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Jose Ruben Diaz Vasquez April 9, 2019

The Production of Ideology Through Chicanx Poetry: Towards an Alternative Framework for the American Dream

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Abstract

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Beginning in the 1960's, endeavors such as the Chicano Power Movement and the Farmworker Rights Movement (inspired by the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements) sought to promote political, economic, and cultural shifts that contributed to a distinct generation of artistic work produced by Chicanx artists and writers. The calls for change from these minoritized writers undeniably clashed with the dominant discourses and master narratives of the U.S, including the powerful concept of the American Dream. Through an empirical study, I investigate the ways in which Chicanx poets between the 1960's and 1990's 'talk back' to the dominant discourse of the American Dream. Specifically, I examine 65 poems by Chicanx poets published within one anthology—*The Floating Borderlands* edited by Lauro Flores. I utilize Wendy Griswold's analytical tool of the Cultural Diamond to conceptualize this anthology and the poems therein as cultural objects, situated in a particular social context, that work with a variety of producers and receivers to create ideologies that shape their social world as much as they are shaped by it. Therefore, this project is a systematic study on the extent to which a selection of 65 poems engages with or does not engage with the dominant discourse of the American Dream. Through a multi-methods approach, I draw on close-readings, content analysis, and cultural sociology analysis, and I argue that the majority of poems engage with the Dream and promote narratives and discourses which demand a framework of multiple intersecting, diverging, and cross-cutting imaginaries to understand the various meanings attributed to the American Dream. This alternative framework suggests that individuals with different positionalities imagine paradigmatically distinct 'American Dreams,' to what is dominantly considered to be 'the American Dream'—this includes the notion of a better life, upward mobility, and equality for certain groups—and thus they pave the way towards alternative realities, epistemologies, and identity-formations.

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Table of Contents

In this paper, I lay the groundwork—methodological, theoretical, and analytical—for a larger, more comprehensive project that studies how literature, and, particularly, Chicanx poetry relates to the production of social ideologies of race, citizenship, gender, borders, etc. Such a project requires a diverse range of disciplinary approaches, frameworks, and analytical techniques. Because this current project can be seen as a micro-model for the larger endeavor, I primarily draw from the fields of literature and sociology, especially cultural sociology, combining methods and approaches to effectively investigate the ways in which literary sites produce ideology. This project provides a solid amount of initial empirical work that examines a selection of 65 poems from a notable anthology of Chicanx literature—*The Floating Borderlands: Twenty-Five Years of U.S. Hispanic Literature* edited by Lauro Flores. Specifically, in this paper, I am concerned with examining the ways that the American Dream presents itself in Chicanx poetry.

The object of my current study is to identify if and how Chicanx poets contest, negotiate, re-imagine, and re-enforce ideas of the American Dream. I study the poems produced by 29 Chicanx poets, which are included in the *Floating Borderlands* anthology, because the anthology is a collection of some of the best works published in the *Revista Chicano-Riqueña/ The Americas Review* (Flores 1998). This inquiry has three main components: 1) A critical interrogation, historical exploration, and problematization of the American Dream concept. 2) A systematized study of the ideologies contained within the anthology poems. 3) A determination of the extent to which there is overlap between dominant American Dream discourses and Dream discourses emerging from Chicanx poets.

The anthology I am studying is a celebration of a literary and arts magazine that ran from 1972 to the late 1990's. The time period out of which this magazine arose is significant because

it was the same moment that saw the rise and fall of the Chicano Power Movement, the Farmworker Rights Movement, the Young Lords, the Black Panthers, the Brown Berets, and other social movements that informed and intersected with the lives of the larger Chicanx community. The Chicano Power Movement involved political, economic, social, cultural, and artistic efforts to establish the well-being and rights of Chicanxs in the U.S. as well as to determine the aesthetics, identity politics, and poetics of Chicanx artistic productions. This interweaving of politics, art, social activism, and cultural critique is evident alone in the Chicanx poets that I study in this anthology, and, broadly, of many Chicanx poets during the time period. Many poets not only produced literary works, but also were widely involved in activism efforts across the various regions of the U.S. Scholarship on Chicanx literature is plentiful as is scholarship inquiring about the nature, characteristics, and motives of Chicanx poetry. There are a number of studies about how Chicano fiction engages with the concept of the American Dream and how the Dream shapes the literature, but it is much rarer to find works that discuss how Chicanx poetry engages with the Dream. This lacuna could be due to an assumption that the topics and themes in Chicano fiction will be identical to those in poetry, or it could be due to the politics of interpretation that complicate endeavors to study how certain ideas emerge in poetry.

My work seeks to demonstrate a method for systematically measuring the presence of discourses and ideologies within poetry, considering the nuances of interpretation. Additionally, I seek to innovate the platforms that permit the study of poetry as well as the analytical frameworks used to study poetry. In my work, I use Griswold's (2008) cultural diamond to trace the ways in which poems, as cultural objects, move about the social world and serve to disseminate the ideologies embedded in these works. The cultural diamond is an analytical tool for studying culture; it organizes the study of cultural phenomena around cultural objects, which

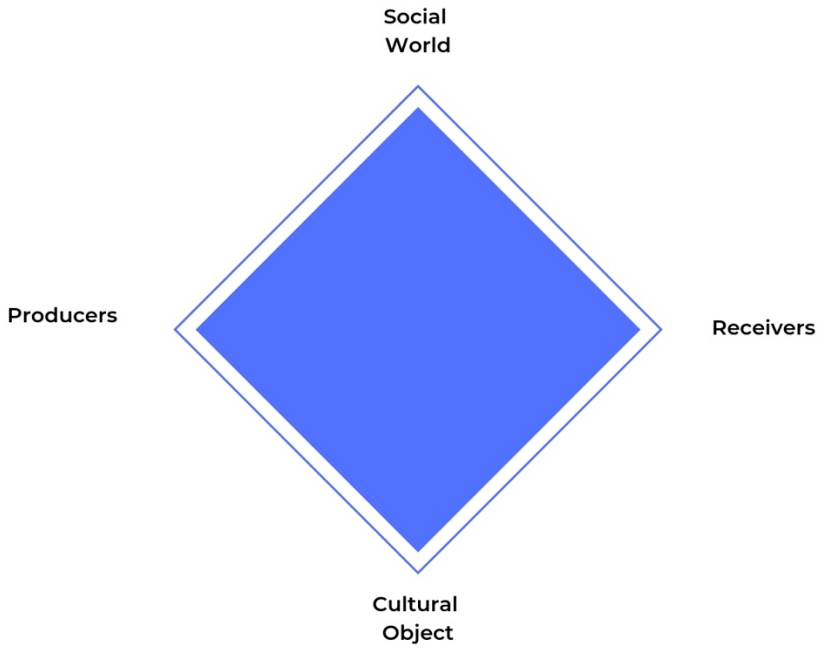
serve as useful aids for "grasping some part of the broader system we refer to as culture and holding up that part for analysis" (Griswold 2008: 12).

Because the cultural diamond provides the core analytical framework for how I study Chicanx poetry in the *Floating Borderlands,* I will begin this paper by explaining the various components and implications of this framework. My goal is to demonstrate how the cultural diamond and a concept I will also describe—the social mind— are helpful tools for making sense of complex cultural and ideological phenomena such as the American Dream and Chicanx poetry. I will proceed by clarifying the meaning of another concept I will refer a lot to—ideology and hegemony. Establishing the basic analytical frames and conceptual toolkits will allow me to move towards a closer examination of the American Dream concept as well as Chicanx poetry. I will discuss the historical origins of the Dream, main debates about its meaning, the limitations of the current scholarship on the Dream, and I will make clear what is meant by the American Dream ideology in this paper. After providing some brief context and basic definitions of Chicanx poetry, I will describe the methodology I employed in pursuing the empirical core of my study. Up next, I will present my data analyzes, which will be organized according to the major themes and topics that arose across the poems that did engage with the American Dream. After examining the ideologies present in these poems and how they support the new framework I am proposing, I will discuss how the findings suggest the usage of an alternative framework for understanding the American Dream.

ESTABLISHING A BASIC FRAMEWORK: THE CULTURAL DIAMOND

The cultural diamond is not a theory nor a model of culture, rather it is an analytical framework, or as Griswold (2008: 15) puts it, it is "an accounting device intended to encourage a fuller understanding of any cultural object's relationship to the social world." The four points in the cultural diamond are: cultural objects, producers, receivers, and the social world. Each element occupies one point on the diamond and there are six links—the four sides of the diamond and the two diagonal lines that can be drawn from the four points. Not only are these four points important in and of themselves since they provide a more complete understanding of a given cultural object, but the six linkages are also necessary for demonstrating the various ways in which interactions between producers and cultural objects or receivers and producers, for example, shape a particular cultural product or phenomena (Griswold 2008).

