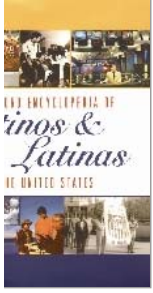


# Oxford Reference



## The Oxford Encyclopedia of Latinos and Latinas in the United States

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## Dominican Writers in the United States.

Dominican literature in the United States can be traced as far back as the first half of the twentieth century, as politicians, scholars, and writers established themselves in this country, mainly for political reasons. These writers include Pedro, Max, and Camila Henríquez Ureña, who were the children of the poet laureate Salomé Ureña and Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal, the man who was president of the Dominican Republic at the start of the U.S. occupation of the country from 1916 to 1924. Pedro Henríquez Ureña first came to New York in 1901 at the age of sixteen with his brother Max and took courses at Columbia University. He left in 1904 and stayed in Mexico for almost a decade until he returned, first to Washington, D.C., and later to New York, to work as a journalist for various newspapers. In 1916, he began teaching at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, where he also obtained an M.A. degree and soon thereafter a PhD. After his graduation, Henríquez Ureña lived in Cuba, Mexico, Spain, and Argentina. He also stayed in the United States from 1940 to 1941, where, as a visiting professor at Harvard University, he delivered the prestigious Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, the texts of which were published in 1945 by Harvard University Press under the title *Literary Currents in Spanish America*. Henríquez Ureña died in Argentina in 1946.

Camila Henríquez Ureña received an MA from the University of Minnesota in 1918. Subsequently, she taught Spanish literature at Vassar College, in Poughkeepsie, New York, from 1942 to 1959. She focused her scholarly work on pedagogy and on feminist and Hispanic topics. After almost two decades of academic work, she moved to Cuba, where she joined the literacy campaign that the new revolutionary government had launched. There are several editions and compilations of Camila's work in Spanish, published by Cuban and Dominican organizations.

There were a number of other important writers in the first half of the twentieth century. José M. Bernard published a volume of verse entitled *Renuevos* (1907). Fabio Fiallo Cabral published a volume of short fiction entitled *Cuentos frágiles* (1908). Manuel Florentino Cestero published the book of poems *El canto del cisne* (1915) and a prose fiction work entitled *El amor en Nueva York* (1920). Jesusa Alfau Galván published a series of short articles and essays in the weekly *Las Novedades*. Gustavo Bergés Bordas published a collection of essays entitled *Cien días en Nueva York* (1925). Angel Rafael Lamarche wrote the short fiction collection *Los cuentos que Nueva York no sabe* (1949), published in Mexico. Virginia de Peña wrote the novels *Toeya*, *Atardecer en las montañas*, *Sobra de pasión*, *La hora del destino*, *Amores de Júpiter y Selene*, *Magia de primavera*, and *El fulgor de las estrellas*. Andrés Francisco Requena, after writing a few poems praising the Trujillo regime, wrote the novel *Cementerio sin cruces* (1951), which cost him his life because of its criticism of the dictatorship. These works were written in Spanish.

Contemporary literary works in Spanish have been promoted through the efforts of Silvio Torres Saillant, founding director of the Dominican Studies Institute at the City University of New York and subsequently director of the Latino–Latin American Studies Program at Syracuse University. Daisy Cocco-de Filippis, who in 2002 became provost at Hostos Community College, for years has hosted monthly meetings of women writers known as “La Tertulia.” These gatherings have served not only as workshops to discuss works in progress but also as networking and support systems for the writers. These *tertulias* have produced anthologies such as *Tertuliando: dominicanas y amiga(o)s = Hanging Out: Dominican Women and Friends: Bilingual Text(o)s bilingües* (1997), a collection of the poetry and fiction of writers such as Yrene Santos, Zaida Corniel, Marianela Medrano, Miriam Ventura, Virginia Moore, Ynoemia del Villar, and other members of “La Tertulia.” Another similar anthology is *Poemas del exilio y otras inquietudes = Poems of Exile and Other Concerns: A Bilingual Selection of the Poetry Written by Dominicans in the United States* (1988), which Cocco-de Filippis coedited with Emma Jane Robinett.

