

"I am Joaquin"

By RODOLFO "CORKY" GONZALES (1928-2005)

Yo soy Joaquin,
perdido en un mundo de confusion:
I am Joaquin,
Lost in a world of confusion,
Caught up in a whirl of a gringo society,
Confused by the rules,
Scorned by attitudes,
Suppressed by manipulations,
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 Cuauhtemoc¹,
Proud and noble leader of men, King of an empire,
civilized beyond the dreams of the Gachupin² Cortez,
Who also is the blood, the image of myself.
I am the Maya Prince.
I am Netzahualcoyotl,³
Great leader of the Chichimecas.
I am the sword and flame of Cortez 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,

¹ Aztec ruler killed by the Spanish conquistador Cortez (around 1520-21)

² Derogative slang term for Spanish invaders and their ancestors, meaning "those with spurs"

³ Ruler of pre-Columbian Texcoco, Mexico

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 Christian church took its place in God's good 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, Mestizo⁴

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

Hidalgo⁵ in the year eighteen hundred and ten

who rang the bell of independence

and gave out that lasting cry:

El Grito de Dolores⁶,

"Que mueran los Gachupines y que viva la Virgin de Guadalupe."⁷

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 all of those who have come this way,

I placed on that fortress wall to wait for Independence.

Morelos!⁸

Matamoros!⁹

Guerrero!

⁴ Person of mixed Spanish and Indian ancestry

⁵ Miguel Hidalgo, a priest who incited the rebellion of Indians and Mestizos against the Spanish in 1810 by ringing the church bell and crying out "Mexicanos, Viva Mexico"

⁶ "The Cry of Dolores," referring to the town of Dolores, Mexico where Hidalgo raised his cry against the Spanish.

⁷ "Death to the Spaniards and long live the Virgin of Guadalupe." Based on ancient Indian female fertility goddesses such as Tonantzin, the Virgin of Guadalupe represented a Mestizo appropriation of the cult of the Virgin Mary and became a symbol of indigenous and Mexican resistance.

⁸ Jose Maria Morelos, a hero of the rebellion.

⁹ Mariana Matamoros, a hero of the rebellion.

All Compañeros¹⁰ 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 his 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 again commence.
I fought and died for Don Benito Juarez, Guardian of the Constitution.¹¹
I was him 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 Zapotec¹² 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,¹³ crude and warm.
A tornado at full strength, nourished and inspired by the passion and
the fire of all his earthy people.
I am Emillano Zapata.¹⁴
"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.¹⁵
All of which is our reward, A creed that formed a constitution for all

¹⁰ Comrades, friends, allies in struggle.

¹¹ Juarez was the most significant political leader of Mexico in the mid-19th century, credited with guarding the Constitution of 1857 against despots. He served a number of years as President.

¹² Juarez was a short man of Zapotec Indian ancestry.

¹³ A leader of the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920.

¹⁴ Also a leader of the Mexican Revolution.

¹⁵ Corn, the staple of the Mexican diet.

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, course and brutal,
I am the mountain Indian, superior over all.
The thundering hoof beats are my horses.
The chattering of machine guns
are death to all of me:
Yaqui
Tarahumara
Chamula
Zapotec
Mestizo
Español¹⁶
I have been the Bloody Revolution,
The Victor,
The Vanquished,
I have killed and been killed.
I am the despots Diaz¹⁷ and Huerta¹⁸ 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,¹⁹ the Virgen de Guadalupe,
Tonantzin, Aztec Goddess too.
I rode the mountains of San Joaquin. I rode as far East and North as the
Rocky Mountains
And all men feared the guns of Joaquin Murrietta.²⁰
I killed those men who dared to steal my mine,
who raped and killed my love my wife
Then
I Killed to stay alive.

¹⁶ Indian tribes, mixed bloods, and the Spanish.

¹⁷ Porfirio Diaz, President of Mexico 1876-1880, 1884-1911; his fraudulent reelection in 1910 sparked the Revolution.

