

FINDING JOAQUÍN
THE QUEST TO ENABLE AND INSPIRE THE PAN-MEXICAN YOUTH
IN THE BARRIOS THROUGH CULTURE

HONORS THESIS

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by

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If you are young and brown, believe in yourself; you are young Queens and Kings, you are beautiful and blessed. Why do you think God's mother humbled herself to become one of us to give us her blessing? Utilize and manifest your God-given talents, respect and love your parents, fight your battles with love and intelligence, and I promise you everything else will fall into place.

¹ Mother; literally translated to "Boss Lady"

*Yo soy Joaquín,
perdido en un mundo de confusión:
I am Joaquín, lost in a world of confusion,
Caught up in the whirl of a gringo² society,
Confused by the rules, scorned by attitudes,
Suppressed by manipulation, and destroyed by modern society.*

*My fathers have lost the economic battle
And won the struggle of cultural survival.
And now! I must choose between the paradox of
Victory of the spirit, despite physical hunger,
Or to exist in the grasp of American social neurosis,
Sterilization of the soul and a full stomach.*

*Yes, I have come a long way to nowhere,
Unwillingly dragged by that monstrous, technical,
Industrial giant called Progress and Anglo success....*

*I look at myself.
I watch my brothers.
I shed tears of sorrow. I sow seeds of hate.
I withdraw to the safety within the circle of life --
MY OWN PEOPLE...*

² Anglo-American

ORPHANS

The Hispanic population has been the fastest and youngest growing in the United States for some time. Out of the broad Hispanic population, the Pan-Mexican³ community has been the fastest growing and by far the largest in terms of numbers. It is clear that such a young and large population will play a critical role in our nation's future. However, Pan-Mexican youth find themselves in a marginalized, weary, angry, and confused cultural and psychological state. Their Mexican peers do not deem them Mexican enough since they were born/raised in the United States, and at the same time, Americans do not consider them *truly* American since they do not fall into the conformist American image (Pan-Mexicans look, speak, worship, etc., differently). Unable to call an identity or culture their own, Pan-Mexican youths find themselves lost in a sort of limbo or transitioning phase with one foot on one side of the border and the other foot on the other side.

Pan-Mexicans are separated from both their ancestor's land and their American homeland. Octavio Paz says every separation causes a wound and creates a feeling of solitude. Paz explains, "I want to point out that every break creates a feeling of solitude—separation from one's parents, matrix or native land, the death of the gods or a painful self-consciousness...solitude is identified with orphanhood" (*Labyrinth of Solitude*, 64). An orphan with two mothers, both rejecting the child. Without a mother culture to claim as their own, they are not able to answer the biggest question a human being can ask (especially a young person)—who they are. This leaves an emptiness in their being. It

³ For purposes of this essay, I will refer to Mexican-Americans and native-born Mexicans raised in the United States, or for at least a large part of their life, as Pan-Mexicans. Even though there are differences between the two brother-groups in terms of their American experience, I believe that in this topic their similarities in experience are significant and deep enough to address them simultaneously.

should not be surprising then, that many of those disenfranchised youth resort to creating and joining “interim cultures⁴” as a way to fill that gap and *earn* a sense of purpose and identity. I say *earn* because in order to become one in the circle (an insider of the interim culture), one needs to prove oneself to be worthy of such an honor.

Unfortunately, many interim cultures that youth resort to bear bad fruits. With a lack of positive role models (role models, mentors, community leaders) and youth groups (that focus and address their unique cultural and psychological needs), youth will find themselves withdrawn in isolation, or gravitating towards the neighborhood gang to find camaraderie, respect, purpose, social capital and believe it or not, love. This is what I believe to be the biggest problem in Pan-Mexican communities. We (and I am speaking as a member of the guilty party), do not teach our history to our youth. It is because either we do not realize the importance of doing so or we do not know it ourselves, but we leave our youth uncultured and without self-identity, susceptible to outside interference. That is why when the gang comes along offering purpose and identity the youth is eager to accept; or when a bigot pounds their so-called inferiority into the head of a Pan-Mexican, they end up believing it. In other words, the problem is not that the lack of a mature culture leaves a child to believe in nothing, alas, it is much worse; it leaves a child vulnerable to believe in anything.

Moreover, joining gangs entail other consequences, for example, committing or being the victim of violent crimes, involvement in the illegal drug trade, dropping out of school or doing poorly in school, and eventually death or prison. Furthermore, death and prison themselves entail consequences to the individual, family, and community, such as

⁴ Interim culture is a substitute culture that is created where there is none to claim as their own.

perpetuating the cycle of poverty and destroying the family and thus, the community . In the absence of strong female role models, a young woman, having no point of reference on which to base her womanhood except what surrounds her in the barrio, may end up using her body as a means, or become a female drug dealer, or end up as a victim of violent and abusive relationship. Without a strong and positive self-image and lack of opportunities to succeed, young women may end up idolizing Hip Hop and R&B artists and models because they have money, recognition, and success. Why them? Because this what they see. Pop culture and social media perpetuates this idolization. Trying to imitate their idols and live glamorous lifestyles, many fall into the wrong paths. To them, it is a way out of their social prison, a place where those things would never be available to young women like them. At the end, many will find themselves as single mothers with little to no education to provide a better future for her children. Similarly, young men (not having positive male role models and thus not knowing what characteristics and roles a Father/Man is supposed to embody) will gravitate to the individuals who have power and wield it, in a place where the men (their fathers and grandfathers) are powerless in society and need it. They are the pimps, hustlers, and gangsters. They flaunt cash, drive fancy cars, and have women: the barrio prototypes of Hollywood celebrities and consequently their role models, and they become the point of reference of their manhood. Can we blame them? Stuck in a place where poverty and violence is the norm, as many men do when pushed, they fought to survive. Add on top of that reality an American obsession with violence (conveyed through media; e.g. movies, sports, video games, etc.), and now you have barrio John Wayne and Al Capone toking pistols.

With a side of overactive and misdirected *Mexicanismo*⁵, our young Emiliano Zapata⁶ and Adelita⁷ turn to Rodolfo Fierro⁸ and La Cucaracha⁹. Because of a lack of education and job opportunities, young men will gamble their lives and freedom for the dope game (the fastest and surest source of income in the Barrio) or their barrio (home) and homeboys (family/gang) because they have nothing else to give it too. The result is *Mi vida loca*,¹⁰ as my friends and I used to say as adolescents; the lifestyle of the *Vato*¹¹ *loco*. And believe me, a Vato Loco, not an orphan, was all we wanted to be.

Without a strong culture to provide the foundation of their identity, Pan-Mexican youth will search for it elsewhere. That elsewhere can be many things, but it is not solidarity. Solidarity is what the Pan-Mexican community needs. Not more divisions, confusion, or red herrings.

⁵ Mexicanism; everything having to do with Mexico and being Mexican; can be extreme but not necessarily.

⁶ Arguably the greatest Mexican to have existed; General in Mexican Revolution; Fought for Indian peasantry; Renowned for his character, strength, and humility.

