

Book Review:

Boffone & Herrera's *Latinx Teens*

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*Latinx Teens – U.S. Popular Culture
on the Page, Stage, and Screen*

TREVOR BOFFONE AND CRISTINA HERRERA

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In August 2022, Barnes and Noble created a policy to limit its stock of hardcover fiction, which social media warned would disproportionately affect writers of color. In the same month, *Daily Beast* interviewed laid-off HBO execs who said the channel was prioritizing content that catered to “middle America.” Their *Gordita Chronicles*, a show built around a Dominican family moving to Florida, is a clear example of a show that was diversifying Latinx representation that was not only canceled, but removed from the streaming site. With news like this, Trevor Boffone and Cristina Herrera’s *Latinx Teens – U.S. Popular Culture on the Page, Stage, and Screen* provides a critical examination of the diverse representation of Latinx teens that has erupted over different media.

Each chapter of *Latinx Teens* focuses on television, film, books, stage, and public influence. In so doing, they provide a foundational discussion on twenty-first century fictional and cultural significant Latinx teens across various aspects of popular culture. They position the significance of their book as “a more concerted effort to center Latinidad in U.S. mainstream culture” (5). They position their analysis of media representation in conversation with the demographic status of Latinx in the United States. Despite Latinos comprising

“roughly 17% of the U.S. population” (21), Latino characters comprise 5.8% of named characters (20). In other words, while representation has increased, popular culture’s evolution of Latinx storylines and characters are not yet comparable with the size of the U.S. Latinx population. Boffone and Herrera make this critical connection to foreground the significance of the analyses of print, visual, and other popular media representation of Latinx adolescents.

Their text stands out in comparison with earlier monographs from University of Arizona’s Latinx Pop Culture series because they center Afro-Latinx and LGBTQ teens as a critical starting point. By starting their first chapter with *Glee*’s Santana (played by Naya Rivera), Boffone and Herrera center the significance of Afro-Latinidad and queer representation across the dozen shows featuring and or starring Latinos since *George Lopez* and *East Los High*. In their discussion of television shows, they review content written by Latinos and starring Latinos in conversation with content featuring Latino recurring characters. While they acknowledge the distinction between Latinx content created by Latinx creators vs. content created by non-Latinx individuals, they hint at the critical distinction of both quality of support regarding Latinx character development. While their text introduces the distinction, scholars and educators will need to supplement their discussion with quantitative and qualitative reports for more in-depth engagement. Their approach, in this vein, will serve students and faculty in introductory level courses.

At a time when Latinx Studies and African-American Studies scholars and research centers contend with how and to what extent to integrate Afro-Latinx individuals’ roles in the cultural fabric of their/our communities, Boffone and Herrera’s centering reminds Latino/Latinx Studies scholars of the

necessity to remember Afro-Latinos. They speak to millennial and gen-Z's trends of resisting to choose one group and, by extension, one political economic reality in the U.S. Their work excels in showcasing the multiplicity of Latinx lived experiences in the ways that Latinx fiction writers, playwrights and activists move beyond the historically limited themes of immigration, and heterosexual families. At a time when anti-LGBTQ policies limit how much current and future youth have access to content that reflects their lived experiences, *Latinx Teens* can be a powerful gateway for important conversations. The diversity of what they discuss can serve as a primer for educators of all levels seeking to find ways to integrate discussion of how creatives are seeking to document and share diverse Latinx storylines.

By citing the ways that playwrights and fiction writers are expanding on historically dominant themes of family and immigration, Boffone and Herrera bring important attention to the increasing diversity of the Latinx populations' lived experiences. For example, in their discussion of Miranda and Hides' *In the Heights*, they explain that "investors didn't think the show could be a success unless it relied on stereotypes" like drug addiction or teen pregnancy (101). That Miranda defended his decision in the context of Stanford's competitive nature speaks volumes of the power of both telling our own stories beyond the stereotypes productions like *West Side Story* banked on for their success.

Still, in light of the diversity of Latinx experiences, Latinx content creators and actors are reimagining the weight of stereotypes through the emotional depth and nuances of the current political moment. Boffone and Herrera excel in introducing the negotiations playwrights, actors, and writers have to make to tell the coming-of-age stories of the ever-evolving

Latinx teen in what is now the United States. Their text reminds the reader that the Latinx community story moves beyond the stereotypes of teen pregnancy and drug addiction; they also move past the immigrant struggle into the complex conditions under which Latinos navigate the social responsibility of success, reminding viewers and readers that “there is neither one way nor is there one rubric” to exist (41).

The crisis of Latinx content’s longevity and marketing in larger institutions, however, points to the need for further attention to publishers’, production companies invisible while rubrics when it comes to what and the extent to which they want to produce and promote Latinx centered content. In “browning” *Hamilton* in their discussion of Latinx adolescence on the stage, for example, Boffone and Herrera highlight the Trojan Horse the award-winning musical had been. As important as that analysis is, it raises the question why, after the success of *In the Heights*, Miranda felt compelled to tell the story of a white Caribbean immigrant. Boffone’s *Hamilton* syllabus provides a number of scholarly, journalistic works critiquing Miranda’s intervention, which could easily highlight the political economic barrier that often exists between an artist and the critical interventions he wants to make regarding representation. Undoubtedly, scholars will be looking to Miranda’s reach on screen and on stage as a nuanced rubric regarding the negotiations creators must make to sustain visibility and success while writing our stories.

Boffone and Herrera position each chapters’ foci within the historic trends on scholarship on the topic. Scholars and educators of the field can complement Boffone and Herrera’s coverage breadth through the additional readings they recommend and the expansive coverage outlines like *Latinx Spaces* and NYU’s *Interventions* provide. By so doing, they

situate their book within the fields of television, film, literary, and theater studies as well as Latinx and Gender Studies. Further, their list of recommended viewing and reading at the end of each chapter make the introductory text an easy tool in Latino, Gender, Media, Literature and Theater Studies courses. Whether teaching a course on representation on the page, stage, or screen, educators will find the content easy to integrate into high school or college level classrooms. These seasoned and prolific scholars excel in positioning themselves within the larger frameworks of the fields they tackle while writing in language accessible to high school upper-level students and introductory level college students.

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