

Latino USA: Graphic Narrative, History, and Heteroglossia

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Artículo recibido el 4 de octubre de 2016, aprobado para su publicación el 22 de noviembre de 2016

Abstract

With a population of more than 45 million, Latinos have become a significant demographic group within the United States. Increasingly, Latinos are part of and represent diverse political, social, and economic institutions throughout the United States. How did this phenomenon begin? Which are the historical conditions that explain this increase in the Latino population? What do we mean when we refer to Latinos as a particular demographic group within the United States? These are some of the questions that Ilan Stavans and Lalo Alcaraz (2000) approach in their graphic book *Latino USA: A Cartoon History*. Through the analysis of this graphic book, I analyze the topic of history and, specifically, the production of a historical graphic narrative about Latinos in the United States. I argue that *Latino USA* shows that history is a polyvocal narrative in which different voices are involved. Besides hegemonic representations of reality, it is possible to find different perspectives and points of view from which facts are interpreted. Besides analyzing the content of the text, I explore who, how, and why produces that text. In other words, I analyze the author's own position in her/his text in relation to the material that she/he writes about.

Key words: Hegemony, text, Latinos, graphic novel, visual narrative

Latino USA: Narrativa gráfica, Historia y Heteroglosia

Resumen

Con una población mayor a 45 millones, los Latinos se han convertido en un significativo grupo demográfico al interior de Estados Unidos. De manera creciente, los Latinos hacen parte y representa diversas instituciones políticas, sociales y económicas en Estados Unidos. ¿Cómo comenzó este fenómeno? ¿Cuáles son los factores históricos que explican el incremento

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de la población Latina? ¿Qué podemos entender cuando hablamos de los Latinos como un grupo demográfico particular en Estados Unidos? Estas son algunas de las cuestiones que Ilan Stavans y Lalo Alcaraz (2000) exploran en su Novela Gráfica: *Latino USA: A Cartoon History*. Mediante el análisis de esta obra, analizo el tema histórico y, en particular, la producción de la historia en la narrativa gráfica sobre los Latinos en Estados Unidos. Sostengo que *Latino USA* muestra que la historia es una narrativa multivocal en la cual participa un amplio conjunto de voces. Y más allá de las representaciones hegemónicas de la realidad, es posible encontrar diferentes perspectivas y puntos de vista sobre los hechos interpretados. Sumado al análisis de contenido de la obra, exploro quién, cómo y por qué este texto. En otras palabras, analizo la postura del autor (él o ella) al interior del texto y la relación con el material sobre el que él o ella escribe.

Palabras clave: hegemonía, texto, Latinos, novela gráfica, narrativa visual

Introduction

With a population of more than 45 million, Latinos have become a significant demographic group within the United States. Increasingly, Latinos are part of and represent diverse political, social, and economic institutions throughout the United States. How did this phenomenon begin? Which are the historical conditions that explain this increase in the Latino population? What do we mean when we refer to Latinos as a particular demographic group within the United States? These are some of the questions that Ilan Stavans and Lalo Alcaraz (2000) approach in their book *Latino USA: A Cartoon History*. However, Stavans and Alcaraz do not answer these questions in a conventional way. On the contrary, they present an original account in which the history of Latinos in the United States is a complex and multivocal phenomenon. This non-conventional representation can be explained by considering two main reasons: first, Stavans and Alcaraz's approach to history goes beyond a single-voice enunciation of a set of linear events; and, second, the graphic presentation of their book allows Stavans and Alcaraz to go beyond the possibilities of narration of verbal language and let images communicate particular meanings about the history of Latinos.

Latino USA: A Cartoon History (Stavans & Alcaraz, 2000) is a graphic book that tells the history of Latinos in the United States of America. The book shows some of the most important events, people, and ideas that help us to understand how Latinos have become a significant group in the United States. In this sense, this graphic book represents events such as the discovery of America, the Mexican-American war, the Cuban Revolution, and the Puerto Rican struggle for independency. Several historical figures are also represented: Christopher Columbus, Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Porfirio Díaz, John Kennedy, César Chávez, and Fidel Castro, as well as renowned Latin American artists whose work is influenced by both Latin America and North American traditions. Finally, this book presents some aspects of Latino culture such as the use of *Spanglish*, the characteristics of Latino food, the dynamic of Chicano movements, and the practice of Latino traditions.

