

5-2019

Her Heart is at Home: A Journey into Three Generations of Diaspora

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Weston, Meghan, "Her Heart is at Home: A Journey into Three Generations of Diaspora" (2019). *Capstone Projects and Master's Theses*. 460.

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“Her Heart is at Home: A Journey into Three Generations of Diaspora”



Fig. 1 A photo of four generations of Gonzalez women in Teocaltiche

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Peace Studies

Senior Capstone

Creative Project

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Spring 2019

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Capstone Senior Project Proposal

Major and Concentration: Human Communication- Peace Studies

Title: “Her Heart is at Home: A Journey into Three Generations of Diaspora”

Project Description: For my Capstone Project, I would like to create a collection of poems and short stories. My central theme will focus on my family and the Mexican Diaspora to America. Through my pieces, I want to explore the struggle and success of my grandmother who is an immigrant and my mother who was born in the United States but was taken back to Mexico as an infant. I want to look at the diasporic differences between my grandmother, mother, and myself. My pieces will deal with the identity struggles I face as a White Passing Mexican, the language barrier and impact it has had on my grandmother, and the pressure put on my mother from her Homeland and her Hostland.

Alignment with Common Themes: Because the theme for Capstone is Diaspora, I will specifically focus on the qualifications required for a migrational movement to be considered diasporic. I will focus on the relationship with both the homeland and the Hostland as well as the physical and emotional connections to Mexico. My project will consist of 9 poems, three from the perspective of each generation of diaspora. Their differences will show the uniqueness of my grandmother’s diaspora from my mother and even my own, a second-generation Latina with strong ties to her family history. The narratives in all of the creative pieces will be from the point of view of my grandmother, my mother, and myself. I want to explore the rejection my family has faced from their Mexican family whom they left behind and the rejection they have faced from the country that was supposed to be the promised land. I will touch on topics of racism, poverty, education, and white-privilege.

Expectations: My purpose of this project is to tell the story of my family in a setting that allows me to expose people to a narrative outside of their comfort zone. My grandmother does not speak English and her education stopped in third grade. I want to tell her story in a way she never could due to societal barriers. I also want to paint a portrait of the faces that go along with the statistics of migration, especially in this political climate. My deliverables for this project will include 9

poems. These pieces will clearly and substantially inform the audience about the topic of diaspora, demonstrate my creativity, and express a very strong ability to make use of those disciplines in the development and implementation of the project.

Specific Skills Required: Since I will be working with stories and narratives and will be turning them into poems, it is important that I have some technical skills in working with these topics. I have taken workshops on creative writing and poetry for years and my most recent exposure was a class that merged social justice and creative writing in fall of 2018. The class honed many of my skills in poetry and short story writing but also taught me how to incorporate social justice into these mediums. In spring of 2018, my poetry was published in the campus literary journal, In The Ords. I also worked alongside the oral history department at CSUMB to put together an Oral History Archive of local activists for the Monterey Peace and Justice Center in 2017. It was a creative project that dealt with local narratives. I am choosing to do a creative project because I feel that this format allows me to tell a narrative in a way that cannot be achieved through an academic essay or an internship. I want to show people that Mexican-Americans are more than statistics or charity cases, they are human beings. Through telling stories of my families struggles and experiences, I will be traveling beyond the news stories and the numbers. I do not believe I can achieve this in any other medium.

Next Steps: To complete this project, I will need to conduct interviews with several of my family members including my grandmother, my mother, my father, and my great aunts. I will also need to write my poems in a timely manner to allow for review and revision from several people.

Timeline: By March 13, I will have my project draft due which will include the rough drafts of all 13 deliverables I plan on including in this project. By March 27, will have revisions on all of my pieces and will have them peer-reviewed. By April 10, I will have all of my pieces in their final draft stage. By April 22nd, I will have them displayed in a creative manner, ready for presentation. By April 29, my final portfolio will be completed and ready to turn in. By May 6, my final poster will be ready for the Capstone Festival. On May 8, I will be ready for the Capstone Festival.

Prologue

My grandmother, Antonia Perez, came to the United States from Mexico at age 19. She had a third-grade education, no grasp of the English language, no money, and the unbreakable desire to make something of herself. With her husband, my grandmother began a new life in a country that was less than welcoming. My mother was born shortly after my grandmother's arrival to the US, but was raised for a large portion of her childhood in Teocaltiche, Mexico, my grandmother's homeland. My mother came back to the United States with a few more English vocabulary words but was thrown to the public education system who saw her as a weak link rather than an asset. Just like her mother, my mother made something of herself and was the first person in her family to go to college and graduated with a Bachelor's Degree. A few years after that, I was born and had none of these linguistic disadvantages and was the 10th place Impromptu Speaker in the Nation during my high school years. With just one generation in between, my grandmother, who knew no English, had a granddaughter who was a nationally top-rated competitive speaker. Through education, hard work, and a little bit of luck, my grandmother would become the matriarch to a family that prides itself on education and perseverance.