⁷ Embodiment of ideal female Mexican Revolutionist; Personifies strength, loyalty, resilience, beauty, and courage.

⁸ Mexican Revolutionary General under Francisco “Pancho” Villa; known for his barbarous ways; Legends say he had to execute a man before his morning coffee.

⁹ Translated into female Cockroach; Embodiment of an *Adelita* run amok; Cucaracha because she would switch men often.

¹⁰ Translated into “My Crazy Life”; sometimes just a saying, but more of a philosophy, a worldview.

¹¹ Young man; conveys a sense of masculinity, independence, strength, and honor

*I am Cuauhtémoc¹², proud and noble,
Leader of men, king of an empire civilized
Beyond the dreams of the gachupín¹³ Cortés,
Who also is the blood, the image of myself.*

I am the Maya prince.

I am Nezahualcóyotl¹⁴, great leader of the Chichimecas.

I am the sword and flame of Cortes the despot

And I am the eagle and serpent of the Aztec civilization.

I owned the land as far as the eye

Could see under the Crown of Spain,

And I toiled on my Earth and gave my Indian sweat and blood

For the Spanish master who ruled with tyranny over man and

Beast and all that he could trample

But...THE GROUND WAS MINE...

¹² Last Aztec emperor; Name means "one who has descended like an eagle"; Led the final fight against Hernan Cortez and the Spanish invaders; Remembered for his courage and ultimate sacrifice; Cortez tortured him in order to find the Aztec gold reserves, though Cuauhtémoc never broke.

¹³ Derogatory term for Spaniards. Can be used for all White European.

¹⁴ His name means "Coyote who Fasts" in classical Nahuatl; Revered as a philosopher king, sage, warrior, architect, and poet; He composed many poems and literature, and was a patron of the arts.

THESIS

I argue that the Pan-Mexican youth need a steadfast and robust initiative to teach them and apply their Pan-Mexican culture¹⁵ or their *natural culture*. The incorporation of their natural culture in their lives will effectively inspire and enable them to break the chains that oppress and hold them back. It will also provide the foundation on which they can build their self-identity, their family, and their communities. This cultural initiative does not need to be institutional, but instead grassroots and local, working and moving forward in solidarity with their kin communities. The initiative is a collective effort between families, schools, churches, civic organizations, and communities can we accomplish this victory. Without solidarity, Pan-Mexicans are like a herd running in all directions, stomping and running over each other getting nowhere. But together, we are soldiers marching in unison. Each unique and inherently valuable, but marching towards the same end, that is a healthy, vibrant, self-sufficient, and self-empowered Pan-Mexican people. That power will also touch the lives of the Mexican and American people. Because Pan-Mexicans are their bridge, and what happens to them, affects both sides of the border.

Therefore, solidarity among *la Raza*¹⁶ is necessary. There needs to be a robust integration of Pan-Mexican culture into the lives and education of the youth from birth to senior year in high school. However, we will have to start at home. Once we do, then we can worry about institutional change. Schools and laws will change once Pan-Mexicans are in those positions, but first come education. Similarly, change starts at home, with

¹⁵ Historical, social, the arts, religious, etc., I will call it natural culture henceforth.

¹⁶ The People.

ourselves, with our hearts, and together. Community Mariachi groups, *Folklorico*¹⁷ dance groups, peewee sports, Pan-Mexican high school/college student organization, , families, and the *parents*, are among the many free or affordable resources in the community we can use to convey their rich and mature natural culture. Much time and effort is required, but nothing beautiful and worthwhile came about without it. If the mature natural culture is already established, there will not be need for interim cultures or soil for negative ideas to take root. If the rich natural culture has already taken root in the young Pan-Mexicans heart, a foreign and hostile culture will be less likely to have a negative effect.

Every barrio has its local heroes. It is a shame they are typically forgotten to the years. By exposing the youth to local heroes—teachers, community activists, and artist—we will be engraving the images of praiseworthy, selfless, and successful examples of Pan-Mexicans in their community into their hearts and souls. Instead of having to search for role models elsewhere, the young girl will have already been inspired by the single mother activist Dolores Huerta, or impassioned by the lauded Reies Lopez Tijerina. Through this family and community effort, we will not only inspire and build up their self-esteem and sense of belonging and purpose, but we will also enable them to be successful and productive members of the United States.

¹⁷ Folklore; traditional Mexican dances

I was both tyrant and slave.

As the Christian church took its place in God's name,

To take and use my virgin strength and trusting faith,

The priests, both good and bad, took--

But gave a lasting truth that Spaniard Indian Mestizo were all God's children.

And from these words grew men who prayed and fought

For their own worth as human beings, for that

GOLDEN MOMENT of FREEDOM.

I was part in blood and spirit of that courageous village priest

Hidalgo who in the year 1810 rang the bell of independence and gave out that lasting

cry-

El Grito de Dolores

"Que mueran los gachupines y que viva la Virgen de Guadalupe...."

I sentenced him who was me, I excommunicated him, my blood.

I drove him from the pulpit to lead a bloody revolution for him and me....

I killed him.

His head, which is mine and of all those

Who have come this way,

I placed on that fortress wall

To wait for independence. Morelos! Matamoros! Guerrero!

All companeros in the act, STOOD AGAINST THAT WALL OF INFAMY

I died with them ... I lived with them

HOMEBOYS, HOMEGIRLS & KING DAVID

Pan-Mexicans have been facing institutionalized and social oppression in this country since the Mexican-American War, which resulted in the loss of half of Mexico's land to the U.S. Even though Americans were happy to welcome the new abundance of land and natural resources, there was one unwanted consequence with the acquisition of such a large spoil of war; that is, what on earth to do with all the Mexicans who didn't leave to Mexico?

Fast-forward many decades, burn some land grants and break a war treaty, and we can see the bad fruits of an uncomfortable and distrustful *relationship*—if we wish to call it that. More evident, we can see it in the eyes of the Pan-Mexican youth, disenchanted from lack of motivation and opportunities, marginalized in a society that mostly refuses to accept them as their own, and with no common identity to call their own. I myself am a product of this reality. We commonly refer to each other in the barrios as *homeboys* and *homegirls*, for males and females respectively. This is not an inappropriate or derogatory term at all, but instead a sign of trust, mutual respect and inclusion. When you are considered a true homeboy or homegirl in the barrio, it is a sign that you have *earned* that respect we talked about earlier and that you are “one of us” in the interim culture. It is not a trade or a certain feature that includes them into this subgroup, but instead a common origin (Pan-Mexican) and a similar current social state (oppressed), or in the words of Octavio Paz, “*chingado*¹⁸” (*Labyrinth of Solitude*, 76, 77). Add an attitude of “smile now cry later” on top of that and you are a premium and full-fledged member of the subgroup. Moreover, for simplicity's sake (and to emphasize their

¹⁸ Damned; F@#\$ed; oppressed; out of luck

power and potential), I will occasionally refer to the homeboys and homegirls collectively as the Sleeping Giant, or better yet as the young *Davidians* (after King David, the humble shepherd who became King of Israel) to emphasize their potential until we begin to discover their true identity (*King James Version*, Samuel & Chronicles).