Through the analysis *Latino USA: A Cartoon History*, I analyze the topic of history and, specifically, the production of a historical graphic narrative about Latinos in the United States. I argue that *Latino USA* shows that history is a polyvocal narrative in which different voices are involved. Besides hegemonic representations of reality, it is possible to find different perspectives and points of view from which facts are interpreted. In the case of *Latino USA*, three main phenomena show how polyvocal narratives work within historical graphic narrative. These three broad phenomena are the representation of Latinos/as, the Latinos/as' use of Spanglish, and the idea of *latinidad*. This multivocal narrative is innovative in the sense that historical accounts are typically told from one invisible and expert narrator. Even historical graphic narratives privilege one official narrator as it happens, for example, in *Maus* (Spiegelman, 1986) and *A people's history of American Empire* (Zinn, Konopacki, & Buhle, 2008). *Latino USA*, on the contrary, is told from more than 4 visible and non-official narrators. Rather than a deductive thematic analysis, I strive to accomplish what Bakhtin (1981) calls an analysis of the work as a whole. Inductively, I present the issues that I consider are the main subjects that *Latino USA* offers as a graphic narrative. In addition, as Said (1978) suggests, besides analyzing the content of the text, I explore who, how, and why produces that text. In other words, I analyze the author's own position in her/his text in relation to the material that she/he writes about.

Regarding to the authors' position in their texts, it is important to mention that in *Latino USA*, the history of Latinos is told through four main voices (see figure 1). First, the teacher, a white woman who narrates the history of Latinos from the point of view of academia and, therefore, who represents the formal and official voice of history. *A calavera* (skull) is other important narrator that represents the oppositional perspective of official history. *Calavera* is an allusion of artwork of the Mexican artist Jose Guadalupe Pasada who used *Calaveras* to satirize political life in Mexico. From a graphic standpoint, *Calavera* is an aggressive representation of a critical voice. Compared to the teacher, *Calevera* does not have clothes, is aggressive, and often interrupts harmony and symmetry on the panels. It is in the voice of *Calavera* that we read/see contra-hegemonic interpretations of history because he always disputes classical and academic interpretations about Latino history. The third, a toucan, represents the mythical hero often used by



Figure 1: Stavans, I. & Alcarraz, L. (2000). *Latino USA: A Cartoon History*. New York: Basic Books, p. 12

the Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez in his literary work. He works as a translator and as a mediator, and his accounts are often comical. *The author*, the fourth voice, is the graphic representation of Ilan Stavans, author of the book. Paradoxically, he does not represent to himself as the authoritative voice of the book, but as a Chicano who presents his own perspective and explains some issues that the teacher, that is, the official voice, fails to point out. It is interesting to notice that *the author* is frequently placed at the corner of the panels, which could be read as the non-official voice of Latinos that are excluded from telling their own history. In fact, unlike the teacher, *Calavera*, *the author*, and the toucan are symbols of the Latin American culture. Even though they do not constitute collective representation of Latino/as, they do refer to specific countries—*Calavera* to Mexico *the author* to Chicanos, and the toucan to Colombia. Finally, There is no hierarchy among all of these voices because all the narrators are equally important in relation to the quality and quantity of their comments. There are also other secondary narrators such as Cantinflas—one of the most popular Mexican film actors- *El Santo*—a popular Latino hero-, Alcaraz—the illustrator of the book- and Captain America. Each one of these voices represents a particular point of view about Latino history in the United States.

This set of narrators constitutes what Bakhtin (1981) calls heteroglossia, that is, the heterophony or diversity of voices within a single discourse. In this case, heteroglossia works at two levels: among the several narrators that tell the history of Latinos in the United States and within each one of these narrators. It is important to notice that even if history is told by a single voice this voice is already populated by various voices, meanings, and intentions. In Bakhtin's words, "Along with the internal contradictions of the object itself, the prose writer comes to discover the social heteroglossia that surrounds the object, the Tower of Babel confusion of languages that goes on around any object. The dialectics of the object are interwoven with the social dialogue surrounding it" (p. 278). If we extrapolate Bakhtin's explanation to an historical object, then we can claim that history is not an isolated object waiting to be represented, but an object interwoven with the multiple voices that surround it.