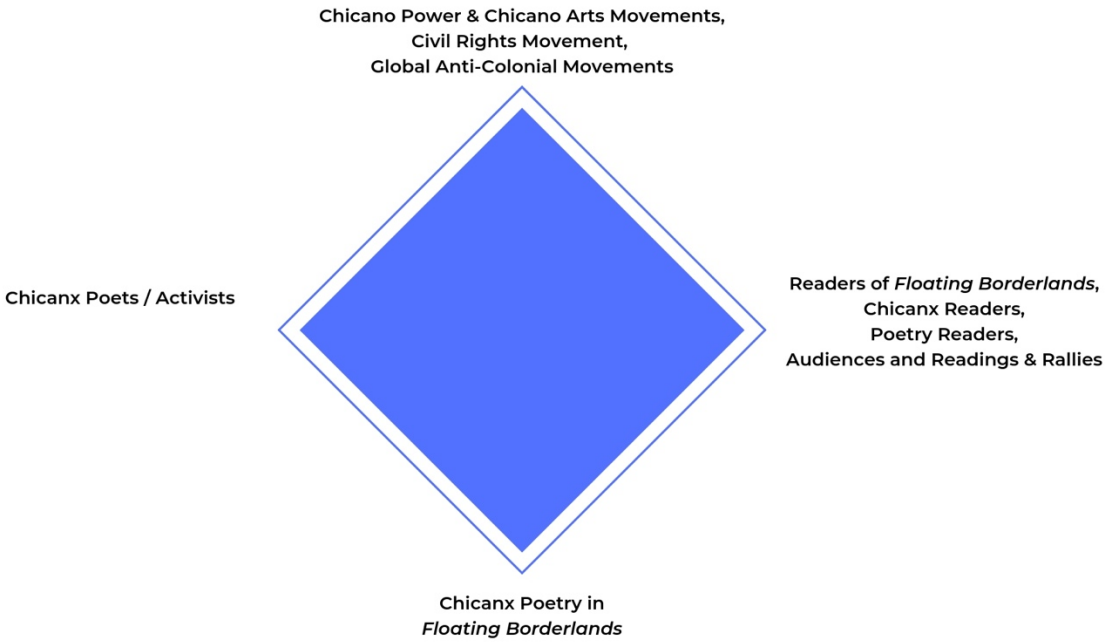
A cultural object is a "socially meaningful expression that is audible, visible, or tangible or that can be articulated," and it can tell "a story, and that story may be sung, told, set in stone, enacted, or painted on the body" (Griswold 2008: 12). Thus, a cultural object can be a poem, a novel, a painting, or a type of religious clothing for a particular faith. Producers are the organizations, individuals, systems of meaning, or general groups that are responsible for creating an object, while receivers are the audiences, readers, and, generally, the people who interact with the object (Griswold 2008). The social world refers to the social context, which is constituted by the economic, political, social, cultural patterns and structures present within a specific place and moment in time (Griswold 2008). As Griswold (2008) likes to remind, the cultural diamond does not dictate what the relationships between points and links are, rather it merely points to the fact there do exist a crucial set of relationships between these four elements.



This visual is a replica of Griswold's (2008) original cultural diamond.

To apply this cultural analysis framework to my project, the anthology that I am studying is the cultural object, which is an object containing a myriad of complex meanings and ties to what can be considered other cultural objects. These other connected objects are the *Revista Chicano-Riqueña* and the individual poems produced by the poets. The producers consist of the publishing press, the editor, and, in a sense, the *Revista,* whose immense cultural content made the anthology possible. The receivers are the targeted audiences, primarily Chicanx individuals and Latinx people, broadly, but the receivers also include just any literate person who comes across the work or is interested in Latinx literature. The social world can be understood through the context that I provided to situate Chicanx poetry. This includes the advent of the Chicano Power Movement, the Chicano Arts Movement, the other nationalistic movements taking place at the time, as well as the remarkable rise in structures, institutions, professional spaces, and

publishing presses that were supporting Chicanx art. Focusing specifically, on the relationships between the producer, the cultural object, and the social world—what Griswold calls the production of culture—it is important to make some observations here. One group of main agents of production—the writers—navigate the social world of the late 1960's up until the late 1980's not only as writers but as grassroots organizers, popular speakers, and travel all over the U.S. sharing their work. This is a unique and vital aspect of studying the role of Chicanx poets and not Chicanx fiction and novel writers, since for these genres (fiction and novels) it was less possible to share their work during a rally intended to stir people towards collective action. These poets thus are important to study not only for the content of their work but for the spaces they had access to during the Chicano Power Movement and the kinds of audiences they spoke to. In fact, about 55% of the poets whose work I analyze were involved in some sort of social activism or literary advocacy that placed them in front of large and diverse audiences (See Appendix A). Because the Chicano Power Movement was a male-dominated movement and a largely cisheterosexual project, there are many ramifications for ideology production, but most notably the dominant exclusion of the imaginaries of non-normative sexualized, gendered, and raced subjects during the Chicanx community. This means that discourses and ideologies from these individuals are being produced as absent, non-credible, and unimportant.

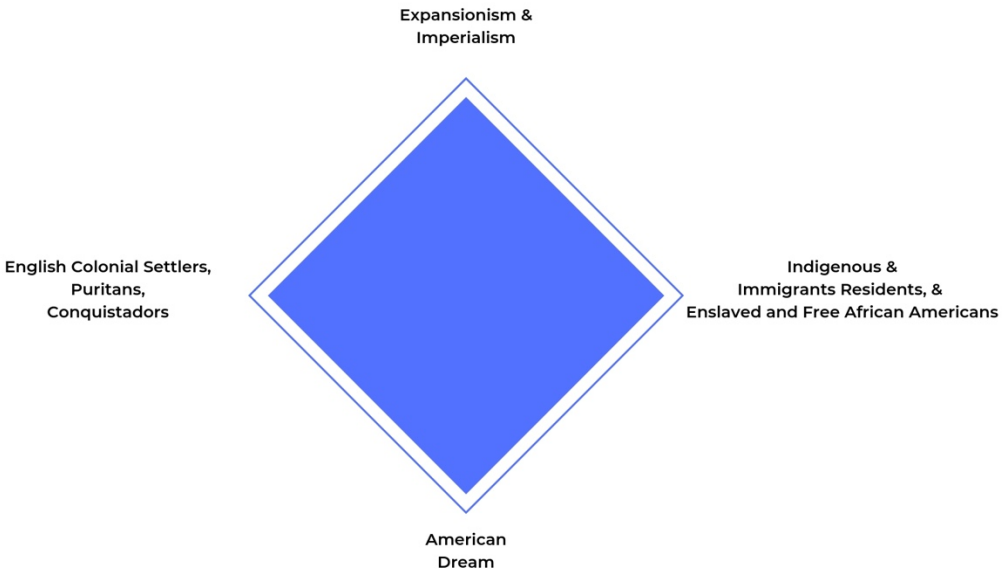


Visual representation of cultural diamond considering Chicanx poetry of Floating Borderlands

On the other side, because poets were not just sharing their work in public readings and only artistic spaces, examining the receivers obtains a crucial importance due to the politics of interpretation. Going into a deep examination of how these politics play out in the domain of audience receptivity is beyond the scope of this current paper, but my goal here is to make clear that such a study is warranted and important for understanding the complete phenomenon of ideology production. As presented in Griswold (2008: 86), the social mind exists between the two extreme and opposite conceptualizations of the mind as either an individual mind that is shaped by individual experiences or as solely a brain or province of neuroscience. The social mind refers to how an individuals' membership in particular groups and categories shapes one's tastes, emotional responses, meaning-making processes, intellectual propensities, and so on (Griswold 2008). Thus, the social mind draws attention to the fact that someone's social position within a social structure produces particular inflections for cultural receptivity. I argue that this

concept of the social mind is also apt for thinking about imaginaries, and perhaps fusing the definitional elements of the social mind with how I defined the imaginary creates a sort of social imaginary that is not solely about reception of culture but production of meaning. In any case, applying the social mind concept to understanding audiences of Chicanx people, allies, and governmental institutions that were being protested by the Chicano Movement calls attention to the necessity of examining and studying precisely how individuals receive these cultural objects. Again, such a study is beyond the purview of this paper, however it could happen in a number of ways, including through qualitative interviews and ethnographies or through content analysis of people reacting to a poem being read at a rally or lecture. The Chicano Power Movement feature a variety of agents and change-makers not least of which were Chicanx students across the country working to obtain ethnic studies and Chicano studies programs, and perhaps many organized teach-ins and other social movement tactics where poetry could have been involved.

These two concepts from cultural analysis form the basis for how I approach the next topics. In the next section, I shift away from a "forest" analysis of these poems towards a "trees" analysis, where I look more closely, first at the American Dream concept and ideology and, second, at the selection of 65 poems included in the *Floating Borderlands anthology.* As the American Dream is a cultural phenomenon, one can look at it as a cultural object, which the diagram below illustrates. My concern is now to zoom in on that object and understand specifically its ideological components.



Based of off Griswold's (2018) diamond.

ESTABLISHING A COMMON DISCURSIVE GROUND:

Tracing the History of the American Dream

I begin by outlining a brief history of the American Dream to both establish a common discursive ground for being able to analyze the Dream and to underline the key paradigms, assumptions, and limitations of past approaches studying the American Dream. Because there are countless scholarly sources that engage with the American Dream, my work here should not be considered comprehensive of all literature on the topic. Indeed, there is a more narrowly defined body of literature that is bounded by its concern with the entity of the American Dream idea, and I seek to engage with some of the most influential of these works. My goal in examining these sources is to be able to measure, understand, and articulate the shape(s) of the American Dream as an ideological structure. In this alone, my work departs from much of the previous literature, which tends to be concerned with the *meaning*, *future, and origin* of the Dream rather than with an exact study of its characteristics as an ideology.

As many scholars agree (Carpenter 1955; Allen 1969; Mogen, Busby, and Bryant 1989; Cullen 2003; Newlin 2013), the ideas of the American Dream can be traced back to the pre-colonial and colonial periods of America. Some scholars state that the American Dream phrase was first coined and formalized by James Truslow Adams in *The Epic of America* (Cullen 2003; Newlin 2013) and others associate the Dream to Horatio Alger's rags to riches novels (Tebbel 1963), while Churchwell's (2018) most recent work on the matter examines newspaper articles, speeches, and other archival documents to locate the first uses of the phrase towards the end of the 1800's. Despite some differences among scholars on when to date the origins of the Dream, I hold that the ideas, images, and principles that undergird the Dream were not present during the

colonial and conquest projects that took off with the arrival of Europeans in North America during the Age of Exploration (Cullen 2003).

