

## “GATHERING WHAT IS LEFT”: A CONVERSATION WITH ARIANA BROWN

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**Abstract:** In her collection of poetry, *We Are Owed.*, Ariana Brown asks the reader to develop a Black consciousness by rejecting U.S., Chicano, mestizo, and Mexican nationalism in order to confront anti-Black erasure and empire-building. Brown “maps” not only the racialized, but also the gendered and sexualized experiences of Afro-Mexicans in the diaspora. In this conversation, Brown highlights the necessity to consider everyday life as a space that is rife with historical, political, and cultural information. Brown builds upon Dionne Brand’s concept of “gathering what is left,” that is, making community and archive through imagining not only what might have been, but also through concrete practices in the here-and-now to not only build new strategies for resistance and refusal, but also to forge a future of care, love, pleasure, and joy—to make the world anew.

**Keywords:** Blackness, African Diaspora, Mexico, United States, Poetry

**Resumen:** En su colección de poesía, *We Are Owed.*, Ariana Brown le pide al lector que desarrolle una conciencia negra mediante un rechazo al nacionalismo estadounidense,

chicano, mestizo y mexicano para enfrentarse a la violencia anti-negra y a la construcción de imperios. De este modo, Brown “traza una ruta” de las experiencias racializadas, pero también las de género y sexualizadas de los afromexicanos en la diáspora. En esta conversación, Brown destaca la necesidad de considerar la vida cotidiana como un espacio repleto de información histórica, política y cultural. Además, Brown se basa en el concepto de Dionne Brand de “recoger lo que queda,” es decir, hacer comunidad y archivo a través de imaginar no sólo lo que podría haber sido, sino también a través de las prácticas imaginarias y concretas en el aquí y ahora para no sólo construir nuevas estrategias de resistencia, sino también para forjar un futuro de cuidado, amor, placer y alegría; es decir, para hacer el mundo de nuevo.

**Palabras clave:** negritud, diáspora africana, México, Estados Unidos, poesía

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In a tweet on September 30<sup>th</sup> 2020, Ariana Brown reflects on her positionality as a Black Mexican-American writer, specifically the way that her body is made to feel in primarily Latinx spaces: “I get invited to do a lot of shows in Latinx student orgs/cultural centers, etc. ppl [people] often seem surprised when I show up and talk about Blackness. This is fine: I will not participate in Mexican hegemony, nation-building, and the anti-Black legacy of chicanismo & mestizaje.” She goes on to say, in the same thread, that “every day I learn new language to articulate \*my\* experience of Blackness, how to care for myself, my desire...it is anti-Black to assume I should do anything else.” The tender possibilities of Blackness take center stage in this plea for refusal. Brown directly addresses the very intimate ways that

the logics of the nation-state, mestizaje, and "multiculturalism," work to maintain a certain order of things—through the stories that we tell, the histories that we imagine, and the desires we act upon. The author makes clear that canonical histories of Latinidad wield Brownness and mestizaje as their entrance card, invoking stories about who "we" are and how "we" got to be here. Brown's poetic production builds upon these experiences of violence and self-care in order to ask how it might be possible to redefine origins, turning eyes away from foundations of Chicano nationalism, Borderland rhetoric, and mestizo consciousness to then question how Latine communities may become accountable to each other, demanding a reconsideration of *whose* desires, pleasures, joys, and triumphs are being centered to forge this vision of futurity.

This is precisely the project that Brown takes on in her recent collection of poetry *We Are Owed*. With this collection, Brown asks the reader to develop a Black consciousness by rejecting U.S., Chicano, mestizo, and Mexican nationalism and confronting anti-Black erasure and empire-building. Brown "maps" not only the racialized, but also the gendered and sexualized experiences of Afro-Mexicans in the diaspora. She also highlights the necessity to consider everyday life as a space that is rife with historical, political, and cultural information—echoing the call of Yomaira Figueroa (who writes the blurb of Brown's collection) for us to push back against and "revolt" in the face of deeply engrained forms of violence: "This means that we must interrogate and contest the living legacies of mestizaje and its failure to eradicate racial interpersonal and structural oppression and inequality. This also means actively subverting the forms of anti-Blackness endemic to Latinx and Latin American communities" (4).