Along with these four main voices, images represent the main events that constitute Latino history. In *Latino USA* images are not reduced to illustrate verbal content. On the contrary, images constitute themselves other voices that throughout the book communicate different points of view about the history of Latinos. These images perform functions as diverse as exaggerating, imitating, contradicting, or exemplifying the verbal text of this graphic book. From a graphical standpoint, *Latino USA* is a tangled comic book in which panels are asymmetrical, verbal texts are saturated, and the structure is difficult to abstract. It is difficult to understand which the unit of meaning is. Indeed, as McCloud (2006) explains, every panel works as a unit of meaning, but in the case of the pages, they are not always units of narration. Alcaraz's style of drawing is, for lack of a better word, Baroque: every panel is full of details and the thick outlines of the drawings of objects, human bodies, and verbal texts overlap among each other. Among all kinds of comic transitions (McCloud, 2006), Alcaraz privileges the subject to subject, and the scene to scene transitions. In other words, probably because *Latino USA* is a historical graphic narrative, panels privilege the representation of both historical characters and events. As a historical graphic narrative, *Latino USA* also includes the representation of other media and genres such as maps, extracts of poetry, and excerpts from treaties. All of

these linguistic and graphic storytelling elements serve as devices of symbolic representations that communicate different points of view.

Historical Graphic Narratives

According to these entangled relationships between images and verbal text, both verbal language and images, and, therefore, the graphic narrative as a whole, can be approached as an example of heteroglossia. More specifically, *Latino USA* can be approached as a graphic book in which the concept of history is problematized in terms of multiple voices and points of view. Thus, *Latino USA* is a historical graphic narrative in which history is a polyvocal and multiperspective account. Before showing some examples of the book that illustrate this polyvocality of history, it is important to explain what I mean here by history, graphic comics, and narratives.

According to Ricoeur (2004, 1997, 1994, 1976), there is a close relationship between history and narrative because the latter can be considered as one of the phases of the former. For Ricoeur, documentary research, explanation, and writing are the three phases of history, and it is in the writing process where narrative becomes a fundamental concept because it gives to history a strong sense of temporality. The idea of temporality is crucial in Ricoeur's thought because it is the "structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity" (White, 1987, p. 171). Unlike linear chronicles of events, history is reconstructed around a plot, which gives it a strong sense of temporality. This reconstruction of history is understood by Ricoeur in terms of imitation. He draws on Aristotle's idea of imitation to explain that history is an narrative act based on the imitation of events. Imitation, as highlighted by Ricoeur, cannot be understood as a copy or duplicate or reality, but as a reconstruction of the past in which historical imagination intervenes. Imitation in history is approached as a re-construction, rather than as a passive process of construction. Thus, both history and narrative share imitation as a central element. However, they differ in terms of structure because, as Aristotle (1907) explains, historical compositions do not present a single action, but a period of time in which several events take place.

Historical comics challenge the traditional way to represent history, that is, through verbal language. By challenging this traditional language, what comics do is to break the classical division between high culture and popular culture (Chute, 2006). As Gardner (2008) point out, comics become a medium to represent *serious* matters such as history, biography, or autobiography. Historical graphic narratives such as *Maus* (Spiegelman, 1986) and *A people's history of American Empire* (Zinn, Konopacki, & Buhle, 2008) show that comics must not necessarily be related to funny stories created to entertain audiences, but they can be created to communicate historical matters (see Young, 1998). In addition, graphic narratives challenge the traditional form of historical storytelling in which there is a strong sense of closure and moral purpose. Graphic narratives as Chute explains, do not offer solutions because they do not have didactic or educational purposes. Comics' possibilities of *spacing* offer authors the opportunity to play with the idea of closure in historical writing. Finally, as Ewert (2004) states, because in graphic narratives images are not reduced to illustrate verbal texts, they offer particular ways to communicate additional meanings that verbal texts cannot express.

