



Blanco reading his poem One Today at the second inauguration of President Barack Obama, 2013

# Interview: Richard Blanco

Poet, Author, Civil Engineer

By Elman + Perez-Trujillo

Selected by President Barack Obama as the fifth inaugural poet in U.S. history, Richard Blanco joined the ranks of such luminary poets as Robert Frost and Maya Angelou. The youngest, first Latino, immigrant, and gay person to serve in such a role, he read his inaugural poem, One Today, at the official ceremony.

Blanco was made in Cuba, assembled in Spain, and imported to the United States—meaning that his mother, seven months pregnant, and the rest of the family arrived as exiles from Cuba to Madrid, where he was born. Only forty-five days later the family immigrated once more and settled in Miami, where he was raised and educated. The negotiation of cultural identity and universal themes of place and belonging characterize his body of work. He is the author of the memoirs *The Prince of Los Cocuyos: A Miami Childhood* and *For All of Us, One Today: An Inaugural Poet's Journey*; the poetry chapbooks *Matters of the Sea*, *One Today*, and *Boston Strong*; the poetry collections *Looking for the Gulf Motel*, *Directions to the Beach of the Dead*, and *City of a Hundred Fires*; and a children's book of his inaugural poem, *One Today*, illustrated by Dav Pilkey. His latest project is a blog co-created with Ruth Behar, *Bridges to/from Cuba: Lifting the Emotional Embargo*, providing a cultural and artistic platform for sharing the real lives and complex emotional histories of thousands of Cubans across the globe.

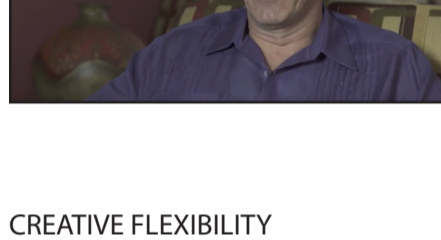
His literary awards include the Agnes Starrett Poetry Prize from the University of Pittsburgh Press, the Beyond Margins Award from the PEN American Center, the Paterson Poetry Prize, two Maine Literary awards in poetry and memoir, and a 2015 Lambda Literary Award.

In addition, Blanco has also written and performed occasional poems for organizations and events such as the re-opening of the U.S. embassy in Havana, Cuba, the Boston Strong Benefit Concert, Freedom to Marry, the Fragrance Awards, and the Tech Awards in Silicon Valley. He has been featured on CBS Sunday Morning, National Public Radio's All Things Considered and Fresh Air with Terry Gross, as well as media from around the world, including CNN, Telemundo, AC360, BBC, Univision, and PBS. His poems and essays have appeared in numerous publications, such as the Best American Poetry series, the Nation, the New Republic, the Huffington Post, and Condé Nast Traveler.

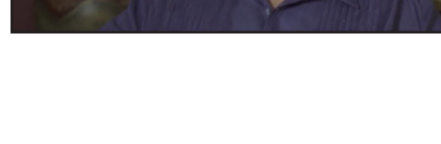
A builder of cities as well as poems, Blanco holds a B.S. in Civil Engineering and a M.F.A in Creative Writing. He is a Fellow of the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, a Woodrow Wilson Visiting Fellow, and has received honorary doctorates from Macalester College, Colby College, and the University of Rhode Island. He has taught at Central Connecticut State University, Georgetown University, and American University. The Academy of American Poets named him its first Education Ambassador in 2015. Blanco splits his time between Bethel, ME and Boston, MA.

The videos below are organized by topic and run between 60 seconds and 6 minutes. Tap on any video. You must be connected to the Internet to view the videos.

**INTRODUCTION:**  
1:05 min.

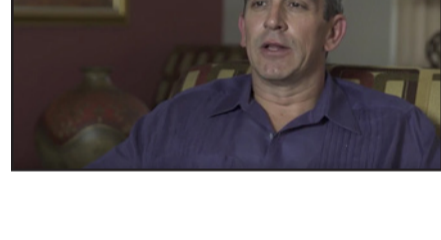


**CREATIVE FLEXIBILITY**  
4:51 min.



Is there any conflict in the dual identities of starting out as a civil engineer, then becoming a poet?

**EDUCATION:**  
3:34 min.



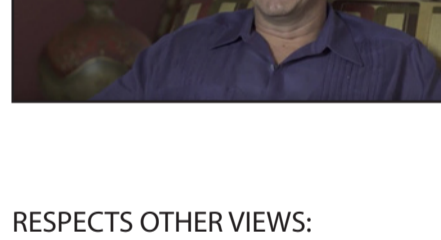
What did you learn in engineering school that helped you with your poetry?

