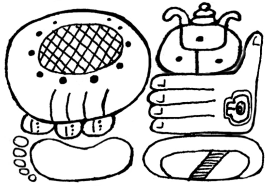


## Recollections of an 11-Year-Old Native Daughter



**By Jab'ellalih**

No, I'm not "Spanish," nor "Hispanic," nor "Latina,"

And I'm not "white" or "Anglo-American" either.

From what I'm told, you knew it when you recommended aborting me, saying I would  
"never survive" anyhow,

And when I survived because of the treatments my mother had learned from her  
mother and her mother's mother,

And when I was born on exactly the day my parents had predicted months earlier using  
the Maya calendar, the moons, and the eclipse, rather than the doctors' charts and graphs.

I was neither white nor Latina because I was dressed in Maya clothes just like my  
mother's, within minutes of being born.

You knew because my name was embroidered into my huipil in glyphs,

And because you had to verify state laws to double-check if a hieroglyphic name might  
not be legal on a birth certificate,

And because you sought to ban me from having my mother's surname.

I was neither white nor Latina when my great-grandmother waited to greet me and say  
good-bye in the Guatemalan Maya community where she was born.

You knew it when you were rude in the passport office and the airport,  
And when you asked what my name means, if it's Arabic, or if I'm Muslim,  
And when I crossed the border and my American passport was a red flag, rather than  
"blue gold,"

And when you wanted to search under my Maya clothes in public because you found  
them "strange."

I was neither white nor Latina when I learned to write my name (and other things) in  
glyphs before I could write it in a Latin-based alphabet.

Everyone knew I was neither white nor Latina when my parents spoke to me only in  
K'ichee' and in indigenous signs,

And when the Maya school let me into the third grade at the age of four so that I would  
inspire the other kids to value *qach'ab'aal*, "our language."

And when I grew up thinking my culture or my language ability should never be a  
disability.

I was neither white nor Latina on my first day of school in the USA, when you spoke to  
me so slowly, because you had read that I spoke Mayan and used a Native sign language at  
home.

You knew it when my prior schooling did not affect the grade into which you placed me,  
And when you sent me for all those special tests to make sure I wouldn't slow the other  
kids down,

And when you wouldn't let me skip a grade, because you assumed I would be "better off" in the lower grade, even though I had passed every test with higher scores than anyone my age and most of the next.

I was neither white nor Latina when you would not let me join the special school program because I was multilingual, even though I had outscored all my monolingual classmates in English,

And whenever you were surprised I do well in school,

And whenever you presumed I could not have *really* finished reading the whole book,

And whenever you figured you just had not yet figured out how I had been tricking your system.

I am neither white nor Latina when you send me and my sisters to ESL class for a day of "special observation" every time we start at a new school.

You know it whenever you ask of my indigenous first language, "where is that from?" or "is that even a language?"

And whenever you and your friends tell me to stop speaking K'ichee' with my parents because, "In America, we speak American,"

And whenever you hate me because I can correct your English *and* your Spanish.

You made me different when you confessed your mom hadn't let you invite me to your party because I'm "not white,"

And when your parents all insisted on staying to watch over my birthday party when I turned seven,

Because they were “a little nervous” about letting their children eat and play with “Mexican people.”

I was neither white nor Latina when I told you that we children did not want to play “cowboys and Indians” in phys-ed,

You knew it when you lied and said you had not forced us to play the game anyhow,

And every time you got angry “someone” had notified the principal of the offenses in your handouts, textbooks, classroom aids, and scripts,

And every time you denied or refused to apologize for your school lessons.

I am neither white nor Latina when I think about treaties settlers broke, as you discuss “noble” Native sachems who “welcomed” Europeans.

And when I think of the hundreds or thousands of Native American slaves also “helped” the colonists, as you celebrate Squanto or Sacajawea,

And when the only thing that thrills me about your Thanksgiving is my mashed potatoes and corn on the cob,

And that time you gave me the role of a Wa-Ta-Nee girl in the school musical,

I am neither white nor Latina when you asked me whether “my people” have a flag.

You know it whenever you assume I should know the answer to every question about any Native culture, event, or person,

And whenever you turn to me to double-check the pronunciation of a Native term, from any language of the Americas,

And whenever you assign me to do a report on the most “underdeveloped” countries or remote “hinterland” provinces.

I was not white or Latina a few months ago when that mall security guard *playing* immigration officer “caught” me *playing* school with my sister, while we waited for a parent to exit the restroom.

Or when she interrogated me in Spanish, even when I kept telling her, “You can speak to me in English,”

Or when she asked how I got there, where I was born, if I had *papeles* proving I am an *Americana*, even though I’m just eleven.

I am not white or Latina whenever people ask me, “*Where are you from?*”

When they really want to ask, “*Why do you have dark skin?*”

Or, “*Why don’t you have an accent?*”

Or, “*Why do you think that?*”

I am neither white nor Latina because I like doing things differently,

And because I welcome finding answers you don’t expect,

And because I remember everything you’ve said and done,

And because I see it as my duty to not just speak out and act, but to speak and act better,

Because I know Native ways are not just ways of the past, but ways for tomorrow.