

# River of Angels

Alejandro Morales

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# Press

*River of Angels* has been **praised by the critics and the audience** as a work that deals with the human history of the development of Los Angeles as a multi-ethnic city, linking it to its own natural topography. The novel has been mentioned in literary articles in the USA and Europe, and the author, Alejandro Morales, has been interviewed in several occasions.

*“I could not stop reading until I finished! The novel shows in an impressive way how we have managed to unite as people and as a nation.*

*The lives of this Los Angeles people, their fights, their loves, their sins, their hopes and dreams, are still in us today and help us understand the complicated current mess with conflicts and unión.*

*There is more that links us together than there is that separates us. Just like in my own work, strong women are the leaders in the path towards peace and prosperity.”*

**-Victor Villaseñor**

*“Morales has formidably managed to weave the cultural, social and political threads of the fable of a city to form a tapestry that depicts Los Angeles in a way never seen before. A brilliant success.”*

**-Ishmael Reed**

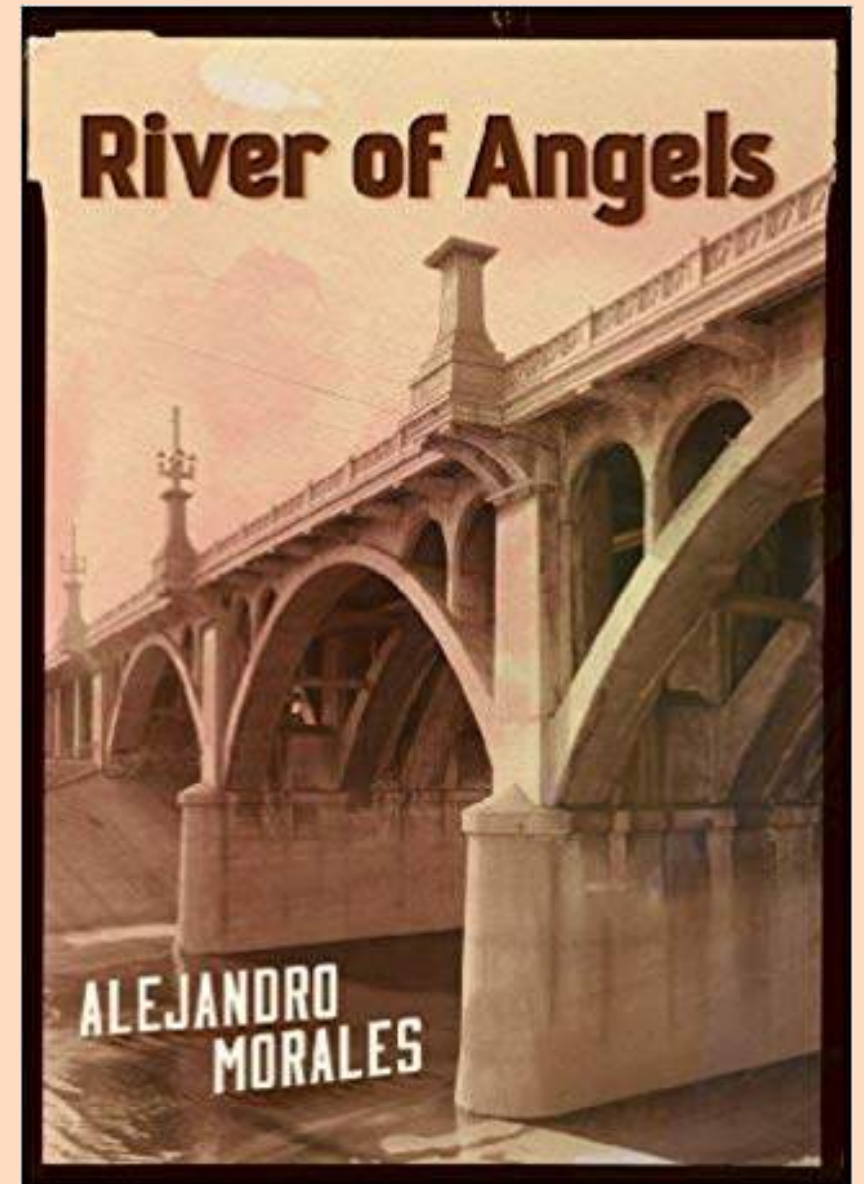
# General Information

**Themes:** Origins, Multiculturalism, Overcoming, Murder, Generations, Love, Los Angeles, Family, Friendship, Emigration, Social Differences, Ethnic Differences, Racism, Urban Development, Old Traditions, California, 20th century.

