

López-Calvo, Ignacio and Victor Valle (eds.) *Latinx Writing Los Angeles: Nonfiction Dispatches from a Decolonial Rebellion* (2018). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019. 246 pp.

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The image of Los Angeles that emerges from *Latinx Writing Los Angeles*, the remarkable anthology of nonfiction writings edited by Ignacio López-Calvo and Victor Valle, is as familiar as it is unrecognized. It's familiar to those of us who grew steeped in the Spanish-speaking cultures of the Californias. It goes unrecognized in a substantial portion of the literary anthologies that have focused on Los Angeles to date. Los Angeles, as referenced and imagined in the writings included in this anthology spreads past its city limits, and comes with a history richer and more extensive than what its Hollywood credentials and many of its literary doorkeepers would have us believe.

Two introductory essays frame the selection of readings included in this volume. The first and longer one is by Victor Valle, while the second essay is co-authored by both editors. Both essays make compelling cases for the need to expand our understanding of Latinx literatures and Los Angeles literary cultures, so as to include the kind of writings the volume brings together: works of nonfiction, of creative nonfiction, works that straddle dividing lines between history and literature, between “disinterested” expression and the commercial and political taint of various forms of journalism. Most pressing in the eyes of the editors is the need to question and revise literary and academic framings obsessed with a Hollywood version of Los Angeles and ignorant, willfully or not, of the city's rich and long-standing history of conflict, its fabric of diversity, its “radical cosmopolitanism.”

In their essays and in their selections for the volume, the editors are attentive to the mutually constitutive logics of spatialization and subject formation. Liminal positions, transnational narratives, and relational perspectives are recognized in the volume for their impact and substance. The volume presents Latinx nonfiction as a compelling counterpoint to tenacious ideologies of nationalism, of the kind we see on the rise in the U.S. and around the globe. The volume also makes the case, through its focus on nonfiction, for the need to recognize the varied literary sensibilities of Latinxs in Los Angeles: “commercial journalism,” Valle reminds us, “constituted that community's predominant form of literary practice” (10). Attention to the various forms of nonfiction creative writing, journalistic and otherwise, emerges as a central task in tracing the movements of Latinx historical memory.

Both introductions to the anthology and most of the selections that follow engage in an ongoing dialogue with journalism, the most expansive and most socially recognizable depository of the form of language expression—nonfiction writing—that the anthology sets out to explore. The long and complex history of journalistic coverage of Latinx communities in Los Angeles is confronted head on by many of the authors included in the volume, several of whom played pioneering roles as writers and editors in Latinx journalism in Los Angeles. The *Los Angeles Times* lurks all throughout the book, in anecdotes and references to the city's, and the newspaper's, longstanding practice of racializing Latinx youth as dangerous and criminal. Investigative reporting by Latinx authors is richly represented in the volume by the likes of Héctor Tobar and Sonia Nazario, Pulitzer Prize winners and members of a generation that solidified the presence of Latinx journalists in the highest echelons of the profession. Tobar, whose work includes coverage of the 1990 Los Angeles riots for the *Los Angeles Times*, is represented in the volume with an excerpt from his memoirs of growing up in the 1960s and 70s, as the son of Guatemalan immigrants raised in a home where Che Guevara, Radio Havana, and other symbols of the revolutionary left had pride of place. An excerpt of Nazario's *Enrique's Journey*, the award-winning, long-form investigation where she follows a child's odyssey to reunite with his immigrant mother, is included in the volume. Ruben Martínez—journalist, author, and the Fletcher Jones Chair in Literature and Writing at Loyola Marymount University—is another contributor to the volume.

A Jesuit *crónica* opens the selection of texts, anchoring the history of Los Angeles in a colonial past and establishing themes and figures that will remain constant features of the city's image. The California mission and its legacy as a symbol of the double role played by Hispanics in the history of the Americas—oppressors of indigenous people and oppressed in the United States—appears again later in the volume, in Alejandro Murguía's reflection on graffiti, defacement, and integration in the San Fernando Mission.

Memoirs, chronicles, and investigative journalism make up the core of the writings in this anthology. Artists like Guillermo García-Peña and Harry Gamboa Jr., whose work veers towards the experimental, are represented with writings that are solidly testimonial. Memories of a life taking photographs—a life devoted to resisting clichés with the production of photographic clichés—constitute Gamboa Jr.'s contribution to the volume. His presence in the anthology is a welcome surprise to scholars who may be more familiar with the work Gamboa Jr. completed as part of the legendary art collective ASCO. Gomez-Peña, on his part, is represented in the anthology with a text where the

groundbreaking performance artist denounces the curious and appalling deportation (from Mexico to the U.S.) of Mexican-born artist Hugo Sánchez.

