

# YOU DON'T HAVE A CLUE



Latino Mystery  
Stories for  
Teens

Edited by  
Sarah Cortez

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This book is dedicated to Ms. Lucha Corpi,  
friend, beloved mentor and pioneering genius  
in Latino mystery writing.

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## Foreword

Award-winning poet, editor and policewoman Sarah Cortez has gathered eighteen of the most popular and talented authors of young adult fiction to provide a bundle of short stories guaranteed to frighten, intrigue and entertain readers, both young and not so young. No subtle nuancing of conflict and characters here; these stories will grab readers by the throat and send pulses skyrocketing as protagonists face villains of every sort, from other-worldly super criminals to secret neighborhood murderers, teachers who dismember their victims, Aztec goddesses that rise from the sea and professional kidnappers who may be masquerading as your very own mother or best friend. There is even a story of historical fiction speculating on an assassination attempt on Pancho Villa.

Officer Cortez is no stranger to crime and mystery, of the fictional *or* real-life variety. A veteran police officer in Houston, Texas, she is also the editor of two previous collections of mysteries, *Hit List: The Best of Latino Mystery* (Arte Público Press, 2009) and *Indian Country Noir* (Akashic Books, 2010), in addition to an anthology of teen memoirs, *Windows into My World: Latino Youth Write Their Lives* (Arte Público Press, 2007) and her own award-winning poetry collection, *How to Undress a Cop* (Arte Público Press, 2000). With *You Don't Have a Clue*, Sarah breaks new ground in a number of ways. Good story collections of any genre are hard to find, but collections of mysteries written with young readers in mind are almost nonexistent. Young



adult story collections from Latina/Latino authors exclusively featuring Latina/Latino protagonists are equally rare and equally golden. Putting all of these qualities together makes this collection very special, even more so considering the accomplishments of the authors included. These are the top talents in the field. Ray Villareal's *My Father the Angel of Death*, a novel about the son of a professional wrestler, has taken the nation by storm, and so have works by René Saldaña and Gwendolyn Zepeda; in fact, the list of awards accumulated by this book's featured authors is too lengthy to recount, but a few deserve mention here: Mario Acevedo was included in Barnes and Noble's Best Paranormal Fantasy Novels of the Decade; Sarah Cortez received the 1999 PEN Texas Literary Award; Alicia Gaspar de Alba won the Lambda Literary Foundation Award and the Latino Literary Hall of Fame Best Historical Fiction Award; Sergio Troncoso won the Premio Aztlán Award as well as the Southwest Book Award. Bottom line: This is an impressive lineup of authors.

Although the eighteen stories' settings range from New York City to San Antonio, and their characters' lifestyles range from urban poverty to suburban affluence, commonalities still tie them all together. As in the lives of most teens, relationships are often at the center of life's heartache and happiness, including family relationships, relationships among and between friends, and especially relationships grounded in romance. In this collection, love for a family member or for that special someone often serves as motivation for risking total embarrassment in front of peers or even provoking the ire of a suspected killer. Also, loyalty to friends or family often results in total disregard for personal safety, and bravery often wins out over common sense in defense of others. Issues of belonging or not belonging, of feeling loved or unloved, of feeling normal or abnormal and feeling hopeful or hopeless are common across all stories as

main characters attempt to solve the mysteries and personal dilemmas thrust upon them.

Perhaps the most important commonality, however, is that all the characters come home to tortillas and tamales, to *abuelo y abuelita*, to a place where they are called *mijo* or *mija* and the musical sound of the Spanish language fills the air. Like the authors, the main characters of each story are Latina/Latino, which means that in addition to all the usual characteristics of American teenagers they also have a rich overlay of language, cultural heritage and life experience that permeates their way in the world. The importance of books with characters representing the diversity of our society cannot be overstated. Its impact on young people is deep and can last a lifetime. Literature has great power to help all readers make meaning of their lives as they engage with stories in which characters struggle and succeed (or don't succeed) against the common and uncommon obstacles life places in front of them. As they process their reading, they are also processing their own life experiences, but when young readers fail to see themselves in their reading, the not so subtle message is that their lives don't count. However, when they do have the opportunity to live vicariously through young men and women with whom they can easily identify, the great power of books and reading to help them not only make meaning of their reading but also make meaning of their lives is all theirs. This is not a book for readers of Latino cultural heritage only, however, but a great book for any readers who enjoy a mystery, relish analyzing clues and solving crimes, love being scared silly or appreciate the twists and turns and delightful surprises of a wonderful story as crafted by true masters. I guarantee it.

James Blasingame, Ph.D.  
Arizona State University

## Introduction

Few people—of any age—can resist the implicit invitation contained in a good mystery story. And so, it is not surprising that more authors have turned to writing mystery, or crime fiction, for the young adult reader. However, a glance at both the library's shelves and the vaunted lists of writing prize-winners reveals that Latina/o authors have yet to become fully engaged in revealing their realities on the written page of the young adult mystery.

Armed with this knowledge and fueled by my own childhood and teen passion for reading crime and mystery fiction (a love which exists to this day), I conceptualized an anthology—the first of its kind—that would ask Latina/o writers to create an edgy collection of stories such as they might have enjoyed in high school or which their own sons and daughters would enjoy. Importantly, we all desired to create a collection that would speak eloquently to the complex and morally disarrayed society that teens navigate today.

As the authors created their characters and focused their plots, what emerged were protagonists that one could find in high schools around the United States: the college-bound prep school boy; the plump, not-yet-beautiful but dutiful daughter; the envious but attracted-to-ostentatious-wealth senior studying SAT vocabulary words; or the street-wise Bronx rapper with a heart of gold, to name a few. What unites all these protagonists

is their desire to see justice done and a willingness to use their brains to accomplish that end.

This anthology contains stories for students at all skill levels. Whether reading a story with few twists and turns or more, the reader will be immediately pulled into the fascinating problem-solving aspect—the “gaming” or puzzle aspect—of the story. Don’t be surprised at the deep discussions about the tempting array of possibilities along the right-wrong spectrum as readers consider and analyze the characters’ choices, always with a dose of healthy skepticism and a growing appreciation for the vagaries of human nature.

For years, much has been made in the literature of reading about the fact that students enjoy reading for pleasure when they can pick books that interest them and when those books are engaging but accessible. With this in mind, the authors and I give you *You Don’t Have a Clue*—a volume of fast plots, engrossing characters and satisfying conclusions. You’ll get to follow clues, observe crime scenes, examine personalities, eliminate false leads, reflect upon the foibles and strengths of human nature, and ponder the greatest mystery of all—how to serve justice.

*Sarah Cortez, Editor*  
*Houston, Texas*