"Not Nowhere:" “Walking Bridges” in an AmeRícan Utopia

The AmeRícan Poet: Essays on the Work of Tato Laviera

Two neologisms coined by Tato Laviera, “AmeRícan” and “nideaquínideallá,” reveal an etymology that highlights a complex and paradoxical geography and identity. In effect, the words, “Nuyorican,” “AmeRícan” and “nideaquínideallá” stem from and straddle the paradox of being “somewhere” that is, “not nowhere” or being “someone” that, is “Not Neither.” The U.S. Puerto Rican/Nuyorican experience is located outside of the “mainstream” in both the United States and in Puerto Rico—on the border, a new variation on Thomas More’s “no place.” Countering the idea that this space is marginal, empty, or off the map, Laviera draws attention to this so-called “nowhere” space outlining the identity of his community. Rejecting assimilation, Laviera underscores the need for critical thinking, “self reflection,” and “walking bridges” to other communities in an ongoing process of approximating toward a complex but inclusive ideal.