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Does Chicano Rap Empower the Twenty-First Century Immigrants' Rights Movement in the United States?

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You got no fuckin' idea what La Raza means
It's about our people out there working
Surviving with pride and dignity, that's La Raza
It's all goin down this year
-- Kid Frost, "La Raza, Part II"

People typically keep social movements and music in two completely different categories. However, such binary categorization fails to recognize how one may inform the other. The relationship between Chicano Rap and the twenty-first century Immigrants' Rights Movement proves that music can be a powerful instrument to communicating the voice of a social movement.

The United States in the twenty-first century continues to struggle with the issue of immigration. The anti-immigrant sentiment of the U.S. government and its citizens led to the formation, activism, and outcry of the twenty-first century Immigrants' Rights Movement. The demands of this movement have overlapped those of other social movements that started in the 1940s, such as the Civil Rights Movement, the Chicano Movement, and the Farm Worker Movement. Each of these movements, while approaching from different directions, addresses the ongoing violations and subsequent demands of the immigrant community.

Chicano Rap, "a subgenre of Rap music as well as Latin Hip Hop," which is used as a tool to communicate the hardships and obstacles faced by the undermined Mexican immigrant community, empowers the Immigrants' Rights Movement (2). Chicano Rap lyrics from several Chicano artists, including Kid Frost, Cypress Hill, Control Machete, Lil' Rob, Proper Dos, Akwid, and Kinto Sol, expose the frustrations and demands of Mexican immigrants and Chicanos living in the U.S., and thus, encourage activism to change anti-immigrant United States legislature and national mentality. Chicano Rap embraces the preservation of Chicano and Mexican identity, therefore, giving people the power to pressure the U.S. government to bend to the demands of the Mexican community of which most are undocumented. Instead of employing immigration reforms to help the immigrant community, the United States government shows aggression and unjust legal actions that hurt undocumented Mexicans and Chicanos, and thus, Chicano Rap upholds activism in the Immigrants' Rights Movement to obtain legislative changes. Because Chicano Rap vividly points out the abuses committed by the United States on the undocumented Mexican community, the music empowers the Immigrants' Rights Movement to gain momentum against the U.S. government.

Chicano Rap demands the unity of the undocumented Mexican and Chicano community in social movements, specifically the Immigrants' Rights Movement, in order to gain respect and changes in the United States.

Preserving a strong identity, undocumented Mexicans and Chicanos gain the power to strengthen the Immigrants' Rights Movement in the United States. Although people migrate into the United States from all over the world, according to the 2004 Pew Hispanic Center report, "Mexicans make up 57 percent of the undocumented immigrants," and Mexican migration has increased "almost 15-fold from about 76,000 in the 1970 Census to more than 11 million in 2004" (Passel 2). Because Mexican immigrants make up the largest group of immigrants in the U.S., Chicanos, a word that has come to mean "those who are of Mexican descent, whether born in the United States or in Mexico" but have U.S. citizenship, need to embrace their unique identity (Munoz 7). Describing the power that upholding Chicano identity gives to the Immigrants' Rights Movement through diary entries, Carlos Morton states, "Hay que aceptar parte de nuestra 'americanidad' tanto como nuestra 'mexicanidad.' We must find a happy medium entre los dos, y ser orgullosos de nuestro mestizaje cultural as we are for our racial mixture" (34)[1]. However, Chicanos who should benefit from their citizenship rights, which under the Fourteenth Amendment states, "All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside," suffer from the same discrimination and abuse that undocumented Mexicans suffer in the United States (Jacobson 646). Because Chicanos are treated as second-class citizens, they must maintain a strong identity that reinforces their power in the Immigrants' Rights Movement in order to demand conscientiousness from the U.S. government to treat undocumented Mexicans and Chicanos with equality and humanity.