Cullen (2003) claims that the first great American Dream was conceived by Puritans and other groups of English religious settlers in their quest to establish a home in the so-called "New World." Focusing exclusively on the experiences of the Massachusetts Bay Colony Puritans, both Allen (1969) and Cullen (2003) draw attention to the ideals and values they used to construct a society that would endure the harsh circumstances and challenges of New England. The Puritans envisioned themselves as descendants of the Israelites searching for a promised land (Allen 1969; Cullen 2003), and this self-perception helped fuel their ideological justifications for the displacement and genocide of countless indigenous people. Additionally, the Puritans sought religious freedom for themselves and their future generations of children, but they built a society intolerant of any other form of religious worship (Allen 1969; Cullen 2003).

In fact, central to the goals and values of the Puritans and Pilgrims was a sense of community, which Cullen (2003: 22) describes as a "series of deep emotional and affective bonds that connected people who had a shared sense of what their lives were about." Quite accurately, Cullen adds that "Freedom was a means to that end (of building community)" (Cullen 2003:22), which should be of little surprise considering the whole point of settler colonialism is to establish a sort of livelihood in a foreign territory. I present these facts so as to effectively situate and flesh out the powerful American Dream discourse of "a better life." I suggest that Puritans and Pilgrims' desires of a better life were complex imaginations concerned with the building of a new society upon new territory. In the imagination of these European settlers, indigenous people were sub-human, heretics, and incapable, and the land of North America therefore was unexplored and available via the so-called right of conquest. Not only was the land

seen as 'available for the taking' but the Puritans viewed the space afforded by the land as the opportunity to engineer the ideal society of their imagination. Thus, I argue that their desires of a better life subconsciously imagined a society that was religiously intolerant, racist, sexist (Cullen 2003), and upheld cis-gender heteronormative practices and traditions. That these fractures and detestable realities are written out of the dominant discourses about the Dream is suggestive of many limitations within studies of the American Dream and symptomatic of larger epistemological concerns on the topic.

Since the Age of Exploration, during the invasion and colonization of North America, European settlers sought to amass tremendous wealth and riches. As Adams (1933) descriptively writes, the Spanish, French, and English empire-building projects were all concerned with economic gain, and this was no exception for the individual settlers that came. Studying letters from the beginning of the colonial period in America, Adams (1933: 33) references one person who excitedly wrote about "'land in the woods'" they were able to purchase. Adams (1933: 33) expands that the possibility of this 'land in the woods' proved to be "one of the most powerful of the forces which worked toward a democracy of feeling and outlook, toward the shaping of our American dream." Once again here, the imagined and *narrativized* availability of land is a 'means to an end' – land ownership enabling a settler to start over, establish a livelihood, and generate wealth for future generations. Adams (1933) also cites a poem written by an English Puritan, Andrew Marvell, who depicts American lands, although having set foot only on the Bermuda Islands, as utopic places rife with opportunity, riches, and beauty. These letters and poems spread stories about American lands, and, most importantly, they generated discourses that constructed lands owned by indigenous people as 'available for the taking,' sites for wealth production, and places to establish idealized communities. Thus, put simply, narratives created

discourses, and these discourses shaped the imaginations of English settlers, producing very specific kinds of ideologies.

The Many American Dreams: What do they all point to?

The Dreams of riches, Dreams of a better life, and the conquistador Dreams of building empires were inextricably woven, and this is true also for other formulations of dreams that emerged during this time period and in the course of U.S. history. Cullen (2003) identifies six main Dreams throughout U.S. history: The Dream of a Better Life; the constitutionalist Dream of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness; the Dream of Upward Mobility; the Dream of Equality; the Dream of Home Ownership; and the Dream of the Coast. Numerous variations of the Dream are present in different texts, including the Dream of Rags to Riches (Tebbel 1963); Dream of Westward Expansion (Allen 1969), the Dream of Democratic Equality (Churchwell 2018), the Dream of Naval Supremacy (Churchwell 2018), the Dream of Triumphant Power (Churchwell 2018), the Dreams of Continental and Hemispheric Domination (Churchwell 2018), and so on. I lay out these different instantiations of the Dream in order to convey the multiplicity, messiness, and multi-dimensionality of the American Dream idea(s). Cullen (2003) is primarily concerned with the origin of the Dream and its different meanings across time, and Churchwell (2018) focuses specifically on the semantic inception of the American Dream phrase during the Progressive Era to investigate what the Dream meant in the early 1900's—a time period critical for the development and popularization of its meanings. Still, other scholars have chosen to study the American Dream idea as it has shaped and been shaped by American literatures, including the European-American traditions, Chicano-American traditions, and other ethnic groups (Carpenter 1955; Mogen, Busby, and Bryant 1989; Hume 2000; Newlin 2013). Despite plentiful

studies on the *meanings*, *origin*, *futures*, and *influence* of the Dream, I argue that these scholars have largely approached the topic with limiting and flawed frameworks.

Limitations of Current Literature on the American Dream

Approaches to the study of the Dream have been limited in three main ways, by: 1) Romanticizing America and the notion of the Dream. 2) Systematically exploring the meaning(s) of the Dream rather than systematically examining the Dream's ideological structure. 3) Operating through a largely unproblematized, unitary framework that is rife with contradictions.

Despite Cullen's (2003) attempt to more systematically determine the meanings and uses of the term, the paradigms of his work make clear a tendency to romanticize the Dream, which functions as an automatic response to any critique made to it. He correctly connects the dreams of the Massachusetts Bay Puritans to the role they played in building a settler colonial state when he writes that the Puritan's dream "of a city on a hill became an empire on a continent, largely peopled by Americans who would have appalled them in their diversity and secularity" (Cullen 2003: 33). However, Cullen (2003:33) immediately writes after that "in the end, though, it's their dream…that despite all that has happened partially redeems them" and frequently Cullen expresses his admiration and esteem towards Puritans, uplifting their reputation through the claim that the fervor and tenacity of their American Dream—the ideals upon which they tried to establish a society—is what allowed Americans for generations after to have their own dreams as well. Cullen's (2003) move towards redeeming the Puritans for their role in mass colonial and state harm is a callous, violent claim that suggests past injustices have been overcome through a presumed virtuosity of the American Dream. In other words, colonial and slavery injustices are

forgiven, and the reputation of the English settlers is saved as they are actually hailed as mythic, heroic figures.

The work of Adams (1933) rampantly romanticizes the Dream, which is evident enough from the title of his work, *The Epic of America,* and his primary goal of recounting U.S. history through the influential force of the American Dream. Adams (1933) tries to narrativize and uplift U.S. history so that it may be regarded as an epic, and in doing so, Adams almost completely erases the massive genocide, enslavement, colonialism, and oppression crucial to the very possibility of a United States of America. Adams (1933: 374) regards the American Dream as the U.S.'s unique gift to mankind, luring "tens of millions of all nations to our shores," democratizing access to a better and richer life for the common man in a manner previously impossible due to the restrictions of older civilizations. Yet, at the end of his "epic," Adams's (1933) tone is also worried—noticing an increasing value placement on materialism and class stratification, Adams call Americans to fight for the liberty and opportunities of the common man, in order to save the American Dream.

Almost one hundred years later, Churchwell (2018) also attempts to use the American Dream as a rallying cry but this time against authoritarianism, corruption, and kleptocracy—what one might say Adams (1933) was warning about. Churchwell (2018:288) re-states that when the Dream emerged in the Progressive Era it served as a call to "combat bigotry and inequality, and strive for a republic of equals." She rejects claims that the American Dream is only about capitalism and individualism, only about protecting white privilege, obscuring the racist foundations of capitalism in slavery, and that the Dream was ever about imperialism (Churchwell 2018). Mainly, she argues, the Dream may have been used in these ways at some moments in time, but these uses were never so profound that they defined the core idea of the Dream

(Churchwell 2018). That the American Dreams of equality have not come true does not mean the Dream is corrupt, she writes, it indicates that people are (Churchwell 2018). Once again, there is a tenacious effort to preserve the purity and righteousness of the Dream concept and idea, and to use it to rally people together in the name of more equality, democracy, and more dreaming. The patterns in the literature make it unsurprising that both Adams (1933) and Churchwell (2018) ended their monographs on the Dream by telling the story of an immigrant who believes in and needs the hope that emanates from the American Dream.

The romanticizing of the Dream leads to bias, subjective, and misguided claims on the meaning of the Dream, and it is also true that the very focus on the meaning(s) of the Dream have led scholarship astray. All of the aforementioned scholars in this literature review have sought to systematically analyze the meaning of the Dream, and this has developed strong issues in the premises of their approaches. To study the meaning(s) of the Dream indicates an interpretative and subjective endeavor to understand a certain concept and make claims about it, which will likely lead to ontological suggestions and certainly will result in interpretative and subjective findings. For instance, if I say I want to study the meaning of love, then I am engaging in a study that might feature: 1) a somewhat objective, simple definition of what love is so as to provide some backdrop for elaboration 2) a survey of what others have said love means. 3) an attempt at a unique articulation of what love means to me, considering my context, experiences, and perspectives. The results of this study will be subjective in the sense that any conclusion I come to about the meaning of love is subjective, being largely contingent on my context, experiences, perspectives, and beliefs. The meaning of love is interpretative, because the nature of the concept of love is that it's meaning can be interpreted differently by everyone. In my

work, I move away from a study about the "meaning(s) of the American Dream" towards an investigation of the Dream's structure as an ideology.

