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**LATINX THEATRE  
COMMONS WALLACE  
PLANNING GRANT  
CONCEPT PAPER**

FOR ARCHIVING  
LATINE THEATRE

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SEPTEMBER 2024



LATINX THEATRE  
**COMMONS**



**Collaboratively authored by the Latinx Theatre Commons**

**Circle of Scholars for the Wallace Foundation Planning**

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LATINX THEATRE  
**COMMONS**

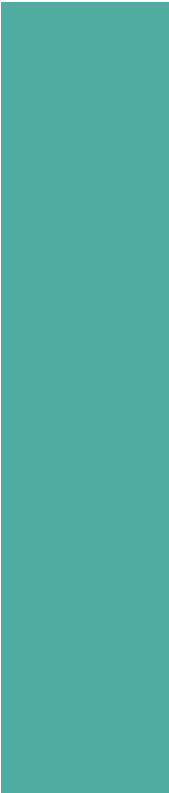
The **Latinx Theatre Commons (LTC)** is a national movement that uses a commons-based approach to transform the narrative of the American theatre, to amplify the visibility of Latinx performance making, and to champion equity through advocacy, art making, convening, and scholarship. The LTC is a flagship program of HowlRound Theatre Commons.

Our values include Service, Radical Inclusion, Transparency, Legacy & Leadership Cultivation, and Advancement of the Art Form. The actions of the LTC are championed by a volunteer Steering Committee made up of passionate Latinx theatremakers and scholars from across the country. The LTC Steering Committee a self-organized collective that has chosen to adopt a commons-based approach to advocate for Latinx theatre as a vital, significant presence in the New American Theatre. We foster emergent national leadership through an organic organizing method of activating our networks and expanding our circles of connection. We seek to celebrate diverse connections, honor our past with reflection, and envision our future with optimism and enthusiasm.



**HowlRound Theatre Commons**, located in the Office of the Arts at Emerson College, is a free and open platform for theatremakers worldwide that amplifies progressive, disruptive ideas about the art form and facilitates connection between diverse practitioners. Using a commons-based approach, HowlRound invites open participation from theatremakers worldwide around shared values and envisions a theatre field where resources and power are shared equitably in all directions, contributing to a more just and sustainable world. For more information visit [howlround.com](http://howlround.com).

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## A. INTRODUCTION

### Who are Latine/x/a/o peoples?

Latine/x/a/o people are persons of Latin American descent, who currently constitute 18.9 percent of US Americans. Latine people are racially diverse, with Indigenous, African, European, and Asian origins. Latine people are culturally and linguistically diverse, from over twenty different Latin American nation states with very different religious and political orientations. Latine people have had varied experiences of colonialism, racial capitalism, enslavement, war, and migration in their histories.<sup>1</sup>

Processes of naming make visible a historical revision that is not only genealogical; they also account for the changes in what is named, in what one wants to make seen. While Hispanic was the term used during the 1980s, then Latino/Latina, and lately Latinx, we have opted to use Latine over the others because we want to intervene in the US academy with a gender-neutral Spanish term that affords ease of pronunciation; this is indeed the nomenclature commonly used in Spanish in Latin America and the Caribbean. For us, Latino refers to the historically specific way in which the term was used in the 1990s at the very same time that the term multiculturalism was being questioned; Latina highlights women who self-identify as such. Latinx is gender inclusive, including trans and gender non-conforming people. Latine is more euphonious to Spanish speakers, and therefore it is the term used throughout this document.

<sup>1</sup> Latine is a geographic term, whereas "Hispanic" is a language-based term to describe the peoples from or descended from countries where Spanish is the dominant language, thereby including Spain.

## B. DEFINING LATINE THEATRE

### What is Latine theatre?

The most basic definition of Latine theatre is theatre created by, for, and/or about Latine people. Latine theatre centers the experience of Latine people and engages Latine cultural and aesthetic practices recognized and appreciated by Latine audiences.

This rather simple definition, however, is complicated by the reality that along with being culturally and linguistically diverse, Latine theatremakers are aesthetically diverse, utilizing a variety of influences, i.e. Mexican carpa theatre, Argentine criollo grotesco, Cuban Bufo, as well as Indigenous and Afrodiasporic dance, musical, and ceremonial traditions. Latine theatre, present and past, is necessary, urgent cultural work, which is aesthetically heterogeneous, linguistically hybrid, culturally engaged, and deeply resonant for all audiences. Its aesthetic diversity reflects the diversity of Latine identity and experience.

While it may be useful to concentrate on individuals who make Latine theatre, we are better served by considering how we are united as artists, collectives, and theatre companies with missions, visions, and goals to engage, serve, celebrate and support Latine communities. This work has emerged while wrestling with our histories and conditions as we continue to make our presence known in the United States onstage and off. Latine theatre reflects our negotiations as a minoritized and marginalized political identity within the still pervasive hegemony of white culture, amid the celebrations of our distinctive, diverse cultural expressions that have contributed to the formation of dominant culture for centuries.

Latine theatre is US theatre and American theatre, in the capacious form of both ideas. Latine theatre is produced by—or reshaped or reimaged by—individuals, teatros, and institutions that explicitly think of themselves in relation to one or more of the influences above. The simplest category is a self-identified Latine who often conceives of their work in relation to communities where Latine or Hispanic identity is present, and in expanded notions of the Americas, telling the stories of their communities would otherwise go unheard.

**This work has emerged while wrestling with our histories and conditions as we continue to make our presence known in the US onstage and off.**

While beginning largely in teatros and culturally-specific community and small professional theatres, Latine theatre is increasingly part of US regional theatre, Broadway, Off-Broadway, and Off-Off-Broadway as they more actively engage the heterogeneous complexity of their audiences as well as the artists, visions, and voices that serve them. Given that more first, second, and third generation Latine artists are accessing formal post-secondary training in theatre arts, this growth is not surprising. Until the 1960s, “American” theatre did not include Latine theatre in its self-definition; its inclusion since then has been hard won.

## Brief History of Latine Theatre

Performance in the Americas began centuries before European contact, beginning with Indigenous dance and ceremony throughout the hemisphere. The first performances in Spanish in the United States were religious in nature and were performed in Florida (1567) and present-day New Mexico (1598). Early records cite Spanish-language theatre productions staged in the United States from the late eighteenth century forward.<sup>2</sup> Spanish-language theatre would continue to serve Hispanic audiences well into the twentieth century. Yet these remained marginalized ventures; while the Federal Theatre Project touched many English-speaking audiences across the country in the 1930s, only one Spanish-language company was recognized. However, the mid-1960s marked the emergence of bilingual community-based theatre in support of identity and political action, spurred by civil rights movements and increased immigration. In California, El Teatro Campesino developed “the acto—short, often comedic sketches performed by the farmworkers themselves—as a highly effective form of political theatre”. The political motivation of El Teatro Campesino resonated with audiences beyond the agricultural fields, and in short time, teatros Chicanos (as the politicized Mexican Americans self-identified) were launched in urban centers and universities throughout California, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, and as far afield as Illinois and parts of the Northwest. El Teatro Campesino inspired many other teatros, often students, and

2 See, for example, Jorge Huerta, *Chicano Theatre: Themes and Forms*. Bilingual Press: 1982; Huerta, *Necessary Theatre: Six Plays about the Chicano Experience*. Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1989; Richard Flores, *Los Pastores: History and Performance in the Mexican Shepherds' Play of South Texas*. Washington: Smithsonian Press, 1995; Nicolás Kanellos, *A History of Hispanic Theatre in the United States: Origins to 1940*. Austin, TX: University of Texas, 1990; Elizabeth Ramirez, *Footlights Across the Border: A History of Spanish American Theatre in Texas*. New York; Peter Lang, 1990. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003; Adam Versényi, *Theatre in Latin America: Religion Politics and Culture from Cortés to the 1980s*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Key historical texts and forms include the *Popul Vuh*, *Rabinal Achí*, *pastorelas*, and *auto sacramentales*.





El Teatro Campesino performing during their national tour, 1967.  
Photo courtesy of El Teatro Campesino Archives.

formed El Teatro Nacional de Aztlán (TENAZ), meaning The National Theatre of Aztlán.<sup>3</sup>

In New York City, the Hispanic community was predominantly peninsular, from Spain, until the 1930s and 1940s, when Cubans and then Puerto Ricans migrated to the city and became attentive audiences. The Hispanic audience during this period favored peninsular genres and acting styles. The 1950s have been identified as the “nutritive stage of Hispanic New York theatre” for the infusion of Spanish American and Puerto Rican plays into the canon of peninsular works.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> “Aztlán” is the Aztec word for the lands to the north; the term was adopted by Chicano activists to refer to the land stolen by the Yankees in 1848.

<sup>4</sup> Miller, John C. “Contemporary Hispanic Theatre in New York.” in *Hispanic Theatre in the United States*. Kanellos, Nicolás, ed. Houston, Tex: Arte Público Press, 1984, pp 24-33.