**Genre:** Historical, Drama.

**Audiovisual Potential:** TV Series, Miniseries, Film, TV Movie.

**Continuity Potential:** This novel has great potential for an adaptation into a film or a limited series, if the plot is followed to the letter. However, it is written in a way that it can also be used as the structure for a great unlimited series, with the possibility of easily developing a good number of subplots about the characters, which are very well constructed, and of expanding the story with new generations of the families Ríos (renamed Rivers) and Keller.





# Alejandro Morales



Montebello, California, 1944, of Mexican parents. Morales has a PhD from Rutgers University in New Jersey. He is a Chicano and Latino Studies emeritus professor at the University of California Irvine. He is a celebrated author of Chicano literature and considered a historian of the Chicano world.

He started his literary career with the first Chicano novel ever published in Mexico. He was a pioneer in Chicano literature written in both Spanish and English. His narrative fiction drinks from historical narrative and viceversa. His characters, often vilified by society but with extraordinary lives, rise from the nooks of the history of south California, ready to be rescued through his writing.

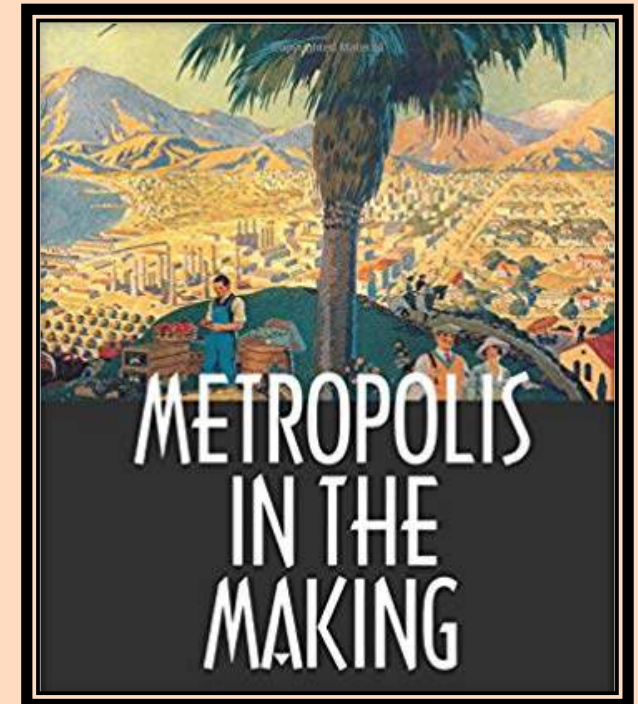
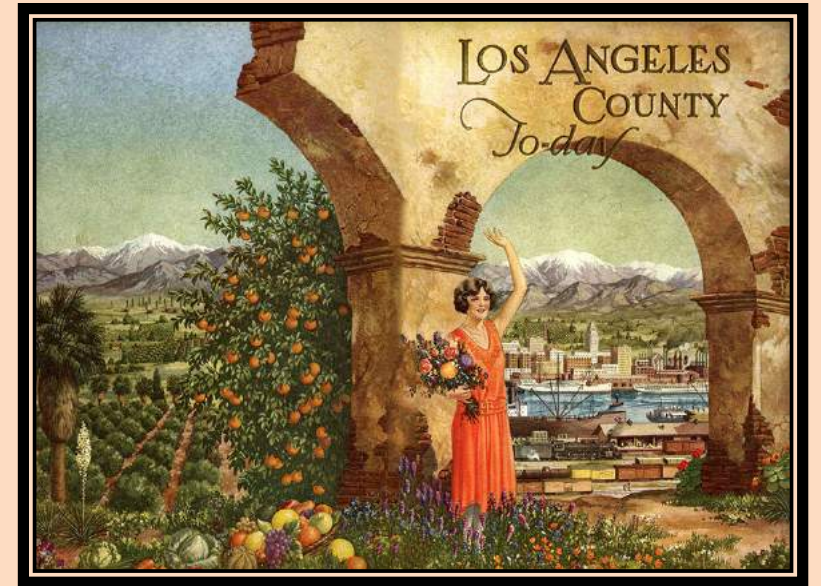
His collection of original manuscripts is in the library of Stanford University in California, where they carry out significant studies on the are of multi-ethnic literature in the USA. Morales was awarded with the **Premio Luis Leal** for his contribution to Chicano, Latino and American literature. He lives in Santa Ana, California, where he keeps writing novels, short stories and poetry.