Such a move benefits from a methodological and paradigmatic shift that combines literary and sociological approaches. The works I have found on the Dream are largely from the fields of history, American literature, and popular writing. In this paper, I situate a discussion about the Dream within the context of an interdisciplinary project that draws heavily on close-readings and literary analysis as well as on content analysis and sociological frameworks. This is important to acknowledge because what previous scholars might regard as inquiries into the meaning(s), origin, and implications of the Dream I consider as inquiries into the ideological structure of this concept. In making this distinction, I follow significant logics that demonstrate that such an approach is necessary. As noted earlier in this paper, narratives about America through letters and poems produced by settlers, through speeches, newspaper articles, and other documents helped generate certain discourses about the Dream. These discourses were highly influential in creating images, associations, ideals, tropes, and rationales in the minds of Europeans even before they saw or traveled to colonial America. What formed in and throughout these discourses then was the development of an Anglo-Saxon-American imaginary, which refers to the collective set of ideologies, memories, histories, images, and, generally, cultural and social knowledge that emerges from a particular positionality within an international and national *historicized* framework. Because of the existence of the Anglo-Saxon American imaginary and other imaginaries, the results of my study will capture nuances between specific subjectivities and the ideology of the Dream will largely depend on what discursive frame or imaginary one is focusing on. Nonetheless, by demarcating the boundaries, overlap, and gray areas between

imaginaries, my arguments about ideological structures will be precise and enabling a systematic study of ideology.

Although much of the literature has contributed new perspectives and considerations for the Dream, the majority of works are limited by their commitment to a unitary, narrow framework. Mogen, Busby, and Bryant (1989) have come closest to the paradigmatic shift I suggest, but ultimately their concern with re-shaping the canon of American literature through a more complex and nuanced account of the Dream. However, my focus remains on the ideology of the Dream and building a framework properly accounting for a critical understanding of this concept by examining Chicanx poetry. When Cullen (2003) asserted that there is no one American Dream but many varieties of Dreams, he was not speaking to the different ways people imagine the idea of the Dream, Cullen only referred to the fact that the Dream has carried many different meanings across time and place. This is notable in Cullen's (2003:120) argument that equality has always been at the core of the American Creed, and thus the Dream, therefore much of Civil Rights Movement and the work of Black people was to uphold the Dream and make it true. Churchwell (2018: 270) makes a similar claim when she writes: "In 1963, the American Dream as it was first imagined—a dream of democratic and economic equality—was powerfully revived by Martin Luther King Jr.…" I argue that both scholars are speaking from and about an Anglo-Saxon imaginary, which has largely conceptualized the Dream as centering equality for all people; of course, for most of America's history, and arguably still in today's time, the Anglo-Saxon imaginary has not regarded Black people as people. It would be more accurate to say that the Dream has always meant that all white men are equal. The Dream emerging from Black activists and people during the Civil Rights Movement emerged from a different positionality and also from a different imaginary—a Black American imaginary, which used the

discourse of the Dream to mobilize people. It cannot be said that the Dream uttered by MLK was in any way shape or form similar to the Dream imagined by the English invaders of North America. Many works on the Dream are limited by this unitary, narrow conceptualization of the Dream, which treats the concept as more or less stable and whole, rather than nebulous, permeable, and existing in different realities.

Perhaps the limit of this framework is no better illustrated than in a passage from Adam's (1933: 372) often referenced work:

"A continent which scarce sufficed to maintain a half million savages now supports nearly two hundred and fifty times that number of as active and industrious people as there are in the world. The huge and empty land has been filled with homes, roads, railways, schools, colleges, hospitals, and all the comforts of the most advanced material civilization…we threw ourselves into the task of physical domination of our environment with an abandonment that perforce led us to discard much that we had started to build up in our earliest days."

Some points have been covered in past discussion here and do not need to be mentioned again, including the re-envisioning of land by Anglo-Saxons and Europeans, the redemption of the Dream in the name of progress and nobility, the de-humanization of indigenous people, and the erasure of genocide, slavery, and colonialism. This passage from Adams calls one to complicate the imaginary as well by considering how the imaginary is inflected across time, space, and place. What overlap is there between the Anglo-Saxon imaginary of the 1930's, pre-Civil Rights, and the Anglo imaginary after the civil rights movement? Regardless, my concern here is to demonstrate that the framework we use to understand the concept of the American Dream can no longer be one that is unitary, narrow, and stable, but rather a framework that is complex, nebulous, existing across different realities, and fluid will be more helpful for

understanding this ideology. Cullen (2003) states that the Dream has always served as a *lingua franca,* or common ground, for different people to understand each other and be bound together. I disagree with the basic claim that the Dream has helped bring people together (that is, without violence, oppression, and state-imposed homogenization of ideals), but I do give some credit to Cullen for pointing out that the American Dream functions as a common discourse that people in the U.S. generally recognize. However, within this common discourse there are also variations of the discourse, emerging from positionalities in the U.S. social system and axes of oppression, and therefore different imaginaries that produce different visions and ideas about the Dream.

Contextualizing Chicanx Poetry

Before proceeding, it is important to have a general understanding of what Chicanx poetry is and to situate it amongst American literature as well as the socio-political and cultural context between the 1960's and 1990's. Between the 1960's and the turn of the century, nationalistic movements and forms of activism disrupted and transformed the status quo of the United States. Scholars, activists, artists, working class individuals participating in the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, and the Chicano Power Movement, to name a few, identified and challenged government practices that systematically oppressed specific groups of people. Writers and poets, specifically, engaged not only with the task of voicing the plights of the oppressed, but re-imagining forms of resistance and literary activism. Often, during this time period, poets could not just be artists and cultural producers, they had to take up roles as grassroots organizers, movement-builders, and spokespeople for vast communities.

The Chicano Arts Movement of the late 1960's and early 1970's, that was intertwined and occurred alongside the Chicano Power Movement, uplifted the voices of the Chicano

community, providing mediums for Chicanos to express and protest their experiences of racism, classism, and other systemic issues (Castaneda N.d.). Sexism was marginally included as point of contention at the outskirts of the movement, according to Luis (2013: xxxiv), and it would not have been so without the firm stances of Chicanas and Chicanxs who "opposed the macho behavior of their comrades in arms and demanded to be treated with respect…beyond their sexual and cultural roles." For this reason, it is important to distinguish between a *Chicano* movement and a *Chicanx* movement, since the Chicano Power Movement and the associated arts movement taking off in the 1960's dominantly centered the voices and aspirations of cisheterosexual men. In this paper, I refer mainly to the group of artists during this time period as Chicanx—not the movement—, in order to refer to all the writers, whether recognized or marginalized in mainstream discourse, of various gender identities. This is just one of the flaws that riddled the Chicano Power Movement, and many scholars have pointed out several other important criticisms in other work.

Chicano poetry emerges out of this politically and socially contested context, providing a literary space for marginalized ideas, experiences, and knowledges, and intersecting a variety of temporalities, histories, epistemologies, discourses, and cultures. Pérez Torres (1995: 3) puts this phenomenon as moving "through the gaps and across the bridges between numerous cultural sites: the United States, Mexico, Texas, California, the rural, the urban, the folkloric, the postmodern, the popular, the elite, the traditional, the tendentious, the avant-garde." Chicano poetry is thus characterized by a struggle with multiple localities, histories, perspectives, and geographies. As Pérez-Torres (1995) suggests, Chicano poetry is steeped in questions of cultural identity, identity formation, history, cultural nationalism, and resistance to repression. These questions have been critical to Chicano poetry, because the origin, development, and main

characteristics of this corpus of texts has been intimately tied to Chicano people's political struggles (Pérez-Torres 1995). Thus, understanding Chicano poetry must begin with a recognition and general awareness of the Chicano subjectivity that produces and emanates from much of the literature. The term Chicano in itself is contentious and contains immense tension, because it tries to construct a subjectivity that traces descent to pre-colonial indigenous cultures and upholds a belief in a return to cultural origins and a homeland (Pérez-Torres 1995). Any attempt to generalize or categorize a group of people into a single, stable identity label confronts the nearly unavoidable issue of homogenizing that group of people, erasing differences, and creating further hierarchies. Pérez-Torres (1995) states that the creation of "Chicano" left in question what space there was for "Chicanas," how sexuality would be included in culturally-focused identity label, and what kind of linguistic attachments would be favored under a label that dealt people of countless linguistic abilities. Then again, what it means to be "Chicano" is also influenced by the geographic and thus geopolitical locations of individuals across the U.S. and borderlands.

Pérez-Torres (1995: 6) describes a classic Chicano poetics as "poetry that evinces a strong narrative or dramatic line…poetry that deals overtly with issues of repression, discrimination, exploitation undertaken by the dominant society against Chicanos; poetry that critiques the effects of racist and ethnocentric ideologies; poetry whose mode of expression often assumes the hitherto silenced voice of Chicano communities." Within these characteristics, Pérez-Torres (1995) presents four general areas, or themes, that are present across these texts: the usage of Aztlán as a foci for cultural identity and land claims, dispossession, a mythic memory that connects Chicanos to pre-colonial indigenous cultures, and the articulation of a third language that is neither fully Spanish or English. Perez-Torres (1995) asks: "with which forms of

sociohistorical and cultural discourses does it (Chicano poetry) engage?" My works responds that one of those discourses is that of the American Dream, and my project seeks to figure out the precise ways in which this happens. Another important move made my Perez-Torres (1995) is that he situates Chicano poetry through postcolonial and postmodern lens, leading him to connect the Chicano Power Movement to other nationalistic movements taking place worldwide, including the Black Power Movement, the Young Lords, and the several independence movements of African nations against their colonial oppressors. One final important note by Perez-Torres (1995) is that he claims that the Borderlands concept developed by Gloria Anzaldúa is the main figure that currently captures Chicano imagination as identity, eclipsing even the notion of Aztlan.

METHODOLOGY:

The approach utilized in this work seeks a balance between approaches and frameworks from literature and sociology. The sample for my study is an anthology edited by Lauro Flores called *The Floating Borderlands: Twenty-five Years of U.S. Hispanic Literature*. I chose this particular anthology, because it is a collection of what Flores determines to be the best poems published within a well-known and influential literary magazine—*Revista Chicano-Riqueña*. The *Revista* was founded by Nicolas Kanellos and Luis Dávila in order to provide an outlet for the literary and non-literary artistic endeavors of Hispanic artists (Flores 1998). This sample is useful precisely due to its connection to this larger body of Hispanic literature. The anthology is an interesting site for exploring how an editor's curation is shaped by specific aesthetic preferences, ideological stances, and positional biases. That being said, the anthology is a window into the

literary trail of only one magazine published during a time period of tremendous growth and concerted efforts to create a Chicanx poetics and aesthetics. The process of curation provides an interesting arena of analysis for two reasons: 1) it explores how editors and other agents can function as gatekeepers denoting which aesthetic propensities and ideologies within poems should be regarded with merit. 2) building off the previous reason, it provides a means of justification for further studies exploring how ideological formation in literature is affected by certain factors.

