

## Why I Stand Up: Chicano-America

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I grew up in an English speaking, middle class home. I have light skin and am half white, half Mexican. Reading this, you might think otherwise, but that only speaks to the diverse, yet shared culture of Chula Vista. Growing up in a border city is growing up in Chicano-America. In Chicano-America, Spanish and English are fluid like melted Slushies from the 7-11 on every corner. People find comfort in warm tortillas, the smell of la panaderia, and bright sun only matched by brighter walls with murals commanding “¡Viva la revolución!”. Home for me is where everyone calls me *mija*, but the street signs are in English.

For many, home here is safety from *la migra* and ICE, and enough money to put food on the table. Living in a border city means high drug usage, homelessness, and policing, or having to look out for workers being harassed by border patrol who ask for their papers on nothing but their sunhats and brown skin. I once heard a very wise lady capture the truth in a sentence. She said, “For many in South San Diego, activism and human rights are something taken like breathe, food, and water, out of necessity.” My family, having crossed in the 40s before the term, “illegal alien” was coined by the agri-businesses, is one of the lucky ones. For us, crossing the border is like crossing a street with a 5 hour return time: We, the U.S.-ers (\$), can go in freely for cheap merchandise, good food, and socializing with friends *y familia*; They, the “bad hombres” (usually less \$), have to risk their lives, their children's lives, and *separation from familia*, all so they can be criminalized and dehumanized when they thought they'd be living the American dream. More like the American nightmare.

Cesar Chavez was a hero, don't get me wrong, but the labor conditions endured by farm workers and undocumented immigrants are not much different now than they were in the 1960s. My grandparents, grand aunts, and grand uncles were and are very involved in *el movimiento* and their stories of mistreatment in the farming industry as children are almost identical to the stories I hear within my community and classroom. Many of my closest friends growing up have been descendents of parents who crossed illegally. These stories are fresh and full of police brutality and unlawful deportation. In my *escuelita*, Chicano Saturday school, we often talk about what to do if ICE approaches us or a family member and how to defend our rights. Most people will and can never understand what that fear of deportation is truly like, what it's liked to be ripped from your job, home, and family. Being a light skinned, mixed race, citizen, understanding that this is a fear that many have to deal with daily came as a shock at first, but it's now a reality I hope to change. These are not “illegals getting what they deserve”, these are human rights violations. No citizenship does not equal no rights, or no humanity. I want to come to ACLU so that I can continue the work that my elders, many sharing the same blood, started and help Chicano-America and it's many strong, intelligent leaders defend my community.

Because solidarity is the only way.