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"Bad Hombres": Trump Era Politics and Media in Shaping the Perceptions of the Mexican Diaspora in the United States

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"BAD HOMBRES": TRUMP ERA POLITICS AND MEDIA IN SHAPING THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE MEXICAN DIASPORA IN THE UNITED STATES

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

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By Angelica Soria

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Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

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For my grandparents, parents, tío's, and tía's that worked with their hands so I could work with my mind.

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Abstract

My research delves into the anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric spread throughout the United States under Donald Trump's presidency by himself, mainstream media news outlet Fox News, and the U.S. government. Furthermore, examining the social identity of ethnic Mexicans in the United States in response to and as a consequence of the negative rhetoric. This thesis analyzes discourse including the harmful rhetoric and its impact on policy formulation, public perception, and the lived experiences of Mexican immigrants and ethnic Mexican communities. By looking at existing discourse, this research provides a critical discourse analysis of political speeches, media coverage, and ethnic Mexican testimonios. This analysis reveals a pattern of demonization, stereotyping, and scapegoating of Mexican immigrants in the United States. These mechanisms contribute to existing social tensions and generate a hostile environment not only for Mexican immigrants but the broader Mexican demographic in the United States.

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Chapter One: Introduction

I.   Introduction

"We have some bad hombres here and we're going to get them out," is what Donald Trump said at his final presidential debate in 2016 in reference to unauthorized immigrants who crossed the U.S.-Mexico border (Peters, G. and Woolley, J.T., 2016). This is just one example of how Trump has generalized the undocumented immigrant population to perpetuate harmful rhetoric in an effort to push his political agenda. His demonizing rhetoric largely targeted Mexican immigrants as the source of crime in the United States and a threat to the nation. The United States is repeatedly seen as a "melting pot" of cultures, a nation founded by immigrants and built into a dream destination for individuals and families seeking a better life. However, over recent years there has been a deeply polarized debate regarding immigration, particularly in regard to Mexican immigrants. The rhetoric surrounding Mexican immigrants in the United States is one aspect of the complex immigration debate issue. While not all citizens hold negative views, there is a well-documented history of demonizing language and stereotypes employed by some individuals, media outlets, and political figures. Such rhetoric often characterizes Mexican immigrants as criminals, job stealers, or threats to the nation's cultural identity. Public opinion influences policy which then feeds political rhetoric and media portrayal, developing the cycle of mistreatment towards immigrants and stifling their integration into American society. Thus, to address the dehumanization of Mexican immigrants comprehensively, it is vital to assess both the policies that contribute to the dehumanization and rhetoric that fuels public sentiment.

Looking at the militarization of the United States-Mexico border is important in understanding how it impedes the human rights of Mexican immigrants as well as their social

and economic opportunities within the United States. Analyzing the dynamic between the legislature implemented in regards to U.S. borders as well as the rhetoric that surrounds it will help inform policy decisions and public discourse, promoting a more comprehensive understanding of the issue and its implications for all parties. The United States immigration system is a complex web of laws, regulations, and policies that have undergone significant changes over the years. A critical examination of these laws reveals practices that include family separations, lengthy detentions, and the denial of asylum claims, violating the basic principles of human dignity. Paired with immigration laws is the increased militarization of the United States-Mexico border (Massey, D., 2020). A heightened security presence, including border patrol agents and physical barriers, has been implemented in the name of national security. However, such militarization not only affects the safety of immigrants coming through the southern border but also symbolically devalues their lives by treating them as potential threats to the nation, rather than as human beings in search of refuge and prosperity (Chavez, L., 2008). Highlighting specific laws enacted under President Donald Trump with underlying injustices aimed toward Mexican immigrants will show exactly how they are treated as the Other in the United States.

It is not beneficial to discuss the mistreatment of ethnic Mexicans in the United States without providing them a platform to explain how their lives have been impacted because of it. Therefore, this study includes existing testimonios of ethnic Mexican responses to anti-Mexican sentiments during the Trump era. Anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric has influenced not only how others perceive them but how the Mexican diaspora in the United States perceive themselves. The consequences of anti-Mexican immigrant narratives could be a Mexican immigrant parent not teaching their U.S.-born child Spanish, no longer passing down recipes from the homeland, and many other cultural disconnections. These disconnects weaken their sense of identity and

can have lasting effects on future generations (Deonarain, S., 2020). Negative narratives can strain interpersonal relationships leading to mistrust, prejudice, and internal conflicts based on the misconceptions perpetuated in these narratives (Rojas Perez OF, Silva MA, Galvan T, et al., 2023).

II.   Positionality

As a third-generation Mexican immigrant, it is important that I call out the injustices that my people, my family face here in the United States. My grandparents on my father's side, *mi Tata* Arturo Soria *y Nana* Cristina Soria, immigrated to the United States in the mid-to-late 1900s. From El Remolino, Zacatecas, Mexico, they made their way to Southern California to work the agricultural fields. Eventually, they ended up settling down in the Coachella Valley with 7 kids and a thirst for achieving the American Dream. For me, growing up in the Coachella Valley, which was just under two hours away from the border, meant there were frequent doctor, party supplies, and taco trips to *Mexicali*. Eventually, once my family had the means to, trips back to *El Remolino* were the highlight of my summer breaks. Watching my grandparents become rejuvenated as we hiked *el rancho* and hearing my dad, *tío's,* and *tía's* talk about their early memories of life in Mexico brought me closer to the country I claim as a second home despite never residing there. Fostering that connection to our roots is important to me; continuing to speak the stories of love, suffering, and triumph that my family faced is part of that. Ensuring that I do my part to dismantle the figurative and literal wall between my American and Mexican identities is one way I can repay them for the opportunities they gave me.

Being born and raised in the Coachella Valley meant I was exposed to the stark differences between communities that held a majority white population and those that had majority persons of color. Coachella and Indio both have a large Mexican, in general a broader

Latino population, whereas Palm Desert and Palm Springs are known to have a wealthier, white, U.S.-born demographic. As tensions rose throughout Trump's era, I became fearful that my family would become victims of hate-speech our President encouraged. Therefore, the choice to solely concentrate on Mexican immigrants in the United States is in part due to my ancestral history. However, as an academic and researcher, I must acknowledge that experiencing this type of racism can be assumed to be shared between the broader Latino community in the U.S.

III.   Background and Need

a.   Brief History of Mexican Migration

Mexican immigration to the United States can officially be traced back to 1848 with the conclusion of the U.S.-Mexican War in which the United States invaded and took almost half of Mexican territory (Gutiérrez, R.A., 2019). The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo gave Mexican citizens in the annexed territories one year to move further into Mexican national lines or to stay and automatically become American citizens. It was speculated, based on information from the 1850 census, that nearly 86,000 ethnic Mexicans resided in the United States (Martinez, O., 1975). The next major wave of Mexican immigration to the United States occurred when the U.S. Congress negotiated bilateral labor agreements with Mexico, known as the Bracero Program in 1942. From 1942 to 1947 nearly 219,000 Mexican *braceros* were under working and living contracts in exploitative agriculture and infrastructure jobs (Gutiérrez, R.A., 2019). By the late 1940s, derogatory words like *wetbacks* were used to reference Mexican immigrants who had entered without inspection by traveling through the Rio Grande. This form of rhetoric gave leeway to criminalize undocumented Mexican immigrants as "illegal aliens" and was seen as a form of power employers had over undocumented workers to threaten deportation or exploit

them as they had no legal resources (Gutiérrez, R.A., 2019). These phrases are still commonly used in debates by anti-immigrant and anti-Mexican supporters.

More recently, as of 2021, the U.S. held 97% of all Mexican emigrants (MPI, 2022). Data released by the Migration Policy Institute (2023) shows that about 45.3 million immigrants resided in the United States in 2021, about 13.6% of the total U.S. population. As seen in Figure 1[1] the Mexican immigrant population steadily increased throughout the years, only falling slightly in the last decade due to policies imposed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. While the year prior to this data showed a slight decline from 2019 to 2020 due to a global pandemic, COVID-19, and the threats put out by the Trump administration, numbers slightly rose again in 2021. Since the start of census reporting, the highest percentage of immigrants in the United States was recorded in 1890 with 14.8% of the total population (MPI, 2023). Accounting for 24% of the total immigrant population in 2021, Mexicans are the largest immigrant group in the U.S. (MPI, 2023). Additionally, about 27% of the nation's population are immigrants and their U.S.-born children, according to the Current Population Survey in 2022 (MPI, 2023).

Because of the prominent presence of Mexican culture in the United States, it is important to call-out and hold institutions accountable for influencing and perpetuating harmful narratives. The purpose of my thesis is to hold agents accountable by highlighting specific examples of President Trump's, the federal government, and mass media's derogatory and racist rhetoric towards the Mexican diaspora in the United States.

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[1] Chart can be found in Appendix 1.

IV.   Research Questions

The overall focus of this research paper is to discuss the treatment of Mexican immigrants in the United States by conducting a comprehensive critical discourse analysis of the existing immigration laws, media rhetoric, and public sentiments circulating in the United States during the Trump-era. Through critical discourse analysis, this study will explore two interconnected questions within immigration discourse in the United States:

- What rhetoric among citizens in the United States demonizes Mexican immigrants and how is that perpetuated through political agents and the media?

- How does anti-immigrant rhetoric impact the social identity of Mexican immigrants and their following U.S. born generations?

Chapter Two: Methodology

This research is an analysis of Donald Trump's presidential campaign and term to examine the impact political and public rhetoric had on ethnic Mexicans in the United States during the time. While other demographics were targeted throughout the study's focused timeline (2015-2023) like the larger Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and LGBTQIA+ communities, I will be focusing on the Mexican diaspora in the United States alone. This is crucial in understanding how political agents have the power to widely influence public opinion and societal practices to welcome or ostracize different groups. Finally, my research will showcase how these harmful narratives have altered the self-perceptions of ethnic Mexicans in the United States and the way in which they engage in the nation's society.

I. **Research Design:**

I will use Critical Discourse Analysis as a methodology for this study. Critical discourse analysis will prove to be powerful in examining the demonization of Mexican immigrants in the United States by shedding light on the underlying power dynamics, ideologies, and social constructs that influence the portrayal of this group in the media, political discourse, and public narratives. In his work, Norman Fairclough (2013), a leading scholar in critical discourse analysis, emphasizes the importance of understanding how language is tied to social practices, power structures, and the dissemination of ideologies. He argues that critical discourse analysis allows researchers to dive deep into the way discourse operates in society and how they influence perceptions of different social groups (Fairclough, 2013). In using critical discourse analysis, this work is an effort to uncover and address the contextual patterns that become evident as a result of anti-Mexican immigrant social interactions in the United States.

By analyzing various forms of discourse, including media articles and political discourse, a critical discourse analysis can uncover the underlying ideologies and social constructions that contribute to the stigmatization of Mexican immigrants. Teun A. Van Dijk, another prominent scholar in critical discourse analysis says, "CDA focuses on the ways discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of *power* and *dominance* in society" (2001). The circulation and discussion of information is what makes that specific group or topic powerful, watching how each different concept interacts with each other and their audiences is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in practice. I will analyze where political agents use their discourse to exercise power over the public which overall dominates the attitudes towards the Mexican diaspora in the United States. Van Dijk defines social power as "control" one will have power over the other if they can control them. In his chapter "Critical Discourse Analysis" in *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* he says this determines who is afforded privileges in society like "money, status, fame, knowledge, information, 'culture,' or indeed various forms of public discourse and communication" (2001, p.355). By paying attention to specific, common vocabulary used in relation to Mexican immigrants like "illegal aliens" or "~criminals" it can be seen how this community is being labeled as the Permanent Foreigner (Chavez, 2008, p.26). The use of specific language in media and political discourse has grown over the recent decade. As politics have become more performative, the language used has increasingly organized social identities.

I will use Critical Discourse Analysis to uncover the patterns of political discourse towards Mexican immigrants by looking at which specific words trigger anti-Mexican immigrant reactions in the public. Ruth Wodack's "The Discourse of Politics in Action: Politics as Usual" (2009) explores the relationship between language, power, and social action in relation to

political discourse. Wodak examines the ways in which politicians use language to build their own identities, shape public perceptions (of themselves and others), and engage in political practices. Wodak then emphasizes that politics have become increasingly performative, where language shapes political realities. This is seen following the 2016 presidential election where undocumented immigrants, though he calls them "illegal immigrants," were at the forefront of Donald Trump's campaign. The negative rhetoric surrounding immigrants and the southern border led groups to turn their pitchforks on this community. Through a critical discourse analysis, this thesis will see the inner workings of how demonizing speech is strategically used for specific gains– not only within the political discourse sphere but in public rhetoric as well. In contribution to that theory, Hardy (2001) says that critical discourse analysis attempts to uncover the way reality is produced rather than interpret its existence. I will be analyzing how major news channel media sources manipulate the language to associate Mexican immigrants with "criminals," "rapists," or "drug dealers" in effort to push certain agendas. This then gives power to political actors to continue on with these harmful actions, perpetuating this endless cycle of hate. Looking at the socially constructed ideas of Latinos, specifically Mexicans, in the United States allows this study to expose the foundation of anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric in the United States and its consequences.

II.   Data Collection:

There is no specific framework for performing a critical discourse analysis research project; scholars state that each project is unique and dependent upon the specific discourse being analyzed within that specific project (Gee, 2004). My objective is to analyze the current immigration climate in the United States, expose the rebirth of unconcealed racism targeting Mexican immigrants, and examine the impacts of the negative rhetoric on the community. In

narrowing down the study to discourse produced between 2015-2023, I will be filtering discourse that is relevant to the precedent set by the election of the 45th President of the United States through his anti-immigrant and anti-Mexican agenda. This critical discourse analysis will include the analysis of 6-12 sources, a number that will be narrowed down as the research is performed to ensure the relevance of each discourse piece chosen. The discourse will be categorized into political discourse, public discourse, and ethnic Mexican social identity in the United States. Sources eligible to fall under political discourse are legislation and legal discourse; here I will be looking for laws enacted under Trump and any legal responses to his administration's rulings. Under public discourse, I will be looking for speeches, remarks, and statements made by Donald Trump sourced from the University of California Santa Barbara's The American Presidency project. Additionally, public discourse will include Fox News that connects to Trump's discourse like programs aired on their television network or articles published to the news website. For Mexican social identity, I plan to look through interviews and testimonios previously published on ethnic Mexican responses to the political and public rhetoric of the Trump era. These can include local news interviews, other research performed including testimonios, and books that include testimonios with Mexican immigrants and Americans of Mexican ethnicity.

III.   Data Analysis:

The analysis will take part in four stages; data collection, data organization, pattern identification, intertextuality of data. **Stage One** will consist of selecting the discourse and familiarizing myself with them. Reading through the speeches, legislation introduced, media articles, existing testimonies, and examining public opinion polls then coding these pieces into my different subtopics of political rhetoric, public rhetoric, and Mexican social identity. Here I will be explicitly looking for discourse that has "Mexico" or "Mexicans" in the text. As well,

Stage One will focus on dissecting the text for relevant reflections of anti-Mexican sentiments. **Stage Two** will be organizing the data systematically, making sure the pieces I chose are representative of my thesis topic, organizing for the ease of analysis. The coding process will focus on both the language, attitudes used, and the tone of the author, in each of these discourses. **Stage Three** will be where I identify the dominant patterns, themes, and ideologies of the selected texts. Some dominant discourse patterns that are well-known in immigration discourse are that immigrants are economic threats or burdens, are national security risks, or are threats to the cultural unity of the nation. Going into the research, I will already be looking for these themes as they are the more prominent ones. **Stage Four** will consist of me considering the intertextuality of all of the discourse chosen. This is where I can see how the discourse speaks to and influences each other, how they contribute to the construction and reinforce the existing ideologies, or how they challenge them. Throughout this stage I hope to identify how political and public discourse perpetuate the anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric cycle. This will be where I explore the power relations – who has the power to speak, who is silenced, and how is that power maintained – between all actors: political agents, the public, and Mexican immigrants.

