

# Intersections: A Poetry Collection

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## **They Shall Grow Not Old**

A moment of silence for the first 20 Africans to step foot on US soil,  
The broken battered souls out of place and unknowingly sealing the fates of millions more.

A moment of silence for the two in every five that never made it on a ship,  
For the one in every three who died on mobile slaughterhouses miles away from the motherland.

A moment of silence for two by six foot coffins,  
For the mangled remains of brothers and sisters shackled there, still fighting for permission to live.

They shall grow not old,  
They weren't given the chance to.  
Their black blood spread and wasted,  
Their stories too few.

Outrage for sweet souls branded like cattle,  
Humanity reduced to profit and pain.

Outrage for the cultures ripped from begging black hands,  
For the millions of slaves forced to walk the Earth untethered, disconnected from their roots.

Outrage for our African ancestors,  
Beaten and burned down over time into African Americans.

They shall grow not old,  
They weren't given the chance to.

Their black blood spread and wasted,  
Their stories too few.  
So much blood wasted,  
And nothing we can do.

## **The Underdog**

Mexico has always been a nation of underdogs.

It started with the Spaniards, claiming rights to sacred lands and sacred bodies,

Scarring the history of a beautiful nation,

Forever altering the culture of our ancestors.

We rose above that.

Tejano land was threatened and in fighting for their rights,

Fighting for the dirt their ancestors were buried in,

Gringos decided they were villains,

Decided they were wicked for protecting the land holding their roots.

They lost it anyway.

We rose above that.

In 1846 righteous white men stole the northern half of Mexican territory,

Separating families and crushing spirits.

In 1848 they put up the first border fence,

But not the first sign that Mexican blood was too brown for “American” soil.

We rose above that.

Through conquest and servitude,

Through violence and hatred,

Through displacement and sorrow,

We rose above it.

We continue to rise above it.

## **Life Lessons for a Black Child**

### **Lesson #1: Don't be angry**

Our ancestors in bondage held holy rage in their hearts with nowhere to put it down. Instead, it was infused into their blood, passed down and down and down until the fire burned so bright their descendants had to cast it out. On their wives. On their children. On their fellow man. As a race, we are angry. Angry that we were forced to be compliant, powerless, submissive. We are angry, and it gets us killed. We are angry, and we have every right to be angry, but still. We must keep it inside. I push it down, down, down.

### **Lesson #2: Family is everything**

There was a time in which whole black families could be separated at a moment's notice. Husbands ripped away from wives, mothers ripped away from children. The white man kept us separate to keep us down, to keep us broken. It worked, and we brought that brokenness with us to the future. Families are still being separated by the system, by black fathers going out for milk and never coming back. Single black mothers are still running themselves ragged to hold up their worlds, and black fathers are still running, running from children wondering about their daddies. There's nothing stronger in this world than the black family unit, the matriarchal symphony of solidarity and love. So many families are still broken, still damaged beyond repair. But we're rebuilding. I show up for my loved ones and we keep rebuilding.

### **Lesson #3: Take pride in your culture, but not too much**

The slaves we descend from were stripped of their African culture, but they worked hard to build something new, something of their own to pass on. A culture built on community, a culture built on suffering. What were once scraps from white tables became cherished confections, food to look forward to. What were once songs of solidarity became songs of celebration, songs of courage and sacrifice and gangs and baby mamas. What were once maps out of bondage became braided celebrations, hair as a tool to liberate or to shame. Black culture can be loud and proud, just as much as it can be suppressed and hidden. Wear your box braids, fry that chicken, sing your spirituals for the world to hear. Just don't forget to lay your edges. Eat a salad with that chicken, you don't want to be a pig. Keep the rapping to a minimum. Celebrate who you are but do it quietly. You don't want the white man to hear you happy. I hope that one day we can hear us happy.

## **Illegal Aliens**

### *3. Begin Largest Deportation Program in American History*

*...The Republican Party is committed to sending Illegal Aliens back home and removing those who have violated our Laws.*

~ An excerpt from the 2024 Republican Platform

The first evidence of our Chicano ancestors in the US can be traced back to 35,000 BC.

There were 36,619 years of native love, native joy, and native bones becoming one with the Earth before the first colonizers ever stepped foot on our brown soil.

Donald Trump is committed to sending undocumented Mexicans back “home”, but how can this country not be ours to claim when we share kin with the dirt? When our ancestors fertilize the fields we’re forced to work in?

The United States of America, Land of the gringos who want us oppressed, Home of the real aliens, the ones who took our welcome for weakness and forced us out.

Us Mexicans have been clawing our way back to the homeland for centuries, dying for the chance to claim the birthrights that were stolen from us.

We were never illegal. The Earth knows no boundaries, the white men brought those with them. Those who can’t recognize our royalty, the Cochise ancestry connecting us to this continent, they never should’ve come here in the first place.

They want to remove us from our land, but they can’t remove the history from our blood.

We are home. America will always be our home.

Get out of OUR country.

## **A Suffering Race or a Race of Suffering?**

*“You and we are different races. ...Your race suffer very greatly, many of them, by living among us, while ours suffer from your presence. In a word, we suffer on each side.”*

~ Abraham Lincoln

In 2024, I am still fighting the uphill battle that my ancestors in bondage started centuries ago.

Generations of black men fought and died for my right to be stared at in grocery stores.

