**I Am Joaquin**

**by Rodolfo Corky Gonzales**

Section 1: Introduction

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

Section 2: Ancient History

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 rural,

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.

Section 3: Joining the Melting Pot

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 Alfego 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 farce 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.

Section 4: Current Reality

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 Viet Nam.

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.

Section 5: Thinking Ahead

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-smeared 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!