



Alicia Gaspar de Alba

Biography

Alicia Gaspar de Alba is an award-winning novelist as well as a professor and poet. Gaspar de Alba was born in El Paso, Texas on July 29, 1958. She taught English to Mexican executives and staff members of General Motors' maquiladoras at the Instituto Interlingua in Juarez, Chihuahua from 1978-1980. In 1979, The National Research Council (NRC) in Washington, DC offered her a Ford Foundation fellowship for minorities due to her excellent academic performance. She earned her B.A. in English in 1980 and M.A. in English in 1983 from the University of Texas in El Paso. As a graduate student, she worked as a teaching assistant for the English Department, and then became a part-time lecturer in English and linguistics at UT-El Paso. She enrolled as a PhD student in American Studies at the University of Iowa in 1985 but then quit a year later due to culture shock. She worked as a computer brailist at the National Braille Press in Boston from 1986-1990, and she was also an adjunct lecturer in English at the University of Massachusetts at Boston from 1987-1990.

Afterward, Gaspar de Alba returned to her doctoral studies in American Studies, this time at the University of New Mexico, where she graduated with distinction. She focused her research on Chicano/a art, pop culture, literature, and writing. For her dissertation, "Mi Casa [No] Es Su Casa: The Cultural Politics of the Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation Exhibit," she won the Ralph Henry Gabriel American Studies Dissertation Fellowship in 1993, a Ford Foundation Fellowship in 1993, and a Chicana Dissertation Fellowship from the University of California, Santa Barbara in 1992. It was named the Best Dissertation in the field of American Studies in 1994. The University of Texas Press published the dissertation as a book, titled *Chicano Art Inside/Outside the Master's House: Cultural Politics and the CARA Exhibition*, in January 1998.

Quick Facts

- * Born in 1958
- * Is both a scholar of Chicano/a Studies and a novelist
- * First novel published was *Sor Juana's Second Dream*

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Biography continued

In 1993, she won the Premio Aztlan Award given by Rudolfo and Patricia Anaya for her book of fiction *The Mystery of Survival and Other Stories* (Marchino 1998). Her first novel, *Sor Juana's Second Dream*, a seventeenth-century historical novel set in Boston during the witchcraft trials, which includes a mestiza leading role (Marchino 1998), won First Place in Historical Fiction in the Latino Literary Hall of Fame in 2001. It has been translated into Spanish and German. Her latest novel, *Desert Blood: The Juarez Murders*, was released in March 2005 by Arte Publico Press. Gaspar de Alba describes *Desert Blood* as “a mystery novel based on the 12-year crime wave of murdered, raped, and mutilated young Mexican women on the El Paso/Juarez border” (communication with the author).

Gaspar de Alba was a Minority-Scholar-in-Residence at Pomona College from 1994-1995. She was hired as an assistant professor in the Cesar Chavez Center for Interdisciplinary Instruction in Chicana/Chicano Studies at UCLA in 1994, and was tenured in 1999. “Barrio Popular Culture” and “Chicana/Lesbian Literature” are a couple of the courses she has taught at UCLA that include issues of identity, family, sexuality, and religion. She is also very involved in committees at UCLA, such as the Faculty Advisory Committee, the Library Committee, and the Faculty Advisory Board. She is an external reader for graduate student dissertations, as well as a member of the editorial board for Chicana/Latina Research Center (Marchino 1998).

Gaspar de Alba has given many lectures since 1985. These include “Out of the House, the Halo, and the Whore’s Mask: The Gender Politics of the CARA Exhibition” in 1994 and “Alter-Nativity and the CARA Exhibition” in 1995. She was part of a panel presentation in 1996 in a “Live Interview with Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz.” The CARA Exhibition toured to many cities in the early 1990s; it was a very controversial exhibition. Her recent exhibits were “Lesbian Drag: The Separatist Habit of Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz” for the Feminist Research Seminar at UCLA and “Between Sameness and Otherness: The Smithsonian ‘Discovers’ Chicano/a Art” for the Cultural Studies Academic Exchange Session at the conference of Ford Fellows in Washington, DC.



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Selected Bibliography

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Marchino, Lois A. *The Oxford Companion to Women’s Writing in the United States*, edited by Cathy N. Davidson and Linda Wagner-Martin (Oxford University Press, 1995).

Vivancos Perez , Ricardo F. *Los discursos sobre sexualidad en la obra de Alicia Gaspar de Alba* (Texas A & M University, 2002).

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