# SYNOPSIS

**A symbol of the fluctuations of society, the waters of the river will rise someday, and they will break and sweep along to the sea the tons of concrete that have hold it back for years.**

At the beginning of the 20th century, Los Angeles stops being a village to become a big city. The construction of bridges creates both links and confrontations between the people from both sides of the river. In *River of Angels*, Alejandro Morales tells the story of the lives of three generations of the families Keller and Ríos (later known as Rivers), both of a different ethnic, social and linguistic origin, to dig out the stories cemented around the river.

The mysticism and old traditions of the natives and their mestizo children face the prejudicial and eugenic waves coming to America from fascist Europe. Nevertheless, still, the love between Albert Rivers and Louise Keller gives a fourth generation and with it, perhaps, a new story.



# TRIGGER



They are irrevocably in love and waiting for a baby, but Albert and Louis' relationship is frowned upon due to racial and social prejudice, so they decide to get away from their families.

With the help of Sol Ríos, Albert's uncle, the couple finds a home that gives them protection, care, love and understanding in the Mexican neighbourhood of Simons in East Los Angeles. Here, the first one of their three children is born. But when they go back to their parents, after so much insistence and due to them missing their family homes, a series of tragic events will end Albert's life, as well as his father Oakley Rivers' life and his uncle Sol's.

Philip, Louise's uncle, a member of the Aryan club of Los Angeles and promoter of the eugenic ideology coming from Nazi Europe, is responsible for these deaths. This tangible victimization of the Ríos family exposes Los Angeles as a microcosm of a diverse world ruined by racial tensions.





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# PLOT

## Prologue

Mark and Alex are going to the Mark Taper Forum to attend a talk by author Dorothy Allison. To escape the rutinary traffic jam in the I-5, they decide to take an alternative route through Montebello, the Chicano and Mexican neighbourhood in East Los Angeles. The city, one of the most populated in the world, can't stand the massive waves of new inhabitants, not even with constant construction to accomodate the growing agglomeration.

Alex observes the changes in the city. A former space of the Natives and the Mexicans, it has now become a space of multicultural encounter. He thinks about the bridges that connect both sides of the river and of their importance in the economic development of the city.

Once in the library, he pays attention to the pictures on the walls, taken around 1931. The dark Mexican faces pose for the camera in front of the bridges they built. It is here, amongst the commotion of the event and the Hollywood profiles, where Alex acknowledges the inescalpable presence of those people in front of their architectural creations. He can hear their voices revealing their hidden stories and claiming to be relived again.

# PLOT

During the 1840s, the village of Los Angeles started to be known for the big amounts of gold contained within the land. In these years, Abelardo Ríos inherits a piece of land next to the Los Angeles River, the main source of gold in the territory. Abelardo, a man very fond of his ancestors and their traditions, starts a family with Toypurina.

Toypurina, Abelardo, and their sons Sol and Otchoo open a rowboat transport business. Abelardo, being a wise businessman, also rents some land for the San Francisco-Los Ángeles railway. A few decades after, the bridge of Macy Street is inaugurated, connecting two zones with different cultures. Consequently, some confrontations between Chinese, Mexican and African-American workers start. During a storm, the river takes the bridge and also Sol, Abelardo's oldest son. His brother Otchoo, along with two other workers, Paolo and Franco Moretti, fund the "Sol Construction Company". At this point, Otchoo decides to change his name to Oakley Rivers, in an attempt to sound more English.

