of a Cuban home. Based on Cruz's telling, one must wonder to what extent his father felt conflicted leaving his relatives and friends in Cuba, however troubled the country was at the time. The insinuation is that his father's "heart for freedom," a freedom as ideological as it is literal, predisposed him to be an American; he was simply too American to live anywhere beside the U.S. His—and thus his son's—Cuban heritage is only a preface to the "narrative" itself. How fitting, then, that this passage is delivered only in the past tense. With this sleight of hand, Cruz betrays (a probably correct) assumption that his audience is more interested in what made his father similar to Americans of his time, not different. It is a sleight of hand that only promotes U.S. essentialism, a color-blind idea that, as Martinez might agree, mutes and marginalizes ethnic identities.

The other notable exclusion is the name of Cruz's father: Rafael. It is the name that Cruz himself inherited, though he is not known by it. Though the speech's narrative is coherent, one must wonder why, if Cruz is so intent on honoring his father, he would neglect to call him by his actual name at any point in the speech. It is abundantly clear that Cruz withholds both his and his father's first name as a way of cloaking his Latinx-ness. Even in gesturing to him, he calls him "Dad," a distinctly American term of affection. Cruz seems to assume that his audience is more receptive to hearing about "Ted" and his "Dad" than about Rafael and his papá Rafael, Jr., an assumption painting a rigid image of his party.

By contrast, Castro's narrative is characterized by an emphasis on his dual identities, a refusal to understand his Latinx-ness only through his American-ness. While Cruz does pay his father a "thank you" for his legacy, he does not, as Castro does effectively, situate that work within his current identity. The Democrat opens his narrative thusly:

The unlikely journey that brought me here tonight began many miles from this podium. My brother Joaquin and I grew up with my mother Rosie and my grandmother Victoria [pronounced here *veek-tor-ee-uh*]. My grandmother was an orphan. As a young girl, she had to leave her home in Mexico and move to San Antonio, where some relatives had agreed to take her in....My grandmother spent her whole life working as a maid, a cook and a babysitter, barely scraping by, but still working hard to give my mother, her only child, a chance in life, so that my mother could give my brother and me an even better one.

Notice the two bookends at play here. In the first and last sentences of this passage, Castro is actively connecting himself to his immigrant heritage, citing it as inseparable from his present-day self and success. His heritage is not merely a prologue to his “American” identity; it is the identity itself. For Castro’s multicultural audience (and the televised cutaways of diverse Democratic attendees reflects this) this embrace of complexity conveys that Castro’s immigrant heritage would certainly shape his decisions on issues related to race or class, or at least be more likely to. This ethos is essential to Castro’s success with his Democratic audience.

Castro extends this theme throughout his speech, repeatedly locating his past in his present. He recalls days in which, as he and his brother would leave for grade school, his grandmother “[would make] the sign of the cross behind [them], saying, ‘Que dios los bendiga.’ ‘May God bless you’” (Castro).¹² Toward the end of the speech, he aggressively and poignantly brings this moment into the present, with himself as the child-rearer: “A couple of Mondays ago was [my daughter’s] first day of pre-K. As we dropped her off, we walked out of the classroom, and I found myself whispering to her, as was once whispered to me, “‘Que dios te bendiga.’ ‘May God bless you.’” Aside from its emotional appeal, this story reiterates Castro’s embrace of a holistic identity, one in which bicultural selves are never supplanted by a solely “American” one. The choice of this familiar American setting, a pre-K room with parents saying goodbye to their children, amplifies the immigrant presence, punctuated by an intimate use of Spanish. It is as if Castro is inviting the listener to read him and his grandmother together, creating a

¹² Castro’s brother, Joaquín, is actually a Texas congressman in the House of Representatives. He introduced Julián at the 2012 DNC.

trans-generational, trans-cultural self.

3.2 Self-Identification and Identidad

Also of note is how Castro and Cruz go about naming themselves and their communities. These choices reveal the men's own senses of identity, as well as what they believe their audiences are receptive to. Scanning Cruz's speech, for example, one does not find a use of "Latinx." There is not even a nod to cubanxs (Cubans), a reference that may have been effective, given Cruz's Cuban background and the 2012 RNC's setting of Tampa, Florida.

