

A never-ending
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Sometimes, we pay even when there's been no mistake, just for being who we are. I don't mind paying for my mistakes. But it seems like we're paying for everyone else's mistakes too.-Luis Rodriguez

Although injustices like racial oppression are present in everyday life, one often cannot fathom how such a large-scale offense can be solved through individual resistance alone. In the graphic memoir *Always Running*, Luis Rodriguez chronicles his methods of tackling societal oppression and racial prejudice, ranging from conformist resistance to transformative resistance. As Rodriguez becomes completely entrenched inside of a gang life replete with drugs, his mentor, Chente, inspires him to take a stand against the addiction of heroin culture through conformist resistance. Soon after, Rodriguez's efforts mature into what Daniel Solórzano and Dolores Bernal describe as transformative resistance, as he turns toward targeting the oppression of minority Hispanics at Keppel High School. Because Luis grows up in an unforgiving Anglo-dominated world, he believes that the only power he has is in fulfilling his stereotype: the role of criminal or gang member. Deeply conflicted by his commitments to the Lomas gang, Luis takes a step toward breaking the barriers of his own personal oppression with a staunch refusal to engage in drugs. By twelve years old, Rodriguez had already become well-versed in the culture of hard-core street life. Once he moves to Reseda, Rodriguez is introduced to the John Fabela Youth Center, where he meets Chente, the man who plays a crucial role in bringing him out of the gang life. "Chente played administrator, father-figure, counselor and the law" (Rodriguez 146). For Luis, Chente is the influential mentor who offers him a better life, one without the drugs or violence typical of the streets, and is the inspiration that allows him to engage in conformist resistance in his personal life. "Students

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today often identify transformational role models and mentors as influential people who inspire and socialize them to be concerned with and struggle for social justice issues in their school and community” (Solórzano and Bernal 6). Chente actively demonstrates his commitment to social justice with his progressive work in the disadvantaged youth programs, which eventually commits Luis to greater involvement at the center. Luis slowly finds himself broadening his experiences and realizing that there is more to this world than surrounding himself with gang violence. By passing up the chance to do heroin, Luis is demonstrating that he is motivated to create a better life for himself (one with social justice), but one that can only start with personal change. He is not challenging the existing systems of oppression (primarily the major disadvantages faced by minorities stuck dealing with their gang-ridden neighborhoods). Thus, Luis does not target the roots of the problem: namely, that heroin and other drugs are easy to procure in such crime-filled barrios. Luis is not seeking to change institutional oppression here, but instead to bring about awareness of better opportunities for himself and his gang member friends. Luis’s techniques of resistance soon evolve into a much more effective weapon in the pursuit to have his underrepresented minority culture recognized. Arriving at Keppel High School and seeing the pronounced divide between racial classes, Luis resolves to bring more recognition to the Chicano population by auditioning for the part of Aztec mascot. After enduring several more brushes with the law, Luis is allowed to return back to school and promises Chente that he will take this second chance seriously. He becomes increasingly involved with the Mexican organization at school, and founds ToHMAS: To Help Mexican American Students. “ At first, the club concerned itself only with benign aspects of <https://assignbuster.com/a-never-ending-battle-tools-necessary-to-combat-the-injustice-of-class-oppression/>

school life. But the barrio realities, and the long-standing issues of inequality and neglect, kept rearing their heads” (Rodriguez 173). The next step for Luis as head of ToHMAS was to win the part of “ Joe Aztec”; only then could the Chicano students of the school finally put an end to the ridiculous mockery of their Aztec heritage and reclaim the culture as their own. In taking a proactive stance against the profound white-supremacist attitudes at Keppel High, Luis’s activism has finally matured into the most effective type of protest: transformative resistance. He changes the dynamics of the entire school by challenging its blatant ignorance of historical Mexican culture; this resonates with Solórzano’s mention of proving others wrong. “ Proving them wrong seems to be a process in which students confront the negative portrayals and ideas about Chicanas/os” (Solórzano and Bernal 4). By taking back the character of Joe Aztec from ignorant whites and accurately representing a major part of Chicano culture, Luis shapes the road for better minority awareness and respect. His actions directly call attention to the root cause of the problem by bringing about awareness of how racist the school would be if historically accurate depictions of Aztec dancers were denied. It is a clear critique of the systemic oppression against disadvantaged, disrespected Chicanos, a feeling that pervades the whole school. Luis’s act of transformative resistance also serves to better his life situation; by engaging in more ToHMAS-centered activities, he is able to stay out of gang life and focus on his academic pursuits. Thus, his behavior is not destructive like self-defeating resistance would be. More so, instead of reinforcing the present oppressive institutions, he actually deconstructs them, gaining gradual acceptance from the school. Luis’s keen awareness of the social injustices facing Chicano youth at Keppel High as well as his <https://assignbuster.com/a-never-ending-battle-tools-necessary-to-combat-the-injustice-of-class-oppression/>

motivation to target its root causes are both key components of his transformative resistance. As Luis Rodriguez so effectively demonstrates in *Always Running*, the transformative resistance technique is a powerful weapon of choice for the struggle against racial inequality. Even though Rodriguez is deeply drawn to the intense power behind gang life, he begins to engage in more progressive methods of challenging oppressive institutions, which Solórzano and Bernal label conformist resistance. Not long after, Rodriguez learns to forcefully wield the most potent tool of student protest, transformative resistance, during his time at the racially divided Keppel High. Rodriguez's narrative account in *Always Running* is clear evidence that all individuals have the potential to successfully reform oppressive factions of society if transformative resistance techniques are used.