



07

We are Home
Rebecca Maria Silva Sellen





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EL APACHE

26



EL NEGRITO

“The greatest thing you have is your self image, a positive opinion of yourself. You must never let anyone take it from you.”

- Jaime Escalante





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December 2021
California

07



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EL ARBOL

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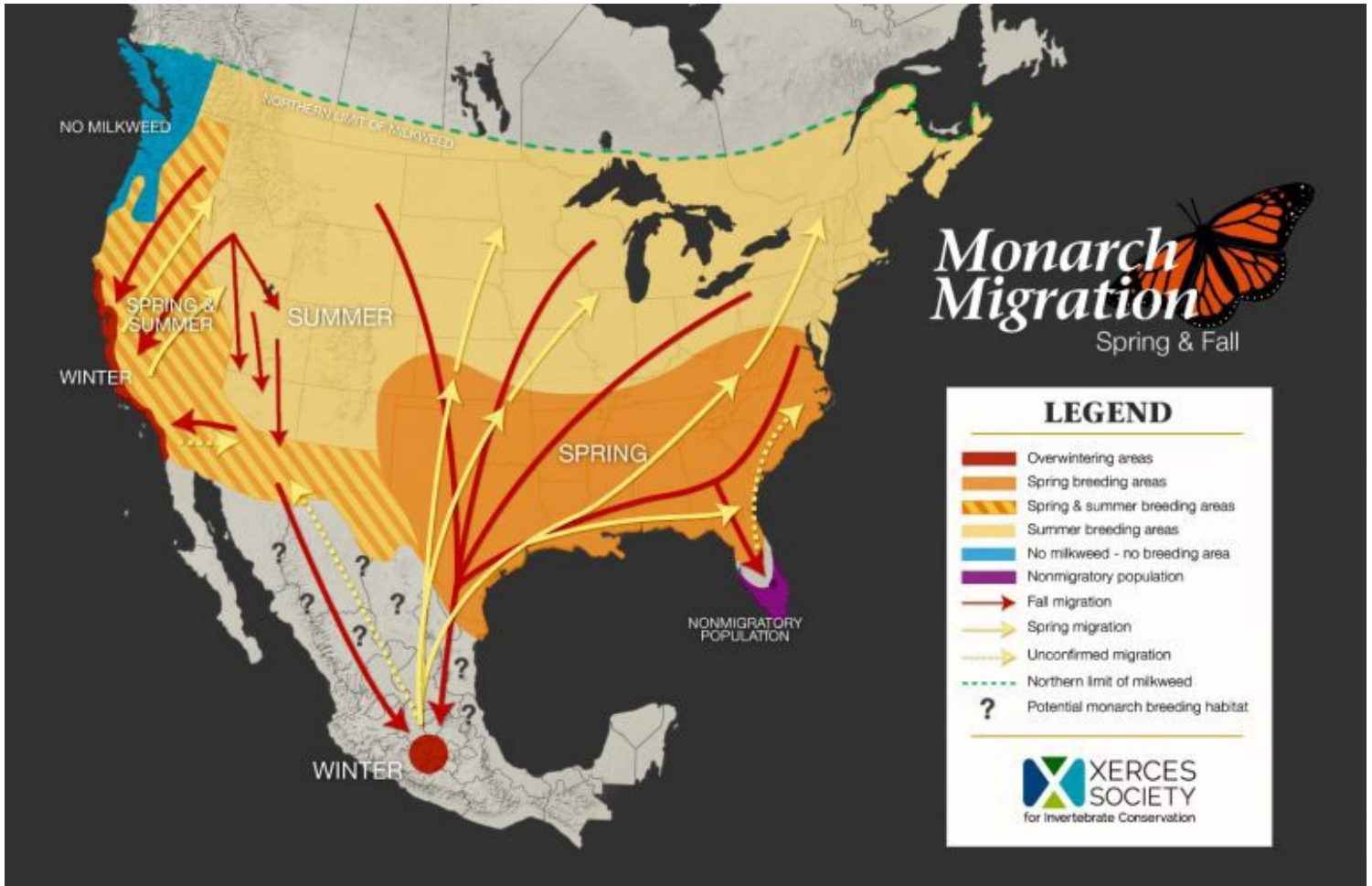
EL APACHE

1

Monarch Butterflies migrate from March to October each year. They travel from Mexico, through the United States, into Canada, and back again.

Monarch migration is multigenerational. It takes 3-4 generations to complete the full cycle of migration. As each generation is born, the butterflies continue on the migratory pattern set by those before them.





