

Writing Latinos

Season 3 Episode 1

Gerry: Hi, my name is Geraldo Cadava, and I want to thank you for tuning in to season three of Writing Latinos, a podcast from Public Books. We're back for more terrific conversations with Latino authors writing about the wide world of Latinidad. As always, we aim to provide thoughtful reflections on Latino history, culture, politics, and identity, and how writing conveys some of its meaning.

Gerry: Don't forget to like and subscribe to Writing Latinos wherever you get your podcasts. And now, for the show.

Gerry: Holy moly, we're doing a third season of Writing Latinos, and I'm so excited to kick things off by talking with Lori Flores about her new book, *Awaiting Their Feast*, Latinx Foodworkers and Activism from World War II to COVID 19. It's published by the University of North Carolina Press as part of their Dynamite Latinx History series.

Gerry: *Awaiting Their Feast* is Flores second book. Her first one was *Grounds for Dreaming*, Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the California Farm Worker Movement. That book was published by Yale University Press. Flores is a history professor at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. And simply put, she's one of the best historians out there working on Latinas and Latinos in the United States.

Gerry: And she's written a great book on an important topic. So thank you so much for listening. And thank you, Lori, for joining us today.

Lori: Thank you so much, Jerry. It's so fun to now talk with you about this project.

Gerry: How long have you been working on it? When, when was it's kind of early moments?

Lori: I think it's, was seven years altogether, um, 2017, I started coming up with the idea.

Gerry: That's great. And, um, uh, my first question, I just wanted to ask you if you could tell us a little bit about how this project began to take shape in your mind, because, you know, I know that you've lived in Maine and you live in New York now, and you went to graduate school in California. So you've kind of been in areas where.

Gerry: Latino food production and food work has been an important part of life there. So I just wanted to hear you talk about where the project came from.

Lori: Yeah, I definitely think I'm somebody who uses the place she lives in to inspire the work that she writes. Um, and so, that is a pattern that I've come to notice about myself.

Lori: I think because when it comes to the creative process of writing, I love to be able to, as a storyteller, give whoever's reading my work, a sense of place and ambiance. Um, and so I definitely think the first book, *Grounds for Dreaming*, took inspiration from a totally different landscape that I was exposed to in California and the Salinas Valley in particular.

Lori: And. I definitely had more to say about farmworkers because *Grounds for Dreaming* was about the farmworker movement. And I knew that I was still fascinated with farmworkers lives and labors in the United States. But I also wanted the next book I wrote to be more ambitious in scale. I wanted to challenge myself, especially because I had moved to the East Coast and was teaching students.

Lori: in Maine and then later New York. I wanted to write something that could speak to their histories, their experiences, their questions. And I wanted to ground myself more in the places that they were living so that way I could connect with them better as a teacher. And so this work evolved from that idea of, you know, my strong suit was labor history.

Lori: My passion still remained in farmworker history, but I was trying to think of a project that could be bigger and encompass more people and more Latinos than my previous work. And the Northeast especially is this incredibly diverse place when it comes to Latino, Latinx communities. And so I thought to myself, if I could look at the larger food chain and talk about people who are involved, not just in harvesting and processing, but then what happens to the food down the line when it comes to our tables, our cafeterias, our restaurants, our sports stadiums, uh, all of that could be an interesting angle at which to connect readers who were both interested in Latino history and labor history, but then also food studies.

Gerry: Totally. I'm so glad that you kind of opened up. by talking about the larger scale that you wanted to, um, work with this time around, because part of what I was thinking when I read your book was that, you know, a lot of Latino historians have written. labor histories that are certainly connected with food, food industry is, I mean, when you read about the variety of strikes that took place in the early 1930s, you're reading about berry farms and food labor and food production, but your book also you know, opens that up to also talk about food consumption, the desires of consumers, the wide variety of Latino food businesses like bodegas, taco trucks, upscale restaurants.

Gerry: So this is definitely an ambitious project. So what made you decide to write about all of them? In the same book, and I'm sure that also created some challenges for you as a writer, just figuring out how to narrate this story.

