of their subjectivities invisible and tell them aloud for Marta and themselves to witness.

Rivera-Valdés’s novel *Rosas de Abolengo* (2011) questions the reliability of concepts such as memory and truth to complicate set positions and convictions. Lázara, the protagonist, lives in New York and belongs to a family of Cuban immigrants. She is searching for the truth of her family’s past to better understand conflicting views on the Cuban Revolution. Her search can be seen, then, as recreating Rivera’s and many other Cuban émigrés’ intense dialogue with those two sides. If the author’s main intention with this novel was to satirize a Cuban exile living in Miami and her recalcitrant anti-Castro position, the result is a narrative that reinforces the value of the spoken word, of Spanish as preferred language of expression, and of emotions as key to our identity.

Rivera-Valdés’s subtle use of humor and accessible style show us complex aspects of the human condition with an empathic and reflexive tone. Her characters live the challenges, expectations, frustrations, and accomplishments that often seem to characterize the lives of immigrants all over the world.

*María Celina Bortolotto*

See also: Children’s Literature; Cuban Diaspora

**Further Reading**


**Rodriguez, Luis Javier**

1954–

Poet, memoirist, novelist, journalist, community organizer, and activist.

Having spent his teenage years embroiled in the East Los Angeles barrio gang life, Luis Javier Rodriguez has dedicated his adulthood to gang prevention
Rodriguez, Luis Javier

Activism and community organizing. He is recognized as a foremost contemporary Chicano writer, and his writings are devoted to reducing gang violence, building Chicano community and identity, and supporting at-risk urban youth.

Rodriguez was born in the U.S.-Mexico border city of El Paso, Texas, but he spent his first two years of life in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. When Rodriguez was two years old, his family relocated to Watts, Los Angeles, where they lived in poverty and faced racial discrimination. In this environment, Rodriguez struggled to receive an education. When he attended school for the first time at age six, he did not yet speak English, so he was dismissed by his teachers and excluded from classroom activities. He continued to receive poor schooling at Richard Garvey Intermediate School, which was severely underfunded, and Mark Keppel High School, where he was racially profiled and tracked into industrial arts classes.

In the 1960s, Rodriguez’s family moved to an unincorporated area of the San Gabriel Valley called Las Lomas, or the Hills, which was one of the poorest neighborhoods in Los Angeles County. At age eleven, Rodriguez joined his first gang because, as he explains in his best-selling memoir Always Running: La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A. (1993), he “needed protection” and felt that “claim[ing] a clique” (43) was the only way to survive in this violent neighborhood. By his late teen years, Rodriguez was already a seasoned member of the Las Lomas gang, routinely doing drugs and regularly being detained by the police for stealing and fighting. In this dark period of his life, he struggled with suicidal thoughts but managed to retain a sense of self-worth that kept him alive.

Despite his gang affiliation, Rodriguez found himself drawn to community organizing and activism at a young age. In 1968, he participated in the East L.A. Walkouts to protest the unequal conditions in the L.A. Unified School District. On August 29, 1970, he was arrested for participating in the East L.A. Chicano Moratorium against the Vietnam War. He also became a leader among the Chicano students at his high school, eventually being named president of the Chicano student club To Help Mexican American Students (ToHMAS). With the support of a local community center, he used his skills as a graffiti artist to paint several murals in the cities of Rosemead and South San Gabriel.

Rodriguez also sought ways to educate himself. Fueled by a love of books, he frequently visited libraries on his own, and he soon developed a desire to express himself through his own writing. He began writing a column for his high school’s student newspaper as well as his own short stories and poetry. In 1972, he enrolled in California State University, Los Angeles, where he majored in broadcast journalism and Chicano studies and became involved with Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA). However, he was forced to drop out after getting into an altercation with the police that led to his incarceration the Los Angeles County Jail. This marked a turning point in Rodriguez’s life, in which he made a commitment to give up the gang life and withdraw from drug use.

After renouncing his former life as a gangster, Rodriguez began cultivating his passion for writing. He started working as a writer and photographer for weekly newspapers in East L.A. and took creative writing, journalism, and speech classes at East L.A. Community College. In 1985, he moved to Chicago to edit the People’s Tribune newspaper and became involved in the poetry scene there,
cofounding the Guild Complex Literary Arts Center with poet Michael Warr. In 1988, he launched his literary career by self-publishing his first book, a poetry collection called *Poems across the Pavement*, and founding Tia Chucha Press, which has published since its founding more than fifty works by U.S. authors of color. In 2000, Rodriguez moved back to Los Angeles and continued to spearhead many community efforts to support the arts, including cofounding a nonprofit called Tia Chucha’s Centro Cultural and creating an annual outdoor literacy and arts festival called Celebrating Words: Written, Performed, and Sung.