In the following interview, we discuss the trajectory of *We Are Owed.*, the field of Mexican American Studies, spaces of ritual, Black community, and possible future worlds.

**Joshua Deckman:** I want to thank you for having this conversation with me. First, I'd like to talk about the origins of *We Are Owed.* Where did the project come from? How did this work get started?

**Ariana Brown:** That's a really big question. I've been working on this book for probably six years before it actually came out. When I was an undergrad, I got my degree in Black Studies and then I went into Mexican American Studies. So, when I entered the Mexican American Studies space, I had a lot of questions about how my instructors and the texts we were reading contended with their relationship to Blackness. The reality was that I didn't find a lot of satisfying answers from my instructors. And so, I wanted to take the research into my own hands. I will say, I didn't really have an understanding or critique of nationalism while I was still a student—which is something that is so central to my book. That critique was something I found later through social media, ironically, through finding Alán [Pelaez Lopez]'s work, and engaging with an online creator named Rubén. Rubén used to run an account called Queer Xicano Chisme, where they talked a lot about nationalism. But when I was in Mexican American Studies, I was interested in questions like: How are we thinking about Black people who are in all these spaces that we're studying? How do we make room for Blackness within Mexican and Mexican American spaces? And here I need to be very transparent. My Black ancestry comes through the US—that is, my father's ancestors were enslaved in the US South. And my mother is a brown, mestiza, Mexican American woman. So,

I don't have a direct ancestral lineage to other Afro Latinx people. However, because of a shared loss of origin stories that Black people displaced by slavery experience, I was very interested in the origin story of Mexico as a country and how I "fit" into the narratives that I studied in my Mexican American Studies classes. You could say I was obsessed with beginnings—constantly asking: Where do people come from? How do we begin to understand who we are? What are the stories we tell ourselves about who we are? How do these stories come into being? I think this is why I became very interested in the colonial history of Mexico. I took a course at UT taught by Dr. Martha Menchaca, who writes one of the books that I cite in *We Are Owed.*, and, of course, it was called *Mexican American Indigenous Heritage*. And for a while, I thought that the book that became *We Are Owed.* was going to be a poetic retelling of that history. I didn't realize yet that a lot of people have already done that in very problematic ways. And I didn't need to do that. When I eventually graduated from my undergrad program and I went into my MFA [Master of Fine Arts], for the first time I was around other Afro Latino people. Particularly, people from the Caribbean. And it was in engaging with their work, having conversations with them outside of class, that I finally found people to talk about Blackness in a Latin American context with. It was in communion with these people that I began to develop the political ideologies that are present in *We Are Owed.* That's when I began to really understand what the book needed to be. I really want it to be clear about who I am in relation with and what my allegiances are. That was also when I started to study about nationalism and to understand the inherent flaws and power hierarchies in how we geopolitically divide people. That's when the book became *We Are Owed.*, when I could really start to make my own critical intervention into the types of discourses that I

had not had the opportunity to engage, when I could make room for Black voices in Mexican narratives that I felt had been denied to me.

**Joshua Deckman:** And it sounds like throughout this text you're not only claiming that new origin stories are necessary, but that these stories must, above all, address the material conditions of your people, right?

**Ariana Brown:** Yes, yes.

**Joshua Deckman:** This is something that Alán talks about in the forward to your collection, which is urgent and poetic in its own right. They write that your poems act as a “portal,” opening new futures and other possible worlds that center the lives of Black folks in diaspora wherever that may be. But to forge this life otherwise, to arrive at these futures—you make a turn to history, both national and personal. And this careful revision of history/memory seems to take on a sacred type of reverence in your text, making me think of the rite of Sankofa—a going back and taking that which is needed in order to move forward. Is there anything sacred about this journey for you? Have you entered into ritual with this text?

**Ariana Brown:** Yeah, I would say definitely it was a ritual. I think also a big part of why there's a lot of personal narrative in the collection is because I have a background in slam poetry. [*We Are Owed.*] becomes a ritual or confessional in the same way. When I say “I” in the poem, I'm talking about myself. This is an approach that's been inherent in my writing practice for a long time. I mean, Black children are racialized very early. Nobody had to tell me that Blackness is not valued or protected. I knew because of the way people treated me from when I was a little girl. The questions that I had then, were often about, like, why is it so hard to feel like I belong in Mexican or Mexican American spaces?

