

# Inflammatory Literature



## THE LEGACY OF AMERICAN JOURNALIST Ruben Salazar

Wednesday, March 3, 2021, at 4 p.m. PT  
Live via Zoom  
University of Southern California

Written by **OLIVER MAYER**

Directed by **EDGAR LANDA**

OBS Tech and Programming by **JOE SHEA**

### Cast:

Ruben Salazar | **HERBERT SIGUENZA**

Tecato, Car Salesman, Cesar Chavez | **DAVID ZAYAS**

La Chenchu, Borja, Octavio Paz | **MARLENE FORTE**

The L.A. Times, JFK, Nixon | **MATTHEW LILLARD**

The L.A. Times, Dr. Ruth Landes, Stokely Carmichael  
| **CHASTITY DOTSON**

“Brown Eyed Children of the Sun” and “California  
Dreamin’” | **ELLAS** (Suemy Gonzalez, Nelly Cortez,  
and Melinda Salcido)

### Panelists:

**OLIVER MAYER**

**ELDA MARÍA ROMÁN**

**ROBERTO SURO**

# BIOS:



## Chastity Dotson

Chastity Dotson is an actor, writer, and activist. Credits include *Imposters*, *Patriot*, and *Manifest*. Dotson is the founder of 300FOR300, a nonprofit that is empowering the dreams of 300 girls of color through storytelling. She is a staff writer on AMC's *Ultra City Smiths*.



## Marlene Forte

Born in Havana, Cuba, Marlene Forte is an actress known most recently for her work in movies such as *Knives Out*, *El Chicano*, and *The Way Back*. On TV, she has been seen on *Superstore*, *Good Girls*, and *The Conners*, as well as *Altered Carbon* and *Fear the Walking Dead*. On stage, she is a founding member of LAByrinth Theater Company alongside David Zayas, and has worked on multiple new plays by Oliver Mayer and Luis Alfaro.



## Edgar Landa

Edgar Landa is an actor/director and creates fights and violence for theatres large and small. He serves on the faculty for the USC School of Dramatic Arts and is the resident fight director for the school. Recent directing credits include: *As You Like It*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest* (Thin Air Shakespeare—Jackson Hole, WY); *Camino Real* (USC); *If You Can Get to Buffalo* and *The Offending Gesture* (Son of Semele Ensemble). Landa is a long-time collaborator of Son of Semele Ensemble and Shakespeare & Company. He is a proud member of Stage Directors & Choreographers and Actors Equity Association. [edgarlanda.com](http://edgarlanda.com)



## Matthew Lillard

Matthew Lillard is an actor best known for a slew of terribly average teen movies throughout the 90s. Over his long and meandering career there have been a few highlights: *Scream*, *SLC Punk*, *The Descendants*. He can currently be found on NBC in *Good Girls*. He's proud to share this virtual stage with these lovely artists.



## Oliver Mayer

Oliver Mayer is a playwright, librettist, essayist, and professor with tenure at USC's School of Dramatic Arts. The author of over thirty plays, he is perhaps best known for the groundbreaking *Blade to the Heat* and its sequel *Members Only*. His and composer Jenni Brandon's opera *3 Paderewskis* is the winner of The American Prize for new opera and received its world premiere at The Kennedy Center. He is a native of Los Angeles.



## Elda María Román

Elda María Román is an associate professor in English at USC. She is the author of *Race and Upward Mobility: Seeking, Gatekeeping, and Other Class Strategies in Postwar America*. Her current book project, *The Redistributive Imagination*, traces the effects of and responses to contemporary alarmist discourse—about demographic change, economic scarcity, and effects of climate change—and demonstrates how these issues are represented and reframed collectively and imaginatively in Latinx and Black literature, film, and television.

# BIOS:



## Herbert Siguenza

Herbert Siguenza is currently the Playwright in Residence for the San Diego Repertory Theatre thanks to a generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Siguenza is also a founding member of the performance group Culture Clash. For twenty years, he and Culture Clash created a series of plays based off oral histories of residents from different neighborhoods throughout America. As a solo writer and performer, Siguenza has produced *Cantinflas!*, *A Weekend with Pablo Picasso*, *Steal Heaven*, *El Henry* (Outstanding New Play Award, San Diego Theatre Critics Circle, 2014), *Manifest Destinitis*, *Beachtown*, and *Bad Hombres/Good Wives* for the San Diego Rep.



## Roberto Suro

Roberto Suro holds a joint appointment as a professor in the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism and the Sol Price School of Public Policy at USC. As associate director of the Sol Price Center for Social Innovation, Suro leads the Southern California Symposium, an executive education program that brings together social actors from a variety of fields for intense consideration on the long-term challenges facing the region. He contributes commentaries on immigration policy and Latino politics for *The New York Times Sunday Review* and other publications. Recently, his scholarly writing has focused on migration to the United States from Central America.



