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Bridging Policy and Testimonio: A Chicana Feminist Epistemological Analysis of Three Presidential Executive Orders

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Bridging Policy and Testimonio: A Chicana Feminist Epistemological Analysis of Three Presidential Executive Orders

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Abstract

Drawing from a Chicana feminist epistemological lens and critical constructivist framework, this reflective academic essay employs qualitative document analysis to explore how Executive Order 14224 (2025), *Designating English as the Official Language of the United States*; Executive Order 14172 (2025), *Restoring Names That Honor American Greatness*; and Executive Order 14190 (2025), *Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling*, leverage power through policy language. Written from the positionality of a Mexican-American from the Borderlands of south Texas, the author contrasts policy with her *testimonio* in a series of vignettes to ground the policy critique with lived reality and provides a window into her cultural intuition. The essay argues that, collectively, these executive orders enable cultural erasure and subtraction, denying the shared historical experiences and contributions of Mexican-Americans. This essay contributes to Chicana feminist and critical policy studies scholarship by using *testimonio* as a counter-narrative to show the real-world impact of federal language, naming, and curricular policy on Mexican-American communities.

Keywords: Chicana feminist epistemology; *testimonio*; critical constructivism; federal language policy; Mexican-American identity

Introduction

During the early part of 2025, a series of presidential executive orders were issued in rapid succession. Attempts to make English the official language of the United States, renaming the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America, and efforts to ban diversity, equity, and inclusion struck me on a personal level. Like many Americans, I never paid too much attention to presidential executive orders, but these all applied to me in some form or fashion. They felt personal—not just to me, but to my close family, relatives, and friends. As someone who served over twenty years in K-12 public schools as a Bilingual/ESL teacher and administrator, I also felt these orders speak to me professionally. I read them curiously and closely, and I studied them.

I focused on three specific presidential executive orders: Executive Order 14224 (2025), *Designating English as the Official Language of the United States*; Executive Order 14172 (2025), *Restoring Names That Honor American Greatness*; and Executive Order 14190 (2025), *Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling*. As I familiarized myself with these orders, I recognized particular ways that language was used. I sensed a profound meaning behind them. These three orders represented formal expressions of government authority and provided insight into the ways knowledge, identity, and society are constructed through policy language. I decided to explore them more closely with an academic lens and developed the guiding question: In what ways do these executive orders reflect and reinforce power structures for the Mexican-American community? Drawing from aspects of qualitative document analysis (QDA; Bowen, 2009), this question led me to determine that these orders reflect and reinforce power structures by enabling cultural erasure and subtraction (San Miguel & Valencia, 1998), and denying the collective historical experiences and contributions of Mexican-Americans in the United States.

I want to fully acknowledge that I do not speak for or represent the opinions or interpretations of all Mexican-Americans, but I will share *my* way of understanding based on my cultural knowledge and personal experiences (Delgado Bernal, 1998). I begin this reflective academic essay with a brief overview of presidential executive orders and then discuss the theoretical frameworks and methodology that frame my interpretation. I follow this with my positionality and subsequently continue with two primary sections for the essay. The first section focuses on two of the executive orders: Executive Order 14224 (2025), *Designating*

English as the Official Language of the United States, and Executive Order 14172 (2025), *Restoring Names That Honor American Greatness*. The second section focuses on Executive Order 14190 (2025), *Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling*. Each section opens with an excerpt of the executive order under examination, followed by a personal testimonio presented through a vignette to ground the policy critique in lived reality. I then move on into analysis and discussion. The essay ends with a final vignette, reflection, and closing thoughts.

Presidential Executive Orders

Presidents use executive orders to communicate their priorities and direct their administrations. Executive orders do not create new laws, but tell federal agencies how to implement existing laws. They can be issued immediately and do not have to endure the typical months or years of wrangling through Congress. Executive orders can influence major policy areas and quickly push forward a president's agenda. Examples of notable and consequential executive orders include the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II (1942, #9066), Truman's military desegregation (1948, #9981), and Eisenhower's school desegregation (1957, #10730). Courts can strike down executive orders and future presidents can reverse them, but they are part of a political strategy meant to shape government policy that, in turn, influences American society.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The guiding question for this reflective academic essay was: In what ways do these executive orders reflect and reinforce power structures for the Mexican-American community? To explore this question, I employed a Chicana feminist epistemological framework (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Chicana feminist epistemology emerged from a tension between the Chicano Movement and mainstream white feminism. Within the movement, Chicanas who raised gender concerns were often criticized for doing so. They were accused of embracing a white, middle-class concern that had no place in Chicano politics. In contrast, the feminist movement was largely pushed by white middle-class feminists who could not articulate or recognize the specific positions and perspectives that form the lives of Chicanas such as immigration, migration, generational status, bilingualism, language proficiency, religion, and gender (Anzaldúa, 1987; Delgado Bernal, 1998). Chicana feminist epistemology recognizes lived experience as a

legitimate site of knowledge production (Delgado Bernal, 1998) and, with respect to this essay, it is a means for revealing the leveraging of power within policy.

