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Political identities in U.S. latino poetry in the Twentieth Century

This article attempts to consider the Latino consciousness as backdrops for the work of four Latino poets writing in the United States before, during, and after these movements. These discussions arise from an analytical reading that examines thematic, formal, symbolic, and historical elements in selected poems of William Carlos Williams, Rodolfo Gonzales, Gary Soto, and Martín Espada. These poets have retained political and social consciousness throughout the Twentieth Century as presented their poetry. Williams demonstrates a stringent criticism of the American judicial system in his poem "An Early Martyr". Having published the majority of his work prior to the Civil Rights movement Williams poetry is less Latino specific than later poets. Rodolfo Gonzales, whose work *I am Joaquin* features the reconstruction of Mexican history and identity as integral for the development of Chicano consciousness, present a more direct and Chicano specific work. Gonzales writes *I am Joaquin*, a specific political and social piece, by establishing a dichotomy between two seemingly opposing forces: Chicanos as the oppressed and the U.S. government as the oppressor. The authors removed from the Civil Rights Era, such as Gary Soto, exhibits a lack of specificity and criticism seen in the works of Williams and Gonzales. Though Soto uses less referential political statements he retains subtle social messages through the presentation of migrant workers. Moving to the poetic works of Martín Espada, we see a separation between him and the aforementioned authors. Espada seems to be less concerned with creating a socially oppressed Everyman (as seen in Gonzales) as opposed to capturing the images of very specific oppressed persons. Finally, in an analysis of these four Hispanic poets we can see various trends reflecting distinct levels of political and social consciousness and expression showing that the presences of social and political subjects never diminishes.