

# Hunger of memory: book review

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



## **Introduction**

In his famous autobiographical book *Hunger for Memory: the Education of Richard Rodriguez*, Richard Rodriguez, a renowned public speaker and author expertly illustrates his personal experiences of emotional disconnect and societal alienation. He explores how this has had a tremendous influence on his life from his childhood as a first generation Mexican-American boy.

The main thesis or theme of the book from the author's point of view is that the society together with the education system in general requires a radical revision for it to be able to produce people who do not have alienation from life like the he himself was.

He author uses exemplary evidence from his narrative of personal experience to drive the point home. Actually, talks about how his personal experiences have led him to form self opinions about the entire social and education system. He talks about his education experience and his relative social economic success. He describes the supposedly 'high price' that he had to pay for this social economic success and education. The ultimate price was that he was completely alienated form life. Rodriguez case is comparable to the experiences of other individuals in the society. He claims that his personal experiences exhibit a true picture of what goes on in the society, which is people have to pay a hefty price for them to achieve education, social and economic success. He explores his Mexican heritage alienation and credits this to the failing social and education system.

Rodriguez talks about how the existing systems forced him to be separated from his family that led him to exhibit feelings of alienation. He later explores his subsequent assimilation into his the American after being forced

to break away from some of his private childhood that involved for example , the Spanish language and how he had to start from first square to adopt new lifestyle in an English speaking nation. In fact, it is relatively safe to say that most of the circumstance dealt with by Rodriguez essentially revolved around the fact that he was a United States native being from Mexico, a country with a different culture, it was a definite fact that cultural strains were likely to occur. There was absolutely no way that the family could not maintain its entire culture in an environment with a completely different culture setting. There was a very clear culture distrust that emanated from this situation, for example Rodriguez states that his father often used a derogatory term towards the Americans, calling them “ los gringos”. He states that this is indeed an exemplification of that cultural animosity that more often than not arises when two different cultures come into contact and where the social support system is not adequately designed to support or accommodate everyone irrespective of their cultural background.

Having been born in California to Mexican immigrants, Rodriguez family was not well off, although his father’s earnings, complimented by those of his mother were able to send him and his siblings to the Catholic schools. When he joined elementary school he was not able to speak any English. However when he finished education, he turned out to be Fulbright student in renaissance literature, awarded with degrees from the Stanford and Columbia Universities. on the edge of a gleaming career and unhappy of the many advantages presented to him as a result of affirmative action, he rejects many lecturing jobs . He felt uncomfortable with the fact that the advantages that came his way were as a result of his classification which in

his own view was not fair to others. After his education, Rodriguez would spend six years in essay writing, one of them being the Hunger of Memory. After compiling the book, it gained a lot of fame in the world of literature. The book was an expression of sincere feelings about the mentality of the “scholarship boy”, that Rodriguez was opposed to. Experts in literature have also described the book as an apology for rejecting his Mexican way of life and language so that he can fit in the society.

He was brought up in poor conditions and was determined to change his life as well as that of his family through his own personal efforts. The book actually revolves around the life of Rodriguez; then a young boy who was struggling to make life better. He thus recounts his experiences as a minority student. He is forced to alienate himself from his family, cultures and past for academic success. As Rodriguez described his family it is evident that his parents were not educated. His family lived a life of its own. The family was evicted from Los Gringos for speaking only Spanish. As the author points out, Spanish played a major role in family integration . This language enhanced the togetherness of their family through cementing their intimacy. However, later in life he discovers that togetherness is not created by a certain language and it is created by associates. In his life in school, he largely liked the American way of life and with time he was molded in to a total assimilated man. However, Rodriguez is not comfortable with this assimilation later in life.

Contrary to his earlier perceptions, he began to realize that although he was a beneficiary of the affirmative action he was not contented with the fact that he had to disown his own language in exchange for education. The “

scholarship boy" is not allowed a chance to admire his parents. Early in life, he was embarrassed by the fact that his parents did not have education and he thought that the best way to save himself from the nostalgia of the life that he had lost, he focuses on benefits that education will confer him.

Racial prejudice is also clear in the book. Rodriguez is not comfortable with his skin color and that's the reason why he does not want to undress. He views his skin color as a sign of poverty and a symbol of the disadvantaged. Back in school he still held the notion that the white color was superior and people had to conform to the ways of Americans. He considered his color as the source of conflict between his private life and the social life. The author remembers a case where he laughed and scorned the Chicanos who were so conservative with their culture. He thought that they were simply foolish not to conform to the whites' way of life. This was a case of racial prejudice since some races' ways of life were considered superior.

Although Rodriguez is a direct beneficiary of the affirmative action and bilingual programs, he later in life became a major fighter against the programs. It is believed that a student understands better when he or she is taught in his or her mother tongue. However, Rodriguez sees this as another way of discriminating people and sites that teaching someone in pure Spanish would bring forth feeling of separation and inferiority. It is contrary to what everyone expected that the writer would criticize something that he is a beneficiary of. This actually shows the independence of the writer's mind.