For purposes of this essay, I will focus my energy on ways to rectify the oppressed reality in which the Davidian youth find themselves. Therefore, first, I will attempt to explain some of the biggest evils in the barrio and attempt to highlight the struggles, barriers, and uniqueness of our Pan-Mexican youth.

I am Joaquin.

*I rode with Pancho Villa, crude and warm, a tornado at full strength,
Nourished and inspired by the passion and the fire of all his earthy people.*

I am Emiliano Zapata. "This land, this earth is OURS."

*The villages, the mountains, the streams belong to Zapatistas.
Our life or yours is the only trade for soft brown earth and maize.
All of which is our reward, a creed that formed a constitution*

For all who dare live free!

"This land is ours . . .

Father, I give it back to you. Mexico must be free. . . ."

I ride with revolutionists against myself.

I am the Rurales¹⁹, coarse and brutal,

I am the mountain Indian, superior over all.

The thundering hoof beats are my horses. The chattering machine guns are death to all of

me:

Yaqui, Tarahumara

Chamala, Zapotec

Mestizo, Español.

I have been the bloody revolution,

The victor, The vanquished.

I have killed

And been killed...

¹⁹ Means the "rural ones"; a force of mounted police or gendarmerie that existed between 1861 and 1914

LACK OF EDUCATION

Education is the key to success I am told, and I can honestly attest to that. Allow me to present an anecdotal example. In the beginning of 2013, I was living in the streets. 2012 was, for a lack of a better word, one of the craziest years in my life. I do not want to go into details but I will give you some context to make my point. My best friend Bob was on the run. Facing manslaughter and drug charges, he had been on the run for some time. My other close friend, I'll refer to him as "H", was also on the run for attempted murder. Fortunately, he was so *barred out*²⁰ that he did not succeed in his endeavor. Many homegirls of mine were strung out on drugs, living fast, making money and dying from the inside out. Bob's younger brother, I'll call him G, was in state jail for assault with a deadly weapon (he is still in there; he was 17 at the time) and many other friends were doing time in prison as well. We were reaping the fruits of our labor. Selling drugs, living fast, at war with other neighborhoods and men like us, all of these things were catching up to us. Yet, there was not a sign of slowing down.

By 2013, H was in prison, Bob had been murdered on Father's Day (his father had died when he was young and he left his little boy), and I was homeless. I had totaled many cars, lost thousands, lost my source of revenue, lost *all* of my friends to prison, death, or rancor, and had nothing to my name except a couple guns and a backpack full of drugs. I eventually suffered a seizure from withdrawing from all the drugs that were in my system and probably from stress as well. I had hit rock bottom.

When I was released (more like escaped because I did not have insurance and did not want police interrogating me) the first thing I did was take my high school diploma (I

²⁰ Under the influence of Xanax.

had bought it for \$260 cash from a “private Catholic school”; they were neither Catholic nor a school) to my local community college. There, by the grace of God, I met Dr. Serafin Garcia. He opened my eyes, ears, heart, and mind. Thanks to him, and the opportunities that my community college provided, I went on to create the first Pan-Mexican student organization on campus. I became a student leader, facilitated leadership workshops, coordinated New Student Orientations, mentored gang members, became an “A” student, and earned a full ride scholarship to Texas State University. Education—with a change of the soul of course—definitely changed my life and my family’s life as well. During my time back in school, I have met individuals with very similar stories to mine. Many times more compelling and inspiring than mine that I could write books about their lives if I possessed such talent. However, regardless how humble or grand a story may be, they all share a similarity, and that was the opportunity to get an education. Even the most wretched or unfortunate lives are given a second chance through school.

So where am I going with this you might ask? Well for one, we are the exception, not the rule! These fairy tale stories do not happen every day. As a matter of fact, the fate of Bob, G, my homegirls, and H, take lives every day in the barrio. The lack of education is one of the biggest factors young men and women fall victim to the streets. Idleness is the devil’s workshop (*King James Version*, Proverbs 16:27) and young minds that are not being educated gravitate to the streets. This process begins very early in the Davidian child’s life. Schools do not know how to handle these confused young Davidians. When they find themselves excluded, they recluse or rebel. Either way, school districts find it easier to suspend or expel troubled students than counsel them, or to pack them in “special” classrooms. Sometimes because they lack funds, other times because they do

not care to help. Once in the streets, it is a downward spiral to the penitentiary or the cemetery. This is the school-to-prison pipeline. And this, I believe is one of the main factors millions of Davidians did not, cannot, and will not make it.

In fact, Davidian children are miles behind their White counterparts from birth. Born in less well-equipped hospitals they do not have the best care. The parents might not have insurance, so “in-and-out with them” since every day is more money out of the taxpayer’s pocket. It is a fact that early childhood development and education is imperative to how the child will manifest in adulthood. With that premise established, the Davidian child falls even more behind during this critical time. At home, many times one or both parents work most of the time, thus hindering the parent-child bonding that is very critical to the child’s mental, social, emotional, and motor development. When it comes to early child development centers or daycare centers, they are either inadequate, not available, or unaffordable. When they reach school age, many Davidian children whose first language is Spanish will have trouble socialization, expressing themselves, participating and fitting in. These negative experiences can connect stress and humiliation with school. Davidians are then herded into English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms or Special Education classrooms. Once in school, we see also disproportionate school discipline directed at Davidians, many will be expelled or dropout. This is a driving force behind lower education attainment rates for them, further damaging lifelong earning potential. Instead of correcting behavior through positive reinforcement, our schools punish the behavior. Thus instilling a criminal-like mentality in the Davidian of trail and punishment

Furthermore, what about the children of the Davidian's who did not make it. Will they have a better chance to make it? Will they break the chains that are holding them back? As generation after generation fall into the same cycle of self-destruction, the hole will be deeper, and possibility of escaping the hole slimmer.

