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Braiding Languages, Weaving Cultures: An Interview with Diana Montejano

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The work of poet, activist, and educator Diana Montejano originates from and is representative of the confluence of languages and cultures in the U.S. Mexico borderlands. From the perspective of a bilingual and bicultural writer, she describes her "one Chicana's enduring love affair with *poesía* and the art of expression." As an educator in San Antonio, Texas, she is invested in encouraging her students to make connections to their cultures, histories, and languages. She shares with them her insight that an awareness of the discontinuities of life in the borderlands–the Catholicism, the educational system, the physical and psychological mestizaje, patriarchal dominance and gender roles, as well as the problems, trials, and the blessings of a culturally diverse human being–may serve as the springboard for their writing and lead to better self-expression and increased interpersonal understanding.

Montejano's publications include the chapbook Nebulous Thoughts (1997) as well as individual poems in The *Virgen of Guadalupe*, *The Rio Grande Review*, *Cantos al Sexto Sol: A Collection of Contemporary Aztlanahuac Writing*, and *Blue Mesa Review*. In 1996, an excerpt of her poem "El honor" was published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. She currently teaches English and Creative Writing to at-risk youth in San Antonio, Texas.

In this interview Montejano traces her beginnings as a writer from her initial reading of the voices of resistance in the African American Civil Rights Movement to her subsequent turning to Chicanos and Chicanas for mentorship. She furthermore discusses the poet's medium, language, and comments on bilingualism, the politics of language in the borderlands, and what she calls the "braiding" of languages in her poetry. As she says elsewhere, the freedom to express herself in poetry, "came about through acquisition, through experimentation, and through a great deal of study."

NS: When did you become aware that you were a writer?

DM: I think that I was 15 years old. I had a nun who taught me, and, I try to impress this on my students, it took *one* teacher. I was the scourge of school. I was a lot of trouble, and I acknowledge that now--at that time I would not acknowledge that I was any trouble at all. But I think I was just a natural rebel and part of that rebellion was speaking Spanish, and they forbade me to do that.

NS: This is in Del Rio?

DM: No, I was born in Del Rio; I was raised in San Antonio. My parents moved to San Antonio when I was about a year old. Part of that rebellion was speaking Spanish in school because at that time it was totally forbidden. One of the weird things was that the school set up a court of your peers to judge you on your infractions, breaking the rules and stuff like that. Every Friday they would take

these students before court, and they had their judges and their panel and the whole thing. Of course we didn't have defense lawyers. You were just up there, and "today you did this, on this day you did that," and they had their little snitches posted all around the school. This is horrible, you know.

NS: And speaking Spanish was one of the infractions?

DM: Speaking Spanish was one of the infractions. What made it worse was my brother, my big brother, was one of the judges. I think it was done on purpose; it was a continual pattern. My younger brother and I were always there at the court, and of course big brother would go home and start saying, "Look, they're embarrassing me, and I'm in this position," and we told him, "You sell-out." And that added to my anger. In high school, I met an Irish nun who went and told the principal that punishing me was not working. "It seems like she thrives on this punishment." She wanted to take charge of me, and so every day after school I would go to Sister Sabina. She told me one day, "Diana,"--she was the only nun that did not change my name from "Diana" [Spanish pronunciation] to "Diana" [English pronunciation], which is a problem that I have even with Chicanos or Latinos--and she says "Diana, punishing you in the normal way doesn't work with you. I'm not here to punish you, I'm here to guide you." And I'm looking at her like "Huh, why don't you just punish me, it's easier; put me to clean the bathrooms, wash the dishes or something," but she gave me a book, J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye.* And she goes "Well, if you want to consider this your punishment, fine." She said "Take your time, read the book."

