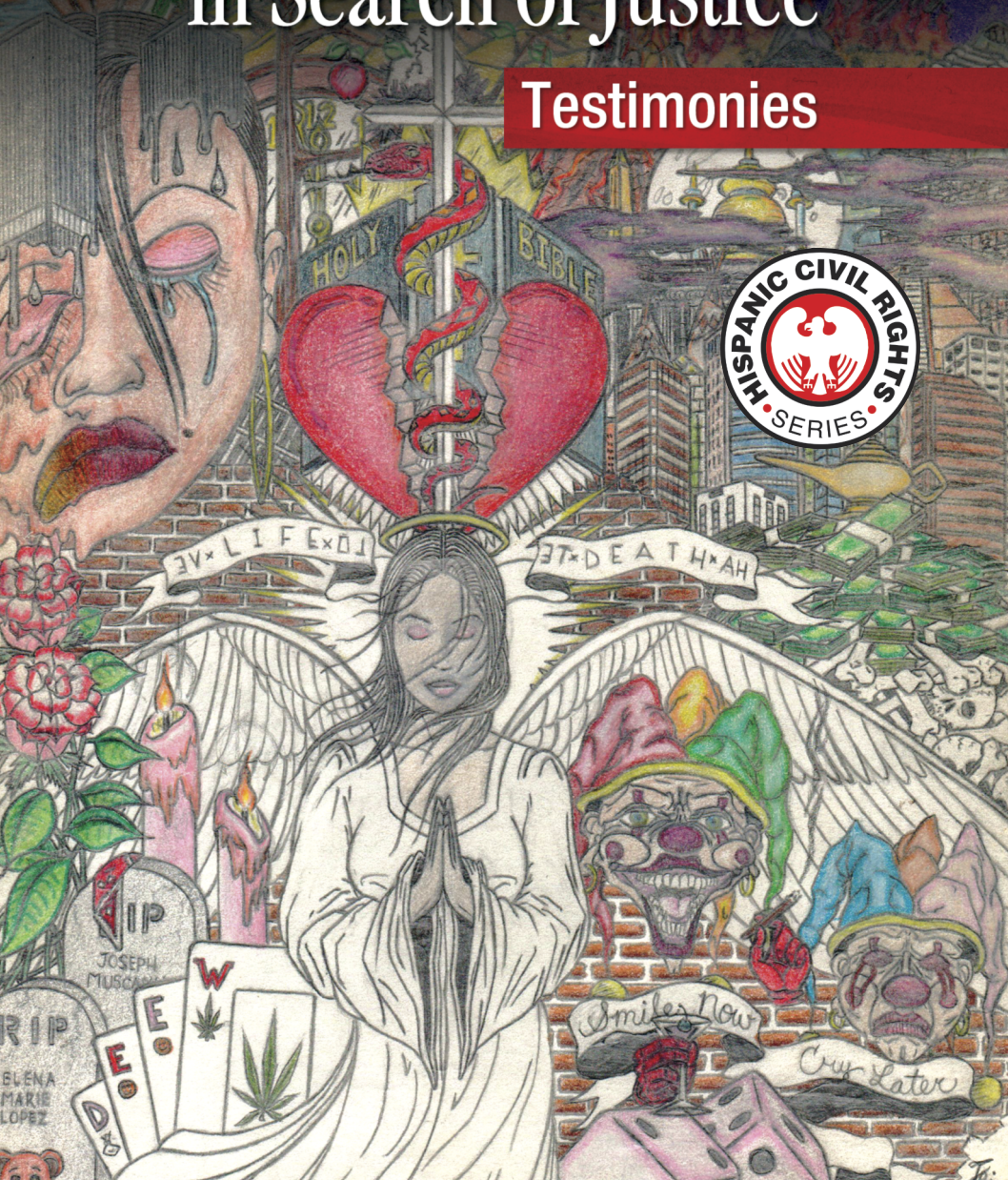


Latino Young Men and Boys in Search of Justice

Testimonies



Edited by Frank de Jesús Acosta | Co-edited by Henry A. J. Ramos

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FOREWORD
Luis J. Rodríguez, Author of *Always Running*



Arte Público Press
Houston, Texas

Latino Young Men and Boys in Search of Justice is funded in part by grants from The California Endowment, California Community Foundation, Marguerite Casey Foundation, City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance, W. K. Kellogg Foundation and the Sierra Health Foundation. We are grateful for their support.

Recovering the past, creating the future

Arte Público Press
University of Houston
4902 Gulf Fwy, Bldg 19, Rm 100
Houston, Texas 77204-2004

Cover art by Alberto Symon
Cover design by Mora Des!gn

Names: Jesús Acosta, Frank de, editor. | Ramos, Henry A. J.,
1959- editor.

Title: Latino young men and boys in search of justice :
testimonies / edited by Frank de Jesus Acosta and Henry A. J.
Ramos ; foreword: Luis J. Rodriguez, Author of Always Running.

Description: Houston, TX : Arte Publico Press, 2016.