In fact, when interviewed about his book *–Latino USA–* Stavans claims that he uses cartoons in order to communicate history in an innovative way: “I didn’t want to be didactic about history, to say that this is the way it is. I wanted to leave it as an open question mark. I ask readers to give their own opinions” (Hopkinson, 2000, p. 2). In the same sense explained by Young, Chute, and Ewert, *Latino USA* is a graphic narrative that challenges the concept of history and its classical forms of representation. *Latino USA* presents history not only as an arbitrary account of events, but also as an account that not only refers to national-estate events, but also to everyday routines, traditions, and practices. This perspective of arbitrariness in history can also be related to the idea of imagination. Imagination, in this context, does not mean fiction or invention, but interpretation. *Latino USA* can be approached by considering this relationship between imitation, representation, imagination, and narration. Because history is not –and cannot be– an objective and neutral account of events, it incorporates imagination and interpretation.

Figure 1 constitutes an interesting case for analysis because it shows these perspectives on history, imagination, and interpretation and also the other characteristics about polyvocality that I mentioned above. First, this one-page panel shows that history does not have to be told by one single voice, but from several standpoints. The teacher, the toucan, the *calavera*, and the author are the narrators of the events of conquest and exploration occurred in the American continent between 1492 and 1890. As we can see throughout the book, these four characters represent different ideological instances or, as Bahktin (1981) points out when defining heteroglossia, they constitute different belief systems. In fact, the book is designed so that one single event is narrated from several perspectives. Moreover, not only narrators offer their own interpretations, but also images connote additional meanings. In the case of the particular panel of figure 1, we see how narrators do not agree about the necessary criteria to define what a historical period is. As Chute (2006) claims, this multiple voicing of comics transform narrative in a polyvalent weave in which comics can be not only dialogic, but also trans-discursive.

But figure 1 also shows us that because history is a reconstruction of events the form of its narration is always arbitrary. While the teacher has established this period of time (1492-1890) as the moment when the conquest and exploration of America occurred, the *calavera* questions the arbitrary selection of this temporal frame when he argues: “Wait a second! Why choose these years as the dividing line? Whose big idea is that?,” to which the author replies that it is the role of the historian to set those limits. We find several panels like this in the book where the narrators highlight the arbitrary organization of history. Along with this idea of arbitrariness, they question notions such as originality, authorial account, reader, and truth. It is often in the voice of the *calavera* that we see/read these disputes. Even though narrators often highlight the arbitrariness of their accounts, it does not imply that these narratives are fiction. As Ricoeur explains, although historical narrative refers to real referents, the historians’ interpretations of these events make them socially constructed phenomena insofar as they are interpreted through historical imagination.

Historical events have the same structure as narratives because both are defined in terms of temporality, imitation, and plot. What would be then the difference between these two concepts? White states that history is one type of narrative, along with myth and fiction. However, with Ricoeur, we could also ask, what is then the difference between history and

fiction if both narrate? To understand this difference, it is necessary to consider the theory of the sign, but approaching it from the standpoint of Charles Peirce, rather than from the European structuralist perspective of Ferdinand de Saussure. The difference between history and fiction lies in the fact that the referent, in the case of history, is real because it is constituted by events that happened at some point of time. What the historian does is to reconstruct –through historical imagination- those events. However, we can only talk about referents if we consider a model of sign that not only includes signifier and signified, but also a referent, that is, an object outside the sign. As Ricoeur (2004) claims, the consequences of the rejection of the referent by European structuralism “have been devastating for historical narrative, whose difference from fictional narrative rests on the referential intention that runs through it” (p. 247).

In addition to the verbal representation of this idea of historical arbitrariness, we can also see how it is represented through graphic devices. In figure 1, the *calavera* points at the spot where the period of time of conquest and exploration is written. Carefully observed, this spot is a clapperboard, which may be associated with the idea of production that filmmakers carried out when producing fiction. In some sense, this clapperboard can be seen as the graphic representation of Ricoeur’s concept of historical reconstruction, that is, the process of imitation in which the authors are not limited to duplicate events, but to interpret them from his/her particular standpoint. This clapperboard represents the film idea of staging, which can be extrapolated to the historical field to claim that imitation is not a passive act of duplication, but an active process in which historical imagination intervenes. This is the reason why Ricoeur (2004) claims that imitation incorporates heterology insofar as “a narrative does not resemble the event it recounts.” (p. 279). Thus, imitation leads to heteroglossia in the sense that imitations are themselves double-voiced and internally dialogized.