NO MILKWEED

NORTHERN LIMIT OF MILKWEED

SPRING & SUMMER

SUMMER

WINTER

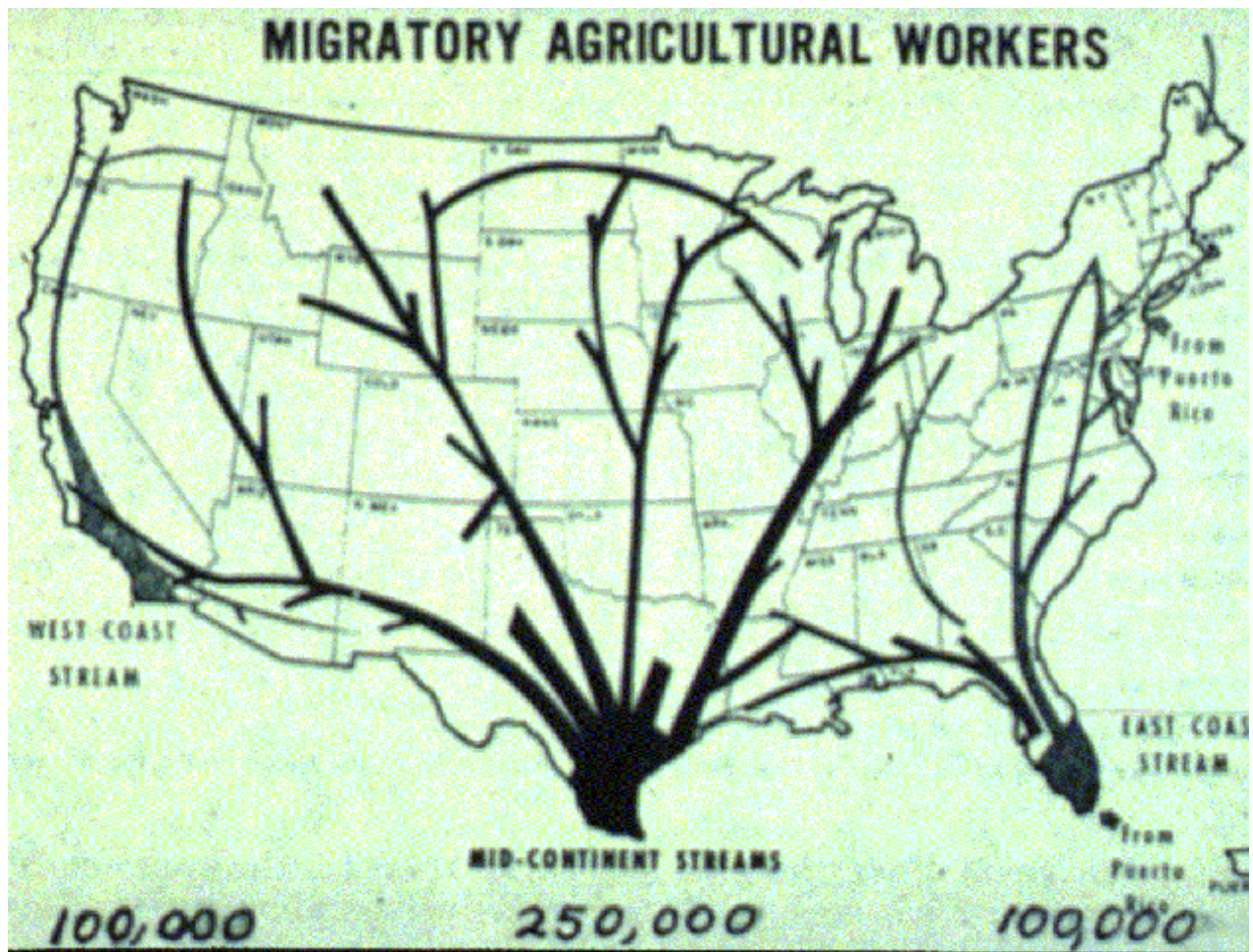
SPRING

NONMIGRATORY POPULATION

WINTER

XERCES SOCIETY
for Invertebrate Conservation

MIGRATORY AGRICULTURAL WORKERS





One continent. One people. Native to North America.

Free to move in patterns across the land, we migrated with the seasons, the animals and the vegetation.

We were colonized and were separated from the land.

Systems were built forcing us to assimilate and forget who we are.

Our roots were severed. Our connection to the land broken.

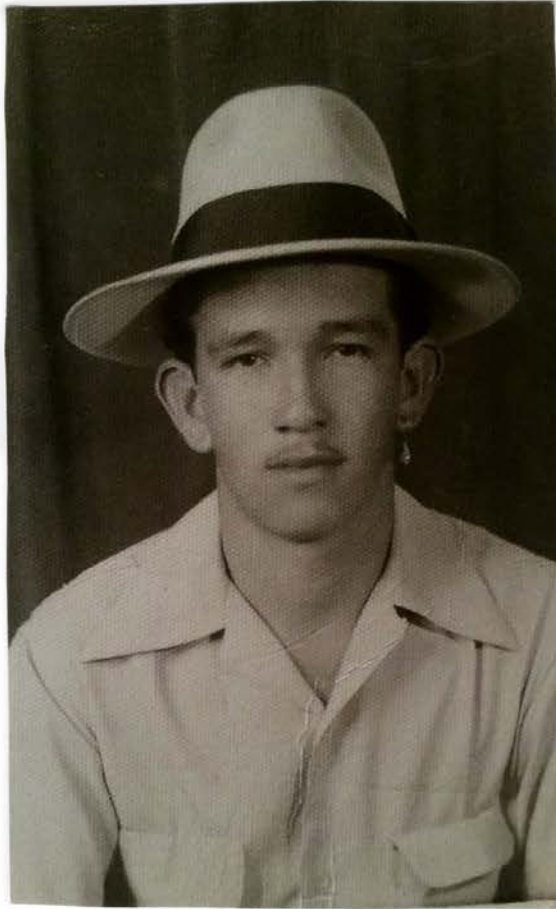
Treated as second class and inferior.

Continuously told this is not our Home.