As a Chicana scholar, my interpretation of executive orders challenges dominant notions of objectivity and universalized knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Central to this framework is my cultural intuition, a complex and culturally situated process that honors my distinctive perspective (Delgado Bernal, 1998). From this positionality, I recognize that opportunity structures in our society are unequal and unevenly distributed (Delgado Bernal, 1998). I examine the presidential executive orders discussed in this essay through this lens, attuned to questions of objectivity and power (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Chicana feminist epistemology is not peripheral, but a central and vital source of insight (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

While Chicana feminist epistemology explains *whose* knowledge has been marginalized, critical constructivism provides a broader framework for analyzing the ways in which knowledge is constructed through social interaction, culture, and power (Kincheloe, 2005). Critical constructivism is based on constructivism (Kincheloe, 2005). It asserts that “nothing represents a neutral perspective—nothing exists before consciousness shapes it into something perceptible” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 8). People often do not understand the way their environment has shaped their perspective (Kincheloe, 2005). Critical constructivism provides “an introspective process” that helps people reflect on knowledge about themselves (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 10). Combined with critical theory, it helps people “construct their consciousness,” thus helping them understand themselves as a “social being in light of the way dominant power operates to manage knowledge” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 10). Critical constructivism helps us to see how knowledge and understanding are shaped by language, cultural symbols, and various power dynamics related to race, class, gender, and sexuality (Kincheloe, 2005). For this reflective academic essay, it is also a particularly useful lens for examining whether education reinforces existing power structures or works to challenge them (Kincheloe, 2005).

Both of these frameworks challenge traditional notions of knowledge and argue that knowledge is never neutral. They both ask who determines what counts as legitimate knowledge and value the lived experiences of marginalized communities. For the purpose of this academic reflective essay, they provide complementary frameworks that illuminate how policy is encountered, interpreted, and embodied.

I began the writing process by selecting the three specific executive orders discussed in this essay: Executive Order 14224 (2025), *Designating English as the Official Language of the United States*; Executive Order 14172 (2025), *Restoring Names That Honor American Greatness*; and Executive Order 14190 (2025), *Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling*. These orders were all issued in 2025 and were available through the Federal Register (<https://www.federalregister.gov/>).

I drew my method for analyzing the executive orders from aspects of qualitative document analysis (QDA; Bowen, 2009). First, I familiarized myself with presidential executive orders. I researched their purpose and how they have been commonly used by past presidents. I looked into prior historically significant executive orders and changes stemming from them. I did multiple readings of the entire text of each executive order that I selected and highlighted meaningful sections of the executive orders that stood out to me. From there, I coded particular sections, phrases, and words in the executive order text that suggested to me some type of power, identity construction, belonging/exclusion, racialization, or a dominant narrative. Ultimately, as I analyzed the executive orders, informed by Chicana feminist epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 1998) and critical constructivism (Kincheloe, 2005), I derived a theme of cultural erasure and subtraction (San Miguel & Valencia, 1998) from all three. For the purpose of this essay, however, I chose to specifically focus on Executive Order 14224 (2025), *Designating English as the Official Language of the United States*, and Executive Order 14172 (2025), *Restoring Names That Honor American Greatness* to illustrate this theme. I did this so that I could further expand on the theme of denying collective historical experiences in Executive Order 14190 (2025), *Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling*. Denying collective historical experiences is also a form of cultural erasure (San Miguel & Valencia, 1998), but I wanted to highlight the particular aspects of the order that I felt enabled that in this essay.

I created two sections under the umbrella of those two themes. In section one, I focus on how Executive Order 14224 (2025), *Designating English as the Official Language of the United States* and Executive Order 14172 (2025), *Restoring Names That Honor American Greatness*, enable cultural erasure and subtraction (San Miguel & Valencia, 1998). In section two, I focus on Executive Order 14190 (2025), *Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling*. The scope of this executive order is much broader than what is discussed in this essay, but I will specifically center my attention on the definitions of discriminatory equity ideology and patriotic education

along with the re-establishment of the 1776 Commission. My analysis and discussion will focus on the ways the order enables a denial of collective historical experiences and contributions of Mexican-Americans.

Each section begins with an introduction of the executive order. After introducing the executive order, I present my own *testimonio* and present it through a vignette under the subheading “My Lived Reality.” I use the vignette as a conduit for my *testimonio* to ground policy critique in lived reality. Vignettes are commonly used to capture brief moments in time, illustrate perceptions and beliefs, and present hypothetical scenarios (Finch, 1987; Murphy et al., 2021; Sampson & Johannessen, 2020). Presenting my *testimonio* through vignettes allowed me to critically reflect on my lived experiences within the context of my cultural history and sociopolitical reality (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). I present my *testimonio* as an epistemological intervention (Anzaldúa, 1987; Delgado Bernal, 1998) that challenges the assumption that the meaning of a policy is limited to only the text, i.e., the specific words in the executive orders. The intertwining of vignette and *testimonio* with presidential executive order analysis allowed me to illustrate how the orders function as mechanisms that shape knowledge and perspectives in American society and within its educational system. It allowed me to provide snapshots of my lived experiences that connected with the executive orders and allows readers to have a window into my cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Importantly, it helped me to illustrate for the reader how policy does not represent everyone’s knowledge and voices.