*I am
The black-shawled Faithfulwomen
Who die with me
Or live
Depending on the time and place.
I am faithful, humble Juan Diego,
The Virgin of Guadalupe,
Tonantzin, Aztec goddess, too.
I rode the mountains of San Joaquín.
I rode east and north as far as the Rocky Mountains,
And all men feared the guns of Joaquín Murrieta.
I killed those men who dared
To steal my mine,
Who raped and killed my love
My wife.
Then I killed to stay alive.
I was Elfego Baca,
living my nine lives fully.
I was the Espinoza brothers
of the Valle de San Luis.
All were added to the number of heads that in the name of civilization
were placed on the wall of independence, heads of brave men
who died for cause or principle, good or bad...*

ONE-WAY TRIP FROM SCHOOL TO PRISON

When schools give up on Davidians, one of the most damaging consequence is crime. According to Statistician Ann Carson, Ph.D. from the U.S. Department of Justice, Hispanic male inmates comprise 22% of total male inmates in the United States, while Hispanic females comprised 17% of total female inmates (bjs.gov). Out of that total, 65.3% of Hispanic male prisoners are under 40 years old and 68.8% for their female counterparts (bjs.gov). Moreover, Dr. Carson shows that 58.3% of all crimes committed by Hispanics were violent (highest percentage in races) and 15.1% of crimes were drug related. It is important to point out that despite equal rates of drug use proportionate to their populations, Hispanics are twice as likely as whites, and equally as likely as blacks, to be admitted to state prison for a drug offense (bjs.gov). The Sentencing Project (TSP), an organization that works toward creating a fair and effective U.S. criminal justice system, shows that nearly one in three (32%) persons held in federal prisons are Hispanic, even though Hispanics make up only 17.4% of total US population (sentencingproject.org). Similarly, the U.S. Sentencing Commission reports that *more than half* of all people (50.3%) sent to federal prison for committing felony crimes in 2011 were Hispanic even though Hispanics only compromise 17% of total U.S. population (pewhispanic.org).

These facts are not only very disheartening, but they do not seem to be slowing down. On the contrary, as TSP highlights, Hispanics are the fastest growing group being imprisoned, increasing from 10.9% of all State and Federal inmates in 1985 to 15.6% in 2001. From 1985 to 1995, the number of Hispanics in federal and state prisons rose by

219%, with an average annual increase of 12.3% (sentencingproject.org). TSP also adds a side note:

There is a fair amount of inconsistency in measuring Hispanic jail and prison populations, as they are frequently counted in conflicting or contradictory methods; e.g. Hispanics measured racially as black or white and not as a distinct group. It is commonly suspected that the actual number of Hispanics incarcerated is higher than what is accounted for by reporting agencies (Ann Carson, USDOJ).

In other words, these numbers can be much higher. The likelihood of Pan-Mexicans being incarcerated is also a big factor. According to the TSP, Hispanic men are almost four times as likely to go to prison at some point in their lives compared to non-Hispanic white males, while Hispanic females are incarcerated at almost twice the rate of white females (117 persons to 63 persons per 100,000 population). Lastly, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) confirms that 68% of the 55,000 foreigners in US prisons are Mexican nationals (bbc.com).

These statistics are imperative to understanding the reality of the Davidian youth growing up facing institutional barriers. Frankly, as a thinking person you might ask why are the numbers so damn high. Is it because Davidian youth are actually committing more crimes? Are they just not good at *not* getting caught? Is there a biased system of racial profiling (taking advantage of an already oppressed population) that is detrimental to young Davidians?

When you have a large concentration of young homeboys and homegirls without good paying job opportunities, without a school system that invests in them, without a society that embraces them, without extracurricular activities to stimulate their minds and souls, without a sense of *self*, you will soon see high school dropout rates spike and consequently crime as well. Crime is a product of the lack of self-identity and education. The school-to-prison-pipeline, and read the reports yourself, the criminal system is not working in favor of poor minorities. Instead of rehabilitation for a drug case, a judge and prosecutor will throw out a wild number at the youth (20 years, 40 years, Life) not realizing (or unwilling to realize) the human being behind the crime. That young person is now being defined based on the worst moment of their life. And like cattle being branded or auctioned off, they are made to line up to be sent away—stripped of their names, future, and identity, given a number, made property of the state, to waste their lives in a concrete cell.

So many of our brightest and most talented youth are wasting their lives away in prison because of crime, maybe for life. You may know some of them, maybe many. They may be your father or mother, brother or sister, uncle or cousin. They may have made some bad choices in life and are now paying for those crimes. However, imagine for a second what they could have accomplished if they, let us say, went to college, or if they would have put all their energy into sports, music, art or theatre? What if the young homegirl making moves for money became the next Selena Quintanilla or astronaut Ellen Ochoa; if the young men hustling in the streets went to business school instead of Huntsville? Amazing, simply amazing. We need something simple yet powerful to help us stop and reverse that reality. We need to plant the seeds for change. An early exposure

to their rich yet untold Pan-Mexican story can have made them place their own story within the larger anthology of a great people, thus giving them purpose, direction, and confidence in themselves. Still, for now, let us come to a reckoning that the justice system has failed them and is working against young Davidians.

Of the same name,

Joaquín,

In a country that has wiped out all my history, stifled all my pride,

In a country that has placed a

Different weight of indignity upon my age-old burdened back.

Inferiority is the new load

The Indian has endured and still emerged the winner,

The Mestizo must yet overcome,

And the gachupín will just ignore.

I look at myself

And see part of me who rejects my father and my mother

And dissolves into the melting pot to disappear in shame.

I sometimes

Sell my brother out

And reclaim him

For my own when society gives me

Token leadership in societies name...

MI VIDA LOCA

According to the National Gang Center—a project jointly funded by the U.S. Department of Justice’s (DOJ) Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)— the most recent figures provided by law enforcement show that 46% percent of all gang members in the United States are Hispanic (nationalgangcenter.gov). More revealing, Hispanics make up 45.5%, 51.0%, and 53.8% of all gang members in larger cities, suburban counties and smaller cities respectively. While Hispanics make up only about 18% of the total population, they constitute just about half of all gang members in the United States! Gangs and gang violence are some of the issues that touch my heart the most. Forget the fact that I have been a victim of a couple gunshots and stab wounds here and there because of the gang life, what hurts me the most is my family and friends who I have lost to the *vida loca*, as many gang members put it.

Why do many young Davidians resort to the lure of the gang (interim) culture? It is the lack of culture, education, and role models in their early life and community. I believe we can find common ground on the premise that all children need and should have role models. When we say role models, what we really mean is *positive* role models, for not all role models are positive (Hitler can be a role model for some). For some their role model is their father or mother, maybe a scientist or super hero—someone they can identify with or someone they want to become. The role model has to be not only worthy and positive, but also attractive or appealing to the young child. It is this meticulous balance of characteristics that we look for in a role model for the youth. However, if we examine this from the youth’s point of view, the key factor for them is the attractiveness

of the potential mentor. It is clear then that in order for the young child to “look up” to someone, there needs to be someone the child will *want* to look up too and emulate. In other words an *attractive* role model, not necessarily *worthy* role model.

I clarify this because in no way do I want to convey that the fathers and mothers of young Davidians are unworthy of being role models. On the contrary, many of the values of the parent(s) are worth imitating, such as steadfastness, stalwartness, meekness, and hope. In fact, I personally believe they make the best role models of all. In hindsight, as adults many Davidians will look back with pride at their parent(s). But as children, those values are difficult to understand. If your mother cleans houses for a living you might be more inclined to be ashamed than proud of her hard work and trustworthiness. If your father (if he is in the picture) does yardwork, works as a cook, or is a mechanic, his great work ethic might be undermined to the youth by the job itself. I am not saying it is ok, but for the most part, it is the reality. Virgilio Elizondo says:

And this is where a split—and its pain—begins to form at the base of the child’s personality. On the one hand, the child venerates family members, but persons like them do not appear on television or in movies except in a “substandard” role, as corrupt or subservient or silly or stupid. The ideas, language patterns, and mannerisms of media heroes are not what the child experiences in family life. The beginnings of a “split image” of “the ideal person to look up to” take form. Which way will the child go? In all probability, we will not isolate young persons from the entertainment media. What alternative is there to the influence they exert?

