



## **AP<sup>®</sup> English Language (Operational) 2004 Sample Student Responses**

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Rodriguez contrast Mexico and California not as two different places but two polar states of mind; these cultural philosophies are indicative of his divided mind and conflicting feelings. He associates California with a youthful "wild child" (a) outlook and Mexico with a more developed Epicurean pessimism. In the simplistic sense, he has evolved from the youthful Californian to the older Mexican, but - looking back - he does not truthfully sympathize with the totality of this transformation or agree to discard either world view in decisive favor of the other.

Richard Rodriguez encapsulates this ambivalence in a classical metaphor: California is "comedy"; Mexico is "tragedy". This metaphor becomes a conceit which he develops through the totality of his autobiographical introduction. In essence, California is historically a land of rebirth where lives are started anew and cultures reblossom. Mexico has endured great tragedy yet takes on an "opulent" pessimism - Food, children, and funerals are celebrated.

Rodriguez, however, only uses his perception of these locales to fuel his perception. He has developed "Platonic Forms" - of a sort - of Mexico and California that only necessarily comport to his reality, his mental development. He bases this on his personal literary cannon and personal experience. He cites Josiah Royce and subscribes somewhat to the ideas of this famous Harvard professor. Although the opportunity did not come to fruition,



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Royce believed that California could ameliorated the North-South split, even that of 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe. ~~Royce~~ Rodriguez augments this historical sidnote with parallel experiences. He points out his family's cultural, technological and slightly personal rebirth.

Rodriguez is no easy critic of this California ethos. He assigns it the intellectually intermediate titling of ~~the~~ a "boy's wisdom." Even though he was not of the appropriate age group to experience all of the Californian transform~~ation~~ including: name change, sex change, divorce, elevation to celebrity, he does acknowledge these aspects of the new American dream.

On the other hand, Rodriguez does have some inclination towards the semi-pessimistic outlook of his ~~past~~ framing of the Mexican lifestyle. Although he contends, "some part of me continues to resist the cynical conclusions of Mexico," he still attributes some of his current attitudes toward that same cynicism. Thus, he must essentially move back in time to capture the true essence of even~~er~~ mindedness.

The true defining aspect of Rodriguez' character is his conflict of feelings. He concludes that "both sides can claim wisdom" and he essentially delves his conflict to a purely "literary problem." He is not a pure example of either way of life or either philosophy. He is a genuine amalgation

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of chosen characteristics of each. In keeping with his conceit he describes this as an "argument between ~~tragedy~~ and comedy and tragedy," a forceful compromise between nearly diametrically opposed positions. Yet he does not consider them so incontrovertably different. He acknowledges the large amount of demographic shifting from Mexico to California ("hoping to cash in on comedy"). He also alludes to the "Protestant conquest" of California, excising it from Mexico. Thus, California had a hint of Mexico from its inception.

Just as California was not truly a clean slate, neither is the mind of Richard Rodriguez. He is born of Mexican parents in California, born into a world of conflicted feelings and divided mental loyalties.

In conclusion, Rodriguez contrasts California and Mexico as philosophical opponents who clamor for the changes in his emotional composition. He uses his own idealized forms of these geographical entities as well as reputable facts about their political and social histories. The former tells more about Rodriguez. He is a revisionist of Californian and Mexican histories. He has isolated the mature, tragic elements of Mexican life and set them in opposition to the youthful comedy of Californian life. His conflicting mental story of evolution must thus be told in reverse: he

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recounts each mindset as it was useful to him in  
 a certain portion of his life and as he remembered  
 that portion and reapplied it ~~later~~ later in  
 his life. In essence, Rodriguez thought he had  
 discarded his "protestant optimism" toward "the  
 Mexican point of view" but having polarized decidedly  
 to reevaluate his transition in Retrograd  
 Rodriguez is caught crossing the emotional borders  
 between California and Mexico in his mind but  
 the jury is out on where he is going.

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In the introduction to Robert Rodriguez's Days of Obligation, he explores the differences between California and Mexico. ~~Through~~ ~~comparing~~ Through this comparison, Rodriguez delves into his own conflicting outlooks of optimism and cynicism.