Due to the wars in Europe and Mexico, many migrants arrive in Los Angeles. Oakley marries Agatha Banac, and they have a child named Albert. After years missing, Sol comes back, helped by Madre del Río. In order for Sol to be employed, the River's put him in charge of Casa de Adobe, designed by Agatha. Abelardo, loved by many, dies. Toypurina mysteriously disappears into nature.

The world war starts. As the city of Los Angeles grows, so does the family business. Toypurina comes back as a spirit from the river, taking care of thousands of lost souls, an omen that something terrible is about to happen. Dame Marie, Albert and Agatha's second child, is born and the River's move to Hancock Park. Sol keeps visiting Madre del Río.

The territory Abelardo had inherited decades before is to be a park: the Abelardo and Toypurina Garden Park. However, not everything is good in the 1910s: due to the many migrations from Europe, an epidemic of influenza arrives in the American coast, causing the death of many people, just like Toypurina predicted.

Los Angeles is a city of dreams transformed into a metropolis segregated by racism that oppresses its inhabitants. Mexicans, Japanese, Chinese and Black people are evicted and marginalized. Extreme conservative ideologies from Central Europe get to Los Angeles, imposing Eugenism as a powerful doctrine. Uncle Philip Keller is the spokesman of the radical movement.

# PLOT

Ernest Prescott Keller, a Harvard graduate, learns from the common people and starts his own Keller Building Company. Allison Fulbert Greenmuth decides to marry Ernest instead of studying Law at Harvard. She wants her three daughters, Luoise, Emily and Gloria, to study. On his part, Albert has already grown up and is an excellent Engineering student, so he works as a private tutor for Louise Keller, Ernest's daughter. She is an open-minded girl: she loves multiculturalism and diversity and totally opposes to her uncle's ideas. Albert and Louise fall in love.

During the late 1920s, immigration seems unstoppable due to the massive raise of violence in the world. Economy grows and the country lives one of its best moments. The Keller's inaugurate some more bridges and the business is doing extremely well. However, what people did not expect was the Great Depression of 1929, provoking business tycoons and big entrepreneurs to go bankrupt, besides increasing the spirit of racism and discrimination. Leonard Banac foresees the crisis and Ernest and Oakley benefit from it, but uncle Philip is ruined. The Great Economic Depression brings more unemployment, more deportations, and more discrimination and racism.

Mexicans create a sort of an underground society in which they try to help each other aside from the rest of the population in LA. Albert is marginalized at University for being a Chicano boy. However, everything is different in the meetings between the Keller's and the River's, where the young members of the families are taught progressive ideologies, hidden from the supremacist ideology in the outer world. Meanwhile, the USC Aryan Club, of which uncle Philip is a member, starts planning segregation.

Allison confronts uncle Philip for his racism, for he keeps on trying to impose the Aryan repression. Opposing to Albert and Louise's relationship –and her pregnancy too–, he insists on separating them and their parents support him. Helped by Sol and Louise's sisters, the couple escapes to the Mexican neighborhood, where they feel secure and eventually get married.

# PLOT

While 3000 resident Chinese are deported, and the Aryan supremacy gains power among people, news announce the rise of Nazism in Germany.

Albert and Louis come back home, where they are welcomed in the best way. Both the Keller's and the Rivers' join forces to create a sense of union between their families, and also to protect themselves from the danger uncle Philip tries to cause. Since Ernest does nothing to keep Philip away from his family, Sol decides to take action. They set up a fight and Philip kills Sol.

Oakley falls into a depression after his brother's death and Albert substitutes him in the family business. Madre del Río advises him to get away from uncle Philip, but, instead, Albert confronts him. Uncle Philip kills him in the bridge, where he leaves the body for everybody to see. Oakley, deeply depressed, dies suddenly before the third baby is born. Louise feels the presence of Albert, who tells her to take care of herself and to think about their children. In the river bank, thousands of people from everywhere pay homage to the three deceased: Sol, Oakley and Albert. Sol Louise Rivers, Albert and Louise's third child, is born. Agatha and Louise take charge of the family business.