In addition to appearing in anthologies, some of these writers have published books of their own. Yrene Santos, an award-winning poet, has published the collections of poems *Desnudez del silencio* (1988), *Reencuentro* (1997) and *El incansable juego* (2002). Marianela Medrano, a poet and poetry therapist residing in Connecticut, has published *Oficio de vivir* (1986), *Los alegres ojos de la tristeza* (1987), *Regando esencias/The Scent of Waiting* (1998), and *Curada de espantos* (2002). The poet Julio Alvarado has published a collection of poems entitled *Fiesta Rota* (2003).

Along with the Dominican writers who publish in Spanish and those who write in English, there are also those who write in both languages. One of them is Alan Cambeira, a writer whose works are mainly dedicated to the home country. He is the author of *Quiénes son los dominicanos* (2002) and *Quisqueya la bella* (1997), two collections of essays on Dominican identity and culture, and *Azúcar: The Story of Sugar* (2003), a novel about the exploitation of sugarcane plantation workers in the Dominican Republic.

The works of Dominican writers who publish in English include, in chronological order, the fiction, poetry, and essays of Rhina Espaillat, Julia Alvarez, Junot Díaz, Loida Maritza Pérez, Josefina Báez, Angie Cruz, Nelly Rosario, and Annecy Báez. Recurring themes of their works are the feeling of loss and separation from the home country as well as the difficulties of cultural adaptation (Julia Alvarez); life in inner-city poverty, fragmentation of the family, and masculine sexual identity (Junot Díaz); self-hatred and conflictive racial and sexual identities (Loida Maritza Pérez); the subversion of traditional notions of ethnicity (Josefina Báez); ambivalent feelings of anger and reconciliation with the home culture (Angie Cruz); and the subversion of traditional notions of gender and of the home culture (Nelly Rosario).

## Rhina Espaillat and Julia Alvarez

Born in 1932 in Santo Domingo, Rhina Espaillat came with her family to the United States in 1939. At sixteen, she was already a published poet. Her poetry has been included in numerous literary magazines and anthologies and has received prestigious awards, including the T. S. Eliot Prize, the Richard Wilbur Award, the Sparrow Sonnet Prize, and three yearly prizes from the Poetry Society of America.

Julia Alvarez was born in New York in 1950. She spent her early childhood in the Dominican Republic until 1960, when her family moved back to New York to escape the Trujillo regime. She is the author of four novels, three collections of poetry, one collection of essays, one children's book, three young adult novels, and one cookbook, in addition to numerous poems, articles, and essays published in countless journals, magazines, and other publications. She is also the recipient of prestigious awards, fellowships, and other forms of recognition for her literary work. Her most celebrated works include the novels *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* (1991), *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994), *¡Yo!* (1997), and *In the Name of Salomé* (2000). Her poem collections include *Homecoming* (1996), *The Other Side/El Otro Lado* (1996), and *The Woman I Kept to Myself* (2004).

## Junot Díaz

Born in 1968 in the Dominican Republic, Junot Díaz moved with his parents to the United States in 1975. He holds a bachelor's degree from Rutgers University and an MFA in creative writing from Cornell University. He is the author of the best-selling short-story collection *Drown* (1996), which has been translated into twelve languages. He has also edited one anthology, *The Beacon Best of 2001: Great Writing by Women and Men of All Races and Colors*. His fiction has appeared in *Story*, *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, *Time Out*, *Glimmer Train*, *African Voices*, four annual volumes of *Best American Short Stories* between 1996 and 2000, and the "Future of American Fiction" issue of *The New Yorker* in 1999. He has received a Pushcart Prize XXII, a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1999, a Lila Wallace–Reader's Digest Writers' Award, and the 2002 Pen/Malamud Award. Díaz taught in the MFA program at Syracuse University from 1997 to 2002, and then became an associate professor in the Writing and Humanistic Studies program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston.