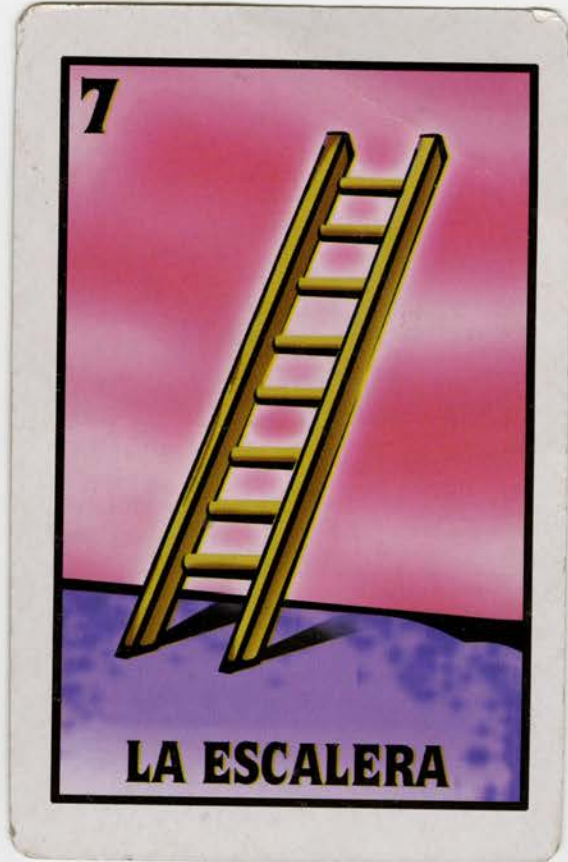
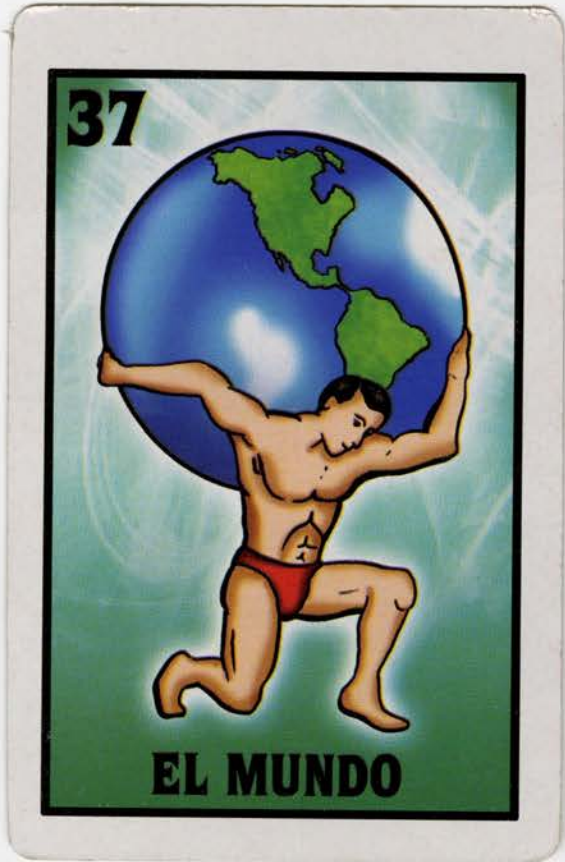
This is our Home. It has been our Home for thousands of years.

We are Indigenous. We are Native People.

We are Native American.







2







Aero, 8 years old, 3rd grade

"I am Mexican and American. I eat Mexican Food and American food. I like to salute and do the pledge of allegiance. I like to pretend I have a mustache.

Nobody at school knows I'm Mexican. My friend said 'Maybe your Mexican' and I said, 'Hardly, no.'

I feel like I'm American mostly.
When people know I am Mexican I feel happy.

I don't want to say but a lot of people are like Trump. When Obama was president, more people were Mexican. Then Trump came and less people were. When people say they like Trump I don't feel happy. I feel better when they say they like Biden."

Phoenix, 11 years old, 6th grade

"I am Mexican and American. I feel like both. I don't tell people I am Mexican. Some people aren't nice. Only people I trust and respect. I don't feel comfortable telling some of my friends.

I have guilt about being American and part of the U.S. I'm not like the people here. I don't want to be associated with them. Some people are nice and some people are not.

I don't like that I do not look Mexican. I am proud to be Mexican. I don't like people assuming I am only American and am on their side.

Trump thinks we are criminals, crooks, bad people. The cages weren't good. To him we are the enemy. People that shouldn't be helped or allowed to join. People here think that too. I feel hurt."





Ever, 10 years old, 4th grade

"I don't like to say I am Mexican. People just know. They ask me and I don't answer.

I am not included in America. They have more rights than Mexicans. I am outside of what is American.

I sort of feel disconnected. I am not welcomed because I'm darker skinned. Mexicans are treated different than Americans. Sometimes I wish I wasn't here. I want to disappear.

They make fun of me. Partly because I am Mexican. Partly because I have darker skin. Sometimes I feel more connected to being Mexican. I want to feel Mexican.

People think Trump is so good. I really don't like that. Trump thinks Mexicans don't matter, that they shouldn't be here. Some people are nice. People that look like me are nice. I wish there were more people that look like me here."

Quest, 13 years old, 8th grade

"I see myself as Mexican and American. Some people know I am Mexican but most people ask what I am.

I don't know how I feel. I can't decide. It's hard to feel connected to being American with all the negative things. I live here. I was born here.

Being American feels embarrassing. It's corrupt. There are a lot of close-minded and racist people here in our community and at school. They have Asian hate, Black people hate, things said about Mexicans. I don't want to be seen like one of those people.

I don't know enough about what American is to know the positive sides.

They are not good people to my brother because of how he looks. I don't feel it like he does. I've never been told anything directly.
I don't care if people say stuff. If they do, I will do something about it.

I know Trump wants Mexicans not to be here. He wants them to disappear.
Trump is bad for Mexicans."



38



EL APACHE

26



EL NEGRITO

3



The United States gained California in 1849. Many Mexican and native people lived on the land. The government granted them U.S citizenship. As gold was discovered, many faced racism and intimidation. Land was taken and many people of Native, Mexican, African and Asian decent were systematically forced out, brutalized, hung and killed.

Indigenous people throughout Canada, United States and Mexico were forced into Indian Assimilation schools. In 1884, the United States government passed the Dawes Act which legalized the separations. It was active until 1934.