In 1953, the staging of *La carreta* (*The Oxcart*), by then yet unknown Puerto Rican writer Rene Marqués was directed by Roberto Rodríguez Suárez with actress Miriam Colón. Colón and Rodríguez joined forces and formed El Nuevo Círculo Dramático, which, along with La Farándula Panamericana, were the two leading groups until the mid 1960s.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre (PRTT) began working in and with Puerto Rican communities throughout New York City, inspiring new companies. Two key Latine theatre institutions emerged: International Arts Relations (INTAR) and Repertorio Español. Other small companies were launched, producing plays that “latinized” the Off-Off-Broadway movement by retooling themes and aesthetics from non-United States traditions. However, those very aesthetics and the use of the Spanish language remained unreadable to English-language theatre critics who pushed their work away from Off-Off-Broadway to the then nascent Spanish or Hispanic theatre, as the newspapers referred to Latine theatre in New York during its early years.<sup>5</sup> While it is true that many Latine theatres that emerged in New York City in the 1970s did not survive, several have and are identified with the language of their performances. In 2014, PRTT merged with Pregones (founded in 1979), focusing on Puerto Rican theatre (including Nuyorican) and working predominantly in English, with Spanish woven through. Their theatremaking is notable for its infusion of music and dance in the productions. INTAR and Repertorio Español also thrive; INTAR focuses on works in English, and Repertorio on works in Spanish.

To the south in Miami, Florida, the first exiles from the 1959 Cuban Revolution arrived and transplanted two popular theatre genres from Cuba: *sainetes*—one-act comedy sketches, often with music—and *teatro bufo*. As Kanellos has argued for the Mexican American

5 Manzor, Lillian. “Momento Renacentista”: US Cubans and Latine Off -Off-Broadway.” In *Marginality Beyond Return: US Cuban Performances in the 1980s and 1990s*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Vol. 1. UK: Routledge, 2022, pp 68-118

community, it is through vaudeville and vernacular theatrical traditions that Cuban exile identity began to be performed. 1966 brought the launch of Teatro 66, which presented Hispanic and European avant-garde work. Teatro 67 then opened its own venue the next year for work in Spanish.<sup>6</sup> Teatro Prometeo at Miami Dade College was launched in 1973 and remained the only Spanish-language acting conservatory program in the United States (with a producing theatre) for forty-five years.<sup>7</sup> Teatro Avante was founded in 1979; Teatro Avante's success is evidenced in their creation of the prestigious International Hispanic Theatre Festival (IHTF), now in its thirty-sixth edition. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, many venues sprang up across Miami, and a considerable number of companies emerged with a repertoire that was Cuban in style but cosmopolitan in taste. Latine theatre artists gained visibility sometimes while transitioning from explicitly radical political thinking to more culturally-based approaches. The end of this period is narrated by many scholars as a movement "from the margins to mainstream."<sup>8</sup>

In Los Angeles, Broadway veteran Carmen Zapata joined forces with Margarita Galbán and Estela Scarlata to found the Bilingual Foundation for the Arts (BFA) in 1973. In operation ever since, the BFA produces works in repertory, with the same cast performing in Spanish on one night and in English on another. However, despite the long history of Spanish-language theatre in California, it appears that there are very few of them currently in operation. The Teatro de las Americas, founded in 1991 in Oxnard, California, is one of the few presenting works from Latin America, Spain, and elsewhere, in Spanish with English supertitles.<sup>9</sup> In Los Angeles, Teatro Frida Kahlo, founded by Ruben Amavizca-Murúa, produces plays in Spanish and/or English.

6 Manzor, *Routledge*, 119.

7 Manzor, *Routledge*, 120.

8 Huerta, Jorge. "From the Margins to the Mainstream: Latino/a Theater in the U.S.," *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*: Vol. 32: Iss. 2, 2008. 463-84.

9 "Obras Anteriores." *Teatro de Las Americas*, 2024, [teatrodelasamericas.org/obras-antiores/](http://teatrodelasamericas.org/obras-antiores/).

During the 1980s, “The Decade of the Hispanic,” shifts in theatre emerged as a result of increased national attention and foundation support. Central to this moment was an increased attention to multiculturalism and a logic of inclusion in which Latine playwrights often negotiated the burden of representation produced by broad cultural expectations about what it means to be Latine. This second generation of playwrights and directors began to develop work in the primary regions with significant ethnic representation of Latine people: California, Texas, Florida, and New York.

Responding to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), immigration policy, and US intervention throughout the hemisphere, in the 1990s, “The Decade of the Latino,” Latine artists more openly challenged United States politics in the Americas, often using humor as a tool for political critique. Feminist and Queer artists also began to take center stage during this period, illuminating the histories of sexism and homophobia within and outside our communities (some of which continue today).

From 2003 to the present, Latine artists, such as Lin-Manuel Miranda, Quiara Alegría Hudes, and Nilo Cruz have won Pulitzer Prizes in drama.<sup>10</sup> A decade ago the Latinx (then Latino/a) Theatre Commons brought Latine theatremakers together for the first time in many decades to celebrate successes and imagine the future as a group of diverse artists committed to working together in a commons-based model, to update the narrative of American theatre, and to acknowledge the contributions of Latine theatremakers and our theatre to the transformation of the American theatre landscape. The last decade has underscored our importance even as we have met the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 and other challenges in our communities.

<sup>10</sup> The first Latine to win a Pulitzer Prize for Drama was Nuyorican Nicolas Dante (born Conrado Morales) in 1976. He cowrote the book for the musical *A Chorus Line*.



The world premiere of *Water by the Spoonful* by Quiara Alegria Hudes at the Hartford Stage, directed by Davis McCallum, 2011. Photo by T. Charles Erickson.

This short history will serve as the basis for the more nuanced historiography we want to write focusing on Latine theatres across ethnic lines and geographical areas, seeing the history and development of these theatres (and the aesthetics they pioneered) in context with each other and the greater Latine theatre movement. While companies function autonomously, we seek to remember that they work in concert with each other, responding to similar political circumstances and histories and often collaborating at festivals, through residencies, or even through mailed correspondence in ways that transcend experiences of isolation.

## Latine Theatre: Production Practices, Political Advocacy, and Aesthetic Forms

**Production practices** of Latine artists are greatly varied. Perhaps because of the traditions of popular theatre in the United States and Caribbean, and the history of Latin American *creación colectiva* (collective creation), many Latine theatremakers in the United States engage highly collaborative artistic practices, community engagement, and overt dedication to political and social justice,

i.e. theatre for social change.<sup>11</sup> This is in marked contrast to United States's dominant commercial theatre practices. Less overtly political, culturally dedicated organizations are committed to civic engagement and cultural support in Latine communities that are or have felt marginalized, revitalizing national cultures, Spanish-language entertainment, and performance forms. Whether political or social, both groups are historically under resourced, often working with limited national arts and foundation funding.

Other theatres are more specifically centered on creating new work by Latine artists, primarily playwrights. Some of the Latine artists in these spaces, and those that enter the theatre world by other portals—namely through commercial theatre, queer theatre, multiracial theatres and feminist theatres whose missions aligned with their visions, may see themselves as individual artists whose primary concern is aesthetic. Despite this, their work is still often under-resourced, made with modest budgets. When produced within predominantly white institutions, there is additional pressure to create “diverse” audiences, even as these artists are perpetually perceived as “emerging” artists, even in mid-career. In summary, Latine modes of theatre production are diverse, complicated, and include, but do not necessarily center, commercial production.

**Political Advocacy:** Latine theatre is often politically and socially engaged by necessity or default. Latine theatre is made by artists shaped by a complex set of influences: Spanish conquest and colonialism in the Americas, two nineteenth century wars of expansion in the United States (Mexican American and Spanish-Cuban-American), chattel slavery, political revolutions (including those in 1917 in Mexico, 1959 in Cuba, and 1979 in Nicaragua), and other forms of racial violence, economic displacement, and precarity. Other influences include environmental and accessibility concerns; changes in civil and immigration rights; continued United States military and economic interventionism in the Caribbean, Central America, and

<sup>11</sup> Latine familism, a social phenomenon prevalent in Latine heritage by which commitment to the family unit is valued higher than individual concerns, may also contribute to the proclivity for community-minded action. See: Susan Emley Keefe, “Real and Ideal Extended Familism among Mexican Americans and Anglo Americans: On the Meaning of ‘Close’ Family Ties.” *Human Organization* 43, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 65-70.

South America; and increasingly heterogeneous immigration from these regions. Similarly, the impact of NAFTA in Mexico has created ongoing conflicts over the circulation of goods and contraband; border policy is an unceasing concern, and growing solidarities with the Global South have also entered Latine artists' everyday consciousness. Latine theatremakers are as concerned with "international" affairs as they are with local ones.

Artist responses have varied but include direct political advocacy against violence and theatre designed to help audiences understand and cope with violence, including by sharing modes of production designed to garner empathy for the Latine experience in the face of dehumanization; theatre for the Latine community about the experiences and legacies of colonization, including immigration, assimilation, generational conflict, aspects of gender identity and sexuality, the primacy of upward mobility and centrality of the nuclear family; and, increasingly, theatre that inveighs against the cultural and racial erasure of Indigenous and Black heritage. As diasporican playwright Quiara Alegría Hudes so potently reminds us, the subjects of theatre can be invested in religion and spirituality; they do not need to privilege capitalist success or reject their families.<sup>12</sup> Theatre can celebrate life and community rather than dysfunctional isolationism. Theatre can attend to subjects other than the secular, Protestant, capitalist, upper middle-class family. In this sense, Latine theatre greatly differs from the values of US commercial theatre.