I wondered, "What is this? What *is* this?" and I actually enjoyed it, very much. Then she kept bringing me books, LeRoy Jones, Eldridge Cleaver… I read *The Autobiography of Malcom X*. It was a banned book and she brought it to me, a nun brought it to me. You know, they had those big habits and those big huge pockets, and she's digging in it and she's saying "I didn't give this to you, but I want you to read it." Then she started bringing me poetry--Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, and when I read Gwendolyn Brooks, I wrote my first poem, "Crying." She saw it and started praising me, "You have a flair for writing. I'm not sure you're aware of this, but you have a flair for writing." So that was all I needed, and I started writing and writing and writing, and I wrote a book. I wrote a research paper on the voices of resistance of African American writers at that time. There was no Hispanic, "Chicano Literature" to speak of. So a lot of my poetry was patterned after Countee Cullen, Gwendolyn Brooks, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston, on and on the list went. And I noticed especially in Zora Neale Hurston how comfortable she was with the black vernacular. I read that even her own people criticized her for making "the blacks look like they're uneducated," and she responded by saying "Well, I'm writing the way the people are, the way they speak," and it struck me, it struck a chord. But at the same time my braiding didn't just take off then; I know this is the way we spoke in the barrio--the way we spoke at home. Dad spoke English, Mom spoke

Spanish. This is how we learned to speak English and Spanish.

My mom learned English with us. She learned how to do her reading and writing by sitting down and doing the exact same lessons we were assigned to do. I think I went up to approximately the third grade before I really grasped what English was and what they were saying because I was so hung up in the "you're *not* going to teach me in it"—the whole rebellion thing. I think part of it was the anger at home because of the injustice that was going on. My parents could not buy a home in a certain section of town. All of this I'm listening to, I'm absorbing even though I'm not cognizant, I'm not fully aware of why, and what's going on.

NS: But even in the third grade you were angry.

DM: I was in the third grade. I was angry all throughout school, even college. It took me a long time; it took me a very long time to realize why I was angry. In third grade, they were trying to change my writing hand from left to right, and they were literally hitting me with a ruler, but sideways, which really hurt more.

NS: So you were getting punished, not only for the language that you're using, but for writing with your left hand too**.** It's amazing you became a writer.

DM: Well, thanks to Sister Sabina and the fact that I saw her doing things that she was not really supposed to do, and that she would say, "It's OK, it's OK, you just need to take what you need from these books, what you can absorb, and realize that these experiences are not uniquely yours There's a whole bunch of people out there that have experienced what you have." I wrote a play, "Jana," at that time, and it was patterned after a story about a daughter who was angry because her father was in prison, and she lacked a father-figure. It was a story. I turned it into a play and I actually read it to my classmates, and that's where everything took off. Sister Sabina asked me to read it, and she asked me to run for the school editor position, and I was looking at her, "Are you sure you want me to do that?" And she's going "Yes, you have what it takes." And I said, "OK, I'll run."

I won by one vote because I had a bad reputation. I was being escorted to school by the police. I was playing hooky. How can you go play hooky in a brown uniform? That was pretty stupid of me. Everybody knew you were from Catholic school, but I thought I was being real cool.

"What's wrong with you?" That was a question I grew up with "What's wrong with you?" And it took me a long time, and I don't think that I started working out the answer until I got older, when I started that introspective period of my life where I'm trying to figure out well, what is "wrong" with me. There's nothing wrong in the end. Or maybe just a few things wrong, but not as much as people had said, including my own mother. "What's wrong with you? Why can't you just do what they ask you to do? Behave. They don't want you to

speak Spanish, well then, *don't* speak Spanish." And I said, "No, no, that's not what it's about!"

EM-J: In Sandra Cisneros's "*Bien* Pretty," the narrator, Lupe, says that Spanish has certain associations for her that English does not. Do you also associate certain things with speaking Spanish and others with English?

DM: I don't know, I think that I would tend to associate Spanish more with love and romanticism and music.

EM-J: That's what she says. Spanish is the language of poetry, of passion.

DM: It's all so rhythmic, lyrical; it's a lyrical language versus English which has some guttural context to it that makes it kind of harsh. Do I know what I understand in either English or Spanish? I can't tell you. What I think in Spanish or what I associate Spanish with, is anger, all the emotions, I think. I can express myself pretty well in Spanish. When I'm in love, when I hate, when I'm disgusted, when I'm about to launch into some kind of rebellion, I take off. But it depends, again, on who I am addressing here.

NS: You said that earlier in your career you didn't realize that you could go back and forth from English to Spanish; you thought you had to write either in Spanish *or* in English. What made you decide that you can do both?