This is not in the book, but I was the *only* Black person in my house growing up because my father is deceased. I was also, for a long time, the only Black person in my neighborhood and my school. And so, all of these people that I grew up around—that I’m supposed to feel a connection with because we’re all Mexican, we’re all from San Antonio [Texas, United States], we all are in the same sort of context and place—made me feel this very intense disconnect. I know that I am different, I know that I’m being regarded as different and excluded in particular ways. I wanted to know why. I also wanted to know how. Why do people respond to me the way that they do? How did those ideologies come into being? So, studying history became very utilitarian for me because I could point to a trajectory, you know, locate the deeply embedded processes of stealing humanity from certain groups of people in the name of nation and empire. I also became very curious. By the time I got to middle school and high school, there were finally other Black people in the schools—not a lot because of where I lived in San Antonio. But I was sort of really struck by how immediately comfortable I felt among other Black children, compared to how I felt around any non-Black people, generally speaking. And that was interesting for me to feel that sometimes unspoken understanding that other Black people were able to have with each other, which I have never seen across any other group. It was a particular kind of relationality and I just want to know more about that. It made me feel like I wanted to know more about Blackness, like I wanted to study it, like I wanted to understand myself and my context better. So, the poems are kind of an obsessive way of making sense of a lot of those early feelings that have been with me for a long time.

So, in considering your question about sacredness and ritual, I think it is something deeply embedded in the

understanding I have about performance poetry, which has carried over into this collection. There's a story that I think is useful to share here. One of my earliest and most important mentors is a Black woman from Baytown, Texas named Ebony Stewart. She's very well known in Texas as one of the most decorated slam poets, just of all time here. She's been my friend for over a decade. I met her when I was 17. She was one of my first coaches. Ebony had us do this thing when we were youth poets and getting ready to compete at the national level later in the summer. She was very insistent that we took care of our teammates, because you may have practiced the poem 1000 times in rehearsal, but when you get on stage at Nationals, you might become emotional, suddenly. So, it was always very clear that we needed to take care of our teammates when they got off the stage. But primarily, one of the things Ebony had us do was when we got on stage was this: she had us write down the names of the people we were taking on stage with us physically on our hands, or on a piece of paper to put in our pocket to keep close to us. She said, if those people are not here in the room with you, place them in the audience and look at them during your performance and feel them on your hand if you can't make eye contact. She was teaching us how to be in ceremony, how to perform a ritual to summon our strength, and also how to safely exit it. And I think of this way that Ebony was teaching us to take care of each other and ourselves, to make sure that we were holding ourselves during these moments and conjuring the presence of our loved ones. This is also something I carry into the writing practice, because you're always asking yourself, who is this for and am I going to be okay at the end of this processing, when I leave this space?

**Joshua Deckman:** ...a ritual of conjuring your own community, conjuring this community of care, almost? And



you're sort of digging into yourself to find that strength in the other—who may or may not be there beside you. I think that's a beautiful way to think about what you're doing in your text, conjuring not only for knowledge but in and for communion and comfort. But also, what a wonderful coach and terrific way to keep your teammates with you!

**Ariana Brown:** Yeah, thank you.

**Joshua Deckman:** As we discuss ritual, community, and creation, your book also seems to be working against certain structures, right? I mean, as we're finding joy, as we're finding community, and love and acceptance in one sphere, there's sort of this other sphere that embraces resistance and refusal? Calling into question the tensions you experienced within institutionalized Mexican American and Latinx spaces—as you referenced in your experiences at [the University of Texas], Austin.

**Ariana Brown:** Yes, right.

**Joshua Deckman:** And one of the first poems of the collection is wonderfully named, 'at the end of the Borderlands.' It's the poem that begins the collection, and seems to be very explicit in its criticism. Full stop, right, we are at the end of the borderlands—as if you're saying "I don't want to talk about the borderlands anymore." And we know we're talking about Anzaldúa, the foundations of Chicano Studies, and even mestizaje...sort of implicitly putting an end to this theoretical, psychic, physical in-betweenness that Latinx Studies scholars have used to conceptualize the relationalities or politics of the US southwest. Could you talk a little bit more about this refusal? What do you see as the dangers of these myths or narratives of mestizo being and Chicano nationalism?