**Latine theatre often incorporates dance, music, and spiritual traditions, or references to them as part of the fabric of the play in ways that break with traditional realism.**

<sup>12</sup> Quiara Alegría Hudes, "Pausing and Breathing: Two Sisters Deliver the ATHE 2018 Conference Keynote" *Theatre Topics* 29.1 (March 2019): 1-13.

**Aesthetic Forms:** Latine artists are trained in a variety of forms, including many cultural forms from Latin America, “Western” forms of drama, and hybrid forms. Latine theatre often incorporates dance, music, and spiritual traditions, or references to them as part of the fabric of the play in ways that break with traditional realism. These plays may also openly engage the audience in ways that break the fourth wall. Though most often written in English, Latine theatre can be bilingual, in Spanish or Indigenous languages, or any mixture of these, code-switching as necessary between registers to support an imagination that encompasses complex cultural realities. Scholar Frances Aparicio identifies heritage traditions of spoken word, Caribbean rhythms, and musicality, as well as bilingual “flex/ability” as signifiers of late twentieth century Nuyorican writing.<sup>13</sup> Playwright Caridad Svich has argued for a baroque language quality in Latine theatre, and there is certainly an attention to poetic language and the power of storytelling in Latine theatremaking.<sup>14</sup> Latine theatre is dedicated to finding its necessary language to authentically express its experience.

Concepts such as hybridity, transculturation, transnationalism, and other terms reinforce a sense of doubled relationality in which the work is explicitly engaged with and simultaneously reimagines US practices. Until recently, and even now only in a few places, do university educated Latine artists in the United States have access to Latine theatre pedagogies and histories. Additionally, many Latin American artists have adapted Eurocentric forms and structures. For this reason, we include adaptations of European and other classics produced, but not originally written, by Latine artists as Latine theatre.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps it might be said that Latine theatre is as wide as the Latine experience, which is heterogenous, contradictory, and culturally capacious. One powerful image that provides an organic crystallization of this condition is the understanding of Latine Theatre

13 Aparicio, Frances R. “1973: The Nuyorican Poets Café is born in an apartment building on the lower East Side.” *A New Literary History of America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009. pp. 977-983

14 Svich uses the term “Neo-Baroque.” Caridad Svich, “US Polyglot Latino Theatre and its Link to The Americas,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 16.2 (2006): 182-97. 192.

15 See for example, Carla Della Gatta, *Latinx Shakespeares: Staging US Intracultural Theater*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2023; Rosa Andujar, ed. *The Greek Trilogy of Luis Alfaro*. London: Methuen Bloombury, 2020.



as “An Octopus With Many Legs.”<sup>16</sup> This notion establishes a visual image of connectivity and difference and serves as a grounding to understand and argue for characteristics of the theatre as situated in language and language use, marginalization and difference, and relationship to community. The evolving definition is shaped by the complex individuals, communities, experiences, and aesthetics incorporated in a logic that suggests shared values, experiences, and approaches, which begin to provide a description of the intersecting interplay of influence and constructs of Latine theatre.

While some of these descriptors seem to relate not only to Latine theatre but to a range of other minoritarian theatre practices in the United States (Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI), African American/African Diaspora/Black, Indigenous/Native American) and some of the general practices of contemporary US theatre in general, this is no accident, as Latine theatre is ideally and increasingly understood as a part of a more self-reflexive and broadly inclusive conception of US theatre.

16 Originally disseminated in 1997 by Diasporican scholar Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez based on a comment by Chicana actress Ruby Nelda Perez in 1994. It is the title of Chapter 4 of *José Can You See: Latinos Off and On Broadway*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999.

## C. THE NEED TO ARCHIVE LATINE THEATRE

The archive remains a viable site for learning, especially about the conditions and challenges that gave rise to new change and opportunity. By offering context for the formation of archives, the archive helps us better understand where we are going.

Given the cultural importance of Latine theatre to cultural, political, and social history, as well as the need for theatre artists and scholars to understand the historical, cultural, and aesthetic particularity of Latine theatre, **the creation of broadly accessible archives is crucial.** Widely accessible archives of Latine theatre would prevent the kind of cultural ignorance and isolation described in Micha Espinosa and Cynthia Santos DeCure's *Latinx Actor Training*, by allowing artists full access to their histories with which they currently may have a distant experience or little relationship.<sup>17</sup>

### **We currently have no accessible narrative work on Latine Theatre.**

One of the reasons these archives are so important is exactly because there are few accessible narrative Latine theatre histories available. We cannot give our students a parallel option to the famous collection by James Hatch and Errol Hill on the history of African American theatre as a starting point, in part because of the lack of accessible archives. Other than works by Jorge Huerta and Nicolás Kanellos, there are few books written on the history of Latine theatre before the 1990s, by which time scholars were no longer encouraged to write narrative comprehensive theatre history books, but instead were expected to write more narrowly focused thematic and/or regionally bounded studies, compounding the issue. Recent engagements in historiography include Beatriz J. Rizk's *A History of Latinx Performing Arts in the U.S.* (Routledge 2023) and *The Routledge Companion to Latine Theatre and Performance* (Routledge 2024), edited by Noe Montez and Olga Sanchez Saltveit, but these ambitious volumes cannot replace the depth of knowledge that robust archives can provide.

<sup>17</sup> Micha Espinosa and Cynthia Santos DeCure. *Latinx Actor Training*. New York: Routledge, 2023.



Servant Poncia (Stephanie Diaz, standing) speaks to sisters Angustias (Claudia Quesada, left), Martirio (Ayssette Muñoz) and Magdalena (Sonya Madrigal) in *¡Bernarda!*, Emilio Williams's adaptation of Federico García Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*, a Teatro Vista production at Steppenwolf Theatre, 2023. Photo by Joel Maisonet.

**Students, scholars, and artists need access to archives to understand the impact of Latine theatres of social change** and collectively created works on social history and theatre history. While many of the collective works were never published, the flurry of presses dedicated to publishing writers of color, such as Arte Público and Kitchen Table Press, largely disappeared by the 2000s (with the exception of Arte Público). Alexander Street Press's Latine collection does not fill this gap and is not an open source. Giving working artists access to archives is a double register; the archives help artists identify what needs to be created. The lack of present archives also impoverishes the cultural history of the United States, in which, at present, Latine cultural production plays a nearly insignificant role in this narrative, as it does in mainstream theatre history despite its actual impact on both.

**The need to diversify US theatre production and pedagogy relies upon access to these archives as does the rewriting of US theatre history.** Artists cannot reimagine US theatre as truly inclusive without access to their history, and scholars cannot write new histories without access to archives that detail that history and its precedents. The creation of accessible Latine archives would prevent artists, especially emerging Latine artists, from having to start from zero when researching Latine theatre practices. Accessible archives would also allow instructors to assign primary sources to their students to support

this form of learning and allow instructors who are not experts in the field to educate themselves as they educate others and diversify their syllabi. Making these archives less hard to reach, geographically and financially, would make this type of research more possible and transformative for a field actively striving for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**Access to Latine archives would work against gaps of knowledge across national borders.**

One of the most difficult challenges faced by artists and scholars dedicated to transnational collaboration, cultural understanding, and analysis is the lack of access to Latine theatre histories for scholars and artists outside of the United States. The creation of these archives would greatly enrich scholarship and artistic production on a global scale, unimpeded by national embargoes, economic disparities, and differential access to travel.

**Correctly archiving Latine theatre is a mode for correctly categorizing Latine peoples.**

The current apparatus misspells Latine names, and twentieth century archival logics elide Latine peoples. Just as the Census does not know how to categorize us, neither do libraries. Within universities, Latine Studies and even Ethnic Studies often function as a pop-up initiative embedded in pre-existing departments; leading institutions are unsure of our place both within the institution and in history more largely. A recategorization of our theatre work permits a resorting of Latina/o/e/x for legibility more widely.

**Current modes of archiving are in crisis.** The collapse of trade journalism and the national theatre reviewing system resulted in a crisis of documentation about the arts. Latine theatre has been particularly impacted by this. For example, the *Village Voice*, a longtime supporter of Latine theatre, no longer publishes on limited runs, affecting much Latine-produced theatre in New York. In general, the issue of paywalls—from local papers to the *New York Times* to academic libraries—inflects access to critical commentary, as well as to (formal, elite, academic, etc.) styles of writing. As a consequence, the importance of Twitter, Substack, and blogs increases, offering perhaps a greater diversity of criticism but also a less cohesive and reliable process of documentation.

## D. CHALLENGES TO ARCHIVING LATINE THEATRE

### Challenges to Archiving, or Archive as Afterthought

Many theatre artists, producers, scholars, and advocates think of “the archive” as something that somehow happens following the embodied work of theatre production. The always urgent immediacies of theatre production, in tandem with the operational pressures on both theatre organizations and individual theatre artists to think toward the next production, typically renders the task of attending to the needs of the immediate past as an afterthought. The sensibility is that archival work happens “after”— after the show closes, after the season resolves, after the company reaches a milestone, after the theatre ceases or shifts operation, after the manuscript is delivered to the publisher, after the website is updated, after some librarian calls, after someone dies... Yes, most theatremakers agree that building an archive is important. Even so, a peculiar sort of magical thinking also persists with the vague notion that some unspecified someone will someday have the necessary time, resources, expertise, and commitment to go back and collect all the relevant materials and somehow put them into an archive somewhere. This is both an historic problem and an urgent problem facing the arts.