Chicano rappers encourage the preservation of Chicano and Mexican identities in order to strengthen their demands in the Immigrants' Rights Movement. Because Chicano rappers are usually of Chicano descent, they use lyrics that are heavily influenced by Mexican history and themes relevant to Mexicans

[1] We must accept part of our 'Americanism' just as much as our 'Mexicanism.' We must find a happy medium between the two, and be proud of our cultural mixture as we are of our racial mixture.

living in the United States; their lyrics promote pride and respect for Mexican heritage, language, and race. In the song, *El Principio*, Mexican rapper Akwid states, "Y no importa donde me encuentre/ Siempre me acuerdo de 'onde vengo/ Pura raza mexicana . . . 100%," explaining that people must always embrace their Mexican heritage because their legal status in the United States should not be what makes them who they are[2]. Kid Frost, a rapper from East L.A. who brought new attention to Chicano Rap echoes these sentiments in his song, *La Raza*, when he states, "Si en da street hold all betters/ Chicanos and I'm brown and proud."[3] Embracing their Mexican heritage, their skin color, and thus, their identity, Chicano rappers encourage undocumented Mexicans and Chicanos to take pride in their culture. "We choose to call ourselves Chicanos! Chicano means pride and certainty. Chicano stands for justice and equality. Chicano means a warm and understanding human being who desires the best for all people;" this rationale is enforced by Chicano rappers who seek to empower undocumented Mexican and Chicano communities in order for the U.S. to guarantee and enforce the protection of their human rights (De Leon 65). Chicano rappers motivate undocumented Mexicans and Chicanos to hold close their Mexican culture and their brown pride in order to strengthen their demands to the U.S. government in the Immigrants' Rights Movement.

Legislative initiatives from the 1940s to the twentieth century enforced anti-immigrant sentiments in the U.S., therefore, the slow implementation of U.S. immigration reform motivate undocumented Mexicans and Chicanos to advocate for their human rights in the twenty-first century Immigrant's Rights Movement. The 1942 Bracero Program between the U.S. and the Mexican government was abused by U.S. farm owners because they exploited migrant Mexican workers that came to the U.S. on temporary permits with underpay and unsanitary living conditions (Marentes 3). The H-2A Visa Program created formal barriers for immigrant farm laborers to apply for citizenship, thus "working under the threat of being sent home to Mexico, or not hired back the following year, workers [were] reluctant to complain about working or living conditions" (Shea 126). With the 1954 Operation Wetback, "the INS claimed to have apprehended nearly 1.1 million Mexican nationals," and thus, the "neighborhood sweeps" on illegal immigrants targeted

[2] And it does not matter where I am/ I always remember where I am from/ All Mexican Raza . . . 100%.
[3] If in the street hold all betters/ Chicanos and I'm brown and proud.

"predominately Mexican American neighborhoods in the southwestern states and received extensive news coverage" (Gutierrez 180). Even though the United States aimed anti-immigrant legislature to expand the rights of its citizens, these laws not only discriminated against undocumented Mexicans but also Chicanos who should have full access to their citizenship rights. In 1982, President Ronald Reagan established the program, "Operation Jobs," which arrested undocumented immigrants holding supposedly well-paying jobs to free those jobs for U.S. citizens (Flores 94). By 1997, political parties combined legislative goals and received approval of President Clinton to "remove welfare benefits (food stamps, payments to elderly and disabled people) from not only illegal but legal immigrants" (Zinn 648). California's Proposition 187 "banned all state services, including health care and education, to undocumented immigrants" (Chang 375). Belittled and ripped from social justice throughout U.S. history, undocumented Mexicans and Chicanos continue advocating for human rights and equality in the twenty-first century Immigrants' Rights Movement. Despite the end and unconstitutionality of some anti-immigrant U.S. initiatives, people must continue waging war against discriminatory and exploitive legislature that targets undocumented Mexicans, Chicanos and other immigrant communities. Clarifying the role of U.S. immigrants in the twenty-fist century Immigrants' Rights Movement, Angelica Sala from the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles states, "We are good people who want to contribute to this nation . . . Most of the time we're invisible to society, but this is who we are. We're not criminals" (Pomfret and Geis 1). Because "Mexicans have always occupied a unique position among immigrants to the United States, unaided by their precursors, relegated to the lowest paying jobs, and forced to live in rural squalor and degrading slums," undocumented Mexicans and Chicanos have been and are oppressed under punitive U.S. legislature (Meier and Rivera 111).