Lori: I knew that trying to be more ambitious in a second book is a double edged sword.

Lori: On the one hand, it motivates you and it pushes you to read more, to think bigger, to dialogue with different people and scholars who you might not have in the past. So I knew it would be good for me to try. And then on the other hand, I knew that I wouldn't be able to talk about everybody I care about.

Lori: Could I that I knew I wouldn't please every reader that I could that I knew I would be Dipping in and out of stories that deserved a lot more depth in order to achieve the breadth and the width of this narrative and what I wanted it to be which was like this aerial view of a region rather than a Commute a deep community study that I had done in my first Book and so I knew it would make me feel both ways both excited and also nervous that I wouldn't be able to do everything I, I would like to do in, in a book such as this, especially with, you know, practical things like word constraints and page constraints and, you know, what editors and presses were asking for.

Lori: And so, um, I think overall though, I'm happy with the result because I feel what this book will hopefully do is present enough of a wider swath of narratives and historical actors that will then inspire people to either look into or write their own deeper histories of places and food establishments and different locales.

Lori: Um, I hope that this book will be a jumping off point for people rather than the ending word on all of these subjects.

Gerry: What you've managed to accomplish is so, um, panoramic and deep at the same time when you're taking New England as your landscape, but you have a lot of really, uh, interesting, nuanced, complicated stories and figures in your book.

Gerry: And one of my favorite characters in the book was Zarela Martinez, the owner of a Mexican restaurant in New York. And just to give. Uh, listeners, a sense of the kind of texture of, of the book, you know, can you tell us a little bit about Zarela and the restaurant that she owned?

Lori: Sure. Uh, Zarela is fascinating.

Lori: She's actually one of the first, uh, touch points for this book because I've found her archives in the Schlesinger library at Harvard or Radcliffe rather. Um, very early on in 2017 and I was so fascinated with these papers. They were brand new. They hadn't really been looked at by a lot of scholars and they're in the same archive as, you know, big figures in culinary history like Julia Child.

Lori: And, uh, so I knew there was an interesting story there. Once I read that she was a Mexican immigrant who started working in El Paso and then got a catering business in New York and rose up to be one of these pioneering 1980s restaurateurs in the Mexican food scape who was serving higher end regional Mexican dishes and exposing Manhattan to a totally different genre of Mexican food than the usual Tex Mex, which was the obsession, uh, in the early 1980s in Manhattan and many other places.

Lori: So Zarela is actually a character that I got a lot of pushback on. A lot of people thought she was strange to include in this book because she was of a higher class status and that she was privileged in the culinary landscape and profession through her networks in ways that a lot of her humbler food entrepreneur counterparts in the United States didn't enjoy that level of success.

Lori: But I think she's essential as a actor in this book because she does show that. Latino food history is Latino business history, and it's American business history, and that comes with all sorts of class statuses and places in the landscape, and it's, I think when people think of Latino food history, they might think of a hole in the wall restaurant or street food enterprise, but not necessarily haute cuisine, and that's what Martina's Um, and other people, for that matter, in the 80s, like Josefina Howard, who opened the Rosa Mexicano chain in New York City, I mean, they are really important people to pay attention to.

Lori: And so I think having the middle and upper classes meet with, um, working classes in this book, it's productive to put their histories on the same plate, so to speak, and offer it to the reader and get them to think about the complexity of Latinos in general.

Gerry: Totally. I'm curious about this idea that someone like Zarela doesn't belong in a book like yours because for two reasons, I think first like you said the Latino a book about Latino food necessarily involves like Latino entrepreneurs who opened up restaurants But also I wonder if you think it Uh, kind of continues to put Latino food in a box of being lower class, working class only.

Lori: Yes, for sure. I think right now, you know, and this has been happening for many decades, I argue since the post World War II period, is that Mexican food has kind of been frozen in this, uh, state of being thought of as, Oh, it should be cheap. It should be humble. It should be unassuming. It shouldn't garner the level of prices that other cuisines, you know, from Europe can get in a, in a restaurant setting.