My Capstone Project is a creative project consisting of poems from the perspective of the three generations of diaspora in my family: my immigrant grandmother, my first-generation mother, and myself, a second-generation, biracial, white passing granddaughter. I will include a total of nine poems, all dealing with a different aspect of diaspora, immigration, and cultural acceptance. My poems were written with the intent of honoring the sacrifices made by my mother and grandmother to help me get to the place I am today. My pieces will deal with racism, colorism, imperialism, self-acceptance, and the indomitable human spirit that lies in the hearts of my Latinx brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers.

This collection is meant to educate, shock, and empower. This collection will not apologize for making anyone uncomfortable or angry. This collection will exist with strength, pride, and love.

Para ti, abuela.

Abuela



Fig. 2 My grandmother, Antonia Perez

Este Poema No es Para Ti

Si no puedes leer este poema, no es para ti.

Este país te mimas. Sostiene tu mano.

Sus carteles y menús están en su idioma.

La escuela se enseña en tu lengua.

No es necesario que lleve a tus hijos a todas partes como traductores.

Este poema es para mi abuela.

Verá, ella puede leer este poema sin tropezar con sonidos extraños.

Ella no necesita luchar o fingir que entiende.

Ella no necesita a mi madre para susurrarle el poema en Español.

Durante demasiados años, mi abuela ha sobrevivido sin la comodidad del idioma de su país.

Ella ha pagado caro por negarse a hablar la lengua de su opresor.

Este poema es para mi abuela.

Para aquellos de ustedes que pueden leer este poema sin abrir una aplicación en su teléfono,

Doy la bienvenida a tus ojos que miran.

Porque al menos puedes saborear la amargura de su historia.

Nunca compadecí a mi abuela, pero anhelaba que su vida fuera más fácil.

Un poema no deshará la lucha de décadas, pero es un comienzo.

Este poema es para mi abuela.

Si miras este poema y no entiendes nada, bienvenido a su mundo.

Saborea la frustración que sientes e imagina ese dolor temporal como tu realidad.

Imagínese trabajar el doble de duro que un hablante de inglés solo para llamarlo vago.

O peor, indiferente.

La verdad es que nunca conocerás su lucha.

Ni siquiera puedes leer su poema.

This Poem is Not for You

If you cannot read this poem, then it is not for you.

This country coddles you. It holds your hand.

Your street signs and menus are in your language.

School is taught in your tongue.

You do not need to drag your children everywhere to be your translators.

This poem is for my grandmother.

You see, she can read this poem without tripping over foreign sounds.

She doesn't need to struggle or pretend she understands.

She doesn't need my mother to whisper the poem to her in Spanish.

For too many years, my grandmother has survived without the comfort of her nation's language.

She has paid dearly for refusing to speak the tongue of her oppressor.

This poem is for my grandmother.

To those of you who can read this poem without opening the translate app on your phone,

I welcome your gazing eyes.

For you can at least taste the bitterness of her story.

I never pitied my grandmother, but I longed for her life to be easier.

One poem will not undo the struggle of decades, but it's a start.

This poem is for my grandmother.

If you look at this poem and understand nothing, welcome to her world.

Savor the frustration you feel and imagine that temporary pain as your reality.

Imagine working twice as hard as an English Speaker just to be called lazy.

Or worse, indifferent.

The truth is, you will never know her struggle.

You can't even read her poem.

Yard Sale Queen

Her education shuddered to a halt in 3rd grade-

This was a rite of passage in Teocaltiche.

It was how she became a woman,

Like all of her sisters before her.

Please don't misunderstand, she was by no means uneducated.

Her literacy did not come from dirty chalkboards or ladies in floor length skirts.

Her scholarship did not spill from the pages of dusty, archaic textbooks.

Don't think her dull or dim, even for a moment.

Her catechism flowed like a spring from the stories her father told while tipsy.

It was weaved into the blankets and socks her mother braided to relax.

It was stirred into the simmering chile colorado, sitting on its primordial stove.

In Teocaltiche, school could never be confined to four disheveled walls.