The anthology is composed of three different sections entitled: Nationhood Messengers, Memory Makers, and New Navigators of the Floating Borderlands. Flores created these sections purposefully to categorize writers according to the role he saw them fulfilling in the cultivation of a "Nuyorican" and Chicanx literary tradition (Flores 1998: 8). These roles include serving as the pioneering artists, the fresh voices emerging in literature, and those who bridge those time periods between the pioneers and the new voices (Flores 1998: 8). The anthology primarily includes a combination of Puerto Rican descendant writers and Chicanx writers, with the exception of other ethnicities included in the emerging voices section. There are fifty-one poets included in total, and well over half of them—twenty-nine are Chicanx poets. Altogether, these 29 Chicanx poets provide 65 poems for analysis. 17 of the poets are men (accounting for 36 total poems) and 12 of the poets are women (accounting for 29 of the total poems). I cannot identify any non-binary or gender non-conforming poet within this anthology.

The approach for this project was to first establish an operational definition for the American Dream. This definition serves to build the criteria I then used to determine whether a poem engaged with the American Dream or not. The close readings of each of my poems found *all-or-nothing* results, meaning that by using my criteria a poem either did engage with the

Dream or did not. I conducted two rounds of close-readings. In the first, I aimed to understand, simply put, what the poems were literally about. In other words, I sought to understand what was literally happening in the poem and therefore also distinguished between the literal and figurative elements of the poem, as all were fusions of both. Strictly speaking for these poems, this approach was possible. I did not have to contend with any poems whose constructions were so complicated by an intricate interweaving of the figurative and literal. This first reading was also crucial for gauging the pattern of ideas in the poems and for building the criteria I would use to examine the presence or absence of the American Dream. I synthesized what knowledge I had gained from reviewing the literature about the Dream and the themes and topics I found in these poems to create criteria appropriate for this body of poems. The American Dream is an iconic phrase that is in the everyday lexicon of the people in the U.S.; however, the things people associate with the Dream are wide and varied. For instance, the American Dream of home ownership is prevalent in much of the discourse about the dream, however it does not appear prominently in the poetry of the anthology. Thus, it would not be useful to analyze the poetry using a criterion that included home ownership, rather the most productive analyzes were to be attained by calibrating the criteria to the topics relevant to the poetry. For this reason, the three criteria that I utilized as codes for reading the poems were focused on some of the three most re-occurring Dreams—the Dream of a Better Life, the Dream of Upward Mobility, and the Dream of Equality.

The second round of close-readings involved a heavy analysis of each poem by distinguishing between figurative and literal language elements and properly situating and contextualizing the poems. I contextualized poems by understanding their socio-historical and cultural background and their inter-textual links across poetic and prosaic texts as well as

connections to other cultural productions. Differentiating between literal and figurative elements was an essential component of measuring which poems engaged with the Dream, and this is a preferred approach to systematically coding the poems by focusing on identifiable keywords. Many poems used the word "dream" but of course this did not refer to the American Dream in every situation, nor did it mean that when the speaker of a poem was dreaming that they were necessarily conversing with the American Dream. Rather, if a poem's speaker was dreaming, I first sought to understand what was *literally* occurring in the poem (i.e. was the speaker sick and having nightmares, was the speaker dreaming about a loved one, etc). Then, I sought to contextualize the poems by considering their background and any inter-textuality that may connect the poem to a facet of the Dream (i.e. referencing Martin Luther King's speech, referencing a recognizable phrase, etc).

Through my approach, I seek to be as successful as possible in developing a method for carefully measuring ideology in poems through literally analysis and considerations from the field of cultural sociology. In no way am I ignorant to the delicate ground my analysis resides on, and it must not be dismissed that in analyzing these poems I am providing particular interpretations. However, my approach (indeed my argument is contingent upon this) does allow me to make the bold claim that it cannot be argued that the poems I determined to engage with the Dream, otherwise do not. That is, my interpretation that these poems converse with the Dream must be a valid and true one within the scope of possible interpretations for the poem. These poems as texts and as cultural objects are clearly threaded with ideas that converse with the Dream, though in a multiplicity of ways.

DATA ANALYSIS:

Out of the 69 poems included in my analysis, I found that 38 poems engaged with the Dream and 31 did not engage with the Dream. In this section, I will present general themes and close-readings of those poems that did engage with the Dream, exploring the ways in which the poems engaged with this concept as well as any findings that consequently emerge.

Work, Gender, and the Possibilities of Hope

In *Maria la O,* Barbara Brinson Curiel writes about a female speaker that undergoes tremendous hardship and tragedy, which, for better or for worse, she is able to endure (Flores 1998). The dramatic situation of the poem follows a clear story-line, and has seven short sections, each describing a different moment in the story (Flores 1998). In the first section, the reader learns that the speaker was named after a random song whistled by a stranger, that the speaker is poor, and that she is an illegitimate child who receives ill treatment from her mother. The speaker's situation improves in sections two and three when she marries a man named Mario, moves out of her mother's house, and presumably acquires some sort of home or apartment just for themselves. The speaker watches her husband walk to work and describes him:

"His arms and neck shine.

His veins trace a memorized path.

A stonemason,

Walls rise beneath his hands" (Flores 1998: 86).

The speaker depicts Mario's body as strong, robust, and erotic. Through her eyes, he is not an asexual subject, he is a handsome, muscular man who is made more attractive by his discipline and commitment to work and providing for the couple. The speaker also describes Mario's "sand dollar nipples," "muscled back," and that he is a "silk man between my thighs" (Flores 1998; 85). These erotic scenes suggest a sense of joy and satisfaction that is composite of the material comfort of their situation (they have a place for themselves) and the intensity of their love. However, the poem takes a sharp turn after section 5, because the reader learns a "devil/ perches on Mario's chest" (Flores 1998: 86). The speaker descriptions of Mario's body emphasize exhaustion, weakness, and illness:

"His heart reaches
through his ribs for air.

He walks to work,
his back straining
for a breath…

His face has turned grey" (Flores 1998: 86).

Mario's vigor is absent as work becomes a more burdensome and overwhelming force in the poem. In fact, the work appears to be draining Mario's lifeforce, and leaves him in a sickly, weak state, where he can no longer be productive. Curiel achieves this through a sequence of striking images that follow a story-line. The poet further presents powerful and deliberate images which resonate specifically with American Dream discourses. The speaker describes that "there was no work," and as a result "Mario sold my gold earrings" (Flores 1998:87). Furthermore, Mario

"dreams of hell," "doesn't see our wood fence/ splinter into the road," and finally dies in the last section of the poem (Flores 1998: 87-88). The images of selling gold earrings, of nightmares, and of a splintered wooden fence are evidently in conversation with images conjured by the dominant American Dream discourse. However, rather than agreeing with the narratives typically portrayed by the Anglo-Saxon imaginary, which has been discussed earlier, these images stand in stark opposition and tell a different narrative.

Upon her husband's death, the speaker is forced to reconnect with her mother and to possibly live with her again. In the last lines of the poem, the speaker states:

"The straight steel arms of the train track

Will embrace me,

Carry me to railroad yards,

To fields of,

Texas cotton,

Michigan cherry,

California grape,

To the city's concrete bed,

To an open road" (Flores 1998: 88).

Rather than an image grounded in the present tense, which Curiel employed throughout the entire poem, Curiel switches to the future tense to deliver this image. She writes that the train track *will* embrace the speaker, and the image of railroad yards--work on the railroads being something that elicits strong connotations to a history migrant labor--leads to "fields of Texas cotton" and "California grape." The images of Texas and California both evoke the memory of U.S. imperialism that justified westward expansion through manifest destiny, thus although we don't know where the speaker was living when her husband died, the reference to Texas and California inevitably conjure the idea that there is opportunity to find work in the west. This is further expanded through the two last images: the city's concrete bed and an open road--the city signals an urban place of opportunity for labor and an open road is *a possibility of hope*. These images too are conversing with the American Dream discourse, but rather than articulating a hopeful, optimistic, and romantic view of a potential better life, the poem provides a largely bleak and depressing outlook. There is no indication that the speaker believes something better will come; on the contrary, the speaker appears to be driven by the mere fact of survival and the purely coincidental possibility of hope. In other words, the absence of an active faith in a better life towards the end suggests an interpretation that the Dream of a better and richer life failed and that the Dream of upward mobility through hard labor cost Mario's lives. Through adopting the perspective of a woman of color, this poem reveals an imaginary framework that presents the dominant American Dream ideas as out-of-touch with reality, dangerous, disappointing, and highly questionable as to their truths.

In *Running to America,* Luis J. Rodriguez writes about an unidentified group of migrants that are crossing the border, and he uses sensory appeals and lists to convey certain notions about the Dream (Flores 1998: 248-250). Through the repeated line of "running to America," Rodriguez explores the various hardships, obstacles, situations, and circumstances that migrants

encounter, and which draw them to the U.S. In the first stanza, Rodriguez describes the migrants as “night shadows/ violating borders,” that they dodge “30-30 bullets,” hide from “infra-red eyes” and leave familiar things in their running to America (Flores 1998: 248). The scene Rodriguez portrays reveals a militarized border, a nation-state hostile to migrants, and the somewhat ritualistic obstacles that these migrants have to overcome in order to escape the violence of their hometowns. Rodriguez makes it clear too that migrants leave behind family, memories, comfort, and a sense of community belonging. These descriptions embody what it means to pursue the American Dream as a Latinx migrant, which starkly contrasts that situation of the English settlers who sought to colonize and displace. Rodriguez also uses lists and sensory imagery to convey the inter-generational continuity of Latinx migration:

“They have endured

The sun’s stranglehold,

El cortito,

Foundry heats,

And dark caves

Of mines

Hungry for men.