Black women were maimed and raped for my right to wish away the kinks and coils they gifted me.

Black children held generational burdens too heavy for their small hands for my right to laugh along to racism hidden under the guise of humor.

For a history infused with so much suffering, with so much hatred, it's no wonder that shame lingers in our bloodstreams.

It's no wonder the tendrils of hatred make themselves at home in our institutions, no wonder that we accommodate bigotry to ease the pain.

However, we are not a race of suffering.

This burden is not one we picked up but instead one our ancestors were buried in.

For centuries we've been digging ourselves out, looking for the sky, all for dirt to be thrown back in our faces.

We keep digging.

Now it's my turn to pick up a shovel, my turn to hold my head high in stores and to cherish my type four curls and to speak out against bigotry.

There's always going to be suffering infused into my soul, suffering passed down from the first in my line to step off of a slave ship.

But I don't have to be buried in it.

## **Intersections**

I carry the legacy of suffering.

The legacy of my first ancestor to be ripped away from their home, of my first ancestor to die on American soil.

The legacy of the Scottish slave owners who raped my matriarchs, of the children born with our oppressor's last name.

The legacy of silence, of all the sorrow buried in the effort to endure.

Where do I put that down?

I carry the legacy of displacement.

The legacy of indigenous roots conquered by Spaniards, of gringos who ruined something that never belonged to them.

The legacy of forced assimilation, of a culture destroyed and a people forever changed.

The legacy of unjust borders, of hearts broken and families separated.

Where do I put that down?

I am mulato,

I am mestizo,

I am fromexicana,

I am latine,

I am black,

I am chicane.

Both suffering and displacement hold vigil in these veins.

I am still fighting the battles they started, still holding their pain in my heart.

I come from slave just as much as from indigenous, from Scottish just as much as from Spaniard.

This heavy history holds on, a lead coating settled around my heart.

Like all those who came before me, I can't put it down.

I hold it up.

## **Project Explanation**

My idea for this project was to use the subjects we studied in week 5, displacement and enslavement, and tie them together with my own lineage and family history. In poem number one entitled “They Shall Grow Not Old”, I wrote about the initial displacement of the first Africans to be shipped to America for slavery. I also wrote about the conditions on slave ships and the legacy of death that taints them. The goal is for the reader to feel for these people, for them to understand how hopeless the conditions of slavery paired with the loss of their African culture was for the first generation of enslaved people. I also wanted to portray how in many cases throughout history, enslavement and displacement work together to oppress people.

Poem number two entitled “The Underdog” is written about the cultural and physical displacement of Mexican people. In this piece, I wanted to use specific examples of times of when land was stolen from Mexico by the United States and the time in which indigenous culture was altered by Spainards. In contrast to the sad nature of first poem, I wrote this poem as a rallying cry because I wanted to infuse the fighting spirit of Mexico into the poem. The country has been through a lot of injustice, but the people continue to strive for better and I wanted my piece to reflect that.

Poem number three is entitled “Life Lessons for a Black Child”. With this poem I attempted to tie enslavement to the ways slave trauma has been passed down for generations and how African American families are still affected by it today. Much of this poem was inspired by lessons that my mother has passed down to me and my brother. I combined commonalities found in black families due to slave trauma and stereotypes that I have been warned by my mother against feeding into with the hopes of educating the reader on the ways in which Black people oppress themselves to an extent for their safety. This poem was important to the collection because not everyone is aware of how the legacy of slavery continues to impact the black community and black people everywhere are at a disadvantage because of that.

Poem number four entitled “Illegal Aliens” is a direct commentary on how Donald Trump’s plans for his upcoming term are perpetuating a culture of displacing Mexicans. This poem was not originally going to be a part of this collection, but after the results of election night it felt very important. The purpose of this poem is for the reader to understand how wrong it is to label Mexicans as illegal or alien. Many people seem to forget that the vast majority of American citizens cannot trace their lineage back to this continent. Most Mexicans can. This poem serves as a reminder that people in power cannot continue to displace native people.

Poem number five entitled “A Suffering Race or a Race of Suffering?” is where the collection starts to get personal. Similar to poem number three, in this poem I wrote about the suffering that continues to permeate black culture. However, in an effort to create a link to the last poem in the collection, I bring in specific examples of things I have experienced and struggled with as a black person. The goal of this poem is to give an example of how slave trauma can affect a person, specifically how it can cause cultural shame. It isn’t easy to be

different, and I think it's important that people who don't understand that specific struggle witness it.

The final poem in this collection entitled "Intersections" is a combination of everything I discussed in the previous poems; enslavement, displacement, slave trauma, black culture, and Mexican culture. Because intersectionality was also a topic that we discussed heavily, it made sense to me to end this collection by showing the reader how the struggles of my two cultures both shackle and liberate me. I am always going to struggle with racial and ethnic persecution. That is my cross to bear. However, I really wanted to use this poem to claim my cultures and the struggles they have passed down to me. I am proud to be Mexican and I am proud to be black. For the collection, this ties enslavement and displacement and the pain and struggle they cause into a little bow that is my very being. For me, this poem is a way of claiming the multifaceted nature of my identity and the trauma that comes with it while choosing to take pride in it anyway. Overall, this collection examines my ancestry and uses the enslavement and displacement of my ancestors to contextualize my lived experience and the lived experience of other black and Mexican people. I hope you enjoy.

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