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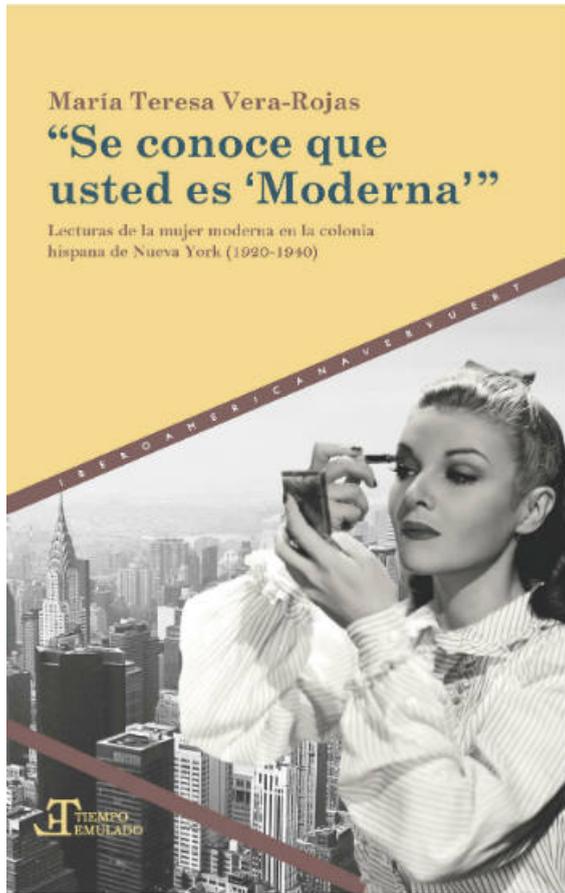


Se conoce que usted es ‘Moderna’: Lecturas de la mujer moderna en la colonia hispana de Nueva York (1920-1940) by María Teresa Vera-Rojas

Vera-Rojas, María Teresa. *Se conoce que usted es ‘Moderna’: Lecturas de la mujer moderna en la colonia hispana de Nueva York (1920-1940)*. Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2018. 395 pages.

Any study focused on 20th century press production in the United States must reference this critical analysis of Spanish-language newspapers, femininity, modernity, and the Hispanic woman in New York City by María Teresa Vera-Rojas. Through a carefully contextualized analysis, Vera-Rojas invites readers to consider the textual margins of three of the most important Hispanic newspapers in New York at the beginning of the 20th century: *El Gráfico*, *Artes y Letras*, and *La Prensa*. While many studies about the press culture during this time period have focused on the ways in which these newspapers supported the Hispanic community in terms of political objectives, cultural preservation, and intellectual proliferation, few, if none, have considered that which surrounded said articles and editorials and deciphered the images, cultural messages, and ideas proposed in the *páginas femeninas*. The close readings offered throughout the chapters of this book are supported by a theoretical framework that considers the contradictions and the external/internal cultural forces at odds when constructing, controlling, and/or redefining the identity of the Hispanic woman in early 20th century United States.

The introduction to the book is followed by a panoramic account of the ways in which the newspapers depicted femininity, feminism, and womanhood in the Hispanic community as a response to and criticism of the current cultural phenomenon of the modern American woman. The critical analysis of several articles provides a glimpse into the discursive practices that attempted to mold and inform the ways Hispanic women saw themselves in relationship to Hispanic men, with each other in their community, and against the modern American woman. This historical and cultural context then leads us into chapter 2 which explores the intersectionality between race, class, gender and politics of a community that finds itself surrounded by a modernization process that often brings about conflicting messages. Vera-Rojas seeks to situate and understand the position of femininity, feminism, and womanhood in the process of modernization of the Hispanic diaspora of New York City with a special emphasis on moving beyond the readings and including the reader. Next, the author takes readers into the intimate world of domesticity and how the publications studied intervened in promoting particular home life practices that were in constant dialog with American advances in



science, hygiene, technology and the likes, while also responding to American views about Hispanics. The marginalized spaces that Vera-Rojas analyzes are prime material for exemplifying the contradictions and tensions that the newspapers dealt with when making choices about content and commercial ads. Chapter 4 shifts from the space of domesticity to the modes of regulation of the Hispanic women's identity through beauty and the body. While the female body as an extension of the nation is certainly not a new topic, Vera-Rojas problematizes this trope by considering how messages about health, hygiene, and beauty also informed a nationalist and identity agenda for the Hispanic community while also being subversive spaces for Hispanic women. The last two chapters of the book studies two important protagonists of this era: the female readers of the Spanish-language newspapers and the American flapper. The author singles out these characters as vital to interpret the discourse surrounding femininity, womanhood, and Hispanic identity. The use of visual culture for both the flapper and the Hispanic women highlighted in the publications is argued to play a role in the identity building agenda of the newspapers while also informing Hispanic women's perspectives about themselves.

Ultimately, Vera-Rojas brings a new perspective to the traditional analysis of Spanish-language newspapers as focused on nation and identity building based on race and class. She also moves beyond simply reading the newspapers as straightforward didactic

publications with clear objectives for controlling Hispanic women. Her work steps into the margins and is comfortable exploring the interstitial spaces where meaning and cultural values are negotiated through articles and editorials but also through letters by the readers and images from American popular culture and advertising. Of particular interest is her view that Hispanic women of this time were not merely consuming or mimicking the images and messages presented in the Spanish-language newspapers or American modern popular culture; she demonstrates the agency of these female readers and writers by encouraging us to consider the how skillfully the interstitial spaces of the newspaper were used by them. This book is essential reading for those interested in Spanish-language newspapers, femininity, modernity, and the Hispanic woman in early 20th century US and offers an example of how press culture can be studied from a perspective that is often overlooked yet played a vital role in the lives of the Hispanic women who wrote for, read, and responded to these newspapers.

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