My Family. Dir. Gregory Nava. Perf. Jimmy Smits, Esai Morales, Edward James Olmos. New Line Cinema, 1995. Film.

My Family (1995) narrates the story of the three generations of the Sanchez family. José Sanchez (Jacob Vargas) walks from Mexico to the US in the 1920s, after facing economic difficulties caused by the Mexican Revolution. He marries Maria (Jennifer Lopez) and they raise their family in East LA. The film spans the 1920s through to the 1990s, narrating the story of José and Maria Sanchez and their children Paco (Edward James Olmos), Irene (Lupe Ontiveros), Chucho (Esai Morales), Toni (Constance Marie), Memo (Enrique Castillo), and Jimmy (Jimmy Smits). As the children grow older, they encounter problems growing up in the East, a segregated area for Mexicans in Los Angeles. The last part of the film focuses on Jimmy and his wife Isabel, using them as mouthpieces of the Chicano community who have faced racial prejudice and injustices. The "product" of these repressed individuals, their son, Carlitos (Paul Robert Langdon), is described as "a problem child" who expresses himself through his tantrums. Moreover, Carlitos rejects his ancestral background as he imagines his father to be an American comic book hero who will take him to Texas. The film illustrates the tensions between the visible borders of the urban setting and the invisible limitations felt by the characters in the city that function in the film as a commentary on the divisions felt between the Mexican and American cultural spheres.

The urban settings in the film reveal the problematic nature of the Chicano culture in relation to the land they inhabit. The city of Los Angeles becomes a symbolic place in which the two cultures both mix and are in conflict with each other. Before focusing on Los Angeles, the border between Mexico and America is referred to as "a line in the dirt" implying the division to be insignificant; however, when Maria gets deported, the not-so-rigid border breaks up the Sanchez family, a significant example of how Chicanos are not welcome in the country. The bridge between the eastern and the western side of Los Angeles is another urban element used in the film that both connects and divides the two cultures. The narrator, Paco, remembers his family whenever he sees the bridge that connects the east side of Los Angeles with the west. The eastern part of the city, the *barrio*, is the place where his family lives; whereas the west is the richer

part of the city where they go to work. The bridge serves not only as a connector but also a separator between the two cultures. As Paco points out, many people travel to the western part of the city but no one from the west travels to the east. When they finally do, as in the case of the meeting of the Gillespie family with the Sanchez family, the gap between the east and the west of Los Angeles is reiterated through their encounter. The Gillespie family assume that the family has just migrated and disregard their past; however, the Sanchez family point out their family history dates back three generations in Los Angeles. The film aims at reintegrating the forgotten Chicano culture into the history of Los Angeles by making use of characters that represent the ambiguous relationship between the two countries. The character "El Californio," (León Singer) a distant relative of José, takes pride in having being born in El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora Reina de Los Angelos, or Los Angeles, when it was "still Mexico." His burial in the back yard of the Sanchez family could be considered an act of re-planting of the Chicano culture. Thus El Californio becomes the embodiment of Los Angeles as a symbolic place where the two cultures merge.

The characters demonstrate the discrepancy between the two cultures. As the first generation is followed by later generations, the family gets more and more involved in the American way of life. The first conflict in the family arises between José Sanchez, the father, and Chucho. José defends dignity and work whereas Chucho believes that Americans only respect money and deals marihuana instead of having a respectable job like his father. Some of José's children, however, are involved in American society more amicably as they take up occupations related to some of the most important American institutions: Paco serves in the navy, Toni and her husband work against the illegal deportations of immigrants and are therefore involved in politics, and finally Memo studies law in an Ivy League university. Nevertheless Memo silences his father whenever he tells the story of his illegal entry as Memo sees it as a hindrance to his acceptance in the American society. Memo further reveals his desire to break away from his past when his future fiancée addresses him as "Bill", a name he has assumed to pass as American. The younger generation's desire to become a part of the American social sphere, when it comes to Jimmy's story, seems to end in disillusionment. The achievements of the three siblings, according to Paco, become possible only when the scapegoat of the family, Jimmy, carries all the shame, rage, and injustices faced by the

Chicano community. Jimmy, José Sanchez's youngest son, and Isabel, his wife, share a common past as Jimmy witnesses his older brother Chucho's death in the hands of the police and Isabel, in turn, witnesses her father's death. Their conversation reflects how alone they feel in a huge city where they do not belong. They explain to each other that the happiness in their families does not soothe their rage for being part of a minority in America who have to continuously face injustices in the society.

The narrative of the family's history beginning with José Sanchez's departure from Mexico and raising his six children in his own culture transforms into an amalgam of Mexican and American cultures in the film as the children are exposed to the American way of life. *My Family* captures the struggles of the Sanchez family by reflecting Los Angeles as a city in which Chicanos are physically segregated by the bridge and narrates the stories of an immigrant family who face invisible borders caused by racial prejudices. *My Family* is a worthwhile watch especially for an audience unfamiliar to the difficulties faced by the Chicano community in the US. The film is a heart-warming film that touches upon these conflicts between the communities by making use of the familiar problem encountered in any family: the generation gap.

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