Not infrequently, an individual theatre artist, researcher, or administrator recognizes the need for an archive and unofficially deputizes themselves to hold onto the archivable materials. But even here, perhaps due to the propulsive productivity pressures that characterize theatre and academia, even these unofficial “archives-to-be” all too frequently end up as boxes in attics, closets, and basements, in unplugged hard drives (or old storage media such as CDs and floppy disks), or in private cloud storage accounts. Across the Latine theatre ecosystem, there are almost certainly scores of such vast unprocessed and unorganized personal collections, rich with resources but vulnerable to neglect, decay, and disposal, and without a clearly communicated disposition plan to allow such materials to be routed efficiently to an appropriate repository.

## Ideological Challenges

The crisis confronting theatre archives is longstanding and **not unique to Latine theatremaking**. The American Theatre Archive Project (ATAP)—a project of the American Society for Theatre Research since 2009/10—has advocated for working theatre artists and producing organizations to become proactive participants in the archiving process. ATAP encourages artists and arts organizations to develop an ongoing archival strategy for their work not just after the fact but at every stage of the work (before, during, and after). The ATAP model invites artists and arts organizations to build an internal process where every document created as part of the work, whether physical or digital, has a designated archival destination from the outset.<sup>18</sup> Yet ATAP's mission of helping theatres and individual artists to build, organize, and maintain archives that will be of interest to repositories for easy transmission has also fallen prey to the general disinterest—among funders, administrators, and institutions—in subsidizing the time, labor, supplies, and expertise required to both develop and maintain an archival strategy for theatre materials.

### **Theatre is often marginalized within the arts and humanities.**

Recent online and accessible initiatives such as the Latinx Project out of New York University “explores and promotes U.S. Latinx culture and scholarship” but does not have a portion devoted to theatre.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, the *Latino Book Review* has interviews with several playwrights and a podcast, but it is devoted to print culture and does not offer “Dramatic Literature” as a field of writing alongside Poetry, Fiction, Nonfiction, and Children's Literature.

**Theatres and artists do not archive for themselves.** Theatres often rely on their in-house produced publicity and marketing information to serve as an archive, yet the legibility for a historical register is different. The newly-created National Latinx Theater Initiative (NLTI) seeks to address this issue.<sup>20</sup>

18 Susan Brady and Helice Koffler, “The American Theatre Archive Project: Carrying the Record of the Past to the Future”: *Performing Arts Resources* v31 (2015): 103-XIII.

19 The Latinx Project, accessed 6 June 2024. <https://www.latinxproject.nyu.edu/>

20 NLTI was launched in 2023 with a ten-year goal of raising \$15 million to aid funding Latine theatres. As of this writing, they have raised \$9.8 million.

## Structural Challenges

**Generalized gaps of cultural knowledge within institutional archives** regarding Latine populations and Latine linguistic, cultural, and historical specificity, complicated by the fact that many (if not most) Latine theatre artists are “multi-hyphenates” who work as performers, writers, scholars, advocates, and/or administrators in partnership in a broad array of institutional and organizational contexts. The few institutional repositories that exist face the challenge that the drive for many institutions traditionally has been to collect. With limited budgets, theatre collections may not have finding aids and other organizational elements that accompany full processing, serve research, and provide the infrastructure necessary for digitization projects and broader access. Only in rare circumstances is there collaboration between librarians and archivists and theatre faculty and artists in the processing of theatre collections.<sup>21</sup> Put another way, the multidisciplinary (and often multilingual, multiracial, or multinational) work of Latine theatremakers does not always sort easily into the indexical categories that typically guide the acquisition priorities and processing practices for archival materials housed by major repositories.<sup>22</sup>

Another challenge is the **failure of major repositories to proactively cultivate (and/or invest) in relationships with Latine artists and arts organizations**, resulting in an uneasy or ineffective disposition and/or acquisition of the materials of major Latine artists and organizations at the appropriate moment. This leads to an inconsistency of archival projects and, ultimately, an inconsistency or lack of access for those interested in Latine theatre history.

Because archives typically organize materials according to individual names/lives or institutional histories, **shorter-lived collaborative**

21 Lillian Manzor, Kyle Rimkus, and Mitsunori Ogihara “Cuban Theater Digital Archive: A Multimodal Platform for Theater Documentation and Research.” *Information Technologies for Performing Arts, Media Access, and Entertainment*, edited by Paolo Nesi and Raffaella Santucci, Springer-Verlag, 2013, pp. 138–150.

22 Eric Mayer-Garcia, “Theorizing Performance Archives through the Critic’s Labor,” *Theatre Survey* 64, no. 3, 2023, 247–70. See also Mario H. Ramirez, “The Task of the Latino/a Archivist: On Archiving Identity and Community”: *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 5.1 (2009).

**initiatives (like festivals) can be rendered illegible** (and thus vulnerable) within the standard acquisition and processing protocols followed by established repositories.<sup>23</sup>

The most prominent national archives (including the Billy Rose Theatre Division at the New York Public Library, the Harry Ransom Center and the Benson Latin American Center at the University of Texas at Austin, the Chicano Studies Research Center at University of California, Los Angeles, and at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC) include a wide array of materials relevant to Latine theatre and theatremakers. None however house “a collection” dedicated specifically to Latine theatre. Likewise, **none produce synthesizing finding aids or guides to the Latine theatre** materials housed in their collection, and none indicate that the acquisition of Latine theatre materials is part of a legible collecting priority for the institution.

## Organizational and Network Challenges

The challenge presented by **the proliferation of independent collectives** that define much contemporary Latine theatremaking—including among others the Sol Project, the Fornés Institute, Teatro Luna, Latinx Playwriting Circle, the Latinx Theatre Commons (LTC) itself—are characterized by revolving (often volunteer) leadership structures and co-production partnerships with host institutions. Such collective operational models reliably confound the conventional cataloging questionasked by institutional repositories (i.e. “whose archive is it”), which can freeze archival momentum.

**Vulnerability of Latine-specific hosted initiatives at institutional theatres** when decommissioned, moved between institutional homes, or deprioritized as a result of shifts in artistic leadership. Examples include the following: Latino Theatre Initiative at Mark Taper Forum; Hispanic Playwrights Project at South Coast Repertory; Festival Latino

23 Trevor Boffone, “‘A Home Page for All of Us’: A History of Café Onda: Journal of the Latinx Theatre Commons (2013–2018)” : <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/141/article/794745/>. On the complexity of archiving “digital native” performance materials, see also Douglas Reside, “Last Modified January 1996: The Digital History of RENT” : <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/theatre-survey/article/abs/last-modified-january-1996-the-digital-history-of-rent/4C9AC75413CF96721764123A4DCFAC1F>



at the Public Theater; San Diego New Latinx Play Festival at San Diego Repertory and La Jolla Playhouse; Teatro sin Fronteras at the San Diego Repertory Theatre; CrossingBorders at Two River Theater; among others.

**Vulnerability of independent archival initiatives**—community-based archives or public-facing internet archives—that require sustained investment of both labor and financial resources, as witnessed by the cautionary tale of 13P Theater Collective.<sup>24</sup> Independent archives built and funded by scholars themselves include Trevor Boffone’s 50 Playwrights Project (#50PP) and Carla Della Gatta’s Latinx Shakespeares archive. For these archives to endure, they will need to be supported by new funding sources, software, and additional labor.<sup>25</sup>

**Notable culturally-specific archives** dedicated to Latine theatre (including the Cuban Theater Digital Archive (CTDA) at the University of Miami; the El Teatro Campesino Archive at University of California, Santa Barbara; the Latino Theatre Initiative Papers and the Diane Rodriguez Papers at University of California, Los Angeles; the *Teatro Milagro Collection* at Reed College; the José Rivera Papers at Brown University; the Jorge Huerta Papers at University of California, San Diego; the Cherríe Moraga Papers at Stanford University; and Hemispheric Institute Digital Video Library at New York University) stand as indispensable resources for researchers, practitioners, and others while also demonstrating the breadth and depth of how crucial a rigorously curated collection of Latine theatre materials can be. That such culturally-specific archives are so few—and that many exist because the materials were donated by the artists and scholars—remains a startling reality of the contemporary archival reality for Latine theatre.<sup>26</sup>

24 Tracy B. Grimm and Chon A. Noriega, “Documenting Regional Latino Arts and Culture: Case Studies for a Collaborative, Community-Oriented Approach”: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43489651>

25 For the 50 Playwrights Project, see <https://50playwrights.org/the-50pp-list/>. For Latinx Shakespeares, see <https://www.latinxshakespeares.org/>.

26 Lilian Manzor, “The Cuban Theatre Digital Archive: A Learning and Preservation Resource for Theater History in the Cuban Diaspora”: *Caribe* 13.2 (2011): 71-94.

## Technological Challenges

**Vulnerability of digital resources**, especially e-programs and web-hosted dramaturgical resources. The uncertain durability of those digital assets, which are not infrequently removed or migrated within months of the production or when the producing organization redesigns its website, looms as a formidable archival crisis.<sup>27</sup> The constant evolution of web-based resources is itself the basis for their instability.<sup>28</sup> What is cutting-edge today will be obsolete within a few years.

