

From the Daughter of an Immigrant

It's 2008, and it's my first day of middle school. I look around the cafeteria, waiting for the bell to ring for first period, and I realize how alone I am. I didn't understand why my mom forced me to come to a school where I knew no one. "*Esta escuela es mejor por que esta en el área de gringos*" my mom would tell me. Why did it matter that this school was in a white neighborhood and that it was predominantly white? I asked myself as I stood in the cafeteria alone, friendless, and anxious.

"The dream was this" my mom would tell my siblings and I growing up, "*que tuviéramos una vida mejor y ustedes un futuro exitoso*". Growing up and hearing my mom and dad talk about immigrating to America sounded like everything but a dream to me. "As soon as my feet touched the Rio Grande waters, I fell to the floor and could not walk," my mom said. "I walked for almost a week across the desert, and the muscle cramps on my legs and feet were excruciating, but I had no choice but to eat my pain away." Who could ever put themselves in such a dangerous situation by choice? I would think to myself.

It's 2015, and I am about to graduate high school. This is the first time I hear about who Donald Trump is because of the presidential election. "When Mexico sends its people... they're bringing drugs, they're bringing crime...they are rapists". "He won't win," I would say. He has no political experience. He does not hide his hatred for immigrants, the black, or the LGBTQ community. America would not choose someone like him, EVER!

The loud and obnoxious bell startles me, and I hurry to first period, desperately searching for a classroom in a school where I know no one. It's first period, and everyone must present themselves. I hear some laughter in the back as I say my name is Ixzel Moreno. "What does that even mean?" Says the girl next to me in a derogatory tone, and the entire class breaks into

laughter. Her name is Megan. She is tall, blonde, and has green eyes; she looks like the pretty, perky girls I see on Disney channel. The ones I wish I looked like. I quickly sit down and wait for the teacher to give her a warning, but he never does, which only further justifies her behavior. I feel tears filling my eyes and a tight knot in my throat that feels as if someone is choking me. I want to run, but I'm too embarrassed to move a muscle. I feel like a fish out of water gasping for air in a place where I'm all alone with no way of fending for myself.

I'll always remember her name and how she made me feel so little, so frivolous, like a small grain of sand in this huge universe.

*The border says stop to the
Wind, but the wind speaks
Another language, and keeps
going*

- "The Border" Alberto Rios

When one seeks a better life and future for themselves and their family, no borders exist. There are no language or cultural barriers one will not overcome to achieve a better life. People don't leave their native land and their entire lives behind for pure joy, but for necessity due to present dangers, famine, drug wars, etc.

It's early 2019, and I get the first glimpse of the Trump administration keeping immigrants in detention centers. I see children in cages without their parents. Where are their parents? What year are we living in that the government has turned to cage human beings like animals?

“No one wants to believe that they would turn their back on the cries of tormented children, yet we stand as a nation with their tears staining our souls. Despite the Administrations FEIGNED concern for families the harm has already been done”

- YWCA

How can we make a change when the ones in power don't want to see that change transpire?

I'm a minority. I've always been reminded of that. The color of my skin, the color of my hair, and the color of my eyes reflect who I am; a Mexican American minority with immigrant parents and siblings. My culture, my beliefs, and my language, they shape who I am. "You need to speak English, not Spanish," says my 6th-grade math teacher to some of my Hispanic friends and me as we discuss some math problems that we can't seem to solve. We look up and stare at each other, still so naïve to realize what racist remark we have just experienced. But how can a helpless and naïve group of middle school minorities stand up against a white teacher in a white school? How will our parents defend us against this discrimination if they do not speak the language? If they do not have the legal protection required? Especially if they are illegal immigrants.

It's 2016, and I'm nineteen. It's my first time voting, and I recognize the privilege I have to be able to. I voted for my parents, for my siblings who are DACA recipients, for every immigrant, for all minorities, for the LGBTQ community, and for women. Through my vote, I voiced my resistance against racism, hatred, homophobia, misogyny, and xenophobia.