Lori: And I think it's very damaging to keep. Mexican food in that sort of box. I think we are, as a nation, getting a little bit better about acknowledging that Mexican food can look all sorts of ways, but I think if you were to look at mainstream opinions and discourse about what this cuisine should encompass, include, cost, if, uh, you look at social media reviews.

Lori: of Mexican food establishments, for instance, this equation of authenticity with cheapness continues to be a problematic thing, in my opinion, um, if you're going to say, well, it's only the real thing if it costs a few bucks, that first of all, doesn't allow people to make, um, a living for the most part, or be able to give their employees a living wage, but it also devalues.

Lori: It's the procurement, the ingredients, the labor, everything that needs to go into serving you a plate of Mexican food versus a plate of another kind of food.

Gerry: I think Zarela herself pushed back against that idea in some interesting ways where she would note that, uh, you know, she uses the same exact ingredients as the high end French restaurants in New York.

Gerry: Um, and then she also, I don't know if she was the first to do this, but. Didn't people expect at her restaurant to come and get, like, an unlimited supply of free chips and guacamole?

Lori: Yes, and rice and beans with a combo platter.

Gerry: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, totally. Gosh, I mean, this leads to so many interesting questions about, like, where the idea came from that Mexican food was supposed to be cheap and humble.

Gerry: Yes. And intersect with the idea that we have of, not we, but Many Americans have, in general, of Mexicans themselves as lower class, working class immigrants or recently naturalized citizens or something like that.

Lori: Yeah, kind of frozen in this perpetual state of cheap labor. Um, I think that one of the big arguments and the through lines through the book is that we as a nation have devalued in tandem Latinx food and Latinx food labor at the same time.

Lori: And I think the beginning of the story, especially of ideas of You know, the, the chips and the guac should be free. The rice and the beans should be included. The idea of the combo platter and the plentitude that should come in a Mexican meal. Um, very interestingly, I think the TV dinner revolution, um, and Mexican food's place in that at mid 20th century is a big part of that because frozen food, um, and Mexican TV dinners were this combo platter.

Lori: It then informed fast food chains to do the same thing and then it informed what people expected even at higher end restaurants to be able to get a variety of things all on one plate for one price rather than paying a la carte for certain things. So it's very interesting how at Mid century, in the 1950s, mainstream American consumers and grocery shoppers could find combo platters of Mexican food in the freezer aisle or in taco kits in the, what would become the ethnic food aisle.

Lori: But it's at the exact same moment we're doing this and offering it to American consumers to eat and to play with, in many ways, Mexican cuisine and engage with it. At the same time that we are denying actual Mexican and Puerto Rican guest workers in agriculture working in our fields and our factories when they're asking for this food that would be more culturally familiar to them in their labor camps, we're not giving it to them.

Lori: So it's this profound irony of the food being available to some. You know, feast being available to certain demographics in this country and famine or near starvation or malnutrition being given, ironically, to the very food workers who are helping get all these things in our grocery stores, in our restaurants.

Gerry: One of the things I loved about the first part of the book, too, about, uh, this kind of reinterpretation of the Bracero program and Puerto Rican migrations in the 40s and 50s, like, seen through the lens of food production. I found it so interesting that many of the workers themselves were demanding, uh, both nutritious food, but also food from their own cultures and part of what I found interesting about that is that, you know, you read a lot of literature about Latino history in the 1920s and 30s and you read about these Americanization programs where you have these progressive era reformers talking about, you know, uh, trying to get immigrants to not eat like greasy food, to eat American food, to learn English, stuff like that.

Gerry: So I couldn't help but like hear workers own demands for their. own food and nutritious food as a kind of, uh, if not explicit, but some kind of reaction against this push to Americanization in an earlier era.

Lori: Yeah, it's definitely a push against white bread, white carbs. Um, and that also was a big feature of World War II rationing in general and the kinds of foodstuffs that were available for these guest labor forces.

Lori: It's very interesting. The book includes sample menus, it talks about the actual diets that these guest workers were getting while they were working, breakfast, lunch, dinner, that they actually had to pay for out of their wages. And that was even more motivation for them to say, we don't like this. this food at all.

