



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (204)

TEXT: *Florilegio de las letras en español en los Estados Unidos*

AUTHOR: Various Peninsular and Hispanic American authors

EDITOR: Víctor Fuentes

PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

PROJECT, EDITOR, AND HISTORICAL MOMENT

Origins in Ventana Abierta:

The *Florilegio* grows out of the “Mirador al Pasado” section of the journal **Ventana Abierta**, founded in 1995 by **Luis Leal** and **Víctor Fuentes** at UC Santa Barbara. The journal emerged during the “culture wars” and California’s Proposition 187, which sought to deny education and health services to undocumented children, and at a time when some academics dismissed Spanish as a “ghetto language.” Against this backdrop, the project asserts that Spanish has been spoken and written in what is now the U.S. – including epic poetry– long before English.

Homage to Luis Leal:

Conceived as a tribute to **Don Luis Leal** (1907–2010) –a “maestro de maestros,” leading hispanicist and mexicanist who elevated Chicano literature to high academic standing– the volume aligns with **Ventana Abierta**’s late issues on “Escribir en español (hoy) en los Estados Unidos.” Fuentes writes in a collective “we,” accompanied by Leal’s legacy and the journal’s Honorary Council (Fernando Alegría, Ángel González, Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, Elena Poniatowska, Miguel Méndez, Bernice Zamora, Norma Cantú, among others).

SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION: A HISTORICAL LITERARY CORPUS

Beyond a simple anthology:

Initially planned as a selection from the “Mirador al Pasado,” the *Florilegio* soon expanded to include additional texts and contextual essays. Each selection is framed with notes and author profiles (semblanzas), often designed to capture “latidos íntimos” of the person as well as literary relevance.

Toward a history of Spanish-language literature in the U.S.:

The volume is explicitly “enmarcado en un corpus histórico-literario,” pointing toward yet-to-be-written “Historias de la Literatura de lengua española en Estados Unidos.” It organizes texts chronologically (16th–20th centuries) and geographically (East Coast, Southwest, California, New York), showing how Spanish-language literary production has been continuous, diverse, and deeply rooted in U.S. territory.

STRUCTURE AND KEY SECTIONS

Pórtico and early voices:

Opening with Elena Poniatowska’s essay and early Spanish references to “California” (Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo), the anthology foregrounds the deep historical presence of the Spanish language.

16th–18th centuries:

Exploration and colonization: **Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca**, **Gaspar Pérez de Villagrán**, **Fray Francisco Palóu**, **Fray Francisco Payeras**, among others.



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Oral and popular literature in New Mexico and California: cuentos like **Pedro de Urdemalas**, romances (“Gerineldo,” “Delgadina”), *coplas californianas*.

19th century:

East Coast “despegue”: **Félix Varela, José María Heredia**, the anonymous novel **Jicoténcal**, **Rafael Pombo**, **Juan Clemente Zenea**, **Juan Antonio Pérez Bonalde**, **Eugenio María de Hostos**.

Pacific voices: **Francisco P. Ramírez**, **Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo**, **Apolinaria Lorenzana**, corridos on Joaquín Murrieta, poetry in Hispanic press of L.A., San Francisco, Santa Barbara.

New York explosion: **José Martí**, **Dolores Montenegro**, **Juana Borrero**.

20th century (to late 1950s):

Popular oral literature: corridos (“Gregorio Cortez,” “Los Americanos”), cuentos.

Worker literature and anarchist/worker manifestos (Práxedes G. Guerrero, Ricardo Flores Magón).

Border writings (José Vasconcelos, Joaquín Piña, Américo Paredes).

Hispanicismo, pan-Americanism, and Spanish “fashion”: **Rubén Darío**, **Pedro Henríquez Ureña**, **Salomón de la Selva**, **Federico de Onís**, “pocho” chronicles of Jorge Ulica/Julio G. Arce.

Poetic “florece”: **Federico García Lorca** (*Poeta en Nueva York*), **Julia de Burgos**, **Juan Ramón Jiménez**, **Eugenio Florit**, **Gabriela Mistral**.

Colofón:

Essays like Luis Leal’s “¿Qué es un latino?” and Fuentes’s own intrahistorical narrative “Niñerías,” along with an extensive bibliography, round out the project and point toward future research.

THEMATIC AXES: LANGUAGE, IDENTITY, AND RESISTANCE

Spanish as foundational, not foreign:

The *Florilegio* systematically undermines the idea of Spanish as a marginal or immigrant language by tracing its continuous use from early exploration, mission, and colonial life through independence, migration, labor struggles, and modernist poetics.