Identifiers: LCCN 2015025479 | ISBN 9781558858213 (alk.
paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Juvenile justice, Administration of—United
States. | Hispanic American youth—United States. | Juvenile
delinquency—United States.

Classification: LCC HV9104 .L327 2016 | DDC
364.36089/68073—dc23

LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2015025479>

CIP

∞ The paper used in this publication meets the requirements of the
American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence
of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

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Printed in the United States of America

15 16 17 18 19 20

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Acknowledgements

Our undying gratitude and appreciation for the support, partnership, leadership, contributions, friendship, love and prayers of those who made this publication and community education project possible. Particularly, Dr. Nicolás Kanellos, Dr. Gabriela Baeza Ventura, Dr. Gail C. Christopher, Luz E. Benítez Delgado, Dr. Robert K. Ross, Luz Vega-Marquis, Robert Phillips, Antonia Hernández, Nike Irvin, Peter Rivera, Charles Fields, Beatriz Solís, Ray Colmenar and Michael Palumbo (Graduate Fellow and Advisor).

We especially wish to acknowledge our institutional partners and supporters: namely, our publishers and project sponsors Arte Público Press at the University of Houston and the Insight Center for Community Economic Development, as well as our funders: The California Endowment, Marguerite Casey Foundation, W. K. Kellogg Foundation and the Sierra Health Foundation.

We could not have found such powerful creative voices and works to feature here without the incredible work and goodwill of our organizational partners and their committed staff: The National Compadres Network, Santa Cruz Barrios Unidos, Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice, Tía Chucha's Centro Cultural and Bookstore, Homies Unidos, Catholic Prison Ministries/Healing Justice Coalition, La Plazita Institute, Homeboy Industries, Policy Link, the Gathering for Justice and Inside Out Writers (Leslie Poston). Arte Público Press (Nellie Gonzales and Matthew Hall); The Insight Center for Community Economic Development (Michael Palumbo and Brad Caftel); CURYJ (Freddy Gutiérrez, Michael Muscadine,

José Luis Pavón, Rubén Leal, and Rana Halpern); Santa Cruz Barrios Unidos (Cynthia Gutiérrez, Jennifer Barajas, Fátima RodríguezOrtiz and Edgar Puga).

We gratefully acknowledge the valued assistance of our impressive council of project advisors: Jerry Tello, Luis J. Rodríguez, Nane Alejandre, Father Greg Boyle, Rubén Lizardo, Richard Montoya, George Galvis, Albino García, Jr., Alex Sánchez, Javier Stauring, Carmen Pérez, Luis Cardona and Tomás Alejo.

Additionally, we express special gratitude to our personal circle of loving support and creative inspiration: María Acosta, Luis García, Claudia Lenschen-Ramos, Gregory Ramos, Kiki Ramos Gindler, José Fonseca, Alejandro Delgadillo, Pat Shibuya, Jerry Tello, Donald and Tawnya, Bill Bamish, John Palumbo, Otilio Quintero, Henry Domínguez, Arturo Ybarra, Gary and Nancy Kobayashi, Peter Nishita, Linda Bowen, Dr. Guadalupe Rivera Marín, Evangeline Ordáz and Armando Molina, Lorraine García-Nakata, Anne Laddon, Sasha Irving, Mary Legleiter, Mariano and Ruby Díaz; and Carmen, Joe, Cecilia and Henry, Ronnie, Yvette, Michael and Willie A, Jojo, Roz and Mark, Familia Fonseca; and Rolling Stone, Katie, Anthony, Michael, Marc, Johnny, Lisa, Anthony, Christopher, Daniela, Mariano Jr. "Pops" and Jason; Spirit Relations—Cecilia Sandoval, Michael Balaoing, Richard Verches, Blanca Almeida, Bong Hwan Kim, Debbie Ching, Stewart Kwoh, Connie Rice, Sandra Gutiérrez, Tom David, Gabby Gonzales, Ramón Miramontes, Albessa Ybarra, Blair Chambers, Rubén and Sarah Gonzales, Sally Lew, Antonio Manning, Angel Zapata, John Castillo, Marvin Thurman, Mike López, Benny Torres, Vusi, Mandla, Fran Jemmott, Gaylord, Shedrick, Venice, Jitu Sadiki, Anthony Alejandre and Magdalena Beltrán del Olmo; Barrio Whittier (Patrick Irish, Paul Mick-Matt, Jessie and Carol, Metz, Limon, Klein, Kiko, Tocayo Frank, John Q & V, Skip, Cholo Pat, Bobby, Yvonne, Victor P, the JTS and Tubby's gang. Rest in Peace Papa John Palumbo, Helen Verches, Esperanza Lizardo and John Caldwell, who passed to the spirit world during the becoming of this book.

In Loving Memory of José Montoya

This book is dedicated to Movimiento Warrior Poet, maestro José Montoya. José passed into the spirit world in September 2013. He was truly one of the seminal activist-artists, muralists, poets, writers, musicians and educators who used their gifts in the cultural arts to advance freedom, the struggle for justice, pluralism and human dignity for Chicano, Latino and Indigenous people.

