

AWP 2022 - EVENT OUTLINE
Philadelphia, PA

**Documenting the Undocumented: Writing the U.S./Mexico Border
Across Genres**

Event Organizer & Moderator: Jennifer De Leon
www.jenniferdeleonauthor.com

PANELISTS: Ricardo Nuila, Aida Salazar, René Colato Laínez, Marcelo Hernandez-Castillo, and Jennifer De Leon

EVENT CATEGORY: Multiple Literary Genres Craft & Criticism

EVENT DESCRIPTION:

**Documenting the Undocumented: Writing the U.S./Mexico Border
Across Genres**

The border. ICE. The wall. Asylum. Human cages. How can we truthfully represent the current “immigration crisis at the border” in our writing? What are political and philosophical concerns, particularly when authors inherit stories they are in effect, still living, and when readers might expect a happy ending? Authors across categories—fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and young adult and children’s books—talk frankly about the struggles and benefits of writing “la frontera.”

AGENDA:

-Moderator Jenn De Leon welcomes audience/reads brief bios of panelists/explains format

-Panelists each give a brief reading (2-3 minutes) from their work and describe how that passage illustrates specific perspective(s) on our topic.

-Questions for Panelists

1. What in your life experience draws you to explore “the border” in your work? In your genre(s) specifically?
2. Question from 2020: In light of the recent discussions surrounding the novel *American Dirt*, and without going too far into the weeds with that particular project, what are your ideas on a) how we as Latinx authors can resist the idea of the “Single Story” in border narratives, and b) how publishing can augment Latinx voices without reducing our experiences to predictable storylines by caricatures, not characters?
3. One of the interesting common threads between all of your work is this notion of being both inside and outside worlds, of characters navigating dual or multiple identities. Can you speak to how you approached the *page* with this dual-consciousness in mind? Through *craft*?
4. In writing about the border, there is an unavoidable element of a “before and after” to some degree. In what ways did you use this to inform the structure of your work—a particular book, story, poem?
5. The border inevitably brings up issues of power. Can you describe some of the ways characters in your book grapple with these issues? Furthermore, do you see gradations of power within undocumented communities—class, gender, skin color, age, and more—and if so, how do you reflect these realities in scene or image or language?
6. Every story is a journey. Border stories are no different in this way, even though there is a tangible divide between home and destination. As your characters move in this space, to what extent are they on a quest of discovery and to what extent are they seeking escape?
7. Considering the overall national (and international) conversation surrounding “the border,” what are some ideas you would like readers to take away from your creative work as they negotiate the space between fake news and testimony, between fact and fiction, between art and politics?

*Note: Depending on time, we won't be able to address every single question here.

-Q & A (Audience)

-End

Context/Background:

Event description:

The border. ICE. The wall. Asylum. Human cages. How can we truthfully represent the current “immigration crisis at the border” in our writing? What are political and philosophical concerns, particularly when authors inherit stories they are in effect, still living, and when readers might expect a happy ending? Authors across categories—fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and young adult and children’s books—talk frankly about the struggles and benefits of writing “la frontera.”

Statement of Merit:

While there is no singular “border narrative,” the subject of immigration at the U.S./Mexico border is timely and groundbreaking. In particular, providing a platform for Latinx writers across genres—including a children’s picture book author, a doctor, an internationally best-selling memoirist, a YA author, and a poet who crossed the border as an unaccompanied minor—to discuss the ways in which the content affects form and vice versa. This conversation helps shape a critical counter-narrative.

Brief Bios of Panelist:

Jennifer De Leon is the author of *Don't Ask Me Where I'm From* (Simon & Schuster, 2020) and *White Space: Essays on Culture, Race, & Writing* (UMass Press, 2021). She is a Creative Writing and Latinx Literature professor, editor, speaker, and consultant.

I am **René Colato Laínez**, the award winning author of many bilingual/multicultural children's books. I am a master's degree from Vermont College of Fine Arts in Writing for Children & Young Adults. I am an elementary bilingual teacher at Los Angeles, California.

Aida Salazar is an author, translator, and arts activist. Her books include the multiple-award-winning verse novels, *THE MOON WITHIN*, and *LAND OF THE CRANES*. She is a founding member of Las Musas – a Latinx kidlit author collective. Learn about her forthcoming projects at AidaSalazar.com.

Ricardo Nuila is a practicing doctor, teacher, and writer. His nonfiction has appeared in *The New Yorker* and *VQR*, and his fiction has appeared in *Best American Short Stories*. A former Yaddo, MacDowell, and Dobie ranch Fellow, his first book on safety net hospitals will be published by Scribner.

Marcelo Hernandez Castillo is a poet, essayist, and translator. He is the author of *Cenzontle*, winner of the A. Poulin, Jr. Prize (BOA Editions 2018), *Dulce* (Northwestern University Press 2017), and *Children of the Land* (Harper Collins). A Canto Mundo Fellow, he co-founded the UndocuPoets campaign.