Instead, Cruz offers two uses of "Hispanic," the most essentialist, Euro-privileging option available. He laments that Democrats will "tell Hispanics that we're not welcome here and send the Vice President to preach a message of division."¹³ He later boasts that 2.3 million "Hispanics" own small businesses. Most fascinating between these selections is Cruz's choice of "*we're* not welcome here" (my emphasis). The phrase marks the only time he aligns himself with today's immigrant communities. It is his first insinuation that their obstacles might resonate with him personally. Indeed, this simple "we" connects the speech, if only fleetingly, to those whose heritages mirror Cruz's.

Of course, though, one must still consider the senator's problematic use of "Hispanic." If Cruz makes the effort to deliver and translate an entire Spanish sentence—"él no tenía nada"—why does he still insist on this demographic term elsewhere? It would seem to be a purely audience-centric decision. Given Cruz's more homogeneous audience (and the TV cutaways would back this assertion up as well), one observes the senator concluding that his listeners would be more receptive to "Hispanic," a consonant-

¹³ It is unclear how this apparent defense of Latinx immigrants squares with Cruz's anti-amnesty campaign.

ending word that does not demand a Spanish pronunciation. (It should be noted, at least, that Cruz's pronunciation of the Spanish sentence was fully accented.) Further, a Republican audience might find "Hispanic" more resonant with the traditions of the party, since the term is a nod to the Nixon administration. In both cases, the Republican Party emerges as at best inflexible and at worst insular, a party that exacts high cultural costs on the marginalized persons who wish to join its discourses.

At the same time, alarmingly, Cruz's brief self-identification is actually more substantial than Castro's. Whereas the Republican aligns himself with a Hispanic "we," the Democrat neglects racial and ethnic identification altogether. Consider Castro's opening:

My fellow Democrats, my fellow Texans, my fellow Americans: I stand before you tonight as a young American, a proud American, of a generation born as the Cold War receded, shaped by the tragedy of 9/11, connected by the digital revolution and determined to re-elect the man who will make the twenty-first century another American century:
President Barack Obama.

While Castro displays these many allegiances, he leaves out any marker of Latinx-ness, instead focusing on nationality and history. As in Cruz's cases, this gesture opposes the hybridity that Castro otherwise embraces. The fact that he appeals to these "common" identities reveals just how much a national audience shapes Latinx political rhetorics, even those from progressive parties. Like Cruz, Castro seems compelled to highlight what makes him similar to his diverse listeners, not what distinguishes him from them. Of course, this emphasis not only has its political advantages—relatability—but it also

suggests that Latinx politicians must generalize themselves to succeed nationally, regardless of affiliation.

3.3 Quantitative Data

Along these lines, my quantitative data affirms that Cruz and Castro are, overall, rather evasive with their Latinx identities, that they seek to avoid identifying themselves as “too” Hispanic. Key words include

Word	# of Times Used by Castro	# of Times by Cruz
America	12/2,096 (0.5%)	8/1,193 (0.6%)
American (noun)	5/2,096 (0.2%)	5/1,193 (0.4%)
American (adjective)	3/2,096 (0.1%)	2/1,193 (0.1%)
[name of his political party]	2/2,096 (0.09%)	1/1,193 (0.08%)
Latino	0/2,096 (0%)	0/1,193 (0%)
Hispanic (noun)	0/2,096 (0%)	2/1,193 (0.1%)
Hispanic (adjective)	0/2,096 (0%)	1/1,193 (0.08%)
[Spanish words]	12/2,096 (0.5%)	7/1,193 (0.5%)

Though neither politician relies heavily on any single word in this table, the “ethnic” identifiers, namely “Latino” and “Hispanic,” are especially sparse, if existent at all. Interestingly, while Castro uses more Spanish words than Cruz (albeit just in absolute numbers), it is only the Republican who gestures to “Hispanics” by title. His choice might be propelled by the need to acknowledge, if not pay lip service to, diversity in a party not associated with such. At any rate, the numbers suggest that, for Latinx politicians seeking national roles in America, they must confront the impulse for de-

racialization, for colorblindness. “Unity through diversity” does not seem to be an option for them, nor for their parties themselves.

