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# El Paso Times

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## OPINION



**Richard Blanco**

*Richard Blanco, an inaugural poet for President Barack Obama, wrote this poem for the USA TODAY Network. This work reflects his view of how Latinos are feeling in America in the wake of the shooting in El Paso and seeks "to celebrate our incredible contributions ... as an antidote for the fear and isolation we are feeling and fighting right now."*

O say, can you see us by the dawn of our ancestors' light still breathing through the cities we forged from the wind of our wills, drenched in the rain of our dusty sweat, and christened for the faith gleaming in our saints' starry eyes: San Francisco, San Antonio, San Diego?

O say, when will you have enough faith in us to meet the gleam of our eyes in your own, when will you see us as one in this one country we all so proudly hail, and tear down the ramparts that divide us from you, instead of raising new walls?

O say, when will you believe our hands across our hearts' unwavering belief in those broad stripes and bright stars waving in the same sky above our same schools, churches, and baseball fields?

O say, when will you un-translate us, un-italicize us from the lands and mountains our lives rooted and named: la Sierra Nevada, la Florida, Montana, Sangre de Cristo, Tejas, Nuevo México?

When will you recognize the shared words of our shared history: say, rodeo and bronco; say, patio and plaza; say, bonanza and canyon; say that you hear our rivers gallantly streaming in Spanish: río Colorado, río Los Angeles, río Grande?

When will you stop drowning us, trafficking us like cattle in trucks, corralling us in kitchen alleys and musty motel rooms, scarring our children's faces behind the striped shadows of iron bars, rebranding our skin as rapists and murderers lurking behind you? When will our immigrant toil and struggling dreams not be your ploy for profit? When will you praise us as assets and allies?

We will not live our worthy lives in fear and shame.

O say—look at us: we're the determination in our dirt-creased hands harvesting lettuce, and the firm handshakes of our mayors bestowing keys to their cities; we're the silent chopping of onions you don't hear at your dinner table, and the silence in the eyes of astronauts awing a nationless Earth.

O say—listen to us: we're the snip-snip of gardeners trimming your hedges, and the rattle of our maracas playing on the radio; we're the kind voices of bus drivers wishing you a buenos días, and the pop voices of singers stirring you to dance into your bodies; we're the riveting of steel piecing cars together, and the beats of our poets pounding out lyrics.



O say—feel us: we're the strength of nannies pushing strollers up park hills, and the muscle of batters swatting home runs over stadium walls; we're the prideful tucking of satin hotel sheets, and the pride of graduates in satin gowns.

O say: then why the bombs of slurs still bursting in the toxic air against us? Why the rockets' red glare of your eyes aimed at us in this needless, perilous fight? O say let there be proof that star-spangled banner still waves for us, too. Let the land of the free count us in, too. Let the home of the brave remain our home, too.

*Richard Blanco is the fifth presidential inaugural poet in U.S. history — the youngest, first Latino, immigrant and gay person to serve in such a role. Born in Madrid to Cuban exile parents, the negotiation of cultural identity and place characterize his work. He is the author of five poetry collections, including "How to Love a Country" (2019) which explores the many sociopolitical issues of our nation, past and present. His work can be found at richard-blanco.com.*

■ How "The U.S. of Us" poem came about. **Page 4A**

■ Read and hear the poem online in Spanish at [elpasotimes.com](http://elpasotimes.com)

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