

Booklist

Advanced Review – Uncorrected Proof

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★ **The Story of Spanish.**

Nadeau, Jean-Benoît (Author) and Barlow, Julie (Author)

May 2013. 496 p. St. Martin's, hardcover, \$27.99. (9780312656027). 460.9.

As with *The Story of French* (2006), authors Nadeau and Barlow once again present a thoroughly researched linguistic history, this time chronicling the evolution of Spanish. From its obscure roots in ancient Phoenician, to the more pronounced influence of Arabic (as in *azucar*, from *al-sukkar*, for “sugar”), to its spread to some 500 million *hispanohablantes*, or Spanish speakers, the authors cover more than 2,000 years in concise chapters with clever headings like “The Missionary Position” and “Waiting for the Godos” (a pejorative term for the less than warmly welcomed Visigoths of the fifth century CE). The influence of political figures such as the Castilian king Alfonso X, who standardized Spanish grammar, and notorious conquistador Hernán Cortés complements the distinguished literary achievements of authors like Spanish playwright Pedro Calderón, Peruvian poet Pablo Neruda, and contemporary U.S. novelist Junot Díaz. And readers will enjoy exploring the similar cultural motives for political actions as seemingly disparate as the Inquisition (intended originally to root out false converts to Christianity) and Arizona’s recent SB 1070, the harshest anti-undocumented-immigrant legislation in the U.S. Part anthropological study, part travelogue, this volume is an entirely compelling compendium.

— *Diego Báez*