

### 1. Why Am I So Brown?

By Trinidad Sánchez Jr.

A question Chicanitas sometimes ask  
while others wonder: Why is the sky blue  
or the grass so green?

Why am I so Brown?

God made you brown, mi'ja  
color bronce—color of your raza  
connecting you to your raíces,  
your story/historia  
as you begin moving towards your future.

God made you brown, mi'ja  
color bronce, beautiful/strong,  
reminding you of the goodness  
de tu mama, de tus abuelas  
y tus antepasados.

God made you brown, mi'ja  
to wear as a crown for you are royalty—  
a princess, la raza nueva,  
the people of the sun.

It is the color of Chicana women—  
leaders/madres of Chicano warriors  
luchando por la paz y la dignidad  
de la justicia de la nación, Aztlán!

God wants you to understand...brown  
is not a color... it is:

a state of being a very human texture  
alive and full of song, celebrating—  
dancing to the new world  
which is for everyone...

Finally, mi'ja  
God made you brown  
because it is one of HER favorite colors!

### 2. Love Poem for My People

By Pedro Pietri

do not let  
artificial lamps  
make strange shadows  
out of you  
do not dream  
if you want your dreams  
to come true  
you knew how to sing  
before you was issued a birth certificate  
turn off the stereo  
this country gave you  
it is out of order  
your breath  
is your promiseland  
if you want  
to feel very rich  
look at your hands  
that is where  
the definition of magic  
is located at

### 3. Where You From?

By Gina Valdés

Soy de aquí  
 y soy de allá  
 from here  
 born in L.A.  
 del otro lado  
 y de éste  
 crecí en L.A.  
 y en Ensenada  
 my mouth  
 still tastes  
 of naranjas  
 con chile  
 soy del sur  
 y del norte  
 crecí zurda  
 y norteadada  
 cruzando fron  
 teras crossing  
 San Andreas  
 tartamuda  
 y mareada  
 where you from?  
 soy de aquí  
 y soy de allá  
 I didn't build  
 this border  
 that halts me  
 the word fron  
 tera splits  
 on my tongue

### 4. Learning English

By Luis Alberto Ambroggio  
 (translated from Spanish by Lori Carlson)

Life  
 to understand me  
 you have to know Spanish  
 feel it in the blood of your soul.

If I speak another language  
 and use different words  
 for feelings that will always stay the same  
 I don't know  
 if I'll continue being  
 the same person.

### 5. My Memories of the Nicaraguan Revolution

By Eugenio Alberto Cano Correa

A tear streaming from my eye,  
 Running through a field seeking refuge,  
 A road lined with bullet shells instead of pebbles,  
 An empty wheelbarrow stained red,  
 A pillar of smoke uniting sky and ground,  
 A slogan cried from the background,  
 A hug of protection from my *mamá*.

## 6. We Would Like You To Know

By Ana Castillo

We would like you to know  
 we are not all  
 docile  
 nor revolutionaries  
 but we are all survivors.  
 We do not all carry  
 zip guns, hot pistols,  
 steal cars.  
 We do know how  
 to defend ourselves.

We do not all have slicked-back hair  
 distasteful apparel  
 unpolished shoes  
 although the economy  
 doesn't allow everyone  
 a Macy's charge card.

We do not all pick  
 lettuce, run  
 assembly lines, clean  
 restaurant tables, even  
 if someone has to do it.

We do not all sneak  
 under barbed wire or  
 wade the Rio Grande.  
 These are the facts.

We would like you to know

we are not all brown.  
 Genetic history has made  
 some of us blue eyed as any  
 German immigrant  
 and as black as a descendant  
 of an African slave.  
 We never claimed to be  
 a homogenous race.

We are not all victims,  
 all loyal to one cause,  
 all perfect; it is a  
 psychological dilemma  
 no one has resolved.

We would like to give  
 a thousand excuses  
 as to why we all find  
 ourselves in a predicament  
 residents of a controversial  
 power  
 how we were all caught  
 with our pants down  
 and how petroleum was going  
 to change all that but  
 you've heard it all before and  
 with a wink and a snicker  
 left us babbling amongst  
 ourselves.

We would like you to know  
 guilt or apologetic gestures  
 won't revive the dead

redistribute the land  
 or natural resources.  
 We are left  
 with one final resolution  
 in our own predestined way,  
 we are going forward.  
 There is no going back.

### 7. The Monster

By Luis J. Rodríguez

It erupted into our lives:  
 Two guys in jeans shoved it  
 through the door—  
 heaving & grunting & biting lower lips.

A large industrial sewing machine.  
 We called it "the monster."

It came on a winter's day,  
 rented out of Mother's pay.  
 Once in the living room  
 the walls seemed to cave in around it.

Black footsteps to our door  
 brought heaps of cloth for Mama to sew.  
 Noises of war burst out of the living room.  
 Rafters rattled. Floors farted.  
 The radio going into static  
 each time the needle ripped into fabric.

Many nights I'd get up from bed,  
 wander squint-eyed down a hallway

and peer through a dust-covered blanket  
 to where Mama and the monster  
 did nightly battle.

I could see Mama through the yellow haze  
 of a single lightbulb.  
 She, slouched over the machine.  
 Her eyes almost closed.  
 Her hair in disheveled braids;

each stitch binding her life  
 to scraps of cloth.