

Frederick Luis Aldama. *Latino Comic Book Storytelling: An Odyssey by Interview*. San Diego: ¡Hyperbole Books!, 2017. 137 pp.

Frederick Aldama's *Latino Comic Book Storytelling: An Odyssey by Interview* contributes to academic conversations not only within the realm of Latino comics studies but also in the larger field of Latin/o American cultural studies. He does this by complicating the notion of the archive to include cultural texts existing outside of the traditional canons that have come to characterize literary and cultural disciplines within academia. The book is structured by thirty interviews that Aldama conducted with an emerging generation of Latino comic book creators, set alongside conversations with established author-artists such as Lalo Álcáraz, Frank Espinosa, John Gonzales, Jules Rivera, and Sam Teer. For the comics creators and consumers that contribute to the metaphorical odyssey that these interviews provide, comics as a medium present an accessible vehicle for the expression of Latino identities and experiences, both of which have often been marginalized and underrepresented within traditional US comics production. As Aldama asserts, "For Latino storytellers who are visually inclined, the comic book medium offers a real possibility. Pencils, paper, and a drafting table are far cheaper than film cameras and film stock required of the other visual-driven media modes. And, as you'll discover in goring yourself on the panoply of voices herein, Latinos with limited means and who want to maintain total control over their artistic production turn to the visual-verbal format of comics" (13). Ultimately, Aldama's compilation of interviews carves out new spaces for these author-artists to assert their own interventions in the field as they create the stories that help creators and readers digest the realities of growing up Latino in the US.

In the living, breathing archive that Aldama constructs in this book, he draws the reader's attention to the relevance of individual biographies as they coexist with each comic creator's process and practice, ultimately working to represent the multiplicity of Latino identities and experiences within the comics community. In this way, *Latino Comic Book Storytelling* puts author-artists in dialogue with one another from coast to coast. For example, José Cabrera, who has roots in Los Altos de Manhattan (i.e. Washington Heights), appears alongside Lalo Álcáraz, whose comic strip *La Cucaracha* runs in the *Los Angeles Times*. In addition to showcasing the work of artists from all across the US, Aldama also works to demonstrate the transnationality of influence at work in the production of US Latino author-artists. While Cabrera finds himself at the beginning of a promising career, publishing work whose significance he locates within the context of contemporary US comic production with close ties to the Dominican community in upper Manhattan, Álcáraz sees his own production as part of a long tradition of editorial cartoonists with roots extending to Latin America. At the same time, however, Álcáraz translates these influences into work that seeks to intervene in

contemporary US comics production, righting the historical wrongs of Latino (mis)representation within the medium. In his interview with Aldama, Alcaraz highlights the significance of Latino comics as they relate to social, cultural, and political issues relevant to the larger community: “You have to remember, I grew up watching white people on television or in print and wondering where were the brown people. This continues today. When we do finally see ourselves we’re misrepresented, I don’t want my kids to grow up where this continues and they don’t see themselves represented or misrepresented” (19). Diverse though the group of author-artists collected in this book may be, this desire to work towards Latino visibility in the US comics industry is one bond that unites them all. For many, it is part of their quest as author-artists of Latino comics. Contributing to this mission, Aldama’s *Latino Comic Book Storytelling* offers yet another platform through which Latino comic book creators are able to tell their stories: discussing their motives, tracing their inspirations, and stating their goals as they work towards constructing a new US comics universe in which Latinos occupy the graphic narrative forefront.

A continuation of the work that he began in *Your Brain on Latino Comics* (2009), Aldama’s *Latino Comic Book Storytelling* is an invaluable tool for undergraduate and graduate students interested in Latino literature, comics, and cultural studies, particularly those that look to rearticulate the place that alternative media occupy within contemporary cultural production. As Latino Studies and related fields move towards expanding their fields of analysis, this book serves also to underscore the numerous ways in which comics can and should be considered alongside other textual objects in the study of US Latino life and culture. As scholars of the discipline attest, the graphic narratives of which comics are composed proffer unique and insightful textual windows into cultural imaginaries; in doing so, they explore Latino experiences in the US in a medium that has long been overlooked by the academy, just as Latinos have been within the history of comics production. Not only does Aldama’s interview odyssey highlight the perspectival shift that comes with the foregrounding of Latino protagonists in the comics themselves, he also trains the spotlight on Latino storytellers, signaling both comics and their production as a site of power and agency. This book is a must read for comic book enthusiasts from all walks of life.

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