In the following decades, the city is divided by the river: to the east, the working classes; to the west, the upper social groups. The Nazi ideology was not successful in Los Angeles, and the city now lives a peaceful period. Louise, helped by her mother-in-law Agatha, rises her children. Uncle Philip dies, and they happen to be the heirs of his fortune. It turns out that after Ernest fired him and bought his part of the business, Philip moved to Mexico to find refuge from the spirits of Sol, Albert and Oakley, who used to haunt him. He spent some time there, working at a church, and then went back to California, where he stayed at a monastery for 20 years. There, he built the fortune that he eventually left to Louise and her children.



# CONTEXT

*River of Angels* tells the story of the many relationships between the diverse multicultural populations in both sides of the Los Angeles River. In a span of approximately one hundred years, starting in 1842, both physical and social bridges have been built in the river, which is the origin of the city of Los Angeles.

At the beginning of the 20th century, a wave of immigrants arrive to the area and Los Angeles starts becoming a multicultural place.

The story in the novel includes the saga of two families, the Rivers and the Kellers, whose paths cross despite being very different. This is played as a symbol to this multicultural dynamic of Los Angeles.



# CONTEXT



The historical and geographical journey of the development of Los Angeles at the beginning of the century is framed not only by the achievements of these two families, but also by other events like the Great Depression, the Mexican Revolution, the First World War, or the rise of Nazism in Germany.

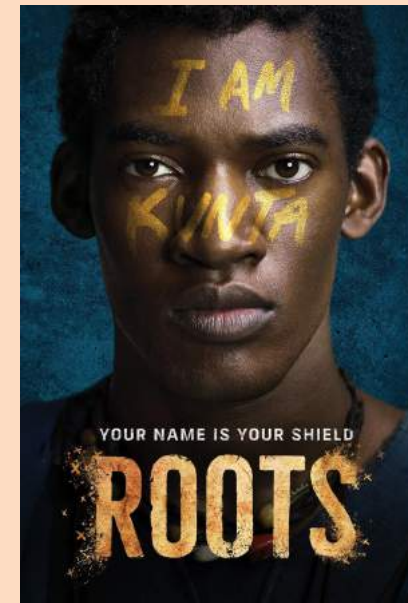
Young Albert and Louise are idealistic for a new world, they want to explore and learn with uncle Sol about the different places and cultures of Los Angeles. They see the contrasts between the massive deportations of Mexicans and Chinese, and the racism they suffer from the White Europeans in the poorest communities in Los Angeles. In fact, they also perceive the altruism of those same White people towards poorest people of their own ethnicity.

Albert and Louise also witness the events organized to promote the eugenic ideology among the population, coming from Nazi Europe.



# TONE AND REFERENCES

This is the epic story about the construction of city of Los Angeles and it's people. The building of the bridges connects its population in a drama of ideological, racial, cultural, social and economic tensions. This is a story about lovers and haters, narrated by several generations of two very different families having to share this town.





HOLLYWOODLAND

# MAIN CHARACTERS

**Abelardo Ríos:** He is a descendant of Mexican farmers who inherits some land next to the Los Angeles River. Abelardo not only founds the business of transport through the river, but he also cultivates the history of his ancestors, together with the knowledge, understanding and respect for the river and its surroundings. He is generous with those in need, and he is a wise investor in profitable businesses - like the establishment of a new railway in Los Angeles. He is respected and loved by people of any social status.

**Toypurina Ríos:** Native North American, Toypurina complements Abelardo. She has the gift of perceiving destructive forces, and she tries to protect her family from them. Her mysterious sensibility about abusive circumstances and social tensions make her Abelardo's best adviser. Even after her mysterious disappearance when she is already old, her energy remains omnipresent. She never abandons her family home, protecting it from forced occupation, and she stays next to the river, taking care of lost souls.

