



Crowding Out Latinos

Marco Portales

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In this groundbreaking analysis, Marco Portales examines the way in which education and the media act as immobilizing social forces to shape the Latino world that exists despite the best efforts of many Mexican Americans and other Latinos. The delicate relationships between what Latinos are and what they seem to be, as perceived both by the larger society and by Latinos themselves, create and craft a culture that students of American culture have not sufficiently studied or understood. As bandidos or gigolos, drug users or unwed mothers, Latinos continue to figure in the public consciousness primarily as undesirables. Despite decades of effort by Spanish-speaking Americans to improve their image in the United States, Mexican Americans and other resident Latinos are still largely perceived by other Americans as poverty-stricken immigrants and as second-class citizens. Accordingly, the great majority of Latino citizens receive substandard educations, equipping them for substandard jobs in substandard living environments.

The lives of Mexican Americans and other Latinos, Portales contends, can best be illuminated by looking at the history of Chicanos and particularly through Chicano literature, which dramatizes the impact of education and the media on Latinos. Like Irish literature, Chicano literature has sought to articulate and to establish itself as a postcolonial voice that has struggled for national attention. Through psychological and sociopolitical representations, Chicano writers have variously used anger, indifference, fear, accommodation, and other conflicting emotions and attitudes to express how it feels to be seen as an immigrant or a foreigner in one's own country. Portales looks at four Chicano literary works - Americo Paredes' "George Washington Gomez", Anthony Quinn's "The Original Sin", Sandra Cisneros' "House on Mango Street", and Ana Castillo's "Massacre of the Dreamers" - to focus attention on social issues that impede the progress of Latinos. By doing so, he hopes to engage both Latino and non-Latino Americans in an overdue dialogue about the power of education and the media to form perceptions that can either empower or repress Latino citizens.

Author note: Marco Portales is Professor of English at Texas A & M University, College Station and the author of one previous book, *Youth and Age in American Literature*.

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