

### The Latino Nineteenth Century

James Wilkey

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## Review

Wilkey, James

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**Lazo, Rodrigo and Aleman, Jesse.** *The Latino Nineteenth Century*. NYU Press, \$30.00 ISBN 9781479855872

*The Latino Nineteenth Century*, presents itself as less a “revision of literary history per se as it is a return to the circuits of texts, print cultures, artists, and institutes [that form] in real and imaginary ways the Latino nineteenth century.” The collection of essays assembled here present this reconstructed literary world with compelling depth and force. The core of the volume works to understand the Americas as a contiguous space. This space shared Spanish language and rapidly changing population dynamics. The authors explore Spanish-language discussion of ideas with fresh eyes and, in the process, challenge an American literary tradition that typically embraces and English-only, New England-centric bias that fetishizes author over text. *The Latino Nineteenth Century* eschews nation-state identities in favor of the connections of language and shared experience.

The authors examine a diverse range of literary examples in constructing and illustrating the essential argument that *Latino* used in the context of the nineteenth century is not an anachronism. Instead, *Latino* represented a thriving literary exchange outlining a vast swathe of geographic space. From Mexican railroad fiction, to California during the gold rush, to Cuba. Even New England, taken to task for its English bias in the past and present, still emerges as a center for *Latino* dialogue if one knows how to hear the meaning. While the authors engage with the behemoth to the North, they do so without falling into the trap of allowing the text to reorient around the U.S. Instead, the authors of *The Latino Nineteenth Century* deftly navigate how Latinos absorbed English literature, as well as the forgotten prominence of Spanish language literature that is obscured in retrospect, but apparent in context.

It's also worth noting that the book is refreshingly self-conscious, resisting the New England-centric reading of the nineteenth century without jettisoning

the importance of places like Philadelphia as part of the mutable ethno-geographic space of *Latino* America. Naturally, the book is rooted in reading texts, and the archive work on display in *The Latino Nineteenth Century* is exceptional and well documented. Much of the remapped literary work, while lost to English-language bias of the field, survives in a plethora of periodicals and publications with far reaching audiences. They were simply audiences who could read Spanish. In many cases these works of literature, art and other medias of expression had to be rediscovered, adding to the intrinsic value of the text as a bibliographic resource. *The Latino Nineteenth Century* gives breath to voices that had been lost to the untended memory of a thriving international and intra-national conversation.

Ultimately, *The Latino Nineteenth Century* is a compelling piece of scholarship with a great deal to say about the way academics draw the borders of nationality, whether intentionally or not. The book also offers a careful examination of the lingering biases crafted by the limitations and intimacies generated by language and geography. These factors filter out critical details of history well within reach, but concealed behind a veil of inexplicable ignorance in the modern field; that one can study a subject in translation. It is, after all through the intimacy of language that the authors link the intertextuality of their subjects and rediscover their forgotten sources. *The Latino Nineteenth Century* isn't just a good book, it's an important one in reorganizing the way that Latin American studies conceives of the generation and periodization of Latin American identity, as well as the genuinely massive scope of its national borders drawn irreverent of the nation-state borders found on any map. This book is required reading for Latin Americanists, and highly recommended to any reader with even a passing interest on the subject for its density and efficiency.

*James Wilkey is a doctoral student at Louisiana State University, where he studies the history of Latin American Popular Culture, with a Specialty in Cuba and Cuban Diaspora.*