

Rodolfo Gonzales (1928-2005)

With his poem, Gonzales shared his new cosmological vision of the “Chicano”, who was neither Indian nor European, neither Mexican nor American, but a combination of all the conflicting identities. The poem describes the dilemma of Chicanos in the 1960s trying to assimilate with American culture while trying to keep some semblance of their culture intact for future generations, then proceeds to outline 2000 years of Mexican and Mexican-American history, highlighting the different, often opposing strains that make up the Chicano heritage, and realizing his status as an oppressed minority in the United States. The poem was written in 1967 in Colorado. Scholars consider Gonzales to be one of the founders of the Chicano Movement.

I Am Joaquin

by Rodolfo Gonzales

Section 1 of 6

Section 2 of 6

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
 Faithful women
 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 treacherous 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!

Name: _____

Period: _____ Date: _____

After reading “I am Joaquin,” answer the following questions. Make sure to provide a good size paragraph for each answer (at least four sentences), and to make direct references to the readings by quoting a couple of lines from the poem.

Note: Here, assimilation is understood as the shedding of Mexican culture and values, and the adoption of Anglo (White) American culture and values, which the poems understands as very different.

QUESTIONS

1. *I Am Joaquin* is one of the earliest and most widely read works associated with the movement. In its entirety, the poem describes the then modern dilemma of Chicanos in the 1960s trying to assimilate with American culture while trying to keep some semblance of their culture intact for future generations, then proceeds to outline 2000 years of Mexican and Mexican-American history, highlighting the different, often opposing strains that make up the Chicano heritage. If you had to summarize the main message of the poem in ONE sentence, what would it be?
2. Discuss the character, I am Joaquin. Who is Joaquin? What historical, social and cultural elements make up his identity? In your opinion, is this a positive and healthy identity, or a negative one?
3. In what sense is it possible to "lose" the economic battle and "win" the struggle for cultural survival? Why did Mexicans in the United States might have felt that they had to choose between assimilation and economic success, or cultural retention and poverty? In other words, why did they saw assimilation into Anglo American culture as an advantage?
4. After reviewing the history of Mexican human bodies, Joaquin concludes that in the present he has "a different weight of indignity" upon his age-old-burdened back. What different interpretations can be deduced from this statement? In the final analysis, is Joaquin a victim or a victor?
5. “I am Joaquin” has been criticized for its representation of women. In comparison to the men mentioned in the poem, how are women represented in the poem? Are they as active in the making of history? In your opinion, is this representation of women accurate or fair, why or why not?
6. “I am Joaquin” was written in 1967, do you think much has changed for Mexicans/Chicanos? Do you think Mexicans in the United States still feel they need to choose between holding on to their culture, even though it might make life harder, or assimilating into dominant culture in order to have a better life?