

## Latinidad - Fall 2021: The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop

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BEFORE YOU SEND IT OUT

“Marcela Landres is a valuable resource to the budding, querying, agented, and published writer, and the diversity of her services reflect that. To the Latino/a writer she offers the additional layer of #OwnVoices insight and perspective in navigating the publishing industry. Whether it be identifying agents that represent your work, applying a detailed eye to your manuscript, or simply being a soundboard for industry questions, Marcela is there for you.”  
—Stephanie Nina Pitsirilos, author of “Jean” which appears in *Speculative Fiction for Dreamers: A Latinx Anthology*, <https://www.stephanieninapitsirilos.com/>

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1. Saludos

Desmond Tutu reportedly said, “There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in.” Part of the reason not enough BIPOC get published may be writing workshops weed them out.

The writing workshop was invented decades ago and has remained mostly unchanged. But who created the writing workshop? Who does it serve? Who does it overlook or even undermine? All good questions I hadn’t considered until I read the eye-opening *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop* by Felicia Rose Chavez.

Imagine your favorite teacher, the one who changed your life. That’s Chavez. Skillfully playing the dual roles of cheerleader and revolutionary, Chavez reveals the racism inherent in traditional writing workshops and offers a specific blueprint for creating an anti-racist version. The *Anti-Racist Writing Workshop* should be read not only by teachers but also by critique group members as well as individual writers seeking constructive feedback of their work. To learn more, read the Q&A below.

Helping Latinos get published,

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## 2. Q&A

Felicia Rose Chavez is an award-winning educator with an MFA in Creative Nonfiction from the University of Iowa. She is the author of *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop: How to Decolonize the Creative Classroom* and coeditor of *The BreakBeat Poets Volume 4: LatiNEXT* with Willie Perdomo and José Olivarez. Chavez served as Program Director to Young Chicago Authors and founded *GirlSpeak*, a literary webzine for young women. She went on to teach writing at the University of New Mexico, where she was distinguished as the Most Innovative Instructor of the Year, the University of Iowa, where she was distinguished as the Outstanding Instructor of the Year, and Colorado College, where she received the Theodore Roosevelt Collins Outstanding Faculty Award. Her creative scholarship earned her a Ronald E. McNair Fellowship, a University of Iowa Graduate Dean's Fellowship, a Riley Scholar Fellowship, and a Hadley Creatives Fellowship. Originally from Albuquerque, New Mexico, Felicia currently serves as Scholar-in-Residence in Creativity and Innovation at Colorado College. Find her at [www.antiracistworkshop.com](http://www.antiracistworkshop.com).

Q: You raise many excellent points in *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop*, including: “Understanding the art of the question is an invaluable, lifelong skill for any writer, and yet too often workshop leaders cross their fingers in hopes that students will show up, much less speak up, at readings. Together, my workshop participants study how to differentiate between closed and open-ended questions, how to formulate action-oriented questions, how to harness specificity to invoke richer responses, and how to fold in follow up questions. . . .” Asking good questions is arguably a way of requesting help. Latinx children—especially girls—aren’t necessarily taught to ask for help. How did you learn the art of the question?

A: Beyond a display of humility (Can you help me to understand?), I interpret the question as a display of curiosity, sincerity, and community (Let’s break it down together). Women in conversation was something I witnessed from a young age. Stories were in the air all around me—family members talking and talking over afternoon coffee at the kitchen counter, rancheros blasting in the garage. School was sterile but the exchanges at home had energy, laughter, long, loaded pauses. And I just had to know! Who and why and when? Women have been talking shop since the get go, sensitive to the nuances of neutrality for the sake of their survival. Rather than ask one another for help, I encourage my students to exercise curiosity for context, insight. What do you

want to know, need to know, in order to best receive the writer's work? How might a question form a bridge?

Q: Part of the anti-racist workshop is the Inspiration Lab, where your students share the work of their artistic mentors, anything from a song to a standup routine, not just a literary text. Are there any artists you discovered via your students who you now consider to be your own artistic mentors?

A: The Inspiration Lab is the way of the future. I really believe that. Students foreground their reading of a fellow writer's draft with the source of inspiration. In this way, my writers have gifted me and one another with an ever-growing, student-sourced reading list, and let me tell you, it's so much more alive than anything I could have managed to curate. Going way back, they put me on to Black Mirror and Das Racist and Two Dope Queens and even Calvin and Hobbes. I'm a big believer that inspiration is everywhere, that it's our responsibility to actively seek it out as opposed to wait for it to hit, and my students are quick to volunteer on that front.