DM: Back in 1981, I was sending all my poetry to Cecilio García-Carmarillo, I mean, poetry that I had written since I was like about 15, 16, 17. Cecilio was encouraging me at that time to mix, braid, the two languages. He's a Chicano poet, former editor of the *Caracol*. He's a very, very well-known figure in Chicano literature and poetry. He lives in Albuquerque. He was an activist here in South Texas. He's originally from Laredo, and he went to UT [University of Texas] at Austin. I met him through my big brother, and we became very good friends because I was a poet and so was he. And so he would compose all these poems, and he would do the braiding at that time while I would continue to stick either to all English or all Spanish. I'm not going to say that's the dividing line, but it wasn't until I reached the University of Texas-El Paso [UTEP] in 1993, when I actually started playing with mixing, the braiding, and I liked it. I met Ben Saenz, who became my mentor and teacher, my sponsor at UTEP, and he just encouraged me to experiment.

It's not code-switching; a lot of people call it code-switching. I'm not so sure it's code-switching because I tend to think that code-switching is still taking it a step further and mixing the slang. The slang words, like the "ramflas" and the "carcachas" and all this which stand for cars, and "chantes" and stuff like that you just don't say if you're speaking to someone like…I wouldn't go and speak to my mother about my "chante" or my "ramfla," my "carucha," my "carcacha." I would just say "Quieres ir al caro, vamos para la casa." [Would you like to go to the car, let us go home.] But let's say that I'd speak to someone who is street-wise, and I would instantly know.

NS: It depends on who you're speaking to.

DM: That's right and I kind of assess the situation very quickly, and I can't tell you how that process comes about.

NS: So you call it "braiding" when you mix the Spanish with the English.

DM: The good English and the good Spanish. The code-switching, it's almost like the slang and the street lingo in with it. Like when I say, "hissy-fit, she's about to have a hissy-fit." That's something you just don't normally come out and say to a learned person; you would change the word. And so that's like an English slang, and I tend to pair them. I don't know why.

EM-J: Do you do it sometimes for poetic purposes? Because it sounds better in your poetry?

DM: Some of what I do is I'll write the poem in whichever language it comes out. I'll write it, and then when I go back to revise it, I start playing sometimes with the words, I really love it if they have what we call double entendres.

There's a line that I wrote, "Pedacitos, you fed to gods, sin consciencia." "Pieces that you fed to gods without conscience." But that "sin," "without" in Spanish, also stands for "sin" English. So it kind of fits within the text about a young woman who lost her virginity and her innocence, and that cut her up in pieces that "you fed to gods," and it's a sin.

EM-J: So it makes it more complex.

DM: Yes, it makes it a little bit more complex. And I try to do stuff like this although sometimes I'm not very successful. Where do I stick in the English and the Spanish? It usually comes out in my revision, and I play around a lot. Does this sound better? No. Does that sound better? And sometimes I'll just say "What the heck, this is what I wrote." And, of course, in the revision process, you start editing yourself and sometimes you just leave it the way it is or you'll just take out the word and say well, "Heck the last lines came out in Spanish."

I was trying to play with the César Chávez poem to a make it like a bilingual sestina. I was not so successful, and I'd still like to go back and play with it-- I know I am, because it's become a challenge now.

NS: This is a new poem you've finished?

DM: It's a new poem that I found. It was incomplete, and I was supposed to send it off about three years ago. I found it, and I finished it, and I came and read it [at an earlier lecture]. The last lines except for "in my sleep" or "laid with a gentle heart," I think that's it for the English, and I just took off in the Spanish, and I left it that way. I did not go back to change anything because I believe somewhere in the poem lies the translation. And that's something else I'm conscious of in my poetry: I want my audience to understand that if they listen

very carefully, they can pick up the context, the gist of the poem, the meaning because there is nothing that I say wholly either in English or Spanish, it's just braided to where you can understand.

EM-J: In my survey of Western literature classes, my students read a poem by Pat Mora or Sandra Cisneros, and many very much resist the Spanish in it. "I can't understand this. This is not a poem for me." They immediately back off and don't want to engage. What would you say to students like that?

DM: You know, I have the same problem with my students now, and these are the street kids so you would think that they're rebels at heart and would embrace this, but it's not true. They say, "My parents never taught me Spanish." That's part of what happened; it happened in my own family where you have the parents that are teaching the children the Spanish and the English, and those who are just teaching them English because they feel that by learning the language they're not going to suffer or have experiences like I did. What do you say to them? You say, "You know you need to be patient and try to learn this because you're going to love it." I tell my students that. I gave this same poetry reading to my students prior to coming here, and they were mesmerized. Now these are the students that don't understand Spanish. They're Chicano, they're Hispanos, and they say, "I don't understand the language," and I have some Anglo children there, I have some Black children there, and they were just mesmerized. I said "If you listen very carefully, you're going to be able to understand what I'm saying, because of the braiding." And I said "You just need to pick up on it and you're going to learn, but you do have to listen."