Lori: First of all, the portions are paltry. Second of all, the flavor is not there. And third of all, we want something more culturally familiar. And we want cooks of our nationality to cook it for us. And the demands that these workers were placing on the US government and on commissary companies and their own employers, I found it super fascinating.

Lori: I thought it would be my book's twist or spin on the great scholarship already out there about these guest worker programs. If we delve into food activism within the workers themselves, it's a different story that I think hadn't been told in quite that way before. And whether they knew it or not, Mexican and Puerto Rican guest workers were saying the exact same thing at the exact same time across two different, you know, regions or more.

Lori: Um, and it just goes to show that We can't keep food workers out of the picture of being consumers themselves, like they are eaters too, um, and so I think the big reminder of this book is like, look at these food workers as big, as

fuller beings than just, you know, the active limbs, you know, and bodies that are helping to get food to us.

Gerry: Can you tell us, give us a bird's eye view of how American tastes for food? Latino and Latin American food changes from the late 19th century to the present?

Lori: Sure. I mean, you brought up a very early stage of that, which was the Americanization programs of the early 20th century that were very much thinking of Mexican food as unhealthy, uh, not hygienically prepared, um, connected with sort of a working class or poor identity that wasn't a part of modern America.

Lori: I think tastes for Mexican food and the craving for it, nationally changed with mid century tourism to Mexico. I think a lot of people got enamored not only with the vibrancy when it comes to art and music and dance and different forms of culture and material culture, but also the food and this idea of spice, this idea of difference and exoticism.

Lori: And by the late 20th century, you know, 80s, 90s, like we were a nation obsessed and we were definitely fetishizing Mexican cuisine in all sorts of ways. Uh, the book points out some things in popular culture, um, that show that we were really, really embracing Mexican food to a level that it makes. for so much cognitive dissonance to think about the xenophobia then towards the people because the food became a stand in for the United States in a lot of ways.

Lori: That Mexican food was everywhere and it was celebration food. It was party food. It was the food that you had in get togethers and was coming, becoming such a big part of. American life, or U. S. life, I should say, um, and at the same time, we were exhibiting more and more rejection. Of Mexican people as, as newcomers, but citizens were not immune either.

Lori: Citizens of Mexican descent were conflated a lot of the time.

Gerry: You mentioned at some point in your book, I can't remember if it's was your idea or if you were quoting someone, but there there's a kind of direct correlation between the rising popularity of. Mexican cuisine or Latino Latin American cuisine and the rise of xenophobic anti immigrant sentiments.

Lori: I think what I can only make sense of now is pointing out the contradiction because we can, we continue to see it everywhere. Uh, I think, uh, we are noticing it more. Um, for instance, You know, in the intro, I talk about

Christian Nielsen, uh, former, um, Department of Homeland Secretary who got called out in Washington, D.

Lori: C. for eating at a Mexican restaurant at the same time that she's supporting the separation of families at the border, uh, and activists It's sort of saying, shame on you, like, why are you enjoying the food and showing such vitriol towards the people? This doesn't square. And it's really hypocritical. So moments like that, I think people are noticing how we as a nation have divorced the food from the people ostensibly responsible for helping us enjoy it so much.

Lori: So I think that's what I can make sense of now. And in a lot of different disciplines, I think scholars have tried to investigate how we are able to hold such contradictory ideas in our heads and continue to act the way that we act. And so the anthropologists have something to say about that.

Lori: Sociologists and political scientists have their own thing to say about that. Legal scholars and historians have their own thing to say about that. And food studies, um, is an interesting field because, you know, on the one hand we have this idea that, oh, If you eat in a diverse way, it might open you up to appreciating diverse groups of people.

Lori: And then on the other hand, people saying, no, not at all, actually, if you just separate the food ways in such a marked manner, what it actually allows people to do is just see one thing as a leisure activity and then see the people, um, as problems. Uh, and so there's There's still a lot of, um, hypocrisy out there right now about, uh, how pervasive Mexican food is in our landscape versus how much we want that landscape to be devoid of Mexican people, especially if they're newcomers.