Positionality

As the daughter of Mexican immigrants, born and raised in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, I am an *amasamiento*, “an act of kneading,” as Anzaldúa (1987) describes (p. 86). My ancestors inhabited both sides of the river and lived under many flags—the Spanish, the Mexican, the Texan, and the United States. I identify as a Mexican-American, Chicana, Latina, Hispanic, Tejana, and Mestiza. These many categories show how complex it is to define someone like me, but they also reflect the tapestry of geographic and political histories, and social and cultural frameworks that are intricately woven into the ways that I view the world. I embrace them all. As one who grew up in poverty and attended public schools in the Borderlands of Texas and Mexico, my ontology and epistemology have been shaped by three cultures: the American, the Mexican, and the in-between culture that developed from straddling

both (Anzaldúa, 1987). My education was shaped by the American educational system and my lived experiences include, but are not limited to, learning English as a second language and experiencing linguistic shaming (Gallegos, 2023), as well as having been provided an English-only and Euro-centric curricula throughout my academic studies. Along with these experiences, my 22-year career in public education as a Bilingual/ESL teacher and administrator in Texas, and my own personal educational journey in attaining my doctorate, has provided me with additional insight into markedly different opportunity structures (Delgado Bernal, 1998) that are embedded into American society. As a scholar, I remain that *amasamiento*, and draw from the many ways I know and understand the world in which I exist.

Section I: Cultural Erasure and Subtraction

Executive Order 14224, Designating English as the Official Language of the United States

Executive Order 14224 (2025), *Designating English as the Official Language of the United States*, made English the official language of the United States and revoked Executive Order 13166 (2000), *Improving Access to Services for Persons With Limited English Proficiency*. Agencies are not prohibited from providing something in another language; they are just not required to provide it. The order states:

In welcoming new Americans, a policy of encouraging the learning and adoption of our national language will make the United States a shared home and empower new citizens to achieve the American dream. Speaking English not only opens doors economically, but it helps newcomers engage in their communities, participate in national traditions, and give back to our society. This order recognizes and celebrates the long tradition of multilingual American citizens who have learned English and passed it to their children for generations to come.

To promote unity, cultivate a shared American culture for all citizens, ensure consistency in government operations, and create a pathway to civic engagement, it is in America's best interest for the Federal Government to designate one — and only one — official language. Establishing English as the official language will not only streamline

communication but also reinforce shared national values, and create a more cohesive and efficient society. (Exec. Order No. 14224, 2025)

My Lived Reality

Vignette #1: Pretending Our Community Doesn't Exist

I sat in a public housing project visiting with 86-year-old Graciela [pseudonym]. Her elderly neighbor, Juana [pseudonym], decided to stop by. She did not speak English and, knowing that I am “educada,” she brought me a flyer that someone from the main office gave her. “¿Qué dice esto?” she asked. It was a flyer promoting a utility assistance program. The flyer, however, was all in English and stated that whoever was interested in the program had to scan a QR code with their cell phone and then proceed to fill out an online form. After filling out the online form, they could expect a phone call from somebody with information regarding their appointment if they qualified. Juana and anyone else interested in this program’s assistance were expected to have a cell phone, read the flyer in English, scan the QR code, fill out the online form, and click submit. Grateful that the program existed at all, and seeing the legitimate need, but also the injustice, I helped Juana and Graciela do this. They got their appointments, but what if I had not been there to help them?

A few weeks later, Graciela was hospitalized. In an effort to help her, I volunteered to go to her home to pick up some things. When I got to her home, a large manila envelope was left at her front door. It was her lease renewal packet from the housing authority. I delivered it to Graciela at the hospital, but there she was, in a hospital bed, with about a half-inch stack of papers to fill out ... in English. Graciela is a U.S. citizen, but only speaks Spanish. This is not uncommon along the Texas-Mexico border.

No one in this country would be okay if this were the other way around, if that packet or flyer were all in Spanish and it was handed to monolingual English speakers who genuinely needed assistance. Graciela and Juana are not being granted equal access or opportunities as other Americans. I ask myself: Why do those in power want to deny the existence of people like Graciela and Juana? Why are they so against Spanish speakers? And why do they want to pretend like they do not exist?

Executive Order 14224, Designating English as the Official Language of the United States

Analysis and Discussion

Our language and culture are intertwined. I ask, who is marginalized with English-only policies? *People like Juana and Graciela*. How does having a mandated “national language” help people like Juana and Graciela feel at home and welcome if their native language, Spanish—the second most spoken language in this country (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.)—is deliberately ignored and erased from business and services that they need?