(Galilean Journey, 29)

Look at our society and tell me where we praise the blue-collar workers? Look at Television and movies, we praise the pragmatic American go-getter and demean the humble worker. On top of that, if your parent does not speak the English language and does not have the material things others do, the Davidian might start looking at their parent—and eventually themselves—as inferior. I can still remember having to translate for my young mother as a child. When she had to pay the bills, I had to go; when I enrolled in school for the first time, I did all the talking; when she applied to jobs, I had to fill out the applications. It was embarrassing to have adults talk to my mother as if she were a child. As I grew that embarrassment turned into frustration, and eventually anger—anger towards society and myself. Therefore, even if the parent(s) *is* worthy of admiration, the context in which they find themselves in society and the label stamped on them is frankly belittling and *unattractive*—a key factor for the youth to accept a role model. This leaves the young Davidian to look elsewhere for their role model.

Well, what lies outside of their home is usually the barrio and the barrio has a surplus of *role models* who might seem attractive at first. These are individuals who have respect (and/or are feared) in society, they who humble themselves to no one, and take no part in laborious jobs. Instead of the old gas-guzzler their parent drives, these individuals drive Cadillacs. Instead of the humble clothing of their family, these individuals are draped in fashionable clothes or attired in crisp Dickie or Ben Davis gear—flawless, like military personal. They patrol the streets proudly, with a sense of authority instead of timidly. These individuals are the proud firefighters and police officers of the Davidians in the barrio, and with nothing else to turn to, many will naturally draw to them. As my older homeboy who I will leave unnamed put it long ago, “This is all I know and all I’ll

ever know—the Hood²¹. I was born here and I will die here...right here, for my homeboys and for the Hood because that is all I got”. These individuals are Cholos and they are the role models many Davidians end up emulating. Jose Vasconcelos calls the first stage of building a culture as Tribalism, in which violence is supreme (Miller, 13). The interim culture (gang culture) is an attempt to reconcile to lack of natural culture, and it begins violent.

Moreover, education or lack thereof, and few career opportunities play critical roles. Low college graduation rates for Pan-Mexicans puts them at a disadvantage when competing against the greater workforce. Many jobs that once only required a high school diploma now require College degrees. Add on top of that disproportionate school discipline directed at Davidians and we can see why many are expelled or dropout. They feel the entire institution is against them. For example, there is a joke among Pan-Mexicans that we always feel like we are in trouble or did something wrong. When someone calls our name, we immediately think it is negative. I believe this is proof of the disproportionate disciplinary action schools take on Davidians. Consequently, show me a young homeboy or homegirl without a high school diploma or job, and I will show you a gang member, criminal, or indigent individual in the making. The school-to-prison-pipeline is institutionalized and streamlined.

In light of the lack of role models, education, and career opportunities in the barrio, the gang provides. The gang provides identity and street knowledge (education) that is applicable to the Davidian. Just as important, the gang provides social capital. These are resources that are indispensable in barrios where violence and hard times are the

²¹ The Gang

norm. Original Gangsters (OGs) are the role models; and even more important for some, the gang provides a source of revenue for those willing to partake in the dope game or other illegal but profitable businesses like prostitution, gambling, or extortion among others. For other Davidians who come from families that have been in the gang (interim culture) for generations, the gang identity is so deeply entrenched in their being that it is impossible for them to envision themselves otherwise. *Abuelito*²² was from the Hood, my father was from the Hood, therefore, I will be from the Hood; forget getting jumped in²³, these Davidians, homeboy or homegirl, are blessed in²⁴. In a society where they feel unidentified, cast out, forgotten, the gang welcomes them in and provides for them.

It is because of these reasons—among others—that many Davidians resort to interim cultures (gangs and such). Some communities are so low in other outlets and resources that without the neighborhood gang or click, they would have nowhere else to go. In those forgotten neighborhoods, the gang provides them with a social network and social capital. They may now have connections to many more resources than before. With that new nexus of people, the young Davidian can now barter if needed and perhaps make a living. Moreover, the gang provide a sense of belonging. In my case, my most loyal friends were from my gang. Friends that took bullets for me, and I for them. If you are down and out, your homeboys get you back on your feet. In the midst of poverty, you will always have somewhere to lay your head. Homeboys “break bread together”²⁵, fight together, ride together, go to jail together, and even die together. That so-common urge to

²² Grandfather

²³ Initiation for many gangs consists of testing the recruit by making them fight a group of bona fide gang members in order to test their heart or *corazon*; Sometimes called a *cora* check, literally a heart check.

²⁴ Born into the gang; through their descendants they are automatically considered part of the gang; Like a child born into nobility, there is no need to earn it; She just is.

²⁵ Eat together, share food (from the Lord’s Last Supper); to make money (bread) together

be a part of something greater than oneself is quenched. They will find purpose (goals to increase the gang, to be the best gang) and identity (the gang itself, their nickname, their reputation). The gang even provides a “homeland” for the young Davidians; the block(s) or apartment complexes that the gang claims.

It is the lack of a rich and mature natural culture that lets the interim culture take a hold of the young lives. For humans will always search for purpose, and when there is not a healthy one waiting for them to be instilled, the interim culture—left to run amok—will take dominance over the abandoned and idle mind. However, I do believe there is a caveat here. I am afraid that as a society we have been looking at gangs the wrong way, through a negative prejudicial lens. Instead of working with the gangs and trying to understand them, we reject them. We form police units that specifically target them, community watch groups to monitor them and once we push them outside of the law, we gasp when they embrace it and operate fully outside the law. Many of the gangs started out as clubs or baseball teams. It was through alienation—lack of identity, education, and opportunities—that they were driven to what they are today. We have to acknowledge the power of the interim cultures found in the barrio. Only by understanding it, will we be able to reverse it. Maybe even incorporate some aspects of it (loyalty, courage, brother/sisterhood) into the greater Pan-Mexican and American culture. Eventually giving young Davidians something they can call their own; something unique and beautiful, accepted by society, participatory in civic responsibility, self-sufficient and self-empowered.

Now I bleed in some smelly cell from club or gun or tyranny.

I bleed as the vicious gloves of hunger cut my face and eyes,

As I fight my way from stinking barrios

To the glamour of the ring and lights of fame

Or mutilated sorrow.

My blood runs pure on the ice-caked hills of the Alaskan isles,

On the corpse-strewn beach of Normandy,

The foreign land of Korea and now Vietnam.

Here I stand before the court of justice,

Guilty

For all the glory of my Raza to be sentenced to despair.