Gerry: Writing Latinos is brought to you by Public Books, an online magazine of ideas, arts, and scholarship. You can find us at publicbooks.org. That's P U B L I C E. B O O K s.org to donate to public books, visit [public books.org/donate](http://publicbooks.org/donate). I can't help but think of like this cognitive dissonance a little bit and I can't tell, and this is where, I mean, I don't know if I have a question here, but it's just weird that.

Gerry: Um, you know, pretty much any quote unquote American restaurant you go to these days is going to have a couple of dishes on it that are Mexican, I assume because they have a cook staff that can prepare that food. So, uh, and it's popular. So, you know, I think we're just repeatedly, um, hit over the head with the fact that.

Gerry: That Mexican, Latin American food is extremely popular and widely consumed in the United States, almost to the point that we don't, we just take it for granted, you know, it's, it's just part of what we, um, how we live. But I wonder if, you know, this cognitive dissonance, do you think of it as willful?

Gerry: Something we're doing, uh, you know, intentionally, like we just don't want to be confronted with the reality that. In order to eat the food, we also have to understand. where it comes from, who it's produced by, or is it just some broader societal effect, uh, where we've compartmentalized our lives in so many different ways?

Lori: I mean, it could be both. I think many people are not willfully, uh, engaging in what they recognize at the time would be hypocritical behavior. But I think the xenophobic actions are certainly willful, um, on the other end. So while you're eating, and I think it's also because we frame food and eating and sharing meals as apolitical, that we sort of don't think we're enacting something political by the decisions we make when it comes to our meals.

Lori: And I also think that's something to call out is. Uh, people then get to exert a lot of, like you said, compartmentalization and justifications that they can, you know, give to themselves about, well, I just, um, voted for or supported this anti immigrant. politician or measure, whatever piece of legislation that's out there or action.

Lori: And at the same time, I'm doing this and then going to go out for margaritas and nachos with my friends in a couple of hours, right? Like, I think a lot of people are not thinking that through precisely because we have framed food as this pleasurable thing, void of politics. And, um, I actually argue consumers do need to think of food as a political thing and your meals as political decisions.

Lori: Um, of course that sort of mindfulness is something one needs to cultivate over time. But going back to your, comment that yes, no matter what kind of cuisine, no matter what kind of restaurant, I can even tell you down this block and that that I'm in in Brooklyn, there's a sushi restaurant that has.

Lori: Mexican sushi on the menu or like a Mexican roll. Um, or like, you know, Mexican influenced items on the menu. And so in cuisines that we wouldn't even expect to find it. I can tell you here in New York, you see it all the time. This and Chicago, as you observed there as well, and in many other places. So the degree to which Mexican influence culinary Innovation, creativity, um, has

pervaded many different kinds of cuisine, just goes to show us that you can't talk about U.

Lori: S. food history, U. S. food It's like I said before, business history without talking about the influence of Mexicans and other Latinos. And I think a lot of people do not want to acknowledge that if you take that away, you are taking away a huge amount of information and people and dishes and ingredients from the 20th and 21st century culinary landscape of this country.

Gerry: Amen. Yeah, totally. You know, I wanted to ask you about the current moment that we find ourselves in. And I feel like the things you've been talking about are a kind of natural segue to that. I don't think it's news to anyone who might be listening to this that, you know, the immigrant rights movement is kind of at this very difficult moment right now where immigrants are under constant attack.

Gerry: You have an executive order that would end birthright citizenship, a declaration of emergency at the border. Massive deportations, and this, unfortunately, is the world that your book has been published in. So, how would you like *Awaiting Their Feast* to be read in this moment?

Lori: There's so many ways I think this book could be useful, or that could help people talk about, you know, the deeper, harder things like race and politics, if we use food as the entree, so to speak, to talk about those things.

Lori: I, first of all, think, yes. Um, we, are in need of a moment and we probably will reach that breaking point where people might look at just how much the food chain is made up of not just Latino but Black, Caribbean, you know, um, indigenous labor that is powering many elements of our food industry. I think people are very surprised to learn that Haitian immigrants and indigenous immigrants are just as much a part of this conversation as black people.