Chicano Rap motivates undocumented Mexicans and Chicanos to engage in the twenty-first century Immigrant's Rights Movement in order to push the U.S. government to help the immigrant community with effective immigration reform. In *La Raza, Part II*, Kid Frost encourages activism among undocumented Mexicans and Chicanos in order to demand respect and new legislature from the United States government. He states, "Man, I think I came up with a solution/ And the answer is Brown Revolution/ So pump fist to this/ And wave your Mexican Flag." Confronted with the constant harassment of the government and fearing

deportation, in his song *Harto*, Akwid states, "Estoy harto de vivir asi/ No puedo mas con esta vida/ La realidad que me confrenta no se olvida/ . . . Pinché gobierno me quiere sacar del norte."[4] Chicano lyrics expose the suffering and anxiety that undocumented Mexicans and Chicanos endure under U.S. anti-immigrant legislature, and yet, the violations committed against the immigrant community boosts activism and support for the Immigrants' Rights Movement. In the song, *Los Hijos Del Maiz*, Kinto Sol, one of the leaders of the Spanish language hip-hop movement, states, "Dueño de nada en un mundo inseguro/ Medio comiendo un pan medio duro/ Esclavo del hambre/ miseria violencia/ Aveces parendes a no tener conciencia/ Trabajos no hay/ Dinero esta escaso/ Políticos con feria no nos hacen caso... Le llaman democracia (si como no)/ Me causa gracia/ Pero mas dolor y me deja un mal sabor."[5] Kinto Sol's lyrics emphasize the lack of trust that undocumented Mexicans and Chicanos have towards the U.S. government, hence, they mock democratic values because they live in poverty and government initiatives strip them from their human rights. In the album titled, *Mexican Power*, Proper Dos vividly describes the torment that oppressed immigrant communities tolerate under anti-immigrant laws. In his song, *M.F.M*, he states, "And won't stop til my point's understood/ And I ain't gonna do it in my own neighborhood/ I'm gonna do it where they'll be affected/ Until some civilized muthafuckas are elected." Urging the immigrant community to defend their rights in social movements and protests, Chicano Rap advocates for new leadership and beneficial legislature that will diminish the anti-immigrant sentiment in the U.S. Chicano Rap shows support for the rights of undermined undocumented Mexicans and Chicanos, therefore, underpinning the initiatives of the Immigrants' Rights Movement.

Enacting U.S. anti-immigrant legislature, police and government officials discriminate, abuse, and terrorize undocumented Mexicans and Chicanos, thus, pushing them to protest their rights through the Immigrants' Rights Movement. Implementation of the "Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal

[4] I am fed up of living like this/ I cannot deal with this life anymore/ The reality that confronts me cannot be forgotten/ . . . Damn government it wants to get me out of the north.

[5] Owner of nothing in this uncertain World/ Sort of eating bread that it sort of hard/ A slave of hunger/ misery violence/ Sometimes you seem not to have a conscience/ There are no jobs/ Money is scarce/ Politicians with money do not pay us any attention . . . They call it democracy (yeah ok) / It humors me/ But gives me more pain and it leaves me with a bad taste.

Immigration Control Act (HR 4437)- the Sensenbrenner bill," required the creation of a 700 mile fence along the US-Mexican border, an upscale of deportations and raids, and criminalizes anyone who assists undocumented immigrants or illegally immigrates to the U.S. as a felon under federal jurisdiction. The replacement of the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) with three stronger agencies under the control of the Department of Homeland Security, which include the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), cause further anti-immigrant sentiments in the U.S. (De Genova 2). In spring of 2006, the Immigrants' Rights Movement of the twenty-first century came to life through mass protest mobilization throughout the United States. Millions of people defended the rights of the immigrant community, specifically with the one-day general strike and boycott, "A Day Without Immigrants" (Johnson 11). Immigrants marched for justice because not seeking U.S. citizenship, they face exclusion from voting, holding elective office, statutory exclusion, or limited access to social services, employment, licensing, educational programs, and are subject to deportation at any time (Garcia 612). Just a year before, the Department of Homeland Security announced a new "aggressive" and "hard-hitting" campaign of raids and deportations to "[reverse] the growing tolerance for . . . illegal immigration," which fueled the uproar and protests of the fraught immigrant community (9). Anita Kumar and Jose Cardenas from the St. Petersburg Times report, "the marches were really a reaction to what they felt was an attack . . . the fear they have is that they will be deported and lose the good they have accomplished in this country," describing the terror and anxiety that affects the daily lives of the immigrant community. Immigrants and Chicanos must continue their fight against abusive legislature that limits and abuses the rights of unprotected immigrant communities in the United States.