Q: Your reading guide (<https://www.antiracistworkshop.com/resources>) is a generous gift not just to writing teachers but to anyone who wants to read BIPOC writers. How has the list evolved from its initial draft to now?

A: Thanks for the spotlight. The guide is exciting because it's community sourced; every one of us shares in its evolution. Don't see your name on the list? Don't be salty. Add it. Don't see your own artistic mentors on the list? Add them. Most recently it's the genre categories that are taking shape beyond what I could have ever conceived. I call it a living document, which is just a fancy way of saying Google Doc, but there's something to that language—it pays homage to the elders while reflecting the here and now, a record of the living present tense. Too often these big expensive anthologies are dated before they even print. Who's new? Who's now?

Q: I love how you equate mentoring with mothering: "Mothering, for me, means willpower, fortitude, grit. It is the transcendent power to multiply oneself, succeeded by the supreme humility to serve that second self. Listening is an extension of that humility, a tribute to the fact that none of us are alone." Books can be like our children in that they come from us but do not belong to us alone. What if any surprises has The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop brought to you? Has your baby made unexpected friends?

A: Writing the book demanded great courage. How could I assess my classroom successes without first reflecting back on the journey that delivered me to that moment? Because damn, it's been a journey. I wanted readers to

have context into to why this work is essential and urgent, not just a passing nuanced approach or an experiment in pedagogy. It's everything. It's my life, it's my heart, it's my past and my future. Can they see it through my eyes? Can they exercise the imaginative empathy it requires to see things anew? I'd hand my husband a chapter and my stomach would be in knots because I was exposing something about myself that I'd never really shared with anyone before. Sometimes the anecdotes were ugly, others mere moments that splintered under my skin and stayed with me, became part of my narrative. The book is an effort to reclaim that narrative. I'd spent night after night awake, buzzing with fear, thinking I was a traitor for sharing my story. But now there are so many students, writers, and educators holding their hands out to me, naming my book a gift instead of a betrayal. And it is such a relief. It's like this meteor shower exploded in my mind! I wasn't alone. It didn't just happen to me. I can't even put into words how much stronger this knowledge made me. It validated my presence in the classroom all those years ago and my presence, now, on the page. My stories aren't an act of betrayal, they're an act of love.

Q: Haymarket (which publishes *Things That Make White People Uncomfortable* by Michael Bennett and Dave Zirin and *Citizen Illegal* by Jose Olivarez) seems like an ideal home for The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop. How did you come to be published by them?

A: I submitted the book proposal to one publishing house only, and that was Haymarket Books. In retrospect that was a risky move, but I believed in their mission, I knew they were right for the project, and I loved the idea of paying homage to my Chicago teaching years through them. I credit Young Chicago Authors with teaching me how to love and mentor and be in dialogue with students, relating to them as whole people with inspiring writing legacies. It took a radical writing community to nurture me and grow me into the teacher I am today, and it took a radical publisher to see this book through fruition. Partnering with a small publishing house has taught me a ton, both good and bad. Still, I wouldn't have done it any other way.

Q: In The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop you mention, "When I first had my son, I thought there's no way it's possible, passing down this burden of how to be a person: a good boy, a just man. The responsibility felt overwhelming. It wasn't until later, when I realized just how much I had changed since giving birth, that it dawned on me: My son is training me in how to be a person, too. Teaching is reciprocal." By giving birth to this book you are teaching countless people. How has the process of writing, publishing, and promoting this book changed you?

A: I'm entirely different now. Matured, I would say, from fearful to forthright. I've grown into (am growing into) what the book demands of me, which is to say confidence, eloquence, inventiveness, dependability. And let's not forget self-preservation, as the book elicits frightening messages of hate and defensiveness and dismissiveness from white educators. I want to know, how can we do better, be better? A fellow Latina author recently referred to me as a small business owner—my business being the professional development workshops and one-on-one consultations that I offer faculty from across the teaching spectrum, from elementary to graduate school, in pursuit of *doing better*—and that kind of blew my mind, because to me it's the movement, right? The work is the movement. It's not just me out for me. The anti-racist workshop is human-to-human connection: I see you, I hear you, you exist. Let's build together.

Q: Do you have upcoming projects that my readers should have on their radar?

A: Yes! Thank you for asking. For those who teach, I'm conducting one-on-one consultations to talk shop, brainstorm, troubleshoot, dream. Name your rate for a half-hour or hour-long session. Reach out here: <https://www.antiracistworkshop.com/contact>. I also aim to buy a building to start a learning retreat for anti-racist writers and teachers. I dream of something beautiful, safe, and restorative. Please contact me if you're down to support this initiative.