The order claims to recognize and celebrate “the long tradition of multilingual American citizens who have learned English” (Exec. Order No. 14224, 2025). However, as a former school administrator and Bilingual/ESL teacher, I see how this order diminishes the effort it takes to learn English as a second language. The order ignores the amount of time, instruction, commitment, and practice it takes to learn another language. It pits those who learn English quickly against those who take longer to become proficient or fluent, or perhaps never learn to speak it. Are we to look down on someone who did not master English in a few months, a year, five years, a decade? Whose timeline are we on to become proficient in English? The order states, “Speaking English not only opens doors economically, but it helps newcomers engage in their communities, participate in national traditions, and give back to our society” (Exec. Order No. 14224, 2025). Does this mean that if you do not speak English you cannot experience economic success, engage with your community, participate in national traditions, or give back to society? Of course not. To exclude those who have not learned English, like Graciela and Juana, from recognition and celebration is disrespectful. They, too, have contributed to their communities, celebrated national traditions along with countless others, and given back to society in their own ways throughout the course of their lives. They deserve to be celebrated and their culture deserves to be respected regardless of which language they choose or are able to speak. They are not *less worthy* because they do not speak English or because they are poor.

In August of 2025, several media outlets, including *The New York Post* and *The New York Times*, reported that the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Deputy Secretary sent out a memo advising their leadership about Executive Order 14224, *Designating*

English as the Official Language of the United States. In a memo obtained by *The New York Post*, they cited the HUD deputy secretary was cited as stating the following:

We are one people, united, and we will speak with one voice and one language to deliver on our mission of expanding housing that is affordable, helping those in need, caring for our most vulnerable Americans, and revitalizing rural, tribal, and urban communities. (King & Christensen, 2025)

According to *The New York Post*, the memo stated that the deputy secretary directed all HUD “communications, correspondence, and physical and digital published materials to be produced exclusively in English” (King & Christensen, 2025). They will no longer offer non-English translation services and are directed to remove all “printed or digital collateral about non-English translation services currently displayed in HUD offices or HUD-funded facilities. Printed or digital collateral not in English can be replaced with an English-only version” (King & Christensen, 2025). A review of English translation service contracts will also be conducted (King & Christensen, 2025). There have been clear outcries as to the violation of the Civil Rights Act and blatant exclusionary tactics. However, to me, this emphasizes yet another way that Mexican-origin communities are marginalized and inhibited from feeling a full sense of belonging within American society.

Executive Order 14224 (2025), *Designating English as the Official Language of the United States*, reflects and reinforces power structures by elevating the value of the English language over other languages and positioning itself as the official national language. It is exclusionary for people who do not speak English but live in the United States. Rooted in the signing of historic documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, it ignores its own power structure—documents in English—over Native Americans and the existence of their languages during the founding of this nation. It benefits the Federal Government, but overlooks the harm to speakers of other languages who are not fluent in English. It seeks to reinforce shared national values, but it diminishes the value of other languages that people speak and their respective cultures. It promotes a belief that speaking English drives engagement with communities, participation in national traditions, and giving back to society, but it ignores the countless number of non-English speaking people who regularly participate in such activities. Efforts such as these to erase our language from business and services emphasize the enduring

colonial legacy of the U.S. annexation of former Mexican territory. We are still not understood, and we are still being “othered.”

Executive Order 14172, Restoring Names That Honor American Greatness

The executive order *Restoring Names That Honor American Greatness* declared the renaming of the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America (Exec. Order No. 14172, 2025). An excerpt from the order reads:

The area formerly known as the Gulf of Mexico has long been an integral asset to our once burgeoning Nation and has remained an indelible part of America. The Gulf was a crucial artery for America’s early trade and global commerce. It is the largest gulf in the world, and the United States coastline along this remarkable body of water spans over 1,700 miles and contains nearly 160 million acres. Its natural resources and wildlife remain central to America’s economy today. The bountiful geology of this basin has made it one of the most prodigious oil and gas regions in the world, providing roughly 14% of our Nation’s crude-oil production and an abundance of natural gas, and consistently driving new and innovative technologies that have allowed us to tap into some of the deepest and richest oil reservoirs in the world. The Gulf is also home to vibrant American fisheries teeming with snapper, shrimp, grouper, stone crab, and other species, and it is recognized as one of the most productive fisheries in the world, with the second largest volume of commercial fishing landings by region in the Nation, contributing millions of dollars to local American economies. The Gulf is also a favorite destination for American tourism and recreation activities. Further, the Gulf is a vital region for the multi-billion-dollar U.S. maritime industry, providing some of the largest and most impressive ports in the world. The Gulf will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping America’s future and the global economy, and in recognition of this flourishing economic resource and its critical importance to our Nation’s economy and its people, I am directing that it officially be renamed the Gulf of America. (Exec. Order No. 14172, 2025)

