In “‘Race’ Politics” Luis Rodriguez shifts genres from an autobiographical incident in *Always Running*. Read the poem twice: once to get an initial overall impression and a second time to annotate it with your questions, impressions, and responses. Focus your second reading on words and phrases that give you a strong sense of Connotation, Attitude, and Shift.

**Response Notes**  **“Race” Politics**

Luis J. Rodriguez

My brother and I-shopping for *la jefita*-

decided to get the “good food”

over on the other side of the tracks.

We dared each other.

Laughed a little.

Thought about it.

Said, what’s the big deal.

Thought about that.

Decided we were men,

not boys.

Decided we should go wherever

we damn wanted to.

Oh, my brother-now he was bad.

Tough dude. Afraid of nothing.

I was afraid of him.

So there we go,

climbing over

the iron and wood ties,

over discarded sofas and bent-up market carts,

over a weed-and-dirt road,

into a place called South Gate

-all white. All-American.

We entered the forbidden

narrow line of hate,

imposed,

transposed,

supposed,

a line of power/powerlessness

full of meaning,

meaning nothing-

those lines that crisscross

the abdomen of this land,

that strangle you

in your days, in your nights.

When you dream.

There we were, two Mexicans,

six and nine-from Watts, no less.

Oh, this was plenty reason

to hate us.

Plenty reason to run up behind us.

Five teenagers on bikes.

Plenty reason to knock

the groceries out from our arms—

a splattering heap of soup

cans, bread and candy.

Plenty reason to hold me down

on the hot asphalt; melted gum

and chips of broken

beer bottle on my lips and cheek.

Plenty reason to get my brother

by the throat, taking turns

punching him in the face,

cutting his lower lip,

punching, him vomiting.

Punching until swollen and dark blue

he slid from their grasp

like a rotten banana from its peeling.

When they had enough, they threw us back,

dirty and lacerated,

back to Watts, its towers shiny

across the orange-red sky.

My brother then forced me

to promise not to tell anybody

how he cried.

He forced me to swear to God,

to Jesus Christ, to our long-dead

Indian Grandmother—

keepers of our meddling souls.

What is the speaker’s attitude toward the incident? Identify three words that give you this TONE.

What is the speaker’s attitude toward the five teenagers who jumped them? How do you know?

What is the speaker’s attitude toward his brother? What lines give you this impression?