Representation of the Other

The way in which the Other is presented –a phenomenon often represented in *Latino USA*- is an interesting issue to analyze under this perspective of imitation and heterology. *Latino USA* shows how the representation of the Other is a multiperspective and multivocal process. From a political standpoint we can see that *Latino USA* constitutes an example of cultural resistance not only because it incorporates several voices, but specially because it presents non-hegemonic historical accounts through the incorporation of historical signifiers. The book presents the history of Latinos/as in the United States of America from their own point of view. In fact, the authors of *Latino USA* have Mexican origins and a strong influence of Chicano culture (Kanellos, 2008; Hopkinsin, 2002). But, as Stavans and Alcaraz often emphasize through images in their book, Latinos/as do not have a unified voice insofar as *Latinidad* does not constitute one-single and fixed identity, but an amalgam of constantly changing characteristics. As Solé (2004) claims after studying Stavans’s scholarship, the concept of hybrid identities is crucial in Stavans’s work because it presents a way to highlight the role that transformation and acculturation play in immigrants. Thus, *Latinidad* is to be understood in relation to heterology and hybrid identities.

This idea of hybrid identity is constantly represented throughout the book. In fact, the panels in *Latino USA* show Anzaldúa's idea of being in borderlands as characteristic of this hybrid identity. Stavans and Alcaraz represent Latino/as identity as a "place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 25). Latinos/as live in the borders of dichotomies such as here/there, we/they, and present/past. Instead of choosing one element in these dichotomies, Latinos/as have developed a capacity for synthesis that allows them to create a third new element. As *Latino USA* shows, one of the best examples through which Latinos/as overcome dichotomies is the use of Spanglish. The book not only explains what Spanglish is and which are its origins, but it is also written in Spanglish. Thus, we have a multi-lingual historical account.

From a cultural standpoint, Spanglish is the manifestation of the acculturation processes that immigrants from Central and South America have had to cope after coming to the United States. From a cultural-linguistic standpoint, Spanglish as a Creole identity, that is, as the language that comes from a mixture, in this case, the hybrid identity of Latino/as in the United States. From a political standpoint, as Solé (2004) explains, Spanglish needs to be understood in relation to a broader political frame in which the use of a language is always made in relation to power relationships. Figure 2 is one of the many panels that illustrate the role of Spanish and English languages in Latino culture in the United States and, specifically, the social consequences and symbolic capital implied when speaking these languages. In this panel we see the confrontation between native-American and Latino-Americans because of the use of English and Spanish. The angry faces of the Americans represent the social, historical, and political connotations that Spanish have as a part of a xenophobic attitude in the United States. The act of pointing at the Latino individual shows an accusation because of the way in which he speaks. As Hernández-Compoy (2005) points out, the quality of Latino English is judged in relation to the person who speaks it, and not as the result of a syntactic and semantic performance. The accusation represented in this panel also represents what Anzaldúa (2007) has called the wild tongue: "Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self. So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language," (p. 81). More interestingly, this panel shows the intricate relationship between

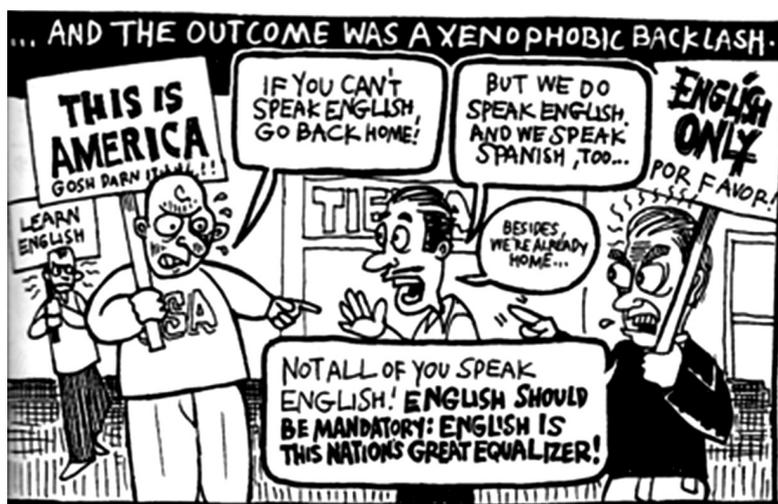


Figure 2: Stavans, I. & Alcarraz, L. (2000). *Latino USA: A Cartoon History*. New York: Basic Books, p. 146