Here I stand,

Poor in money,

Arrogant with pride,

Bold with machismo,

Rich in courage

And

Wealthy in spirit and faith.

My knees are caked with mud; my hands calloused from the hoe. I have made the Anglo

rich;

Yet

Equality is but a word—

UNIQUENESS OF PAN-MEXICAN STORY

Some may say that we have seen this before in previous immigrant groups and time will fix this too. Who can forget the Irish gangs of the nineteenth century, or the Italian and Jewish gangs of the early twentieth century? It just takes a couple of generations and they will eventually assimilate right? I do not hold this view. To me, the position of the Pan-American is quite a different one. Being so close to their ancestor's homeland, separating themselves from Mexico is physically impossible. Speak to the *Raza* in the border towns, and to them Mexico is just *el otro lado*, literally the "other side". Families cross the border everyday like we cross county lines. The interconnection between the people in Mexico and the American Southwest is so interweaved that the lines blur and the border simply becomes a line on a map. There is an interdependence between both sides.

This means that there is a constant integration of *paisanos* or new migrants every generation with each new first-generation disconnected with the previous ones. It is as if each cohort of first generation Pan-Mexicans has to create its own story/culture *en el Gabacho*²⁶, fight their battles and claim their own land. With so many stories and experiences, it is difficult for them to create a common story or be aware of such a rich history. Moreover, depending on where you live or who you are speaking to, Pan-Mexicans call themselves different names. Chicanos for the civil rights generation, Latino for the millennials, Tejanos for Texans, Mexican-American for many, etc. The lack of an encompassing story is one of the major inhibitors of the maturation of a common culture. The resistances and contributions of Joaquin Murrieta, Tiburcio

²⁶ The United States; derived from *Gabacho*, an Anglo-American

Vasquez, and Elfege Baca in the nineteenth century were largely unknown to the Pan-Mexicans of the early twentieth century. Similarly, the mass deportations of their generation during the Great Depression were forgotten/irrelevant to the *Pachucos*²⁷ of the mid-1900s. Furthermore, the violence and oppression perpetrated at Pachucos (especially during the many Zoot Suit Riots across America), were also unconnected to the Chicano Civil Rights generation of the 60s and 70s. Moreover, most Pan-Mexicans today are for the most part ignorant that a Chicano movement even took place. Instead of a long historical connection deeply rooted in our collected experience, each new generation is burdened with the task of creating a new culture, identity, and purpose for their respective generation. This is our community's greatest sin. By not teaching and connecting the experiences, struggles and journey of the previous Pan-Mexican generations with the youth of today, we leave our youth thinking they are a new phenomenon, without history and identity, stuck awkwardly between two different cultures, not knowing where to turn. Ask your typical African-American about his past and she will be quick to bring up the great names of Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King and Malcom X. I'd be surprised if the typical Pan-American millennial knew who the great Tomás Rivera was! That disconnection is not only obvious, it is disheartening, or dare I say embarrassing. Consequently, we see the birth of new interim cultures to fill those gaps. If we do not come to a common consensus of who we are, we will never attain solidarity as a people.

We need to shed any bias we have against the traditional Pan-Mexican culture. Even if we do not agree with everything our culture stands for, we need to understand that if we do not have a common consensus of who we are, we will be meaningless by

²⁷ Young Pan-Mexican man who wore Zoot Suits in the mid-1900s; the genesis of the modern *cholo*, or gangster.

definition. Something that is not identified, recognized, or named or defined, does not have a meaning. We, on the other hand, need identification, recognition, and definition.

*My land is lost
And stolen,
My culture has been raped.
I lengthen the line at the welfare door and fill the jails with crime.
These then are the rewards
This society has for sons of chiefs
And kings
And bloody revolutionists,
Who gave a foreign people all their skills and ingenuity
To pave the way with brains and blood
For those hordes of gold-starved strangers, who
Changed our language and plagiarized our deeds
As feats of valor
Of their own.
They frowned upon our way of life and took what they could use.
Our art, our literature, our music, they ignored—
So they left the real things of value and grabbed at their own destruction
By their greed and avarice.
They overlooked that cleansing fountain of
Nature and brotherhood
Which is Joaquín...*

A CASTLE'S FOUNDATION

So what can we do? Dear Pan-Mexicans, henceforth I will be addressing you directly, all others indirectly. We find ourselves here, facing the issues that affect our communities and the obvious question is what can we do? To begin, we should not wait for others to take the first step. How can we expect others to help us when we cannot get on the same page to help ourselves? Moreover, outsiders and outside organizations cannot fully comprehend and appreciate (even with the best intentions) the trials and tribulations of our community as we can. No one knows the pain of a sick man more than the sick man himself. Similarly, no one knows a family's hardships, or secrets, or needs, like the family itself. Therefore, it is up to us to make the first big step towards combating the evils and barriers that haunt and hinder us. Then, once we are standing firmly on two feet, we can begin creating institutional change in our schools and community centers, at our jobs, in policy and in politics, in the judicial system and anywhere else we see an injustice or room for improvement. So how do we improve the lives, social conditions, self-perspective, etc. of our young Davidians? I believe we can accomplish this task, or at least begin to accomplish this task, through the incorporation and implementation of Pan-Mexican culture into the lives of our young Davidians.

Since the beginning, man used an effective, sometimes forgotten, way to inspire and enable youth: Indoctrination²⁸ of their respective culture. Native American parents would teach their children the ways of their ancestors. Families and communities would share their accomplishments and struggles, pass down their collective wisdom, instill

²⁸ I feel people tend to assume *indoctrination* with brainwashing or making someone believe falsehoods. I do not share that believe. Instead, (for purposes of this paper at least) indoctrination means the intentional teaching of truths, custom, and culture.

character, and teach practices to their youth. All the youths in the community knew their history—where they came from and where they were going. Although they each had different personalities and goals for their particular lives, they were nonetheless aware of their common past, and consequently, where they fit in this big world. The youth did not have to invent some interim culture to provide structure or purpose, because their rich and mature culture (instilled from youth with love) already fulfilled those needs. For the most part, Pan-Mexicans do not have that luxury.

Therefore, I strongly believe that if we, the Pan-Mexican community, teach our youth the importance, the richness, and the beauty of their people's culture properly, we can begin inspire and enable them to fully manifest themselves. The solution I am purposing is both simple and daunting. I am calling you to teach the youth in your community Pan-Mexican culture. Some say culture is not the easiest thing to define or convey. Questions like, "whose culture?", or "isn't that limiting?", or "how?" come to mind. However, I feel this is not the case, at least not for my case and my definition of culture. I define culture as the shared story, origin, arts (theatre, painting, literature, films, language, and music), history, traditions, community goals, religion, sports, and politics of a certain group of people. There can be an umbrella culture, and large subcultures within it; here we refer to both.

