

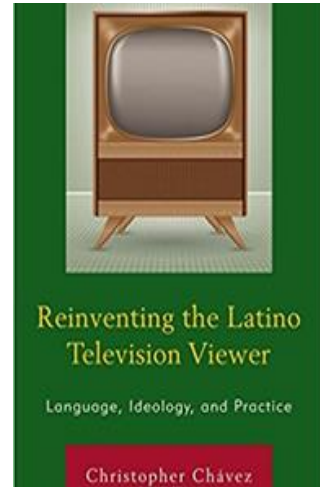
Christopher Chávez, **Reinventing the Latino Television Viewer: Language, Ideology, and Practice**, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015, 170 pp., \$68.19 (hardcover).

Reviewed by

Lindani Mbunyuza-Memani

Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, USA

In **Reinventing the Latino Television Viewer: Language, Ideology, and Practice**, Christopher Chávez offers insightful perspectives on how television invents and reinvents viewers in a capitalist system in which U.S. Latinos are fodder for competing media conglomerates. The main issue addressed in this five-chapter book is the intersection of language and ideology and how, in practice, these work to erase Latino audiences from the very media purported to serve their needs. Using a critical media studies approach that ties together the political economy framework, Pierre Bourdieu's (1998) theory of practice, and an assortment of research approaches, including case studies, the book illustrates how profits are maximized, cultural differences are assuaged, and Latino audiences are assimilated into the dominant culture and "reframed as English speaking" (p. 9). In this setup, English is constructed as normative, while Spanish is the inferior other.



In the introduction, by drawing from a number of scholars such as Irvine and Gal's (2000) work on the intersection of language and ideology, Chávez carefully sketches out how language and ideology connect to make institutional practices seem acceptable. Such a practice in which oppression is normalized can also be seen as the social acceptance of dominance.

Chapter 1 provides a historical account of the Latino television industry and its relationship with Latinos. Chávez traces a history of Hispanic media from the 1800s with the publication of the semiweekly newspaper the *El Misisipi*. The histories provided in the chapter include a discussion of the rise of media organizations such as Univision, whose policies and practices in inventing Latino viewers Chávez analyzes in the book. Beyond the histories, some of the data for this chapter are drawn from qualitative interviews with television executives who assert that Hispanic television is intended to be a moneymaking venture, a fulfillment of the capitalist goals of media conglomerates. From these assertions about the importance of profits, readers can already see that, consistent with business philosophies, profits are prioritized over everything else. However, Chávez also adds dissenting perspectives, including that Hispanic television has functioned as a space for alternative programming unavailable in mainstream media. The author argues that Hispanic television developed as a form of resistance, since Hispanics were historically excluded in mainstream media. In connecting history to prevailing practices in the media world, the author notes that television practices continuously change as executives revise programming approaches to suit shifting market and audience trends.

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The discussions about dynamic market trends and the historical account of Hispanic media continue in chapter 2, the book's rising point in which the author provides more empirical evidence of the media's framing and reframing of Latino audiences. In this chapter, Chávez argues that the growing Latino population—specifically the youth, with their access to technology—are the most targeted as the media work to produce a new generation of Latino audiences who are media consumers and who are consumed by the media. This young audience is media-savvy, is technologically advanced, and—most important, as the author tells us—consumes products without cultural limitations. The breadcrumbs left by audiences as they consume the media are used to track their consumption patterns for the benefit of media organizations that use the information to construct homogeneous audiences.

In chapters 3 and 4, the author deals with the issue of language, demonstrating in chapter 3 that programming benefits an English-speaking audience and that the inclusion of Latino speech tends to stereotype Latinos. Chávez notes that, even as there are bilingual (Spanish and English, illustrating some diversity and inclusion in the media industry) and monolingual (English only) networks, it is people with a "crossover appeal and a strong command of the English language who are at an advantage as English continues to have linguistic capital" (p. 125). In other words, there is better currency for English-speaking content producers and professionals than those who are mostly Spanish speaking.

Given the connection between television programs and audiences, the author also notes that those "better rewarded are Latinos who are already recognized by white audiences" (p. 126). This illustrates the intricate connections between language and ideology and their function in constructing and normalizing beliefs about social arrangements in which English language and Whiteness are placed at the top of the hierarchy. For instance, media professionals recognizable to White people are considered more valuable than those who are less known by White audiences. In practice, these politics of language and ideology result in "de facto segregation within the broadcast industry" (p. 124). As such, not only do Spanish text producers and other Latino media industry professionals lose out, but so do Spanish-speaking Latinos who are erased from their own media spaces as programs favor a mainstream or English-speaking audience rather than cultural diversity. In other words, television programming stays within the hegemonic arrangement that supports rather than challenges the status quo in ways that legitimize the dominance of the English language, including those who speak and understand the language.

In chapter 5, the concluding chapter aptly titled "The New Hispanic Television Landscape and the False Promise of Democracy," Chávez stresses that there is a "new kind of Latino who is better suited to a consumer society" (p. 130) and is *mainstream-able*. This is the language media executives use as they work to "reinvent Latino audiences," as the book's title suggests. Using Bourdieu and Thompson's (1991) articulations about the social production of dominance, Chávez illustrates his point by drawing from interviews that there are Latinos who symbolically place themselves at the lower rungs of the social ladder—a view supported in practice by the emergence of English-only television that has further constructed Spanish as the other. As his final note, the author stresses that in reframing Latino audiences by constructing the "new Latino as acculturated and English-speaking, television networks have abandoned a large population of Latinos" (p. 154). In other words, by diminishing Spanish from television, Spanish-speaking Latinos are neglected in favor of those who are fluent in English.

Although Chávez is now a university professor, he is a former media industry insider with access to decision makers. His background and knowledge contribute to the strengths of the book as he uses past knowledge and interviews with network executives to add vigor and nuance to the book. For this reason, the book benefits from the author's past experience in the media field and from a wide array of research approaches, such as interviews, case studies, and document analysis. *Reinventing the Latino Television Viewer* can be emulated and contextualized for different language groups in multicultural societies, which might pique the interest of readers and researchers working in the same research areas. Since the book traverses the fields of sociology and the media, it would be a worthy resource for a wide variety of graduate students, particularly those interested in the deeper politics of language, ideology, and media representation as these intersect to construct race and class.

Chávez delivers on his promise of investigating the construction and representation of U.S. Latinos in television in ways that fulfill the normative arrangement of life in which differences are obscured from sight and assimilated to the dominant culture—a widespread phenomenon.

References

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