

Jan 1st, 2:00 AM

# Chicago Based Excerpt from "The Massacre of the reamers: Essays on Xicanaisma

Ana Castillo  
ac@anacastillo.com

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/naccs>

 Part of the [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#), and the [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#)

---

Ana Castillo, "Chicago Based Excerpt from "The Massacre of the reamers: Essays on Xicanaisma" (January 1, 1996). *National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies Annual Conference*. Paper 3.  
<http://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/naccs/1996/Proceedings/3>

This Event is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at SJSU ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies Annual Conference by an authorized administrator of SJSU ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@sjsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@sjsu.edu).

# I

*The National Association for  
Chicana and Chicano Studies  
1996 Keynote Addresses*

*Chicago Based Excerpt from*  
Massacre of the Dreamers:  
Essays In Xicanisma (1994)

**Ana Castillo**

**Keynote Speaker for the Chicana Caucus**

**W**hile I descend from Mexic Amerindian lineage, the fact that I was born and raised in the United States, a descendent of one and two generations of migrants from Mexico, and was raised in the inner city of Chicago (Place of Wild Onions), means that I have been completely alienated from my indigenous connection to the Americas. This led me as a graduate student at the University of Chicago to prepare a final thesis entitled: "The Idealization and Reality of the Mexican Indian Woman." I researched and used documentation from two fields: imaginative literature and anthropology.

Unfortunately the writings of mestizos, criollos,<sup>1</sup> Spaniards, and Anglos from the nineteenth century up to that time (1979) did not reveal anything more than stereotypes. At best I found ethnographic data that ultimately did not bring me closer to understanding how the Mexic Amerindian woman truly perceives herself since anthropology is traditionally based on the objectification of its subjects. Furthermore, to my mind, the Mexic Amerindian woman has been gagged for hundreds of years. I not only refer to the literal silencing of the Mexican indigenous population, economically impoverished and therefore powerless and voiceless, but also the censorship that results from double sexism, being female and indigenous. The Mexic Amerindian woman has inherited the sexism instituted by dominant Mexican and U. S. society compounded by the sexism within certain oppressed indigenous cultures. In neither the creative literature nor the ethnographic documentation, did I hear her speak for herself. Only in 1992, the quincentenary of European conquest,

was the world delivered the voice of *one* Mesoamerican woman, the Mayan Rigoberta Menchú who received the Nobel Peace Prize for her ongoing activism on behalf of her people's human rights.

In graduate school, perceiving myself as a Mexic Amerindian woman once removed, I wrote the autobiographical poem "Entre primavera y otoño." In poetry I have found the freedom to speak both from my mind and heart. In this poem, I liken myself to the silenced indigenous woman of México. It begins:

La india carga su bandera  
sobre su cara  
manchada de sangre  
sus cicatrices corren  
como las carreteras viejas  
de su tierra  
y la india no se queja.<sup>2</sup>

The Indian woman carries her flag/over her face/blood stained/her scars run/like old roads through her land/and the Indian woman does not complain.

Most Mexicans are mestizo/as and by and large mostly Mexic Amerindian. However the denigration of our indigenous blood has been so pervasive that few of us, especially in the past, have claimed our lineage. During the Colonial period of Mexico, a mestizo with money could buy his whiteness, thereby also purchasing the privileges reserved for criollos and Europeans. While mestizo/as came to compose the majority in Mexico, in the United States, genocide of the Native American was the preferred alternative for the Anglo for establishing a new nation.

It has been said of me and of my writing that I am in search of identity, as indeed we all are, which is a fact of living in a world of fragmented selves. White men (and white women) have always attempted this through their writing; and because they are members of dominant society, their search was considered representative of all, therefore, universal. On the other hand, the search by those of us who come from marginalized cultures in the United States is categorized as a sociological dilemma or a schizophrenic self-perception.

In graduate school I did indeed search for some clue to a crucial part of my "identity" inherent in the Mexic Amerindian woman. Unfortunately and not surprisingly, I certainly did not find her within the ivy halls of academia. In 1979 the first generation of college educated Chicanas was in the making and their investigations and publications were also difficult to come by. It was indeed a question of each one becoming a *re-conquistadora*, exploring herself as subject through scholarship. Although I had no interest in pursuing a doctorate after receiving my Master's Degree in Social Science (Latin American and Caribbean Studies), my informal

investigations as a creative writer and my own analyses with regard to being Chicana continued to feed the search for my Mexic Amerindian woman sense of self.

## Notes

---

1. In Mexico, a *criollo* is a Mexican-born individual of full-blooded Spanish lineage. Despite the Spanish descent, a *criollo* in the Colonial period was not granted the same status as a Spanish-born subject.
2. First published in *River Styx 7* (Big River Assn., MO, 1980). It is also in my book, *My Father Was a Toltec and Selected Poems* (1974-1988) (New York; W. W. Norton, 1994).

**Credit:** From MASSACRE OF THE DREAMERS. Copyright © 1994 by Ana Castillo. Published by Plume, a division of Penguin Books USA, Inc. and originally published by University of New Mexico Press. Reprinted by permission of Susan Bergholz Literary Services, New York. All rights reserved.

---