**Ariana Brown:** I have so much to say about this. I'll try to be coherent. I always say that when I was getting my Black Studies degree, the program at UT Austin was called African and African Diaspora Studies. So, they're thinking about Blackness globally, and I always felt like the foundational question of Black Studies was, how do we achieve liberation? And then the discipline itself built upon that, furthering questions about what have people done in the past, what has worked, what hasn't worked, what have we learned, what should we try next—or, here's some historical context to understand the conditions that we are fighting against right now, today. That seemed, to me, to be what Black Studies was doing. By the time I had gotten to Mexican American Studies, it seemed like the foundational question of that discipline was always: who are *we* as a people? And that feels like a very different question with a very different goal.

**Joshua Deckman:** With different intentions informing the asking of the question as well...

**Ariana Brown:** Different intentions, of course. I remember day one of my first Black Studies class, I studied under Dr. Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, who is a Black performance theory scholar. She went through the definitions of white supremacy, hegemony, agency, and all these other things, because she wanted us to have a foundational understanding of power before we could talk about anything else. And I found that same critique of power wasn't present in Mexican American Studies classes. People didn't know how to analyze power, relationships of power, or check themselves and their relationship to white supremacy—or how it permeates the discipline itself. And so, because of that, the discipline lends itself very easily to romanticism, to these flattening of experiences. People didn't know how to talk

about a relationship to whiteness, or Blackness in any context, in any geography...My professors must have hated me. I was such an antagonist because I wanted them to teach, you know. I was like the resident Black history expert in those classes. At one point, we were reading the Brown Berets' 10 Point Plan, and it looks a lot like the Black Panthers' 10 Point Plan, which I know came a few years earlier. And I asked if they could tell me about the relationship between these two groups of people, but something more than what I already knew. And people couldn't do that, they didn't want to make those connections...I had a lot of questions, period. I was frustrated a lot by people's refusal to think about relationality. Even at UT the Mexican American Studies program and the Black Studies program are now housed in the same building. They were literally down the hall from each other and they didn't communicate. I had questions about how this idea of brownness and a lot of the language of the Chicano movement was borrowed directly from the Black Power movement. This idea of exporting Black language and strategies to a different context and sort of like equalizing this idea of Blackness and brownness even though Blackness is unique and cannot be borrowed from in that way without losing something—the context changes and I wanted to be able to talk about how does the context change and what does this mean?

I also read *La raza cósmica* before I ever read *Borderlands*, I'll be very clear. When I read *Borderlands*, I was like, *this* (*La raza cósmica*) is the book she's basing it on? (*laughs*) I read that book several times cover to cover, I cited it in my papers. I have a lot of questions about this...Like, this seems harmful...this became very clear to me, particularly because I kept talking about, like, the social conditions of Blackness, which was drilled into me in my

Black Studies education. There is nothing in the world that operates like Blackness does all the time. There are moments in time where different groups of people can be treated like Black people, but they are never given the direct social positionality that Black people are given, period. And so, because I understood that uniqueness, I was very frustrated and annoyed, irritated, by this language and Chicano Studies of, like, we're in the in-between, you know, we're neither here nor there, *ni de aquí, ni de allá*...and if someone is in the in-between, then how do we talk about the moments when you have power and the moments when you don't? The moments when Mexican Americans have argued to legally be classified as white so that they are not treated like Black people, right, when they have actually enacted harm against Black people in the US or in Latin America and the Caribbean? Like, how do we talk about all of those things instead of just romanticizing this indigenous past because you're all descended from Aztecs and as a mestizo people stake claim to Aztlan.

