

I Am Joaquin

by **Rodolfo Corky Gonzales**

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 gringo 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
I am Cuauhtémoc, proud and noble,
leader of men, king of an empire civilized
beyond the dreams of the gachupín Cortés,
who also is the blood, the image of myself.
I am the Maya prince.
I am Nezahualcóyotl, 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.
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 eighteen hundred and ten
 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
 to feel the hot gouge of lead which my hands made.
 I died with them ... I lived with them I lived to see our country free.
 Free from Spanish rule in eighteen-hundred-twenty-one.
 Mexico was free??
 The crown was gone but all its parasites remained,
 and ruled, and taught, with gun and flame and mystic power.
 I worked, I sweated, I bled, I prayed,
 and waited silently for life to begin again.
 I fought and died for Don Benito Juarez, guardian of the Constitution.
 I was he on dusty roads on barren land as he protected his archives
 as Moses did his sacraments.
 He held his Mexico in his hand on
 the most desolate and remote ground which was his country.
 And this giant little Zapotec gave not one palm's breadth
 of his country's land to kings or monarchs or presidents of foreign powers.
 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 Rurales,
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.

I am the despots Díaz

And Huerta

And the apostle of democracy,

Francisco Madero.

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,

Tonantzín, 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.
Hidalgo! Zapata!
Murrieta! Espinozas!
Are but a few.
They dared to face
The force of tyranny
Of men who rule by deception and hypocrisy.
I stand here looking back,
And now I see the present,
And still I am a campesino,
I am the fat political coyote—
I,
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 society's own name.
I am Joaquín,
Who bleeds in many ways.
The altars of Moctezuma
I stained a bloody red.
My back of Indian slavery

Was stripped crimson
From the whips of masters
Who would lose their blood so pure
When revolution made them pay,
Standing against the walls of retribution.
Blood has flowed from me on every battlefield between
campesino, hacendado,
slave and master and revolution.
I jumped from the tower of Chapultepec
into the sea of fame—
my country's flag
my burial shroud—
with Los Niños,
whose pride and courage
could not surrender
with indignity
their country's flag
to strangers . . . in their land.
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—
The Treaty of Hidalgo has been broken
And is but another threacherous promise.
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.
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.
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.

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!