When we grow older, all of a sudden there's a big demand for bilingual this, bilingual that, and you're wondering "What happened here? Where did we go wrong?" because on the one hand they ostracized us for speaking Spanish when we're very little, and yet when we grow up, you totally convert to the other side and go English. You grow older and there's this demand. And people look at you like "Oh, are you bilingual, by the way?" And you say, "No, I'm not, I really don't … I can understand it or I can read it," and they're looking at you like "Well, what's wrong with you? Aren't you Chicana? Aren't you Hispana? You're supposed to know, this is part of your culture." When we've spent all these formative years dealing with this system that says, "No you can't do it [speak Spanish]; you can't do this at this time."

NS: Our students are products of parents who were punished in school for speaking Spanish, so they weren't allowed to speak Spanish at home because their parents wanted them to "fit in" and to succeed in school. They say they're constantly upset by the fact that people say "Well, why can't you speak Spanish, you're Hispanic, aren't you?" Or they're upset by the fact they can't talk to their grandparents who only speak Spanish. So it's been a real tragedy in the United States for the Hispanic population. The kids that are now 25, 20 can't speak Spanish.

DM: It's amazing. In my home we could not visit my grandfather and utter a single word in English. "OK" was about it, and it had to be "OK" [Spanish accented], not "OK" [English accent].

NS: Where did he live?

DM: He lived in Del Rio, but he was one of those gung-ho ex-revolucionarios who served in World War I and was discriminated against. He was just a very angry man at all the injustice. This is my mother's father, so my mother was angry too, and I think my father was angry too. And all this, we absorbed it. But you could not enter his home and speak English, even when we were in school and wanted to come in and impress him. I think that happened to my big brother once, and he said "If you're going to speak that foreign language in my home, get out, go outside; foreigners belong outside my home."

That was very harsh. He always looked like he was angry, and they tell me I have that same characteristic, that same look. "Miss, you look like you're always angry." And I say "I'm *not* always angry."

One of the things that made me very angry was the fact that the nuns that were running the Catholic school had fled the Mexican Revolution--they were all Mexican nuns, and they all understood what you were saying. "¿Puedo ir al baño? Quiero ir al baño. Quiero ir hacer esto, o lo otro." [May I go to the bathroom? I want to go to the bathroom. I want to go do this or that.] And they would sit there and pretend they didn't understand you, and they spoke broken English. They had set up a system of spies in school as to who spoke Spanish and who didn't. I think they would have been perfect torturers. And yet my experience was that I found a good teacher, and that's all I needed. She believed in me and she understood that I needed someone to believe in me. She understood that.

EM-J: That makes such a difference.

DM: It did. But the other thing I wanted to say is that the Spanish we were taught, that we were allowed to speak, was only in Spanish class, and it had to be Castilian Spanish. Who's going to speak this? "Cómo está usted?" [Castilian accent]. And this is the Spanish we were expected to speak. It was really crazy.

We had Spanish class right after lunch, and Sister Augustine would come in--I wrote a poem about it--she would come in with her Castilian thing, and she would start spitting at us. [Laughter] And all of us would have assigned seats, and we would say, "Oh, my God, here she comes." She never understood why all the front row would be gone. And of course I was always in the front because they had to watch me.

EM-J: Do you think there's more room for voices like yours to be heard these days in the American mainstream?

DM: I think it's important. Listen, it's in advertising, and once it gets to advertising, everyone knows about "Yo quiero Taco Bell." And "más food, less dinero"–give

me a break! It's acceptable once it finds its way into the mass media, the advertising, and these are national commercials that are broadcast all over the United States.

EM-J: How about in publishing?

DM: Publishing even more so. But are there publishers out there that are sensitized to this aspect, this experience? I don't know. I can't tell you. I was telling this student yesterday that Bilingual Press has a waiting list of at least two years. In other words, they'll take your work, but you have to wait two years until it's out. I don't know what Arte Público's wait list is. I think those are the only two major Latino publishing houses. There are no literary agents, no female literary agents that are Latina, neither Cubana, Dominicana. It's just a rough business and it's rough if you speak all English. And the young lady was talking about writing the traditional novel. What are they talking about? Traditional novel in terms of all English? How would you put a Latino, Chicano experience in all English when a major portion of what you identify with is in Spanish?

