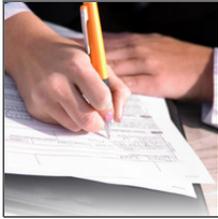


But I'm a U.S. Citizen!

Not If University of Houston has its way

By **Kat Avila** | Published on LatinoLA: April 13, 2013



Years ago I took a side trip from New York City to see Niagara Falls. It was easy enough to cross over to the Canadian side, but when I tried walking back into the U.S. the guard gave me a hard time. I remember throwing down all the cards in my wallet to prove I was a U.S. citizen (in those days Americans didn't have to carry a passport). These cards included my California driver license and my Cal State Fullerton student card.

And I still have to prove I'm a U.S. citizen, but this time within my own country's borders. You have to prove your right to work. If you live in Arizona, you can't walk down the street without i.d. because of SB 1070's racial profiling. Most recently, University of Houston (UH) tells me that I won't be receiving any future royalties for my dad's book unless I sign a Nonresident Alien Information form.

It's blackmail, really. Arte Publico Press, part of University of Houston, is regarded as the largest publisher of U.S. Latino authors. Regardless of whether you are a U.S. citizen or not, their tax department insists you have to sign this form created for nonresident aliens. I'm told that handwriting an "N/A" on the form after you have signed and dated it proves you are a U.S. citizen.

Does that make sense to you? It didn't make any sense to me. The U.S. authors who cooperate have to indulge the UH tax department not just one time, but every year. Every year for the rest of their lives they have to "prove" to the University of Houston that they are still U.S. citizens. University of Houston won't accept any other kind of proof other than the Nonresident Alien form, which isn't proof at all.

I hope this kind of thinking isn't too contagious. In the end, it treats us all as undocumented.

My grandfather successfully fought repatriation to stay in this country. My dad went to segregated schools in Los Angeles because he was an American of Mexican heritage, but he and my uncles went on to fight wars for the U.S. anyway before the birth of the Civil Rights Movement.

I'm not signing any form for NONRESIDENT ALIENS after all the sacrifices and stands that have been made. It's an insult that I wish the University of Houston would rectify.

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