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Dagoberto Gilb
Papers, 2000-2001

6 folders (0.25 linear feet)

Acquisition: Gift donated by Dagoberto Gilb, 2001.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Writer Dagoberto Gilb was born in Los Angeles. "My mother was Mexican, my father was of German descent. That's the future of this country. This kind of mestizaje is what we have, the culture we're creating," (*Los Angeles Times*, 2/12/2001). Gilb's mother and father divorced when he was a toddler and he was raised by his mother. After high school, Gilb enrolled in junior college. "When I got to college, I loved it. It changed my life I just went nuts over books." (*Publishers Weekly*, 1/15/2001).

Gilb graduated from the University of California at Santa Barbara in 1973 with a double major in Philosophy and Religious Studies. In 1976, he earned a master's degree in Religious Studies. Yet Gilb was unable to gain entry into the post-college job market. "I'm a kind of big guy and particularly then-now I look sweet and nice, but then I looked mean and ugly and scared people. And so I could never get these white-collar jobs. Men kind of backed away from me, and women kind of looked for their purse, kept it near," (*National Public Radio*, 4/22/2001).

Gilb discovered that it was easy to find work on construction sites, however, and he soon became a skilled carpenter, a journeyman in the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners. He made his living from construction work for much of the next fifteen years. During this time, Gilb began writing regularly, continuing to keep a journal of his experiences in a series of spiral notebooks. In the late 1970s Gilb began shuttling back and forth between El Paso and Los Angeles as jobs became available. In El Paso, he met writer Raymond Carver, who offered to help him land a spot in the prestigious University of Iowa Creative Writing Program. Gilb turned the suggestion down, not realizing that, "What [Carver] was telling me °© what I came to learn over the next decade °© was the way the system works. You go to Iowa, you turn your story into a professor, who's a famous writer. And that famous professor-writer gets you to an editor. Whereas I was under the misconception, that you put things in the mail, and some editor reads it and (something) happens, if it was good." (*Dallas Morning News*, 4/30/1999) Instead, Gilb began mailing his short stories "into the wind," receiving little encouragement from editors and publishers. "I don't know where my life would have been if I'd known what [Carver] was talking about. On the one hand I suffered for not getting published. On the other hand I wouldn't have the material I have now." (*Dallas Morning News*)

In 1982, Gilb got his first break when Wendy Lesser of the *The Threepenny Review* agreed to publish one of his stories. "She didn't know me. She didn't publish me because I was a friend of somebody, or that she was going to get anything out of it at all. She just read the story and published [it]," (*Dallas Morning News*). Over the next decade, Gilb published stories with increasing frequency and he also received occasional appointments as a writer-in-residence at colleges and universities. After winning California's James D. Phelan Award in 1984, Gilb was solicited for a book by a friend in El Paso. In 1985 a collection of Gilb's stories, *Winners on the Pass Line*, became the first publication issued by Cinco Puntos Press. In 1988 Gilb received a Dobie-Paisano Fellowship from the Texas Institute of Letters. In 1992, the National Endowment for the Arts awarded Gilb a

fellowship for Creative Writing. He and his family were about to be evicted from their home. Instead, he bought it.

Despite his growing acclaim, New York publishers remained wary of his work, frustrating Gilb's efforts to win a book contract from a major East Coast publisher. By 1992, he decided to turn his short fiction over to the University of New Mexico Press. The resulting collection, *The Magic of Blood*, was an enormous critical success, winning rave reviews for its clear-eyed look at the lives of working-class Chicanos in the American Southwest. It also brought numerous awards to its author, turning Gilb into a literary celebrity. *The Magic of Blood* was a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award given for the best fiction of the year. It also earned Gilb the PEN Ernest Hemingway Foundation Award for the best first fiction, the Jesse Jones Award for best book of fiction from the Texas Institute of Letters, and a Whiting Writer's Award.

Gilb's novel *The Last Known Residence of Mickey Acuna* was published by Grove Press in 1994. The national recognition continued to pour in and the novel was named a *New York Times* Notable Book. In 1995 Gilb received a Guggenheim Fellowship. Two of his stories appeared in the *Best American Essays* collections.

