

# Abstract

## “Imágenes y esencia del mexicano: mestizaje y mexicanidad”

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Central to any analysis of *Mexicanidad* or the quality or essence of being Mexican is an understanding of the political, historical and cultural ramifications inherent in the concept of *Mestizaje*. Generally, in Spanish America south of the United States border (what I prefer to call Mestizo-America), the concept is limited to the marriage of the pre-Columbian peoples to the Euro-peninsular Spanish-speaking peoples. While there are numerous other mixtures, the Mestizo appears to be recognized as the most prevalent, projecting a particular synthesis of behavioral and cultural patterns unique in the Spanish-speaking world.

Analysis and discussion of *Mestizaje* must begin with the question of racial purity of the conquerors, the attitudes of race in medieval Spain, the role of the medieval Christian Church in promoting cultural and religious racism, the subsequent violation of natural rights of the Amerigenous natives and, most important, the recognition that this was *not* a meeting that was "sealed with a kiss" between Cortés and Malintzin but rather a violent cultural clash of two culturally and religiously diametrically opposed worlds.

Understanding these two distinctly different worlds provides a complex syncretic and often-contradictory foundation for the establishment of the *Mestizo* in New Spain. What follows are three

centuries of neo-medievalism with a vertically structured society. Moreover, the expulsion of the Spanish did not constitute significant change; for the masses it was merely a changing of the guard as the American-born Spanish *Criollos* assumed power.

At what point is there a clear delineation of cultural markers of *Mexicanidad*? Pedro Henríquez Ureña is probably one of the first to show the unique Mexican character found in the writings of Mexican dramatist Juan Ruiz de Alarcón. What follows is a series of concerted investigations into the unique make-up and characteristics of the Mexican by Vasconcelos, Samuel Ramos, Leopoldo Zea, Alfonso Reyes, Agustín Yañez and Emilio Uranga. Several questions are central for analysis: (1) the problem of *Mestizaje* as a still evolving phenomena, (2) the concept of the "Mestizo-American" intelligence, (3) the question of a unique "Mestizo-American" culture (4) the contradictions of cultural characteristics attributed to the Mexican by twentieth-century Mexican essayists.

As an extension of the Mexican, the Chicano appears to be in a unique position between both the Mexican and North American cultures. Like the Mexican, the Chicano cannot be stereotyped or generalized for there is no one prototype. As a point of departure, the analysis of the *pachuco* by Nobel laureate Octavio Paz leads to a discussion of the question of culturally inappropriate perceptions of Americans of Mexican ancestry. An historical and economic analysis must be understood before one speaks of cultural retention and/or rejection of traditional values. As the fastest growing population in the United States, will Chicanos be part of the trend towards assimilation into mainstream America or will there be, as in Mexico, a syncretism mold that seeks its own identity? What are the implications of a country like Mexico, economically underdeveloped, yet with some of the best prose fiction writers in the world? Mexico in fifty years became one of the literary giants in the world. Chicanos, with no access to literary presses before 1970, enjoy more flexible opportunities than their brothers south of the border despite an alarming dropout rate and poor education. As we move into the end of the century and their numbers rise and their power grows within the academic, business and political arenas, what will be their contributions in the area of culture and literature? Will they become part of the middle-class malaise or will they struggle, like the Mexican, for a unique place in culture and letters? In a time of fragmentation and ethnic conflict and strife around the world, what are the socio-cultural and literary implications as the colors of brown, black and yellow become more predominate in U.S. society? (**This**

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