**Joshua Deckman:** So, this leads you to write asides in your collection like, "I don't want to use Anzaldúa's language," and in one of your tweets, you write: "if I ever write an embarrassing stuck between two worlds poem, please drag me with the force of a thousand ancestors," which is a wonderful, wonderful tweet by the way. (*both laugh*) It seems to really capture all of that frustration, right, and that disconnect and that failure to speak clearly, coherently and historically, about relations that are not being given the light of day within your experience of Mexican American Studies. If we look at Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, there are people who would argue that within this queer, open space of the border there is room for everyone. And they may point to her line "and Yemayá blew that wire fence down" in order to say Blackness is right here. In making the reference to

Yemayá, to Santería, to the Caribbean, to Cuba—and talk about how she tries to distance her fetishization of racial mixture from the eugenicist projects that inspire it, maybe “inspire” is not the best word...

**Ariana Brown:** Right. Exactly.

**Joshua Deckman:** But one gesture still is not enough, and, like you mention at the beginning of our conversation, you want to create a new vocabulary looking to other spaces for inspiration. You had mentioned coming into contact with Caribbean writers and even tweet: “honestly, reading afrocaribbean authors has done so much more for me than reading chicana/mexican american authors, I think because afrocaribbean authors can talk about diaspora & colonialism without relying on narratives of hybridity & eugenics.” I also know you’ve talked in the past specifically about Dionne Brand and Audre Lorde, right? So, I’m really curious as to what Afro Caribbean thought has to offer to Mexican American and Chicana communities, specifically those who claim Blackness themselves. What are the relationalities that become apparent when we start to put these two groups in conversation with one another? Or, in a more concrete example, what does Dionne Brand’s *A Map to the Door of No Return* have to offer that Anzaldúa simply cannot get right?

**Ariana Brown:** I want to preface this by saying that I am not the most well-read or well-studied when it comes to Afro-Caribbean thought. I read *A Map to the Door of No Return* as the last thing that I read before finishing *We Are Owed*. And I was, like, I’ve been looking for this book for so long. I didn’t know that this was the book, you know, that I was looking for. But when I found it, I knew this was it. A lot of my encounters with Afro Caribbean thought have been from Afro Caribbean writers who are my friends that I came into

contact with a few years ago. One person who is Cuban, one who's Puerto Rican, and another who is Garifuna from Belize—their family is from Belize. And I feel like just from the conversations we would have, the things they would write about, and then the conversations we would have about what we were all working through in our writing there was this immediate connection. And in how we were all writing toward certain things it became clear to me that these are conversations I would never have had if I stayed in Texas, you know. And so, when I'm thinking about your question, there are a few things that I want to say. One, I thought initially that I was going to do erasures of *Borderlands*, blackout poems, you know, as part of *We Are Owed*. I read that text cover to cover so many times. I marked it up. I tried to figure out how to do an erasure that would feel useful for the project of the book. And I just couldn't get it right. My [writing] workshop must have been so tired of me. I kept bringing in these marked up poems and they were, like, we don't know what you're trying to do...because the language for me wasn't there. In order to have to have a useful erasure, there has to be something for you already there or you have to insert something, and I thought to myself I think that Anzaldúa has actually said enough, like, I think there's been enough done with her. So, the poem that actually follows that aside about not wanting to engage with Anzaldúa in the text is called “alternate names for pelo malo,” which is a crowdsourced poem from Twitter. I asked Afro Latinx Twitter users, how do you refer to different Black hair things in Spanish and they gave me that language—I was foregrounding their voices and words that come from hurtful but also beautiful experiences.

**Joshua Deckman:** So, you choose to fill the gap in your poems not with potentially problematic border theory that is not built by and for Blackness, but with language that comes

from everyday Black experiences, to connect on a material and affective/emotional level with that community?

**Ariana Brown:** Exactly, and that's what I built that poem out of...and when I think about what Anzaldua misses that I feel like Dionne Brand hits the nail on the head about is how to talk about displacement and what it means to be a colonized subject, living in the aftermath of colonization—while still contending with the legacy of slavery, while still critiquing one's relationship to a nation state. And then foregrounding all of this in Blackness, right, thinking about relationality between different colonized subjects. I feel like *Borderlands* is very specific, you know, like we're talking about the Texas-, or US-Mexico border; we're talking about people who live here specifically even though she does claim it can be extended to anyone, this in-between space. I feel like Dionne Brand refuses all romanticism, you know. These things are not romantic. There's nothing beautiful about being a displaced person, this is actually violent, and I want to name that violence and I want to think critically about Blackness, right, and how our understandings of ourselves and our history change from place to place. I think Dionne Brand's work does all of those things that Anzaldua is trying to do without relying on eugenic language or eugenic arguments...