Rodriguez’s contributions to poetry were recognized in 2014 when he was named the official poet laureate of Los Angeles. Across a thirty-year career, he has been published in many poetry anthologies and authored five poetry collections, including *Poems across the Pavement* (1989), *The Concrete River* (1991), *Trochemoche* (1998), *My Nature Is Hunger* (2005), and *Borrowed Bones* (2016). He has written two memoirs, the best-selling *Always Running* (1993), which describes his childhood and early years as a gangster, and *It Calls You Back: An Odyssey through Love, Addiction, Revolutions, and Healing* (2011), which continues the story of his life after he renounced gangsterism. In his third work of nonfiction, *Hearts and Hands: Creating Community in Violent Times* (2001), Rodriguez offers concrete suggestions about how to reduce the influence of gangs on urban youth by providing them with nonviolent opportunities. He is also the author of two children’s books, *America Is Her Name* (1998) and *It Doesn’t Have to Be This Way: A Barrio Story* (1999), as well as two works of fiction, the novel *Music of the Mill* (2005) and the short story collection *The Republic of East L.A. Stories* (2002).

In all of his writings, Rodriguez combines poetic aesthetics with a frank account of the harsh realities of urban life. His unfiltered discussion of drug use, gang violence, police abuse, poverty, and racial oppression has prompted many of his works to be censored by school districts around the country (according to the American Library Association, *Always Running* is one of the one hundred most censored books in the United States). Yet, the powerful messages of Rodriguez’s works cannot be suppressed. Collectively, they offer critical insights into how collective organizing and community support can help urban youth transcend the seductions of gang life and become self-actualized revolutionaries.

*See also: Chicano Movement*

**Further Reading**
Rodriguez, Richard

1944—

American essayist, public speaker, and journalist in print and on television.

A master of the personal essay, Richard Rodriguez is the author of four collections of essays—books also classifiable as memoir or autobiography. He is best known for his 1982 autobiography, *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*. He is also the author of *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father* (1992), *Brown: The Last Discovery of America* (2002), and *Darling: A Spiritual Autobiography* (2013). In his essays, Rodriguez weaves public events or political issues with his own personal life. For example, Rodriguez’s “Late Victorians” essay about his personal experience living through the AIDS epidemic is centered on a consideration of Victorian architecture in San Francisco. Rodriguez’s literary style (always elegant, but often complex and allusive) became more challenging as his books progressed.

Rodriguez was born in San Francisco, California, on July 31, 1944. His parents, Victoria and Carlos Leopold Rodriguez, came to the United States separately (his father alone, his mother with her sisters and mother), escaping political and religious turmoil in Mexico. His mother was from the Mexican state of Jalisco, and his father, an orphan since age eight, was from Colima. When Rodriguez was six years old, his family moved to Sacramento, which Rodriguez considers his hometown. But he has lived most of his adult life in San Francisco. He has also lived at various times in Los Angeles, New York, and London.

In Sacramento, Rodriguez attended Catholic schools, entering first grade at Sacred Heart Grammar School and graduating from Christian Brothers High School in 1962. He received a bachelor of arts degree in English from Stanford University in 1967 and a master of arts in philosophy from Columbia University in 1969. He was then a PhD candidate at the University of California, Berkeley, and was subsequently awarded a Fulbright Fellowship at the Warburg Institute in London. It was while writing his dissertation (on English Renaissance literature) in the reading room of the British Museum that the idea of leaving higher education came to him. Because of his education, Rodriguez no longer considered himself disadvantaged, prompting him to later leave teaching as a protest against affirmative action policies that would have rewarded him for being a “disadvantaged” minority (Rodriguez 1982, 27 and 150).

The young Rodriguez began his career in journalism as a paperboy delivering the *Sacramento Bee* newspaper and later writing a gossip column called the Watchful Eye for his high school newspaper. He would go on to write for many years for the Sunday opinion page of the *Los Angeles Times*. He was also a contributing editor to *Harper’s Magazine*. And he worked for two decades at the