## David Zayas

David Zayas is best known for his role as Angel Batista on the Golden Globe®-nominated psychological drama *Dexter*. Zayas was recently seen as Sal Maroni on the Fox series *Gotham* and Sheriff Aguirre on the Netflix series *Bloodline*. Zayas began his acting career with LAByrinth Theater Company in 1992. He has starred in more than thirty theater productions, most with The LAByrinth Theater Company, including: *Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train*, *In Arabia We'd All Be Kings*, *Our Lady of 121 St.*, and the Pulitzer Prize®-winning *Anna in the Tropics* on Broadway.



## Ellas

The band Ellas is made of **Suemy Gonzalez**, **Nelly Cortez**, and **Melinda Salcido**. This triple threat from Los Angeles, California, is ready to dazzle audiences around the world with their unique blend of mariachi and modern music. With a guitar, guitarron, violin, and their angelic harmonies, they have reached #7 on the iTunes Latin charts for their debut album *Ellas #primerafila*. Additionally, Gonzalez, Cortez, and Salcido have earned Grammy nominations and a Grammy award in their individual musical careers. They have performed at iconic venues such as the Hollywood Bowl, the Dolby Theater, and the “nest” for the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The mixture of their own musical upbringing along with some of their favorite musical genres of gypsy jazz, pop, and country will keep audiences all around wanting more.

This event is presented by USC Visions and Voices: The Arts and Humanities Initiative; organized by Oliver Mayer (Dramatic Arts), Barbara Robinson (USC Libraries), and Carlos Parra (History); and co-sponsored by the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, USC Dornsife College, the USC Libraries, the USC School of Dramatic Arts, and La CASA.

# THEMEGUIDE

**“Chicano meant looking at oneself through one’s ‘own’ eyes and not through Anglo bifocals.”—Ruben Salazar**

## WHAT TO KNOW

- Ruben Salazar (1928–1970) was a journalist and civil rights activist known for being the first Mexican American journalist to substantively cover the Chicano community in mainstream English-language media.
- He was killed during the National Chicano Moratorium March Against the Vietnam War, when he was struck by a tear-gas projectile fired by an L.A. County sheriff’s deputy.
- This event features a short play inspired by Salazar’s writings, directed by USC lecturer Edgar Landa, written by USC professor Oliver Mayer, and performed by Chastity Dotson, Marlene Forte, Matthew Lillard, Herbert Sigüenza, and David Zayas.
- Presented on Salazar’s birthday, the performance will be followed by a discussion with the actors as well as USC professors Elda María Román and Robert Suro.
- The event also features music by Ellas.

## ABOUT RUBEN SALAZAR

Ruben Salazar was born in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, in 1928. He moved with his family to El Paso, Texas, when he was eight months old. He served two years in the U.S. Army and studied journalism in college.

Salazar started out his journalism career as the first Latino reporter at the *El Paso Herald-Post*. He worked at the *Santa Rosa Press Democrat* and the *San Francisco News* in the 1950s before accepting a position with the *Los Angeles Times* in 1959. As a foreign correspondent for the *L.A. Times*, Salazar covered the U.S. military invasion of the Dominican Republic and the Vietnam War, and became the paper’s Mexico City bureau chief. In the U.S., he focused on covering the Mexican American community, the Chicano movement, and East L.A. Throughout his career, he regularly covered issues that many reporters were not looking at, like conditions in prisons and how inequities in employment, housing, and education affected Chicano communities. His 1970 book, *Stranger in One’s Land*, is an account of a six-day hearing by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights about problems facing Mexican Americans in the U.S. Southwest.

In 1970, Salazar became the news director for the Spanish-language TV station KMEX, while continuing to write a column for the *L.A. Times*. On August 29 of that year, during the National Chicano Moratorium March Against the Vietnam War, he was killed by a tear-gas projectile fired by an L.A. County sheriff’s deputy. While some say the death was accidental, others think it was a deliberate political assassination in response to Salazar’s critical coverage of police treatment of the Chicano community.

The Ruben Salazar Papers can be found in the USC Libraries’ Special Collections.

**“A Chicano is a Mexican-American with a non-Anglo image of himself. He resents being told Columbus ‘discovered’ America when the Chicano’s ancestors, the Mayans and the Aztecs, founded highly sophisticated civilizations centuries before Spain financed the Italian explorer’s trip to the ‘New World.’ . . . Chicanos will tell you that their culture predates that of the Pilgrims and that Spanish was spoken in America before English and so the ‘problem’ is not theirs but the Anglos’ who don’t speak Spanish.”—from “Who Is a Chicano and What Is It the Chicanos Want,” a 1970 *L.A. Times* column by Ruben Salazar**



Ruben Salazar at the US Army Base located in Saigon, Vietnam, 1965.



Ruben Salazar at work as the News Director of the Spanish-language television station, KMEX, Los Angeles, California, 1970.