language, home, and nationality. According to the panel, from the American perspective home corresponds to the place where an individual's native language is spoken; from a Latino Standpoint, it corresponds to the geographical place where he is in a given moment.

Latinidad, Conquest, and Stereotypes

Spanglish is not the only example of the border or hybrid cultural identities of Latinos/as in *Latino USA*. The very idea of *Latinidad* is a complex identity difficult to represent. In this sense, the Baroque and saturated style of panels and images in *Latino USA* correspond to the approach of Latino/a identity that Stavans, Alcaraz, as well as several others Chicanos/as, want to support. *Latinidad* is not a single identity, but an amalgam of identities constituted by several nationalities such as Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Peruvians, Ecuadorians, Colombians, and so on. Figure 3 shows, in two panels, the confusion generated among the Latinos/as characters and the narrators of the book because of this concept of *Latinidad*. While the two Latino individuals ask why they are *latinoamericanos*, the teacher and the author explain that this and other related terms such as Hispanic or Latino are historical constructions. It is interesting to notice the graphic representation of the American culture in the two weapons carried by the toucan, that is, from the very stereotype that Latinos have about *gringos*. At the bottom, on the right corner, we also see a small representation of the author who, dressed like a conqueror, claims to prefer the term *Hispanic*. According to Oxford English Dictionary, as an adjective, the word Hispanic means, "pertaining to Spain or its people." As a noun, however, it refers to "a Spanish speaking person." Interestingly, the noun Spanish emerges in the United States as a way to call Latinos/as in the United States. This inherent confusion of the term Hispanic corresponds to the very idea of Latinos/as' identity, that is, as a heritage of the Spanish colonizers and as a contemporary phenomenon of immigration of Spanish speakers into the United States. In both cases, the idea of Hispanic links people from Central and South America to territories to which they do not belong. While the adjective Hispanic connects Latinos/as to Spain, the noun Hispanic connects them to the United States. Thus Hispanic is a notion that shows the political dimensions of representing the identity of the other.



Figure 3: Stavans, I. & Alcarraz, L. (2000). *Latino USA: A Cartoon History*. New York: Basic Books, p. 7

Latinidad is an identity that individuals from South and Central America acquire after coming to the United States and it is not an identity with which they have always identified. As Cervantez-Rodriguez and Lutz (2003) claim, “‘Latinization’ derives from the demographic growth of the Latin American-origin population in the United States” (p. 538). Finally, the politics of representation are closely related to the production and reproduction of stereotypes and, therefore, to what Said (1978) calls the problem of essentializing the humanity of the other.

One last case for analysis is represented in figure 4, which represents the so-called discovery of America. In this one-page panel we see the asymmetrical combination of verbal text, graphic representations, and claims of the narrators. They all refer to role of conquerors in the American continent. As usually, the role of the narrators—especially of the *calavera* and the toucan—is to dispute certain historical interpretations and to question the use of some terms such as *new*, *we*, *they*, and *colonization*. In this sense, it is interesting to notice that along with the toucan’s question for the *new* world, we see in the next panel (vertical reading) the interaction between colonizer and colonized which shows that this *new* world had a prior existence. Moreover, we can see the face of the author in one of the huts while he states a list of words that describes the interaction between colonizer and colonized in the new world. This pun, along with the other graphic and linguistic elements, shows the different perspectives from which the conquest of America can

be understood. As Mignolo (2005) states, while hegemonic historical discourses call this event the *discovery* of America, other subaltern and alternative voices prefer to call it the *invention* of America. According to the former view, America is a new territory whose land must be appropriated, whose people must be converted, and whose labor must be exploited. The idea of *invention* of America, on the other hand, highlights the undeniable link between America, coloniality, modernity, and capitalism.

