

identities in the United States. He has been criticized for his stand against bilingual education. Other books include *Mexico's Children* (1992), *Days of Obligation: An Argumer with My Mexican Father* (1993), and *Brown: The Last Discovery of America* (2003), which is about the changing demographics in the United States.

From *Hunger of Memory*

I

Visiting the East Coast or the gray capitals of Europe during the long months of winter, I often meet people at deluxe hotels who comment on my complexion. (In such hotels it appears nowadays a mark of leisure and wealth to have a complexion like mine.) Have I been skiing? In the Swiss Alps? Have I just returned from a Caribbean vacation? No. I say no softly but in a firm voice that intends to explain: My complexion is dark. (My skin is brown. More exactly, *terra-cotta*^o in sunlight, tawny in shade. I do not redden in sunlight. Instead, my skin becomes progressively dark; the sun sings the flesh.)

When I was a boy the white summer sun of Sacramento would darken me so, my T-shirt would seem bleached against my slender dark arms. My mother would see me come up the front steps. She'd wait for the screen door to slam at my back. "You look like a *negrito*" she'd say, angry, sorry to be angry, frustrated almost to laughing, scorn. "You know how important looks are in this country. With *los gringos* looks are all that they judge on. But you! Look at you! You're so careless!" Then she'd start in all over again. "You won't be satisfied till you end up looking like *los pobres* who work in the fields, *los braceros*."

(*Los braceros*: Those men who work with their *brazos*, their arms; Mexican nationals who were licensed to work for American farmers in the 1950s. They worked very hard for very little money, my father would tell me. And what money they earned they sent back to Mexico to support their families, my mother would add. *Los pobres*—the poor, the pitiful, the powerless ones. But paradoxically also powerful men. They were the men with brown-muscled arms I stared at in awe on Saturday mornings when they showed up downtown like gypsies to shop at Woolworth's or Penney's. On Monday nights they would gather hours early on the steps of the Memorial

Richard Rodriguez

Writer and former teacher Richard Rodriguez was born in San Francisco in 1944, the child of Mexican immigrants who had great expectations for their four children. Rodriguez attended Catholic school, where the nuns quickly noticed his abilities and encouraged him to speak only English at home. His autobiographical narrative *Hunger of Memory*, published in 1982, recounts the separation he felt from his home language and his public identity.

Rodriguez writes memoir, essays, and criticism, and his work often discusses the mix of racial, cultural, and ethnic



terra-cotta: a brownish-red clay often used to make flowerpots