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Latinas in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia

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Author

Barnes

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LATINAS

Vicki L. Ruiz & Virginia Sanchez Korrol, eds., *LATINAS IN THE UNITED STATES: A HISTORICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. 3 vols. pap., \$325.00, ISBN 0253346800 (set).

Reviewed by Sherri L. Barnes

Latinas in the United States should not be confused with the also recently published *Encyclopedia Latina* (Grolier, 2005), which focuses on Latino/a history, culture and society, not women of Latin American descent exclusively. The editors of the Grolier work chose the feminine form of the adjective — “Latina” — to match the feminine form of the noun “Encyclopedia.”

Latinas in the United States is the only historical encyclopedia on Latinas (women from North, Central, South America., and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean) in the U.S. Prior to its publication, the only other reference source dedicated to the Latina experience was the outdated biographical *Notable Hispanic American Women* (Gale, 1998). The focus of *Latinas in the United States* is on “how Latinas have shaped their own lives, cultures, and communities” and their perspective on significant social, cultural, and political events and issues.

The history begins in 1540, when Latinas first arrived in the Southwest. The editors do not clearly state the end date of the historical period covered. However, with regard to what biographies were included, they do state that histori-

cal figures were privileged over more contemporary ones. Contemporary personalities are more likely to be mentioned in one of the thematic essays. For instance, to demonstrate historical scope, Carmen Miranda would warrant a single entry, whereas Rosie Perez’s significance would be covered in the “movie stars” entry. Jennifer Lopez doesn’t warrant analysis.

The majority of references are biographical, with organizations, historical events, and political, social, and economic issues relevant to the Latina experience making up the rest of the entries. The breadth of issues covered is indicative of the collective — rather than personal — politics of Latina feminism and women’s studies. Some entries do a better job than others at illustrating Latinas’ contributions. “Environment and the Border” is an informative historical overview of environmental issues at the border, but little is said about Latina involvement in overcoming the problem or the impact on Latinas’ lives. In contrast, the entry on the sixties era Puerto Rican nationalist group the Young Lords discusses the significance of the group as well as how influential women members Denise Oliver and Iris Morales increased women’s political participation in the group, challenged the gender constructions they had grown up with, and transformed the group’s agenda to include equality for women and an eradication of male chauvinism.

In front of the alphabetically arranged entries, five historical and regional essays provide an overview of Latinas in the Southwest, North-

east, Midwest, Southeast, and Northwest. The essays highlight when and how Latinas first arrived in the region and describe their struggles and their contributions to society. Other very valuable quick-reference sections of the encyclopedia include a list of the biographical entries that appear in the text, a list of all of the organizations referenced, and a bibliography of selected readings in Latina history. The list of biographical entries is cleverly arranged by subject. This section will be useful for students who are assigned to research a Latina in a particular field but can’t think of any names. The list of all the organizations included is also a handy quick reference, but I was sorry that the National Latina Health Organization (a reproductive rights organization founded in 1986) wasn’t included. “Selected Readings in Latina History,” formatted in two columns per page, runs nearly three pages.

All of the essays are signed, and most of the contributors are Ph.D.s or doctoral candidates specializing in Latina studies. Overall, this is a thoroughly academic, well-conceived, and well-produced resource that should inspire other Latina reference projects.

[*Sherri L. Barnes is the librarian for women’s studies, U.S. history and writing studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her award-winning Black American Feminisms: a Multidisciplinary Bibliography can be accessed online at <http://www.library.ucsb.edu/subjects/blackfeminism/>.*]

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