IV.   Strengths and Limitations:

This qualitative approach to my study holds both strengths and limitations. Utilizing one approach in only analyzing existing discourse allows me to focus solely on the texts. This will give my research the ability to uncover underlying power structures and ideological nuances embedded within the language used. A critical discourse analysis allows me to explore how linguistic choices like framing, metaphors, and narratives construct and perpetuate negative narratives and discriminatory stereotypes towards the Mexican diaspora in the United States. I am able to uncover implicit biases, dominant narratives, and discursive strategies used by actors

to justify unequal power relations. Therefore, I will be able to expose the multifaceted nature of anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric. Going beyond surface level interpretations to include its historical patterns, influences on the socio-political realm, and the cultural dimension. Additionally, using a critical discourse analysis approach gives me room to be transparent by promoting reflexivity in research. It encourages researchers to critically examine their own positioning, biases, and assumptions throughout their analysis.

The last point can also be a limitation to my research as my own biases and subjectivity may propose a barrier in my interpretation of the discourse. Since I will be looking and sorting through discourse to include and analyze on my own merits, this could impact what meanings I attribute to each text. These interpretations could be influenced by my own perspectives, values, and preconceptions which may not fully capture the complexity of each discourse example this thesis will introduce.

Another limitation in performing a critical discourse analysis solely in qualitative research is the lack of direct engagement through interviews or interactions with participants. Incorporating interviews that would have been exclusive to this study would have helped propel the direction of my research further. Nevertheless, I include previously published interviews and testimonios in my analysis that aid in providing deeper perspectives and personal narratives. These sources still contribute to a more holistic and empathetic understanding and analysis by shedding light on the voices and experiences of the marginalized ethnic Mexican community in the United States.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

In this chapter, I will delve into the existing research and literature on Mexican immigration to the United States and ethnic Mexican sense of belonging in the United States. This chapter is structured to provide a comprehensive review of existing literature, key theories, and scholarly discussions that are relevant to my research. This literature review will begin with an exploration of the theories that are the frameworks for this research. Prominent scholars such as Charles Taylor, Leo R. Chavez, and Cherríe Moraga, whose contributions have shaped discourse in the field. Then, this chapter will transition to an analysis of scholarship that has investigated similar phenomena within Mexican immigration to the United States. First starting with the political rhetoric and discourse about the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border under the guise of a security concern. Following that, this chapter will explore existing research surrounding public rhetoric and the implications of widespread, demonizing narratives of Mexicans in the United States have on the greater American public. Lastly, this review will touch on how anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric shapes the formation of identity, social integration, mental well-being, and political participation amongst the Mexican diaspora in the United States. Through this comprehensive review, this thesis contributes to the broader scholarly discourse of Mexican immigration to the United States and establishes a strong foundation for my research.

I.   Social Imaginaries - The Latino Threat Narrative

The concept "social imaginaries" is often credited with being made popular by Charles Taylor in his book "Modern Social Imaginaries" (2004). Taylor's view is that there is a collective understanding, shared beliefs, and a cultural framework that shape how individuals

perceive and interpret the society around them. Those communal values influence how people relate to each other, institutions, and the broader social context. He argues that social imaginaries are not only individual perceptions but are shared across a community that create the foundation for identity, communication, and their social cohesion (Taylor, 2004). I will use this to look at the rising white supremacist sentiments specifically targeting ethnic Mexicans in the United States. These social imaginaries are assembled by social contracts in which individuals reciprocate "performative acts of promising and agreeing [to] create a quasi-objective social totality that then governs their actions" (Lee & LiPuma, 2002). An example for this that I will touch on in the later chapters is the ideals generated by former President Donald Trump. While the original slogan comes from Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign where he used the phrase, "Let's Make America Great Again" (Harris, 2020). The Make America Great Again (MAGA) ideology was reformed by a quasi-quid-pro-quo agreement between Trump and his followers, support him and he will make the country "great *again.*" Many left-leaning and anti-Trump individuals believed that it was a hint towards a time when women and minorities "knew their place" (Jouet, 2017). His explanation for using the slogan was in defense of "American exceptionalism;" in his book he says, "Maybe my biggest beef with Obama is his view that there's nothing special or exceptional about America—that we're no different than any other country" (Trump, 2011). In an interview he explained that America was no longer as exceptional in many areas like employment, the border, security, or law and order– and he believed that through his leadership he could restore the country to its "former glory" (Engel, 2017). Restoring the exceptionalism of the United States of America was an angle of the social imaginary Donald Trump was feeding into the public.

Ideas for social imaginaries are also formed through TV and radio news, talk shows, movies, and the general media as they encourage collective biases (Chavez, 2008). For persons who participate, the social imaginary is seen as the most authentic platform to live their lives by. I would like to highlight that while the frameworks "social imaginaries" and Benedict Anderson's (1983) "imagined communities" share multiple similarities (Taylor has even credited Anderson with inspiration for his "social imaginaries" framework), they refer to distinct concepts within the realm of social theory. As stated, Taylor's "social imaginaries" encompasses broad mutual beliefs and cultural values that influence how a society collectively comprehends their reality. "Imagined communities" specifically addresses social construction of nations, emphasizing that people perceive themselves as part of a widely shared community even if they never interact with the majority of their fellow community members (Anderson, 1983). Anderson's framework focuses on the cultural elements like language, symbols, and shared narrative, add to the formation of a national identity, whereas "social imaginaries" can be applied to various aspects of societal interpretation including identity, norms, and cultural structures. Both concepts recognize the role of human imagination in shaping shared beliefs, though "social imaginaries" maintains a broader perspective appropriate for different societal phases while "imagined communities" concentrates on the dynamics of nationalism and the creation of nations.

My decision to use "social imaginaries" as a framework is related to how the anti-immigrant sentiment is not one that embodies the whole of the United States. While there is a large community in the U.S. who loudly proclaims their dislike for Mexican immigrants in the U.S., there is an equally as large (or larger) community who have favorable opinions on them (The Pearson Institute, The Associated Press, 2023). In the beginning of Chapter 2 "What Is a

'Social Imaginary'?" Taylor says, "the social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (2003). The word I would like to focus on from that definition is "legitimacy"; as in the context of the American social imaginary this thesis would like to study how the "legitimacy" in question is the perceived right to belong in the United States.

Prevailing social imaginaries are tied to anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric in the United States by shaping perceptions of identity and the nation's culture. In anti-immigrant discourse, the imagined community of the United States has often emphasized an exclusive and narrow definition of the American identity. That sentiment is generated by fears of the perceived threat of immigrants to the nation's security. In this context, the idea of a "security threat" is that immigrants will disrupt life for native-born citizens through economic, cultural, and political factors. The belief that immigrants as whole but especially Mexicans (as they are the largest immigrant community in the U.S.) will disrupt societal norms and will weaken the American culture. This will be covered more in-depth in Chapters 3 and 4. Such social imaginaries have become embedded in political rhetoric, media representations, and public discourse, creating a narrative that frames Mexican immigrants as "other" and outside the bounds of the envisioned American national community. Political leaders often play a substantial role in shaping these imaginaries, reinforcing negative stereotypes, and fostering a sense of "Us vs. Them" mentality.

My research will look at discourse through the lens of The Latino Threat Narrative of the American imaginary. Coined by Leo R. Chavez, this is the "alleged threat to the nation" posed by Mexican and other Latin American immigrants in the United States (2008, p.23). His book, "The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation" (2008), examines the portrayal of Mexican immigrants as threats to national security, criminals, and as detrimental to

the nation. Some of the dominant and common beliefs of the American imaginary are that immigrants will steal jobs from them, refuse to integrate, or that they are a danger to the preservation of the national identity. Beliefs that Latinos are unwilling to learn English and the "American culture," and are uniting to reclaim the land lost in the Mexican American War eventually are major fears of this American imagined society. Chavez notes that the Latino Threat Narrative highlights the experiences of Mexicans, however public discourse about United States' immigration regularly includes immigrants from Latin America as a whole (2008, p.3). For the purpose of this study, the incorporation of the Latino Threat will directly focus on ethnic Mexicans in the United States. Ethnic Mexicans in this study will be categorized as Mexican immigrants both documented and undocumented, as well as their U.S.-born children. The choice to highlight solely the rhetoric surrounding Mexican immigrants in the U.S. is due to the isolation of Mexicans in immigration public discourse. Mexican immigrants are consistently regarded as the representation of "The Illegal Alien" amongst immigrant groups in the U.S. and are often in the direct line of sight of negative immigrant narratives. Chavez explicitly says, "Latinos are an alleged threat because of this history and social identity, which supposedly make their integration difficult and imbue them, particularly Mexicans, with a desire to remain socially apart as they prepare for a reconquest of the U.S. Southwest" (2008, p.4). This narrative, rooted in racialized fears, has played a significant role in dehumanizing Mexican migrants, and has shaped the immigration discourse and policy landscape.

Analyzing discourse through the lens of the American social imaginary will help provide context as to why the predominantly white, Trump-supporter population is against the Mexican immigrant community in the U.S. Outlining what the Latino threat social imaginary defines as a "legitimate" right to belong in the United States. Chavez says "in much public discourse means

that they [Mexicans] are criminals and thus [*illegitimate*] members of society undeserving of social benefits, including citizenship" (2008, p.4). Anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric in these social imaginaries not only marginalizes ethnic Mexicans in the U.S. but also perpetuates harmful narratives that influence public opinion and policy decisions.

II.   Disappearing Tribe

Criticisms from the American imaginary determining that Mexican immigrants and American descendants of Mexicans are not integrating themselves into the culture of the United States have taken a toll on the social identity of these communities. This narrative has impacted the self-perception of Mexican immigrants and their future American Mexican generations. It is imperative that this thesis looks at the community's response to the pressures of the American imaginary calling for further integration while in actuality demanding assimilation from Mexican immigrants and descendants in the United States. In Cherríe L. Moraga's essay "Indígena as Scribe" she points out the concept of "a 'disappearing tribe' of Chicanos, "It was a metaphor to describe the cultural assimilation of generations of familia that follow them[...] How do I counter the loss of values, memories, ethics, and faith practices that go with this generation of elders?" (p.91, 2005). Disappearing Tribe is the loss of cultural traditions, language, and even every-day mannerisms that are lost through the generations. I plan to use this framework when specifically looking at how ethnic Mexicans have reacted to the anti-Mexican rhetoric in the United States since Donald Trump's presidency. In her book *Native Country of the Heart: A Memoir* (2019), Moraga gives a firsthand account of how she had to sacrifice pieces of her identity as a means of survival. Furthermore, how the pressures of her elders or society have told her to forgo her entire culture for the supposed betterment of herself, she says "that our dreams *can* come true in 'America,' but at the cost of a profound senility of spirit" (p. 6, 2019). Her fight between cultures

and identities as a Mexican American woman is reflected in most of her work and has proven to be an essential narrative especially when looking at the current state of immigration politics in the United States.

A portion of my research will focus on the social identity of Mexican immigrants in the United States in the aftermath of the Trump era. Beyond that, I plan to incorporate the narratives of Mexican-American children who still face the same criticisms despite the United States being their home country. The dominant idea of Mexicans in the United States is that they are all immigrants, but there are also those of us who are not really immigrants, who were born in the United States but still face the same criticisms. Moraga makes this clear in her work: we must remember and tell the stories of our ancestors and carry these experiences down so that we do not forget our roots. In the face of discrimination and oppression, Moraga makes it known, especially in *Native Country of the Heart* (2019), that it is okay to keep home cultures. I hold this framework close to my heart as a third-generation immigrant, who feels pride in being a Chicana from Southern California, hearing and speaking *Spanglish*, and playing *corridos* at my predominantly white private colleges. However, that pridefulness was a journey to come to. It is important that I point out the other side to that journey. As I look through discourse about Mexican social identity in the United States, it is possible to come across narratives that also suppress their Mexican identity in the face of damaging and dehumanizing rhetoric.

III.   Political Rhetoric

The militarization of the US-Mexico border has been a focal point of scholarly research, with an emphasis on understanding the historical context and evolving policies of United States immigration. For the context of this thesis, I define militarization as the expansion and dramatization of enforcement personnel at the US-Mexico border, wherein these acts generate

more suffering for migrants. I draw inspiration for this definition from Timothy J. Dunn in "The militarization of the US-Mexico border in the twenty-first century and implications for human rights" (2021) where he defines militarization as "police acting like the military and the military acting like police as well as their mutual collaboration and integration, particularly military involvement in domestic law enforcement and security matters." Andreas (2000) in "Border Games: Policing the US-Mexico Divide" provides an extensive analysis of how border security measures have evolved over time, leading to the intensification of enforcement efforts which have direct implications for the experiences of Mexican migrants. Operation Gatekeeper and Operation Streamline, among others, have demonstrated the magnification of border security, involving the reinforcement of the border with fences, walls, increased Border Patrol presence, and advanced surveillance technology. Furthermore, Cornelius (2001), in "Death at the Border: Efficacy and Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Control Policy," sheds light on the complexities of border enforcement measures, which, while intended to curb illegal immigration, have had unintended consequences, including pushing migrants into more dangerous routes and methods. Cornelius' research highlights the need for a comprehensive assessment of the outcomes of border militarization. In agreement, Hing (2016) reiterates that border enforcement strategies affect migratory patterns but are not working at preventing unauthorized entry into the United States. Consequently, the department's prevention through deterrence strategy is directly linked to the significantly increasing number of deaths among border crossers as they push them out of the public eye. Moreover, Massey, Durand, and Pren in "Border Enforcement and Return Migration by Documented and Undocumented Mexicans" (2015) state that migrants are remaining in the United States longer after successfully entering, lowering border crossing statistics; however not in the way policymakers had thought. As a result of these tactics, Slack et

al.'s (2016) "The Geography of Border Militarization: Violence, Death, and Health in Mexico and the United States" states that these enforcement strategies inflict more pain, suffering, and trauma on migrants.

Andreas (2003) underscores the impact of border security policies on the movement of people, goods, and information across the border, emphasizing its growth in terms of personnel and technology. In his piece "Redrawing the Line: Borders and Security in the Twenty-First Century" (2003), he explores the evolving landscape of border security in the twenty-first century. The author discusses how post 9/11 era brought increased attention to border security, with the US-Mexico border serving as a focal point. Andreas' work provides an in-depth analysis of how the border has shifted from a relatively dynamic space to a heavily fortified and securitized region. Especially following the terrorist attacks of 2001, policy makers have "seized windows of opportunity" to pass stricter immigration laws, supporting the criminalization of immigration law as said by Daniel Martinez and Jeremy Slack (2013) in "What Part of 'Illegal' Don't You Understand? The Social Consequences of Criminalizing Unauthorized Mexican Migrants in the United States". Additionally, Bill Ong Hing's "Defining America Through Immigration Policy" (2004) recounted and explained the reaction both society and policy had to migration repercussions specifically from Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican experiences. He highlights that the supreme court has historically given Border Patrol more leeway to target Mexicans, like in the exceptions granted in *United States vs. Brigoni-Ponce* (1975) that allowed officers to stop vehicles if they have evidence and reasonable suspicion that the occupants are in the country illegally. These policies have had profound implications for migration routes, leading to shifts in migration patterns, and exposing Mexican migrants to increased risks and dangers.

