



Bodega Dreams

By Ernesto Quinonez

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In a stunning narrative combining the gritty rhythms of Junot Diaz with the noir genius of Walter Mosley, *Bodega Dreams* pulls us into Spanish Harlem, where the word is out: Willie Bodega is king. Need college tuition for your daughter? Start-up funds for your fruit stand? Bodega can help. He gives everyone a leg up, in exchange only for loyalty—and a steady income from the drugs he pushes.

Lyrical, inspired, and darkly funny, this powerful debut novel brilliantly evokes the trial of Chino, a smart, promising young man to whom Bodega turns for a favor. Chino is drawn to Bodega's street-smart idealism, but soon finds himself over his head, navigating an underworld of switchblade tempers, turncoat morality, and murder.

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Bodega Dreams By Ernesto Quinonez Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Growing up in Spanish Harlem, Chino knew he needed three things to survive: a solid friend (his *pana*), a decent nickname--not some lame thing his parents had called him, like Tito or Googie--and a reputation that he would rather lose a tooth or get his ribs broken than back out of a fight. With the help of Sapo, "the meanest and ugliest kid on the block," Chino manages to make it as far as college before his life is endangered. He even attracts the attention of Nancy Saldivia, a beautiful Pentecostal girl so genuinely devout that she has earned the high school nickname "Blanca." In a typically vivid passage at the start of his debut novel, *Bodega Dreams*, Ernesto Quiñonez writes:

Blanca wasn't allowed to wear jeans but she made up for it by wearing tight, short skirts. She always carried a Bible with her and never talked bad about anybody and at school she only hung around with her Pentecostal friend, Lucy. Lucy was a hairy girl who never shaved her legs because it was against her religion. Blanca had hairy legs as well, but Lucy's legs were so hairy that everyone called her Chewbacca.... When the cruelty toward Lucy became too much for Blanca, she'd punish the boys by being the coldest, most serious person in school. Only Blanca could get away with this because she had an angelic face that almost made you want to sing Alleluia. Made you want to pick up a tambourine and join her one night in her church. Make a joyful noise to the Lord so she would begin to jump up and down to all that religious salsa. And maybe you'd be lucky enough to cop a cheap feel as the Holy Ghost took over her body.

Our narrator's luck is running out, though, and when Sapo introduces him to the mysterious, powerful Willie Bodega, Chino finds himself helplessly drawn into a criminal network. Even if Chino and Sapo's world is far from your own, you can't help but succumb to Quiñonez's funny, rapid-fire prose and his uncanny gift for dialect. The author's dead-on renderings of verbal tics and rhythms fit seamlessly into his depiction of the vibrant culture of East Harlem. *Bodega Dreams* is an unusually accomplished debut with all the right ingredients: distinctive characters, a troubling plot, and a seductive voice. --Regina Marler

From Publishers Weekly

Praise the lord and pass the hooch: this galvanizing debut is the novel East Harlem has been waiting for since the days of the Young Lords. Quinonez has a poet's ear for the barrio's Spanglish rhythms and idioms, a brujo's gift for describing its alma, and an intense, unrelenting streetwise energy. The book features a cast of memorable characters, including dim-witted Neno, who can't complete a sentence without quoting a song lyric; the nefarious barrio lawyer Nazario; the drug runner and possible hitman Sapo, who would rather be flying a kite from the top of a tenement; and cameo appearances by many real artists and poets. But at the heart of everything is Willie Bodega, a former Young Lord who has become the biggest drug lord of them all. Bodega is also one of the most visionary and magnanimous characters in contemporary fiction. He hands out money for tuition, rent, whatever anyone needs--asking only loyalty in return. Bodega has a dream of what Spanish Harlem could become, and no scruples at all about how the money to fuel his dream is acquired. "We were all insignificant," says Chino, the narrator, "dwarfed by what his dream meant." Chino is an artist who can wax positively lyrical when he is not trading hilarious banter. The plot is basic noir--the fall of an anti-hero--but it is wrapped with a glittering array of scams and schemes that keep it all hopping. Both dreams and realities are compellingly and coolly styled by this exciting new author, and the very few first novel faux pas don't much distract from his insightful and significant achievement. Agent, Gloria Loomis. Author tour. (Mar.) FYI: Quinonez was named one of the Village Voice's 1999 Writers on the Verge. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From School Library Journal

YA-Willie Bodega, a man of middle years, heads a syndicate that organizes the economics, justice system, and politics in Spanish Harlem. He works toward his dream of creating a rising professional class of Puerto Rican citizens with the aid of a tiny cadre of powerful, ultimately traitorous, friends. Using the voice of a barely post-adolescent youth to tell the tale of Willie's undoing, Qui-onez gives readers pitch-perfect characterizations, crisp dialogue, and plenty of action. Chino is newly married to a pregnant Pentecostalist who holds herself above barrio politics. He and his wife attend night school, work, and struggle to pay the rent. Chino's wild boyhood friend introduces him to Bodega, in a roundabout way, and against all of his better instincts, Chino begins to work for Bodega, dreams with him, and, in the end, takes his place. Realism and romantic adventurism are neatly bonded here, making this a book for eager and reluctant readers alike. In a market that is short on Latino novels of literary merit, this one stands out and demands attention from readers from all cultural backgrounds.

Francisca Goldsmith, Berkeley Public Library, CA

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Aaron Mullen:

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Eleanor Bender:

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Loyd Tyler:

Spent a free time to be fun activity to do! A lot of people spent their spare time with their family, or their friends. Usually they accomplishing activity like watching television, going to beach, or picnic from the park. They actually doing same thing every week. Do you feel it? Do you want to something different to fill your current free time/ holiday? Could be reading a book may be option to fill your free time/ holiday. The first thing that you will ask may be what kinds of publication that you should read. If you want to consider look for book, may be the reserve untitled Bodega Dreams can be good book to read. May be it may be best activity to you.

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