3.4 Ramifications

In the end, though, do these compromises significantly hamper the support Latinx politicians already enjoy from their “ethnic” constituencies? According to an October 2015 Gallup poll, Cruz’s Cuban-ness has never granted him a Latinx “boost” to begin with (Bird and Newport), but we might conclude that Castro’s essentializing rhetoric did not undercut his ample Latinx support. This is reflected in the positive, contemporaneous tweets reacting to his speech:

With his Tweets per minute peak at 11,503, @JulianCastro drove more conversation than any #GOP2012 speaker than @MittRomney. [1,205 retweets, 131 likes]

—@gov, Twitter Government, 4 Sep. 2012

Wow! @JulianCastro is killing it delivering his speech! So proud to be a Texan, a Hispanic, an American! #dnc2012 [1,463 retweets, 412 likes]

—@EvaLongoria, Eva Longoria, actor, 4 Sep. 2012

“My mother fought hard for civil rights, so instead of a mop, I could hold this microphone.” @JulianCastro #latism [42 retweets, 11 likes]

—@latinorebels, Latino Rebels, social activism organization, 4 Sep. 2012

“you can’t be pro-business without being pro-education.” Julian Castro #DNC2012 #msnbc2012 [68 retweets, 8 retweets]

—@MariaTeresa1, María Teresa Kumar, President of Voto Latino
and MSNBC host, 4 Sep. 2012

Four tweets cannot summarize an entire racial group's response to one speech, but these in particular augur well for Castro's success with Latinxs, especially if he becomes a vice presidential candidate in the upcoming election.

An explanation for this positivity could be that, though the former mayor does not use the most nuanced identifiers for himself, the "content" of his speech still advocates for progressive, Latinx interests, namely legal and cultural acceptance. Moreover, in contrast with Cruz, Castro and his Latinx supporters might agree that identity is not a zero-sum game, that American-ness does not come at the expense of Latinx-ness, of one's immigrant heritage. In other words, maybe Castro's Latinx voters instinctually yet profoundly understand the rhetorical "game" he must play, since they themselves must play it (albeit on smaller levels) on a daily basis. This understanding, if only subconscious, could help account for their loyalty to Latinx Democrats.

4. Conclusion

I have analyzed the distinct rhetorics of Julián Castro and Ted Cruz, scrutinizing divergences in their identities and parties, as well as some key rhetorical similarities. My analysis supports the argument that Cruz aligns himself with an essentialist Latinx identity, focusing on nationality over racial and cultural heritage. Castro also submits to this representation, but his overall rhetoric favors a multi-faceted identity, one in which immigrant and American-born perspectives always coexist, are always in conversation. This divergence in (rhetorically constructed) selves, in addition to the men's resounding

political success, strongly suggests that Cruz's Republican Party is less embracing of hybridity, whereas Castro's Democratic Party is more so, if only marginally.

Moreover, this divergence goes to show how wide-ranging the poctx identity can be. Indeed, as American-born Latinxs, descendants of immigrants, Castro and Cruz are both one-hundred-percent poctx (whether they embrace it or not). In fact, they probably embody the past and present connotations of "poctx"; Cruz seems to be deliberately "Americanizing"—i.e. Anglicizing—himself, while Castro takes a more complex approach to what "American" even means. In tandem they raise questions about racial performativity that would enrich future studies of poctxness.

Finally, one might consider how both politicians could further complicate their rhetorics, making them reflect their rich, complex selves. Cruz, for example, could bring his father's immigrant struggles more into the present. He might acknowledge the struggles' roles in his current American-ness, resisting the impulse to simply rest on their ideological commonalities with other citizens. Similarly, Castro could use terms such as "Latinx," "Chicanx," or even "Tejanx" to convey his unique identities, which would resonate with voters engaged with or cognizant of immigrant experiences. Of course, both men will continue to compromise with their myriad audiences, but they can still more closely embrace a holistic, poctx approach to identity, one resulting in a more responsible Latinx rhetoric. Doing so would honor the growing, shifting identity of the country they claim to represent.