**DEVELOP A VOICE:**  
2:20 min.



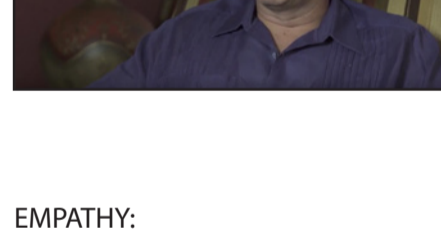
How do you attain such clarity and accessibility in your work?

**CRITICAL THINKING:**  
3:14 min.



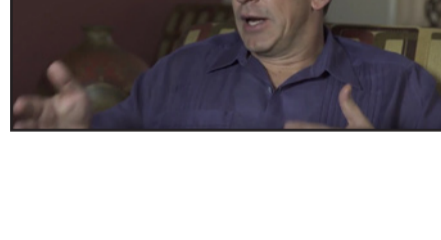
How do you compare writing poetry and prose?

**RESPECTS OTHER VIEWS:**  
1:46 min.



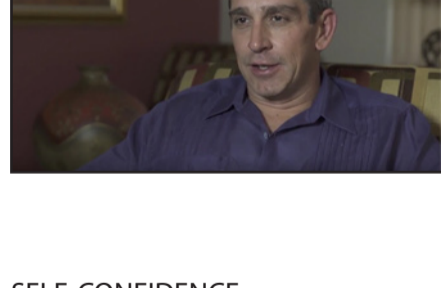
Did you let your family read your memoir before it was published?

**EMPATHY:**  
4:15 min.



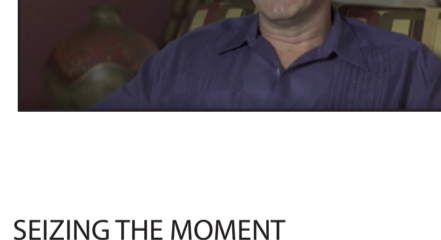
How does your memory of events and dialogue compare to your families memory?

**INSIGHT & INSPIRATION**  
6:27 min.



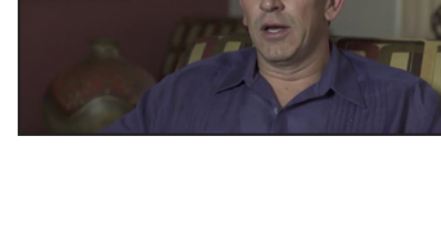
A lot of your writing addresses the immigrant search for a mythic America.

**SELF-CONFIDENCE**  
6:16 min.



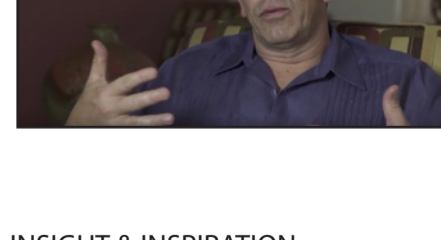
What was it like to read your poem to millions of people on January 21, 2013, at President Obama's second inauguration?

**SEIZING THE MOMENT**  
2:36 min.



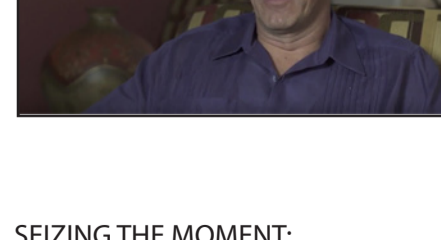
You didn't know President Obama before you were selected to be the Inaugural Poet. Have you been able to maintain a relationship as writers moving forward?

**EXPOSURE:**  
2:20 min.



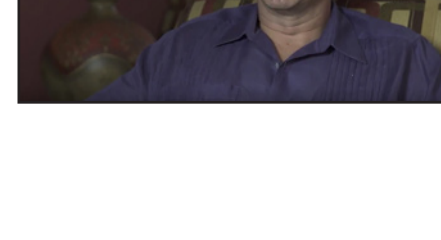
You seem to float above several worlds, and seem comfortable in each.

**INSIGHT & INSPIRATION:**  
3:03 min.



As a poet, how do you define success?

**SEIZING THE MOMENT:**  
3:15 min.



How are you leveraging your opportunities as an Inaugural Poet?