Chicano Rap reveals the mistreatment and terror that anti-immigrant legislature encourages on the immigrant community from U.S. police and government officials, therefore, sustaining the need for the Immigrants' Rights Movement. In the song, *Interrogated Cuzz I'm Brown*, Proper Dos raps about the discrimination that he faced under police persecution for looking Mexican. He states, "So we're lost in the system cops trying to keep us down, interrogated cause our skin is Brown/ . . . Now it was time for the pigs

to have some fun/ trying to get me to confess to a crime I never done/ I was a victim of harassment." Chicano rappers depict anger and defiant behavior against U.S. police and government officials through their lyrics in order to expose the human right violations committed on the undocumented Mexican and Chicano population. In the song, *Homocide*, Kid Frost states, "Now, asked in this situation, exactly what would you do?/ If you heard someone screaming, would you go to the rescue?/ My man tried, that's how he died/ He was shot right between the eyes." Vividly exposing the dangers that undocumented Mexicans and Chicanos tackle when they face extreme discrimination and intolerance in their communities, Chicano Rap explains that people distrust the police, and thus, they fail to report violence and abuses in their communities because they perceive police and government officials as enforcers of anti-immigrant standpoints. B-Real from Cypress Hill in the famous song, *Riot Starter*, states, "Look at all the pigs they can't hold me down/ Riot gear on, they fienin to get clowned/ watch as I throw my weight, they hesitate/ while I'm circulatin the flow/ movin through every state." Emphasizing the power of the undocumented Mexican and Chicano population to overthrow and escape the police, Chicano Rap empowers the immigrant community to defend their rights through active protests, such as in the Immigrants' Rights Movement.

Enforcing unity among undocumented Mexicans, Chicanos, and other immigrants in the U.S., activists of the Immigrants' Rights Movement secure the power to force the government to listen to their voice, which demands for equality, human rights, and justice for all people living in the U.S. With the purpose of obtaining results from the U.S. government, "Chicanos and Mexicans joined together to defend the community interests, define community membership, establish key symbols, and claim rights in the process establishing a social space that enabled undocumented Mexicans to participate with Chicanos in struggling for their own rights" (Flores 90). Because undocumented Mexicans and Chicanos need to corroborate their value and existence to the U.S. government, the Immigrants' Rights Movement needs people who will argue and state, "We can't let them divide us. We must defend each other. Just because someone doesn't have papers doesn't mean they don't have rights" (Halbwachs 156). The minority status of the immigrant community can be overcome with unity and support among the ever expanding Mexican, Chicano, and immigrant community because "where party organizations are strong, coalition-building

flourishes: where they are weak, the politics of factional rivalry prevails" (Polsby 66). The twenty-first century Immigrants' Rights Movement proves that "a broad fraternity of Mexican Americans, especially those who participate in the movimiento, identify with their working-class roots and feel an obligation to their community," empowers the undocumented Mexican and Chicano community (Rosales 250). Demonstrating to the world that the U.S. is made by immigrants, undocumented Mexicans and Chicanos must join to succeed in the fight for their rights. For as Renan Almendarez Coello from L.A.'s most popular Spanish morning radio show states, "the community needs to see us together so [that] they can understand the message that united we are much more powerful" (Pomfret and Geis 1).