Lori: The generalized stereotyped Mexican person crossing the border and getting a low wage job in food. Like, food labor looks all different sorts of ways. Back when I was writing the book, COVID, the first year of COVID was making me think, well, is this going to be the time that people really realize how precious food laborers are and how precarious their lives are and immigration statuses are?

Lori: And it didn't result in any. sweeping legislation. So I thought to myself, if not COVID, what? Um, and perhaps we are entering an era in which we will see

some sort of breaking point happen because Now we are in a moment in which mass deportation is a specter in front of our eyes in a way that during COVID, Trump actually increased numbers of workers allowed in to keep our meat packing going and poultry and, um, and other industries.

Lori: So we are in, um, in a different kind of inflection point. And it remains to be seen how people will come to a collective consciousness about the importance of food labor. But I think a huge obstacle is the way that the food industry is structured itself to keep a lot of things hidden from our eyes. So the very ways in which everything is back of house.

Lori: You could say everything is back of country in a way if, um, a lot of farm labor is hidden from our view, a lot of food processing labor is hidden from our view. I think it was Michael Polan who said, if abattoirs, if slaughterhouses were made of glass. Who could stand to see the sight of that, you know, who, who could stand to see this, the, the ways in which our food, how the sausage is made, basically, um, and how it gets to us, then would we, would we be disgusted enough?

Lori: Pollen's take was, oh, would it disgust us enough to all become vegetarians? But what I am asking in this book is, would it disgust us enough to stand up for food workers in a whole different way than we have in the past? For me, it's not about so much the nutritional choices and diet choices we make, but like you said, justice.

Lori: Um, and who we align ourselves with and stand up for. Um, because food labor crisscrosses so many different people, there's more than enough opportunity for people to feel aligned. Um, but now all we need to do is get different groups of people to talk to one another. In a small way, my book is trying to bridge those people like Pollen and other giants of food studies who might be thinking in certain ways about food justice, environmental scholars, and other people, and connected with historians who started out by caring about the communities, not necessarily the commodities, but now if we talk about community and commodity together, what can we, what can that result in and what kind of solidarities can we produce?

Gerry: I think we got to talk about sea cucumbers. I think we have to because this is not, you know, something you pick up a Latino history book and expect to see. Uh, I think if you know something, you know, we do talk about like crops withering on the vine without immigrant laborers, but I had, I mean, Maine, maybe it's just that Maine is fascinating, but, um, I had never read about.

Gerry: Like Latino workers involvement in the Christmas wreath industry or, uh, the sea cucumber industry or the lobster industry. So, uh, tell us a little bit about that. I think, I don't know if that's just a surprising fact of Latino history that you were able to see because you were looking at a fascinating place like Maine, which doesn't always register for Latino historians or if it was something other than that.

Gerry: But tell us about the sea cucumbers.

Lori: Yes, sea cucumbers and seafood in general. Sea, lives by the sea. I don't think is something we see a lot in. Latino history. I was happy to be able to bring that to the table in this book because I think ecologies and ecosystems and labor systems of the marine life is not something we talk about that often.

Lori: We often keep it on the terrestrial sphere. So sea cucumbers are this oddity that becomes the hot commodity of the far northeast, the rocky shores of Maine, um, and the depths of the Maine waters, um, during the 1990s. So, um, I didn't find this while I was living in Maine during my time teaching at Bowdoin, but I found it after.

Lori: And I just thought it was so fascinating how the reason why Christmas wreaths and sea cucumbers and lobster and blueberries and eggs, the way that they all fit together when we're talking about Latino labor in Maine is that that's how people. Many times, pieced together a calendar year of jobs that they move from one economy to the other and it just shows how agile these laborers are that they can switch to drastically different working environments and do the work well.

Lori: Sea cucumbers were exported for culinary and medicinal purposes to Europe, to Asia, all over the globe. And so Maine became this node, um, at which a lot of money was being made. Out of this. pickle shaped, um, creature at the bottom of the sea that was being brought up by, you know, fishermen, but Latino workers, specifically Mexican and Central American workers were the ones processing this animal inside of dockside factories.