Peaceful protestors marching down Whittier Boulevard in East Los Angeles on August 29th, 1970—a significant day in the Chicano Moratorium movement. (Photo: George Rodriguez)



Ruben Salazar in Zocalo, the Plaza de la Constitucion (Constitution Square) in Mexico City, 1966-1968

## THE CHICANO MOVEMENT

The Chicano movement was a Mexican American civil rights movement of the 1960s and '70s. Like all social movements, it doesn't really have start and end dates, and it was dynamic and multifaceted—happening in multiple places, coalescing around multiple issues, and involving many organizations and individuals. To learn about it, you may want to look up:

- ⦿ The United Farm Workers, a labor union that grew out of the organizing of Delores Huerta, César Chavez, Larry Itliong, and others in California.
- ⦿ El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán, a philosophical statement drafted at the Denver Youth Conference in 1969.
- ⦿ Rejes Tijerina's efforts in New Mexico to organize Chicanos to demand repatriation of land that had been confiscated in violation of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.
- ⦿ La Raza Unida Party, which was founded in Texas and launched electoral campaigns in several Southwestern states in the 1970s.
- ⦿ The Brown Berets, a grassroots group that ran a free clinic, published a community newspaper, and fought against injustices including police brutality, poor school conditions, and discrimination.
- ⦿ The East L.A. Chicana Welfare Rights Organization, founded by Alicia Escalante.
- ⦿ The National Chicano Moratorium Against the Vietnam War, which raised awareness about the disproportionate number of Latinos killed in the war and drew upwards of 20,000 protestors to an anti-war march in East L.A. on August 29, 1970. It was one of the largest civil rights marches in L.A. history up to that point. The peaceful protest ended in police violence that killed Ruben Salazar.
- ⦿ The student group MEChA, which was founded at UCSB in 1969 and is still active today, with chapters at hundreds of colleges and universities across the country. In a sign of the ways social movements grow and evolve over time, in recent years the group changed its name from Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán to Movimiento Estudiantil Chicax de Aztlán after students pointed out how "Chicano" reflects histories of sexism and homophobia in the movement, and called for the gender-inclusive term "Chicax." Student leaders have also called for removing the word "Aztlán," which refers narrowly to the Aztecs, excluding Black people and Mexico's many other indigenous groups.

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- ⦿ One of the issues Salazar emphasized in his reporting was police brutality directed against Mexicans and Mexican Americans, particularly on the part of the Los Angeles Police and Sheriff's departments. What can Salazar's reporting and reactions to it teach us that relates to current-day conversations about police reform and racial justice?
- ⦿ Salazar's promoting of Chicano causes (such as investment in Mexican American-majority schools, the celebration of Mexican cultural heritage in the U.S., and opposition to

racist police abuses) raises questions about the objectivity we expect from journalists. What lessons can we learn from Salazar's work about journalism in the service of the public interest?

- As a reporter at a major newspaper and as news director of KMEX Channel 34 (one of the first Spanish-language TV stations in the U.S.), Salazar opened many doors for future Latinx journalists. How does our current media landscape—particularly in mainstream English-language news outlets—reflect the opportunities Salazar's work created? What barriers remain in terms of U.S. Latinx journalism?

## IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- The *L.A. Times*'s special project on the Chicano Moratorium | [latimes.com/projects/chicano-moratorium](https://latimes.com/projects/chicano-moratorium)
- Ruben Salazar Park | [parks.lacounty.gov/ruben-f-salazar-park](https://parks.lacounty.gov/ruben-f-salazar-park)
- California Chicano News Media Association | [ccnma.org](https://ccnma.org)
- MediaJustice | [mediajustice.org](https://mediajustice.org)
- The USC Annenberg School of Journalism | [annenberg.usc.edu/journalism](https://annenberg.usc.edu/journalism)
- La CASA | [lacasa.usc.edu](https://lacasa.usc.edu)
- Culture Clash | [latw.org/artist-public-profile/culture-clash](https://latw.org/artist-public-profile/culture-clash)

## DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

**BARBARA ROBINSON** of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about the evening's event. Those with a call number (e.g., books) are physical items available in our campus libraries. Those without a call number (e.g., e-books, journals, and databases) are electronic resources, which you can access through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at [libraries.usc.edu](https://libraries.usc.edu).

### RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- Ruben Salazar, *Border Correspondent: Selected writings, 1955-1970*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1995.  
DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: F787 S18 1995  
[Also available online.](#)

### RECOMMENDED DATABASES

- Chicano Database*: designed for research and instruction for Chicano and ethnic studies programs, offering materials that explore issues within the greater US Latinx community, in particular the Mexican-American experience, from the late 20th century to the present.
- ProQuest Historical Newspapers*: find Ruben Salazar's columns he wrote while employed by the *Los Angeles Times* from 1959-1970, and articles about him after his death.

### ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS

- Ruben Salazar (1928-1970) Papers*
- Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department's Records on the Investigation of the Homicide of Ruben Salazar*



Mourners at the public viewing of Ruben Salazar's casket as he lay in state, Bagües and Sons Mortuary, East Los Angeles, California, 1970



This park was renamed in Salazar's honor as it was the final stop during the National Chicano Moratorium, the march in which Ruben Salazar was killed, Los Angeles, California, September 17, 1970.