And that's another thing that leads me to anger. My grandfather always told me when I was old enough to understand, "You know Spanish isn't even our first language." You know you've got the Nahua. And he started telling me things like "metate" and "tomate" and all these "ates." He says "Those are Nahua derivatives." Of course he didn't tell me in that language. He says, "Primero eres India" [First, you're Indian]. "And then you're everything else. If you're looking for an identity, primero eres India." And he would say in Spanish, "Unfortunately, all this has been taken away from us."

And that's part of my own theory about why our youth are in trouble. They are because there's that sense of disconnectedness. We can blame the deterioration of the family and family values and the educational system, and on and on the list goes. But I believe that if you go back and start teaching them to be proud of what their origins are, it's not just Spanish/European crap. And I don't mean "crap" in a disrespectful way because the Europeans and the Spanish people brought us some good things, but most of it was bad. And so, we're still hanging on to this language of the conquerors, the conquest language. La idioma de la conquista. And that's what we know. That happened years and generations ago, and I was telling my students this: "You know you have the blood of royalty running through your veins. You don't even know it. We invented this, we did this, we performed the brain surgeries on patients who survived. They have found skulls, and all this was going on thousands of years before Christ. Probably almost simultaneously, along side the Egyptians and the Phoenicians, and you don't hear this. They want you to know about King Tut, and it's good to know about these civilizations, it's good to know about people all over the world, but first learn about *you*."

EM-J: I think it's a new experience for many students when they're used to reading British or American Lit, mainstream American Lit, and then all of a sudden they

see something written by a Chicano or a Chicana and they say "That's me! And it's in writing."

DM: That's right. You know, Mario Salas, city councilman in San Antonio, he's a former Black Panther, and I want to get him to go to my class and speak because he wrote a sequel to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* based on the philosophy of human values and the inner conflicts, and he's says that it's totally geared towards young readers and he's looking for sponsors because he wants to publish the sequel. I thought that was very interesting. I have not read it, of course it's not published yet, but I just said I need to go talk to that guy. I wonder where he's coming from, writing a sequel to Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is one of the texts that I taught and related to current issues and to self identity and all the human needs to make what we call "human." It was more than just the body. They needed love and they needed warmth and they needed touch. And also the experimentation with life. We talk all about that and students latch on to it. You can relate to British Literature.

Chaucer, once they cut through the language and start understanding what's going on, they love it. Because you're teaching them sex, vulgarity, infidelity, irreverence--all the things that make up teenage rebellion. They're like "This is classical literature?" Once you sell them on that, boy, you can sell them on a lot of things. I read them Robert Graves, World War I poetry, and two of my students got hooked on war poets from the various wars.

EM-J: What advice would you give to aspiring writers, students who wanted to start writing?

DM: Just do it. One thing is that it took me a long time also, again, to get to the point where I didn't care. Because writers are like other people, we're always looking for approval and acceptance and people saying "Yeah, you hit that right on the head as far as I'm concerned." And it took me a long time to not care what other people had to say because there will always be critics out there, and that's their job to say "Well, this will be better…" That's their life.

I would say "just write," and I think sharing with a group is very important, but ultimately you are in control of what you create. So then it becomes a matter of deciding, "Do I keep it this way?" Maybe if you're open minded to suggestions, yes, you may change it, but ultimately, you are in control. So just do it. The important thing is to realize that some of your experiences have value, all of your life experiences have value for someone out there, and there is someone out there who is having the same experience as you.

All the good writing that I've seen, the classics, they all have some kind of tension, some conflict, some human turmoil, and that's not any different from what Latinos, Chicanos experience because we're ultimately very, very human. The way that we express it may be different, but the experience essentially is a human experience.

Part of my talk yesterday was about codes, internal codes. This goes back to reading *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* , which said that we have to recognize the internalized mechanisms that made us tick, that made us act in this fashion and in that fashion and made us speak in this way. We have to recognize these internalized mechanisms whether we assign them names or addresses or whatever before we can come back because some of these internalized mechanisms keep us down. They keep us oppressed, and in turn oppressing yourself, one oppresses an entire society. By the same token, if you're told constantly and you buy into it, that your Spanish is not the correct Spanish, and you internalize that mechanism, in the end, you're the one that's going to lose out.