It was through this education that she became a businesswoman.

She ignored the imaginary money on Wall Street.

She couldn't care less about Federally Recognized Capital.

She laughed in the face of economic regulation that told her she should be broke.

La Señora made her money at *las tiendas del patio*.

Saturday morning was always characterized by her walking shoes and sun hat.

Donning her uniform, *La Señora* rummaged through other man's trash for treasures.

If she could find an old painting or bedraggled heirloom, she was set.

Being the business savvy trader, she was,

La Señora could refurbish any item she could find.

To her clients, her “Silver Teapots” were antiques they were getting for a steal.

To *La Señora*, they were items bought at a Yard Sale that needed a little elbow grease.

They were her American Dream.

She wore the trappings of a woman above her station.

She fed her “Economically Disadvantaged” children with the nourishment of the middle class.

She made a small fortune through the ingenuity that school could never teach her.

She bartered and traded better than anyone I’ve ever known.

She is a Businesswoman.

She is a Merchant.

She is Capitalist.

She is a Yard Sale Queen.

Even the Wind is Afraid

La Mujer is buzzing with excitement because tonight,
Her grandchildren are sleeping over.

She has spent hours re-adjusting the throw blanket and pillows on the couch so they would be
Most appealing and comfortable to them.

It doesn't matter one bit that they hardly understand a word she says,
She knows they understand her *amor*.

More importantly, they can feel it.
A grandmother's *amor* speaks silent volumes.

Her daughter leaves the two *niñas* on her doorstep
And when they walk inside her home,

They smell the familiar fragrances of
Pan dulce and *chocolate caliente*.

She has planned this evening down to the minute because
She doesn't want them to be bored for a moment.

There is a layer of added pressure for grandmothers who don't
Speak the language of their grandchildren.

She cannot tell them a bedtime story or
Make them laugh with a joke,

Instead, she sings them songs they cannot comprehend but still enjoy
And she impersonates little birds to make them giggle.

On the meticulously manicured agenda,
La mujer has placed a movie.

Tonight's special feature:
"Even the Wind is Afraid".

She found this movie at a yard sale and figured a spooky flick
Would be perfect for the evening's festivities.

Las niñas sit down in front of the tv with their brightly colored *polvorones*,
Expecting to watch "The Prince of Egypt" again, the only English movie La Mujer owns.

Instead, they are delighted to see a foreign title appear,
"Even the Wind is Afraid".

As it turns out,
The title was the only English part of the movie.

The rest of the film was strictly in Spanish,

Without the assistance of subtitles.

La Mujer was mortified because she knew the little girls wouldn't understand.

Regardless, she let the movie continue.

It was an awful movie.

Fake blood made of ketchup, ghosts made of sheets.

But *las niñas* loved it.

They laughed the whole way through.

And eventually,

La Mujer laughed too.

A perfect night was had by all,

With hardly a word shared.

Generations, separated by language but

You don't need words to show *amor*.

Mamá



Fig. 3 My Mother, Maritoña Weston

While She Sleeps

She tells me she still dreams in Spanish.

The landscapes her mind creates while she sleeps

Are those of Home.

In her Dreamland, she is a child again.

She is walking along a dirt path,

Trodden by explorers before her.

These adventurers sought to re-conquer the

Land that had been violently ripped from their chests.

It doesn't matter that these modern

Conquistadors are no older than 12.

Nor does it matter than she is only eight.

They yearn to take back the land once lost.

It's been years since she's flown home to see her family.

"It's just too dangerous, maybe next year."

She says that every year,

Knowing it isn't true.

At the end of the beaten path,

La Niña hopes to find a treasure.

*The children who have made it all the way
Have sung of its glory.*

*It's been hundreds of years since the
Spanish kidnapped their home.
But the scars and stories are passed down
Through generations like blood types.*

Her connection to home comes in the form of
Cuisine. Food. Nourishment. Love.
I sit at the kitchen table while she cooks meals from the Homeland,
And I think she's never been more beautiful.

*La Niña is getting tired and hungry,
But she pushes forward, thankful for the shade from the
Trees lining the paths.
She is thirsty for water and knowledge.*

*The legends tell her she is walking a path to
Teocaltiche's greatest riches.
The prize the Spanish couldn't steal.
They say it is so glorious it could not fit on a boat.*

I remember as a child,
My mother would tell me about Mexico
And describe it as a place much simpler than this.

I wanted to dream of Mexico too.

The sun is dipping lower in the sky and

La Niña knows she must be getting close.