Rodriguez's description of California ~~mirrors~~ mirrors his ~~hopeful~~ hopeful optimism. He describes California as a land for starting anew, for succeeding through individualism, and for maintaining youth. The optimism of this land reflects ~~the~~ the author's own outlook ~~particularly~~ that of his younger self. In the "boy's chapter" of his life, he believed in the opportunity ~~and~~ that California ~~embodies~~ embodies. Although he states that this optimism was an ~~outlook~~ <sup>belief</sup> of his childhood, he still acknowledges the veracity of California's ideals. For example, he describes the wealth of his parents made possible by the opportunity in California. ~~Despite his belief in~~ ~~optimism~~ Rodriguez compares California to a "comedy" because of its optimistic, youthful attitudes; however, he also ~~also~~ brings up the irony of the sadness within this optimistic place. This sadness reflects the ~~author's~~ disappointment that results from living life in optimistic hope for improvement.

Rodriguez contrasts ~~the~~ the attributes of California with the contradicting cynicism of Mexico. He ~~describes the outlook~~ ~~of Mexico~~ outlines the main tenets of the Mexican outlook: age brings wisdom, life is hard, and death is the ultimate goal of life. Rodriguez states that he eventually adopted this ~~outlook~~ mindset of cynicism. Although he describes the "tragedy" of this Mexican outlook, he also illustrates that joy can come from living with this mindset. The cynicism and tragedy of Mexico reflects the author's gradual adoption of cynicism and pessimism.

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Rodriguez uses these images of California and Mexico to illustrate his conflicting yet coexisting beliefs in comedy and tragedy. For example, he states that both the cynical man and the optimistic boy were comers. ~~yet~~ ~~yet~~ yet how can these conflicting outlooks coexist? Rodriguez illustrates this combination through the relationship of California and Mexico: he recognizes that there was no "divorce between Mexico and California", suggesting that his contradictory feelings can both coexist without one overpowering the other. He demonstrates his concern for this balance of feelings, stating that he does not want the cynical man to "lord over" ~~the~~ his optimistic side. ~~The~~ The author's ~~blend~~ optimism allows him to hope for improvement and strive for individual success; his Mexican cynicism reminds him that life will be hard and will ultimately end in death. ~~This blend of contradictory outlooks provides him with~~ ~~balance and perspective.~~ In this blend of contradictory outlooks, "both sides can claim wisdom".

By comparing the comedy of California to the tragedy of Mexico, Rodriguez illustrates his internal conflict between optimism and cynicism. He demonstrates, however, that these two outlooks ~~are~~ are both valid and ~~can~~ can coexist within an individual. Through the symbolic attitudes of California and Mexico, Rodriguez conveys his own perspective based on a blend of optimism and cynicism, <sup>and</sup> comedy and tragedy.

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In his introduction to Days of Obligation, Richard Rodriguez discusses his inner turmoil about and conflicting feelings on two ways of life. ~~He compares~~ ~~describes~~ He uses a comparison between Mexico and California to illustrate his feelings as a boy and as a man, and inevitably decides that it is a combination of the two that best describes his life.

To begin, Rodriguez presents himself and the two places as both comic and tragic. He uses ~~an~~ anecdote to discuss the creation of the comedy in California - a place full of opportunity and defiance and youth - "where it is possible to escape the rivalries of the Capulets and the McCoys...". Rodriguez feels that this is a place of great individualism, where his dreams could become a reality.

His next paragraph continues with a description of Mexico, a place of almost existential finality. Though Rodriguez believes in tradition, he can't help but be saddened at the thought of Mexico's undying belief system, chaining him.

Rodriguez believes that California is a symbol of hope and the optimism he holds inside - a place of "the defiance of ancestors." In contrast, Mexico was the country from which people were emigrating - hoping to "cast in on comedy" in California. This contrast depicts the inner conflict Rodriguez feels he is experiencing. As he is aging, he is inclined to believe more so in the Mexican way of life -

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but he is afraid that if he does he will forget the child-like idealism that took him there.

In his last paragraphs, Rodriguez decides that this conflict will outline his book - *Backward*. He will move from his mature "tragic conclusions" to his "[boyish] wisdom." In this manner, he believes that "irresolution" will best describe his life, because both the comedy and tragedy served as meritorious throughout his life.

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