For me, raised as I was between Tijuana, San Diego, and Los Angeles, with family scattered throughout that urban corridor, the inclusion of authors born and raised outside of L.A. is among the book's most resonant features. It positions the book firmly beyond the stifling nationalism that has haunted so much of the region's history. Nylsa Martínez's memories of a visit to Los Angeles echo the experience of countless people, people like me: residents not just of Los Angeles or San Diego, not only of Temecula or Ontario, not strictly of Tijuana, Rosarito, or Mexicali, but of that long stretch of cities stretching binationally, along and away from the Pacific. The image of that strip of land, background to crisscrossing family histories, home to communities whose bonds stretch and stress across a few hundred miles, is brought to light powerfully in Martínez's memoir, and also in Helena María Viramontes's own recollection of a childhood trip to the beaches of Ensenada.

Ricardo Flores Magón is one of several included authors born and raised outside of Los Angeles. The famed anarchist and revolutionary paints a piercing image of both student mobilizations in Mexico in response to the lynching of "a humble Mexican," Antonio Rodríguez, in "the savage plains of Texas" by "a mob of savage whites," and of U.S. newspapers' exaggerated coverage of these mobilizations. The chronicle captures succinctly the role played by newspapers in the networks of identity and power consolidating across the U.S.-Mexico border in the first decades of the twentieth century, a role played by Flores Magón's own *Regeneración*, the anarchist journal he published in Mexico and then later in the U.S. *Regeneración* stands as a prime example of what the anthology's editors describe as "the transnational reach of Mexican anarchism in the history of the Chicana/o Left." The lynching of Hispanics and other forms of racial violence, slavery included, were also condemned earlier by another author included in the anthology: Francisco Ramirez, who founded in 1855 *El Clamor Público*, the first Spanish-language weekly newspaper in Los Angeles (the third newspaper published there in any language) at the age of seventeen.

Latinx contributions to labor movements in Los Angeles are featured throughout the anthology, making the volume an indispensable reference for those looking for a panorama of Latinx participation in the history of worker mobilizations in the Californias. Bert Corona's testimony of activism and community organization, as traced by Jesús Mena, is a standout document of this history, filled as it is with valuable insights into the longer trajectory of Latinx labor activism in Los Angeles. Corona's oral history of a mass mobilization of undocumented people for a street protest in 1971 is particularly impactful, as is his account of the festive air of family and community that reigned over

the peaceful 1970 National Chicano Moratorium before the brutal repression of police forces. The dynamism of 1970s worker movements in California, divisions between Mexican and black workers, the rising awareness of the limits of Chicano nationalism, and the emergence of alternative forms of Latinx subjectivity (in collectives like ASCO) all feature prominently in Corona's extraordinary memoir of a life dedicated to the pursuit of justice.

This book is a document of Los Angeles diversity, its heterogeneity, of the range of differences stirring within the category "Latinx" itself, which includes, as this volume shows, a vast array of perspectives, identities, and experiences. Among the included authors we find the likes of Blanca de Moncaleano, a journalist and women's right advocate born in Colombia and active in the worker's movement in Los Angeles, where she contributed to publications like *Regeneración*, the anarchist newspaper edited by Flores Magón. She edited her own periodical, *Pluma Roja*, dedicated, as its motto announced, to women's education as a road to anarchist victory. Her contribution to the volume is a critique of militarization, a manifesto she published in Los Angeles ("the city of Anarchy") in 1915, as talk of United States participation in World War I was gaining steam. Anais Nin, the renowned writer born in France of Catalan Cuban parents, is also included in the volume. Selected excerpts from her diaries give proof of a writer attentive to both the landscape ("a forest of billboards, each bigger and louder than the next") and the peoples of Los Angeles: from the colorful entertainers wandering around Hollywood Boulevard in hopes of their next break, to the subjects portrayed by "loud and harsh radios" that "told only of crimes, malice, gangsters," to the story of Simon Rodia, an Italian immigrant and mason who built a gleaming tower of assembled refuse: a monument of sparkle, color, and rubbish rising in a forgotten corner of the city.

Personal connections to the city of Los Angeles, its history, and its people nourish the conception and execution of this volume, as well they should. The unpublished memoirs of Alfredo Cobos, the grandfather of one of the volume's coeditors, are a welcome addition to the anthology. They add nuance to the longer history of Latinx Los Angeles political identities (its anarchist and *magonista* legacies in particular) that emerges from the volume as a whole. They also reveal, as do other selections in the text, the ways in which links between the United States and Northern Mexico get reshaped, redefined, and reaffirmed at key moments in their shared history (the Mexican Revolution, for example).

In the U.S. as elsewhere, reading and learning environments unfettered by the legacies of colonization are far from us. They seem a bit closer after reading *Latinx Writing Los Angeles* and

grappling with its proposal for an expansion of different, intersecting, and largely excluding literacy worlds.