The humanitarian and human rights dimensions of border militarization have been explored extensively. A work like Lind (2016) in "Land of the Unfree: A Century of US Immigration Control" discusses how security measures have had a significant impact on the human rights of migrants and how border communities are subjected to intensified surveillance and security presence. These studies emphasize the complexities and ethical concerns surrounding border militarization. Payan et al. (2018) in "A War That Can't Be Won: Binational Perspectives on the War on Drugs" explores the interplay between the War on Drugs, border security, and the dehumanization of Mexican migrants, showing how security measures and racial biases intersect to create a hostile environment for those seeking a better life in the United States. In "Dying to Live: A Story of US Immigration in an Age of Global Apartheid," Nevins (2008) explores the border as a site of intense enforcement, surveillance, and violence. The book presents a critical perspective on the human consequences of militarization, highlighting the risks and dangers faced by migrants as they navigate the heavily fortified border region and the suffering that has resulted from these policies. Nevins' work emphasizes the moral and human rights dimensions of the militarization of the US-Mexico border. This collectively underscores the intricate relationship between border security policies and their consequences for the movement of people across the US-Mexico border.

Security has become synonymous with militarization, emphasizing the need for more equipment, agents, and walls. Political influence from the "War on Terror" and "War on Drugs" further reinforce the notion of securing the borders from "alien invaders" (Slack et al., 2016, p.12.) Rhetoric surrounding undocumented migrants often dehumanizes them, likening them to terrorists. The Customs and Border Protection (CBP) mission, "...to safeguard America's borders

thereby protecting the public from dangerous people and materials... We protect the American people against terrorists and instruments of terror," inaccurately equates undocumented migrants with terrorists. In reality, most migrants are driven by economic and family-oriented factors, not terrorism. Still, throughout the Trump era, racial ideologies were reflected in racist policies that magnified inhumane treatment of Mexican immigrants. Just after he was inaugurated, Trump signed two executive orders that targeted Latino immigrants; one expanding Border Patrol and authorizing the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to build more detention centers along the southern border, the other increased the number of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers and bridged the relationship between local and federal law enforcement (Massey et. al., 2016). President Trump's pervasive laws didn't stop there, scholars have discussed his administration's revival of Secure Communities which facilitated local police to share data with DHS and the FBI. This ultimately increased deportations as the law now prioritized undocumented immigrants who had committed minor offenses or those who were suspected of committing a crime (Simmons et. al., 2020). Researchers have endorsed the idea of a "Trump effect" in the United States, which is that Trump has "emboldened individuals to express their prejudice" through his racially charged speeches as explained further in "The Trump Effect: An Experimental Investigation of the Emboldening Effect of Racially Inflammatory Elite Communication" (Newman et. al., 2020). Out of literature read on the four years of the Trump Administration, it is clear that racialization processes have influenced immigration policies and encouraged discrimination against all Mexicans in the United States, not only Mexican immigrants.

IV.   Public Rhetoric

The demonization of Mexican migrants in the United States, as illuminated in the literature, investigates the racialized narratives and stereotypes that have become prevalent in political discourse, media representation, and public opinion. Rodolfo Acuña's "Occupied America: A History of Chicanos" (2019) traces the development of stereotypes and discrimination against Mexicans in the United States from the early 20th century onwards. Understanding that the anti-Mexican immigrant narrative has been brewing for years and is embedded into American history will provide insight into the persistence of those same sentiments in present-day discourse. The interconnectedness of border militarization and demonizing rhetoric of Mexican migrants in the United States is a prominent theme in existing literature. This convergence of security measures and racial biases creates a climate of fear and distrust, further heightening the challenges and dangers faced by Mexican migrants. The Authors of "A War That Can't Be Won: Binational Perspectives on the War on Drugs" (Payan, et al., 2018) underscores the urgent need to address these issues through equitable immigration policies, media literacy, and a more inclusive approach aimed at recognizing the rights and dignity of Mexican migrants and other marginalized communities in the United States.

The demonization of Mexican migrants in the US has been explored in academic literature, shedding light on the racialized narratives that have stigmatized ethnic Mexicans. Leo R. Chavez's work, "The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation" (2008), examines the portrayal of Mexican immigrants as threats to national security, criminals, and as detrimental to the nation. Harmful anti-Mexican immigrant narratives, rooted in racialized fears, have played a significant role in dehumanizing Mexican migrants, and has shaped the

immigration discourse and policy landscape. Since Mexican accessibility to legal entry was cut in the mid-to-late 1900s, the migrants who had routinely left Mexico to come to the United States were now seen as "illegal." With that, Massey (2020) praises Chavez's (2001, 2008) work explaining that because they, Mexican immigrants, were now "illegal" they were defined as threats to the nation for being "criminals" which in turn influenced the "Latino Threat" in U.S. media and society. Bonilla-Silva's (2019) "Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States" investigates how color-blind racism operates in media representations, perpetuating negative stereotypes of Mexican migrants and other racialized groups. This literature underlines how racial biases intersect with border militarization, reinforcing the notion that Mexican migrants are a threat and subsequently intensifying the challenges they face.

The definition of racism in the context of this study is constructed with Carter's definition; "the transformation of racial prejudice into individual racism through the use of power directed against racial group(s) and their members, who are defined as inferior by individuals, institutional members, and leaders" (2007). Racial groups are oppressed and experience social inequality through the enabling of racism by social institutions and their discriminatory practices (Omi & Winat, 2014). In the United States white individuals are on the advantageous side of the racial hierarchy, as the country is led by a "White racial frame" (Canizales &Vallejo, 2021; Feagin, 2014). As Canizales and Vallejo (2021) explains:

These controlling images shape public discourse and commonplace understandings of

Latinos-regardless of national origin, race, class, or generation-in American society, and

are presented in racial scripts that pit Latinos against U.S.-born Whites and other

immigrant groups.

They go on to explain that these racial ideologies protect white supremacy by racializing

language and stereotypes, as well as the "practices that shape institutional integration, cultural

belonging, and life chances" (Canizales & Vallejo, 2021). It is important to point out the

significance of the 2016 election and Republican presidential campaign when discussing anti-

immigrant rhetoric, specifically anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric in the United States. Since

Trump's campaign, hate crimes against Latinxs in the United States have been steadily

increasing over the last 8 years (Linares, 2023). President Trump's political discourse during his

tenure was marked by inflammatory language and policy proposals targeting Mexican

immigrants. The practice of demonizing Mexican immigrants, Latino immigrants as a whole

really, is not a newly introduced concept within anti-immigrant rhetoric scholarship. However, as

the political climate within the United States changes, the negative narratives become more

obvious and harmful towards the Mexican community.

V. **Social Identity**

This portion of the literature review aims to explore the intergenerational effects of anti-

Mexican immigrant rhetoric in the United States, examining how it shapes not only

contemporary public discourse but also the formation of identity, social integration, mental well-

being, and political participation among the descendants of Mexican immigrants. The rhetoric

surrounding Mexican immigrants can drastically influence how subsequent generations perceive

themselves and their cultural identity. According to Portes and Rumbaut (2001), these

individuals often grapple with a complex process of identity negotiation, torn between their ancestral cultural heritage and the pressures to assimilate into the dominant culture. Negative societal attitudes and anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric play a pivotal role in shaping the identity formation of second-generation immigrants. The persistent negative rhetoric can contribute to a sense of alienation and internal conflict, influencing how these individuals perceive themselves and their place in American society.

This development of their mixed identity often results in an intense internal conflict, wherein the children of Mexican immigrants tackle conflicting expectations and societal perceptions. The persistent negative rhetoric contributes to a real sense of alienation, as these individuals strive to merge their cultural roots with the prevailing narrative that often casts them as 'other' or 'outsiders.' This struggle is not merely an abstract ideological battle; it permeates their daily lives, influencing their interactions with peers, authority, and the broader community. In addition to the research done by Portes and Rumbaut; on his own, Rumbaut, R. G. (2008) in "Reaping What You Sow: Immigration, Youth, and Reactive Ethnicity" explores how negative societal attitudes can lead to a phenomenon of 'reactive ethnicity' among second-generation immigrants. This concept delves into how these individuals, in response to external pressures, may assert their cultural identity more assertively. This can serve as a coping mechanism, allowing these individuals to counteract the dehumanizing effects of demonizing rhetoric by actively reaffirming and embracing their cultural heritage. Rumbaut proves to be a leader in the realm of research on bicultural children of immigrants. In, "Sites of the belonging: Acculturation, Discrimination, and Ethnic Identity among Children of Immigrants" (2005) says that "ethnic self-identities emerge from the interplay of racial and ethnic labels and categories imposed by the

external society and the original identifications and ancestral attachments asserted by the

newcomers." An ever changing dynamic within oneself and society, never stagnant as it is

always being influenced in one way or another.

Speaking to that, Jean Beaman's "Citizen Outsider: Children of North African

Immigrants in France" (2017) offers a comparative perspective by exploring the identity

formation of North African immigrants' children in France. Beaman successfully captured and

expressed the feelings of being a multi-ethnic child of immigrants who are deemed the minority

living amongst the majority. The feeling of balancing your "otherness" among a group of similar

races/ethnicities- in the case of Beaman's writing it was the purebred, white French population.

On page 67, Beaman (2017) said, "… claim a French identity, but they vary in the degree to

which they assert their North African origins" and "Identity is relational and therefore influenced

by how others regard one's claim to it." I interpreted this as Beaman explaining how minorities

often have to prove how connected they are to others on the basis that they need or want those

others to recognize them or validate their connection to them. An example of this is minorities

emphasizing their similar ethnicity, nationality, religion, culture, etc. that they have in common

with the majority in order to seek validation. While focusing on a different immigrant group, the

parallels drawn from this work contribute to understanding the broader dynamics of identity

formation in the context of immigration, shedding light on the nuanced ways in which

individuals navigate and respond to external pressures.

Anti-Mexican rhetoric can hinder the social integration of Mexican-American

communities across generations. Massey and Sánchez's "Brokered Boundaries: Creating

Immigrant Identity in Anti-Immigrant Times" (2010) investigate how negative rhetoric

influences the social and spatial boundaries of Mexican immigrant communities. The authors argue that anti-immigrant sentiment can lead to social exclusion and limited opportunities for community integration. In other words, the racist underlyings of anti-Mexican immigrant sentiments in U.S. society drastically shape Mexican's lifestyles in America. Authors of "Somos Más: How Racial Threat and Anger Mobilized Latino Voters in the Trump Era" have said that Trump's rhetoric has increased the pan-ethnic Latino identity regardless of whether they were born in the United States (Gutierrez et. al., 2019). Academic discourse on the impact of the Trump administration's anti-Mexican agenda on the Mexican community in the United States shows that the rhetoric can go in two directions. One where Mexican immigrants and future generations suppress their identity, or the other where it amplifies Mexican pride as a defense mechanism (Rumbaut, 2008).

While sparse, there have been some studies published on the connection between anti-immigrant rhetoric and psychological stress for Latino immigrants (see Becerra et. al., 2020; Ornelas et. al., 2021; Valentín-Cortés et. al., 2020). Findings have suggested that the increase in immigration enforcement, discrimination, and anti-immigrant rhetoric has played a factor in the heightened stress of Latino immigrants. Because the area has a small number of studies, the ones available have yet to specifically highlight Mexican immigrant results instead focusing on Latino immigrants as a whole. However, from what is available, we can deduce that anti-immigrant rhetoric has indeed impacted the overall health of Mexican immigrants in the United States (Rojas Perez et. al, 2023).

VI.   What's Next:

This literature review provides an overview of the existing scholarship on Mexican immigration to the United States and the negative rhetoric surrounding it by highlighting key themes and findings. One of the central findings is the prevalent presence of anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric in media, politics, and public discourse. Scholars such as Douglas S. Massey, Bill Ong Hing, Rodolfo Acuña, and Rubén G. Rumbaut have contributed valuable insights into the discursive strategies and societal impacts of this harmful rhetoric. This literature review underscores the urgency and ongoing relevancy of addressing discriminatory rhetoric within academic, political, and public spheres. In the next chapter, I present the findings of my investigation into the consequences of anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric on public perceptions. Through a critical discourse analysis of Trump era discourse, this study seeks to explore the ways in which such discourse influences attitudes, behaviors, and social dynamics towards ethnic Mexicans in the United States.

Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

In this chapter, I delve into the findings of the critical discourse analysis that investigates the dynamics of anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric in the United States following Donald Trump's presidential campaign announcement in 2015 and its ramifications on the social identity of Mexican immigrants. My research questions aimed to uncover rhetoric that demonizes specifically Mexican immigrants and understand how that rhetoric is spread through political agents between 2015-2023 and perpetuated through conservative news outlets. Additionally, my research sets out to explore the ways in which this anti-immigrant discourse influences how Mexican immigrants shape their social identities and the lasting effects of the following generations.

This chapter will present data collected through legislation enacted in Donald Trump's first year of his presidency, speeches delivered by Donald Trump, news articles and reports published by conservative news outlets, and testimonios previously published from Mexican perspectives in the U.S. between 2015 to 2023. The following sections reveal the ways in which Donald Trump and conservative media outlets contribute to the anti-Mexican immigrant narrative. By strategically using harmful language like calling Mexican immigrants criminals or by newscasters perpetuating demonizing language that Trump has used, the two agents collectively drive this narrative deeper into the public sphere. The anti-Mexican immigrant narrative fed to the public depicts ethnic Mexicans in the United States as a danger to the "American way of life." The three main themes found throughout my discourse analysis are that Mexican immigrants are portrayed as a national threat to the United States, are criminalized in political and public discourse, and pose a threat to the white demographic of the United States. In regards to my Case Study #3 that focuses on the social identity of ethnic Mexicans in the US, the

dominant theme found there was that the ethnic Mexican community suppressed their cultural pride as a response to negative rhetoric being spread.

I.   Case Study #1: Political Rhetoric

Within his first week of office, President Trump introduced two executive orders, Executive Order No. 13,767: *Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvement* and Executive Order No. 13,768: *Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States*, that I touch on below in Excerpt 1 and Excerpt 2. These two executive orders enhanced interior and exterior border enforcement by increasing resources allocated to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and reassigning federal government priorities, disproportionately targeting Mexican and broader Latinx immigrants. Excerpts 1, 2, and 3 are significant to this study because they are examples of how impactful the anti-immigrant agenda was to Trump's campaign. These excerpts demonstrate how Mexico as a nation and ethnic Mexicans took the heat of this agenda, facing heightened scrutiny and discrimination. Below, I highlight and cut out certain parts of each discourse that this thesis will focus on.

Excerpt 1: Exec. Order No. 13,767: *Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvement*[2]

[…] The recent surge of illegal immigration at the southern border with Mexico has placed a significant strain on Federal resources and overwhelmed agencies charged with border security and immigration enforcement, as well as the local communities into which many of the aliens are placed.

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[2] Full excerpt chosen can be read in Appendix 2.

[…] Among those who illegally enter are those who seek to harm Americans through acts of terror or criminal conduct. Continued illegal immigration presents a clear and present danger to the interests of the United States.

[…]

Sec. 2. Policy. It is the policy of the executive branch to:

(a) secure the southern border of the United States through the immediate construction of a physical wall on the southern border, monitored and supported by adequate personnel so as to prevent illegal immigration, drug and human trafficking, and acts of terrorism; (Exec. Order No. 13,767, 2017).