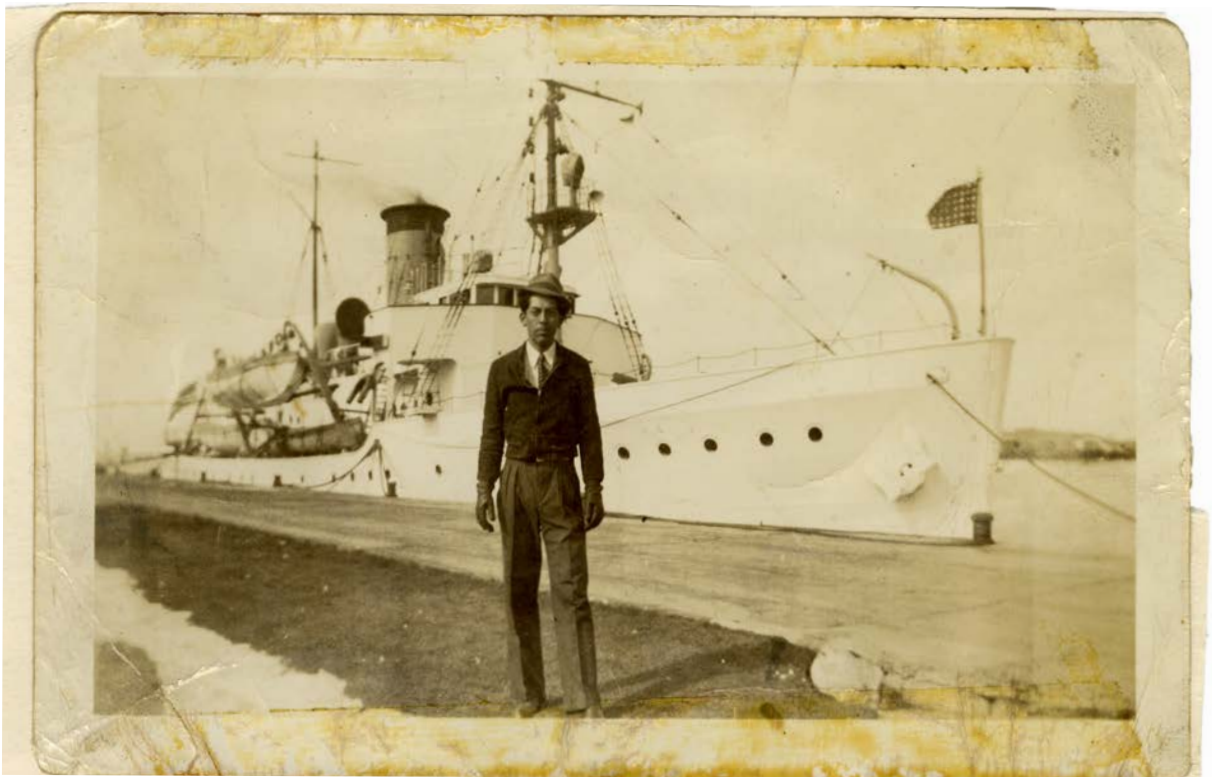
Language, culture and ties to their tribes were lost.

"I don't know much about my mother's grandmother. She was Indio (Native). I know her tribe was moved to Oklahoma but nobody knows the name. I don't think my mother even knew grandmother's real name, her Indian name."

- Maria

"My grandfather was born in Texas. He was in the military and fought in [WWI]. He was a US citizen. He married my grandmother in 1929 and they had my father in 1932."

- Maria



During the Great Depression 1929, President Herbert Hoover and many other politicians claimed Mexicans were stealing American jobs. Between 1929 - 1936, 2 million people of Native and Mexican ancestry were forcibly "returned" to Mexico by the United States government as part of the Repatriation Program.

1.2 million were American citizens.
Many had no ties to Mexico and spoke only English.



"When the plant closed, my father said he wasn't gonna go any place. Besides, that was the year, 1930, that Hoover was sending a lot of Meicans back to Mexico and a lot of Mexicans were working here at the plant. So instead of being forced out they left the country."

- Mary

In 1941, WWII called many men to the frontlines. The removal of Japanese into U.S internment camps followed in 1942. Many Asian American were working in agriculture and factories. There was a need for more workers so the government implemented the Bracero Program (1942 - 1964) to call back the Mexicans they had "returned" to Mexico just 10 years earlier.

"My father was in the El Bracero Program because the United States needed workers. He would drive the construction vehicles and the roadwork trucks. Well, many ranchers treated them unfairly. He never got paid. Years later there was a lawsuit but you had to show proof of what you worked. By that time, how do you show proof? He never filed anything. He didn't want any trouble."

- Gloria



As a result of the Bracero Program, many Mexicans began entering the United States to work alongside Mexican Americans. As the Mexican population began to grow, so did racism and prejudice. The government attempted to reverse the growing numbers and passed Operation Wetback in 1954. It was another mass deportation Act to rid the United States of the Mexican.



"[The United States government] decided they were done with all the workers. They wanted to send us back. You know, that was a derogatory term. The name they gave us. They called us [Wetback] because they said we crossed the river to get here."

- Gloria



"The ranchers were very, very mean. They had no respect for the people. The ranchers picked the workers up in those big work trucks, the kind with all the boards on the sides. Sometimes my father drove him and my mother there. They lived on the ranches if they could. They didn't really have a home. My mother said they use to stay in these little shacks. There were holes in the walls. She would cover the holes with newspaper to keep the cold out."

- Irene





The Zoot Suit riots, in the summer of 1943, was an attack on Mexican Americans who called themselves Pachucos. They dressed in hats, high-waisted, wide-legged trousers, and a long coat with wide padded shoulders called a zoot suit. The clothing was considered "unpatriotic" and the media perpetuated stories of criminal activity among Mexican American zoot suiters.