“Voting is the expression of our commitment to ourselves, one another, this country, and this world”

- Sharon Zalzburg

It's November 2016, and my family and I anxiously await the presidential election results. We go to sleep afraid that Trump might win, but a part of us still hopes America would not choose someone so malevolent. I then wake up to my sister's cries. Just like millions of Dreamers that day, my sister was afraid for her future and for what was yet to come. The racism, ignorance, and hatred trump ignited through his presidency opened my eyes to the reality that was and is America. Trump's win was a dark time for all immigrants and minorities. Being comfortable and unafraid by the fact that Trump won emphasized the privilege and the racist persona living inside many people.

The world on a map looks like the drawing of a cow

In a butcher's shop, all those lines showing where to cut....

We seem to live in a world of maps:

But in truth we live in a world made

Not of paper and ink but of people.

Those lines are our lives. Together,

Let us turn the map until we see clearly:

The border is what joins us,

Not what separates us.

- "Boarder Lines" Alberto Rios

People seem to focus too much on race, skin color, and the attributions that make someone different but disregard the reasons why many travel thousands of miles to America. The lines/borders that physically separate countries should not be a reason that separates humanity from compassion. The lines that 'separate' countries should be viewed as lines that unite people

regardless of nationality. The maps of the world should not be seen as simple pieces of paper but should be seen as people because it is the people that unite those borderlines.

It's 2009, and sixth grade is slowly coming to an end. Looking back, I realize how young I was to have understood the racial inequities in the school system. "My mom and dad say Mexicans are lazy, and they only come to the US to steal our jobs," a classmate told me once. I do not think many of my classmates understood the necessity many people had to immigrate to America. I like to think that they were too young to comprehend how racist and degrading their comments were and that they were too naïve to think for themselves and speak up to their parents against racism. Because, after all, one isn't born racist; racism is taught.

"*Tu vales por dos*," my dad would tell me when I would say I didn't want to speak Spanish anymore. "Your mother and I came to America to give you and your siblings a better life. We endured too much pain in our journey to allow racist remarks to make us feel less than." As a child, it was difficult not to let derogatory words get to me, but my parent's stories and dreams were what made my brown skin thick and resistant.

Since 1996 — and especially after 9/11 — our immigration policies have drastically weakened the rights of immigrants. Many immigrants, including long-term legal residents, are torn away from their families under extremely harsh mandatory detention and deportation policies, or rushed through expedited proceedings that result in widespread mistakes and raise significant human rights concerns.

-The Leadership Conference of Civil & Human Rights

It's 2019, and children in cages continue to make headlines in the news. Adults are locked in a room cramped like sardines in a can with barely any air to breathe. The conditions they're

kept in are inhumane and unhygienic. As of 2020, over 400 kids are yet to be reunited with their parents. Where are their parents? Why were these families separated for? Immigrants come to America seeking a hopeful future, unaware that as soon as they step on US soil, they risk their basic human rights being stripped away. Trump and his administration have catapulted a wave of hate for immigrants that had been so well hidden for many years, waiting to dismantle the sea walls holding it back.

We will continue to protect our most vulnerable communities and demand a home for everyone here in our nation — a nation founded by refugees, immigrants, and those seeking religious freedom.

-The Leadership Conference of Civil & Human Rights

My parents have worked tirelessly every day of their lives for my siblings and me to have a better future. They worked tirelessly despite not being able to obtain benefits due to their illegal status. As the daughter of immigrants, you learn what it is to struggle and the many setbacks you and your family are presented with despite trying to achieve a better life. However, the obstacles help us grow stronger for what is yet to come.

It's September 2019, and after over 20 years of immigrating the US, my parents finally become US residents through my petition as their daughter. A heavy weight of anxiety is lifted off our shoulders. They can finally visit Mexico for the first time in 25 years.

- Ixzel Moreno

It's 2020, and I graduated high school over five years ago. As I write this, I ponder upon my first year of middle school and recall my mom saying how a 'white school' could benefit and further my education. I've learned about systematic racism and the disparities it has created in

educational settings, which have led to further social inequality. I understand the struggles many children go through due to a lack of resources because of the illegal status of their parents. The vicious treatment of immigrants through American policies – even before Trump's administration – has led to a humanitarian crisis that needs to be further addressed by government officials. It's November 2020, and for the first time in four years, there is a ray of hope for better days to come.

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