V. A MÁS POCHX WRITING CLASSROOM, A MÁS POCHX ACADEMY

Whenever I write chapters like those above, I contemplate to what extent their ideas would be clear to my composition students, whether I could explain them convincingly during class. This contemplation is one of the many privileges of my job as a graduate teaching assistant; one night I am applying sociological concepts to one of my favorite newspaper columns, and the next I am preparing an introductory lesson about pathos. The duality is a benefit, since it forces me to ground my research in a world that belongs to and exists for my students just as much as for my professors and me. More simply, my students, most of whom are about five years younger than me, keep my head out of the clouds.

So, I value both the abstract thought of the preceding chapters, as well as their potential to bring pochxismo to the classroom. This aspiration is especially meaningful because I teach at a large, Hispanic-serving institution, a home to many students in whom I see my undergrad self, a well-meaning yet color-blind pochx who was not exposed to Latinx-authored texts until his fourth semester. How differently would I have read the Greeks and Romans, for instance, if alongside them I were taught *Borderlands/La Frontera* by someone like my current self, someone who looked like me and shared my linguistic background? It may have been like spinning an upside-down globe: extra-fun.

I am reminded of what the novelist Cynthia Henríquez said at a first-year-experience conference I attended this year. As she put it to a ballroom of academic professionals, “Diversity is for everyone.” This sentiment is hardly new in Rhet./Comp. circles, but it was something else to hear it uttered by a Latina to hundreds of people, not just as a buzzword. “Diversity is for everyone” dismisses the notion that a pochx text

such as *Bless Me, Ultima* should be read *only* because it would make Latinx students feel more comfortable, more represented, on campus. It suggests that *Bless Me, Ultima* is comparably important to non-Latinx readers, since it promotes an acceptance of, identification with, and empathy toward communities that are not one's own.

In this final chapter, then, I share a transferrable, adaptable, poctx-fied assignment for the composition classroom, one I carried out during my first semester as a university instructor. It is important here because it puts into practice the perspective I have been using throughout this thesis, a racialized lens I hope to impart to or reinforce in students. As Chapter 4 especially illustrates, the lens regards identity as the confluence of at least three dimensions: race, nationality, and rhetoric. Indeed, as I celebrate hybridity in my own research, I am interested in how actual assignments can push students to do the same.

5.1 The Common Experience Program at Texas State

Every year, Texas State University holds what it calls the Common Experience, a program for first-year students that is centered around a theme and accompanying book that is distributed to all freshmen at orientation. For the 2015–16 academic year, the theme has been “Bridged Through Stories: Shared Heritage of the United States and Mexico, an Homage to Dr. Tomás Rivera.” The text is Rivera's most acclaimed work of fiction, *...And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*, a coming-of-age novel about a young, Mexican-American poctx in a family of migrant farm workers. (The author is actually a distinguished alumnus of Texas State and a Lone Star native.) As a fellow poctx and former intern at *...And the Earth*'s publisher, Houston's Arte Público Press, I felt

compelled to contribute to the administration of this program, volunteering to be on its instructors' committee.

What happened surpassed my highest hopes for how the Common Experience could be, pun intended, bridged to the English department, a partnership not often found in first-year-experience programs. At one of the committee meetings, I was nominated to compose prompts about the novel that first-year writing instructors could use for their diagnostic essay assignments, usually conducted during the first week of class. The prompts would provide ways for students to think about ...*And the Earth*, which includes both an English and Spanish version of the text, from a rhetorical and/or literary perspective, as opposed to the historical or institutional perspective more likely to be found in their University Seminar sections. (And from a practical standpoint, starting the semester with Rivera would minimize the number of students who, after receiving their first assignment sheets, might still lack the class's textbook reader.)

