

Nationality in Latin America has long been entwined with questions of racial identity. Just as American-born colonial elites grounded their struggle for independence from Spain and Portugal in the history of Amerindian resistance, constructions of nationality were based on the notion of the fusion of populations heterogeneous in culture, race, and language. But this rhetorical celebration of difference was framed by a real-life pressure to assimilate into cultures always defined by Iberian American elites. In *Mestizo Nations*, Juan De Castro explores the construction of nationality in Latin American and Chicano literature and thought during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Focusing on the discourse of mestizaje—which proposes the creation of a homogenous culture out of American Indian, black, and Iberian elements—he examines a selection of texts that represent the entire history and regional landscape of Latin American culture in its Western, indigenous, and neo-African traditions from Independence to the present. Through them, he delineates some of the ambiguities and contradictions that have beset this discourse. Among texts considered are the Indianist novel *Iracema* by the nineteenth-century Brazilian author Jose de Alencar; the *Tradiciones peruanas*, Peruvian Ricardo Palma's fictionalizations of national difference; and historical and sociological essays by the Peruvian Marxist Jose Carlos Mariategui and the Brazilian intellectual Gilberto Freyre. And because questions raised by this discourse are equally relevant to postmodern concerns with national and transnational heterogeneity, De Castro also analyzes such recent examples as the Cuban dance band Los Van Vans use of Afrocentric lyrics; Richard Rodriguez's interpretations of North American reality; and points of contact and divergence between Jose Maria Arguedas's novel *The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below* and writings of Gloria Anzaldúa and Julia Kristeva. By updating the concept of mestizaje as a critical tool for analyzing literary text and cultural trends—incorporating not only race, culture, and nationality but also gender, language, and politics—De Castro shows the implications of this Latin American discursive tradition for current critical debates in cultural and area studies. *Mestizo Nations* contains important insights for all Latin Americanists as a tool for understanding racial relations and cultural hybridization, creating not only an important commentary on Latin America but also a critique of American life in the age of multiculturalism.

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