She can feel it in her bones.

She is mere minutes away from the Mexico of her ancestors.

What will she find?

Gold? Chocolate? Modelo Especial?

It must be gold. It only makes sense.

She picks up her pace.

My mother has built a life in the states

With a man who loves her more than she will know.

She broke her heart and gave a piece to him,

A piece to me, and a piece to my sister.

She's getting closer now,

Exhausted but Exhilarated.

As she's pushing through the bushes and plants,

She sees it.

Though she thought she gave her whole heart to her family,

A little piece remains in her grandmother's shack in Teocaltiche.
No matter the distance or the years, she will never get that piece back.
Nor does she want it.

She falls to her knees at the sight.

She does not find gold coins or chalices,

Rather a forest so green and lush she cannot believe it's real.

The Spanish took the gold but left the treasure.

La Niña sees her ancestors in the trees.

They are watching over the city with diligence.

In this moment, she feels Mexico in her soul.

She knows peace.

La Niña has seen treasures beyond human comprehension.

She begins the journey home,

Down the dirt path and back to the village

With cobblestone streets and life in the air.

And then she wakes up.

She tells me she dreams in Spanish.

But She's Enough for Me

My mother was born in the States
But was swiftly taken "home" to Teocaltiche, Mexico.
The land of her father and mother and therefore,
The land of her blood.

Raised on a farm surrounded by God's creations,
She spoke perfect Spanish and was seen as a bright, independent girl.
Beloved by her family and community,
My mother was seen as the adorable *traviesita*.

When my mother came back to the U.S,
Her English was subpar and she was uncharacteristically quiet.
Instead of taking any time to get to know her,
School Administrators labeled her as Challenged and threw her to the system.

Despite the educational and social shackles tightening around her wrists,
My mother thrived.
Naturally brilliant and hardworking,
She broke the chains of oppression that would have crushed a normal person.

The chains that break immigrant children every day.

Our system tried to tell her that she wasn't enough.

Mierda.

As my mother grew, she started to shed the shackles of
Her own Mexican community.
She turned her back to her traditional upbringing
To become the person she wanted to be.

It's not ladylike to go to college.

So she got a degree in a male-dominated field.

Women should listen to their husbands.

So she became feisty and strong.

You should have children right away.

So she thrived in her career.

Don't move far from your family.

So she built the life she demanded for herself.

As she paved the road of her life,

She strayed away from the traditional values she was raised on.

She caused controversy.

A traviesa, through and through.

Her family tried to tell her she wasn't enough.

Mierda.

My mother is the child of an immigrant,

But she is also an immigrant herself.

She never felt confined to the restrictions of her Homeland or Hostland and therefore,

She was never enough for either culture.

Too Mexican to truly be American,

Too American to truly be Mexican.

Never enough.

But she is enough for me.

I look at my mother and see a spirit that simply cannot be tamed.

I see a strong Mexican-American mother.

A bold, brave, fearless spirit that

Cannot be defined by borders or tradition.

My mother cannot be defined by you or anyone else.

My mother is, simply, enough.

That Type of Mexican

My family comes from a town heavily influenced by the Spanish
So, many of the people have light hair or green eyes.

They wear the mark of the European beasts who
Imposed these Anglo features on their prey.

My ancestors have historically been
“Ethnically Ambiguous”, meaning

They could really be from
Anywhere.

“Where are you from?”
California.

“No, where are you *from*?”
Oh. My family is from Mexico.

I know my mother is tired of this question but she
Dutifully answers the strangers who have no right to know.

Every once in a while,
Said strangers will assume she is

Greek or

Lebanese or

Ukrainian or

Irish or

But their fatal mistake is assuming she is anything but
Mexican.

On countless occasions, these strangers will begin to discuss
Politics with my mother who will give them a moment of her time.

At the grocery store or the bank,
They strike a conversation.

To make everyone feel heard,
She will kindly shake her head in agreement.

So why do these strangers, so often,
Begin to tell my mother what is wrong with the “Mexicans in our country”?

“You know they steal American Jobs”

“You know they’re only here for the welfare”

This is something that only happens in the movies, right?

We're in 2019, this doesn't *still* go on.

Well, folks, this is real life.

An old, white, [insert gender here] will make a racist caricature of themselves.

They will pretend to know my mother better than she knows herself.

Well, sir

Well, madam

Why do you continue when you see the shock on her face?

And what country is "your" country?

Soon, the shock wears off and turns to anger.

My mother, ever the saint, calmly reports

I am Mexican.