5.2 Diagnostic Essay Prompts

Writing the prompts, I aimed to collide the personal and the public, the literary and the societal. (Have not such collision-points been the touchstones of this whole thesis?) I wanted students to reflect on their own lives while also working with ...*And the Earth* as a piece of rhetoric or literature, so in four of the five prompts I required them to cite at least one section of the novel. (It is told in vignettes, helpfully.) The prompts themselves:

- 1.** Pick a section of ...*And the Did Not Devour Him* that resonates with a story from your life or that of a family member. Discuss how the section

helps you understand or appreciate your story in a new way. Be sure to include the page number(s) of the chosen section.

2. Read one of the text's Spanish-language sections and then compare it with its English version. Discuss how the English version captures and/or fails to capture the beauty of the Spanish one. Include two examples from the text and include page numbers.

3. Dr. Tomás Rivera, author of *...And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*, was a Bobcat, originally from Crystal City, Texas. In addition to becoming a famous author, Rivera went on to become Chancellor at University of California, Riverside. Discuss the value *to you* of learning about this accomplished Texas State alumnus.

4. How are the characters of *...And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* quintessentially American? Discuss two or three examples. Include page numbers.

5. Reading this novel, what are two or three things you've learned about the experiences of Latinos/Latinas in the United States? Include examples from the text.

Similar to almost everything else about my research, these prompts celebrate the mixing up of cultures, the creation of new ones altogether. They are grounded in matters of language (i.e., rhetoric) and identity, not to mention empathy.

Let us focus on that last part—empathy—for a bit, since I believe it to be an inseparable part of race studies. Prompts #1 and #5 are the most empathy-ready of these prompts, and as their wording suggests, they are only partially meant for Latinx writers;

they hold extra potential for those coming to the text with limited exposure to Latinx cultures. Besides opening one's eyes to the historical injustices exacted upon Latinxs, they are meant to help (non-Latinx) writers see that, if they look far enough in their family trees, they will see people much like the family in ...*And the Earth*, a collection of liminal Americans working almost all of their days in exchange for a better life for their children. Prompts #1 and #5 must have hit a note with my own students, about thirty-seven in all, since more than half chose to write on them, more specifics of which I share shortly.

Regarding language and identity, my goal in a few of these prompts was to help my multi-/translingual students understand that their knowledges of other languages were and are *assets* to the writerly toolsets, not deficits. They, like the Spanish-speaking students of my parents' generation, may have been led to believe that proficiency in another language was a subtraction from potential proficiency in English, that to maintain or improve in the former would be to jeopardize fluency in the latter. (And this is to speak nothing of multi-/translingual youth aspiring to acquire an "American" accent that is more privileged.) Of course, though, multilingualism is not a zero-sum game, especially when one's tongues derive from the same root language. So, I wanted to take advantage of everything the Spanish version of ...*And the Earth* could help my students and me learn together.

Prompt #2 was my best effort toward this goal. It troubles the linguistic playing field by positioning English in the book as a language aspiring to capture the beauty of Spanish, not the other way around, a troubling the book itself reflects by placing the Spanish version first. (Besides, I thought, how often are first-year students asked to

discuss linguistic “beauty”?) As it sometimes goes with an instructor’s favorite prompts, only a few students ended up choosing it, but their essays were some of my classes’ most impressive. In hindsight I realize I should have saved prompt #2 for a take-home assignment, given its text-intensiveness, but that makes those students’ work all the more noteworthy. I wanted my multi-/translingual students to feel empowered, exceptional, that they even possessed the ability to respond to prompt #2, and those who chose it displayed an admirable facility with language and the cultures it can house.

To give an example, one student compared the words “bestia” and “animal” in ...*And the Earth*. The relevant passage, in Spanish and English:

Chingue a su madre toda la pinche vida. Ésta es la última vez que vengo así como una pinche bestia parado todo el camino.

.....