A mob of U.S servicemen went around the city, beating anyone they found that was of Mexican decent and wearing zoot suit attire. The first victims were 12 and 13 year old boys.





"My mother and father met downtown when she would hang out with her cousin. They went downtown a lot to the fiestas, carnivals, dances. They got married and had my brother. After that, my mother joined my father in the fields. You know, my mother lost 3 babies. They worked in the migrant camps picking apricots, tomatoes, cotton, and maybe lettuce."

-Irene



As migrant farmworkers, families continuously traveled. Some families travelled together while others separated according to the season. Many families have mixed citizenship. Some of the kids were born in the United States while others were born in Mexico.



"My mother's family did migrant work. They traveled through Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Southern California, Visalia. Their families moved around a lot. My mother picked cotton. Her mother cooked for el campo, you know the campesino's.

My father worked in the camps. That's where my mother and father met.

When they got married they lived in the United States, in Rincon, New Mexico. My mother stopped doing field work and stayed home with my grandmother in Juarez, Mexico. My father continued to work in the fields and would come home every so often. Whenever my mother was pregnant and close to her due date, my father would come back for her and they would cross the river. They would go to El Paso for her to give birth. She did that for 5 of her children until we moved to San Jose [California] permanently."

- Gloria

"Image packing up 1 suitcase of clothes, a few blankets, some bologna sandwiches and coming in a car that you weren't even sure could make it. Some family went to michigan to work but it snows there so we came to California. And my father had family here.

I lived with my father's aunt for 2 years while my mother and father worked the fields. My parents couldn't afford to keep me with them. They were very poor."

- Maria







"My mother was at the cleaners, that was her work, when JFK was killed. They were not into politics. They wanted to keep a low profile, cuz of the treatment. There was lots of racism. My mother said it was difficult to ride the bus [during segregation]. They treated all the people the same, Mexicans and Blacks. [My parents] didn't talk about that stuff. It was too hard. So we stuck to our own communities. You know, my mother's father was killed walking home, hit by a car. They never caught the guy."

- Irene



"As kids, we picked prunes every summer starting when I was about 7 or 8. We picked every year until I was about 13. The field we used to work in was against a gun range. One day as we were picking, the people started shooting at us. They just started shooting directly at us. We all went running. I'll never forget it. At the time there was this man named Juan Corona in the area that had been managing farms. He would hire workers and work and work them. He would put off paying them until he couldn't anymore. Then he would murder all the workers, bury them in the fields and hire more. My mother said, "It was probably Juan Corona shooting at us!" So we never went back (1967 - 1973)."

- Gloria



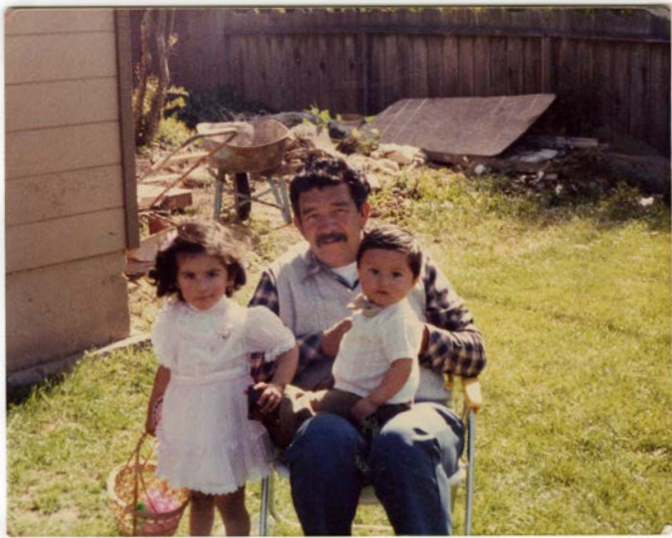
"So I grew up in East San Jose. Where we grew up there was a lot of diversity. Well not a lot of white people, but a lot of everyone else. I don't remember a lot of discrimination when I was a kid. I know that if you were "guero" you were favored, treated better. I mean, grandma was very dark. Grandpa was very light."

- Gloria

"During holidays when we would see my grandfather's family, I remember how loving and warm they greeted us. My Tia's would tell us how beautiful or handsome we were. 'Aye, que guero!' Oh, how light-skinned! It was an endearing term. We all knew light skin would help us in the world. We would be more accepted, more American."

- Rebecca





"My mother and father knew how to sign their name, knew how to read a little bit. Grandpa quit school and started working at 14. My mother started working at 16."

- Maria

"My parent's spoke a mix of Spanish and English. They knew both. I spoke mostly English to them. I picked up more spanish out in the community, interacting with people as I grew older."

- Irene

"Education became very important to my grandfather. He understood it was the way for us to get ahead. I remember him spending late night's in the garage studying and writing in his notebooks. He wanted to show his family that educaion was attainable. He finally graduated High school at 67."

- Rebecca

"Grandpa became a citizen right before he graduated High school in 1995. [Becoming a citizen] was a long process. As a family, politics weren't important to us. Grandpa became a citizen because he wanted to vote. It made him feel American. He didn't like the Bushes. He liked Condoleeza Rice. He said she was a "strong woman."

- Gloria





4





We live in a small town in the foothills of the Sierra Nevadas, just outside of Sacramento. It is on the edge of what is considered a mountain town and carries a rich and boasted history involving the Wild West, wagon trails, and the gold rush.

In 1849, five men considered "foreigners" were beaten and whipped after being accused of attempted robbery. None of the men spoke English. Three of the men were believed to be fugitives and were tried, convicted and hung by a mob of men. None of the men present witnessed the crimes. The news spread and the town aquired the name Hangtown. It is still used today in 2021.