In the mid-1990s, flush with literary success, Gilb came to the attention of *Texas Monthly* magazine. He was the subject of a profile published by the magazine in 1995 and editor Gregory Curtis, who had been an early admirer of Gilb's fiction, suggested that Gilb write for *Texas Monthly*. Gilb was also encouraged to submit work by other staffers. Gilb had previously published an article in the magazine, "Juarez and Peace," in April 1988. In 1992, Gilb another article of his was accepted for publication, but eventually the magazine chose not to publish it. Gilb suggested a couple of other story ideas but neither were accepted by the magazine. Editor Gregory Curtis maintained later that that Gilb's 1992 article was rejected because Gilb's writing involved more personal essay rather than the "straightforward reporting that goes into our stories." (*Los Angeles Times Magazine*, 11/12/95). Gilb contended that the problem wasn't the style of writing, and in fact the rejected piece was not a personal essay. "What I'd say the issue continually was is that they weren't interested in the Mexican American experience from the point of view of Mexican Americans; they were only interested in confirming their stereotypes of Mexican and Chicano culture. When what I offered didn't suit that, they slumped and hid and acted like it was because I was 'difficult.'"

In recent years Gilb's work has appeared in *The New Yorker* and *Harper's*. In 2001 Grove published a new collection of Gilb's stories, *Woodcuts of Women*. *Booklist* noted in its review: "What ties these 10 short stories together is an obsession with women: lovers past and present, a landlady, a drag queen. It's the brooding, often erotic obsession with women that cuts through the mundane lives of Gilb's ordinary heroes and bring the stories to life. He morphs superbly into the skin of his narrators, as varied as they may be. Gilb's piquant prose is his carrying card, and his skills are well represented in this collection. The author is an important American voice and a great literary talent."

In 2000, Gilb's rift with *Texas Monthly* was renewed when a well-publicized disagreement emerged over a piece commissioned by the magazine's new editor, Evan Smith. After refusing *Texas Monthly's* requests for a substantial rewrite, Gilb took the essay to *Harper's*, which published it in its June 2001 issue as "Blue Eyes, Brown Eyes: A Pocho Tours Mexico," just as he had written it.

Dagoberto Gilb currently teaches in the Master of Fine Arts Creative Writing Program at Southwest Texas State University and he resides in Austin, Texas

Books Published:

Winners on the Pass Line, Cinco Puntos Press (El Paso, TX), 1985.

The Magic of Blood, University of New Mexico Press (Albuquerque, NM), 1993.

The Last Known Residence of Mickey Acuna, Grove Press (New York City), 1994.

Woodcuts of Women, Grove Press (New York City), 2001.

Gritos, Grove Press (spring 2003)

Contributor of numerous short stories and articles to magazines and anthologies.

SCOPE AND CONTENTS

These papers are comprised of annotated drafts, typescripts, and correspondence relating to an essay by Gilb which was commissioned by *Texas Monthly* in 2000. The magazine declined to publish the story as Gilb envisioned it, and it was later published in *Harper's* as "Blue Eyes, Brown Eyes: A Pocho Tours Mexico," June 2001. Dates range from 2000-2001.

INVENTORY

	Box	File
Works, 2000-2001		
"The Pocho Tour of Mexico" essay		
Annotated 1 st draft typescript, n.d.	840	1
Annotated 2 nd draft typescript, Nov. 27, 2000		2
<i>Harper's</i> magazine galleys, April 6, 2001, with cover sheet/comments from editor Ben Metcalf		3
Photocopy of article as published		4
Correspondence		
4 unsigned letters, from Gilb to <i>Texas Monthly</i> editor Evan Smith, regarding <i>TM's</i> decision not to publish "The Pocho Tour of Mexico", dated Nov. – Dec. 2000		5
293 e-mail messages regarding the article's conception and eventual publication, dated July 4, 2000 – Aug. 2, 2001, printed in chronological order, 357 pgs.		6