My Lived Reality

Vignette #2: Mi Golfo Querido

I have vivid childhood memories of traveling to South Padre Island and driving down the Queen Isabella Memorial Causeway over the Gulf of Mexico, always excited to look out the car window at the top of the bridge and wondrously admire how we were traveling over water. I remember the blistering heat of summer and the taste of salty water that sometimes got into your mouth, the sounds of the seagulls overhead, and the warm Gulf air. I remember the adventures, like our car tires getting stuck in the sand and having to dig out, the excitement of running up sand dunes, burying ourselves in the sand, and running barefoot along the beach. At that time, there were not that many hotels and restaurants or exclusive million-dollar gated communities along the strip. You could park along the road and walk straight to the beach. Although there were some private access points for some of the hotels, you did not feel like the beach was inaccessible. You did not feel like you had to go to “the other side” of the beach and pay to access it. Sure, that other side had paved parking, showers, and even concession stands, but there were five of us in my family plus my two parents. We were poor and paying even a few dollars for something like that mattered if you had already spent money on gas and groceries to get there.

Executive Order 14172, Restoring Names That Honor American Greatness

Analysis and Discussion

Executive Order 14172 (2025), *Restoring Names That Honor American Greatness*, renames the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America. The political strategy elevates economic prosperity. It associates size and quantity with American power and greatness, and justifies the renaming through words and phrases that reflect size and power structures with economic terms. I have bolded words and phrases from the executive order excerpt that I included earlier in this section to demonstrate what I mean:

The area formerly known as the Gulf of Mexico has long been an integral asset to our once burgeoning Nation and has remained an indelible part of America. The Gulf was a crucial artery for America’s early trade and global commerce. It is the largest gulf in the

world, and the United States coastline along this remarkable body of water spans over 1,700 miles and contains nearly 160 million acres. Its natural resources and wildlife remain central to America's economy today. The bountiful geology of this basin has made it one of the most prodigious oil and gas regions in the world, providing roughly 14% of our Nation's crude-oil production and an abundance of natural gas, and consistently driving new and innovative technologies that have allowed us to tap into some of the deepest and richest oil reservoirs in the world. The Gulf is also home to vibrant American fisheries teeming with snapper, shrimp, grouper, stone crab, and other species, and it is recognized as one of the most productive fisheries in the world, with the second largest volume of commercial fishing landings by region in the Nation, contributing millions of dollars to local American economies. The Gulf is also a favorite destination for American tourism and recreation activities. Further, the Gulf is a vital region for the multi-billion-dollar U.S. maritime industry, providing some of the largest and most impressive ports in the world. The Gulf will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping America's future and the global economy, and in recognition of this flourishing economic resource and its critical importance to our Nation's economy and its people, I am directing that it officially be renamed the Gulf of America. (Exec. Order No. 14172, 2025)

The renaming of the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America is supposed to honor "American Greatness," but it really honors neoliberalism. The order ignores the local small-business fisherman from Port Isabel and South Padre Island and focuses on the corporate wealth of large fisheries and oil and gas industries. And it is apparently not enough to ignore the value of clear and peaceful views of the ocean as far as the eye can see, and trade them for interrupted views of wind turbines and oil rigs off the coastline, but a separate proclamation was also made declaring February 9, 2025, as Gulf of America Day (The White House, 2025).

The renaming of the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America is an affective injustice (Gallegos, 2023; Pismenny et al., 2024) towards Mexican-Americans. It erases our association with Mexico and subtracts (San Miguel & Valencia, 1998) our presence and sense of belonging in American society. I cannot find any "greatness" in renaming a body of water so familiar to me, so attached to my roots, my culture, my *heart*. Who benefits from the renaming of the Gulf of

Mexico? How will future generations construct knowledge about the gulf's history? How is this intended to fit into the broader story of this country?

Section 2: Denial of Collective Experiences

Executive Order 14190, Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling

Executive Order 14190 (2025), *Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling*, is reshaping how American schools address questions of culture, identity, and historical understanding. For this reflective academic essay, I focus specifically on the order's definition of discriminatory equity ideology, patriotic education, and the re-establishment of the President's Advisory 1776 Commission. The definition of discriminatory equity ideology reads as follows:

- (b) "Discriminatory equity ideology" means an ideology that treats individuals as members of preferred or disfavored groups, rather than as individuals, and minimizes agency, merit, and capability in favor of immoral generalizations, including that:
 - (i) Members of one race, color, sex, or national origin are morally or inherently superior to members of another race, color, sex, or national origin;
 - (ii) An individual, by virtue of the individual's race, color, sex, or national origin, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously;
 - (iii) An individual's moral character or status as privileged, oppressing, or oppressed is primarily determined by the individual's race, color, sex, or national origin;
 - (iv) Members of one race, color, sex, or national origin cannot and should not attempt to treat others without respect to their race, color, sex, or national origin;
 - (v) An individual, by virtue of the individual's race, color, sex, or national origin, bears responsibility for, should feel guilt, anguish, or other forms of psychological distress because of, should be discriminated against, blamed, or stereotyped for, or should receive adverse treatment because of actions committed in the past by other members of the same race, color, sex, or national origin, in which the individual played no part;
 - (vi) An individual, by virtue of the individual's race, color, sex, or national origin,

should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment to achieve diversity, equity, or inclusion;