**Together they form the first multi-ethnic marriage of the novel, representative of the family. They have two sons, Sol and Otchoo, who inherit, besides the construction and transportation business, their respect for nature and for their ancestors.**

# MAIN CHARACTERS

**Oakley Rivers(former Otchoo Ríos):** He is Abelardo and Toypurina youngest son. He decides to change his name to sound “more English” and, therefore, avoid any sort of discrimination. He is a smart guy, and takes charge of the family business, which he inherits when the river takes his older brother, Sol. He takes care of his family’s traditions and of their inherited land.

**Agatha Banac Rivers:** The only girl in her family, for she has two older brothers (both of them lawyers like their father Leonard Adam Banac). She falls for Oakley in the moment they meet, and she helps him with the business. She is his best adviser. In the end, she takes charge of the family business together with Louise. She is very athletic and a bit taller than Oakley.

**They constitute the first interracial marriage of the novel, and together they irradiate happiness. They keep the family traditions while they take care of the business. Their children are Albert and Dame Marie Rivers.**

# MAIN CHARACTERS

**Ernest Prescott Keller:** A Harvard graduate coming from a rich family. However, Ernest learns from those he respects the most: ordinary working people. His first job is as an unpaid apprentice at a butcher's shop. In his father's bank, he starts off as a cleaning boy and he gets promoted until he emigrates to California to work in his uncle Philip's company. He sees the great potential in the construction business in Los Angeles, so he opens his own construction company.

**Allison Fulbert Greenmuth Keller:** She comes from a rich French family. Allison loves Ernest so much that she decides to marry him and build a life with him in California, instead of studying Law in Harvard. Firm in family decisions, she teaches gender equality and women's rights to her three daughters, and she confronts uncle Philip for his patriarchal and racist ideology. She is best friends with Agatha Rivers.

**Their marriage was agreed on by their parents when Ernest and Allison were just children. They inherit a fortune from their Anglosaxon families. They share a strong friendship and business relation with their neighbours Oakley and Agatha Rivers.**

**Although they accept uncle Philip in their home and they take care of him, they never accept the racist ideology he is continuously trying to force on them. They have three daughters: Louise, Emily and Gloria.**

# MAIN CHARACTERS

**Albert Banac Rivers:** Oakley and Agatha's oldest son. He symbolizes the interracial generations that result from the ethnic change in Los Angeles. He shows interest for his ancestor's beliefs and he often goes with uncle Sol to visit Madre del Río. He also tries to learn the mysteries of the river and the history of its people through the objects found in it. He is an excellent student, so he is hired as a tutor for Louise, his sister's best friend, with whom he falls deeply in love. Uncle Philip eventually kills him for having married his niece Louise.

**Louise Prescott Keller:** The oldest of three sisters, she is particularly smart. Her intense love for Albert and the baby she is carrying force her to get away from her family. She starts a life with Albert at the Simmons neighbourhood in Montebello, where she learns all about Mexican traditions. She marries Albert and they have three children and a happy life in Boyle Heights, even after uncle Philip kills Albert. Together with Agatha, she takes charge of the family business and she inherits uncle Philip's money.

**They are the second interracial couple of the novel. His marriage turns the Rivers y the Kellers into one family, also uniting their businesses. Family barriers constantly try to separate them. Despite everything, they have three children: Keller Oakley, Allison Agatha and Sol Louise, the last generation of the family saga.**

# MAIN CHARACTERS

**Sol Ríos:** Abelardo and Toypurina's oldest son. The river takes him, but he is saved by the mysterious lizard folk. He is rescued by Madre del Río, who teaches him how to stop crawling and how to speak again. A guardian of everything and everyone, be it homes, gardens, animals, family or workers. Together with Madre del Río, he finds a refuge for Albert and Louise when they start a life together away from their family. He is peace, tranquility, order, Nature.

**Philip Keller:** He is the antagonist that meddles in the life of Albert and Louise, trying to firmly promote the eugenic ideology of Nazi Germany, his patriarchal ideas and his racist hatred. He kills Oakley, Albert and Sol. Their souls haunt him and lead him towards redemption. He leaves his fortune to Louise and her three children.

**Antithetical characters, they are the incarnation of the natural forces versus the evil of human kind. Both uncles try to teach their ideas to Albert and Louise.**

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