We are all affected by culture growing up. The lucky ones were accepted and thrived in the culture they were raised in, many were not. The way we fit, or did not fit, in that culture, affected the way we behaved, the things we did, and the things we went on to do. Culture influences society and society affects us. Things have not changed. Our youth *are* and *will* be affected by culture—yours or someone else's. If they are

introduced as youths into a culture that is hostile or apathetic and foreign to them, they will grow up with a negative or at least distorted view of themselves. Self-esteem plummets, self-perception is corrupted, and their mental and physical development can be hindered as well. There has to be another positive culture *already* established, or combating the other to get established, to prevent the hostile, apathetic and foreign culture from damaging the Pan-Mexican youth's mind and soul. As the adults and young leaders in the community, it is up to us what culture will affect our youngest and most vulnerable. This is something we actually have some control over.

We constantly convey culture to our youth at home some way or another, whether we acknowledge it or not. We convey it at home, through actions (intentionally or unintentionally), through the music we play (pop, rock, *rancheras*²⁹, *viejitas pero bonitas*³⁰), the television we watch (MTV or PBS), the books we read to them (if any), the church we do or not go to. Seeing this constant bombardment of information, it is critical that we stay mindful of what we expose our children to or convey to them. We have to take control of the culture that molds our young. This culture we can call the home or natural culture is our key to success, and on it our youth will build themselves—it is the young Davidian's Foundation.

Vasconcelos said that the highest level of culture was one in which every member was encouraged to be an artist, a poet, a writer, a song writer, a dancer, a reader, a learner, an artisan—that is a cultural creator (Miller, 13). That is our goal and the Foundation begins by teaching both Spanish and English for example. It should be started as soon as possible to have maximum results. The younger a child is, the easier they learn

²⁹ Mexican country music.

³⁰ Spanish oldies but goodies.

a language for example. Preparation should begin before the child is born. Educating or refreshing oneself in the culture or gathering pertinent resources are great examples of how to prepare. As I said before, we should not rely on the public school system or the government to create this Foundation. We will be waiting in vain. It is up to us to be mindful of what we expose and instill in our young Davidian's hearts. On this Foundation the Davidians will create their self-perception, develop their skills and passions, find and emulate their heroes, discover purpose and define meaning; it is the solid Foundation on which a people will build their Castle. Our Castle is both our people/community and our self. We are unique and special within our community, but we are also an embodiment of our people/community. We cannot escape that regardless of how hard we try. The Pan-Mexican will always be judged as one.

The art of our great señores,

Diego Rivera,

Siqueiros,

Orozco, is but another act of revolution for

The salvation of mankind.

Mariachi music, the heart and soul

Of the people of the earth,

The life of the child,

And the happiness of love.

The corridos tell the tales

Of life and death,

Of tradition,

Legends old and new, of joy

Of passion and sorrow

Of the people—who I am...

HOW DO WE BUILD THE FOUNDATION?

Our culture is our Foundation and on it we will build our Castle. But how? “I work full-time,” a parent may say, and “I do not have time”. A community organization or church may say they do not have the resources to fund workshops or events where they can convey culture. These are honest concerns but I believe we can still find a way; there is always a way.

Conveying and instilling our culture can be as easy as imitating it ourselves, and as complex as teaching a full master’s degree on Pan-Mexicanismo. Let us focus on the former. What do I mean by imitating our culture ourselves? Consider music. If there is a *folklorico* dance group in your community enroll young Davidians in it, but if for unforeseen or uncontrollable circumstances, you cannot afford it or make it to practice, you can still do it at home. Whenever music is played at home, let it be Pan-Mexican folk music. Whenever children want to dance, put Pan-Mexican folk music on. Do it as early as possible. Buy or make them a folkloric dress or suit to accompany the music. Dance along with them. Talk to them about the music and explain its importance. Point out the different instruments and sounds and how and why they are used. Give them some history to it. Compare and contrast *huapango*, *jarocho*, and *mariachi* music. Let them know this music is theirs to cherish and enjoy. Of course this will take time and effort to do a little research, but you will be growing as well. And everything you need can be found online or at your public library. Do the research together with your young Davidian.

The key behind what I am proposing is to show our youth that they actually belong to something important and beautiful. To show our youth that they come from

somewhere special and have something they can call their own; to take ownership of their culture. It is not that *folklorico* music is superior to others, or that they cannot enjoy other music. The goal is to show a young and developing mind that they do in fact have something beautiful and rich to call their own. It belongs to none other. This ownership will help them appreciate the music, and more importantly, themselves.

The same can be done with films. Instead of always watching new Disney movies with the young Davidian, watch *Chavo del Ocho*, *Dora the Explorer*, and other relevant Spanish children shows. If the Davidian is older, show them movies from Pan-Mexican directors like the acclaimed trailblazer Ismael Rodriguez, or the powerful and raw Luis Valdez. Show them pictures of the directors and share a short biography of them. The youth who might think that Pan-Mexicans are only good for working at restaurants and cutting grass or selling drugs, will see someone like them, from a similar background as them, with a Spanish surname like them, and directing movies even better than their Anglo counterparts. This can be mind-changing for a young Davidian. To actually know that a Pan-Mexican can direct movies. Who knows, they might be inspired to become the next great Pan-Mexican movie director.

I can give hundreds of example of how we can convey culture. Pan-Mexican history can be taught through documentaries, museums, and books. Community groups can organize youths and create dramas/shows for the community, in which the youth play important figures in our history. The dramas can be about the movement of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta or the life of Dr. Hector P. Garcia (great role models for kids in need of heroes by the way). If community buildings or parks need repair in the Barrio, community groups can organize the youth to paint murals in those parks or run-down

buildings, turning them beautiful and giving the youth something they can call their own. They will visually see what they created in their own community. And they will be praised. This is also an opportunity to share the history of murals in the Pan-Mexican community. Show them the works of Diego Rivera and Jose Clemente Orozco. Fund-raisers can provide the funds to buy paint for the walls or costumes for the dramas. Moreover, fund-raisers themselves can be used to convey culture. A cook-off fundraiser can be an opportunity to share the history of Pan-Mexican gastronomy. Food is not only fun, colorful and delicious, but it is critical to culture. There is a saying that “you are what you eat”, if we take this to be true, our food is imperative to who we are. It is also something we do together and share with others. Again more examples of how we can convey culture, or build our Foundation, at home with little to no expenses.