Now it is White Americans turn to blush.

"Well, I didn't mean *your* type of Mexican".

"Well, you're a different *type* of Mexican".

And what Type is that?

Yo



Fig. 4 The author as a child

Imposter Syndrome

I feel like an imposter at family gatherings,
A rude intruder at any cultural congregation.

My light skin and blue eyes make me stand out
In an uncomfortable way.

I feel boisterous,
Like my skin is too loud.

I am so proud of my Mexican heritage that
I want to scream it at passers-by.

Yet I can't shake this feeling that I am
A fraud, a phony, a fake Mexican.

But what makes a *real* Mexican?
Una Mexicana Autentica?

Is it my ability to eat ridiculously spicy foods
Or my dogmatic loyalty to my family?

Is it my love for nature and God's earth
Or my devotion to my faith?

Is it my childhood memories of La Chancla
Or trying to maintain my Spanish?

Is it my reverence for my elders
Or my desire to return to the Homeland?

My soul encompasses all of these aspects of my ethnic identity,
Yet I feel inadequate as the Latina I know I am.

My Mexican family has always loved and praised me for my
Anglo features.

My pale porcelain skin.
My eyes the color of a stormy ocean.

They tell me I am beautiful for these features.
But I've always wanted to look more like the Latina I feel inside.

My White Privilege and my White Guilt have
Intertwined and meshed to mold the complicated identity I possess.

How does one make sense of their identity when
Their outside does not match their inside?

How do I make sense of myself?

Why can't I feel like a REAL Mexicana?

Why do I tell myself I am nothing more than an imposter?

But that ends today.

Something has to change.

My identity can no longer lie in the pigment of

My skin and my eyes.

It lies in my heart. It lies in my soul.

It lies in the places nobody can see but me.

The Perfect Christmas Present

Christmas is, in and of itself, an idyllic experience for children.

Kitchens are full of the smell of vanilla and nutmeg, tiny factories pumping out

Overly sweet sugar cookies vaguely shaped like Santa and holly leaves.

Fathers are perched atop precarious ladders as nervous mothers twist

Apron strings below, yelling out every few minutes,

“Be careful! You’re not as young as you think you are” while dad hangs more tinsel.

The brightly colored bulbs of lights twinkle like small stars up and down

Neighborhood streets, while innocent children mistake every red bulb as

Rudolph’s Nose.

Every year, my sister and I waited for the Toys R Us catalog to come in the mail and

We would frantically flip the pages, circling any item that remotely caught our interest;

Barbies and Hot Wheels were sure to make the Wish List.

Christmas morning was like waking up in a dream world where

Everything smelled like Cinnamon Rolls and my pajamas were cozy but

Never too warm.

My sister and I always rushed down the stairs to

Tear apart the presents my

Dad had taken such care to wrap.

Lo and behold, our

Wishes had come true and our fragrant tree was garnished with

Dolls and board games and painting sets.

I remember most Christmases with this indescribable undertone of

Joy and

Unbridled happiness.

One Christmas,

However,

Stands out in my mind.

My grandfather purchased a gift for me that my

White classmates never

Understood.

He bought me a Rooster.

He explained to me that it was a big deal for a child to get a Rooster in Mexico.

I was delighted beyond belief to be

Included in this age-old, Mexican tradition.

The Rooster had to live at my grandparents' house but I
Constantly talked about my Rooster to anyone that
Would listen.

Admittedly, none of my classmates or teachers would understand
The significance of this
Seemingly simple present.

While my white friends were comparing their
RC cars and their Build-A-Bears,
I wanted to talk about the Rooster.

To me, this Rooster was more than a pet.
It was a small connection to the land I
So longed to be a part of.

I wanted to go "home" to Mexico because that was my
Mother's home.

But the Mexico of her childhood was unrecognizable in the Mexico of today.

We visited Mexico once and
I found
My heart there.

I scrambled to pick up any shattered remain of the country

I saw as my El Dorado,
My city of gold.

I hoarded postcards and rosaries,
And the few mental snapshots of the Mexico I
Remembered.

The Rooster was a tiny piece
Of Mexico
Of Home.

I still vow to return one day,
But I don't know if that will be by plane,
Or by Dream.

My Journey to Find Home

I was born in the United States to an Irish Father and a Mexican Mother.

My dad, a towering, auburn-haired cop,

Fell in love with the bold, raven-haired firewire that is my mother.

In the year my mother was born,

It would have been illegal for an Irishman and a Latina

To get married or have children.