"I think a lot of times we feel intimidated."

- Gloria

"All the gardeners here are mexican. They move around like, "I'm just here to work." They are very hesitant. The people here don't acknowledge them. I'm light. If I was a darker Mexican it would be different. People fear the dark, dark, person. The lighter we are, the less fear. And when you speak spanish it is worse."

- Maria





"I've had people tell me, 'Go back to your country.'

The other day, this white lady came into the store and she couldn't get her debit card to work. She kept calling me incompetent. When I tried to help her she got more mad, told me to go back to where I came from. Another lady in line stood up for me. She said; "Do you know your history?" The lady told her to mind her own business but she kept asking her. She finally said, "Yes, I do. But we are superior to any other race."

- Irene

"They were hard workers. They really worked. They were constantly working. But I mean, they had no money. They couldn't eat."

- Irene

"My parents were happy I graduated high school. To see your kid graduate high school, get a job at McDonald's and pay their bills was an accomplishment. Being Mexican American, I guess we just thought that was the best that we could do. We were surviving. The mentality is that's our place, under the white man."

-Maria

**I believe the best
SOCIAL PROGRAM
is a JOB!**

-Reagan





"Sometimes when I go to the doctor's office, they look at me and start speaking Spanish automatically. I just say; "Yeah, I don't know what your saying." Even though I do. They look at me, these white people trying to speak Spanish to me. (laughs) They assume I don't speak english."

- Gloria

"When you walk into Nob Hill (Belair) and your the only Mexican there, you get looked at. But I don't care. I walk with my head high. I won't be embarrassed. A lot of Mexicans are afraid, shy. Society has put that on Mexicans, like they are not good enough. 'You are not good enough to come here because I am better than you.' Well, I am a human just like you."

- Maria

"My father had a fear of accomplishment. He just wanted to keep his head down. Didn't want to draw attention to himself. He never wanted any trouble. If you stand out then it's reason for them to go after you. It's something that's just known."

- Maria

"They call my son names in school. They point out his skin color and call him stupid and ugly. They have called him Nigger. This is what their families have taught them. To hate those with darker skin."

- Rebecca





"We are Mexican. We belong to the Indians. I feel proud but sad at the same time because of so much hate Trump is spreading, teaching white people it's ok to hate and discriminate."

- Maria



"I am not political. It's too depressing. Knowing history and then having to hear all the garbage people bring up. Politics is a big let down. I don't remember too much racism growing up. Maybe I was too young to understand. I've had a lot of things happen really recently."

- Irene



"When I was young I wanted to be an American.

It represented good stuff. A roof over your head, fun, food. Mexico seemed hard. You had to work at a young age.

It wasn't until I got older that I got curious about where we come from. If this was our land, what right did the white man have to take it away? Can you imagine no white person here? What would it have been like?

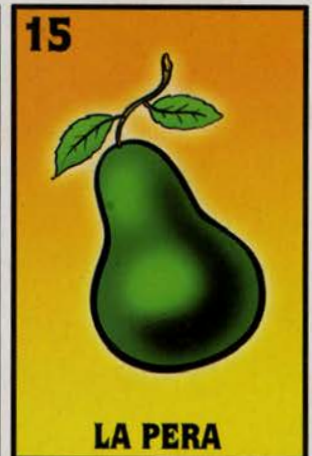
What would have happened if they came and treated us as equals? We could have had the corner office jobs too. Well, there are some that do I guess but there would have been more of us."

- Maria





TABLA 3



5

My children and I had multiple discussions throughout the project. Near the project's close, I asked them to take part in one more exercise. I brought out their original photos printed out on drawing paper. I invited them to reimagine themselves. They were asked to draw, paint or write over their photos in any way they chose to visually state and reclaim their identities. We worked collaboratively to interpret and complete their vision.

The following pages are the result of that work.





The flowers are peace and happiness.

On my shirt I added all the colors for nature; Earth, Fire, Water, Air and Food.

My face and hair are made to stand out because I am taking back what was taken from my family.

I thought about what I would look like if it was never taken.









I am returning to Nature.

Returning to what I would look like if we
were never assimilated.

Imagining what I would look like if the
Europeans came and we were seen as
equals.