The goal is to inspire and enable Davidians in the barrio as young as possible. The way we do that is by exposing the youth to images/examples of themselves in a positive light. We need to show the young homegirl that women like her went on to become governors of states like Susana Martinez of New Mexico, astronauts like Elena Ochoa, or influential journalist like María Elena Salinas who is considered the “voice of her people”. The same for the homeboys. No need to be tough and rough to gain respect when men like Cesar Chavez, gentle and collected, was respected above all. No need to be gangsters, when Nezahualcōyotl, the philosopher king, was both poet and king! The problem is our youth have no idea who these people are. And if they do, they might have only heard their name in passing and therefore have no substance or context to relate to. The resources, the role models, the stories are all out there, we just have to collect them and disseminate them to our communities. Imagine a Pan-Mexican child who is

encouraged to embrace his Pan-Mexican history, to pronounce his name with pride and roll his 'r's with *gusto*³¹, to be proud of being bilingual and see it as an advantage. Alas, that infamous Spanglish³² that is spoken by many, hated by more, and praised by few. I say we embrace our created tongue. Language can manifest a people's emotions, hardships, hopes, and dreams. About these vernacular languages, Octavio Paz said:

In our daily language there is a group of words that are prohibited, secret, without clear meanings. We confide the expression of our most brutal or subtle emotions and reactions to their magical ambiguities... They constitute a sacred language like those of children, poetry, and sects. Each letter and syllable has a double life, at once luminous and obscure, that reveals and hides us... To know it, to use it, to throw it in the air like a toy or to make it quiver like a sharp weapon, is a way of affirming that we are Mexican (*The Labyrinth of Solitude*, 74).

We have to claim these unique characteristics as our own. By embracing them, we will be embracing ourselves. We have to connect the young Davidian's story with the larger Pan-Mexican story. They have to know they are not alone, that they are not an anomaly, but rather a very important and special part of a larger story that is also theirs. Then, the cultured Davidian might have a chance, and no longer have a reason, to not go down the wrong path.

³¹ With delight, pleasure, or honor.

³² Mixture of English and Spanish.

*I am in the eyes of woman,
Sheltered beneath
Her shawl of black,
Deep and sorrowful eyes
That bear the pain of sons long buried or dying,
Dead on the battlefield or on the barbed wire of social strife.
Her rosary she prays and fingers endlessly
Like the family working down a row of beets
To turn around and work and work.
There is no end.
Her eyes a mirror of all the warmth and all the love for me,
And I am her
And she is me.
We face life together in sorrow,
Anger, joy, faith and wishful thoughts.
I shed the tears of anguish as I see my children disappear
Behind the shroud of mediocrity,
Never to look back to remember me.
I am Joaquín.
I must fight and win this struggle
For my sons, and they must know from me
Who I am...*

Conclusion

I must admit, that as a Pan-Mexican myself, I do indeed have a great interest in the survival and ultimate success of the Pan-Mexican community. However, if you are not a member of this community³³, you also have a great interest in their success; let me explain why:

As I mentioned before, the Pan-Mexican population is growing in tremendous numbers and will not be slowing down in the near future. Many states are already very close to having a Hispanic majority. Moreover, many counties/cities/towns in those states are already overwhelmingly Hispanic. In Texas for example, the student population will be two-thirds Hispanic by 2050 according to the Texas Education Agency (texastribune.org). They are already more than half of all the k-12 student population in Texas, and make up fifty-three percent of the student population in California (kidsdata.org). Therefore, your kids are likely to be friends with Pan-Mexican children, be in similar social circles, and (hopefully and in more numbers) attend many of the same colleges. The Pan-Mexican youth will work in your stores and community and provide a large segment of the tomorrow's working population. They will vote and play important roles in determining our nation's leaders; they have already played significant roles in the election of President Obama and will continue to increase their influence in politics. They will be your nurses and doctors when you are sick; your lawyers when in trouble or in need of assistance; perhaps senators when a policy needs revision; and mechanics, architects and engineers when your things need to be build or fixed. On the other hand, depending on how they are included or excluded in society, they might continue to fill the

³³ Anglo-American, Asian-American, African-American, etcétera.

prisons and welfare lines in frightening numbers. Instead of designing your home, they will be breaking into it. Instead of providing medical care or legal advice, they will be filling the streets with guns and vice. They can become the hope of this nation, or a burden. It is up to you and me. I think we need to contemplate for a minute and see how prudent it is to do as much as we can to inspire and enable a young population with so much potential and strength.

Consequently, I encourage any reader of this humble essay, to take up this cross with me and explore how we can we change the hearts and minds of millions of Pan-Mexican youth through culture. You can do it in your own community you know. Get to know your neighbors. Share a laugh or two with them over a delicious *carne asada*³⁴ or *un cafesito*³⁵. You will be surprised how hospitable Pan-Mexicans are and how much you might have in common. They are a vibrant, joyful, stalwart, loyal, and contagious people, the Cosmic Race according to Jose Vasconcelos. Virgilio Elizondo says the following about Pan-Mexicans:

The happiness and joy of the Mexican and Mexican-American peoples is immediately and obvious to outsiders. The tragedies of their history have not obliterated laughter, and joy, warm friendship and capacity to love (Galilean Journey, 43).

If you are a Pan-Mexican or Hispanic (father, mother, grandfather, student, teacher, churchman) it is time we opened our eyes—and our children’s eyes—to who they really are and the power that comes with that. They are Queens and Kings of all the lands from

³⁴ Translates to “grilled meat”; Barbeque.

³⁵ Coffee.

Alaska to *Tierra del Fuego*. We have to teach them their history and their contributions to the U.S., Mexico, and abroad (G.I. Forum, Farm workers movement, and Chicano civil rights movement for example). Open up Jose Vasconcelos' *La Raza Cosmica* and Dr. Michael Miller's *Red, White and Green* and read it with them. Introduce the art of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo to them. Sing and cry to the *corridos*³⁶ of Jose Alfredo Jimenez with them. Watch and critique the cinematic masterpieces of Ismael Rodriguez and modern directors like Luis Valdez (all these things I have mentioned are free by the way). Submerge them in the rich and deep waters of their envied culture. And like a flower in spring, watch them blossom. Eventually, the Davidian will look at his brother, his sister, himself, and realize who he was the whole time—Joaquin.

³⁶ A corrido is a popular narrative song in poetic form; a ballad; Made famous during the Mexican Revolution.

Part of the blood that runs deep in me could not be vanquished by the Moors.

I defeated them after five hundred years,

And I have endured.

Part of the blood that is mine has labored endlessly four hundred years under the

heel of lustful Europeans.

I am still here!

I have endured in the rugged mountains

Of our country

I have survived the toils and slavery of the fields.

I have existed

In the barrios of the city

In the suburbs of bigotry

In the mines of social snobbery

In the prisons of dejection

In the muck of exploitation

And

In the fierce heat of racial hatred.

And now the trumpet sounds,

The music of the people stirs the

Revolution.

Like a sleeping giant it slowly rears its head to the sound of Tramping feet

Clamoring voices

Mariachi strains

Fiery tequila explosions

The smell of chile verde and soft brown eyes of expectation for a better life.

And in all the fertile farmlands,

The barren plains, the mountain villages, smoke-smearred cities,

We start to MOVE.

La Raza!

Méjicano!

Español!

Latino!

Chicano!

*Or whatever I call myself, I look the same, I feel the same, I cry and sing the
same.*

I am the masses of my people and I refuse to be absorbed.

I am Joaquín.

The odds are great but my spirit is strong,

My faith unbreakable, My blood is pure.

I am Aztec prince and Christian Christ.

I SHALL ENDURE!

I WILL ENDURE!

I Am Joaquin

by Rodolfo Corky Gonzales

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