**Joshua Deckman:** Hmm... I'm thinking of the power of the doors of no return vs. the border—the doors of no return are sort of these monuments of what Gilroy would call something like the "primal history of modernity"—emotional monuments to stories that have been violently erased from the archive, from history. And, kind of like Anzaldua, Brand deterritorializes these monuments to claim that they are also a psychic, affective space, writing that they "exist as an absence." ...and this almost mixes with images of the sea...the churning of histories that flow between Africa and the

Americas...very different from Anzaldua's two worlds grating against one another. It's a haunting absence and impermanent ghostly flow anchored in the trauma of the Middle Passage...and liquid flow that also comes up over and over again in your collection.

To me, it's interesting that you close the text with water. In the last lines of your poem "Inhale: The Ceremony," which are some of the last lines of the book itself, you write: "there was never any magic / there was never this body or its wound, / there was only water / and the stories we pass through it." What does this water hold space for and who is able to claim it?

**Ariana Brown:** I think I'm going to answer your question by not answering your question.

**Joshua Deckman:** (*Laughs*) That is perfect.

**Ariana Brown:** That's actually one of the very first poems that I wrote for the book. I wrote that poem back when the book was going to be a different project, you know, when I thought I was going to be writing about the conquest. At the same time, I was still very deeply involved in the Austin poetry slam community. I was going to regular open mics and slams with the same groups of people, reading poems together. When I'm describing "Inhale: The Ceremony," it's a moment when I went to a reading that I had helped put together. I was thinking about sitting in the audience and just feeling—because one of the ways that slam is ceremonial is that there must be witnesses...someone has to be there for the role of bearing witness. And so, watching my friends and people in my community get on stage and be vulnerable and be open to the collective ceremony, I was also bearing witness to their lives—knowing that I was going to get on stage soon after them and participate as well with my own stories. It was a very relational experience that we were



having with each other. It's emotional. I often cry at poetry readings, especially ones that are very embodied in that way. I think I was thinking of water in that sense, the act of bearing witness and sharing experience—holding space for each other and for the future.

But I think after writing the whole book, and encountering *A Map to the Door of No Return* before publishing the book, it becomes even deeper...in one of the opening poems, “a quick story,” I'm talking about the water in Galveston Bay because you have to cross the bridge to get to Galveston, where my father is from. And even thinking about the cover, one of the reasons I chose this cover [by Desiree Vaniecia, a Dallas-based visual artist] is because the Black woman pictured there appears as though she's standing in a doorway. And when I saw it, I thought of that door and about the other ways that histories can be made available to us when archives and institutions stop short. So I do think that all of these things are sort of implicitly connected... There is also a *curandera* that I used to see. And, you know, it's very common in different types of indigenous and African folk healing practices to talk about the four directions. Each direction sort of symbolizes a different thing. But they're usually all associated with a natural element, an animal, maybe a saying, some type of concept. And one of the directions that my *curandera* and I used to talk about was associated with water and grief. And one of the *limpias* that she taught me how to do involves filling a spray bottle with water and different essential oils as a way of cleansing the self. I used to take that bottle to poetry readings a lot. I would let my teammates use it before and after they got on stage. So, I'm thinking a lot about the relationships between water and the self and the community, about how it carries grief and how it also is a release from it at the same time.

**Joshua Deckman:** Wonderful, to quote Brand, you seem to be “gathering what is left,” making community and archive through imagining not only what might have been, but also through concrete practices now—even conjuring through absence in the sense of Saidiya Hartman’s “critical fabulation,” a refreshing and urgent end to the text steeped in Black thought and indigenous forms of collective care.