The cornerstone of Donald Trump's presidential campaign was to promise to build a wall between the United States and Mexico to defend the United States against "illegal" immigrants. More notably, his first executive order while in office introduced plans to do just that (Exec. Order No. 13,767, 2017). Mexico, as a whole country, and ethnic Mexicans in the United States often took the brunt end of Trump's rhetoric, as the former president had demanded Mexico pay for the wall and that Mexican immigrants coming to the US were criminals (see Case Study #2). The federal government, and especially the Trump Administration, has historically decided to use the word "immigration" alongside words like "illegal", "(illegal) alien", "danger", "criminal", and "terrorism" as a strategic move (Exec. Order No. 13,767, 2017; Exec. Order No. 13,768, 82 FR 8799, 2017).

Using negative metaphors in regards to immigration fuels public fears of migrants. A *Social Influence* study published in 2010, found that the term "illegal alien" produced more prejudice against Mexican immigrants because it was associated with "increased perceptions of threat" (Pearson). In the second paragraph of Excerpt 1 the execution order states that

unauthorized immigrants (though they use "illegal" here) "seek to harm Americans through acts of terror or criminal conduct" (Exec. Order No. 13,767, 2017). The perceived "threat" is what gives the power to the government to impose harsher, more dangerous, and unnecessary enforcements at the border.

The last paragraph from Excerpt 1 begins with "secure the southern border of the United States through the immediate construction of a physical wall" (Exec. Order No. 13,767, 2017). Because the border in question neighbors Mexico, the perceived "threat" is largely placed on ethnic Mexican and Latino immigrants in general. The securitization of the U.S.-Mexico border is a euphemism for militarizing the border, to provide "security" against a "threat" by any means necessary. This not only impacts Mexican immigrants but Americans of Mexican heritage in the United States, and even Latino presenting people in the country, as they now have an imaginary target on their back because of harmful narratives. This focus has resulted in a disproportionate emphasis on deterring irregular migration without adequately addressing the protection of migrant rights. This oversight is partly attributed to the dominant narrative of migration as a security threat, which can minimize the need to uphold migrants' human rights obligations. Enhanced border security does not stop the flow of migration but mainly works to punish migrants by making their entry even more dangerous (see Massey, Durand, & Pren, 2016; Duun, 2021; Hing, 2016; Cornelius, 2001). Nevertheless, the decision to introduce immigration legislation so early on in Trump's term and so strongly is to show the power he had acquired with his election. His introduction of Executive Order No. 13,768: *Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States* seen in Excerpt 2 below is a prime example of that.

Excerpt 2: Executive Order No. 13,768: *Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States*[3]

> Section 1. Purpose. [...] Many aliens who illegally enter the United States and those who overstay or otherwise violate the terms of their visas present a significant threat to national security and public safety. This is particularly so for aliens who engage in criminal conduct in the United States.
>
> Sanctuary jurisdictions across the United States willfully violate Federal law in an attempt to shield aliens from removal from the United States. These jurisdictions have caused immeasurable harm to the American people and to the very fabric of our Republic.
>
> [...] Many of these aliens are criminals who have served time in our Federal, State, and local jails. The presence of such individuals in the United States, and the practices of foreign nations that refuse the repatriation of their nationals, are contrary to the national interest (Exec. Order No. 13,768, 82 FR 8799, 2017).

Executive Order No. 13,768's overall message is to protect the American public from unauthorized immigrants. As said in the title "Enhancing Public Safety" and throughout the excerpt by claiming unauthorized immigrants are a "threat to national security and public safety," "harm to the American people and to the very fabric of our Republic," and "are contrary to the national interest" (Exec. Order No. 13,768, 82 FR 8799, 2017). This executive order frames immigration enforcement and the removal of immigrants as part of the national interest. Suggesting that the presence of immigrants who have violated immigration laws pose a risk to national security, that they may continue to engage in illegal activities and undermine the well-

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[3] Full excerpt chosen can be read in Appendix 3.

being" of the United States. Claiming that unauthorized immigrants are "criminals" or are out to "harm" American citizens contribute to a broader narrative of fear surrounding immigrants. It reinforces the perception that immigrants, mainly unauthorized immigrants in this case, are inherently linked to criminality. Just like the first executive order introduced in excerpt one, this one in excerpt two strengthens Trump's Administration narrative of dehumanizing and stigmatizing migrants, labeling them as intrinsically dangerous or undesirable in the United States.

Undesirable enough that the executive order in Excerpt 2 pushed to eliminate sanctuary cities throughout the United States by claiming they "willfully violate Federal law" and "shield aliens from removal" (Exec. Order No. 13,768, 82 FR 8799, 2017). This rhetoric paints sanctuary policies as detrimental and irresponsible. Again, portraying immigrants who utilize and live in these sanctuary jurisdictions as a national security complication and causing harm to American citizens. Executive Order No. 13,768 reinstated Secure Communities, launched by ICE in 2008, which facilitated data-sharing between local police officers, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (Canizales and Vallejo, 2021). This agreement was previously shut down during President Obama's second term due to concerns of racial profiling.

As a result of Executive Order No. 13,768, President Donald Trump planned to overturn the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. For many DACA recipients, the program became their lifeline, providing them with the opportunities to pursue education, work authorization, and contribute to their communities. In a letter from Attorney General Jeff Sessions on September 4th, 2017, addressed to the Department of Homeland Security, he determined that DACA was unlawful and should be rescinded. In response, 15 states along with

the District of Columbia set out to sue the U.S. government in an attempt to block this plan on

partial grounds that it was directly punishing Mexican DACA recipients. The third excerpt for

my first Case Study reads:

Excerpt 3: State of New York et al. v. Trump et al., No. 1:17-cv-05228, 2017[4]

> [...]
>
> 3. More than 78 percent of DACA grantees are of Mexican origin, *See* Ex. 1
>
> (USCIS, Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Fiscal Years
>
> 2012-2017, June 8, 2017), which is more than double the percentage of people of
>
> Mexican origin that comprise of the overall foreign-born population (29 percent)
>
> of the United States. *[...]*
>
> 4. Ending DACA, whose participants are mostly of Mexican origin, is a
>
> culmination of President's Trump's oft-stated commitments—whether personally
>
> held, stated to appease some portion of his constituency, or some combination
>
> thereof—to punish and disparage people with Mexican roots. [...]

Ending the DACA program was widely perceived as a direct attack on ethnic Mexicans

for several reasons. As mentioned in the excerpt above, 78% of DACA recipients were of

Mexican origin as of 2017 (*State of New York et al. v. Trump et al.*, No. 1:17-cv-05228, 2017).

This underscored the program's role in providing opportunities and legal protections to a

significant percentage of Mexican immigrants in the United States, a demographic that has been

at the forefront of Trump's anti-immigrant agenda. Many DACA recipients had spent most of

their lives in the United States, considering the nation their home and forming deep ties to their

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[4] Full excerpt chosen can be read in Appendix 4.

communities. Ending DACA means deporting individuals who had grown up in America, uprooting their lives, disrupting their education, careers, and relationships.

The court case *New York et al. v. Trump et al.* (2017) directly points out that the ending of DACA could be in relation to "President Trump's off-handed comments" about Mexican immigrants and Americans with Mexican heritage. Furthermore, it mentions that the move was to either back up his own beliefs and/or those of his constituents who support what Trump has previously said about the Mexican community in the United States. This proves that his anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric was significant and blatant enough to be called out by several other governing bodies. The state governments included in the lawsuit had called Trump out not only because his anti-Mexican sentiments were obvious, but because it was becoming worrisome that his racist beliefs were going to be implemented into federal laws. The decision to end DACA symbolized Trump's broader anti-immigrant stance, particularly those of Mexican descent. The excerpt shows that it was perceived as a deliberate move to cut the rights and opportunities of Mexican immigrants and their children.

While the language in Executive Order No. 13,767 (excerpt 1) and Executive Order No. 13, 768 (excerpt 2) does not specifically target Mexican immigrants as they often use "many aliens who illegally enter," "those who illegally enter", "illegal immigration" (Exec. Order No. 13,767, 2017; Exec. Order No. 13,768, 82 FR 8799, 2017). Given the context of immigration policy during the Trump Administration it is reasonable to think that Mexican immigrants could be disproportionately affected by Executive Order No. 13,767 and Executive Order No. 13,768. That was proven through the shared feelings of the plaintiffs who issued the complaint against Trump that the ending of DACA was in effort to punish those with "Mexican roots" (*New York et al. v. Trump et al.,* 2017). During President Trump's time in the White House, he was

perceived as targeting Mexican immigrants through his immigration policies like the two executive orders mentioned previously through which he planned to build a border wall, implement stricter immigration enforcement measures, and his push to end the DACA program. His efforts to attack the Mexican diaspora in the United States while in office were made happen by the support he gained through spreading harmful narratives against Mexican immigrants. Case Study #2 will feature statements made by Donald Trump and comments by Fox News programs in connection to Trump's statements. The discourse presented in Case Study #2 are presented simultaneously to show how rhetoric from political figures and mainstream media play off of one another and feed into a larger, more harmful narratives.

II.   Case Study #2: Public Rhetoric

Dehumanizing and demonizing terms like "aliens", "illegals", "invasion" and others are famously used throughout not only Donald Trump's speeches but by conservative news outlets throughout his term. Words like these reduce the status of immigrants as "Others" in opposition to the "American" identity that is present. Josue David Cisneros explains in his article called "(Re)Boarding the Civic Imaginary: Rhetoric, Hybridity, and Citizenship in La Gran Marcha;"

> Obsession over the literal and symbolic border between American and foreigner, between *us* and *them*, is motivated in part by the fear of dilution and dissolution of US Citizenship. As a result, alienation of the non-citizen is fundamental to the rhetoric maintenance of US identity. [...] Just as the border town is drawn to exclude migrants based on their legal, racial, ethnic, or other 'difference,' borders can be redrawn to reshape the contours of US citizenship (p. 26, 2011).

Therefore, those who are in positions of power like the President of the United States or prominent news anchors have the ability to control dominant discourse and construct the identity of who "belongs" or rather who is "American". President Trump has ignited this narrative of migrants, specifically Mexicans, being "less-than" to the "American" identity, reduced to their immigration status. In Case Study #2; I present three different instances in which Donald Trump has directly called upon the "illegality" of Mexican immigrants and has criminalized them. I then present three different stories from Fox News, the most trusted news source amongst Republicans according to a Pew Research Center study published in 2020 (Budiman, A., 2020). The excerpts from Fox News showcase that Trump's anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric bled through the closet door masking racism in American society.

One of Donald Trump's most notorious anti-Mexican quotes comes from his presidential campaign announcement in New York City on June 16th, 2015, covered in Excerpt 4.A. As immigration was one of the fundamental bases of Trump's presidential campaign, this statement sparked intense debate and controversy about immigration in the United States. Furthermore, it solidifies Trump's status as an ally to the portion of the public who were fiercely anti-immigration, and even more anti-Mexican.

Excerpt 4.A: Trump, D. June 16th, 2015. Remarks Announcing Candidacy for President in New York City[5]

> TRUMP: When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs.

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[5] Full excerpt chosen can be read in Appendix 5.

They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people

(para. 10).

The dominant framing of immigrants in the Trump era is that they are "criminals," even more so for Latino, and specifically Mexican immigrants in the U.S. According to Otto Santa Ana (2013), the rhetoric framing immigrants as "criminals" shifted in 2004; prior to that in the 1990s, they were seen as "animals". In the news media immigrants have largely taken on a more negative connotation. Through the speech, he solidified the "Us vs. Them" narrative and effectively played into Chavez's Latino Threat Narrative. Aside from the most disrespectful part of the quote: "They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists". Trump also says "They're not sending you" as a means to further bridge the gap between American citizens and Mexican immigrants. This strategy is to define Mexican immigrants as criminals and American citizens as innocent. He presents American's as faultless in comparison to the "criminals" who could victimize citizens of the United States. However, it is important to clearly define the type of American Trump would like to claim as innocent. This American fits the profile of a white, English-speaking, American citizen– *not* Mexican-Americans. In "The Discursive construction of strangers," Ruth Wodack says, "identity is always defined via *similarity* and *difference*" (p. 17, 2015). By this definition, Trump establishes this narrative to make it easier to accept immigrants as "Other", as "criminals" out to harm the "innocent America(n)." This perfectly sets up politicians to present themselves as saviors to the American public for turning away and ridding the US of these supposed dangers. Additionally, defining the "innocent American" as someone who is white and English speaking rather than including all American citizens, to exclude Americans of Mexican roots and other minorities, is another example of Trump playing into the Latino Threat Narrative. Despite the shock and disgust by many that the then-

presidential candidate would use strategic discourse to paint certain demographics like Mexicans as criminals or dangers to society, Trump faced no consequences. Many of his supporters dismissed it as Trump being straightforward, other supporters denied he ever said it. Below in excerpt 4.B is a discussion covered by *Rolling Stone,* in which hosts from *Fox News'* program called *The Five* decide to deny the fact that Trump has been racist towards Mexicans.

> **Excerpt 4.B: Wade, P. July 10th, 2020. Fox News Achieves Peak Gaslighting by Claiming Trump Never Called Mexicans Rapists. *Rolling Stone.*[6]**
>
> > 'And if you're talking about who likes division, President Trump pushes buttons of division and polarization, quite regularly,' Williams said. 'I think you'll remember he started his campaign by going after Latin immigrants. He said Mexicans were rapists and thieves.'
> >
> > Co-hosts Greg Gutfeld, Jesse Watters, and Jeanine Pirro all shook their heads in disagreement, while some repeated, 'No, [Trump] didn't.' And Watters tried to downplay the severity of the president's past racist remarks by reminding the Fox audience that Trump also said, 'some [Mexicans] are good people' (Wade, paras. 3-4, 2020).

Instances like this where supporters deny or downplay any wrongdoings of Trump in the face of criticism, is a product of confirmation bias and a direct consequence of Trumpism. Trumpism is tied to Donald Trump's personal brand of leadership, characterized by his combative communication style and focus on building a loyal base of supporters rather than consensus-building. Supporters will filter information to seek out content that reinforces their views and dismiss or downplay information that contradicts them. Emotional influences like

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[6] Full excerpt chosen can be read in Appendix 6.

loyalty, admiration, or identification with Trump also drive confirmation bias, as supporters defend him and rationalize any of his controversies. This is seen in Excerpt 4.B by a couple TV hosts denying Trump ever called Mexicans rapists and other hosts on the TV program adding that the president said, "some are good people" (Wade, paras. 3-4, 2020). The hosts decided to add that Trump also said some Mexicans were "good people" as a way to give more weight to justify their support for Trump. Almost as if the hosts believed the public should overlook Trump calling Mexicans criminals and rapists because he said, "some are good people."

Again, at other rallies, in statements, and presidential debates, he harps on that Mexican immigrants coming to the U.S. are "brutal," "unwanted," or the "bad ones." All words that have negative connotations and can work to instill fear into the public. In Excerpt 5.A, I cover Trump's comments at the Republican presidential candidates' debate in Cleveland, Ohio where Trump doubles-down on his previous statements that Mexicans are criminals, drug-dealers, and now, murderers.

Excerpt 5.A: August 6th, 2015. Presidential Candidate Debates, Republican Candidates Debate in Cleveland, Ohio[7]

> **TRUMP:** So, if it weren't for me, you wouldn't even be talking about illegal immigration, Chris. [...] And I said, Mexico is sending. [...]
> The fact is, since then, many killings, murders, crime, drugs pouring across the border, are money going out and the drugs coming in. And I said we need to build a wall, and it has to be built quickly.
> [...] we need, Jeb, to build a wall, we need to keep illegals out. [*cheering and applause*]

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[7] Full excerpt chosen can be read in Appendix 7.

