

## **Building Bridges across Turbulent Waters: The Representation of Undocumented Latinx in U.S. Young Adult Literature**

Slowly, the traumatizing experience of crossing the U.S.-Mexican border as an undocumented, unaccompanied minor is making a presence in Young Adult literature published in the United States. Although still marginalized within the larger fields of American Literature and Latino Studies, the literary representation of vulnerable youth who survive the violent border crossing is emerging from the shadows. This paper focuses on the representation of Mexican and Central American children's migration narratives in YA literature. I examine the migration narratives of Mexican and Central American undocumented youth in various YA novels with particular attention to the discourses of gendered racialization and criminalization. I seek to explore a series of questions such as: How do YA novels depict the distressing existence of an estimated 2.1 million undocumented youth? To what extent does contemporary YA fiction either reinforce the dominant narrative of Dreamers as innocent children who deserve protection or portray them as racialized others embodying illegality? What is the "coming of age" experience like in an anti-immigrant, and indeed anti-Mexican political era? How might adolescent readers respond to the ways that the young protagonists cope with the fear of deportation given President Trump's decision to rescind former President Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)? Lastly, given the historical absence of Latinx migration narratives in YA literature, how might these works of fiction build bridges across turbulent political waters by helping adolescent readers better understand the root causes driving youth to flee violence only to cruelly encounter it again in their new home across the border? My hope is that by gaining a critical awareness of the ways in which violence has shaped the power dynamics around borders and "illegality," young readers will reflect and question the anti-immigrant rhetoric saturating the political sphere and prompt them to consider how they might work towards social change.