

Rhetorics of Democracy in the Americas, edited by Adriana Angel, Michael L. Butterworth, and Nancy R. Gómez. Penn State UP, 2021. 279 pp.

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As a digital scholar involved in a project that explores how visual rhetoric impacts historically marginalized populations during the Trump administration, I am keenly aware of how rhetoric produces and constrains democratic engagement, especially when one considers rhetoric's use in relation to issues of social agency, bodily autonomy, gender, economics, and politics. My own study has been limited to discussions of democracy within the United States, so *Rhetorics of Democracy in the Americas* served as a fitting introduction to expand my understanding of the larger "democratic culture" that editors, Angel, Butterworth, and Gómez argue unites the Americas (1). To this end, the editors collected "voices and standpoints of Latin American authors who have themselves experienced the colonial, political, and social realities of the region" (4). The eleven essays included in this book demonstrate many of the ways that rhetoric is "a multifaceted phenomenon that works ideologically, mythologically and ritualistically to constitute cultures and foster the construction of collective identities for social movements and activism in the Americas" (15). Via the lens of Latin America, editors Angel, Butterworth, and Gómez expand the definition of democracy and attempt to decenter the historically-centered Western and US perspectives that dominate most discussions of the subject. Decentering dominant narratives can be challenging, though, because of the United States' involvement in the politics, economics, and social structures of many countries within the Americas. In addition, this volume is published in the States, so readers might reasonably ask how the collection adds to conversations held stateside about rhetorics of democracy. This collection answers this question by demonstrating that the Americas more broadly conceived—and more broadly recognized—have much to contribute in terms of discussions of power and embodiment beyond their localized moments, places, and practices.

Rhetorics of Democracy in the Americas is divided into two parts that elucidate theory and practice, and the division both creates moments of insight as well as asks much of readers, especially because chapters are focused on such historically, geographically, and socially varied communities across seven different countries within the Americas. The section "Questioning the Narratives of Democracy Beyond the West" contains five chapters that challenge how democracy is defined and constituted. The first two chapters rely heavily on theory and situate the book in terms of how the editors wish readers to approach the book as a whole. In "The Democratic Hemisphere," Christa J. Olson argues that democracy is not just about people; it is also about land and the land as agent. Topography "imprints its inhabitants, marking us"

and the structures created by those who live on it (25). Therefore, arbitrary demarcations of borders do not create or constitute countries but rather the decisions of material and embodied actors. I was reminded here that those in close proximity to one another have more in common with each other than those who may live on the other side of any arbitrary lines made by humans to delineate spaces and places. The second chapter, “A Strange Democracy: Rhetoric, Posthegemony, and Latinamericanism” by José Cortez, reveals the impossibility of a single narrative and uses *mestizaje* as a lens and method through which to view democracy in Latin America. Cortez argues that if Latin America is a mestizo subject, it is both “constituted in an act of mixture grounded in the condition of violence” and therefore is violent in its mixing (51). However, it is through this mixing and violence that there is possibility: a possibility of a democracy “yet to arrive,” which is not limited to Eurocentric definition and enactment (56).

The initial two chapters set the stage for the remaining chapters in the first half of the book as they illustrate the arbitrary nature of borders as well as the connectedness of countries within the Americas. Whether it is a discussion about how Trump’s anti-immigration rhetoric enforces an arbitrary line between the United States and Mexico, the diplomatic use of baseball to negotiate the political boundaries between the United States and Cuba by the Obama administration, or the in-between nature of migrants within the United States who simultaneously hold power politically in the United States and in their home countries, these chapters provide specific examples of a blurring of lines as democratic power and its function refuse to be pinned to a location or a people.

The second half of *Rhetorics of Democracy in the Americas*, titled “Problematising and Reconstructing Democracy in Latin America,” consists of six chapters that explore specific political moments, topics, or leaders with an emphasis on how language is functioning in those rhetorical situations amongst actors. Topics range from a discussion around the use of the word *corruption* in Guatemala, an exploration into the language used by women activists discussing femicide in Mexico, rhetorical analyses of leaders in Brazil and Argentina, and an examination of how language was embraced and weaponized in political decisions around gender ideology in Columbia. The final chapter turns from language to the spectacular by engaging rhetorics of the visual as they link to democratic representation in Venezuela. The chapters in this half of the book provide specific relevant examples of how democracy functions in the Americas. In doing so, they trouble and contribute to a more complex definition of democracy that takes into account democracy’s limits as well as its possibilities.

In terms of applications within the classroom, this book requires some effort on part of the reader to manage the diverse and complex histories of the

various countries described. Because of the breadth and coverage of this collection, it would best serve a graduate-level course in rhetoric (or even a course on politics in government that focuses on the Americas). The two chapters that focus on speeches of political candidates might provide advanced undergraduate rhetoric courses an opportunity to attend to extended rhetorical analyses that call for more than just a superficial understanding of rhetoric and how it functions within political discourse. Other chapters in this collection might be better used as supplementary sources for a politics and government course or a course that centers Latin America or Central America, especially if these courses seek to understand how language and rhetoric shape and contribute to political group or government actions. While some of the chapters may be a heavy lift for novices, all provide opportunities for engagement and education surrounding the political activities of the countries described within.

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