**Imprecision of crowdsourced databases** (i.e. Internet Off-Broadway Database, Wikipedia, etc.) and the limits of optical scanning when used in large-scale digitization projects (i.e. California Digital Newspaper Collection, Digital Library of the Caribbean (D-LOC), Newspapers.com, NewYorkTimesMachine). Such databases and digitization initiatives consistently contain numerous factual, transcription, and indexical errors, especially in the spelling of Latine names and the titles of Latine-authored/produced works, which can result in relevant materials being mislabeled, misrecognized, or missed altogether.<sup>29</sup>

**The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) programs** and their ability to manipulate and widely disseminate false histories is a growing concern. It is crucial to have accurate public history accessible online, as AI scans such information and accepts it as truth. The challenges and opportunities AI present will be of much discussion and at a rapid pace in the coming years.

## Language-Related Challenges

One cause for this legacy of exclusion is language. Language has been a tool of both inclusion and exclusion wielded by dominant US culture

27 Brian Eugenio Herrera, "Evanescence": <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/613150/pdf>

28 This is also an issue within digital cinema. See Gary Baum and Carolyn Giardina, "It's a Silent Fire: Decaying Digital Movie and TV Show Files Are a Hollywood Crisis," *The Hollywood Reporter*. 15 March 2024. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/digital/digital-preservation-film-tv-shows-archives-1235851957/>

29 Noe Montez, "Decolonizing Wikipedia through Advocacy and Activism: The Latina/o Theatre Wikiturgy Project" <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/1/article/653174>

that privileges English and by Eurocentric Latine culture that privileges Spanish above Indigenous and African languages.

**Histories of linguistic racism affect which historical documents**

**remain.** While the United States has no official language, English is the language of the dominant culture; theatre created and performed in languages other than English was perceived as immigrant forms, not of the citizenry, and therefore second-class.

**Linguistic acquisition is less common during graduate study,** leading to fewer scholars who develop the skills to attend to Latine theatre.

**There is a significant drop off in Spanish-language proficiency by the second generation,** which highlights both the need for a bilingual archive and the challenges that a multilingual discipline creates when archiving.

## **Ephemerality of Theatre Festivals, Which Are Crucial to Latinx Theatre History**

During the first National Convening of the LTC in November 2013, four tenets were identified as critical components of the movement at hand: art making, scholarship, advocacy, and convening itself. Convening, which implies gathering, socializing, sharing knowledge, and working together in person, was held up as an important value. While the regular gatherings of the LTC have been highly documented and archived, there are numerous other festivals that have received less attention. It is crucial to acknowledge that Latine theatre festivals are more than performance outlets; they are locations of shared practices and aesthetics that have informed and nurtured Latine theatremaking for generations. As we undertake the work of documenting festivals and national convenings, it is crucial to rethink the conditions of curation and co-production that make theatre festivals possible, in addition to the process of documentation in the digital age. Several challenges arise, noted here.



2022 Latinx Theatre Commons Comedy Carnaval at Su Teatro, (left to right) Samuel Valdez, Jess Martinez, Jessi Realz, Milta Ortiz, Marilet Martinez, Katie Ventura, R. Réal Vargas Alanis, Fran Astorga. Photo by Montour Photography.

**Archival material for festivals is in a different constellation than other forms of theatre.** For example, the TENAZ festival was initiated in 1971, after El Teatro Campesino hosted the first Chicano Theater Festival in Fresno, California, in 1970. TENAZ was a coalition of Chicana/o, Mexican, and Nuyorican theatre companies under the leadership of Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino. The annual festivals hosted in diverse locations featured workshops and performances and grew to include more theatre companies from across the United States and Mexico until the final convening in 1990. Its geographic and programmatic scope over decades has resulted in archives held in at least three university libraries: University of California, Los Angeles; University of California, San Diego; and University of California, Santa Barbara. These archives feature program notes, photographs, meeting notes, and other ephemera from the festival's history. There are no doubt other materials stored as mementos in theatre offices and private homes throughout the United States and Latin America.

**Latine theatre festivals are often also Latin American theatre festivals.** Joseph Papp and the New York Shakespeare Festival produced the Festival Latino from 1976-1991. This festival staged work from Latinx companies inside of the United States and companies from across the Americas. There were numerous satellite festivals staged in the United States and Canada in the 1980s as part of the festival's growing popularity and influence.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Teatro Avante's Festival Internacional de Teatro Hispano (1986-present) offers work staged by theatre companies across the Americas, including Latine theatre companies across the United States.<sup>31</sup> Beatriz Rizk and Nelsy Echávez-Solano have chronicled the first twenty-five years of Teatro Avante's production history.<sup>32</sup> Teatro Dallas was founded in 1985 to "start educating the [Dallas] theater community about the rich tradition of Latin American playwriting," according to the founders' daughter Sara Cardona.<sup>33</sup> In 1993, the company launched its International Theater Festival, presenting productions from Latin America and beyond. In 2024, the biannual, (sometimes annual) XXI International Theater Festival will present companies from Mexico, Argentina, and Venezuela.<sup>34</sup> In 2005, Susana Tubert and José W. Fernández co-founded the Latino International Theater Festival of New York, Inc. Its TeatroStageFest Records are housed at the University of Miami's Cuban Heritage Collection, but it lacks a complete finding aid.

**Along with Festivals, Long-Standing Workshops Need to be Archived.** INTAR's Hispanic Playwrights in Residence Lab, directed by María Irene Fornés starting in 1981, and INTAR Hispanic American Music Theatre Lab (HAMTL) were pioneering workshops that provided training to several generations of Latine artists. The late eighties and

30 Della Gatta, Carla. "Finding the Festival Latino at the Library for Performing Arts," *New York Public Library*, September 25, 2018, <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2018/09/25/finding-festival-latino-library-performing-arts> The Billy Rose Theatre Division at the New York Public Library for Performing Arts holds the most extensive collection of materials on this festival, including audio and video recordings of performances in addition to other paper ephemera.

31 Avante's festivals have large collections held at the University of Miami's Cuban Heritage Collection. CTDA has many of these materials available online.

32 Rizk, Beatriz J., and Echávez-Solano, Nelsy. *25 años celebrando la cultura hispana en Estados Unidos: el Festival Internacional de Teatro Hispano de Miami*. United States, Ediciones Universal, 2013.

33 Astri-O'Reilly, Ana. "Teatro Dallas Imports Latin American Culture to Dallas." *Dallas Observer*, 15 Jan. 2020, [www.dallasobserver.com/arts/for-35-years-teatro-dallas-has-kept-latin-american-culture-on-dallas-stages-11846718](http://www.dallasobserver.com/arts/for-35-years-teatro-dallas-has-kept-latin-american-culture-on-dallas-stages-11846718).

34 "21st International Theater Festival." *Teatro Dallas*, [teatrodallas.org/productions/21festival/](http://teatrodallas.org/productions/21festival/).



María Irene Fornés (center) surrounded by her students in the Hispanic Playwrights in Residence Lab at INTAR in 1991. From left to right: Lorenzo Mans, Cardidad Svich, Leo Garcia, Oscar Colon, María Irene Fornés, Mígdalia Cruz, Nilo Cruz, Lorraine Llamas. Photo by James Kent.

early nineties saw the launch of two important new works festivals, both in California, dedicated to the development of new plays by Latine playwrights. The Hispanic Playwrights Project (1986-2004) was helmed by playwright José Cruz Gonzalez at South Coast Repertory, in Costa Mesa. The Latino Theatre Initiative (1992-2004) was inaugurated by José Luis Valenzuela at Center Theatre Group in Los Angeles, and later helmed by Luis Alfaro and the late Diane Rodriguez. Both initiatives brought together Latine theatremakers from around the United States. In addition to sharing new work that would seed and inspire the field, these projects also served as long-term opportunities for conversations on aesthetics, purpose, dramaturgy, and the state of Latine theatre in the country. The sunseting of both programs in 2004 was a blow to the Latine theatremaking community that had few other opportunities to gather so meaningfully around their art and industry. Latine theatre workshops not only fueled the field with new works but also fueled the professionalization of Latine theatre. These projects were emulated at Latine theatres around the country interested in nurturing local playwrights.

**There are a variety of approaches to documenting festivals.** Today, as scholars document various Latine theatre festivals, how do we consider and document the roles that festivals, curators, invited artists, and production venues play in shaping what work gets staged and how it gets staged? For example, as part of scholarly efforts to document the labors of the initial LTC convening and later encuentros, Brian Herrera offers one strategy for documentation, while Trevor Boffone, Teresa Marrero, and Chantal Rodriguez offer another. Herrera's *The Latina/o Theatre Commons 2013 National Convening: A Narrative Report* offers an accessible account of the events, conversations, and action taken during the multi-day gathering.<sup>35</sup> Boffone et al. created an edited collection of plays following Encuentro 2014 at the Los Angeles Theatre Center, offering a brief critical introduction to each play; and in their second book following Encuentro 2017, they included plays and more critical apparatuses and interviews.<sup>36</sup> The Cuban Theater Digital Archive has pages for various festivals and their different occurrences including festival guidelines, programs, awards, photographs, and other ephemera.

35 Herrera, Brian Eugenio. *The Latinx Theatre Commons Boston Regional Convening: A Narrative Report*, HowlRound/Emerson College, 2015.