In response to this critical sense of history and poetic relation, I mentioned that my students had read *We Are Owed.* in my Latinx Studies course this semester, which led to many conversations on Blackness in Latinx spaces and the critical function of Ethnic Studies. They actually had two questions that I think are a good follow-up to this conversation, if I could ask them?<sup>1</sup>

**Ariana Brown:** Sure!

**Joshua Deckman:** The first question is: As a white/Latinx college student who shows interest in your work, what is the relationship that you envision me to have with it? What kind of effects should your work have on us/others that don’t necessarily identify as Black or Afro Mexican or Afro Latinx?

**Ariana Brown:** Yeah, I think a lot about Toni Morrison saying that she wrote the book that she wanted to read, you know, because I feel like the same was true of me for *We Are Owed.* I think when I am in slam mode, and I’m thinking about the poems I’m going to take to compete, I want to make sure that those poems connect with people. I want to make sure that the queues are easy to follow. I also want to make sure you can understand them the first time you hear

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<sup>1</sup> These questions were formulated by Arianna Costanzi and Caitlyn Tashman, students of Spanish at Marywood University. The determination they share to continuously expand their horizons beyond the walls of the classroom is unmatched.

them. But I think with this collection, I just wrote the thing that felt important for me to write, and I wasn't really concerned about audience. I figured the people who want to take it seriously, will. The people who want to keep their understandings of Chicano ideologies, mestizo nationalisms intact, will do that. But the book is for anyone who is willing to take it seriously and who is willing to sit with it. And also, I think, I want them to do further study. I think the book invites that. That's why I asked Alán to write the foreword. That's why there's a reading list. You don't often see a reading list or bibliography at the end of poetry books. But I wanted that to be there. I wanted to leave the doors that I entered open for people behind me. I often said when I was doing research for the book that it felt like I would open one door and ten more doors would open behind it. It was this never-ending kind of thing, and so I wanted to leave those doorways open—if people had more questions, if they wanted to know more, if they wanted to read more, they could. If they want to read who I read, they have the ability to do that.

**Joshua Deckman:** The second question from them follows the first: How can we participate in your call to build futures otherwise, or productively critique/dismantle the myths of Latinidad™, spelled with a capital L and a followed by a trademark symbol. (*both laugh*)

**Ariana Brown:** I don't know how much you can say to your students. But I am always very clear with folks: get out of the academy as soon as you can. The real work happens in the real world. Organize and figure out what radical groups are in your area. Figure out what mutual aid groups exist. Find out what people are doing to help others who may be facing eviction right now during COVID-19, you know, look for people who are actually doing tangible work that improves

people's lives in a material way. And I don't mean in the nonprofit sector, let me be very clear. I mean the unpaid volunteer work. I know, for example, here in Texas during the freeze earlier last year, Mutual Aid Houston was helping send money and groceries and supplies to people who were experiencing power failure and other difficulties. So, I think they need to be thinking tangibly about liberation. This is something I learned from Alán, because they are a veteran organizer. They taught me a lot about care as a political practice. Not just this kind of like "a pay it forward" thing, where you're in the line at Starbucks and you pay for the person behind you. I mean seriously taking into account one's social positioning of power and asking, what resources do I have that other people do not and how much can I spare, like, as often as I can? In a very real, practical way. In the care networks that I've established with friends and with family, there are some people who make more money than others, and so they share their income with some of my family members that don't make very much and are always in precarious situations. Things like providing rides to other people who may need them or childcare. Like I said, very tangible things, because the concepts that we talk about in class feel abstract. It feels overwhelming to sort of be like, well, how can I undo, you know, 500 years of colonization and anti-Blackness? And you don't have to do that personally...

**Joshua Deckman:** ...you're NOT going to do that personally...

**Ariana Brown:** You're not going to do that personally at all. It's not possible, you know, but you have to really deeply build careful and intentional relationships with others—love and care—and organize. For the future we are fighting for, we have to be able to take care of each other on the way there,

so we can get there. I hope this answers the question. But that tangible community of care is necessary.

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### Works Cited

Ariana Brown [@arianathepoet]. "I get invited to do a lot of shows in Latinx student orgs/cultural centers, etc. ppl often seem surprised when I show up and talk about Blackness. This is fine: I will not participate in Mexican hegemony, nation-building, and the anti-Black legacy of chicanismo & mestizaje." *Twitter*. 30 Sept. 2020, 6:31 p.m.

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