The beginning of Excerpt 5.A is an example of Trump inserting harmful rhetoric into his campaign strategy, again. In the 2015 Republican Candidates Debate, Trump's first comments on immigration were that he is the first to bring light to the situation at the southern border. Particularly, the supposed problem the United States has with Mexico "sending" its citizens north. As touched on in Excerpt 4.A, discourse framing like this gives power to Trump to paint himself as the "American savior" for "locating" the problem and providing a plan to fix it: building the wall. Which he reiterates in the continued interview in Excerpt 5.A:

Excerpt 5.A cont'd.: August 6th, 2015. Presidential Candidate Debates, Republican Candidates Debate in Cleveland, Ohio[8]

> **WALLACE:** Mr. Trump, [...]what evidence do you have, specific evidence that the Mexican government is sending criminals across the border? Thirty seconds.
>
> **TRUMP:** Border Patrol, I was at the border last week. [...] And the Mexican government is much smarter, much sharper, much more cunning. And they send the bad ones over because they don't want to pay for them. They don't want to take care of them (Peters, G. and Woolley, J.T., 2015).

Trump generalized that all Mexicans coming to the United States are the reason for "many killings, murders, crime, drugs pouring across the border, [...] money going out and the drugs coming in" (Peters, G. and Woolley, J.T., 2015). Not only is this damaging, but not true. A study by the Cato Institute using crime statistics from Texas in 2015 found that there were 50% fewer criminal convictions of unauthorized immigrants than of native-born Americans and about 66% fewer for authorized immigrants (Nowrasteh, 2016). Next, he said that the United States needs to keep "illegals" by building a wall out after referring to Mexicans as the immigrant

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[8] Full excerpt chosen can be read in Appendix 7.

problem. The Associated Press Stylebook as of 2013 has denounced the use of and discourages others from using the term "illegal" when referring to a person. They say that the term "illegal" should only refer to an action, people cannot be illegal, but the Associated Press says people can partake in *illegal immigration (Colford, 2013).* By using inflammatory language, especially dysphemisms like "illegal alien," "illegal immigrant," or "illegals" Donald Trump dehumanizes immigrants.

Trump's thoughts and acts in front of a large audience like Fox News' has is dangerous. Even more-so in this day and age where information, true or false, is so widely accessible via the internet and social media. In response to the statements made about Mexican immigrants, Fox News published the below opinion piece by Tommy De Seno in support of Trump's claims.

Excerpt 5.B: De Seno, T. July 22, 2017. Gentleman's Guide to Donald Trump's comments about illegal immigrants and crime. Fox News.[9]

> If the illegally residing Mexican population were to form a state, they would be the 14th most populated state in America – the same size as Massachusetts.
>
> Thinking of the illegally residing Mexicans in terms of the size of Massachusetts adds perspective to the huge numbers. For instance, imagine the problems it would cause were Massachusetts to announce tomorrow it is no longer a state.
>
> [...]
>
> The rest of us would have to pay for all that because the structure of that state which heretofore supported it would no longer exist.
>
> Would we want to do that even for our fellow Americans in Boston? No, we would say they ask too much of us.

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[9] Full excerpt chosen can be read in Appendix 8.

De Seno's article (2017) backs up Trump's claims that Mexican immigrants who come to the US are "rapists" as he compares the numbers of "illegally residing Mexicans" to the state of Massachusetts. The author goes on to say that they have become more of an economic burden for "the rest of us", "us" being American citizens. This is a prime example of the consequences behind Donald Trump's America First campaign. Like-minded people to De Seno and Trump are hyper-focused on the status of Mexican immigrants without giving thought to reasons why individuals had to migrate, the amount of time they have been in the United States, and the positive contributions immigrants have on the American economy and society.

Excerpt 5.B cont'd.: De Seno, T. July 22, 2017. Gentleman's Guide to Donald Trump's comments about illegal immigrants and crime. Fox News.[10]

> Yet that is precisely what the illegally residing Mexican population is forcing us to do. A group the size of Massachusetts is using our structures to afford themselves a civil society, despite not having invested in building it (according to the DHS, 82% of illegal aliens arrived within the last 25 years).
>
> If we would refuse Massachusetts this freebie if they asked, why do we say yes to Mexico who takes without asking? (De Seno, 2017).

De Seno claims that undocumented Mexican immigrants have not "invested" in American society. In his article, he goes on to say that unauthorized Mexican immigrants are taking over the "civil society" of the U.S., "despite not having invested in building it" (De Seno, 2017). Mexican immigration to the United States began in 1848 with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo where Mexicans were later naturalized as American citizens if they did not leave the ceded territory of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah, and Colorado (The

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[10] Full excerpt chosen can be read in Appendix 8.

Library of Congress, n.d.). Mexican immigrant workers were essential to the growth of the United States between 1876-1930. Mexican laborers came to the United States to work in the gold mines of California, built railroads across the country, and played a significant role in the construction and maintenance of the agricultural sector (Gutiérrez, R.A., 2019). As a more recent example, an American Community Survey found that 96.7% of undocumented Mexican immigrants work and provide for the American economy by earning $92 billion in household income and contributing almost $9.8 billion in federal, state and local taxes in 2019 (New American Economy, 2021). Mexican immigrants are significant players in the development of the United States and deserve to be recognized for their part in creating this country. There is a reason why the saying "America is a nation of immigrants" is widely used, because they contribute to the growth of the United States on all fronts.

Furthermore, Trump and De Seno focus solely on Mexican migrants. It is known that Trump has used "Mexican or Mexicans" as a synonym to "immigrant or immigrants" throughout his political career, however this oversight is what has resulted in so much anti-Mexican sentiment in the United States. The synonymity of "Mexican or Mexicans" and "immigrant or immigrants" is used on the basis of generalizing racist beliefs; one, that all Latinos are Mexican and two, that all people with Mexican roots in the United States are immigrants.

No matter their positive influences in the United States, Donald Trump has effectively knocked back years of progress in achieving a more inclusive society by spreading anti-Mexican and anti-immigrant rhetoric. He has framed Mexican immigrants as criminals and as threats to the American way of life. However, the disrespect does not stop at non-U.S. citizens but extends to those born in the United States with Mexican roots. As mentioned previously, he uses words like *Mexican, Latino,* and *immigrant* interchangeably – they all target the same

demographic to him. An example of that in practice is Trump's response to US District Judge Gonzalo Curiel certifying *Low v. Trump University* (2016) that alleged the school was a fraud, where Trump incorrectly assumed that Judge Gonzalo Curiel was Mexican. Judge Gonzalo Curiel is American as he was born in Indiana and is of Mexican ancestry as his parents immigrated to the United States. Nevertheless, Trump accuses Judge Gonzalo Curiel of not being able to perform his job without bias because "he is Mexican" as seen below in Excerpt 6.A (CNN, 2016).

Excerpt 6.A: *CNN.* **June 3ʳᵈ, 2016.** *State of the Union.* [11]

[...]

Tapper: But you're saying he can't do his job because of that.

Trump: Look, he's proud of his heritage. OK? I'm building a wall. Now, I think I'm going to do very well with Hispanics.

Tapper: He's a legal citizen.

Trump: You know why I'm going to do well with Hispanics?

Because I'm going to bring back jobs, and they're going to get jobs right now. They're going to get jobs. I think I'm going to do very well with Hispanics. But we're building a wall. He's a Mexican. We're building a wall between here and Mexico (CNN, 2016).

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[11] Full excerpt chosen can be read in Appendix 9.

In this interview with host Jake Tapper, Trump is implying that Judge Gonzalo Curiel has a conflict of interest in the case with Trump because Judge Gonzalo Curiel is Mexican-American and Trump plans to build a wall between the United States and Mexico. Prior to the discourse shown above, Trump dismisses Tapper's comment that his allegation was racist. In the below continuation of the interview in Excerpt 6.A, his assumption is that anyone with Mexican ancestry could not give an unbiased approach to situations regarding Trump, therefore Judge Gonzalo Curiel should be removed from the case.

Excerpt 6.A (cont'd.): *CNN*. **June 3ʳᵈ, 2016.** *State of the Union.*[12]

> **Trump:** The answer is, he is giving us very unfair rulings, rulings that people can't even believe. This case should have ended years ago on summary judgment. The best lawyers -- I have spoken to so many lawyers. They said, this is not a case. This is a case that should have ended.
>
> This judge is giving us unfair rulings. Now I say why. Well, I want to -- I'm building a wall, OK? And it's a wall between Mexico, not another country, and ...
>
> **Tapper**: But he's not -- he's not from Mexico. He's from Indiana.
>
> **Trump**: In my opinion -- he is -- his Mexican -- Mexican heritage. And he's very proud of it.
>
> **Tapper**: But you're not from Scotland because you have Scottish heritage.

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[12] Full excerpt chosen can be read in Appendix 9.

Trump: Hey, you know what? I'm not building a wall between Scotland and the

United States (CNN, 2016).

This is an example of Trump going beyond being flatly anti-immigrant but being

anti-Mexican as well. At the end of this section of the interview, Trump makes it abundantly

clear that this notion is only valid towards the Mexican demographic. In his mind, even native-

born U.S. citizens are in opposition to him because of his plans for the southern border. This

drives the wedge between the different Mexican communities in the United States and every

non-Mexican immigrant or non-Mexican-American person deeper. He continues to drive the

negative rhetoric that the Mexican demographic in the United States should be seen as "Other"

and an outsider in comparison to non-Mexican or white American citizens. He has undermined

the integrity of people with Mexican roots to the American public by claiming Judge Gonzalo

Curiel could not do his job. Further demonizing the Mexican and Mexican-American

population's post-Trump reputation.

Trump's negative rhetoric towards the Mexican population in the United States is in

an effort to suppress and minimize the power they can utilize just by the sheer number of them

within the country. By beating this rhetoric into the public, the power that the Mexican

demographic holds in the United States is lessened by fear of retaliation. Retaliation in the form

of violence, threats, and humiliation from both the U.S. public and government. In 2021, U.S.

census data reported 62.5 million Latinos in the United States, 37.2 million of those being people

of Mexican origin (Moslimani, M., Noe-Bustamante, L., Shah, S., 2023). California is home to

more than one-fourth of the Mexican immigrant population in the United States and 24% of the

broader immigrant population, the highest percentage in the country (Budiman, 2020). These

statistics are part of the reasons why conservative, anti-immigrant individuals believe and sustain

the idea of a Latino threat to a white America. In Excerpt 6.B below, Retired Colonel Douglas MacGregor voices his theory on why the democratic party is mainly pro-immigrant, which supposedly poses a threat to the Republican party.

Excerpt 6.B: MacGregor, D. June 6th, 2019. *The Tucker Carlson Show. Fox News.* [13]

Guest - RET. COL. DOUGLAS MACGREGOR: It's called demographic change. And right now the largest ethnic minority in California is largely Mexican and Hispanic. California is in the main today no longer a majority English speaking white state. It is in the main something else, something new, but largely Latino, largely Mexican. The Latinos, the Mexicans, are the base of the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party has decided they are the future for the left in the United States. The more of these people that can be brought in illegally, as well as legally, the better it is for the Democratic Party. Because their goal is to transform the United States into a facsimile of California. So that any election is impossible from the standpoint of the right, from the standpoint of the Republican Party, to win anything.

This excerpt is a direct example of Leo Chavez's Latino Threat Narrative as MacGregor goes on to say that California no longer has a white majority demographic. Per 2020 census data, whites are not the majority ethnic group in California, sitting at 35% of the population while Latinos make up 40%, with over two-thirds of them being native-born (McGhee, E., 2022). The statements made by MacGregor are not necessarily in fear for the republican party values, but those of white supremacists. The fear of losing the power of the white majority as California becomes more diverse, multicultural, and multilingual.

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[13] Full excerpt chosen can be read in Appendix 10.

Those fears have materialized into political strategies that expect to uphold white supremacy, as shown in Case Study #1. Whereas in Case Study #2, I presented statements made by Donald Trump and comments by Fox News programs to show how rhetoric shared between political figures and the media are built off of one another. Case Study #3 will go into the repercussions of this interconnected relationship, specifically how that relationship further demonizes ethnic Mexicans in the United States.

III. Case Study #3: Social Identity

> *Pero la raza es fregona*
> *Se las sabe todititas*
> *Si nos sacan por la tarde*
> *Regresamos de mañanita.*
>
> *[But our people are stubborn*
> *Everybody knows*
> *If they kick us out in the evening*
> *We'll be back the next morning.]*
>
> *- "Racismo en Arizona" written by Omar León*

Donald Trump and the media's demonization of Mexican immigrants and native-born Americans of Mexican descent has impacted the way they view themselves in American society. Through derogatory language and stereotypes, ethnic Mexicans in the United States have been stigmatized and discriminated against in various aspects of their lives, from employment to social interactions. Consequently, this has led to the internalization of these negative stereotypes which creates feelings of inferiority and shame regarding their cultural identity. An alternative to that is ethnic Mexicans becoming more prideful in their culture, a phenomenon called reactive ethnicity. This can serve as a coping mechanism, allowing these individuals to counteract the dehumanizing effects of demonizing rhetoric by actively reaffirming and embracing their

cultural heritage (Rumbaut, R.G., 2008). In this last Case Study, I will cover testimonios and interviews previously published on local news sites like KSAT.com from San Antonio, Texas and in book's written on immigrant resiliency. These testimonios will cover Mexican immigrants and their American children's response to Donald Trump and the idea of an American identity.

Living in constant fear of deportation, family separation, and violence led to increased feelings of anxiety and uncertainty within the Mexican community (Becerra D et al., 2020). In Eileen Truax's book "How does it feel to be unwanted? Stories of resistance and resilience from Mexicans living in the United States" (2018), she covers the resilient life-stories of 13 Mexican immigrants in the United States who feel unwanted in the country they call home. Her book introduces Omar León, an immigrant from Michoacán, Mexico now residing in Los Angeles, California who came to the United States when he was just eleven years old. Omar's chapter details how he has dealt with growing up in the United States, becoming a day laborer to make ends meet, and later becoming a prominent leader in local immigrant workers rights organizations. While he recounted his time as a day laborer sitting outside of a Home Depot in the sun waiting for work, he says the tide shifted when Donald Trump began campaigning. He says other immigrants who waited with him began feeling anxious every time someone would drive up, they didn't know if they would be receiving their job for the day or harassed by individuals with a newfound confidence in slinging anti-immigrant rhetoric. In Excerpt 7, Omar León recalls what it felt like after hearing Donald Trump had been elected as the 45th President of the United States:

> **Excerpt 7: Truax, E. 2018. "How does it feel to be unwanted? Stories of resistance and resilience from Mexicans living in the United States". [14]**

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[14] Full excerpt chosen can be read in Appendix 11.

"When he won, we felt horrible; a lot of things started happening. […] It had a big impact on workers like us, because people's attitudes started to change. People who thought like that man [Donald Trump] started coming out of the closet they had been hiding in. Out on street corners and at work sites, there were even more anti-immigrant attacks, like a lot of Trumps started coming out of the woodwork. The fight to get immigrants' rights recognized had taken years, and then from one day to the next, we had to fight twice as hard."