36 Boffone, Trevor, Teresa Marrero, and Chantal Rodriguez, eds. *Encuentro: Latinx Performance for the New American Theatre*. Northwestern University Press, 2019, and *Seeking Common Ground: Latinx and Latin American Theatre and Performance*, Methuen Drama, 2021.

## E. CURRENT STRATEGIES FOR ARCHIVING LATINE THEATRE

The process of archiving Latine theatre practices and performances has been crucial to the preservation of performance history, as well as to the development of historiography for new generations of artists and scholars.

**1. Academic Writing.** Academic writing is a key source for building the archive. The role of scholarship in the evolution of Latine theatre has grown exponentially, as this report affirms. Initially, much of the scholarship was written in Spanish by theatre scholars housed in Spanish and Portuguese departments across the country. Spanish-speaking scholars reading and witnessing plays in Spanish, or bilingual Spanish-English, provided access to these works for non-Spanish theatre scholars who would be otherwise unaware of this rich and vibrant theatre.

Dedicated book projects tracing **the histories of individual Latine Theatre companies**, akin to works such as *Pregonos Theatre: A Theatre for Social Change* and *El Teatro Campesino: Theatre in the Chicano Movement*.

Books tracing **the history of Latine-specific theatre initiatives and new works programs**, such as *The Latino Theatre Initiative/Center Theatre Group Papers, 1980-2005*.

Books chronicling **the evolution of Latine artist training across various disciplines**, like *Latinx Actor Training* and *Theater of the Sphere*, with potential future focus on design, dramaturgy, and management approaches.

**Anthologies of plays by single authors, companies, and/or programming at local, national, regional, and international festivals**, like *Plays from South Coast Repertory: Hispanic Playwrights Project Anthology*, *Encuentro: Latinx Performance for the New American*



*Theater, and Seeking Common Ground: Latinx and Latin American Theatre and Performance.*

**2. Archiving the process of theatremaking as theatre itself** (process is product). Courtney Flores and Regina Garcia started *La Esquinita*, a series in the *HowlRound Journal* that showcased designers.<sup>37</sup> Although successful, showcasing designers with text isn't as effective as with video and pictures, a multimedia approach. Flores and Garcia pushed for more representation at the Carnival of New Latinx Work in 2018, which saw designers heavily featured and fully part of the creative process.<sup>38</sup> While these efforts pushed the needle on documenting the work of Latine designers, a formal mode of archiving the Latine theatre design and implementations process still doesn't exist. This is a critical component of Latine theatremaking that is so informed by Latine aesthetic traditions in the visual arts, music, and dance.

**3. Websites**, such as those pertaining to theatre companies, allow for access to photographs and videos that reveal aspects of staging performance and audience interaction that cannot be collected in the same way through written documentation. Websites themselves also need to be archived.

**4. Social media.** Although social media platforms fluctuate in terms of uses, influence, and popularity, these platforms are cutting-edge spaces that document theatre history and current movements.<sup>39</sup> Many of these methods are out-of-the-box yet can reach wide audiences, including those outside of the typical theatre-going demographic. Social media features an expansive set of platforms that range from legacy status apps (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube) to flash-in-the-pan successes (Vine, Periscope, BeReal). There are also newer platforms such as TikTok that have quickly emerged as major players in the global social media conversation.<sup>40</sup> Platforms such as these have become sites for experiments in social media archiving and documenting.

37 Courtney Flores and Regina Garcia, "La Esquinita," *HowlRound*.

38 2018 LTC Carnival of New Latinx Work, <https://howlround.com/2018-ltc-carnaval-new-latinx-work>

39 Patrick Lonergan, *Theatre and Social Media* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

40 D. Bondy Valdovinos Kaye, Jing Zeng, and Patrik Wikstrom, *TikTok: Creativity and Culture in Short Video* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2022).

The theatre community has historically been an early adopter of social media platforms, and Latine theatre has followed suit.<sup>41</sup> The Broadway production of *In the Heights* relied heavily on Lin-Manuel Miranda's personal YouTube account as a space to generate organic interest in the musical.<sup>42</sup> Miranda regularly posted entertaining videos featuring members of the cast. Miranda was also an early adopter of Twitter where he amassed 3.3 million followers. As Miranda's celebrity status grew from 2008's *In the Heights* to 2015's *Hamilton*, Twitter remained a platform for Miranda and the *Hamilton* company to gain the largest following a piece of theatre has had in the social media age.<sup>43</sup> TikTok has also been a key space for the theatre community since its debut in the United States in 2018. At present, TikTok is as integral to a theatre's marketing efforts as Facebook or Instagram.<sup>44</sup>

**5. Public Writing.** Public writing is equally important for disseminating research on Latine theatre to broader audiences. Currently, limited access to primary sources, such as scripts, production materials, and oral histories, hinders the ability to conduct thorough and nuanced analyses of Latine theatrical productions and movements.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, theatre critics unversed in Latine theatre history and aesthetic traditions have demonstrated a tendency to inadequately review new Latine theatre productions, relying on stereotypes and popular misrepresentations upon which to base their critiques. This not only leads to underinformed reviews but potentially damaging ones that can negatively affect a theatre production's success at the box office and the potential for future productions of a misunderstood play.

**6. Curation of Exhibits.** There are very few curated exhibits of Latine theatre. Past in-person exhibits include the following: *Hispanic Theatre*

41 Aya Esther Hayashi, "'YouTube! Musicals! YouTubesicals!': Cultivating Theater Fandom through New Media," in *The Routledge Companion to the Contemporary Musical*, edited by Jessica Sternfeld and Elizabeth L. Wollman (London: Routledge, 2020), 374.

42 Elizabeth Titirington Craft, "Is this what it takes just to make it to Broadway?!: Marketing *In the Heights* in the twenty-first century," *Studies in Musical Theatre* 5, no. 1, 2011, 50.

43 Elena Machado Sáez, "Debt of Gratitude: Lin-Manuel Miranda and the Politics of US Latinx Twitter," *archipelagos: a journal of Caribbean digital praxis* 4 (2020), <https://archipelagosjournal.org/issue04/machado-gratitude.html>.

44 Trevor Boffone, *TikTok Broadway: Musical Theatre Fandom in the Digital Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024).

45 The Voces Oral History Center at the University of Texas at Austin is one such example. With over 1,800 oral histories available online as videos, they are not transcribed or indexed. Without searchability, they run the risk of obscurity. <https://voces.moody.utexas.edu/>

*in New York City 1920-1976*, presented by the Off Off Broadway Alliance, Inc., in cooperation with El Museo del Barrio, 1977 and *Pasión en Blanco y Negro*, documenting theatre in Miami 1970-1990 by Cuban photographer Asela Torres at the Miami Hispanic Cultural Arts Center, 2022. The digitization of these exhibits for the archive would make these presentations accessible to a wider audience.

Some current online exhibits include the following: *The Hispanic Theater Collection / Colección de teatro hispano* hosted online by the University of Houston, *Cuban Theater in Miami: 1960-1980* hosted by University of Miami.<sup>46</sup>

An example of scholarly and digital collaboration is the online exhibit of photographs that belong to Chicana cultural worker Ana Olivarez (aka Anna Olivarez). The photographs document her experience in Cuba between 1980-1985, the East Coast-West Coast Theater Brigade, and the exchanges between Teatro de la Esperanza and Cuban theatre between 1980 and 1984. Scholar Eric Mayer-García identified their importance for the historiography of the Americas and scanned them for his research. Metadata was created by Lillian Manzor and Helen Hernández Hormilla. The exhibit resides online, the photographs remain with the artist, and the artist and scholar co-wrote an article for the scholarly journal *Theatre History Studies*.<sup>47</sup>

**7. Digital Technologies.** Digital technologies function both to preserve and to spark Latine theatremaking. The digital humanities make archival materials accessible across multiple platforms. Popular and social media platforms make accessible materials that were unknown before the late twentieth century and that have transformed theatre practices, communications, and aesthetics. Ongoing efforts by major archives and libraries strive to create integrated search engines capable of searching across collections within existing library networks (like UC Library Search). WorldCat's ambitious ArchiveGrid—an invaluable if imperfect search tool designed to allow researchers to search for

46 University of Houston: <https://artepublicopress.com/hispanic-theater-digital-exhibit/>; University of Miami: <https://scholar.library.miami.edu/miamitheater/>

47 See <https://ctda.library.miami.edu/digitalobjects/collection/cta0057>. See also Mayer-García, Eric and Ana Olivarez-Levinson, "Intercambio: A Visual History of Nuevo Teatro from the Ana Olivarez-Levinson Photography Collection," *Theatre History Studies*, vol. 39, 2020, pp. 169-184.

primary source materials held in more than 1,400 different archives, libraries, museums and historical societies—reflects only those materials with MARC records voluntarily submitted to WorldCat, thereby excluding finding aids in EAD, HTML, or PDF format (even those from institutions contributing to WorldCat). According to Eric Colleary, the Ransom Center's Cline Curator of Theatre and Performing Arts, the ArchiveGrid has been “in beta” for years.

## F. DEVELOP A PHILOSOPHY FOR THE NEW LATINE THEATRE ARCHIVE

**We need to establish a theory for the Latine theatre archive.** While theories of the archive abound, most define an archive by what it includes and a canon by what it excludes. All archives have limits and guidelines governing what they accept into the archive. Our theory of the Latine theatre archive will prioritize access—linguistic, technological, neurodiverse, and within its structural organization.