Those are some of the things I wanted to say yesterday about the codes, the codes that say "You can't write about that, and you can't express this in this way, and what is your mother going to think?" and "What's wrong with you?" because that was one of the questions that were constantly asked of me. "What is wrong with you?" Even my own mother, "What's wrong with you? Why can't you just do what they say? Even if after you leave, you can be yourself, you know, why can't you just do what they say?" And I said, "No, no, no, no, no, I'm not going to!"

NS: Gloria Anzaldúa, in *Borderlands*, talks a lot about language. And this is actually a quote, "So if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin-skinned to linguistic identity—I am my language." You were suggesting that when they criticized your use of Spanish or wanting to write and go back and forth, they were criticizing *you* and your identity.

DM: Right. I tell my students language is a living, breathing thing; it changes. We change, language changes. I can go back and think of words that we used when we were growing up that are no longer in use, or they have different connotations. One time in El Paso, I thought I was being very insulted, even in Spanish, when someone came and asked me "mochate." And I going "What?" "Mochate." And I said "What?" I was ready to go "Blah, blah, to you too!" And all they were saying was "share." It was the slang word for "share" or "are you going to treat me?" And over here we would say "tritriar," "treat, let's go treat," "tritriar." I was looking at this man because I thought he had insulted me.

But yes, I think I can agree with Gloria, and say that if you insult my language, if you insult the way I express myself, then you're insulting who I am. It took me a long time to start braiding the language, but I'm also proud of the fact that I can go back and speak Elizabethan and go through the Baroque Spanish. Sor Juana de la Cruz, I admire her life story, and her writing was just way before her time. I wish she would have lived now. I admire her greatly.

NS: I just have one more question. It's about labels. I've noticed you say "Chicano/ Latino," and you've said "Hispanic." Some people are focused on "this is the correct label, this is the incorrect label."

DM: I know, and it's all one and the same, like an umbrella, catchall term, right? I'm Chicana. I'm also aware of the fact that there's a lot of young people out there

that just don't even know where the word came from. My grandfather was using the word "chicano/chicana" when we were young. And he also gave me one of my first lessons in, I guess, linguistics, when he said that the Native American Indians in Mexico, they had no "X" in pronunciation and they had no "J." So when the Spanish came along and they were saying all of this, they were going "mechica, mechicano, mechica, soy Mechicano," rather than "soy Azteca." So when people were migrating over here, they dropped the "me" so it became "chicano/chicana." He said that back in the early 1900's it was kind of a very popular word/term to say "chicano/chicana," and it was a very proud term. Somewhere along the way people come out and say that it is a derogatory term. That its meaning comes from the word pig, and I'm like, "no, no, my grandfather wouldn't call us "pigs!"

I also started doing some research of the terms that were applied to "Latinos, Mexican-Americans" according to the census. Where at one point we were "Latins" and then we were "Latin-Americans." In the following census, they became "white," but "of Latin origin" and then you sub-categorized the word, "Mexican, Dominican, Other," you know, "Cuban, Puerto Rican" and then you would check off what it was. Then the term "Hispanic" came around. It originated with the United States census because they sent out a sample, I believe it was with Reagan, to 700 households in the Florida area and 700 more households in the New Mexican area, and they gave them a list of terms that they identified with, and "Hispanic" came up on top.

It's an umbrella, catchall phrase. I personally don't like it, but I use it because that's what my students use. They use the term "Hispanic." Personally, if I can't use "Chicana," I'd rather be called "Latina" and not "Mexican-American" either. Mexicans are Americans. You know, "somos de las Américas." So it's redundant to me. I'm not a hyphenated American. I am a fifth-generation Tejana; I'm very proud of it. Go tell me what's "American" anymore? I tell that to my students. "You know, you need to learn your history." I'm just getting them to think on their own. Let's go to the library. We took them to the section where they can research their genealogy, including the Native American, and trace it as far back as we can go, because I firmly believe that that's the key, or one of the keys, they need to know the other part of their history, not just the "Hispanic" part. Listen," His-panic," you do linguistics.

NS: "Her-spanic."

DM: Yeah, "Her-spanic, His-panic, I'm no one's panic."