*Drown* is a collection of stories about a boy growing up both in the impoverished Dominican barrios and in the inner cities of industrial New Jersey. The stories "Israel," "Aguantando," and "No Face" are set in the Dominican Republic, where little Yunior, his brother Rafa, and their mother Virta struggle with poverty and separation from her husband, who had migrated to the United States. The other stories are set in the United States and portray different stages of Yunior's coming of age. "Drown" and "Edison, New Jersey" describe the claustrophobic atmosphere of an industrial neighborhood, where life seems doomed and hopeless. Díaz's works reflect his Latino, African American, and global literary experiences. Although critics have perceived different influences in his writing, Díaz's success resides in the fact that he has crafted a new voice in the American literary landscape. Within the context of Dominican and other Latina and Latino writers, his work represents a generational shift in terms of his approach to the immigrant experience and his use of the language.

## Loida Maritza Pérez

Loida Maritza Pérez was born in the Dominican Republic in 1963 and came to the United States with her family when she was three. Holding a BA from Cornell University, she is a recipient of the Pauline and Henry Louis Gates Fellowship for Djerassi Resident Artists Program (1996), the Ragdale Foundation's U.S.–Africa Writer's Project Award (1994), and the New York Foundation for the Arts Award (1992). She is the author of the novel *Geographies of Home* (1999), which narrates the life of a troubled Dominican family living in Brooklyn and deals with issues of poverty, domestic abuse, insanity, self-hatred, superstition, religious fanaticism, and conflictive racial and sexual identities. It is also the story of reconciliation with the self and with the home culture, in which religion is depicted as a place of tension between the contradictory feelings of repulsion and attraction towards the home culture. As Aurelia, the mother, comes to terms with her spiritual legacy, she uses it as a tool to address her family's needs. Her struggle is similar to that of her daughters, who are also confronting their own demons, and to that of Papito, the father, who is torn between his responsibility to his family and his religious devotion as an Adventist. While all these struggles are taking place, the home culture is represented in opposition to the civilized and rational universe that is glimpsed through Iliana's brief time in college.

## Josefina Báez

Born in 1960, Josefina Báez left her native town of La Romana to live in New York at the age of twelve, returning repeatedly to the Dominican Republic and spending extended periods of time in Dominican schools. A performer, writer, and educator, Báez has participated extensively in many international theatre festivals and workshops in Asia (particularly India), Latin America, Europe, and the Caribbean. She has devoted herself to a spiritual life under the

guidance of Swami Guru Devanand Saraswati Ji Maharash. Her writing has been published in *Forward Motion Magazine*, *Brujula/Compass*, *Ventana Abierta*, *Tertuliando/Hanging Out*, *Vetas*, *Caribbean Connections: Moving North*, *Ojo Paralelo*, *Aquí es Manhattan*, *allá La Romana*, and *The Beacon Best of 2001: Great Writing by Women and Men of All Races and Colors*. She has taught in the Creative Arts Laboratory at Columbia University's Teachers College.

Báez is the author of the bilingual text for performance *Dominicanish* (2000), a non-traditional portrayal of the situation of a young immigrant woman in New York City who is learning English and, through her new language, new ways to relate to the world. In this process, traditional categories of identity, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality, end up being subverted as the character/narrator opens up to alternative possibilities.

For Báez, her “hyphenated” condition enriches her in ways that could not have happened had she not migrated to New York. Furthermore, her creative work is the site for exploring possibilities in language, musical taste, sensual pleasures, and spiritual awakenings that are brought forth through exposure to multiple cultural stimuli. From this point of view, Dominicaness can no longer be reduced to stereotypical images and must include the contours of the “here” and “now” of the community in New York City.

## Angie Cruz

Angie Cruz was born and raised in the Washington Heights section of New York City. She holds a bachelor's degree from Binghamton University and a Master of Fine Arts degree from New York University. Her fiction and activist work have earned her the New York Foundation of the Arts Fellowship, the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund Award, and The Bronx Writers' Center Van Lier Literary Fellowship. Cruz lives in New York City where she co-founded WILL: Women in Literature and Letters, a collective devoted to social change through artistic expression.

