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Latino TV: A History by Mary Beltrán



Credited as the first English-language television program with an entirely Latina/o/x production, *The Brothers García* (2000–2004) and its pilot surprisingly pay homage to a predominantly white show: *The Wonder Years* (1988–93). Its twelve-year-old Kevin Arnold (Fred Savage) and his adult-self narrator (Daniel Stern) were reimagined as an eleven-year-old Latino boy, Larry García (Alvin Alvarez), narrated by his future self (John Leguizamo). Placing García at the center of a white-centric show set in the 1960s–1970s (and produced and made famous in the 1980s–1990s) is an invitation to reimagine Latinas/os/xs at the center of a largely exclusionary television industry and its history.

Mary Beltrán's *Latino TV: A History* brings this reimagining into realization. The modest-sized book excavates the history of the Latinas/os/x relationship with US television by focusing on English-language media and Latina/o/x representation and authorship. Many others have contributed to this history, leaving fragments that Beltrán patches together with new research to offer a fuller picture, particularly with shows that haven't garnered much attention, like *Fiesta* (1969–70), while building on those that have, like *Chico and the Man* (1974–78). Going forward, *Latino TV* will be essential reading for scholars of Latina/o/x media in training.

Beltrán not only examined source materials such as promotional materials and works by critics but also conducted interviews with Latina/o/x media professionals. She also offers close analyses of programs and episodes of interest, many of which have limited access. With these methods, she offers the reader a sense of how these television shows operated and what they looked like.

The book is organized by a temporal and thematic division of chapters. It begins boldly with a focus on 1950s TV Westerns for children. Those attuned to the field of Latina/o/x media studies know that this era is not given much attention; the same can be said of television Westerns, with a few exceptions. Likely to expand any reader's

conceptualizations of Latina/o/x media, this chapter centers on four programs: two Disney productions, *The Nine Lives of Elfego Baca* (1958–61) and *Zorro* (1957–59), as well as *The Cisco Kid* (1950–56) and *The Quick Draw McGraw Show* (1959–62). Beltrán makes clear that these were not “Latina/o productions” by any stretch but sees them nonetheless as vital representations of Latinas/os/xs of the time. Fraught with denigrating images of Latinas/os/xs, this era ushered in “Chicana/o and Nuyorican Activist Television,” as asserted by the title of the next chapter (44).

In this second chapter, Beltrán offers an industrial analysis of the first public television programs created by and for Chicanas/os/xs and Nuyoricans (Puerto Rican New Yorkers) as part of their regionally specific movements. These programs were the fruits of Latina/o/x activism that targeted local public television stations and commercial affiliates. Some of these activists went on to work as producers of community-focused public-affairs programs. Thus, chapter 2 centers on *¡Ahora!* (1969–70), *Realidades* (1971–77), and *Fiesta*, along with one drama series: *Canción de la Raza* (1968–69), which was included because of its community service and didactic imperatives.

Moving away from public television, the next chapter examines *Chico and the Man* and *Viva Valdez* (1976), along with other rare moments in which Latinas/os/xs appeared on commercial television shows in the 1970s. Building on her previous work on Freddie Prinze, Beltrán covers commercial programming at a time when there were few avenues for Latina/o/x creatives and actors. Thus, “Latino TV” was relegated to “Always the *Chico* (and Never the Writer),” as the chapter's title aptly captures (76). The media activism of organizations like the National Mexican American Anti-Defamation Committee made inroads with public-affairs programs but not with commercial television. Beltrán includes the oft-overlooked fact that activists were hired as consultants to television shows to placate activists and audiences, but there is more to be explored there. Failed and lesser-known Latina/o/x-oriented shows like *The Man and the City* (ABC, 1971–72) and *On the Rocks* (ABC, 1975–76) and *Popi* (CBS, 1976) are also covered, along with a discussion of why some shows were deemed a success and others were not. These ostensible failures become the focus of the next chapter.