To hell with goddamn motherfuckin’ life! This is the last time I go through this, standing up all the way like a goddamn animal. (62, 136)

The student, a Latina, points out that “bestia” in this context holds the connotation of a beast of burden—a beast, yes, but a rather powerless, nonthreatening one. She goes to write that “animal,” while more reflective of the Spanish meaning than “beast,” still fails to convey the full *pathos* of “bestia,” since “animal” is rather clinical. (Just as admirably, the student also notes that the roughness of “pinche” is rather difficult to capture in American swearing.)

Interestingly, some of my non-Latinx students elected to write on prompt #5. Several of them were just not aware of Latinx circumstances during Rivera’s time, so ...*And the Earth* came as a jolt to them. What distinguished their work was not only a

facility with the text, but also a disgust with a secondary education (in Rivera's home state, ironically) that had withheld such perspectives from their own textbooks. It was a showing of trans-racial understanding and critical consciousness I was elated to see in my first semester as a "College Writing I" instructor, a showing that grounded a conference presentation of mine two months later, "...And el Español Did Not Devour Them: Crossing Composition Borders with Latinx Literature."

I mention all of these details because they illustrate how one assignment might engender a pocho-like perspective in those who respond to it, a perspective that embraces hybridity in every form and resists hierarchy and essentialism. By this I mean that a writing assignment focusing on race is "successful" insofar as it bears fruits both for the students who are members of the race(s) under discussion as well as those who are not. For the former group the prompts might, as mine aspire to, promote a critical consciousness about what it means to be a member of a particular race, about what it means to negotiate being a member of that race within a society that does not view it as "mainstream." For the latter group the assignment could, with the aforementioned empathy as a foundation, shine a light on how malleable, if glacial, the racial status quo ultimately is. For example, reflecting in an essay on their family's history, a U.S. student of Irish descent might find out that Irish immigrants and descendants have not always been considered "white" by mainstream America, and that the same has been the case for Italians and Jews. Such moments would invite (provoke?) otherwise privileged students to confront and celebrate the pocho in themselves, the cultural battles of their ancestors.

And these details are adaptable, as I have mentioned. Four of the five prompts, for example, can be reworked to form templates for other essay assignments dealing with

multi-/translingual texts. In the style of one of my favorite first-year textbooks, Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein's *They Say / I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*, I present such templates here:

1. Pick a section of _____ that resonates with a story from your life or that of a family member. Discuss how the section helps you understand or appreciate your story in a new way. Be sure to include the page number(s) of the chosen section.
2. Read one of the text's _____-language sections and then compare it with its English version. Discuss how the English version captures and/or fails to capture the beauty of the _____ one. Include two examples from the text and include page numbers.
3. How are the characters of _____ quintessentially American? Discuss two or three examples. Include page numbers.
4. Reading this text, what are two or three things you've learned about the experiences of _____ in the United States? Include examples from the text.

5.3 Takeaways

With some classroom applications discussed, where does one go from here? Well, it is instructive to remember that, while poctx studies is about race (and it would fine if that were all it were about), it resonates on an even broader scale. The poctx is of literally different languages and cultures, but so, if less dramatically, is everyone else. (Recall my epigraph from Paredes.) Whereas the poctx code-meshes Spanish and English, a white, first-generation college student from North Carolina might code-mesh

an Appalachian dialect and Standard American English, and a similar negotiation applies to students who have grown up with African-American Englishes. Indeed, these *mezclas* externalize matters of identity itself, giving those matters a space in which conflicted individuals can be helped and help themselves.

Indeed, the *pochx* is a fundamentally postmodern figure, one whose existence should provoke us all to have more nuanced conversations about intersections of rhetoric, culture, and identity. Maybe there will be a time when these conversations will become old-hat, when hybridity—of language, of persona, of skin color—will actually become the accepted norm. But that era feels far away.

In the meantime, we would do well to consider everything we can learn from *pochxs* and their texts; they hold knowledge for both the present and future. *Pochxs* are wordsmiths, bricolages, travelers. For us in the business of studying (and teaching) identity, we should proceed much like Carlos Gómez on those basepaths—smiling with pride in one's accomplishments, but with a fire to see those accomplishments to their finish. Adelante.

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