Still they come…” (Flores 1998: 250).

By making a list that references the various kinds of migrant labor, ranging from farm workers to mine workers, Rodríguez further emphasizes the extent to which migrants impact the daily lives

of those who live in the U.S. By focusing on the irony of migrants' continued arrival, Rodriguez underscores the necessity that drives much of this Latinx migration, due to political and economic instability at home. The descriptions of endurance aren't as much to glorify the resilience of migrant workers but rather to make a defiant claim that people fleeing brutal oppression and inequality will overcome physical and social borders because their existence depends on it. Towards the end of the poem, Rodriguez writes:

"Who can confine them?
Who can tell them
which lines never to cross?" (Flores 1998: 250).

In the imaginary of a migrant who can no longer stay in their country of origin, no border will hold enough moral and social credibility so as to impede them from "violating borders." Indeed, it is the presence of such borders that complicate migrants' ability to actually find a better life, since crossing the border without documentation comes at the cost of freedom and mobility, so that from the very entrance of migrants to America, a lower-class citizenship and restricted liberty is established. The dominant discourse of the Dream hardly has the registers to make sense of this reality. It is ironic that though in much of the Dream's history, the Dream has taken a borderless state, in the sense that it can go around and spread democracy in other places, when it comes to America's own borders, the Dream maintains a nationalist framework that does not question the presence of borders in an increasingly globalized world.

Both the poems of Rodriguez and Curiel strongly feature themes of work and economic productivity, and it is important to ask to what extent within migrant imaginaries is migrant subjectivity constructed in relation to work and capitalist productivity? The different gendered positionalities of both authors certainly inflect how each poem views and presents the notion of

work, with Rodriguez using much more aggressive, pained, and rough language to convey the hardship of work life among Mexican migrants in particular.

Time, Coloniality, & The Politics of Land

Time, coloniality, and the politics of land were major topics throughout the anthology, and the poems discussed in this section effectively bring to the fore the major ways in which this occurs. These topics fit my criteria for the Dream in multiple ways, but namely through the Better Life discourse and its sub-topics of land acquisition, community construction or deconstruction, and aspirational desires of life improvement outcomes.

In *Washington D.C.* and *Leaving Cibola* by Edgar Silex, the poet practices a literal re-envisioning of the land and history of iconic places in the U.S through a colonial lens that draws out suppressed histories. The speaker of *Washington D.C.* is walking around the city and painstakingly re-interpreting all the buildings, statues, streets, and sounds in the environment. The speaker describes seeing "white stone faces staring/ from marble sepulchers memorializing the sacred/ names of slavers and lynchmen" (Flores 1998: 418). Implicitly, it is suggested that the statues of Founding Fathers, celebrated military generals, politicians, and so on to the speaker reveal only people who participated in mass, state-sanctioned violence against Black people. The speaker further hears "moccasin bells" and "echodancing" of:

"Red cloud
of Red Bird of Hollow Horn Bear
of Standing Bear of Ten Bears
of Santanta Of Muskogee
Of Sauk of Cheyenne of Mandan

Choctaw Blackfeet Anacostan

Bear Clans Fox Clans Ishi*" (Flores 2018: 418).

Silex invokes the sounds of indigenous music, dancing, figures, and names in order to demonstrate that in D.C. the burden of history is restless and constantly grating the surface of reality through phantasmagoric apparitions. In other words, the indigenous masses murdered on the territory do not rest in peace, and the speaker of the poem vividly experiences how the specter of history haunts this land. Silex's sensory descriptions gives audibility to otherwise imperceptible ghosts, and the speaker's own positionality as a "post-colonial" subject allows the poem to bridge time past, time present, and perhaps also time future. Silex shatters the image of D.C. as this vibrant capital of a powerful nation with images about a troubled past, ghosts, and bloodshed.

Silex again utilizes sensory imagery to blend together colonial realities of the past, present, and future in his poem, *Leaving Cibola.* According to legend, the Seven Cities of Cibola were cities full of gold found somewhere in the Southwestern U.S., and it was the ambition of several conquistadors to find these treasures (Yates 2019). As the speaker presumably drives away from El Paso, Texas, the last place that explorer Coronado searched for the seven cities of gold, he sees that historic past in the present claiming that "no one has ever left here" and that it is "as if time had changed nothing" (Flores 1998: 420). The speaker hears the ghostly voices of missionaries "baptizing/ young Indian women with their sperm," sometimes he sees "the red sand-ghost warriors will dance," and in distant mirages he sees "conquistadors in their shiny armor/ riding their horses toward the glint/ of downtown glass monuments/they never found a single grain/ of sacred dust --gold or otherwise" (Flores 1998: 420). Once again, history is alive in the present and the landscape of presumably, El Paso, or the fictive Cibola becomes an archive

for colonialism, indigenous struggle, and myth. The narratives captured by this present moment and its historical background speak to discourses of exploration, searches for riches, conquest, and plunder—in short, to aspects of the American Dream. It is made more explicit by some of the closing lines of the poem:

"as I drive out of the mountainous arms…

I see…

soft palms of earth

cradling the lives of a hunched-over people

deluded by the illusions of America

of riches they cannot find

having already lost and forgotten

How to be Tigua Aztecas Mixcos Poconchis Yaqui-Tepeus" (Flores 1998: 421).

Silex makes a parallel between the delusions of Coronado, which he mentions in the second line of the poem, and the delusions of the American Dream. Silex thus presents the Dream as a delusion promising riches that cannot be found; additionally, in the mere passage of colonial time, individuals suffered the cost of having forgotten and lost their indigenous identities and roots. Thus, existing as colonial subjects has brought the characters of the poem no closer to riches and farther from the riches of home they once possessed. This idea converses with the American Dream discourse, but ultimately provides a radically different perspective—one suggesting an American lie or an American theft rather than a Dream. A similar argument must be made for *Washington D.C.*, which depicts American bloodshed, genocide, and horror. But if these two poems contain ideas that clearly converse with the Dream, how can one make space for such drastically different ideologies? These two engagements with the Dream are evidently

negative and to the extent that they raise the question: What is the point of still talking about this American Dream?

Ya Basta! Enough! Resistance & Protest

As demonstrated in my literature review, influential movements such as the Civil Rights Movement and acts of protest by people of color, often get interpreted as "reviving," "restoring," or upholding the American creed captured in the Dream (Cullen 2003; Churchwell 2018). However, my analysis of the following poems will bear no such resemblance and will actually suggest different interpretational approaches to activism by people of color and other marginalized communities. Angela de Hoyos's poem, *The Final Laugh,* is an excellent example of the kind of protest contained in these poems. In an ironic tone, Hoyos begins her poem with a speaker who appears to be a low-income, person of color experiencing hunger and exhaustion. The speaker asks:

"What do the entrails know
about the necessity of being white
--the advisability of mail-order parents?

Or this wearing in mock defiance
the thin rag of ethnic pride,
saying to shivering flesh and grumbling belly:
Patience, O companions of my dignity?" (Flores 1998: 114).

In two rhetorical and humorous questions, Hoyos first highlights the role of white privilege in securing sufficient resources and material goods for certain people at the exclusion

of others, and, second, Hoyos teases the notion of ethnic pride when up against issues of food insecurity, poverty, and severe income stratification. Hoyos posits that access to upward mobility is riddled by racial status, which largely determines how mobile one can be in society, and Hoyos also suggests that there is rampant inequality of opportunity. In the next stanza, Hoyos criticizes apathy and people's attitude towards these conditions:

"Perhaps someday I shall accustom myself
to this: my hand held out
in eternal supplication, being content
with the left-overs of a greedy establishment" (Flores 1998: 114).

With a derisive tone, Hoyos suggests one could settle with "left-overs" from a "greedy establishment" and be prepared to continuously beg for more needs as the scarcity or struggle becomes unbearable. Simultaneously, Hoyos construct the U.S social and political government as corrupt and deliberately maintaining an oppressive society. Hoyos conveys the image and trope of the powerless, malleable beggar to starkly contrast citizenship as it is idealized through the American Dream. In the last stanza of her poem, Hoyos presents yet another image and didactic abstraction:

"Or-who knows ?- perhaps tomorrow
I shall burst these shackles
and rising to my natural full height
fling the final parting laugh
O gluttonous omnipotent alien white world" (Flores 1998; 114)

In this final stanza, Hoyos uses the image of shackles to indicate oppression, lack of mobility, and incomplete freedom; she evokes the image of a person rising to their natural full

height to symbolize standing up for one's rights, reaching for one's full potential, and feeling empowered; the final parting laugh is more suggestive of sound but also conjures abstract images. Indeed, although in the first half of the poem there's an emphasis on questions and suggestions of possible choices, the final stanza conveys action through these meaningful and recognizable images. The laugh in particular is subversive in that the built-up irony of the poem is cathartically channeled, with a mix of anger and frustration, into this parting laugh, which is felt more powerfully due to its primal nature as opposed to a more Westernized usage of language. The poem therefore proposes that in order of any notion of the dominant Dream to be realized –higher income, living salary, job security, and social policies to ensure equitable access to resources—mobilization must occur and should be considered as a means towards self-liberation. Thus, rather than promoting the idea that a "better and fuller life" is the goal, Hoyos's would suggest that the goal is to attain freedom and overcome the oppressive establishment, which is quite a radical idea and is further from the dominant discourse on the Dream.

