

SYMBOL: A RIVER POEM BY A MEXICAN AMERICAN

By Ariana Monique Salazar-Newton

This is a symbol:

My parents' birth certificates
Both say they're white children born to white parents
Not because they didn't want to be brown
But because there was no Hispanic/Latin@ option
You either had to be white or opt for minority status
You either had to deny your *cultura* or embrace discrimination

But we're not white
 and we're not black
We're something in between
Like the river
After all, a river is only a border—
A border between lands
A dividing line,
A distinction; a separation
A stop sign.
You see there is no promised land
For the ashy brown, naturally tanned
We never really get to land
We're stuck between that narrow strand

Somewhere between the *curanderisma* of *mi visabuelita*
 and the Christianizers that called her a witch
Between the Catholic saints, like *la Virgen of Guadalupe* of my parents,
 and the evangelicals that call that idolatry
But we're both oppressor and oppressed
Suppressor and dispossessed
We're hybrids, tainted, dirties,
Mixed-bloods, blendeds, blurries,
Cross-breads, mongrels, motley
Fusion, dump truck, mockery
But you can call us *Mestizos*
We're the amalgamation, but claimed by no nation
Not Mexican, *pinche pocha*
But not American either—wet backs, go back!

We're the drowning ignored in the Jordan's flood

The whiplash from rapids draining our blood
We're the tokens in your precepts, with no faculty
We clean your bathroom; we trim the trees
Our grandmothers, our mothers, our sisters were raped
Mi tierra was raped, and we too were enslaved
But we weren't shipped over, no we were kicked out
We didn't have to escape, no we're on an inward route
But people don't know that we were called the "N-word" too
That we were lynched too, that we're still used and abused.
And the reason they don't know
Is because they're called 'white' lynching's.

So this is a symbol, this is a sign
Of those rendered invisible, the forgotten shrine
Not even acknowledged, we're non-entities
Our struggle in the river is a fight to be seen.