While their marriage was legal in the year they got married,

The Court of Public Opinion enforced different rules than

The Federal Court of Law.

My own family told my parents it would be a

Mistake

To bring “mixed” children into this world.

Is there a way, poetically,

To encompass the venom in their voices when they called me

“Mixed”?

Because that is what I am.

Unapologetically

“Mixed”.

I feel no shame for my complicated heritage.

I am not sorry if you can't understand why I don't look a certain way.

I will draw my own box on the census that says

“Mixed”.

In my youth, I traveled to Mexico to

Meet my mother's family.

I walked along the cobblestones and ate.

As I grew older, I traveled to Ireland to

See the land of my father's ancestors.

I walked along the cobblestones and ate.

Whether it was piping hot churros or

Piping hot “chips”,

I felt at home amongst the people.

But the truth is,

Though I sought a geographic “home”,

Neither of these countries fit just right.

I cannot point to a map and

Find Home; but

I can feel it.

I feel it in the Reggaeton my mother would

Play loudly on Saturday mornings

While we cleaned the house.

I feel it in the smell of Soda Bread my

Father insisted we bake every

St. Patrick's Day.

I feel home in a way I cannot see it.

I am Mexican.

I am Irish.

But more than anything,

I am Mixed.

Post-Project Reflection

As I reach the conclusion of this project, I cannot help but feel gratitude for the opportunity to dig deeper into my family's journey than I ever had before. I always had vague snapshots of my grandmother's diaspora; mere glimpses of her story. She shared a few stories with me when I was little, such as having to hide my mother in the closet when the rent collector came around when they were living in the projects in East LA. She told me how she would offer coffee to every guest that entered her home, even though she couldn't afford grounds, just hoping they wouldn't accept. My mother also shared stories with me. She told me what it was like to go through school without a parent who understood grades or who could talk to her teachers. She explained to me the controversy she caused by simply saying she wanted to have her own apartment or by cutting her hair short.

While I heard some of these stories growing up, it was almost impossible to write an entire project based on these flashbulb memories of my family. This project gave me the chance to ask questions, listen to stories, and collect bits of my family's history. This project also gave me a chance to express love and adoration for my mother and grandmother in a way I haven't before. Artwork, specifically poetry, allows us to work through painful memories or intense feelings of love. I was nervous to show my mother and grandmother several of these poems, afraid I was too presumptuous or stepping on their stories. I never wanted to take their voice, rather amplify it to my peers and anyone who would read this collection.

Some of these poems flowed through my pen like water; they felt natural to write. Others, on the other hand, were a struggle to put on paper. Facing my identity and my confusion is hard enough, harder still was knowing that this inner-struggle would be displayed for anyone to see.

This process wasn't always easy, but it was worth it.

Thank you to anyone who took the time to glance at our diaspora.

Reflective Essay

After months of writing, crafting several drafts, asking for and completing peer reviews, and countless thesaurus searches, I have completed my Senior Capstone Creative Project. I will admit that it feels good to not only complete so many personal pieces of writing, but also to see such a challenging project through to the end. Now that this process is coming to a close, I will write an essay to reflect on my journey. I will discuss my projects aesthetics, audience and purpose, overall process, social and historical context, and the artistic tradition I drew inspiration from.

First, I will explain some of the aesthetic choices I made during the creation of my project. My first choice I made purely thinking of my desired aesthetic was the photos used throughout my piece. I had so many pictures to choose from but I knew I didn't want to include so many that they lose their impact and became deluded. With this thought, I had to be very selective; I knew I wanted a photo of the person each chapter was about- my grandmother, mother, and myself- and one photo of all of us together. I wanted the photos to have a vintage look and feel because diaspora is an age-old struggle. I think of my mother and grandmother as timeless and I wanted their photos to reflect that. I sifted through dozens of photos to find the perfect four and I am so pleased with how they look delicately placed amongst narratives and stories. Another aesthetic choice I made was to italicize the Spanish words so they had even more impact on the reader. Switching between two languages in a poem can be challenging for a reader, especially one who is not fluent in one of the languages so I wanted it to be obvious when a word was derived from my grandmother's language. I think the italicized words look so beautiful and pop on the pages.