(vii) Virtues such as merit, excellence, hard work, fairness, neutrality, objectivity, and racial colorblindness are racist or sexist or were created by members of a particular race, color, sex, or national origin to oppress members of another race, color, sex, or national origin; or

(viii) the United States is fundamentally racist, sexist, or otherwise discriminatory. (Exec. Order No. 14190, (2025))

Section four of the *Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling* executive order reestablishes the President's Advisory 1776 Commission to promote patriotic education and is charged with advising and promoting work for celebrating America's 250th birthday and the U.S. Semiquincentennial. It defines patriotic education in section two as a presentation of American history that is based on:

- (i) an accurate, honest, unifying, inspiring, and ennobling characterization of America's founding and foundational principles;
- (ii) a clear examination of how the United States has admirably grown closer to its noble principles throughout its history;
- (iii) the concept that commitment to America's aspirations is beneficial and justified; and
- (iv) the concept that celebration of America's greatness and history is proper. (Exec. Order No. 14190, 2025)

My Lived Reality

Vignette #3: *Mis Abuelitos—the Bracero and the Farmer*

I am from the Rio Grande Valley and never heard the word bracero until I was a young adult. Think about that. It is like saying you lived in Paris, France, but didn't know the Eiffel Tower was there. My maternal grandfather was a bracero; my paternal grandfather was a farmer. My maternal grandfather traveled all the way to California from Guanajuato, Mexico, on a bracero permit to work in the fields during the 1940s. My paternal grandfather went back and forth between Mexico and South Texas as a farmer during the Mexican Revolution. A copy of his "Manifest" from the U.S. Department of Labor dated March 25, 1920, states he came to the U.S. "looking for work." I wonder what may have been going on in his life, but moreover,

*I wonder why I was never taught about braceros and a neighboring **revolution** that happened on the other side of the border, literally 20-30 minutes away from where I was born and raised. The Valley was also promoted as an attractive agricultural frontier during the early twentieth century and brought an influx of Anglo migration through the expansion of the railroad (Kearney, 1997; Mycue, 1995). It caused a significant demographic and economic transformation in the region (Kearney, 1997; Mycue, 1995). Why did I never learn about the migration of families between our border or the economic and social impact of farming during those periods in the Rio Grande Valley? They were, after all, particularly important periods in the development of many of the towns there. Had my teachers even been taught about that? Why were these types of contributions, events, and experiences not acknowledged throughout my childhood? My history, my parents' history, my grandparents' history—as it pertains to American history—has not been told.*

Executive Order 14190, Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling

Analysis and Discussion

While the executive order emphasizes that current individuals may have "played no part" in historical decision-making (Exec. Order No. 14190, 2025), we cannot ignore how historical policies and systems continue to influence contemporary outcomes. The reality is that there are a lot of ways that one can look at the current state of indoctrination in K-12 schooling, but through the executive order's definition of "discriminatory equity ideology," attempts to be *inclusive* of all because an individual living today may have "played no part" (Exec. Order No. 14190, 2025), could result in schools *excluding* students by further propagating deculturalization; the educational process of destroying a group's cultural identity and replacing it with a new culture (Spring, 2025). This could further compound the erasure of legitimate lived experiences and histories for many groups of people, including our K-12 Mexican-American students attending schools in the United States.

By applying a critical constructivist lens (Kincheloe, 2005) to the language used in defining "discriminatory equity ideology," we can glean some additional insight into situated power structures and attempts at deculturalization (Spring, 2025). A critical analysis reveals that the definition focuses on individuals rather than individuals as members of groups. It wants to elevate the value of an individual over the value of a group. For example, in subsection (v),

holding an individual accountable “because of actions committed in the past by other members of the same race, color, sex, or national origin” is discriminatory because those current *individuals* “played no part” (Exec. Order No. 14190, 2025). This provides a broad umbrella of impunity for historical injustices committed against ethnic minorities. It suggests that individuals in the present day have no responsibility to acknowledge or be held accountable for past injustices or current inequities based on historical policies and systems that benefit them but challenge our community. The implications, particularly for those in leadership roles in government, business, and education, are profound.