The design of the archive will likely include a multi-prong approach, from the possibility of creating a central hub that holds original information to links to existing archives, the creation of an account to post information on various media sites and platforms, and the acquisition of digital projects to house them under one (digital) roof. The design should reflect a Latine Studies epistemology and praxis.<sup>48</sup>

**Playwrights and other artists need access to archives,** not just scholars. Latine theatremaking traces its modern history to the mid-twentieth century, when plays began being performed in English and bilingually for audiences who self-defined culturally as sharing heritage with Spanish-speaking peoples but who also spoke English, as participants in United States society, no matter how complicated or marginal that participation may have been. More than a half-century later, and equipped with greater resources, contemporary artists seek to better understand their theatremaking roots and traditions, so interwoven with and reflective of Latine history. Access to archives that can reveal the concerns, conditions, and results of early Latine theatremakers is a boon to the development of contemporary theatremaking. Being able to respond to the past is taken for granted in Western art; Latine artists deserve the same opportunities. In addition, increasing access to Latine theatre archives would foster the development of diverse and rigorous academic writing, offering opportunities for a variety of projects listed below.

48 See the forthcoming issue of *Chiricú Journal*, “Latinx Digital Humanities: Method, Theory, and Praxis,” (forthcoming 2024). See also Terry Cook, Terry. “What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift.” *Archivaria* 43, 1997 (Spring). <http://www.mybestdocs.com/cookt-pastprologue-ar43fnl.htm>



Production still from *A Mexican Trilogy: An American Story*, by Evelina Fernandez, directed by Jose Luis Valenzuela, Latino Theatre Company, 2016. Photo by Grettel Cortes.

**The archive cannot be defined by scholarly disciplines or segregated identities.** A new model of an archive must move beyond legacy language and concepts (finding aid, landing page) and correct the errors of the past 150 years. To document Latine theatre, the archive must interrogate the sorting categories that overdetermine how art is valued: algorithmically, per the Library of Congress, the Dewey Decimal system, Artificial Intelligence, etc. It must be built to be elastic and respond to the needs of the twenty-first century.

**The archive must integrate identities within and across Latinidades.** The first wave of Latin theatre was organized regionally, as much of Latine theatre was local and community-based. Artists migrate and people are more multiethnic today. The movements of theatremaking and theatremakers are one mode for challenging Latine history.

**Early Spanish-language theatre (pre-1960s) must be included.** Until the 1960s, theatre for Latine audiences were primarily created and performed in Spanish, supporting a strong cultural identity that simultaneously marginalized these audiences. In certain areas of the

United States with sizable populations of Spanish speakers, such as in the Southwest in lands that had belonged to Mexico and Spain before them, or in Florida, which had also been Spanish territory and then a popular location for Cuban migrants, Spanish-speaking theatre flourished well before those regions were part of the United States.

**For greater access, Spanish must be incorporated into extant archives** as part of their finding aids, and translations must be made available for key holdings. In its 2022 “Equity Plan/Plan de Equidad,” the National Endowment for the Arts recognizes Spanish as the second most spoken language in the United States, and speaks to its own failures of equity historically.<sup>49</sup> The “Equity Plan” and the NEA’s accompanying “2022-26 Strategic Plan” make a commitment to practices of inclusiveness, such as program guidelines in Spanish or increased support to organizations that demonstrate sustained commitment to underserved communities.<sup>50</sup>

**An expansive idea of Latine theatre must be incorporated.** Some works are not clearly solely US American or Latin American. Examples include playwright Jorge Ignacio Cortiñas’s and Caridad Svich’s plays in Spanish staged in Cuba. The Hemispheric Institute is a model for an expansive idea of Latine and Latin American inclusivity.

49 “Equity Action Plan of the National Endowment for the Arts (Washington, D.C., 2022), 8-9, [https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/EquityActionPlan\\_041422.pdf](https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/EquityActionPlan_041422.pdf).

50 “National Endowment for the Arts Strategic Plan, 2022-2026” (Washington, D.C.), <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/2022-2026-Strategic-Plan-Feb2022.pdf>.

## G. GO-FORWARD STRATEGIES FOR ARCHIVING LATINE THEATRE

### Expand Current Strategies

**1. Academic writing.** The archive can serve future writing. Just as we have illustrated the need to archive the historic documentation of Latine theatre companies and plays, so, too, do we need to archive its scholarship. In addition, the work of scholarly writing should be valued not solely in its finished product but also for the archival richness of the research materials gathered by the scholar (as their own kind of archive).<sup>51</sup>

Also, there is a need to facilitate the access to numerous articles, reviews, and profiles in academic journals dedicated to theatre studies or Latine Studies, providing platforms for essays, articles, and full scripts in Latine theatre and performance studies. Reviews in academic journals need to be sent to theatres as part of the publishing protocol; although these reviews are published after the run of the show, lines from the review may be used in a theatre's marketing or grant proposal. The current separation between scholarly and popular reviewing must be collapsed.

In addition, we need to create and send instructions to scholars on how to get their books listed in MLA International Bibliography and how to create an Amazon author account and update it with blurbs from reviews for their books, and we must create a network for junior scholars to share their work and receive feedback, etc.

**2. Archiving the process of theatremaking as theatre itself** (process *is* product). This may require video and multimedia forms to archive, not just written articles.

**3. Websites,** themselves, also need to be archived. This may involve creating snapshots of independent archival sites and housing them in a central hub, or it may involve purchasing them to ensure their stability.

51 Eric Mayer-Garcia, "Theorizing Performance Archives through the Critic's Labor," *Theatre Survey* 64, no. 3, 2023. 247-70.



**4. Social media.** Possibilities include hiring a social media manager for the new central archive hub. Creating a high-quality social media archive requires time, energy, training, and expertise.

TikTok has emerged as the platform du jour.<sup>52</sup> Theatre creators on TikTok benefit from the burgeoning #TheatreTok community that has become a major factor in marketing, ticket sales, and audience engagement. Within this community, there are models for how Latine theatre stakeholders can engage with a cutting-edge social media documenting campaign. For example, Latino theatremaker Gabriel Rodriguez offers dramaturgical analyses of Latine plays.<sup>53</sup>

The greatest strength that social media holds is its ability to reach audiences.<sup>54</sup> While other modes of archiving require those with interest to seek them out, social media archives can come directly to the social media user. That said, there is an unpredictability of algorithmic logic of most social media platforms, as well as the constant shifts in popularity (and functionality) of different social media platforms. The elisions between indexing and algorithms will continue to expand with AI.

Furthermore, the power of social media lies in the ability to reach young people (aged thirteen to forty),<sup>55</sup> an audience demographic that sees far less theatre than the traditional theatregoing audience.<sup>56</sup> As such, social media platforms are critical spaces to not only archive theatre history, past and present, but to grow new audiences who will ensure Latine theatre's longevity. Given these points, some scholars argue that mediated spaces are the theatre archive of the future.<sup>57</sup>

52 Trevor Boffone, *Social Media in Musical Theatre* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023).

53 Elena Machado Sáez, "Hype It Up: US Latinx Theater on TikTok," in *TikTok Cultures in the United States*, edited by Trevor Boffone (London, UK: Routledge, 2022), 117-125. Trevor Boffone and Danielle Rosvally offer another example by way of their Yassified Shakespeare project. Yassified Shakespeare is an in-depth TikTok archive with over 200 videos in which the creators educate audiences about queer digital remixes of Shakespeare. See Trevor Boffone and Danielle Rosvally, "Yassified Shakespeare: The Case for TikTok as Applied Theatre," in *Applied Theatre and Gender Justice*, edited by Lisa Brenner and Evelyn Cruz (Palgrave, forthcoming, 2024).

54 Bree Hadley, *Theatre, Social Media, and Meaning Making* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

55 Melanie Kennedy, "'If the rise of the TikTok dance and e-girl aesthetic has taught us anything, it's that teenager girls rule the internet now': TikTok Celebrity, Girls, and the Coronavirus Crisis," *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 23, no. 6 (2020), 1069-1076.

56 Boffone, *Social Media in Musical Theatre*, 81.

57 Sarah Bay-Cheng, "Theatre Squared: Theatre History in the Age of Media," *Theatre Topics*

**5. Public writing.** Some ideas of public writing opportunities about Latine theatre include:

- Feature articles profiling prominent Latine playwrights, directors, actors, and other key figures in the Latine theatre community in places like the *HowlRound Journal* and *American Theatre*. Highlight their contributions, unique perspectives, and the impact of their work on both the theatre world and broader society.
- Reviews and critical analysis of recent Latine theatre productions discussing themes, artistic choices, performances, and their significance within the context of Latine culture and beyond.
- Showcases for emerging Latine playwrights and theatre artists who are making waves in the industry. Provide a platform for them to share their experiences, creative processes, and visions for the future of Latinx theatre. This is similar to the 50 Playwrights Project.
- Interviews with a diverse range of Latine theatre practitioners, including playwrights, directors, actors, designers, and scholars, about their inspirations, challenges, and aspirations, as well as their perspectives on the role of Latine theatre in contemporary society. Projects such as these are akin to the Latinx Theatre Alliance of Los Angeles' *Voces del Teatro Oral History Archive*, which is housed in Special Collections and Archives, in the University Library at California State University, Los Angeles.
- Documentaries focusing on Latine theatre practitioners, similar to *Theatre of Rice and Beans*. This film tells the story of René Buch, Miriam Colón, and Max Ferrá, founders of what are still New York City's three most influential Latino playhouses: Repertorio Español, PRTT, and INTAR. It also includes important theatre artists such as Migdalia Cruz, Nilo Cruz, María Irene Fornés, Jorge Huerta, Lin-Manuel Miranda, and others.<sup>58</sup>
- Development of educational resources, such as study guides or multimedia presentations, that explore Latinx theatre in academic and non-academic settings. Provide context, analysis, and discussion questions to facilitate deeper engagement with Latine theatrical texts and performances.