FINDINGS:

The analysis of my selected poems reveals the presence of several discourses around the Dream. However subtle they are, it is important to recognize that viewing the Dream of Upward Mobility through hard work as a lie, dangerous, and disappointing (Curiel's poem) is different than regarding the Dream of Upward Mobility as irrelevant in comparison to the more important goals of self-autonomy, liberation, and the overcoming of an oppressive establishment (Hoyos in *The Final Laugh).* There are also similarities of course. In *María la O*, Curiel presents the narrative of a woman who accommodates to traditional heterosexual roles in that her husband is

in the public labor market and she does domestic work; yet, eventually her husband dies due to illness and an inability to keep up with the overwhelming burden of work, leaving her a widow, forced to return to her mother, and no closer to upward mobility or a better life. The woman's story serves to question this upward mobility narrative. Hoyos writes about an unnamed speaker that from the beginning questions the value of hard work when things such as white privilege obfuscate the ability to gain a comfortable income and living situation. Hoyos's final call towards liberation doesn't even include the notion of upward mobility as an end result, separating itself even more from the dominant American Dream discourse. What these two poems reveal therefore is the presence of alternative discourses for describing social realities in the U.S. These discourses, as I aimed to show in the analysis, are connected to imaginaries that re-envision reality, agency, geography, space, and time in a way that troubles any effort to conjoin these discourses to the general American Dream. What my findings suggest then is that the imaginations resulting from Chicanx poets conjure different dreams or visions than the normative Anglo-Saxon imaginary, such that the validity of putting different imaginaries together under a general discourse of the Dream must be questioned. As *The Final Laugh* reveals, Hoyos provides possibilities of the future that do not make sense through a dominant American Dream framework—overthrowing the entire establishment that oppresses working class individuals, specifically Chicanxs. To say this idea is in conversation with the Dream is partially true, because Hoyos invokes themes and topics that match the criteria I've determined for the Dream, yet it is also true that Hoyos then offers something akin to saying *forget upward mobility, let's move towards liberation.* Since it departs from the dominant framework, new epistemological space is created by this idea, which thus suggests a rupture of the dominant framework. A new framework must account for the epistemological space being created by these imaginations. I argue that thinking about the American Dream through a framework that employs

multiple intersecting, cross-cutting, differentiated imaginaries can help push forward the development of these new discourses and imaginative spaces, which constitute new ontological and social possibilities.

CONCLUSION:

Much of what I offer in this paper is what I consider a compelling methodological, theoretical, and analytical set of strategies for pursuing a project that centers a marginalized body of literature as the object of cultural analysis for ideology production. I argue that close-readings and literary analysis of the literary productions allow for in-depth understandings to be reached about what is ideologically contained within these densely-packed cultural objects. This allows us to proceed towards an approach drawing from cultural sociology in order to examine how ideology impacts receivers and how it may acquire new meanings upon contact with various sorts of receiving audiences. Both components compose a comprehensive study on the subject. The American Dream in this paper has served to demonstrate that this approach can deconstruct complex, nebulous, and mystified ideas and concepts. A framework that approaches the American Dream with the premise that it is an idea that is epistemologically understood differently by different imaginaries allows for new possibilities in this field. As I have suggested, the imaginaries framework that I propose shatters the notion of a stable, unitary framework for interpreting the Dream. Because the Dream means different things across different imaginaries, it must be asked what can be done about the Dream, now? My goal was to arrive to this question in order to empower people, specifically historically marginalized and oppressed groups to take matters into their own mind. Chicanx imaginaries overlap in many ways with the Anglo-Saxon

imaginary for the American Dream and the Chicanx imaginary is riddled with many, many issues related to sexism, exotification of indigeneity, queerphobia, and so on. Nonetheless, what is to be gained is that while marginalized imaginaries draw on some scripts from master narratives such the American Dream, they also expand and create new vistas and thus spaces. The question is: does the discourse of the American Dream erase or drown out the new vistas and imaginations being produced by marginalized individuals?

The dominant imagination of the American Dream, through the Anglo-Saxon imaginary has been described at length in this paper as highly violent and pervasive. Martin Luther King's Dream of racial equality cannot be put on the same group as this Anglo imaginary. Because an imaginary impinges on positionality, these two conceptualizations of the Dream also occupy different positions along a social structure and cannot be equated. The ways in which undocumented youth have used the label of Dreamers to mobilize and gain resources (i.e. passing the Dream Act) also should not be equated with the Anglo Dream of the pre-colonial and colonial periods. In a recent T.V. show called, Pose which includes the first cast of almost exclusively trans* actresses, the American Dream is invoke in the first episode as a pursuit of happiness, of home, and of agency. This imagination cannot be compared with the Anglo Dream. These Dreams are not the same (although they each have their critiques), and the purpose of my work has been to make those distinctions clear. I do not feel entitled to make a claim as to what should be done with the Dream as I speak from only one matrix of positionalities amongst multiple, multiple ones. But my work does suggest that new possibilities, imaginaries, and spaces do exist and in fact abound so that the ties to and invocations of the discourse of the "American Dream" appear as nothing less than a formality—and if a group of people wanted, the epistemologies are available for the construction of an entirely new discourse.

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Appendix A – Biographical Information about Chicanx Poets in *Floating Borderlands*

Name (A-Z)	Date of Birth/Death	Poems in *Floating Borderlands*	Involvements during Chicano Power Movement or Chicano Arts Movement
Alarcón, Francisco X.	(1954-2016)	*Chicome-Coatl/ Seven Snake;* *For Planting Camotes;* *To Undo the Sleep Spell*	Alarcón's poetry discusses the important topics of "Latino and gay identity, mythology, the Nahuatl language, Mesoameircan history, and American culture" (Poetry Foundation). His poetry thus shook up the consciousness of the Chicano Arts Movement by dealing explicitly with queer identities, translating and centering indigenous voices directly, and by becoming a well-recognized author for all this work. His poetry also reached a wide audience by writing to both Latinx adults and children. Additionally, he is known as an educator for his role as director of the Spanish for Native Speakers Program at the University of California, Davis and as teacher of both the Art of the Wild workshop and the California Poets in Schools program (Poetry Foundation).
Avila, Inés Hernández	(1947-)	*Luminous Serpent Songs;* *Coyote Woman Finds Fox*	Much of Avila's formational experiences dealt with activism during the Chicano Power Movement, although in her later, more recent career, she focused on her academic work. Avila is a Mexican descendant and a member of the Nez Perce nation (from her mother's side) (Kanellos 2008). She was a student activist at the University of Houston, published poems in Chicano Movement periodicals, and was also a talented singer of activist songs (Kanellos 2008). Many of her involvements during the Chicano Movement occurred during this period that she worked for her BA, MA, and eventually PhD degree (Kanellos 2008) Upon completing her education, Avila turned to academia to continue her important work, securing a tenure-track position and becoming a full professor of Native American Studies at UC Davis in 2002 (Kanellos 2008). Since then, she has served on several campus committees, academic senate positions, and administrative positions, extending the influence she is able to exert into the bureaucratic domains of university life.[1]
Baca, Jimmy Santiago	(1952-)	*Sun Calendar;* *We Knew it*	Baca taught himself to read and write while serving five years in a maximum-security prison, publishing his poetry book, *Immigrants in Our Own Land* (1979) the same year he was released from prison (Kanellos 2008). In praxis, Baca has organized writing workshops and outreach programs for at-risk youth, prisoners, ex-prisoners, and marginalized communities, generally, for over 30 years (Poetry Foundation). Since 2004, Baca launched a non-profit organization, Cedar Tree, aimed to continue the

[1] https://nas.ucdavis.edu/sites/nas.ucdavis.edu/files/attachments/ines_hernandez-avila_cv_feb2014.pdf

			provision of these writing workshops across the nation. Baca is of Apache and Chicano descent.
Castillo, Ana	(1953-)	*1975;* *Napa, California;* *The Antihero*	Castillo made her primary impacts through her remarkable poetry, teaching creative writing, and working in academic spaces specifically on writing (Kanellos 2008). In the 1970's, Castillo made herself known as a Chicana feminist poet who published in several literary magazines such as the *Revista Chicano-Riqueña* and through self-publishing chapbooks. In the 1980's and 1990's, Castillo travelled across universities and sites in the U.S. in order to teach courses, publish poetry, other work, and tour extensively (Kanellos 2008). In this way, Castillo's contributions to the Chicano Movement were focused on education, sharing poetry, and spreading these narratives based on Chicano experiences (Kanellos 2008)
Cervantes, Lorna Dee	(1954-)	*Heritage;* *Refugee Ship;* *You are like a Weed;* *Blue Full Moon in Witch;* *From the Cables of Genocide;* *On Love and Hunger*	Of Mexican and Native American ancestry, Cervantes contributed to the Chicano Power Movement by becoming one of the most recognized and successful Latina writers during that time period and after (Kanellos 2008). Cervantes obtained leadership in the literary scene by being one of the first Chicana poets published in the *Revista Chicano-Riqueña* (1974) (Kanellos 2008). Cervantes furthered this leadership status when she founded and edited a literary magazine named, *Mango*, which circulated through the Chicano Arts Movement and gained attention by appearing in anthologies and textbooks across the country (Kanellos 2008).
Chávez, Lisa D.	(c. 1961/62-)	*In An Angry Season;* *Young Widow Walking Home*	Chávez has exerted influence through literature by being included in several anthologies for poetry and for essays. She has worked as a Creative Writing Professor at the University of New Mexico and thus has taught many students. Besides her work in academia and teaching, there is less information available about any community work she might have done. Her books were also published towards the turn of the century so it was mainly her individual poems that spread through the Chicano Arts Movement.
Corpi, Lucha	(1945-)	*Lamento;* *Invernario;* *Fuga*	As a university student during the 70's, Corpi was heavily involved in the Free Speech Movement and the Chicano Civil Rights Movement. After receiving her M.A. in Comparative Literature, she became a tenured teacher in the Oakland Public Schools Neighborhood Centers Programs, focusing on adult education (Kanellos 2008) Corpi is also a founding member of the cultural center, Aztlan Cultural, which later merged with a center for Chicano writers (Kanellos 2008).
Curiel, Barbara Brinson	(1956-)	*Maria la O*	Curiel's influence is felt through her poetry publications in several anthologies and through her own poetry books. As an undergraduate, Curiel was an active student that published poems and wrote staged plays: "Guadalupe" (1978) and "Tongues of Fires" (1981) (Kanellos 2008).