Through a Chicana feminist epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 1998), we can also see that the definition of “discriminatory equity ideology” delegitimizes and subtracts value from the efforts that have been instrumental to the advancement of Mexican-Americans. Subsection (vi) of the definition dismisses considerations to “achieve diversity, equity, or inclusion” (Exec. Order No. 14190, 2025). We can see that the order is preying on ethnic minorities and competing to take cultural space away from them. It is asserting a power dynamic by defining “discriminatory equity ideology” and “immoral generalizations” for American society. It assumes shared values in its perspective and does not demonstrate language that is reflective of what Weaver-Hightower (2008) describes as a symbiotic relationship where groups can coexist interdependently or form a cooperative relationship where actors can work together to achieve common goals. There are “extant conditions” that involve the dynamics of race, culture, and social change (Weaver-Hightower, 2008, p. 156) that the executive order’s language ignores.

Executive Order 14190 (2025), *Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling*, enables the erasure of legitimate lived experiences and the collective history of our K-12 Mexican-American students attending schools in the United States. Through a critical constructivist lens (Kincheloe, 2005), we can see how the executive order constructs knowledge. Through a Chicana feminist epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 1998), we can see how our knowledge is marginalized. My cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998) brings to light the way immigration history, the economic contributions of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, and past deportation efforts are taught, or I should say, *not* taught, in schools.

Historically, immigration history in the K-12 system has traditionally and primarily centered around the collective European immigrant experience of going through Ellis Island.

The collective hardships, injustices, and historical humiliation of Mexicans crossing the border into the United States, however, has often been overlooked. Mexicans were “subjected to an elaborate medical inspection that differed in significant ways from procedures that were also in effect at Ellis and Angel Islands” (Stern, 1999, p. 45). The fact that Mexicans crossing the border had to document the complexion of their skin such as “dark” or “light,” were required to pass literacy tests, have letters of recommendation to enter the country, and pay a tax to cross the border is neglected. The history of how, for decades, Mexicans suffered harsh and degrading policies under the pretext of public health measures is rarely shared (Balderrama & Rodríguez, 2006; Dorado Romo, 2017; Stern, 1999). They endured humiliating and dehumanizing delousing practices that included the fumigation of their clothes with Zyklon B and were required to strip naked and be inspected by federal agents (Dorado Romo, 2017; H.R. No. 706, 2021; Stern, 1999). Men had their heads shaved and women had their hair doused with gasoline and vinegar (Dorado Romo, 2017; H.R. No. 706, 2021; Stern, 1999). They were sprayed with toxic mixtures of gasoline and soap—all for a single, one-week certificate to cross the border (H.R. No. 706, 2021). Dorado Romo (2017) found that German Nazis took some of their ideas for the *Desinfektionskammern* (disinfection chambers) from the U.S. Customs facilities and studied the El Paso–Juárez method of fumigation. Despite this painful history and treatment, Mexican immigrants and their descendants went on—and continue—to play an indispensable role in helping to build the United States.

Like my grandfathers, Mexican workers have greatly contributed to the U.S. economy. They made significant historical contributions to the United States during World War II under the government-sponsored Bracero Program and filled tremendous agricultural labor shortages (Orum, 1986). However, much of the War’s history is often focused on military events in Europe, Asia, the South Pacific, and the contributions of White American women entering the labor force. As a result, the essential labor of Mexican workers during this historical period (and currently) continues to remain largely overlooked in mainstream narratives and historical accounts in school classrooms.

Policies of prior mass deportations, such as the Mexican Repatriation Program during the Great Depression and Operation Wetback in the 1950s, are also largely obscured from public discourse and memory, even when these programs often included the illegal deportation of U.S. citizens who were denied protection of their legal rights (Ngai, 2004; Orum, 1986).

They are not at the forefront of the current political and educational discourse that could help to inform all Americans of past injustices and the impact that such policies have had on the lives of Mexican-Americans.

The definition of discriminatory equity ideology defends present-day individuals who “played no part” (Exec. Order No. 14190, 2025). However, are we to forget that our people experienced this treatment? Who does this impunity and erasure of historical injustice benefit? Individuals in the present day have a responsibility to *at least* acknowledge past injustices in historical policies and systems in the United States. They are still benefitting from them while others are not. It is a part of the American story—all of it: the good, the bad, and the ugly.

The 1776 Commission’s charge drives the question, what does it mean to be “American”? Is “American history” a single story or a pluralistic one? Does having more than one identity as an American make you *un-American* or is that what America is actually all about? These are critical questions the 1776 Commission’s leadership should consider.

If we apply a critical constructivist lens, we see a power dynamic between the 1776 Commission as the teacher and the American public as the learner. An examination of word choices in section four of the executive order reveals the 1776 Commission is situated as the teacher, bearer, and facilitator of knowledge: *facilitate the development and implementation; recognize student knowledge; advise; offer advice and recommendations; facilitate, advise upon, and promote; increase public knowledge* (Exec. Order No. 14190, 2025). Through critical constructivism, the 1776 Commission is situated as the creator of knowledge and understanding and exerts the power to preserve “the bonds that knit our country and culture together” (Exec. Order No. 13958, 2020). The power dynamic is rooted in dominating the historical and social narrative, and identification of cultural symbols of the United States; more specifically, it strives to construct the meaning of what it means to be an American by demanding that we accept a particular version of history and perspective as our own.

