



Latinos in the End Zone

Latino Pop Culture

Series Editor: **Frederick Luis Aldama**

Books in the series give serious critical attention to all facets of Latino popular culture. Books focus on topics generally that pertain to the making and consuming of Latino pop culture, including music, performance and body art, TV shows, film, comic books, web media, pop art, low-riders, sartorial wear, video games, sports, and cuisine, among many other areas.

Titles include:

Frederick Luis Aldama and Christopher González
LATINOS IN THE END ZONE
Conversations on the Brown Color Line in the NFL

palgrave▶pivot

Latinos in the End Zone: Conversations on the Brown Color Line in the NFL



Frederick Luis Aldama

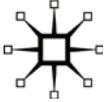
*Arts and Humanities Distinguished Professor of English,
Ohio State University, USA*

and

Christopher González

Texas A&M University-Commerce, USA

palgrave
macmillan



LATINOS IN THE END ZONE

Copyright © Frederick Luis Aldama and Christopher González, 2014.
Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2014 978-1-137-40308-7

All rights reserved.

First published in 2014 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®
in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world,
this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited,
registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills,
Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies
and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States,
the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN: 978-1-137-40309-4 PDF
ISBN 978-1-349-48690-8 ISBN 978-1-137-40309-4 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137403094

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the
Library of Congress.

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

First edition: 2014

www.palgrave.com/pivot



*For our girls Corina, Olivia, and Emilia—
the next gen of Latina/o athletes*

Contents

Preface: A Life Unexamined Is Not Worth Living	vii
Prologue: Kick Offs	1
1 From Scrimmage Lines to End Zones: Latinos in the National Football League	21
2 From Punishing Penalties to Brown Bodies Raiding the NFL	35
3 Sideline... <i>No Más!</i>	51
4 The Blitz... Heroes, Saviors, Saints, and Sinners	71
5 Three Latino Legends: Snapshot by Interview	89
Epilogue: End Zones and New Scrimmage Lines	106
Works Cited and Suggested Reading	112
Index	115

Preface: A Life Unexamined Is Not Worth Living

Our book sets out to uncover the invisible history of Latino professional football players in the National Football League, or NFL. In recent years, the NFL has been a professional league where Latinos have seemingly thrived in the high-profile positions of many of the marquee franchises. Yet the nearly century-old history of the NFL reveals that Latino players are not a new feature to the most popular professional sports league in the U.S. The sudden rise of Latino players exposes a lacuna in the NFL's history. It makes us ask where the Latino football players have been all this time.

While there have been many significant examinations of the intersections of Latinidad and American sports culture, there have been no book-length studies that exclusively excavate the Latino history of the NFL. In *Latinos in the End Zone* we trace the development of professional football as it coincides with the inclusion and participation of Latinos within the game. In order to allow for a free-flowing yet far-reaching exploration of our topic, we envisioned a Socratic dialogue where a great many related topics might be broached in an economy of space. Though we are both scholars accustomed to publishing in many different formats, choosing to give this history the shape of a conversation allowed us to maintain our separate voices (and with these our differing experiences and knowledge). This made for a judicious contrapuntal interplay of two independent voices that move in and around one another

to create the total composition that tells the cultural, historical, sociopolitical story of Latinos in the NFL.

Our ensemble of contrapuntal voices come together in the careful orchestration of exposition (Prologue), development (its interior five major chapters), and crescendo (Epilogue). The middle sections are composed as follows: Chapter 1, “From Scrimmage Lines to End Zones: Latinos in the National Football League,” provides a nuanced socio-cultural analysis of exclusionary practices and trends in the early history of the pro leagues. Chapter 2, “From Punishing Penalties to Brown Bodies *Raiding* the NFL,” considers several significant moments when Latinos *broke* through the brown color line, including the pivotal moment when two of the NFL’s most significant Latino figures Tom Flores (coach) and Jim Plunkett (quarterback) took the Oakland Raiders to two Super Bowl victories. Chapter 3, “Sideline...*No Más!*,” considers issues of access to education (GI Bill, athletic scholarships, and Affirmative Action), the increased regional diversification and heritage of Latino players (from urban to rural regions and of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Cuban origin), and the presence of Latinos in the globalization of the game. Chapter 4, “The Blitz...Heroes, Saviors, Saints, and Sinners,” considers the role of the community, the media, and capitalism generally in the rise and fall of Latino superstar players. Chapter 5, “Three Latino Legends: Snapshot by Interview,” includes conversations we conducted with three Latino football pioneers: Joe Kapp, Tom Flores, and Jim Plunkett. We turn to our elders to learn from their wealth of experience and wisdom as significant shapers in the history of the NFL.

With *Latinos in the End Zone*, we make the case that Latinos have a great stake in the game of professional football, both on the field as participants and as spectators who help drive the economic engine of the NFL. This is a history built out of collective voices and experiences. In many ways it is the weaving together of oral histories to convey the collective and collaborative work of those Latinos that made this history. What better way to tell this story than as a conversation—a dramatic narrative that includes more than us but that reaches out to you as the reader to participate in this exploratory journey of life in its myriad forms and activities.