Next, I will explore who my intended audience is and my intentions when crafting my Capstone. The ultimate goal of my Capstone is to inform both in-group members of my

Mexican-American community and out-group non-Latinx people about what my family's struggle with diaspora has been as well as discuss my own identity issues. I wanted readers to learn from my poetry as well as inspire other bi-racial people to find peace with their own identity struggles, especially those who are White Passing who experience similar levels of White Guilt as me. Although I had the goal of teaching readers, each poem is aimed at a particular audience. For example, my poem "That Type of Mexican" is directed at people who are anti-immigration or those who harbor ill-will towards the Latinx community. My poem "But She's Enough for Me" was written as an ode to my mother and she is my intended audience. My poem "While She Sleeps" is intended for anyone who wants to learn about the impact of the Spanish Conquistadors decimating native lands. All of my poems were written with a different group of people or person in mind which is why I am so proud of my diversity in topics in this Capstone.

Third, I would like to reflect on some of my triumphs and struggles during the writing process. My main triumph during this project, in my opinion, were the poems that helped me work through my identity issues. These feelings were hard to put on paper because that made them real—several of my poems discussed some of my deepest issues. I talked about my White Guilt and the pain I felt when my family praised my Anglo features. I discussed my lifelong desire to be seen as a "real Mexican". I turned these insecurities into tangible words. I am very proud and feel like I displayed bravery in writing these pieces. My main struggle throughout the process, though, came from dwindling inspiration after my first few poems. My first poem, "Yard Sale Queen", was ridiculously easy to write. The words hit me one day in class and I grabbed the first pencil and piece of paper I could find. I scribbled down the poem in a few minutes and it is one of my favorites in the collection. My next three or four poems came to me

with similar ease. After that, however, I hit writer's block and felt that every idea I had was repetitive. For a week, I ignored my Capstone and felt so discouraged I strongly considered switching to a research paper. I am so glad I didn't, though. I decided to interview my mother and grandmother to hear new stories to inspire me and I journaled and meditated about my own life. The creative process for this project was new to me and I had to come up with new methods of finding inspiration.

Next, I will discuss the social and historical context I drew from in writing this project, both familial and academic. The connection to the topic of diaspora is vital for my project because our class focused on that this semester. The historical context of the Mexican diaspora is woven into many of my poems. I discuss the challenges of learning a new language, entering a foreign education system, marrying outside of one's race, and other challenges that immigrants face when leaving their Homeland for a new Hostland. I also wrote about several of the reasons a person might leave Mexico, joining the diasporic movement from home. Some of these reasons include economic opportunity and the drug cartel's damage to small towns like my grandmother's home of Teocaltiche. Despite the importance of academic ties to historical context, I also drew inspiration from the social context that is my family's unique history and make-up. My sister and I are bi-racial and we were raised on a beautiful blend of cultures and traditions. We were taught Spanish by my Mexican family and studied our families genealogy to track where our Irish ancestors came from. My experience of being a Latina with Anglo features plays into my work and I talk about how my Mexican community has treated me differently because of my skin tone. Historical and social context in history books are important to study and incorporate, but so are the nuances of our own personal experiences.

Finally I will look back on the artistic traditions I had in mind when crafting several of my narratives. I could have found inspiration from any number of wonderful poets, however, I drew the most motivation from the storytelling style of my family. During birthday parties, Christmas Eve dinners, or a simply family dinners, my family will sit around in a large circle and tell stories both funny and tragic. My mother, grandmother, aunts and uncles will recall the funny things their brothers and sisters did or regale the family with challenges and triumphs through the years. I directly modeled “While She Sleeps” after a story my mother told me and I tried to write it exactly how I remembered hearing the story as a child. I wrote “The Perfect Christmas Present” in the style a child would write. I find my family to be full of storytellers, spinning stories like it is their art. My inspiration does not come from internationally renowned writers, it comes from them.

I feel an incredible sense of accomplishment when I reflect back on my Senior Capstone Project. Initially, I was nervous to tackle a creative project because it was out of my comfort zone. I have been writing poetry for years and have had some published but I have largely kept it from my family and friends. I am proud of the poems I produced during the course of this project, but I am even more proud of the self-consciousness I had to ignore when deciding to pursue this challenge.

Capstone Final Synthesis Essay

My Senior Capstone class incorporated several learning concepts: group discussion seminars, a creative, culminating poetry project, and an in-depth study of diaspora. Our class read a series of fascinating books covering the many forms of diaspora, including the African diaspora, the Cuban diaspora, and even the Vietnamese diaspora. This literature as well as the unique insights of my classmates taught me so much about a concept I thought I understood. This final synthesis essay will evaluate and assess the entirety of my work in my HCOM 475 course. I will discuss my contributions to the course, analyze my independent and collaborative work, as well as my deepened understanding and appreciation for our class theme.