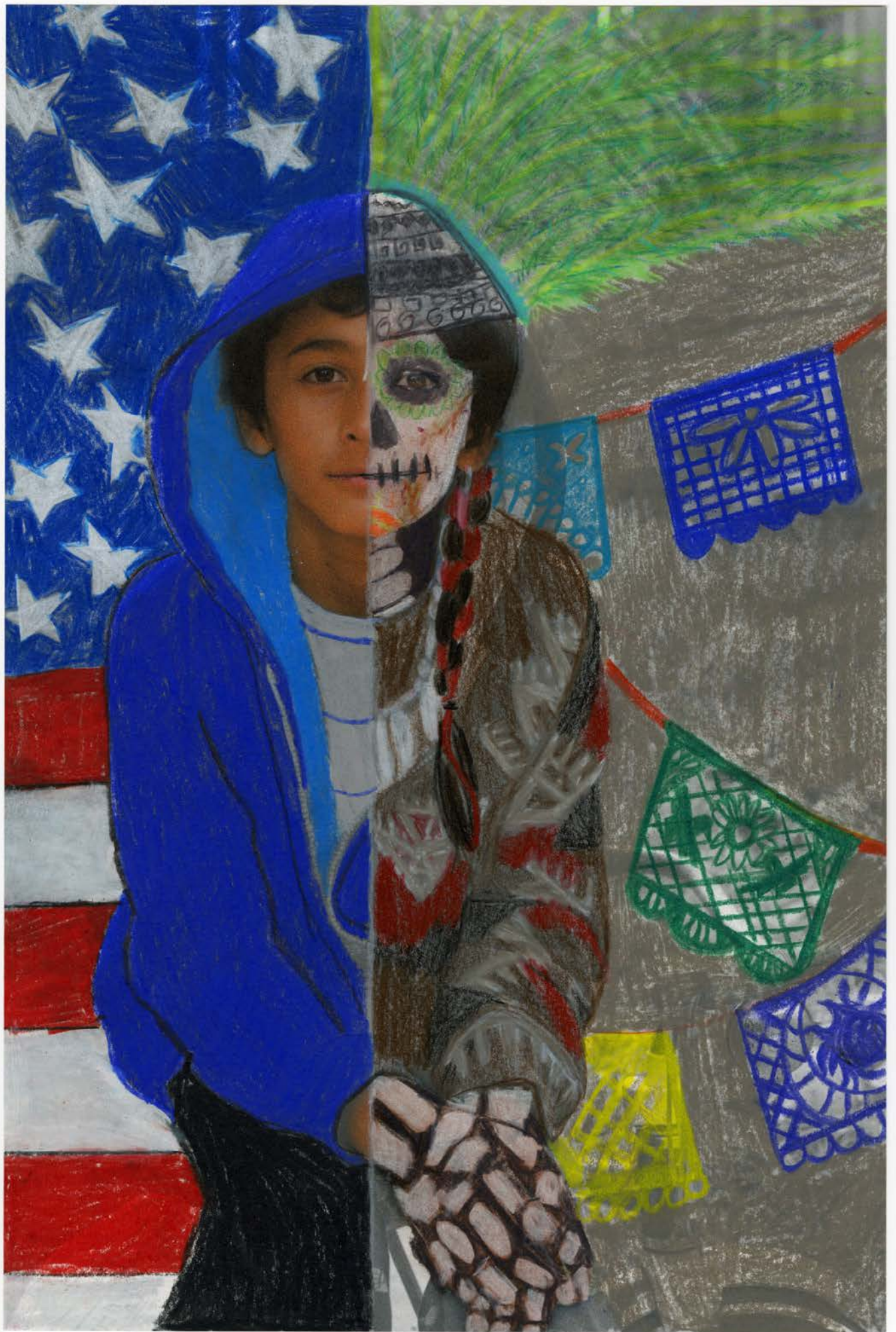


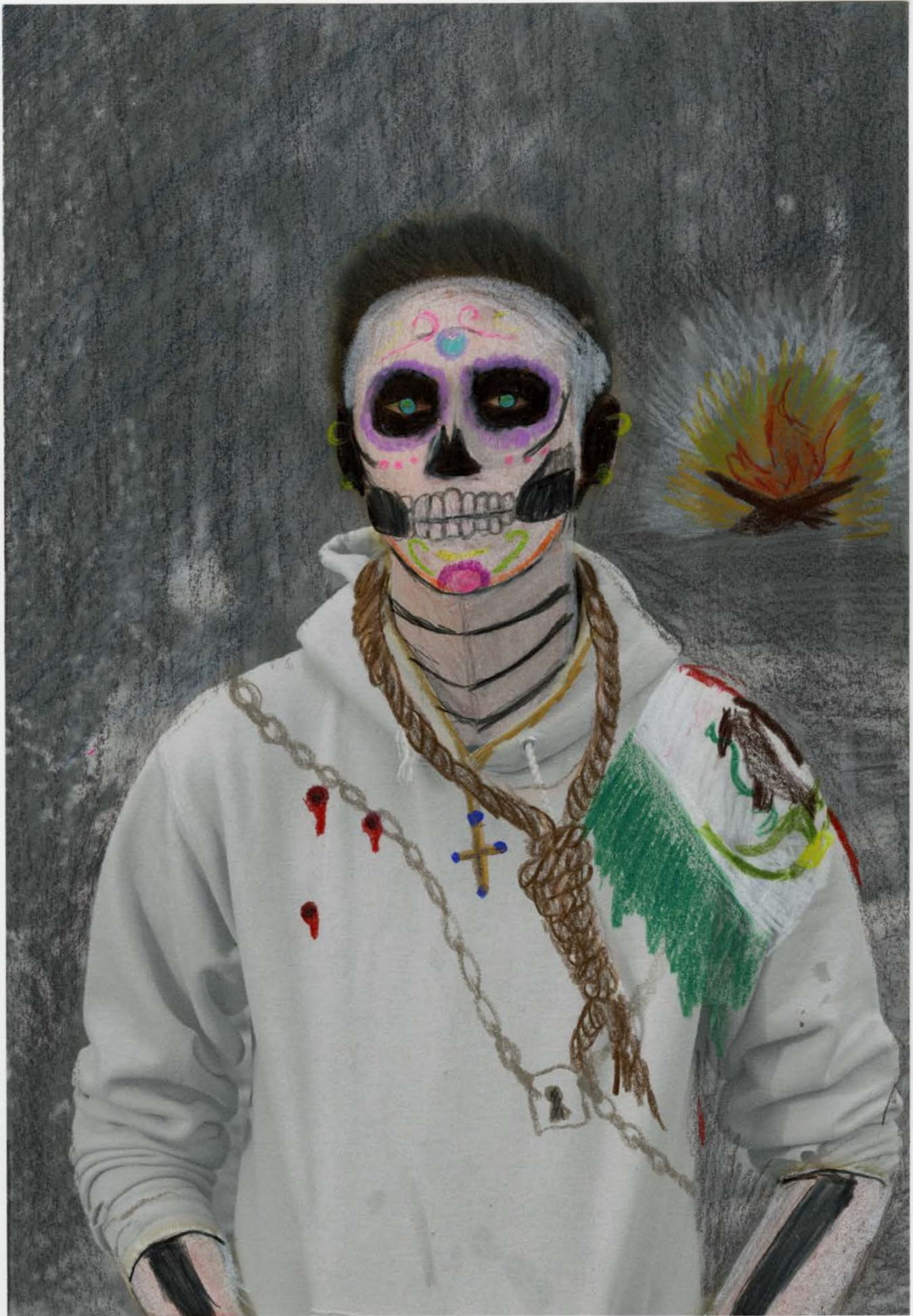
They see the right side and left side.

