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Gloria Hernandez

**Lesson Plan for The Many Deaths of Inocencio Rodriguez by Iliana Rocha**

**Target Audience:** Undergraduate and postgraduate students, community audiences.

**Materials:** *The Many Deaths of Inocencio Rodriguez* by Iliana Rocha.

**Time:** 45-60 minutes

**Medium:** Virtual or in-person

**Objectives:**

- Analyze how Rocha's poetry critiques systemic violence and societal indifference.
- Explore how true crime narratives commodify suffering and erase marginalized identities.
- Discuss the interplay between personal grief and cultural voyeurism.

**Preparation (Before Lecture)**

1. Students should select at least one poem from each section of *The Many Deaths of Inocencio Rodriguez* for discussion:
  - "Bad Hombre"
  - "In the Place of Guesswork"
  - "Hoax"
  - "True Crime Addict"
2. Discussion starter: How does the brevity and form of poetry influence the telling of true crime narratives?

**Lecture:**

**1. Origins and Evolution of True Crime<sup>1</sup>**

- 16th-17th Century Crime Pamphlets:
  - True crime began as factual and moralistic accounts distributed to the public.
- Victorian Penny Dreadfuls:
  - Popular in the 19th century, these publications sensationalized crime stories, often mixing fact with fiction.
- 20th-Century Tabloid Journalism:
  - Crime narratives flourished in tabloids, emphasizing scandal and salacious details.

**Criticism and Sensationalism**

- Snyder-Gray Murder Trial (1920s):
  - Coverage turned the case into a morality play, showcasing archetypes like the "femme fatale."
  - Journalism often blurred reporting and spectacle, catering to public intrigue with crime and punishment.

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<sup>1</sup> Pamela Burger, "The Bloody History of the True Crime Genre," JSTOR Daily, Aug 16, 2016, <https://daily.jstor.org/bloody-history-of-true-crime-genre/>

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### True Crime in Broadcast Media:

- 1930s Radio Dramas (e.g., *Gang Busters*):
  - Expanded the genre's reach by dramatizing real-life crimes.
  - Introduced elements contested by victims' families and critical listeners.
- Adrian Medrano Case:
  - Illustrates the tension between crime entertainment and social equity.
  - Sparked debates about harmful stereotypes and the ethical limits of true crime storytelling.

## 2. Violence Against Women and Systemic Neglect

### Key Themes:

- Systemic indifference to marginalized victims, particularly women and immigrants.
- Gendered violence as a recurring motif.

### Relevant Poems:

- *Texas Killing Fields*: Highlights neglect toward murdered women in Texas.
- *Chelsea Bruck Requiem*: Humanizes a victim of violence, questioning societal failures.
- *Collective Memory*: Links the poet's personal loss to broader systemic violence.

## 3. Infamous Killers and Media Obsession

### Key Themes:

- Romanticizing perpetrators while erasing victims' identities.
- Bias in media focus, favoring high-profile cases over marginalized victims.

### Relevant Poems:

- *Love Letter to Scott Peterson*: Explores public fascination with infamous killers.
- *Tabloid for the Black Dahlia*: Critiques Elizabeth Short's dehumanization as a cultural symbol.
- *The Many Deaths of Inocencio Rodriguez*: Contrasts the anonymity of the poet's grandfather's case with infamous murders.

## 4. Shared Themes and Systemic Critiques

### Themes:

- Empathy versus dehumanization in true crime culture.
- The exploitation of marginalized victims for entertainment.
- Tensions between authentic memory and cultural distortion.

### In-Class Discussion Questions

1. How does Rocha use form and imagery to emphasize the invisibility of marginalized victims in true crime culture?
2. In what ways does Rocha's poetry challenge traditional narratives of true crime media?
3. Discuss the ethical implications of commodifying violence in true crime stories.

### In-Class Activity

#### Commodification of Violence

- **Objective:** Analyze critiques of true crime media.
- **Instructions:**
  1. Assign *True Crime Addict* and one poem about Inocencio Rodriguez.
  2. Identify instances of voyeurism or sensationalism.
  3. Discuss how commodification impacts empathy.

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4. Present analyses to the class.

**Optional Writing Prompts:**

1. Analyze how Rocha critiques the commodification of violence in her poetry. Use specific examples.
2. Discuss the differences between exploitation and advocacy in true crime media. How does Rocha suggest these narratives be reformed?
3. Given that true crime consumption is not likely to fade, how might Rocha wish to change public perception of true crime, justice, and empathy?
4. Compare the portrayal of Inocencio Rodriguez's murder to infamous crimes in true crime media, exploring societal values and systemic injustices. You may write about a true crime of your choosing or from the following suggested list:
  - The Black Dahlia
  - Harvey Milk and George Moscone
  - JonBenet Ramsey
  - Gianni Versace
  - Rebecca Schaeffer

**After-Class Essay Assignments**

**Assignment 1: Analytical Essay**

- **Prompt:** Analyze Rocha's critique of violence commodification in *The Many Deaths of Inocencio Rodriguez*. Use examples from at least two poems.

**Assignment 2: Comparative Essay**

- **Prompt:** Compare Rocha's portrayal of Inocencio Rodriguez's murder with media narratives of infamous killers. Discuss societal and systemic biases.

**Assignment 3: Argumentative Essay**

- **Prompt:** Using Rocha's poetry and your external research, argue whether true crime media can prioritize ethical storytelling and victims' humanity.
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