

**MICHEL**

I think I was very lucky this time around in this course to have students from so diverse

**DEGRAFF:**

backgrounds. But also students who, I think most of them, were first-generation Americans and with ancestry, either parents or grandparents, from actually quite diverse parts of the world. From Mauritius, from India, from Latin America. And also in terms of ethnicity and religion, it was also quite a diverse set. There were students whose parents were Jewish.

There was an African-American student. There were some from India. And they were basically struggling with these notions of who they are in terms of their identity. And can you be Mauritian, but yet not speak the Mauritian language? Can you be Indian and not speak Bhojpuri? Can you be Latino, but not be fluent in Spanish? Can you be African-American, but yet not be fully fluent in so-called Black English?

So those were questions that they themselves brought in that I think enriched the course, because it became very personal in many ways. And I feel that through this semester, they themselves matured in the kinds of answers they were bringing to these questions, which were deeply personal. And in fact, once I discovered that they had such diverse backgrounds, and that the questions were so personal in terms of who they were as individuals, in terms of identity, language, religion, ethnicity, then what I asked them to do as the very first exercise was to write what I call the linguistic biography.

And actually, I am grateful that I get this hint from a dear friend and colleague Professor Anne Charity Hudley who teaches at UC Santa Barbara. And Anne Charity actually shared with me her own linguistic biography. And when I read that, I realized how powerful it was to read about her own growing up, in terms of language, ethnicity, race. So I thought that I would ask students to do something similar. And that helped me throughout the semester to frame what kinds of questions we would answer throughout the course, which were very connected to the essence of the issue of language and identity.