17, no. 1 (2007), 38.

<sup>58</sup> *Theatre of Rice and Beans*. Directed by Tony Mata, 2015.

**6. Curation of exhibits.** Exhibits, both physical and digital, would not only disseminate Latine theatre, but they would also help in understanding the context of the objects selected and their historical and cultural significance. Objects such as documentary and art photography, portraits of theatrical figures, personal belongings of the artists, directing sketches, costumes and sets, models and videos, billboards and posters, programs, and book publications all help to tell a story about theatre that is accessible to all audiences.

**7. Digital technologies.** One possibility may lie in an emerging awareness of digital technologies that can capture information that is not easily available through traditional archival methods of collection.

Current archives **would be well-served by digitization** projects that would make the holdings, whether institutional or informal, more accessible to the public and to Latine theatre scholars at large. Archival materials stored in file boxes, whether in libraries or theatre offices, are limited to in-person access; digitization would facilitate the creation of a central database accessible to anyone with internet services. Naturally, the technologies for storing archival materials must also be updated continuously. In our lifetimes, we have seen the tools of digital storage shift from floppy discs to videocassettes to DVDs and cloud-based storage strategies. As access to technologies shift, the strategies for digital archival storage must shift as well.

HowlRound Theatre Commons, while not a digital repository, also provides resources, publications, and information related to Latine theatre, including scripts, essays, and interviews. HowlRound offers an instructive example of the unpredictability and failure of indexing and searching functions on most resource-dense web platforms; again, the need for a finding-aid to think across platforms and repositories arises. This platform will be greatly enhanced when its contributors can access a Latine theatre archive that strengthens their research and publications. We must also create a finding aid for Latine theatre on HowlRound itself that offers an easy capacity to query solely within HowlRound's present Latine theatre tag that groups all of the articles on the topic together.

## Develop New Strategies

**8. Archiving exchange and pre- and post-show activity.** This may include panel conversations, photographs from theatre events, opening nights, conversations that are part of festival exchange, and more. These aspects of Latine theatre are often considered ancillary, but they are crucial to a holistic archive.

**9. Theatre for new media** should be archived as well. This includes Zoom theatre, hybrid performance forms, and social media works that in themselves are forms of theatre. Examples of digital native theatrical productions include the 2020 Cara Mia production of Virginia Grise's *Farm for Meme* or Bard at the Gate's 2021 production of José Rivera's *Sonnets for an Old Century*.

**10. Create public history.** Producing public history on pivotal moments for Latine Theatre companies and the broader field, aiding education in theatre management programs and preserving impactful leadership decisions.

Create and update Wikipedia pages for key Latine artists and theatres, enabling easy access to accurate information.

**11. Train future Latine theatre archivists and scholars.** We need to work with students—both undergraduate and graduate—working in collaboration with scholars, artists, and archivists. We will look into courses that use primary materials to inform development of Latine theatre courses based around primary materials. These courses will also serve to train students to develop basic archival skills and methodologies that they can implement in projects that can feed into this central hub. We will also look into the possibility of co-teaching or team-teaching Latine theatre classes across various institutions in order to capitalize on faculty expertise and foster exchange among students (something along the lines of what the Hemispheric Institute did for a few courses). We will also look into teaching the role of archiving (oral histories, Wikipedia pages, the LTC's value of resource-sharing, etc.) within Latine theatre courses.

**12. Building relationships with interested funders.** The story of any one Latine theatre production speaks to opportunities generated by communities and spaces that support the creation of such work. Too often, however, the story of those communities and spaces—particularly Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) ones—reflects an absence of resources and support from the greater national infrastructure. Festivals and theatres procure funding from organizations like the Mellon Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and state/local government grants. Individual celebrity funders such as Eva Longoria and Lin-Manuel Miranda have both established fellowships for artists. How should we leverage these initiatives? Support from granting agencies could provide opportunities to create oral histories of individuals produced or performed in work staged at these festivals.<sup>59</sup>

**13. Work with organizations to help them understand the centrality of Latine theatre** as a key form of cultural production. With the institution of the Museum of the American Latino in 2020, the commencement of floating exhibitions in 2022, and evolving plans for a physical museum, the Smithsonian stands poised to be an important new presence on the national scene for performing arts collections specifically relevant to Latine theatre and performance.

**14. Online platforms for disseminations.** Collaborations with Latine theatre companies, festivals, and organizations to create multimedia content, such as podcasts, videos, or interactive websites that celebrate Latine theatrical voices and amplify their impact.

Archives are now created and stored in online platforms that can share their materials as quickly as they are created. What role might video platforms such as YouTube or Vimeo play in making performance more legible to theatre curators who look to plan events like the LTC convenings? To note, the collapse of Vimeo's viability (in tandem with the radical restructuring of Soundcloud) in the last year or so underscores the risk of relying on “free” but corporate platforms to host archival materials in the long-term; likewise, TikTok and YouTube

59 As the elders of Latine theatre have reached their eighties, the urgency of oral histories (and need for transcriptions) is paramount.

accounts are vulnerable to being shut down with little notice or recourse.

In trying to document the very process of curation and planning, what strategies might scholars and archivists working to document Latine theatre use to collect conversations conducted via email, as well as communication platforms like WhatsApp, Teams, and Slack?

**15. The central online hub.** We have conducted an environmental scan of available resources, and the primary conclusion is that we need a central finding aid for all of the current archives. This will serve as a place to start inquiry into Latine theatre. It will be searchable through various constellations, such as organizations, entities, individuals, and repositories. This will offer infrastructural support and fortify the resources that are already there, and it will be designed with interoperability with those existing sites.

The diverse collection of materials requiring digitization or already digitized underscores the need for a comprehensive, and regularly updated, finding aid or research guide to Latine theatre materials housed in archives and collections both nationally and internationally. No such resource for Latine theatre archives currently exists. Efforts are needed to promote public writing and engagement with Latine theatre history through digital platforms, public programming, and community outreach initiatives—all of which can benefit from a Latine theatre digital archive.

Needless to say, this does not exist anywhere. One attempt is the European Collected Library of Artistic Performance (E-CLAP), but what they brought together was the metadata for the assets. Some of the assets were then incorporated into Europeana. The materials they created can be very useful as we consider how to move forward. You can search some of the materials through the Europeana website. Another example is Spain's Centro de Documentación Teatral. They have a catalogue that can serve as a model for what we want to create. They also have an online teatroteca. Both projects had/have major funding from the European Union and different governmental institutions. If we plan ours well, we could aim for various large grants to create what we envision.

**We must:**

- Identify where the physical materials are.
- Identify where the digital materials are.
- Create a database for those materials that includes copyright issues.
- Work in collaboration with archivists to create a general finding aid or research guide to those materials.

We envision a central online hub, where the numerous, diverse, digitized, accessible archives, including websites can be catalogued and accessed online. Hard copy materials would remain maintained at their diverse institutions, but the materials therein are locatable digitally in a catalogue of archives.

The first phase will be to list and detail the materials in archives that have already been identified by archivists. The second phase will be to create an index of historical work that is not yet indexed, such as the numerous MA theses from the 1970s and 1980s that are structured like catalog narratives of discrete theatres or festivals.<sup>60</sup>

**16. Future funding to support the acquisition of materials.** Following the creation of a central online hub would be the acquisition of materials. This would include purchasing existing online archives (Cuban Digital Theatre Archive, #50PP, Latinx Shakespeares, etc.) rather than allowing them to sunset and risk deletion. It would also include acquiring ephemera on eBay, seeking the donations of personal archives, and creating an archiving strategy for the LTC.

Other aspects of this initiative would be to a) create and disseminate a process for people to gift their materials upon retirement or death,

60 The first MA thesis on Chicano theatre was written by Elizabeth C. Ramirez at University of California, Los Angeles in 1974. While Ramirez continued in academia and later published a book, other MA theses on similar topics are largely lost to a lack of indexing.

creating both a checklist and providing information for preparing their materials to be archived; b) acquire Latine theatre's private writing—letters of recommendation, grant proposals, personal communication, research that does not make it into publications—to acknowledge that this labor too forms an archive.



Latinx Theatre Commons Circle of Scholars for the Wallace Foundation Planning Grant at the Latinx Theatre Commons Tenth Anniversary Convening in Boston, MA, March 2024. From left to right: Patricia A. Ybarra, Patricia Herrera, Carla Della Gatta, Noe Montez, Brian Eugenio Herrera, Anne García-Romero, Olga Sanchez Saltveit, Jorge Huerta. (Not pictured: Chantal Rodriguez, Jon Rossini, Lillian Manzor, Paul Bonin-Rodriguez, and Trevor Boffone.)