Frank de Jesús Acosta

“José Montoya—poet, painter, community organizer, educator, leading Chicano rights advocate and agent provocateur—died September 25, 2013 at the age of 81, leaving a formidable legacy of art and activism. The *Sacramento Bee*’s obituary called him ‘one of the most influential and inspirational figures in California Latino history.’

“Every movement has its intellectuals—the poets, writers and academics crucial to shaping and articulating a people’s identity while the political winds swirl and the world becomes dangerous. José Montoya was a cultural front-liner and first responder—a doer; a creator who brought levity, defiance and satirical wit to the bloody fields of the San Joaquin Valley as well as to the frigid halls of academe, all the way to the state capitol and beyond. In the political tumult of the 60s and 70s, José led a pack of sacred clowns, profane and profound poets, dedicated artists who brushed up against the San Joaquin

County Sheriff deputies and the bloody fists of Teamsters who were muscle for ranchers. Yet our father and his merry band of deadly serious artists strictly adhered to [César] Chávez's unyielding demand for a nonviolent movement. That message didn't make it to everyone at the time, and I saw our father disarm many a young man or Brown Beret.

"That was José, a man fit and locked into his times, marching to an improvised drumbeat, always loyal to César while writing elegant poetry that anchored the Chicano movement. José was never afraid of hard work; he instilled this ethic into each of us, an ethic born of his post-Depression era upbringing, pulled into sharp focus from the cotton fields of Bakersfield to the vineyards of Fowler. In his landmark poem 'El Sol y los de Abajo,' he relished the idea of casting himself as a lackluster farmworker, while his family was known as amazingly fast 50-tray-a-day grape pickers:

How I was easy on the clusters
Preferring instead to allow

The iridescent worm live in that leafy green world

"José was always humanizing the common farmworker and his workplace, his master strokes on par with his heroes, Steinbeck and Saroyan. He was also a committed multiculturalist. Dad was a hugely public man who still gave us our precious, private family time while the world was inflamed by the assassinations of MLK and RFK. We saw monumental selflessness and generosity from a man who had huge demands placed on him and who answered for many people. José was a rock star, but always a dad, imperfect like all fathers, but with a heart so huge it still beats and flows like the rivers he loved: the American, the Feather, the Kings y su río El Sacramento. . . . He was

raising children, lots of them, always providing, with our mom, for a large and growing brood of hungry Montoyas, while innovating art activism and education.

“José did it, man. He gave, he taught and he professed until the end. He crossed that finish line bravely, fighting a relentless foe, teaching us until his last breath, the public man ultimately succumbing, but always a glimmer in his eye, a will to live, a look that said if anybody could outsmart this disease it would be this Chicano trickster. We quietly strummed a Mexican corrido on his legendary guitar. José seemed to be mounting a colt from his New Mexico youth. And then the final breaths came—three long poetic breaths to last a lifetime. A breath: like a poem or a book of humility. Another breath: a book of courage. The final breath: a book of surrender and dignity. We lovingly and carefully carried our father, José E. Montoya, out of his famous home on D Street, the surviving members of his beloved Royal Chicano Air Force assembled and lining the walkway from his steps to the street where the hearse waited. The Chicano General was given a full and final salute to the quiet refrains of ‘De Colores.’ A small white United Farm Workers flag was gently placed over his heart; he was united with his homeboy César once again. Fireworks were detonated into the dark sky, and even the cops rolled by, but José Montoya, existential icon, poet, artist, husband, brother, teacher, father and, yes, Chicano intellectual romantic, was long gone. A single candle flickered in his living room window through the night for all of Sacramento to see from the streets he loved and sketched and wrote about. Only the words from his epic pachuco poem ‘El Louie’ seemed fitting now: ‘ . . . his life had been remarkable, un vato de atolle.’”

Richard Montoya, *Sacrament Bee*, October 13, 2013

El Pueblo's Poet Laureate (José Montoya, ¡Presente!)

Frank de Jesús Acosta

Beautiful heart of the spirit warrior
Lifetime of loving, creativity, sacrifice
In the twilight of your journey; only grace
Malady could not deny a last sweet sunset
Smiling upon the harvest of your milpa
Surrounded by grateful flowers

Tu familia, amistades, el pueblo de tu corazón
Warrior, maestro, composer of human poetry
Artista's flor y canto gave us tapestries of life
Colors of justice, songs of hope, the call to action
Litanies of nuestra historia, cultura cura y destino
Chicanismo; beauty and belonging to la Raza Cósmica

Pueblo's prayer of love brought you to the crossroads
Supplications to Tata Dios, Omteotl, la Virgen
Farewell scenes of reminiscence; reckoning; veneration
We offer ceremonies of gratitude and peaceful passage
The pueblo's poet laureate draws his last three breaths
Sweet sunset of courage, dignity, humility; eternal harvest of love