Lyrics from Chicano Rap hold the key to empower the Immigrants' Rights Movement because messages of unity among undocumented Mexicans and Chicanos inspire the immigrant community to strive towards immigration reform. Kid Frost, in his song, *La Familia*, states, "So if you're brown your down, so stay proud/ and remember no busters allowed/ Cause the Mexican people is a big ass gang, yeah/ It's a family thing, huh," explaining that people who are seen as inferior by Americans with anti-immigrant sentiments, need to stick together with brown pride. Power in numbers strikes fear in the U.S. government, hence, uniting and forming alliances strengthens the claims made by the immigrant community. In the song, *Brown Crowd*, Lil Rob, a Chicano record producer and Rap artist from San Diego, California, states, "Chicano sounds are the downest/ . . . brown crowd with the sounds of the brown for the barrio/ . . . Brown, Brown Crowd Chicano we're proud and proud to be Brown/ Got the Brown Crowd bumpin' loud." Unity among the undocumented Mexican, Chicano and other misrepresented immigrant communities sparks their desire and courage to demand change in the government. Challenging anti-immigrant legislature has become one of the most difficult and feared contributions of the immigrant community because risking deportation, imprisonment, and loss of homes and employment, prevent then from engaging in further action. Chicano rapper Control Machete in the song, *Humanos Mexicanos*, states, "somos una Raza que toma el Machete/ para defender lo que nos pertenece/ (Crece) la lucha unida/ (Siente) por un ideal dar la vida/ golpe tras golpe me voy a levantar/ y mis paisanos nunca se van a rezagar/ Ya no más voy a correr, ya no más/ voy a huir, ya

no más voy a morir/ Somos humanos y nos llaman Mexicanos."[6] Chicano Rap encourages unity among undocumented Mexicans, Chicanos and other immigrants in order to overcome the challenges of the Immigrants' Rights Movement in the U.S.

Even though Chicano Rap contains powerful lyrics that empower undocumented Mexicans and Chicanos in their social movements, people will argue that Chicano Rap supports gang violence, civil disturbance against authority, and anti-American attitudes. The use of vulgar language and curse words are common in Chicano Rap, thus, the music causes shock and alarm. However, the rage and attention that Chicano rappers expose in their strong lyrics captures the attention of people in their communities. In the song, *First Day of School*, Proper Dos states, "The bitch was as prejudice as prejudice can be/ And if that wasn't enough/ The old hoe told me to go back to Mexico/ I wanted to kill the ole crow." Provoking a reaction whether of appall or interest, Chicano Rap achieves its purpose. People argue that exposing the issues dealt by undocumented Mexican and Chicano communities through disturbing lyrics causes a backlash and a negative image to Chicano Rap, thus, instead of empowering the community, it encourages it to engage in violent and deviant behavior. Despite the controversy that Chicano Rap lyrics may cause, people cannot underestimate the powerful messages of identity, unity, protest, and social justice that it succeeds to deliver to its audience.

Music is a tool to communicate the needs of the oppressed and undermined communities, and thus, empower social movements. Chicano Rap through its powerful lyrics underpins the visions of the twenty-first century Immigrants' Rights Movement. Demonstrating that Chicano Rap is the means by which the Immigrants' Rights movement gains momentum, Kinto Sol in his song, *Dejo Mi Huella*, states, "Soy simplemente un arma/ De esta revolución/ La invasión a tu nación/ Sigue avanzando/ . . . Recibiendo regresando/ El amor a los que tienen/ Nuestro mismo color."[7] Therefore, Chicano Rap welcomes the preservation of Chicano and Mexican identity in order to empower undocumented Mexicans and Chicanos;

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[6] We are one race that takes the machete/ to defend what belongs with us/ (Grow) The fight united/ (Feel) for an ideal give your life/ hit after hit I am going to get up/ and for my fellow countrymen they will never disperse/ No more will I run, no more/ will I flee, no more will I die/ We are human and they call us Mexican.

[7] I am simple a weapon/ Of this revolution/ The invasion to your nation/ Keep moving forward/ . . . Receiving giving back/ The love to those who have/ Our same color.

hence, allowing them to demand a change in U.S. anti-immigrant reactions that exist throughout the country. Because the United States enforces anti-immigrant legislature, Chicano Rap pushes people to fight towards the implementation of new legislature through the Immigrants' Rights Movement. Chicano Rap demonstrates abuses and intolerance of United States police and government officials on undocumented Mexicans and Chicanos caused by punitive legislature, thus, provoking further action in the Immigrants' Rights Movement to target and defy the U.S. government. Not only does music and lyrics of Chicano Rap inspire undocumented Mexicans, Chicanos and other immigrant communities to demand respect and changes in U.S. legislature but also Chicano Rap promotes unity of undocumented Mexican and Chicano communities. Chicano Rap is filled with prevailing significance that through its lyrics empowers the twenty-first century Immigrants' Rights Movement.

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*Footnoted lyrics translated from English to Spanish by Alejandra Lopez