Multiple “Estados Unidos”:

The anthology refuses a single narrative of U.S. Spanish-language literature: it highlights New Mexico and California oral traditions, East Coast exile and intellectual writings, New York’s cosmopolitan modernism, and borderlands voices.

Continuities of struggle and creativity:

Across the centuries, texts address conquest, displacement, racism, labor and immigration, but also spiritual search, love, urban life, and aesthetic innovation. The volume offers a diachronic view of how Spanish has been a language of both survival and high literary experimentation in the U.S.



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PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

Rewriting the Literary Map of the U.S.

How does this anthology challenge dominant narratives of “American literature”? In what ways does it reframe the U.S. as a multilingual, transnational literary space from its origins?

Spanish Before English: Historical Deep Time

Examine early texts (Cabeza de Vaca, Villagrán, mission chronicles) and later oral traditions. What continuities and ruptures do you see in themes, worldview, and language use? How might this affect current debates about language policy and cultural identity?

Regional vs. National: New Mexico, California, New York

Compare one selection from the Southwest (New Mexico/California) with one from New York in the late 19th or early 20th century. How do regional experiences shape literary forms and concerns?

Popular Oral Traditions and “High” Literature

How does the *Florilegio* balance oral/anonymous popular forms (corridos, cuentos, romances) with canonical authors (Martí, Darío, Lorca, Mistral, Juan Ramón Jiménez)? What arguments about literary value and canon might be implicit in this juxtaposition?

Ventana Abierta and the Cultural Wars

In light of the preface, discuss the role of journals like *Ventana Abierta* in defending and promoting Spanish in the U.S. academy during the “culture wars” of the 1990s. To what extent does the *Florilegio* function as both a scholarly and a political intervention?

Toward a History of Spanish-Language Literature in the U.S.

Fuentes says the anthology “apunta a la Historia o Historias de la Literatura de lengua española en Estados Unidos, en espera de escribirse en su conjunto.” Based on the index, what period or region would you prioritize for deeper study? What methodological challenges arise in writing such a history?

PART 3: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary anthology

- Fuentes, Víctor, ed. *Florilegio de las letras en español en los Estados Unidos*. (Full table of contents as listed in the volume.)

On Luis Leal and Ventana Abierta

- Leal, Luis. *Don Luis Leal, una vida y dos culturas. Conversaciones con Víctor Fuentes*.
- *Ventana Abierta*, no. 29–30 (Otoño 2010): “En rendido homenaje a Luis Leal (1907–2010)” (semblanzas, rememoraciones, ensayos).

Related critical works on U.S. Spanish-language literature

- Kanellos, Nicolás, ed. *Herencia: The Anthology of Hispanic Literature of the United States*.
- Stavans, Ilan, ed. *The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature*.
- González, Juan & Torres, Joseph, *News for All the People* (for media context).
- Paredes, Américo. *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero*.
- Sánchez, Marta E. *Figurative Identities: Chicana/o Art, Literature, and Performance*.



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PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)

What was the original nucleus of the Florilegio project?

- A) A new creative writing journal in English
- B) A selection of literary pages from the “Mirador al Pasado” section of *Ventana Abierta*
- C) A monograph on José Martí
- D) A collection of only 20th-century poetry

Correct Answer: B

One of the main goals of the Florilegio is to:

- A) Argue that Spanish is a recent immigrant language in the U.S.
- B) Show that Spanish-language writing in U.S. territory predates English and has been continuous since the 16th century.
- C) Focus exclusively on Mexican-American Chicano literature after 1960.
- D) Collect only canonical Peninsular authors.

Correct Answer: B

Which of the following best describes the structure of the anthology?

- A) It is organized solely by genre, without historical context.
- B) It is limited to one region (New York).
- C) It is organized chronologically (16th–20th centuries) and geographically, with contextual notes and author profiles.
- D) It focuses only on oral tradition.

Correct Answer: C

Luis Leal is presented in the preface as:

- A) A minor local writer
- B) A hostile critic of Chicano literature
- C) A “maestro de maestros,” leading hispanicist and mexicanist who elevated Chicano studies in the U.S.
- D) A politician who opposed bilingual education

Correct Answer: C

Fuentes states that the Florilegio aims toward:

- A) A definitive, single-volume History of English literature in the U.S.
- B) A set of theoretical essays with no primary texts.
- C) Future “Histories of Spanish-language Literature in the United States” by assembling a historical-literary corpus.
- D) A purely nostalgic celebration with no scholarly ambitions.

Correct Answer: C**

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