The topic of immigration in the United States has always been a hot-button issue but with the resurgence of harmful rhetoric like what Trump had been using it became even bigger, more visible. The annual hate crime report published by the FBI highlighted the 41% increase in anti-Latinx motivated hate crimes from 2016 to 2018 (Lopez, 2019). The 2022 report shows a 52% increase since then with 738 anti-Latinx motivated hate crimes (Linares, 2023). Clearly these are consequences of dangerous and discriminating rhetoric being perpetuated by some of the nation's most powerful politicians and news broadcast companies.

Anti-Mexican rhetoric is demonizing and dismissive of an entire culture. As immigrants try to hide their "Otherness" and fit themselves into the dominant American identity they lose ties to their cultural homelands. U.S. Representative and third generation Mexican immigrant, Joaquin Castro says he was taught English after his parents were punished for speaking Spanish at school (Acosta, S., 2021). In the interview shown in Excerpt 8, by Sarah Acosta (2021), Castro talks about the separation he feels from his culture.

Excerpt 8: Acosta, S. 2021. Many third-generation Hispanics don't speak Spanish, but their parents do. Why? *KSAT.com*. [15]

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[15] Full excerpt chosen can be read in Appendix 12.

"It really is just a generation of people who had a language literally beaten out of them in our school system," U.S. Rep. Joaquin Castro said. "And it's so tragic and unfortunate because it was not only the loss of a language, but also partly the loss of a culture" (Acosta, S., 2021).

As the new generations come, Spanish is becoming less and less taught by Spanish-speaking immigrant parents. A Pew Research study found that 50% of second-generation Latinos in the United States say their parents talked about their country of origin with pride in comparison to 33% of third generation Latinos in the United States (Lopez, M.H., Gonzalez-Barrera, A., López, G., 2017). The study also found that encouragement to speak Spanish decreased across the generations as it went from 85% of first-generation immigrants were encouraged to 68% for second generation and later 26% for third generation (Lopez, M.H., Gonzalez-Barrera, A., López, G., 2017). With the decrease, there is a loss of culture and of identity for both the Spanish speaking parent and the children who were not taught. In the full text available in Appendix 12, Nicole Ochoa Malesky, another third-generation immigrant from the *KSAT.com* interview, says she does not blame her mom for not teaching her Spanish as she knows it was done out of love and protection (Acosta, S., 2021). Protection from negative stereotypes and discrimination like what was seen perpetuated throughout Donald Trump's presidential campaign and term.

Toeing the line between Mexican and American, trying to stay true to your cultural heritage while also trying to fit into the mold of "an American" in a Trump influenced society is a struggle seen from second and third generation Mexican immigrants (Gamboa, S., Lilley, S., Cahlan, S., 2018). In Excerpt 9, a NBC News article about Latinos born in the United States, interviewees explain the relationship between intersecting identities:

Excerpt 9: Gamboa, S., Lilley, S., Cahlan, S. 2018. "Young Latinos: Born in the U.S.A., carving their own identity". NBC News. [16]

> Berenize García, 16, of New York City, said her father, a Mexican immigrant, has pressured her to be "more American," while her mother told her it's disrespectful not to retain and speak Spanish to their Mexican relatives.
>
> "That makes me feel confused, because how can I be Mexican when I'm pressured to be more American? How can I be American when I'm pressured to be more Mexican?" she said.

Berenize Garcia's experience reflects the struggle many individuals face when torn between their ancestral heritage and the dominant culture of their host country. Her father's pressure for her to be "more American" is an example of a common expectation among immigrant families for their children to assimilate. On the other hand, her mother's wishes for her to retain and continue speaking Spanish emphasizes the importance of maintaining that connection to one's roots. Berenize's experiences resonate with a popular Spanish phrase, "*Ni de aqui, ni de alla (Not from here or from there),"* used to describe the feeling of straddling both worlds, of feeling neither fully belonging to one's country of origin nor fully assimilated to the culture of their host country. This struggle mirrors the broader theme of the Mexican demographic in the United States grappling with their self-identity, sense of belonging, and cultural heritage in the face of societal pressures. The interview continues with Alma Flores-Perez's experience:

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[16] Full excerpt chosen can be read in Appendix 13.

Excerpt 9 cont'd.: Gamboa, S., Lilley, S., Cahlan, S. 2018. "Young Latinos: Born in the U.S.A., carving their own identity". NBC News. [17]

[...]

"We're stripped in a lot of cases of our Spanish tongue and our Spanish heritage and told it's really important that you only speak English and you know how to speak English well because otherwise, you're going to face hardship, which is in a lot of ways true because of the prejudice that this country holds," said Alma Flores-Perez, 21, born and raised in Austin, Texas.

"But at the same time, I've really come to see the importance of speaking Spanish or at least trying to claim that as our own and not be ashamed when you do speak Spanish, but also not being ashamed if you weren't taught it, because that wasn't necessarily your choice,"

Battling the negotiation of identity is a complex process where individuals are torn between connecting to their ancestral heritage and being pressured to assimilate to the dominant culture (Portes, A. & Rumabult, R.G., 2001). It delves into the realms of self-perception, societal expectations, and a dance between embracing one's roots and adapting to the prevailing norms. Alma's perspective highlights the pressures faced by many individuals with immigrant backgrounds to prioritize English proficiency as a form of assimilation. This pressure can result in neglecting or forgetting all-together their Spanish language skills and losing a key portion of their cultural heritage. However, Alma also retells that she shifts her perspective into reclaiming her Mexican heritage as she acknowledges the importance of speaking Spanish for her cultural identity. Alma's section of EExcerpt 9 is an example of the concept of reactive ethnicity by

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[17] Full excerpt chosen can be read in Appendix 13.

showing how individuals navigate societal expectations, cultural erasure, and the reclaiming of their ethnic identity in response to those pressures.

Despite challenges posed by racism and discriminatory policies, many Mexican immigrants and advocates have shown resilience and determination in the face of Trump era racism. A study performed by students at the University of California Santa Barbara, "'I Feel Like We're Going Backwards:' Post-Presidential Election Resilience in Latinx Community Members" (Consoli et al., 2018) composed of mostly Mexican participants asked how these community members reacted, how they confronted their fears, and what impact they believe this will have on their future. The concept highlighted from the study in Excerpt 10 is "persistence" as it encompasses the unwavering resolve of Mexican immigrants to continue living and striving for reform despite the obstacles they face.

Excerpt 10: Consoli et al. 2018. "I Feel Like We're Going Backwards:' Post-Presidential Election Resilience in Latinx Community Members." P. 25.[18]

…Persistence, involved the will to keep living in spite of current national conditions and challenges. Representative quotes by participants include: "Mi plan es seguir, somos muy fuertes en general, somos una comunidad muy fuerte, muy trabajadora e inteligente. Muchas personas tenemos carreras profesionales mas no podemos ejercerlas. Pero mi plan es, pues seguir viviendo." [My plan is to continue, we are strong in general, we are a very strong community, hardworking and smart. Many of us have professional careers but we can't practice them. But my plan is, well, go on living]. "Seguimos en la lucha... Obedecemos las leyes que, aunque las leyes a veces están en contra de nosotros... Pero seguir, seguir

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[18] Full excerpt chosen can be read in Appendix 14.

portándonos bien. Salir adelante, seguir contribuyendo al país que construimos

por mucho." [We continue the fight... We abide the laws despite laws sometimes

being against us... But continue, continue behaving well. Move forward, continue

contributing to the country that we've constructed by a lot.]

Excerpt 10 shows that Mexican immigrants will not falter in the face of their adversaries. This resilience not only is a testament of their strength but challenges the demonizing and exclusionary narratives imposed on them. While the study voices the stories of specific individuals, the sentiments are likely shared by many other Mexican immigrants facing similar challenges. The community will continue to prove themselves to a population that denies them and undermines their worth in the United States.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Previous research has studied similar topics in relation to Trump's rhetoric towards Latinos and other marginalized demographics as a whole; however, scholarship focusing entirely on the Mexican demographic is scarce. The same can be said for research on media representation as the majority of existing scholarship looks at the entire Latino demographic rather than narrowing down to specific ethnic communities. This thesis examines the impact of anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric during the Trump era. By focusing on discourse produced by Trump and Fox News, this research analyzes the specific language and context of the readings to identify what makes their speech harmful. Looking at the speeches and statements by Donald Trump in comparison to discourse produced by Fox News helped this research understand the relationship between the two in perpetuating this negative rhetoric. This thesis also highlights how negative rhetoric perpetuated by Trump and Fox News bleeds its way into other aspects of American life like influencing federal legislation. All in all, these key agents of society feed negative rhetoric; therefore, this thesis also sheds light on the consequences they have on the social and cultural identity of ethnic Mexicans in the United States. The aim of this study was to further the discussion on the treatment of ethnic Mexicans in the United States under Donald Trump's presidential campaign and term.

I. Significance and Impact

By touching on different factors like stereotyping, political messaging, representation in media, and the socio-cultural implications of harmful rhetoric on ethnic Mexicans in the United States, this thesis aimed at answering the following research questions:

- What rhetoric among citizens in the United States demonizes Mexican immigrants and how is that perpetuated through political agents and the media?

- How does anti-immigrant rhetoric impact the social identity of Mexican immigrants and their following U.S. born generations?

The research conducted through this thesis is significant because it provides insights into how political narratives are constructed, mobilized, and leveraged to push political agendas. Donald Trump's perpetuation of anti-Mexican immigrant narratives and revival of open-door racism undermines the human rights and dignity of this community. As his rhetoric has had a vast social impact for ethnic Mexicans in the United States, this research helps identify specific patterns in discourse that lead to stigmatized communities and social divisions. Not only has this rhetoric influenced public sectors, as this thesis points out, but it also influences and manifests discriminatory legislation. This research holds the government accountable for perpetuating negative and inflammatory stereotypes within federal laws through their use of language.

Furthermore, this research highlights the crucial role media plays in shaping public opinions and attitudes. By researching anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric in the media, this thesis helps analyze biases and framing techniques in an effort to promote more accurate representations across the board. Above all, this thesis works towards generating awareness for biases in political and public opinion. It serves as a reason why individuals should combat prejudice at all levels, promote empathy, and help in fostering inclusive communities within the United States.

It is important that research continues to analyze rhetoric put out by political agents and other influential figures. This form of research aims to hold those with power accountable for the narratives they perpetuate, whether they be positive or negative. Research of this nature has

many benefits for a progressive and just society. Studies focused on political and public rhetoric generate an understanding of political communication helping to dissect how messages influence and impact public opinion. Just as this thesis does, continued research on political rhetoric helps to identify manipulation tactics that encourage discriminatory sentiments.

Through a critical discourse analysis of existing immigration laws, media rhetoric, and testimonios of the Mexican diaspora circulating throughout the United States from 2021 to 2023, this study was able to answer how Mexican immigrants were demonized by political agents and the media. Through the normalization of hate-speech embedded in Donald Trump's discourse, media and civilian supporters were also endorsed to carry on that hate-speech. As a result, ethnic Mexicans within the United States were demonized and under attack- figuratively and literally (Linares, 2023). Sentiments raised that Mexican immigrants brought a demographic threat to the nation, that they would change the culture, language, and traditional values of the United States (Chavez, 2008; Massey, 2020). As a result, part of ethnic Mexicans began to diminish their noticeable connections to their ethnic roots and lose their cultural ties.

Rhetoric maintained by the President of the United States, Donald Trump and mainstream news media like Fox News aided in making those sentiments more widespread, causing mass hysteria (Hing, 2016). There is a relationship between the three points this thesis highlights; political rhetoric, public rhetoric, and social identity. They all influence and form each other, contributing to an endless cycle of harm for the Mexican diaspora in the United States as long as those in power feed the system with negative narratives. In navigating this study, this thesis was able to understand how power is exercised through political and public rhetoric on the social identity of ethnic Mexicans in the United States.

II.   Power Relationships

The dominant pattern found throughout this study was that Trump's dangerous and harmful influences on American public policy shows the power play of his politics in which he appealed to nationalist sentiments and identity politics at the detriment of ethnic Mexicans in the United States. Donald Trump's statements throughout his presidential campaign and term has altered the ethics of political discourse and, as a consequence, have changed the way public discourse is conducted. By being more candid in his own beliefs, which were seen as racist and discriminatory, his supporters in both the media and other public spaces have taken on a more outright polarizing and divisive stance deemed the "Trump effect" (Newman et. al., 2020). Attacking ethnic Mexicans, both verbally and physically, in the United States had become more prevalent as anti-Mexican rhetoric became popular under Trump's fame (Linares, 2023). Through this study, I noticed the exercise of power from political agents over the public by ruling what topics overruled discourse and how the narratives were framed.

a.   Political Power

Through Donald Trump's 2016 election victory, his type of discourse was validated by those that voted for him and the electoral college of the United States. Now, as the president, Trump was given the power to enact legislation that backed up his anti-Mexican immigrant sentiments. Trump prioritized immigration enforcement that worked toward increasing deportations, expanding detention facilities, and focused on deterrence. Clear examples of militarized immigration enforcement are highlighted in Excerpt 1: Executive Order No. 13,767: *Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvement* (2017), and Excerpt 2: Executive Order No. 13,768: *Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States* (2017). These Executive Orders criminalize immigrants as a whole, but Trump has specifically targeted

Mexican immigrants. Throughout Trump's campaign, he consistently declared that he would build a wall at the southern border to "keep illegals out" (Peters, G. and Woolley, J.T., 2015). Leo Chaves' "The Latino Threat" (2008) talks about how Mexicans are seen as the ultimate "Illegal Alien" in the United States through existing narratives. This theory is manifested through Trump's rhetoric as throughout his campaign and term he has put an emphasis on his belief that Mexican immigrants are at fault for crime and economic downfalls in the United States. With that it is reasonable to believe that these executive orders were implemented under the assumption and hope that Mexican immigrants would be impacted the most. Jointly, these executive orders propelled further militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border through infrastructure funding, hiring of more Customs and Border Patrol agents, use of surveillance technology, and integrating military training strategies. Existing scholarship on this topic shows that these approaches and plans only make the journey more dangerous for immigrants without decreasing the numbers (Nevins, 2008; Massey, Durand, and Pren, 2015; Hing, 2016). These policies reflected a shift towards more restricted immigration measures, focusing on deterrence rather than comprehensive immigration reform. Legislation like Executive Order No. 13,767 (2017) and Executive Order No. 13,768 (2017) can be perceived as a directed form of punishment at the Mexican immigrant population in the United States as they are historically the largest immigrant group passing through the southern border (Gramlich, 2024). Trump's continued use of demonizing rhetoric towards the Mexican diaspora in the United States has paved the way for more racialized legislation.