Rodriguez did not spare the affirmative action program. He cites that affirmative action was basically not meant for him. Affirmative action simply

failed to distinguish him (an ambitious student with a degree in English) from the simply educated American -Mexicans who lived in Barrio and worked as mere menial laborers. Some people have criticized this stand by citing that Rodriguez was one of the arrogant people who do not want to be seen as less competent and less bright.

Language has been a major subject in the life of Rodriguez. He grew up knowing that Spanish was a private language only confined for family use and private life of Spanish people. He viewed English as a superior language that opens one to the world. This mentality towards Spanish created a big drift between not only the writer and his cultures but the family as well.

Unlike a Barrio child he felt his life not split between two cultures but between himself and his family and everything outside English. Rodriguez squarely blames the affirmative action and bilingualism for the gap between him and his family. He feels to have betrayed his own roots and family members for seeing Spanish as an inferior language. However we finally see Rodriguez breaking from the chains of Americanism and going back to his roots. He misses with nostalgia the Spanish life he enjoyed together with family and siblings. He has written many books in Spanish which confirms his reconciliation with his mother language.

Rodriguez also explores this issue from the personal and public life. In many people, a schism between their private lives and their public lives exist.

People should essentially strive to have their private selves match with their public selves in very close terms. Any rift between these two can lead to massive suffering and pain for the people who surround these people, for example their friends and family. A rift can also create or place an enormous

burden on the responsible person's spirit. Honesty and truth are two of the most essential elements in every society. The truth in question should however be complimentary and not earned.

Towards the end of the book, Mr. Rodriguez paints a grim description of his parent's critical distinction between private and public life. He commences by making a mention of the highly disapproving sentiments of his mother towards private family matters inclusion in Rodriguez's autobiography.

Throughout the book, Rodriguez shows the audience of his parent's duality in different settings, for example he talks of his two mother's distinct and separate voice tones, one used with strangers and another one used with the family. Rodriguez then proceeds to tell the reader about his vague attempts at trying to explain the Psychiatry field to his mother and also her relative inability to comprehend or understand the divulgence of personal issues or secrets to total strangers. In responding to this, Rodriguez points out to the common norm among society members of writing personal journals or diaries that reveal their inner and private thoughts and ideas to imaginary strangers.

Rodriguez also gives his own interpretation of the distinction that lies between private and public life. This is particularly indicated in the book where a friend reads an essay written by him and makes a remark about the essay being not like Rodriguez, that is the things that he talks about in the essay do not describe him at all. The question that Rodriguez is trying to pose to the audience is as a close friend, shouldn't one really be familiar with the true being of his or her friend? And if not, why is this so?

However, it is the use of his personal experiences that exhibits the failures of

his own self being and arguments. To some, Rodriguez comes across as a self centered person. He believes that an entire education and social policy and system should be adjusted simply due to personal experiences. He also fails to see some of the contradictions that befall his philosophy. Throughout the book, Rodriguez complains about alienation from Mexican heritage.

Another interesting thing is the fact that he opposes bilingualism and the bilingual education while he himself has been a beneficiary of it. Rodriguez may also come across as an individual who wants to enjoy the fruits of his labor and success as an established writer but at the same time, wants to be viewed as exhibiting guilt over that success so that he be elevated above other members of the society who may not be intelligent or ethical enough to exhibit guilt for acquiring a lot of material wealth.

Rodriguez presents his arguments in a very convincing manner. He uses his personal experiences to show the failures and the defects in the social and education system. His adoption of the narrative tone and helps him to present his argument from a first person's perspective and helps to capture the readers' mind better.

The Tortilla Curtain by T. C Boyle is a total contrast of the Hunger of Memory . The Tortilla Curtain is a story about two Mexican couple who is in the United States illegally and take advantage of the labor of the poor minority groups in the United States. The couple employs the minorities to maximize their profits without caring for their welfare. The two are criminals who pose as good citizens. Unlike the Hunger of Memory, the characters in the Tortilla Curtain enjoy illegal things in the United States. This is a contrast because in the Hunger of Memory Rodriguez together with other minorities



enjoy privileges and services which are legally and rightfully theirs. The couple in the Tortilla Curtain enjoys what they are doing in the United States without complaining although illegal. On the other hand Rodriguez is complaining of what he is legally guaranteed.

In spite of the small discrepancies that plague this autobiography, it overall an exemplary book. The author uses a lot of evidence to back his claims and his passion about the argument is clearly depicted in the book. There are tones of ideas and issues that definitely resonate with a lot of people in the whole world who may have gone through similar experiences to those of Rodriguez. The autobiography is highly captivating and the entire soul of the author is completely exposed to the reader once he embarks on reading. Everyone who professes to be a fan of written art should definitely make a point of reading the book.

## **Works Cited**

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