

Giving a Voice to Stories that Matter

A Conversation with Founder & President of Futuro Media, Maria Hinojosa

Award-winning journalist Maria Hinojosa says a defining moment in her life came in 1962 when she entered the United States from Mexico City with her mother and siblings. They were traveling to Illinois to join their father, a professor of surgery at the University of Chicago.

Maria says she was almost denied entry into the country when an immigration agent at the airport in Texas noticed an allergic rash on her skin, which he thought to be measles. At the time, body checks of immigrants were common practice and the law. After fighting with the agent and “making a scene,” her mother convinced the authorities not to quarantine her, and instead, let her travel with the rest of the family.

Maria discussed how this experience influenced her life and news career during a conversation for clients with David Fox, Southwest region head of Private Wealth Management. She also talked about her memoir, *Once I Was You*, and how her childhood in Chicago influenced her passion for journalism.

“The experience then was pretty much invisibility,” said Maria, who was an avid viewer of the evening news broadcasts as a young girl growing up in Hyde Park. “We consumed news media but never saw stories about people like us.”

At Barnard College in New York City, Maria fell in love with radio and applied to NPR, where she says she was the first Latina journalist to join their editorial team. “It’s important to have journalists of different backgrounds



in newsrooms to reflect our country,” Maria said. She also expressed concern that diversity in news divisions continues to fall short in present day.

Throughout her decades-long career in public radio and television, Maria has been recognized for giving a voice to the voiceless and telling America’s untold stories, especially those in the Latino community. Her nationally syndicated radio program *Latino USA* was awarded the prestigious Peabody Award for an episode about gangs, murder and migration in Central America. As a senior correspondent and anchor for PBS, she reported on

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Immigrant work camps in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, teenage victims of sexual harassment and poverty in rural Alabama.

In 2010, she founded the Harlem-based nonprofit Futuro Media, which tells stories and reports on issues that are overlooked by the mainstream media. She said her experience in public radio guided her decision to start the company as a nonprofit, which has since added a production division and developed multiple revenue streams.

“When you are authentic and representative of stories that people want to see... it’s the best business decision that you can make,” she said. “We bet on solid journalism.”

Immigration and the humanitarian crisis at the U.S. border with Mexico are among the stories that she and her team are covering. For Maria, the detainment of migrants and undocumented people is one that she’s been telling for years. A decade ago, she reported on windowless detention centers with poor ventilation systems and issues with violence and rape, particularly toward women. She said she’s frustrated that more hasn’t been done since her stories aired.

Maria says a solution to the border crisis should be multi-faceted: political, economic and cultural, starting with language and how Americans talk about migrants.

“We have to change the narrative and how we describe people,” she said. “This is a moment to understand what a refugee is.”



Maria believes that investors can also play an active role in changing the landscape by not supporting private-for-profit prisons or technology companies that produce human-tracking software. She said environmental, social and governance (ESG) investing will not only lead to better returns but will also make a meaningful difference in society at large, a point echoed by moderator David Fox. He said that companies focused on ESG initiatives are mission driven and have higher employee morale, adding that investors are taking note.

“The investment will go toward the things that we all want to see thrive, and it comes away from the things that aren’t working,” he said.

In the meantime, Maria said it’s the role of journalists to keep these important stories alive, even as the news profession itself faces financial and resourcing hurdles. Yet, she vows to use her company as a tool to further the profession of journalism.

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