I am indigenous. I am Mexican.

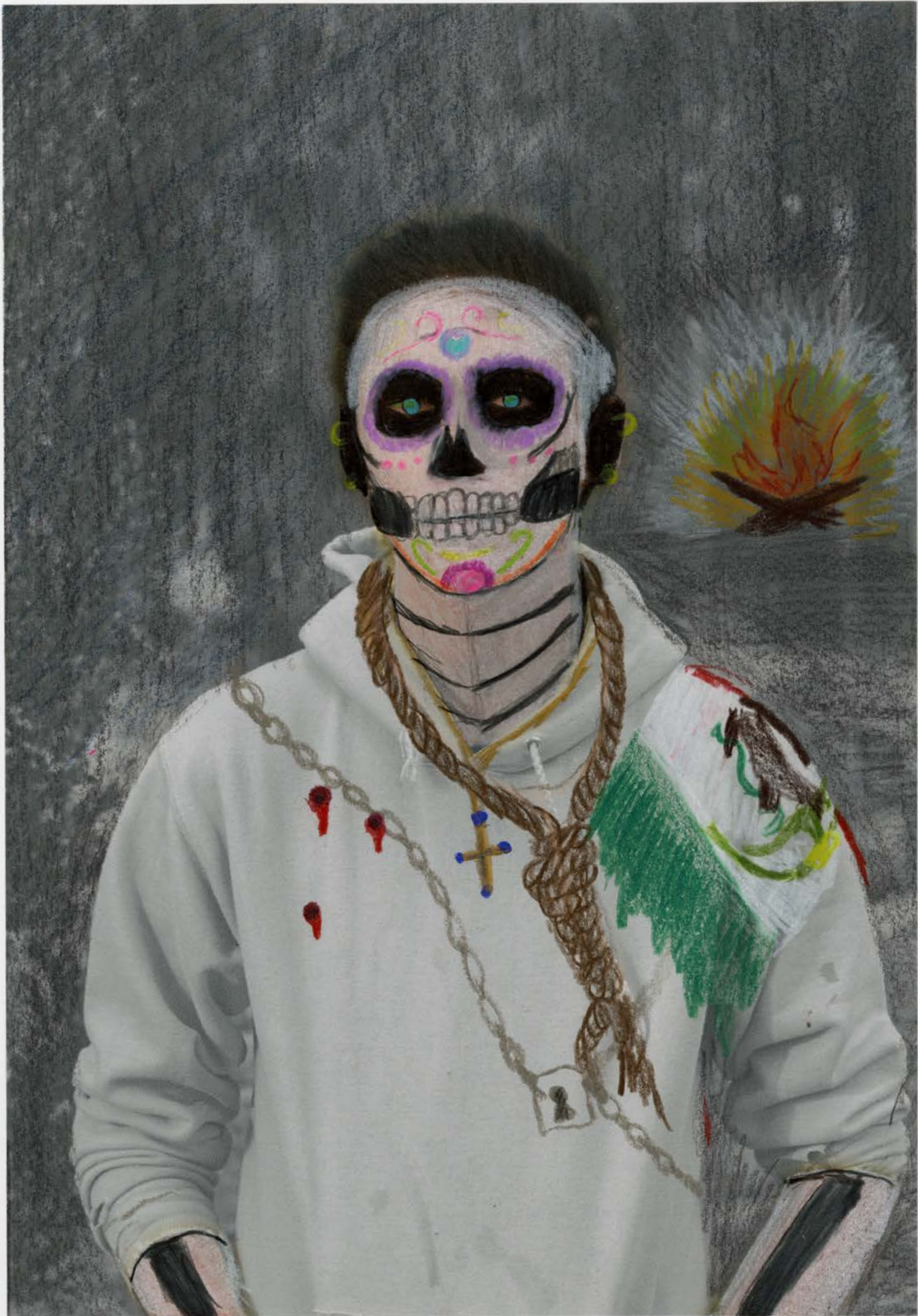
I am American.

I am here. I belong.









Back from the dead.

You can't crush my spirit.

For the people that were hung, shot,
chained, and in cages.

The fire burns in the back to show our
spark of hope.

Our fire has not gone out.

29



EL TAMBOR

12



EL VALIENTE

5

I am an American but have never felt "American".

People of indigenous ancestry continue to be displaced in our communities through nuances in communication, societal messages, the structures of our society and political policy. We are not "American" by default. The tones of our skin are questioned. Were you born here? Where are you from? Do you speak English? If my skin or the skin of my children do not match an "American's" complexion, we are questioned. We must not belong. We belong outside of this place, outside of the United States.

I am Indigenous, Mexican, and American.
This is where I belong.







Soy De mi Dueña

Gregoria Barela

I am my owner.

- Gregoria



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To my family. This story could not have been told without your bravery and honesty. I am very grateful for your participation and humbled by your stories. Thank you to my professors, colleagues and friends for your help and support while making this book.





WARRIORS

As descendants of indigenous people, our ancestral line has lived and died on this land for thousands of years. We have never known any other place, yet we struggle with feeling at home and with what it means to be American.