### 3. Resources

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#### SHORT STORY COLLECTION PRIZE

Submission Period: September 1 - December 1

The W.S. Porter Prize offers \$1000 and publication by Regal House Publishing for a collection of finely crafted short stories. For more information, visit <https://www.regalhousepublishing.com/>

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#### PRESS 53 AWARD FOR SHORT FICTION

Submission Period: September 1 - December 31

A prize of \$1000, publication by Press 53, and 50 author copies is given for a short story collection. This competition is open to any writer, regardless of his or her publication history, provided the manuscript is written in English and the author lives in the United States or one of its territories. For more information, visit <https://www.press53.com/>

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#### GEORGE BOGIN MEMORIAL AWARD FOR POETRY

Submission Period: October 1 - December 31

The Poetry Society of America offers \$500 for a selection of four or five poems that use language in an original way to reflect the encounter of the ordinary and the extraordinary and to take a stand against oppression in any of its forms. For more information, visit <https://poetrysociety.org/>

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#### TOM HOWARD/JOHN H. REID FICTION & ESSAY CONTEST

Submission Period: October 15 - April 30

\$3000 is awarded for first prize for a story, and \$3000 is awarded for first prize for an essay. Ten honorable mentions will receive \$200 each. For more information, visit <https://winningwriters.com/>

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#### VERN RUTSALA BOOK PRIZE

Deadline: October 31

A prize of \$1000 and publication by Cloudbank Books is given for a collection of poetry and/or flash fiction. For more information, visit <https://cloudbankbooks.com/>

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#### \$20,000 PAUL ENGLE PRIZE

Submission Period: November 1 - March 31

The Iowa City UNESCO City of Literature offers \$20,000 to a poet, fiction writer, or nonfiction writer who represents a pioneering spirit in the world of literature through writing, editing, publishing, or teaching. Past recipients include Luis Alberto Urrea and Roxane Gay. For more information, visit <https://www.iowacityofliterature.org/>

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#### ANTON CHEKOV AWARD FOR FLASH FICTION

Deadline: November 30

A prize of \$1250, publication in LitMag, and agency review by a reputable literary agent will be given for a piece of flash fiction. For more information, visit <https://litmag.com/>

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#### KENYON REVIEW SHORT NONFICTION CONTEST

Submission Period: December 1 - December 31

The contest is open to all writers who have not yet published a book of creative nonfiction. Submissions must be no more than 1,200 words in length. For more information, visit <https://kenyonreview.org/>

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#### ACENTOS REVIEW

The Acentos Review publishes poetry, fiction, memoir, interviews, translations, and artwork by emerging and established Latinx writers and artists four times a year. They welcome submissions in English, Spanish, Portuguese, a combination of two languages, as well as the use of indigenous languages. For more information, visit <http://www.acentosreview.com>

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JUST PUBLISHED: DEATH SONG OF THE DRAGON BY R. CH. GARCIA

Legacies of slavery and systemic violence rip at US “unity.” Privileged interpretations of its history, now rejected. Teens still ask, “Who am I?” But now they also struggle with, “Were my ancestors conquerors or the conquered?”

Here enters this saga about Irish-American Miguel Reilly whose summer in rural New Mexico raises explosive questions. Is Miguel really Irish? Was his family linked to resistance to the Mexican American War? Most crucially, what can a young gringo salvage from his heritage to equip him to battle an Aztec dragon?

Garcia’s mix of Mexican myth and fantasy/sci-fi rides the cusp of best-selling Latino works like Gods of Jade and Shadow, Shadowshaper, Lords of the Earth, and The Garza Twins. David Bowles, award-winning author of Feathered Serpent, Dark Heart of Sky: Myths of Mexico, says about this novel: “An epic journey of discovery, transformation and destiny will keep readers at the edge of their seats and gasping at every new twist.” For more information, visit <https://www.rchgarcia.com/>

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“The time for change is now. We can’t wait it out in hopes of a better tomorrow, because today’s creative writing cohort hires tomorrow’s teachers, edits tomorrow’s magazines, produces tomorrow’s plays, and acquires tomorrow’s manuscripts. Their investigative journalism can incite tomorrow’s impeachment; their stump speech can secure tomorrow’s seat in public office. What may read as a crisis in creative writing is at heart a crisis in American culture: without voice, participatory democracy fails.”

—Felicia Rose Chavez

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