¹⁸ Victoriano Huerta, a conservative general who led a coup in 1913 that resulted in the murder of Francisco Madero, who had been elected in 1911 to restore democracy after the repudiation of Huerta.

¹⁹ Legendary Indian said to have seen the revelation of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

²⁰ 1829-1853. A legendary figure in early California, Murrietta is seen as either a bandit or heroic rebel and has come to symbolize Mexican American resistance movements. California Rangers were sent to hunt him down (creating the famous phrase "Bring me the head of Joaquin Murrietta." A head was indeed turned in for the ransom, though its identity was disputed.

I was Elfego Baca,²¹ living my nine lives fully.
I was the Espinoza²² 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!
Murrietta! Espinozas!
are but a few.
They dared to face
The force of tyranny of men who rule
by farce and hypocrisy.
I stand here looking back, and now I see the
present
and still I am the campesino
I am the fat political coyote
I, of the same name,
Joaquin.
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 Gachupin 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 Joaquin, who bleeds in many ways.
The altars of Moctezuma²³ 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

²¹ 1865-1945. New Mexican frontier lawman, lawyer, and politician. He was at the center of the legendary "Frisco Shootout" where he survived a torrent of cowboy bullets.

²² Felipe and Vivian Espinoza, guerrilla insurgents in the San Luis Valley of Colorado who were beheaded.

²³ Moctezuma II (died 1520), ninth emperor of the Aztec realm of Tenochtitlan, defeated by Cortez during the invasion, when the Indians were enslaved by the Spaniards.

between Campesino, Hacendado Slave and Master and Revolution.
 I jumped from the tower of Chapultepec²⁴ 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 . . . in their land.
 To strangers 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 barrios²⁵
 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 Viet Nam.
 Here I stand
 before the Court of Justice
 Guilty for all the glory of my Raza²⁶
 To be sentenced to despair.
 Here I stand
 Poor in money
 Arrogant with pride
 Bold with Machismo²⁷
 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
 Hidalgo²⁸ 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

²⁴ A large hill on the outskirts of Mexico City. In 1847, six military cadets aged 14-20 fought there to their deaths against the invading U.S. Marine Corps. One of them, Juan Escutia, is reported to have wrapped himself in the Mexican flag and jumped to his death rather than be captured. They became known as "Ninos Heroes" or Los Ninos--the Heroic Children.

²⁵ "Barrios": Mexican American neighborhoods; the term is comparable to "ghetto."

²⁶ Race, people, nation. "Viva La Raza" became the protest cry of the Chicano Power movement in the 1960s and of the United Farmworkers Strike led by Cesar Chavez.

²⁷ Spanish idiomatic term for masculinity.

²⁸ The 1848 Treaty of Hidalgo ended the Mexican American War, in which the United States conquered almost half of Mexico's territory and promised equality to its residents.

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 Joaquin.
The art of our great señors Diego Rivera²⁹
Siqueiros³⁰ Orozco³¹ 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 child, and the happiness of love
The Corridos³² 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 barbwire 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.

²⁹ Left-wing Mexican artist and muralist (1886-1947).

³⁰ Jose Siqueiros, Mexican artist and muralist.

³¹ Jose Clemente Orozco, artist.

³² Popular narrative songs that tell heroic tales of great men or criminals, the corridos became vehicles for the expression of Mexican American life and resistance.

I shed tears of anguish as I see my children disappear behind the shroud
of mediocrity
never to look back to remember me.
I am Joaquin.
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 Moors³³
I defeated them after five hundred years,
and I endured.
The part of blood that is mine
has labored endlessly five-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
Clamouring 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 farm lands, the barren plains,
the mountain villages, smoke smeared cities
We start to MOVE.
La Raza!
Mejicano!
Español!
Latino!
Hispano!
Chicano!

³³ North African Muslims who came to conquer or live in much of the Iberian (Spanish) Peninsula in the Medieval period, infusing Spanish heritage and culture with African and Islamic influence (and a darkening of skin).

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 Joaquin
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!