

YO SOY CHICANO

Efren García
Creighton University

The following poem describes the author's heritage of being Chicano (Mexican-American) and being a child of immigrants. The author utilizes his experiences and education to bridge the two cultures of his Latino roots and American life. He highlights the struggles of modern and historical systematic oppression of immigrants in the U.S. as well as the struggles of finding the balance of cultures within himself. Finally, the author expresses gratitude for the seed of culture and opportunity given to him from history and his parents.

YO SOY CHICANO

This is a message to all my *paisanos*.

The blood that flows through me is *Mexicano*.
My parents left their land to be *Americanos*,
To live a dream, for their children.
(What flows in my genes is immigration)
Doing with no formal education
Leaving it all for a nation
That sees them as a burden
Little do they know, it made me more determined to succeed
But that is my ambition – my American seed.

With low wages, no sick days, health for them isn't guaranteed.
My family's existence could be stripped away any day.
My mom earned her residency, yet they call me an anchor baby
I think about this daily, the thought of a raid terrifies me.
For too long I've been afraid to speak *¡pero ya no!*, It's a need.

They want to oppress us, to have us forget our forsaken,
To possess us in concentration camps called detention centers
A nightmare used to form a white man's pension
Where my people, my brothers, sisters
are distressed and abused in cages
Forced hysterectomies, family separations, all the trauma and pain.
My brain is confused: why are we the accused criminals?
Used as an agenda for a political campaign, how cynical!
You can call us extreme but can you imagine the rage we suppress?
I want to scream my heart out; is this our land of the free?

From what it seems: it's a part of the bigger crime scheme in history,
We have always been treated as less,
What is the explanation for this modern
horrifying Mexican Repatriation?
In case it wasn't mentioned in our American history,
A discriminatory mass deportation

of millions of Mexicans immigrants,
even birthright citizens in the 1930s
blamed for economic issues – justification for racism,
does this sound familiar?
The U.S. has never apologized for this ethnic cleansing.
So when we look back, will this vile atrocity, ever be addressed?
What an unending mess.

All this has shaped my identity,
made me realize the real oppression begins within.
I questioned my value.
The most shameful reality of my roots
was that my Spanish was broken
despite my parents both only knowing Spanish.
I don't how to explain this type of pain but I,
Too Americanized to be a prideful Mexican within my peers,
Having to speak it or admit I wasn't best, was my greatest fear.
I didn't grow up *en el rancho* – I've never even been to Mexico.

When I came to Creighton –
I was as Mexican as it got, but afraid of discrimination.
I desired to get closer to my family roots than to try to fit in.
With my opportunity for education,
I stepped up to build the bridge of my two cultures,
my two streams of identities.
Now I have grown into a tree
with the fountain of information as a first-generation student
From history to law to politics –
I needed to quench this desire to learn
To provide for my family,
to be there for my people,
to stand up for them.
That is my fire.

I saw my people in orange jumpsuits and shackles
in immigration court
Innocent people who put everything on the line
to achieve an American dream for their families –
The stream of tears that stabbed my heart as I looked them in the eyes

and knew that could've been me, my mom, my dad...
I could never deny the culture I am given
and forever swear to do all that I can for my family, my people.

*Y con las fuerzas que habita en mi sangre si se pudo,
"Mírame ya mami, te puedo explicar las cosas que nadie le explicó"*
I can tell my parents it's okay to have mental health disorders —
people, *no son locos*
The history of our people, government, disparities,
toxic masculinity, *el machismo*
Most importantly, I can tell you how much I love you
in different ways —
les quiero más cada segundo que tengo con ustedes.
For if it is not old age that takes you, I fear my government will.

This is not for attention,
but to explain the tension within me,
the first step in fighting systematic oppression
that can exist within me.

I am the spirit of Pancho Villa, Cesar Chavez,
Dolores Huerta, Frida Kahlo.
I am the countless families forever lost
in their journey to where I am now
*Yo soy chicano y yo tengo una voz
Por los sacrificios de mi gente en la historia,
y de mis padres.
Yo soy la manifestación de sus sueños.*
I am Mexican, I am American —
Yo soy Chicano