			Her poetry demonstrates her knowledge of Aztec and Maya mythology. She is currently a Professor of English and Women's Studies at Humboldt State University.
de Alba, Alicia Gaspar	(1958-)	*After 21 Years, a Postcard…* *Bamba Basílica*	Gaspar de Alba worked for years with activist groups that protested the mass murder of more than 400 working women in Juárez, Mexico (Kanellos 2008). She also researched the causes and found several disturbing findings from indifference to corrupt investigations (Kanellos 2008) Gaspar de Alba is also a founding faculty member of the UCLA César E. Chávez Department of Chicana/o Studies.[2]
de Hoyos, Angela	(1940-2009)	*The Final Laugh;* *Ten Dry Summers Ago;* *When Conventional Methods Fail*	During the 1970's, De Hoyos created a small press, M&A Editions, in San Antonio, in order to provide opportunities for Chicanx writers to publish their work. Many writers such as Evangelina Vigil-Piñon were able to publish their work through this press (Kanellos 2008) In the 1980's, de Hoyos also founded a cultural periodical, *Huehuetitlan* (Kanellos 2008). Thus, her poems did not only contain activist tones but her own social work helped to further promote Chicanx literature.
Delgado, Abelardo	(1931-2004)	*The Last Wow*	Delgado is hailed as one of the pioneers of bilingualism in Hispanic Literature, as a tremendous oral performer, and as one of the most popular speakers and poetry readers during the Chicano Movement (Kanellos 2008). He did frequent tours and engagements, and his first book, *Chicano: 25 Pieces of a Chicano Mind* (1969) contained many of the poems he often performed during the heat of the movement (Kanellos 2008) These same poems were spread through small community newspapers and through "hand-to-hand circulation throughout the Southwest" (Kanellos 2008). Delgado also helped Latino immigrants obtain citizenship and he did work with Cesar Chavez, organizing farmworkers.[3] He also started his own small printing operation, Barrio Press (Kanellos 2008).
García, Ramón	(? -)	*Miss Primavera Contest*	Garcia's work has appeared in several anthologies and has received numerous awards. He is a full-time faculty member at CSU- Northridge and his community work is limited to academic circles and spaces. He is founding member of the Glass Table Collective, an artist's collective (Poetry Foundation).
González, Ray	(1952-)	*Walk;* *Two Wolf Poems*	González is best known as an award-winning poet, but he has also played a significant role in the formation of Latino and Chicano canons by being the editor of several important anthologies (Kanellos 2008). He also taught classes for juvenile delinquents in his early career.[4]

[2] UCLA Website. http://www.chavez.ucla.edu/content/alicia-gaspar-de-alba).

[3] Romero. 2004. https://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/30/arts/lalo-delgado-73-vivid-poet-of-chicano-literary-revival.html

[4] Encyclopedia.com - https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/gonzalez-ray-1952

González, Rigoberto	(1970-)	*The Flight South of the Monarch Butterfly; Ghost Story*	In addition to his published poetry collections, novels, and children's books, González worked for two years as the bilingual literacy instructor for the Coalition for Hispanic Family Services After School Program in Bushwick, Brooklyn (Kanellos 2008) He is also a member of the Board of Directors of *Poets & Writers Magazine* and of the National Book Critics Circle Award (Kanellos 2008).
Herrera, Juan Felipe	(1948-)	*Photopoem of the Chicano Moratorium; Outside Tibet; Selena in Corpus Christi Lacquer Red*	Herrera was one of the most experimental poets of the Chicano Movement, producing poems of unconventional forms, and working also with theater and photography (Kanellos 2008). Herrera has taught poetry to elementary school students and also helped found and direct various theatre ensembles and productions.[5]
Madueño, Amalio	(? -)	*Ballad of Friendship through the Ages; Sanctuary of Chimayo; Arroyo*	Madueño did organizing work with Cesar Chavez for the Farmworker Rights Movement. He also performs his work frequently throughout the Southwest via readings, seminars, television, and radio.[6]
Maldonado, Jesús María	(? -)	*Gently Lead Me Home*	Unsure of any community work he has done outside of poetry publications.
Mora, Pat	(1942-)	*Elena; Chuparossa: Hummingbird; Cool Love; Sola*	Mora has worked as an English teacher in public schools and college (Kanellos 2008) and has served as a university administrator and museum director (Poetry Foundation). Besides being the author of many poetry collections and children's books, Mora is a popular national speaker and educator (Poetry Foundation).
Quintana, Leroy V.	(1944-)	*Poem for Josephine Baker*	Quintana has been one of the loudest voices representing Hispanic involvement in the Vietnam War (Kanellos 2008) He himself spent a year (between 1967 & 1969) in Vietnam before being able to return to finish his college career. [7]Since, he has worked as an English teacher at three colleges, as a sports writer, alcoholism counselor, and as a counselor for the National City Mental Health Clinic.[8]
Ríos, Alberto	(1952-)	*On January 5, 1984, El Santo…*	Rios has been a highly influential poet with respected status within the writing and academic circles in the U.S. He published his first poetry chapbook in 1979 (Kanellos 2008) and has gone on to be a popular reader and lecturer throughout the country.[9] I did not find specific information about his involvements during Chicano Movement.
Rodríguez, Luis J.	(1954-)	*Running to America*	Rodriguez is widely recognized for his community work; during the Chicano Movement he undertook several leadership roles in Chicano student organizations and after a brief period of incarceration, he pursued journalism and

[5] Brittannica. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Juan-Felipe-Herrera
[6] http://www.thecafereview.com/spring-2012-poets-amalio-madueno/)
[7] Doug Benson. https://www-jstor-org.proxy.library.emory.edu/stable/25744781?read-now=1&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents
[8] Doug Benson. https://www-jstor-org.proxy.library.emory.edu/stable/25744781?read-now=1&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents
[9] https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/poetry/alberto-rios

			the literary scene (Poetry Foundation). He started Tia Chucha Press, helped organize poetry festivals, performed radio productions, began community organizations, and conducted workshops and readings in prisons, juvenile facilities, homeless shelters, migrant camps, and universities across the U.S. (Poetry Foundation).
Romero, Leo	(1950-)	*The Dark Side of the Moon;* *The Moon is Lost;* *The Ocean is Not Red;* *When Pito Tried to Kill*	Romero was also a talented painter and muralist who displayed these works across the state (Kanellos 2008). Many of his poems were published in literary magazines and anthologies, thereby spreading his influence more widely (Kanellos 2008).
Salinas, Luis Omar	(1937-2008)	*I am America;* *As I look to the Literate;* *My Father Is a Simple Man;* *What is My Name?;* *Middle Age*	He was actively and significantly involved in the Chicano Civil Rights Movement as well as in teaching Chicano Studies (Kanellos 2008) Such was the pressure he felt from both engagements that he became hospitalized on several occasions due to nervous breakdowns (Kanellos 2008).
Sánchez, Ricardo	(1941-1995)	*Letter to My Ex-Texas Sanity;* *En-ojitos: Canto a Piñero*	An ex-convict, Sánchez became one of the most widely known writers and one of the first also to be associated to the Chicano Movement (Kanellos 2008). He is described as "a tireless and popular oral performer…and social activist whose creative power expressed itself in innovative uses of both Spanish and English in poetry…" (Kanellos 2008). He performed his poetry memorably at several important marches.[10]
Silex, Edgar	(? -)	*Washington D.C.;* *Leaving Cibola*	Silex has been influential by serving as poet-in-residence for Howard County, Maryland high schools, Diné Reservation high schools, and Hartford, Connecticut high schools.[11]
Tafolla, Carmen	(1951-)	*Woman-Hole*	Tafolla is well-recognized as an oral poet, avid folklorist, and performance artist (Kanellos 2008). One of her most recognized performance pieces, "My Heart Speaks a Different Language," has been presented more than 600 times (Kanellos 2008). She also created the Premio Roberto Salinas Award to recognize exceptional student work and community involvement (Poetry Foundation).
Urista, Alberto Baltazar (Alurista)	(1947-)	*do u remember;* *cornfields thaw out*	Alurista is widely recognized as one of the pioneers of Chicano literature (Kanellos 2008) and an activist for his role in co-founding several important community organizations. Most notably, Alurista helped found the Movimiento Estudiantil de Aztlan (MEChA) in 1967, which helped to establish the concept of Aztlán in literature (Kanellos 2008). MEChA is an active student movement with countless chapters across the country—in high schools and colleges—focused on inspiring cultural pride and collective action. He also helped establish the Concilio por la Justicia (Council for Justice), Centro Cultural de la Raza (Cultural Center for the People), and

[10] https://www.nytimes.com/1995/09/09/obituaries/ricardo-sanchez-54-poet-who-voiced-chicano-anger-dies.html

[11] http://www.hanksville.org/storytellers/silex/

			the Department of Chicano Studies at San Diego State University (Poetry Foundation).
Valdés, Gina	(1943-)	*English con Salsa*	Valdés has worked within the San Diego school district teaching poetry and writing to children as well as leading English as a second language courses for adults (Kanellos 2008). She is also a well sought out performer and public reader (Kanellos 2008).
Vigil-Piñón, Evangelina	(1949-)	*Dumb Broad!*	Vigil-Piñon was a television journalist deeply engaged in community affairs around Houston, Texas.[12] She is a leader in the Hispanic women's movement as an "anthologizer, speaker, and host of writers on tour" (Kanellos 2008).

[12] https://artepublicopress.com/blog/evangelina-vigil-pinon/