To begin, I will discuss my unique contributions to the course. My father has been able to trace his ancestors back many generations and found that they came from Ireland during a period of mass migration from the country. I knew I could write several poems about this diaspora, but I have a much stronger connection to my mother's journey. My grandmother and grandfather came to this country a few weeks before my mother was born. My mother, being born in California, was an American citizen but was taken back to Mexico right after being born. She spent much of her childhood in Mexico but also spent time in America for schooling. I felt that I could contribute to the class in a special way because there are three clear delineation between my grandmother's generation, my mother's, and my own. My grandmother speaks very little English and has immersed herself into a Latinx community in Los Angeles. My mother speaks

perfect Spanish and nearly perfect English but has strong ties to both cultures. Both my mother and grandmother have more Latin features than I do. I am a white passing woman who speaks perfect English and competent Spanish. Our three generations have certain strengths and challenges that the other generations can't fully understand. I am Mexican and Irish, however, my white passing nature separates me from my mother and grandmother in a way that was difficult to bring up in class discussions but I felt that it helped the class learn what it was like to be white passing in a family of people who wish they had more Anglo features, even though I have been ashamed of those same features in the past. I feel that I had a strong contribution to class through the literature discussions as well. I really enjoyed reading the assigned books, particularly The Warmth of Other Suns, The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, and Perfume Dreams. These narrative styles caught my attention and I always had questions or opinions on the readings. I think our professor did a wonderful job of finding a mixture of academic and entertaining reading to teach us the complexities of diaspora.

Next, I would like to discuss my independent work as well as some of the collaborations I participated in with classmates. I will start with my independent work. This creative project was deeply introspective for me and forced me to address some of my life-long struggles of acceptance and identity. Writing my poems was like a therapy session for me; I dealt with the anger I felt at my grandmother's oppression and my mother's mistreatment. I was able to filter through the White Guilt I had due to my skin color. I interviewed my mother and grandmother for stories I hadn't heard before. Overall, I got closer to my family but also uncovered some

thoughts and opinions about myself that I hadn't taken the time to acknowledge before. I shared some of these thoughts with a classmate who also happens to be a very close friend, but it remained very personal and independent for me. Despite this, I also collaborated with several classmates on projects and ideas for formatting and layout of my project. I worked with two classmates on a presentation for six chapters of the book Americanah and we read the chapters and wrote summaries and discussed the meaning of the chapters to effectively write class discussion questions. We worked together outside of class to make sure we agreed on the general messages and principles of the chapters we were assigned. I also met with another classmate outside of class to read several academic articles about diaspora that he found on his own. He discovered these articles while searching for supplemental information for his research essay but we read over the research together and discussed how this might impact our independent projects. Lastly, I shared my piece with four classmates and read over theirs to get ideas on where to place photos, how to correctly title my pieces, and get general feedback on my work. I was shy to share some of my work but I could collaborate effectively because I felt safe and heard by classmates. I found a healthy balance of independent and collaborative work in this course because our professor emphasized the need for both.

Finally I will write about my deepened understanding of diaspora as a general academic concept as well as in my own personal life. Before taking this course, I had a general understanding that diaspora was a way of describing a movement of a group of people from a homeland to a Hostland. However, I didn't understand the criteria that must be met in order for a

migration to be considered a diaspora. I didn't know that several factors could initiate a diaspora such as a people group being forced out of a country for environmental or economic reasons or by forceful removal by a colonizing entity. Most of all, I didn't realize the cultural connection that had to exist within the people group in order for the migrating party to be considered diasporic. Diasporas are so much more than moving from one piece of land to another- the term also encompasses the connection between the people who started at one place in the world and spread to locations far and wide, yet still hold on to each other through talking and sharing stories or simply thinking of each other. This course also led me to learn more about my diaspora as a first/second generation, white passing Mexican American. I have a very strong cultural connection to my Mexican family despite only visiting the country once. I speak Spanish and share a common religion with many of my family in the Homeland, Roman Catholicism. My family here in the US still completes the rosary on Christmas Eve and we cook traditional Mexican food for our gatherings. My family shares stories of what it was like to grow up in a tiny town with cobblestone streets and vendors who would walk around at night selling hot churros and tortas. This class taught me that I am very much a part of my family's diaspora even if I have Anglo features and have spent much less time in Mexico.

I have thoroughly enjoyed this course and I have learned so much from my professor, my classmates, and through my self-reflection. In this essay I reflected on my contributions to this course through our seminar discussions, my independent studies and my collaborations, as well as my deepened understanding and appreciation for our class theme.