The third excerpt, *State of New York et al. v. Trump et al.* (2017) serves as an example of how politicians and government entities should respond when faced with unjust actions. This case highlights the importance of taking uncomfortable measures to protect the broader

population within the country. Ultimately, the President of the United States should not be untouchable and should be held accountable for their wrongdoings, especially when their actions are disrespectful to an entire community. By highlighting Trump's alleged reasons behind ending DACA, the 15 states in the *State of New York et al. v. Trump et al.* (2017), are taking a stance against widespread harmful rhetoric. Even moreso, the case specifically highlights that the ending of DACA was a result of the "culmination of President Trump's oft-stated commitments" (*State of New York et al. v. Trump et al.*, 2017). Illustrating Trump's consistent demonization of the Mexican diaspora in the United States was not incidental at all but a deliberate strategy to fuel his own agenda. Trump sought to emphasize the idea of "America first" which resonated with Americans who were concerned about immigrants "causing" issues like job competition, economic impacts, and security. By positioning immigrants as a security threat to the nation, this narrative gives power to the government to place blame on an entity other than themselves (Massey, D., Sánchez, M.,2010); Mexican immigrants. Trump's administration could deflect responsibility and justify their punitive measures by scapegoating vulnerable populations like Mexican immigrants through negative narratives.

b. Public Power

Political discourse during the Trump era was a direct consequence of his and his supporters' public discourse and continuation of negative rhetoric. Trump's use of specific words and phrases with negative connotations in reference to Mexican immigrants gave leeway for this type of discourse to become normalized. This normalization led to the de-sensitization of jarring statements being made which is what happened in Excerpt 4.B: "Fox News Achieves Peak Gaslighting by Claiming Trump Never Called Mexicans Rapists" (Wade, P., 2020). Trump's supporters downplayed the gravity of his statements giving way for this type of speech to

become more popular. As mentioned by existing literature, the development of stereotypes and discrimination against Mexicans in the United States has been traced to the early 20th century (Acuña, 2019). However, as Trump emerged as a political actor there seemed to be a rebirth of unconcealed racism in both politics and public discourse. Trump used a "white racial frame" to lead the country during his presidency, giving the white demographic an advantage at all levels. He relied on racist tropes to name himself as white America's "savior" against the emerging immigrant population in the United States, who supporters believed were the reason why the American Dream was no longer attainable (Canizales & Vallejo, 2021). Through his rhetoric, Trump effectively shifted the blame of unemployment, lack of housing, and sky-rocketing prices from the government to immigrants and people of color.

With Donald Trump's first speech on June 16th, 2015 (Excerpt 4.A), he moved into the political sphere as a defender of a White America against demographic change that immigrants caused. Immigrants from Latin American countries and specifically Mexicans as the largest demographic (Rosenbloom, R. & Batalova, J., 2022) posed that threat to Trump and others afraid of demographic change in the United States. Thus, the focus of Trump's racist and xenophobic comments were Mexican immigrants. This ideology bled into mainstream media channels like the one this thesis focuses on: Fox News. Fox News generated, and continues to generate, controlling images of Mexican immigrants that label them as outsiders by calling them illegal(*s*), criminals, lacking intellect, hoarders of public resources, and overall, a threat to the American imaginary. The American imaginary, for this thesis specifically, defines the white nationalist agenda of maintaining the white demographic majority in the United States (Hananel, 2020).

The entirety of Trump's harmful rhetoric is perpetuated through media, its influence on the American public is seen by Fox News publishing the opinion piece in Excerpt 5.B:

"Gentleman's Guide to Donald Trump's comments about illegal immigrants and crime" (De Seno, T., 2017). The author uses Trump's words to fuel the "Us vs. Them" rhetoric with an effort to cast Mexican immigrants as "Othered" in the United States. This shows how Trump's rhetoric has trickled down to "ordinary" citizens in the United States and has permeated society. Mexican immigrants were also painted as a threat that undermined the American identity and culture. Mexican culture was presumed to be infiltrating the traditional values, customs, and language of the United States which tapped into anxieties of demographic changes and cultural shifts (See Excerpt 6.B: MacGregor, D. June 6th, 2019. *The Tucker Carlson Show*). This further polarized attitudes towards immigration, some viewed it as a strength in achieving diversity while others saw it as a threat to a homogenous white national identity (Chavez, 2008).

By introducing the findings of Case Study #2 in pairs, this study was able to demonstrate the intertextuality of public rhetoric through the excerpts presented. There is a relationship between how political agents participate in discourse and how the public responds to that, and vice versa. Trump's anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric drew from historical perceptions and stereotypes, his perpetuation reinforced those negative narratives. This endless cycle enables racism and allows groups to be oppressed by the discriminatory practices of social institutions (Omi & Winat, 2014). This is where the process of demonizing Mexican immigrants takes place as outlined by Bill Ong Hing's article, "The Immigrant as Criminal: Punishing Dreamers" (2016). Posing Mexican immigrants as job-stealers, criminals, resource hoarders, and infiltrators gives power to politicians to present solutions that curb immigration to ease mass hysteria. This rhetoric outlined Mexican immigrants as a burden to the United States rather than an asset to the economic, social, and cultural progression of the country. As those same politicians introduced

the narrative, they defined exactly what the alleged problem is and what the exact solution to it is. Effectively silencing pro-immigrant activists who try to set the record straight.

c. Social Identity

Before collecting data for this thesis, my expectations were to find an abundance of discourse displaying how the ethnic Mexican community continued to strive despite Trump's rhetoric. However, the discourse I found had emphasized how anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric had negatively impacted the Mexican diaspora in the United States. Language and customs had been suppressed by many as a means of survival for ethnic Mexicans in the United States (Acosta, 2021; Gamboa, S., Lilley, S., Cahlan, S. 2018). In response to sentiments of a demographic change, Mexican immigrants themselves quieted their cultural roots to appease the white nationalist population (Truax, 2018). In one term Trump had significantly impacted generations of Mexican pride and as Cherríe Moraga (2005) says, left behind a disappearing tribe of Mexican *cultura* in the United States. These practices were also encouraged to their Mexican-American children whether it be by no longer speaking Spanish in public, listening to Spanish music, or showcasing outright pride in their heritage (Acosta, 2021; Gamboa, S., Lilley, S., Cahlan, S. 2018). In an effort to not draw attention to themselves in a time of such political turmoil and with Latino hate crimes on the rise (Linares, 2023), some individuals aimed for assimilating to the American identity as a means of protection.

Though negative impacts seemed to be the dominant theme of ethnic Mexican social identity discourse available, data proved that Trump's rhetoric also had the opposite effect on a different population of ethnic Mexicans in the United States. Strength was found in the community's resilience in the face of adversity, a phenomenon described as "reactive ethnicity" (Rumbaut, R. G., 2008). While Spanish language use for U.S. born children of Mexican

immigrants declined as generations go on (Lopez, M.H., Gonzalez-Barrera, A., López, G., 2017), there was still an acknowledgement of their cultural roots and an understanding of the importance behind continuing to learn their cultural heritage. The sense of resiliency within the Mexican diaspora in the United States was found through community engagement (Truax, 2018). Relying on one another to continue to generate a greater sense of belonging in a country that seemed to not want them. Though Donald Trump's presidency had lasted only four years, his anti-immigrant rhetoric continues to this day (Weissert, W & Colvin, J., 2024). In the short time span, Trump has had a significant impact on how ethnic Mexicans hold themselves in American society.

III.   Limitations

The most significant and apparent limitations to this study are the constraints on available public discourse. The three statements or remarks made by Donald Trump are only a small example of existing harmful rhetoric he has put out. Examples of excluded discourse are Tweets and other posts from Donald Trump's social media accounts. Because of the decision to not pursue a mixed-methods approach, the amount of discourse I was able to sort through and present in this thesis is significantly lower than had I incorporated qualitative processes in this study. I say this because had I used a mixed-methods approach, more discourse could have been covered to investigate the significance of Trump's negative rhetoric towards Mexican immigrants. This study would have been able to point out more precise numerical consistencies of rhetoric throughout the study's timeline. The same can be said for the discourse analysis of Fox News. Including a qualitative approach could have potentially allowed this research to expand outside of Fox News to cover other mainstream conservative news outlets.

Another limitation to this study is not conducting original interviews to gauge the social identity of ethnic Mexicans in the United States. Had this study incorporated new interviews rather than utilizing existing research, it would have been able to provide a more centered answer to the second research question. The decision to not conduct interviews was made on the basis of time availability.

This thesis focuses on the perceptions and experiences of the Mexican diaspora in the United States; however, I must acknowledge that Trump's rhetoric has harmed more communities than just this one. As mentioned, Latinos as a whole have been demonized by the American political and public spheres, and anti-immigrant rhetoric is not exclusive to only Latinos. His anti-immigrant narratives have directly attacked Muslim, Middle Eastern, LGBTQI+, African, and other immigrant demographics coming to the United States. Trump's rhetoric has impacted how many other ethnic communities define their sense of belonging in the United States.

IV.   Recommendations for Future Research

In future research, I encourage both myself and other researchers to incorporate original interviews alongside existing discourse. This added layer of research has the potential to present a different layer of analysis for how ethnic Mexican attitudes may have shifted in a pre-, during, and post-Trump era. By conducting new interviews, research could be collected on how ethnic Mexicans react to each discourse chosen for the study. A deeper, more focused investigation on the cultural impacts across generations could be made. Additionally, a larger time frame could be studied as research on how perceptions carried over into the Biden Administration's term could be explored. Future research could use this to examine whether Trump's rhetoric had maintained popularity without the driving actor in the limelight. It may be too early to investigate how

Trump's rhetoric has impacted how new generations have been raised by ethnically Mexican parents who experienced Trump-era discrimination. Nevertheless, it is important that future work explores these questions so we may understand the relationship between Mexican social identities with U.S. immigration rhetoric and policy.

Furthermore, I would encourage future research to explore the relationships between different dominant immigrant ethnicities and their perceptions towards Mexican immigrants to see how they are perceived amongst the broader immigrant population in the United States. Specifically, non-Mexican Latino's perceptions of Mexican immigrants given that new research shows rising Hispanic support for Donald Trump (Medina, J., 2024).

With a looming 2024 presidential election, further research could include Joe Biden's rhetoric as well. A comparison between the rhetoric used by both Republican and Democratic candidates to see how their speech is received by the public. A question that research may answer is whether one side's harmful rhetoric is more "acceptable" to the public without so much backlash than the other party. This research would prove especially valuable as another Biden v. Trump presidential race is on the horizon this election year. Together, future research and this thesis could provide support in creating a more ethically sustainable political climate. One that denounces discriminatory speech at all levels of American society. These efforts, in collaboration with other U.S.-Mexico border policy research would encourage comprehensive immigration reform that establishes humanistic approaches.

Conclusion

I.   Final Thoughts

This thesis set out to reveal the consequences of anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric during the Trump era, specifically investigating how mainstream media influences impacted the social identity of ethnic Mexicans in the United States. Through a critical discourse analysis, my study was able to fill in the gaps of existing literature on racist rhetoric surrounding Mexican immigrants in the United States. The findings of my research shed light on the mechanisms through which anti-Mexican immigrant rhetoric, amplified by mainstream media platforms, not only perpetuated harmful stereotypes but contributed to the marginalization of the ethnic Mexican community at large. Furthermore, this research underscores the urgent need for informed and humanistic discussions surrounding immigration, race, and media representation. It calls for the acknowledgment of responsibilities of media influences, policymakers, and civil society in fostering inclusive narratives and fighting harmful rhetoric.

Trump's harmful rhetoric during his campaign trail signified the rebirth of unconcealed racism and shifted the way politics in America were conducted. His rhetoric normalized the use of discriminatory speech for other politicians, famous media actors, and civilians in everyday conversations without the fear of repercussions. For if one of the highest powers in government can get away with disrespecting entire communities then surely civilians could do the same. His perpetuation of racist rhetoric was explored in this study by looking at how politicians and mainstream media discuss Mexican immigrants, and how those discussions influence public opinion. The normalization of discriminatory language contributed to an increase in hate crimes and xenophobic attitudes toward ethnic Mexicans and immigrants as a whole. It highlighted a

problematic trend where political leaders and media agents use divisive rhetoric to gain support, at the expense of marginalized communities.

Anti-Mexican immigrant perceptions in the United States led to shifts in cultural identity and community dynamics; altering social relationships, cultural practices, shared values, and ethnic Mexican community behaviors. The progress made in pro-immigrant activism had suffered a huge setback at the hands, or rather, voice of the President of the United States. Fear mongering had been utilized by many conservative politicians to help fuel Trump's immigration politics, and Mexican immigrants had taken the majority of the fall-back. The demonization of Mexican immigrants by the President of the United States did not only impact how that particular population participated in society but also bled into Mexican-American self-perceptions. In an effort to protect themselves from hate-speech and physical hate-crimes, many ethnic Mexicans subdued any characteristics that would set them apart from white counterparts. While this was a theme for the majority of my findings in this study, there was an alternative reaction to this negative rhetoric. It gave a platform to first, second, and third generation Mexican immigrants to mobilize their anger to fight for a more just society. Their fight could be defined as anything between community rallying and engagement to self-education of Mexican origins as a way to offset negative narratives.

While this study has provided valuable insights into the impact of harmful rhetoric on American politics and society, it only scratches the surface in the understanding of these influences. The intricate relationship of how rhetoric shapes policy decisions, public discourse, and social identities requires a more in-depth exploration beyond what this study has touched on. With more research and awareness, further conclusions could be drawn on how to navigate the
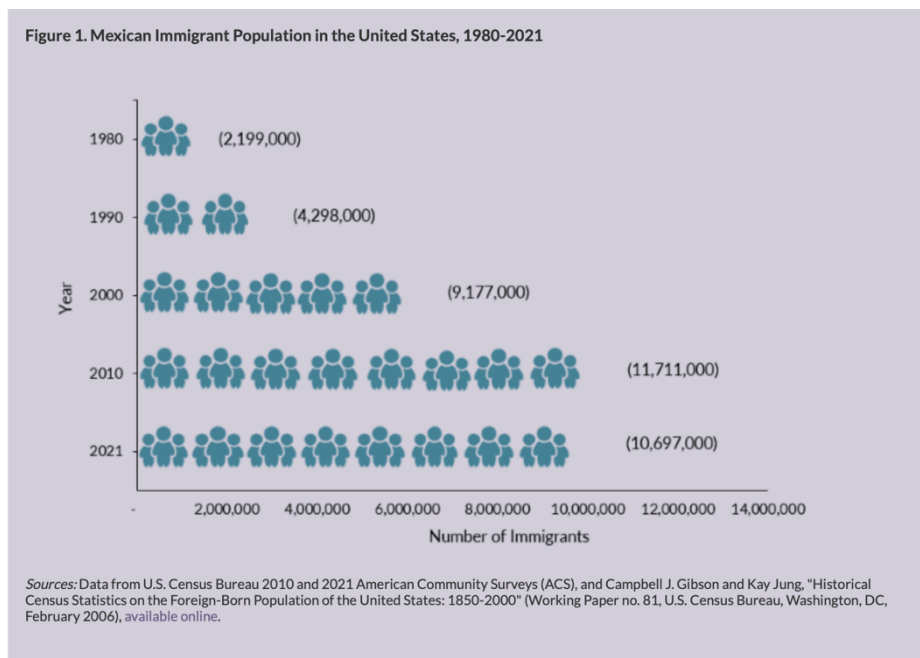
intense United States immigration debate. Through continued research, education, and advocacy,

respect discourse on Mexican immigration could become more informed, inclusive, and humane.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Figure 1

Working Paper no. 81, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, February 2006.

Figure 1. Mexican Immigrant Population in the United States, 1980-2021

Sources: Data from U.S. Census Bureau 2010 and 2021 American Community Surveys (ACS), and Campbell J. Gibson and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850-2000" (Working Paper no. 81, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, February 2006), available online.

Appendix 2: Excerpt 1

Exec. Order No. 13,767: Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvement (2017)

Section 1. Purpose. Border security is critically important to the national security of the United States. Aliens who illegally enter the United States without inspection or admission present a significant threat to national security and public safety. Such aliens have not been identified or inspected by Federal immigration officers to determine their admissibility to the United States. The recent surge of illegal immigration at the southern border with Mexico has placed a significant strain on Federal resources and overwhelmed agencies charged with border

security and immigration enforcement, as well as the local communities into which many of the aliens are placed.