Lori: So, um, this was a fascinating commodity that I never expected to show up in this, um, History of the late 20th century and especially with Mexican and Central American labor at the center of it all but I I found it so important to talk about as an example of you know, the other products of the sea that get to us as a result of this often marginalized and invisible labor

Gerry: I was wondering about this, uh, thing about coastal life and, on the sea too, and I was, you don't have any evidence that the immigrants who were doing this work were familiar with coastal life from Mexico because they lived near a coast or a port or sea in Mexico.

Lori: Now, it was very rare that somebody had previous experience with water, water labor. A lot of people actually came from landlocked homes, um, you know, in the interior and so they had no previous experience with processing fish, um, and other sea, seafood products. So that just makes it all the more impressive to me how quickly they not only learned how to do these jobs, but learned how to do them well enough to make other people above them a whole lot of money.

Gerry: And, and this is, uh, you know, just the most basic thing to say about it, but I think it was particularly important and impressive to me because, again, we, we hear stories about, uh, migrant workers in California and the fruits and vegetables that they bring to our table, but I think the fact that there are immigrants in Maine, an unlikely we.

Gerry: place for many of us to find Latino workers, but also working in these industries, like the harvesting of sea cucumbers and lobsters. Um, it, it just shows how pervasive it is. I mean, immigrant labor is everywhere, and we rely on it in many places we don't even know that we're relying on it. Yeah. Um, just for the nerds out there, let's talk really quickly about food studies, uh, which is now the, the field that you are squarely in the center of, among other fields, of course, but like, um, I mentioned to you that Natalia Molina was the first person that we had on Writing Latinos when her book, *A Place at the Nayarit*, her family's Mexican restaurant in Los Angeles, when that book came out.

Gerry: Even then, she, she was talking about your research that was coming down the pipeline, and so now it's out, um, you know, this is gonna be the latest splash in the field of food studies, and I just would love to hear you talk for a couple minutes about it. You know, what are the, what you find to be the most interesting questions in that field right now and, um, you know, where it might be going.

Lori: I think where Latino food studies has started is at that place of the personal. Um, I think where it's headed is to the place of complexity in terms of thinking of Latinos as, really heterogeneous, just as heterogeneous as any other demographic in terms of class, in terms of political ideology, in terms of, um, gender and sexual orientation, identification, right?

Lori: In terms of generational outlook, um, I think over time. A lot of works have gotten more and more, um, eye opening and illuminating when it comes to showing that Latino politicization, Latino labor, Latino, um, community action has not looked just one way at one time. This is not a community that acts in lockstep.

Lori: Uh, I think Natalia's work has certainly shown the diversity of the Latino experience and the ways in which the U. S. has responded. And I think that the way that you've received messages about that diversity in your own work does that too, in talking about politics and political outlook and affiliation.

Lori: And so I look forward even more to seeing works that will continue to complicate our ideas of who's included in the category of Latino, what kinds of, you know, behavior and actions and solidarities and confrontations. And I think food studies as a field has stayed away from the, the people, um, but I think over time this field has become more open to talking about individuals and now historians have more opportunity to talk about products and economies and, um, and the very different experiences you find within both.

Gerry: That's beautiful, Lori. Thank you so much for joining us. And everyone, you all have to go get your hands on *Awaiting Their Feast*, published by the University of North Carolina Press. It is just a riveting and fantastic read. So thank you all for listening. And Lori, above all, thank you so much for joining us.

Lori: Thank you so much. It was a great conversation. for listening to Season

Gerry: 3 of *Writing Latinos*. We'd love to hear your suggestions for new books that we should be reading and talking about. So drop us a line at gerald@publicbooks.org, that's G E R A L D O, at publicbooks.org. This episode is brought to you by Public Books. It was produced by Tasha Sandoval. Our music is *City of Mirrors* by the Chicago based band Dos Santos.

Gerry: You can follow us on Blue Sky, Instagram, and X to receive updates about season three of *Writing Latinos*. I'm Geraldo Cadava, and we'll see you again soon.