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Archeological findings bury English Only
My View

BY PAUL CUADROS

I was watching the debate between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton with one of my high school soccer players when he turned to me and casually said, "I got sent out of my class today because I spoke Spanish."

I was taken aback and asked him to explain. He said the class was working in groups on a project and his English teacher caught him speaking Spanish to someone in his group. She didn't like hearing Spanish and told him to stop.

Omar was born in the United States. He's smart, an excellent speaker and gifted with the ability to charm and hold his ground in an argument. He politely said he was within his rights to speak whatever language he wanted as long as he was not disrupting the class. His teacher disagreed and put him out.

"The Hispanic kids will never stand up against something like that," Omar said with some irritation. "They're too afraid." He said he would talk to the principal about it and see where school policy stands.

Perhaps Omar's teacher should have seen the recent story in the News & Observer about the exciting archeological finds in Western North Carolina. Archaeologists from Warren Wilson College, the University of Oklahoma, and Tulane University were announcing their recent findings from a dig in Burke County that showed Spanish explorers were well within the interior of North Carolina two decades before the first English attempt to settle Roanoke Island.

Spanish it seems, was the first European language spoken in the South.

David Moore from Warren Wilson College was in Raleigh a few weeks ago to discuss the group's findings at the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences. Moore and the two other archaeologists believe that a Spanish explorer, Capt. Juan Pardo, built a fort and stationed Spanish soldiers there in 1567. Pardo had been sent to explore the Carolinas by Pedro Menendez de Aviles, the Spanish colonial governor, to claim the interior of North America for Spain. The Spanish were seeking a route to Mexico and its riches through the Appalachian Mountains.

Pardo traveled from one Native American village to another through today's Carolinas and Tennessee. He and his men built a village just north of what is now Morganton near a Native American village to wait out the snowy winter and continue their trek. The Spanish built Fort San Juan on the northern edge of the village, and he left some of his men there for 18 months. The researchers say Pardo built six forts in the Southeast and left a total of 120 men. They were all later destroyed or abandoned like the Lost Colony.

The findings of the researchers leave little doubt that Pardo's name should stand with Sir Walter Raleigh, Capt. John Smith, and Lewis and Clark for his boldness and exploration of North America.

As towns and Congress call for English-only ordinances and laws making English the official language of the North Carolina and the country, the findings in Western North Carolina should give us pause that America's history is rich, diverse and that many languages have always been spoken here beyond just English. A quick look at the names of several of our states clearly shows the influence of different cultures on America. Florida is Spanish, so is Colorado, so are California and Nevada. Illinois, Michigan, Ohio and many other states are derived from Native American languages, as are many of our cities. No one seems to be calling to change these names to English.

The recent ordinances and bills about English being the official language go beyond just easing communication. They are a veiled attempt by the dominant culture to force other people to conform to their comfort. Just as Omar's teacher's stance was to make him to speak the language she wanted or suffer being expelled from her classroom.

The story of Capt. Juan Pardo's amazing exploration into the interior portion of the Carolinas and North America and the establishment of several forts is a story that cannot be found in any of Omar's high school history books. But that may change. He might be tickled to know that the Spanish colonial governor who sent Pardo on his mission bears the same last name as his mother.

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