

Voice & Resistance

Latino Poetry has a robust tradition of protest and critique. Latinos have participated in all the major social justice and liberation movements in the U.S. in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries, from the civil rights movement to advocacy for LGBTQ+ and undocumented people, to workers' rights. Freedom struggles in places such as Puerto Rico stretch back even further. Poets were essential in these movements: at the height of the Chicano movement poets were often featured at political events. What sort of language and imagery do we encounter in the political poems of the Latino poetic tradition? How do the poets understand their role in political struggle?

Read an essay on this theme by Eliza Rodriguez



This brochure was compiled from
*A project reader to Latino Poetry, The
Library of America Anthology,*
Rigoberto González, editor, ©2024.
The full resource is at
<https://www.latinopoetry.org>

Discussion Guide Voice & Resistance



The Center for the Book, in collaboration with New Hampshire Humanities and UNH, and thanks to a grant from the Library of America invites you to join us in a celebration of Latino Poetry here in the Granite state in 2024/2025. Our celebration will center around *Latino Poetry: The Library of America Anthology*, edited by Rigoberto González, 2024.

A national public humanities initiative directed by Library of America with generous support from the National Endowment for the Humanities and Emerson Collective, comprising a groundbreaking anthology, events around the country, and an online media archive.

Una gran iniciativa pública en el campo de las humanidades, dirigida por Library of America con el generoso apoyo del Fondo Nacional para las Humanidades y Emerson Collective, que comprende programas públicos por todo el país; un archivo multimedia; y una nueva antología sin precedentes.

<http://nhsl.dncr.nh.gov/latino-poetry>

Start with these poems

“The Black Maria” by Aracelis Girmay
(*Anthology*, p. 392)

“Operation Wetback, 1953” by Diana
García (*Anthology*, p. 269)

“No Longer Ode / Oda Indebida” by
Urayoán Noel (*Anthology*, p. 430)

Notes on the theme generally

These three poems are also at
<https://www.latinopoetry.org/humanities-themes>

Questions to Consider

1. What did you expect based on the title of the poem? Were your expectations met?
2. Did the structure or tone of any of the poems affect your reading experience?
3. Did the poem remind you of any other poems (or novels, or movies)?
4. Did the poem make you think about any of your own experiences?
5. Identify the speaker in each poem. Who is the “I”? Are they situated within the episodes of struggle being relayed by the poem, or are they on the outside looking in? How do these events affect the speaker? In turn, who is the speaker addressing in the poem? What might the relationships between subject, speaker, and reader reveal about poetry’s relation to the political?
6. All three poems bring historical tragedy into the realm of the personal— either by invoking a direct experience (as in “Operation Wetback, 1953”) or by recounting events that the speaker feels a strong connection to but did not personally experience or witness. How does history bear on everyday life in the poems? How does history color and impact seemingly mundane or intimate details?
7. What is the relationship between poetry and action as explored in these poems? What role does the poet play in political struggle? What kind of answers can poetry provide (if any) to those seeking to transform social conditions? How might the poems

imagine alternatives to repressive social and political conditions?

Poems for Further Reading

- “Bananas” by Lorna Dee Cervantes (p. 244)
- “Let Light Shine Out of Darkness” by Daniel Borzutzky (p. 369)
- “A Field of Onions: Brown Study” by Vanessa Angélica Villareal (p. 543)
- “Oklahoma America” by Frank Lima (p. 208)
- “I Am Joaquin: An Epic Poem” by Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales (p. 181)
- “Punctum / Image of an Intifada” by Carolina Ebeid (p. 485)
- “Unity Vision” by Raúl R. Salinas (p. 201)
- from “The Wooden Horse” by Clemente Soto Vélez (p. 135)

Page numbers are from *Latino Poetry, The Library of America Anthology*

A Further Question

In “The Black Maria,” Aracelis Girmay alludes to “cells under a microscope,” while in “Bananas,” Lorna Dee Cervantes speaks to the “quarks and sunlight [. . .] hadrinos and neutrinos of color.” In these and other instances the poems evoke scientific language to color their retellings of history. According to these two poets, what place might scientific inquiry hold in relation to poetry as a way of understanding our place in the world? In what ways do the poets’ treatment of this relationship differ? What relationships are they establishing between how we choose to understand the world and systems of slavery, colonialism, and other forms of oppression? What answers might poetry provide here?