Conclusion

Vignette #4: The Hyphenated Category

“¿Papi, soy Mexicana o Americana?” My father looked at me perplexed and then a look of pity came across his face. He knew my question was sincere and that I genuinely wanted to know the answer. I was confused. He got down on one knee, “Mija, yo soy

mexicano. Nací en México. Tú eres mi hija, así que eres mexicana por mí y por tu mamá, pero naciste en los Estados Unidos, así que eres de los dos. ¿Entiendes?” My six- or seven-year-old self feigned understanding. I don’t think his answer was enough for me. I got that I was “both,” but perhaps I just couldn’t grasp the meaning of that. A part of me was hurt that he was saying that I wasn’t only Mexican. It wasn’t that I was offended at also being American, it was just that my heart, my world, was all Mexican.

As I grew up, this identity—the hyphenated category—Mexican-American, “de los dos,” like my dad had said, became more obvious to me. My American self ate hamburgers and pizza. My Mexican self ate tortillas, frijoles, and drank a cafecito with pan dulce. My American self wished she could shop at Dillard’s and Claire’s Boutique at the local mall while my Mexican self frequented the local pulgas and mercaditos in Matamoros. I would jam out to George Strait and could knock out a two-step, swoon over Luis Miguel, and jump into a huapango all the same. Coming of age meant quinceañeras and sweet sixteen parties, proms, and Friday night football games. I spoke English at school and Spanish at home.

Yes ... I am Mexican and American. I exist in two worlds simultaneously. I love both of my cultures: the one that made me and filled me with so much love and rich traditions, and the one where I developed hopes and dreams, received my education, made friends, and planned my future. My love for one has never meant that I could not love the other. I am still—con gran orgullo—my mother and father’s daughter. I am proudly from el Valle and am a better human being for being “de los dos.” I refuse to deny any part of my identity. I will not be robbed of the left side of the hyphen.

Gracias, Gloria, for putting it out into the universe: Nepantla...

In 1977, the Office of Management and Budget established a system for collecting racial and ethnic data across federal agencies (Omi & Winant, 2015). Within that system, “Hispanic” was not defined as a race but as an ethnicity, the only ethnic category the federal government explicitly tracks (Omi & Winant, 2015). It consists of “Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish culture or origin” (p. 122). These categories carry significant cultural weight and, as Omi & Winant (2015) note, these classifications shape how groups form identities and communities, not just how they appear in census tables.

Race is socially-constructed (Omi & Winant, 2015). Omi & Winant (2015) identify three paradigms of race: ethnicity, class, and nation. Being sorted into a category by government agencies shapes how a person comes to understand how they are (Omi & Winant, 2015). This helps explain why I struggled with my father's answer, "de los dos"—I felt a particular identity, but there was a structural category I did not choose; I was born into it. I was not confused about geography or citizenship—I was encountering, for the first time, the reality of my identity in the United States. It was something being *taught* to me, and something I was supposed to *learn*.

We must understand that there are mechanisms and power structures around us that deliberately try to shape who we are and what we should believe. Through my Chicana feminist epistemological lens (Delgado Bernal, 1998) and critical constructivism (Kincheloe, 2005), Executive Order 14224 (2025), *Designating English as the Official Language of the United States*; Executive Order 14172 (2025), *Restoring Names That Honor American Greatness*; and Executive Order 14190 (2025), *Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling*, do not seem like isolated policy decisions. They seem like a coordinated strategy of cultural erasure and subtraction (San Miguel & Valencia, 1998), one that is personal, deliberate, and ongoing. Executive Order 14224 (2025), *Designating English as the Official Language of the United States*, claims to "promote unity" and "cultivate a shared American culture for all citizens," but it paradoxically promotes *disunity* by excluding the other parts of what make me, *me*: my Mexican culture and Spanish language. It does not account for us *nepantleras* and *nepantleros* (Anzaldúa, 1987) existing in two worlds simultaneously. Executive Order 14172 (2025), *Restoring Names That Honor American Greatness*, wipes out the association we have with Mexico. It is another mechanism that contributes to the shaping of a national story, but for future generations. There will be children who grow into adults that only know it as the Gulf of America. Executive Order 14190 (2025), *Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling*, attempts to shape culture, identity, and historical understanding through American schools. Together, these executive orders shape knowledge and understanding by influencing how languages other than English are perceived, renaming cultural symbols such as the Gulf of Mexico, and defining various values and virtues related to race and gender for K-12 public schools.

With this understanding, we cannot allow the truth about our complex history, past injustices, and current inequities—that we know still exist—to die or fade from the current

discourse. Like the *amasamiento* Anzaldúa (1987) describes, we must continue kneading together our varied experiences and perspectives, resisting attempts at cultural subtraction and erasure. We must resurrect **our** truth every time attempts to extinguish our place in society are made because it is in the resurrection that the path to an authentic, pluralistic, and democratic society exists.

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