Transnational criminal organizations operate sophisticated drug- and human-trafficking networks and smuggling operations on both sides of the southern border, contributing to a significant increase in violent crime and United States deaths from dangerous drugs. Among those who illegally enter are those who seek to harm Americans through acts of terror or criminal conduct. Continued illegal immigration presents a clear and present danger to the interests of the United States.

[…]

Sec. 2. Policy. It is the policy of the executive branch to:

(a) secure the southern border of the United States through the immediate construction of a physical wall on the southern border, monitored and supported by adequate personnel so as to prevent illegal immigration, drug and human trafficking, and acts of terrorism;

Appendix 3: Excerpt 2

Excerpt 2: Executive Order No. 13,768: *Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States* **(2017)**

Section 1. Purpose. Interior enforcement of our Nation's immigration laws is critically important to the national security and public safety of the United States. Many aliens who illegally enter the United States and those who overstay or otherwise violate the terms of their visas present a significant threat to national

security and public safety. This is particularly so for aliens who engage in criminal conduct in the United States.

Sanctuary jurisdictions across the United States willfully violate Federal law in an attempt to shield aliens from removal from the United States. These jurisdictions have caused immeasurable harm to the American people and to the very fabric of our Republic.

Tens of thousands of removable aliens have been released into communities across the country, solely because their home countries refuse to accept their repatriation. Many of these aliens are criminals who have served time in our Federal, State, and local jails. The presence of such individuals in the United States, and the practices of foreign nations that refuse the repatriation of their nationals, are contrary to the national interest.

[…]

Sec. 2. Policy. It is the policy of the executive branch to:

(a) Ensure the faithful execution of the immigration laws of the United States, including the INA, against all removable aliens, consistent with Article II, Section 3 of the United States Constitution and section 3331 of title 5, United States Code;

(b) Make use of all available systems and resources to ensure the efficient and faithful execution of the immigration laws of the United States;

(c) Ensure that jurisdictions that fail to comply with applicable Federal law do not receive Federal funds, except as mandated by law;

(d) Ensure that aliens ordered removed from the United States are promptly

removed; and

(e) Support victims, and the families of victims, of crimes committed by

removable aliens.

Appendix 4: Excerpt 3

Excerpt 3: State of New York et al. v. Trump et al., No. 1:17-cv-05228, 2017

3. More than 78 percent of DACA grantees are of Mexican origin, *See* Ex. 1

(USCIS, Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Fiscal Years

2012-2017, June 8, 2017), which is more than double the percentage of people of

Mexican origin that comprise of the overall foreign-born population (29 percent)

of the United States. *See* Ex. 2 (U.S. Census Bureau, The Foreign-Born

Population in the United States).

4. Ending DACA, whose participants are mostly of Mexican origin, is a

culmination of President's Trump's oft-stated commitments—whether personally

held, stated to appease some portion of his constituency, or some combination

thereof—to punish and disparage people with Mexican roots. The consequence of

the President's animus-driven decision is that approximately 800,000 persons who

have availed themselves of the program will ultimately lose its protections, and

will be exposed to removal when their authorizations expire and they cannot seek

renewal. The individuals who have relied on DACA are now more vulnerable to

removal than before the program was initiated, as they turned over sensitive

information to the federal government in their applications. Despite the federal

government's repeated promises that it would not use such information to conduct enforcement measures, the DHS Memorandum does not explain how the government will keep that information secure, nor does it provide any assurances that immigration enforcement agents will not use such information to find and remove those who applied for DACA.

Appendix 5: Excerpt 4.A

Excerpt 4.A: Trump, D. June 16th, 2015. Remarks Announcing Candidacy for President in New York City

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.

Appendix 6: Excerpt 4.B

Excerpt 4.B: Wade, P. July 10th, 2020. Fox News Achieves Peak Gaslighting by Claiming Trump Never Called Mexicans Rapists. *Rolling Stone.*

Most of the panel on the Fox News program *The Five* either shook their heads no or voiced an objection when co-host Juan Williams spoke the easily searchable truth that Trump called Mexican immigrants entering the country "rapists" during his presidential announcement speech.

"And if you're talking about who likes division, President Trump pushes buttons of division and polarization, quite regularly," Williams said. "I think you'll remember

he started his campaign by going after Latin immigrants. He said Mexicans were rapists and thieves."

Co-hosts Greg Gutfeld, Jesse Watters, and Jeanine Pirro all shook their heads in disagreement, while some repeated, "No, [Trump] didn't." And Watters tried to downplay the severity of the president's past racist remarks by reminding the Fox audience that Trump also said, "some [Mexicans] are good people."

Appendix 7: Excerpt 5.A

Excerpt 5.A: August 6ᵗʰ, 2015. Presidential Candidate Debates, Republican Candidates Debate in Cleveland, Ohio

> **TRUMP:** So, if it weren't for me, you wouldn't even be talking about illegal immigration, Chris. You wouldn't even be talking about it. [*applause*] This was not a subject that was on anybody's mind until I brought it up at my announcement. And I said, Mexico is sending. Except the reporters, because they're a very dishonest lot, generally speaking, in the world of politics, they didn't cover my statement the way I said it.
>
> The fact is, since then, many killings ,murders, crime, drugs pouring across the border, are money going out and the drugs coming in. And I said we need to build a wall, and it has to be built quickly.
>
> And I don't mind having a big beautiful door in that wall so that people can come into this country legally. But we need, Jeb, to build a wall, we need to keep illegals out. [*cheering and applause*]

WALLACE: Mr. Trump, I'll give you 30 seconds -- I'll give you 30 seconds to answer my question, which was, what evidence do you have, specific evidence that the Mexican government is sending criminals across the border? Thirty seconds.

TRUMP: Border Patrol, I was at the border last week. Border Patrol, people that I deal with, that I talk to, they say this is what's happening. Because our leaders are stupid. Our politicians are stupid. And the Mexican government is much smarter, much sharper, much more cunning. And they send the bad ones over because they don't want to pay for them. They don't want to take care of them.

Appendix 8: Excerpt 5.B

Excerpt 5.B: De Seno, T. July 22, 2017. Gentleman's Guide to Donald Trump's comments about illegal immigrants and crime. Fox News.

If the illegally residing Mexican population were to form a state, they would be the 14th most populated state in America – the same size as Massachusetts.

Thinking of the illegally residing Mexicans in terms of the size of Massachusetts adds perspective to the huge numbers. For instance, imagine the problems it would cause were Massachusetts to announce tomorrow it is no longer a state.

Imagine if they insisted that the other 49 states will now have to use their resources and tax revenue to build and maintain Massachusetts' roads, bridges, schools, parks, hospitals, libraries, fire departments, police departments and yes, even their courts and jails.

The rest of us would have to pay for all that because the structure of that state which heretofore supported it would no longer exist.

Would we want to do that even for our fellow Americans in Boston? No, we would say they ask too much of us.

Yet that is precisely what the illegally residing Mexican population is forcing us to do. A group the size of Massachusetts is using our structures to afford themselves a civil society, despite not having invested in building it (according to the DHS, 82% of illegal aliens arrived within the last 25 years).

If we would refuse Massachusetts this freebie if they asked, why do we say yes to Mexico who takes without asking

Appendix 9: Excerpt 6.A

Excerpt 6.A: *CNN.* **June 3rd, 2016.** *State of the Union.*

> **Trump**: I will tell you what it has to do. I have had ruling after ruling after ruling that's been bad rulings, OK? I have been treated very unfairly. Beforehand, we had another judge. If that judge was still there, this case would have been over two years ago.
>
> Let me just tell you, I have had horrible rulings. I've been treated very unfairly by this judge. Now, this judge is of Mexican heritage. I'm building a wall, OK? I'm building a wall. I am going to do very well with the Hispanics, the Mexicans.
>
> **Tapper**: So, no Mexican judge could ever be involved in a case that involves you?
>
> **Trump**: Well, no, he is a member of a society where -- very pro-Mexico. And that's fine. It's all fine.
>
> **Tapper**: Except that you're calling into question his heritage.

Trump: I think he should recuse himself.

Tapper: Because he's Latino.

[…]

Tapper: But you're invoking his race when talking about whether or not he can do his job.

Trump: Jake, I'm building a wall, OK? I'm building a wall. I'm trying to keep business out of Mexico. Mexico's fine. There's nothing ...

Tapper: But he's American. He's an American.

Trump: He's of Mexican heritage. And he's very proud of it, as I am where I come from, my parents.

[…]

Trump: Jake, if he was giving me fair rulings, I wouldn't be talking to you this way. He's given me horrible rulings.

Tapper: But I don't care if you criticize him. That's fine. You can criticize every decision. What I'm saying is, if you invoke his race as a reason why he can't do his job ...

Trump: I think that's why he's doing it.

Tapper: But ...

Trump: I think that's why he's doing it.

[…]

Tapper: Is it not -- when Hillary Clinton says, this is a racist attack -- and you reject that -- if you are saying he can't do his job because of his race, is that not the definition of racism?

Trump: No, I don't think so at all.

Tapper: No?

Trump: No. He's proud of his heritage. I -- I respect him for that.

Tapper: But you're saying he can't do his job because of that.

Trump: Look, he's proud of his heritage. OK? I'm building a wall. Now, I think I'm going to do very well with Hispanics.

Tapper: He's a legal citizen.

Trump: You know why I'm going to do well with Hispanics?

Because I'm going to bring back jobs, and they're going to get jobs right now. They're going to get jobs. I think I'm going to do very well with Hispanics. But we're building a wall. He's a Mexican. We're building a wall between here and Mexico.

The answer is, he is giving us very unfair rulings, rulings that people can't even believe. This case should have ended years ago on summary judgment. The best

lawyers -- I have spoken to so many lawyers. They said, this is not a case. This is a case that should have ended.

This judge is giving us unfair rulings. Now I say why. Well, I want to -- I'm building a wall, OK? And it's a wall between Mexico, not another country, and ...

Tapper: But he's not -- he's not from **Mexico**. He's from Indiana.

Trump: In my opinion -- he is -- his Mexican -- Mexican heritage. And he's very proud of it.

Tapper: But you're not from Scotland because you have Scottish heritage.

Trump: Hey, you know what? I'm not building a wall between Scotland and the United States.

Tapper then changed topics.

Appendix 10: Excerpt 6.B

Excerpt 6.B: MacGregor, D. June 6th, 2019. *The Tucker Carlson Show. Fox News*

Guest - RET. COL. DOUGLAS MACGREGOR: It's called demographic change. And right now the largest ethnic minority in California is largely Mexican and Hispanic. California is in the main today no longer a majority English speaking white state. It is in the main something else, something new, but largely Latino, largely Mexican. The Latinos, the Mexicans, are the base of the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party has decided they are the future for the left in the United States. The more of these people that can be brought in illegally, as well as legally,

the better it is for the Democratic Party. Because their goal is to transform the United States into a facsimile of California. So that any election is impossible from the standpoint of the right, from the standpoint of the Republican Party, to win anything.

Appendix 11: Excerpt 7

Excerpt 7: Truax, E. 2018. "How does it feel to be unwanted? Stories of resistance and resilience from Mexicans living in the United States"

When he won, we felt horrible; a lot of things started happening. […] It had a big impact on workers like us, because people's attitudes started to change. People who thought like that man [Donald Trump] started coming out of the closet they had been hiding in. Out on street corners and at work sites, there were even more anti-immigrant attacks, like a lot of Trumps started coming out of the woodwork. The fight to get immigrants' rights recognized had taken years, and then from one day to the next, we had to fight twice as hard.

Appendix 12: Excerpt 8

Excerpt 8: Acosta, S. 2021. Many third-generation Hispanics don't speak Spanish, but their parents do. Why? *KSAT.com*.

"It really is just a generation of people who had a language literally beaten out of them in our school system," U.S. Rep. Joaquin Castro said. "And it's so tragic and unfortunate because it was not only the loss of a language, but also partly the loss of a culture."

Norma Ochoa is seventy years old. Her first language was Spanish, and while in school in San Antonio in second grade she said a teacher shamed her for speaking Spanish in the classroom and it made an impact on her.

"I felt she demeaned me, and I felt that I wasn't good enough to be there, and I just didn't, I didn't want to go to school," Norma Ochoa, a second-generation Latina, said. "So after that, you know, after maybe a week or two at school of having all that cast upon me, I just felt like I didn't belong there."

That ostracization led to the decision to only teach English to her children.

"I definitely decided that I was not going to let this happen to my daughters," Ochoa said.

Norma's adult daughter Nicole Ochoa Malesky said she knows her mother did this out of love and protection. She doesn't blame second-generation parents for not teaching their children Spanish, but instead society from that era.

"I felt very separated from my culture," Ochoa Malesky said. "I felt very... I wasn't considered Anglo and I wasn't considered Hispanic. So then where did I fall?"

Castro said just because a Latina or Latino doesn't speak Spanish it doesn't make them less Hispanic. He said there are so many different ways to embrace your roots.

"There's so much more to the culture than just the language," Castro said. "So I hope that folks will be proud of who they are, regardless of whether they can speak Spanish or not, and that folks will accept people, you know, even if they don't speak Spanish perfectly."

Ochoa Malesky said she wants to embrace that part of her heritage, saying it's who she is. She said she wants her children to feel that freedom. She said that fear creates a sense of people being quiet or not wanting to talk about things.

"That's not the world that we live and we have to, we have to voice out," Ochoa Malesky said. "As I've gotten older and had children of my own realizing that I want to give my children that education, I don't want that history to be erased. That the stories that we tell, that's how we gain compassion and empathy and a love for all people and all beings is to understand we're a multicultural world, we don't live within."

Appendix 13: Excerpt 9

Excerpt 9: Gamboa, S., Lilley, S., Cahlan, S. 2018. "Young Latinos: Born in the U.S.A., carving their own identity". NBC News.

Berenize García, 16, of New York City, said her father, a Mexican immigrant, has pressured her to be "more American," while her mother told her it's disrespectful not to retain and speak Spanish to their Mexican relatives.

"That makes me feel confused, because how can I be Mexican when I'm pressured to be more American? How can I be American when I'm pressured to be more Mexican?" she said.

[...]

"We're stripped in a lot of cases of our Spanish tongue and our Spanish heritage and told it's really important that you only speak English and you know how to speak English well because otherwise, you're going to face hardship, which is in a

lot of ways true because of the prejudice that this country holds," said Alma Flores-Perez, 21, born and raised in Austin, Texas.

"But at the same time, I've really come to see the importance of speaking Spanish or at least trying to claim that as our own and not be ashamed when you do speak Spanish, but also not being ashamed if you weren't taught it, because that wasn't necessarily your choice,"

Appendix 14: Excerpt 10

Excerpt 10: Consoli et al. 2018. "I Feel Like We're Going Backwards:' Post-Presidential Election Resilience in Latinx Community Members." P. 25.

…Persistence, involved the will to keep living in spite of current national conditions and challenges. Representative quotes by participants include: "Mi plan es seguir, somos muy fuertes en general, somos una comunidad muy fuerte, muy trabajadora e inteligente. Muchas personas tenemos carreras profesionales mas no podemos ejercerlas. Pero mi plan es, pues seguir viviendo." [My plan is to continue, we are strong in general, we are a very strong community, hardworking and smart. Many of us have professional careers but we can't practice them. But my plan is, well, go on living]. "Seguimos en la lucha... Obedecemos las leyes que, aunque las leyes a veces están en contra de nosotros... Pero seguir, seguir portándonos bien. Salir adelante, seguir contribuyendo al país que construimos por mucho." [We continue the fight... We abide the laws despite laws sometimes being against us... But continue, continue behaving well. Move forward, continue contributing to the country that we've constructed by a lot.]

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