But *Latino USA* not only focuses on the Spanish and English colonization of America, but also on contemporary processes of economic control of the first world countries and, particularly, of the United States over the rest of the world. Thus, throughout the book we find images such as Uncle Sam holding Cuba, a country that is represented as a baby, or Uncle Sam holding the world in his hands. In addition, several panels illustrate Mignolo’s (2005) idea according to which the current processes of colonization are not based on the

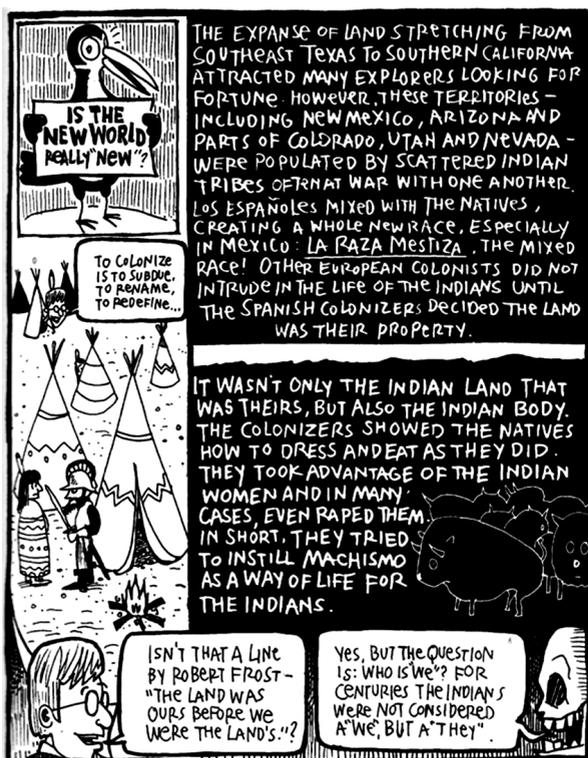


Figure 4: Stavans, I. & Alcarraz, L. (2000). *Latino USA: A Cartoon History*. New York: Basic Books, p. 19

control of lands, but in the control of minds because as Mignolo points out “knowledge is always geo-historically and geo-politically located across the epistemic colonial difference” (p. 43). Thus, *Latino USA* shows that there is not one, but several processes of colonization operating at different levels. In addition, because of its graphic narrative form, *Latino USA* challenges the idea of history as a one-singled voiced discourse about the national-state events. Rather, the book represents history from a non-hegemonic standpoint. Stavans and Alcaraz are Latinos/chicanos striving to understand the history of their new given identity.

Preliminary Conclusions

I have striven to show that *Latino USA* constitutes an example of polivocality in historical discourse. In fact, *Latino USA* is a collaborative narrative that incorporates several interacting enunciators, which tell a non-hegemonic perspective of Latinos/as history in the United States. As a historical graphic narrative, *Latino USA* refers to real referents, that is, to the events that happened since the conquest of America. However, as Ricoeur points out, historians cannot access to the *reality* of those events, because they always use their historical imagination to access the past. Thus, as he explains, imitation incorporates heterology as long as narratives are told from specific points of view. In the particular case of historical graphic narratives, the problem of representation is even more complex because creators use images not only to illustrate verbal text, but also to add more layers of meaning to these representations. Moreover, images are also imitations in Ricoeur’s and Aristotle’s sense, that is, they are not duplicates of reality, but they constitute points of view which have already incorporated heterology.

Because of all of these characteristics, *Latino USA* asks readers to have an active role because the book offers multiple interpretations about the same event and it is the reader who needs to decide what interpretation she/he wants to choose. The problem of heteroglossia becomes even more complex when considering the readers’ processes of reading because, as Bakhtin claims: “An aesthetic reaction is a reaction to another reaction, a reaction not only to objects and to meanings in themselves, but to objects and to meanings as they are for a given human being (p. 222). Besides the historian’s reaction to the events of the past, the reader adds more reactions to that reaction. What all of this shows is the complexity of communication processes that historical graphic narratives offer to us.

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