The 1980s and 1990s saw several short-lived Latina/o/x-centric television programs. The industry sought to maximize the popularity of a small number of well-known Latina/o/x comedians and actors while refusing to relinquish creative control to them, a factor for Beltrán in why these programs were bound for failure. Her primary

objects of analysis, ABC's *a.k.a. Pablo* (1984) and the WB's *First Time Out* (1995), did not even last long enough to complete their first seasons. By discounting Latina/o creatives and consultants and hiring only non-Latina/o/x writers and producers, Beltrán argues, these shows missed the opportunity to capture the loyalties of Latina/o/x audiences and hold the attention of non-Latina/o viewers.

In the fifth chapter, Latino-led television fully enters the scene with shows like *Resurrection Blvd.* (2000–2002), *George Lopez* (2002–7), and the very popular *Ugly Betty* (2006–10). By allowing Latino creatives to draw heavily from their personal experiences, Beltrán suggests, these series gained popularity and longevity. However, producers Dennis Leoni (*Resurrection Blvd.*), George Lopez (*George Lopez*), and Silvio Horta (*Ugly Betty*) were forced to navigate industrial pressures to accommodate white audiences in order to garner the attention of the ever-elusive “mainstream.”

The final chapter of *Latino TV* enters an era regarded by the industry and critics as “Peak TV” and focuses on culturally specific, Latina-led shows. Beltrán looks at Gloria Calderón Kellett's *One Day at a Time* (2017–20), Cristela Alonzo's *Cristela* (2014), and Tanya Saracho's *Vida* (2018–20). Although not framed as such, these programs center intersectionally marginalized Latinas/os/xs. Not only are they there as expressions of Latina subjectivity, but they give visibility to the perspectives of working-class, queer, undocumented, and Black Latinas/os/xs. Beltrán argues that Latina creatives are leading the way with culturally specific (rather than universalizing) programming and “empowered characters” (18). This stands in the face of years of panethnic universalizing by English-language and Spanish-language media, US institutions, and Latina/o/x activism.

Beltrán concludes her study by reflecting on the precariousness of Latinas/os/xs in the television industry. As others have shown, despite years of their struggling for inclusion, the media industry perpetually ignores Latina/o/x creatives while harboring an infatuation for a *commodified Latinidad*. In fact, Latina/o/x creatives, critics, and scholars have criticized that commodification; Yessika (Julissa Calderon), a character in *Gentefied* (2020–21), launches the critique with a pointed remark: “They may love all our shit, but they don't love us.”

Beltrán highlights her frustrations with the past and present but expresses optimism for the future, finding hope in the recent arrival of Latina “creatives” that nonetheless points to a drawback of such a study: prioritizing contemporary concerns of Latina/o/x visibility over

historicity. Certainly, denigrating images and control of production were and continue to be an issue for Latina/o/x communities and activists, but what was deemed “negative” and “positive” has changed over time. Such critical assessments were often contingent on the specificity of the Latina/o/x subgroup and the US region, among other factors, as well as the co-constitutive legacies of English- and Spanish-language media as discursively fueled by the misconception that Latinas/os/xs are foreigners who only consume media in Spanish and that Latin America is the sole arbiter of *Latinidad*. Beltrán's *Latino TV* is an essential contribution to the expanding scholarship on Latina/o/x media and is particularly important for the training of its future scholars.

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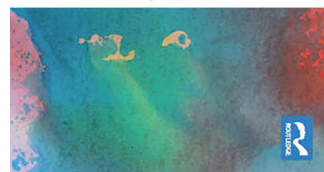
Television's Spatial Capital: Location, Relocation, Dislocation by Myles McNutt



TELEVISION'S SPATIAL CAPITAL

LOCATION, RELOCATION, DISLOCATION

Myles McNutt



AMC's *Breaking Bad* (2008–13), one of the most critically lauded TV shows of the last decade, built much of its neo-Western aesthetic and political relevance upon its Albuquerque setting. The orange blood-soaked deserts and the proximity to cartel wars gave its viewers a heightened sense of the American Southwest. But behind the scenes, the show came

close to looking, sounding, and feeling different: the original plan was for the series to take place in Riverside, California, before it moved to Albuquerque for tax purposes. To consider the choice *Breaking Bad*'s producers made (and its result) is to consider the economic and political pressures within a changing American media-production landscape in which modes of production, distribution, and consumption are in constant flux. The adage “location, location, location”