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Contemporary Hagiography: Social Justice Exemplars in US Latinx  
Children's and Young Adult Literature

Latinx children's and young adult books on social justice heroes from Latin American and Latinx communities are flourishing. Noted Latinx author, Monica Brown, for example, has several picture books on Latinx and Latin Americans heroes, including activists such as César Chávez and Dolores Huerta as well as artist-activists, Pablo Neruda, Gabriela Mistral, and Frida Kahlo. René Colato Laínez's recent *Telegramas al Cielo / Telegrams to Heaven* (2018) on the life of Archbishop Óscar Romero further adds to this list. In young adult literature, we see larger compendiums of heroes in Juan Felipe Herrera's *Portraits of Hispanic American Heroes* (2014) and Margarita Engle's *Bravo: Poems about Amazing Hispanics!* (2017).

Drawing on Desiree Martin's concept of secular sainthood as well as studies of traditional religious hagiography, my paper points to the way these books utilize word and image to highlight the significance of these popular "saints" and, by extension, social justice as a way of life. Simply put, the "saints" in these books signal to young Latinxers the importance of social justice and activism, specifically in regards to issues of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and belonging. Further, the choices of "saints" from throughout Latin America and the US testify to the ways in which this contemporary hagiography is transnational in nature. Young Latinx readers, thus, are invited to envision themselves as part of a wider and more encompassing hemispheric imaginary. In this regard, finding "mirrors" means finding exemplars of social justice, showcasing for young readers the worth and potentials of activism.