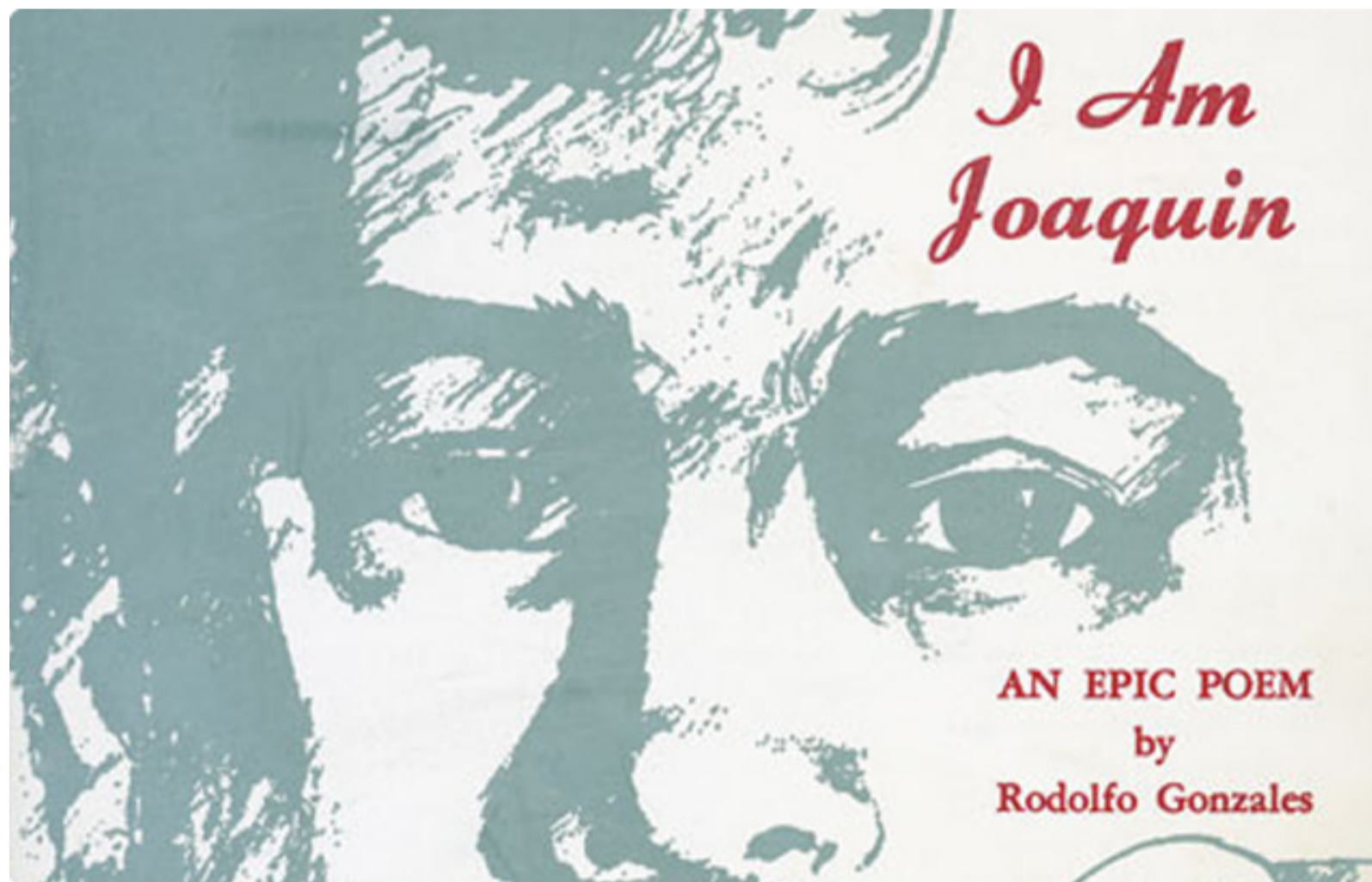


MEXICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

# I Am Joaquin

by Rodolfo Corky Gonzales



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*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  
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!