



Mulattas and Mestizas: Representing Mixed Identities in the Americas, 1850-2000

Suzanne Bost

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In this broadly conceived exploration of how people represent identity in the Americas, Suzanne Bost argues that mixture has been central to the definition of race in the United States, Mexico, and the Caribbean since the nineteenth century. Her study is particularly relevant in an era that promotes mixed-race musicians, actors, sports heroes, and supermodels as icons of a "new" America. Bost challenges the popular media's notion that a new millennium has ushered in a radical transformation of American ethnicity; in fact, this paradigm of the "changing" face of America extends throughout American history.

Working from literary and historical accounts of mulattas, mestizas, and creoles, Bost analyzes a tradition, dating from the nineteenth century, of theorizing identity in terms of racial and sexual mixture. By examining racial politics in Mexico and the United States; racially mixed female characters in Anglo-American, African American, and Latina narratives; and ideas of mixture in the Caribbean, she ultimately reveals how the fascination with mixture often corresponds to racial segregation, sciences of purity, and white supremacy. The racism at the foundation of many nineteenth-century writings encourages Bost to examine more closely the subtexts of contemporary writings on the "browning" of America.

Original and ambitious in scope, *Mulattas and Mestizas* measures contemporary representations of mixed-race identity in the United States against the history of mixed-race identity in the Americas. It warns us to be cautious of the current, millennial celebration of mixture in popular culture and identity studies, which may, contrary to all appearances, mask persistent racism and nostalgia for purity.

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