Cruz's debut novel *Soledad* (2001) is the story of a Dominican adolescent, Soledad, who has escaped from what she describes as the loud, stifling, and waste-filled Dominican neighborhood of Washington Heights to live and attend school in the hip, downtown neighborhoods of New York City. When she is forced to return to the bedside of her mother Olivia, who has fallen into a deep, endless sleep, Soledad is confronted back in the old neighborhood with the conflictive culture and relatives that she had rejected. The memories of Soledad's haunted past intertwine with those of her mother, forcing the two of them to confront each other with an earnest attempt at rebuilding bridges. In this sense, although it is considered “the novel of Washington Heights” (Torres-Saillant2003, p. 120), *Soledad* is also the story of cycles and reconciliation—a gradual process that begins with rejection and ends with the spiritual rebirth of its characters.

## Nelly Rosario

Nelly Rosario was born in the Dominican Republic. Her parents moved to New York when she was three months old. She earned a bachelor's degree in engineering from MIT and an MFA in fiction from Columbia University. She has received numerous awards, including a 1999 Barbara Deming Memorial Fund Fellowship, The Bronx Writers' Center Van Lier Literary Fellowship for 1999–2000, two National Arts Club Writing Fellowships, the 1997 Hurston/ Wright Award in Fiction, and the 1988 National Teachers in English Writing Award. Her work has appeared in *The Village Voice* and in the anthology of essays *Becoming American* (2000). Her novel, *Song of the Water Saints*, won the PEN Open Book Award “Beyond Margin” in 2002 and has been translated into Spanish by Emece Planeta under the title *El canto del agua* (2003). The *Village Voice Literary Supplement* chose her as one of seven “Writers on the Verge” for 2001.

*Song of the Water Saints* (2002) is a novel set mainly in the Dominican Republic, beginning in 1916, during the U.S. occupation of the country, and ending in 1999 in New York City. It is the story of four generations of unruly, headstrong

women who struggle to make their dreams come true. The incessant wanderlust of the first woman, Graciela, leads her throughout the country in search of “a better life.” Her daughter, Mercedes, more levelheaded than her impulsive mother, becomes a businesswoman. Despite her modest success, the economic situation of the Dominican Republic of the 1980s forces her and her family to move to New York and start anew as she looks after her granddaughter Leyla, who seems to have inherited Graciela's restlessness.

In this novel, the home culture is represented through the details of the everyday life of the working and rural classes. It avoids the pitfall of depicting the home culture as either an exotic and unfamiliar place or an idealized Lost Eden. Its innovative treatment of both female and male characters suggests a questioning of the traditional notions of gender in the Dominican Republic. Her female characters are neither the passive victims of male abuse nor pure images of “perfection.” Although they live in a patriarchal society, they pursue their dreams independently of the men with whom they are involved.

## Annecy Báez

Annecy Báez was born in the Dominican Republic in 1958. She came to the United States with her family when she was three. As a teenager, she spent three years in Santo Domingo, where she attended secondary school. After graduation, she returned to New York and studied at Pace University, where she majored in psychology. She received her master's degree from Hunter School of Social Work in 1984 and her doctorate from New York University Ehrenkranz School of Social Work in 1995. She is the recipient of numerous grants and awards for her professional work as a clinical social worker.

Báez is the author of several poems and short stories dealing with teenagers' coming of age in the Bronx and in the Dominican Republic. In particular, she focuses on adolescent girls' conflicts with their mothers, their desire to explore beyond the confines of their protective family life, and their vulnerability in the face of life. She has developed her craft through participation in several workshops, including the Frederick Douglass Writing Center, New York University's continuing education creative writing courses, and the monthly “Tertulia” held by Daisy Cocco-de Filippis. Báez has published her poetry and fiction in the literary journals *Callaloo* and *Brújula*. She has also published a collection of short stories. Fully engaged by her social consciousness, her literary works are permeated with the stories and insights brought about through her professional experience and her understanding of two different cultures.

See also ALVAREZ, JULIA; DÍAZ, JUNOT; DOMINICANS; ESPAILLAT, RHINA; and LITERATURE.

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SOPHIE MARÍÑEZ

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