

Article Preview:


Thoughtful, incisive, self-reflective, each of the books reviewed here offers for contemplation different and compelling facets of contemporary Chicano cultural criticism. That these three books appeared in the same year attests to the richness of current theoretical and critical work in the field of Chicano studies. More importantly, perhaps, they indicate some of the directions that American cultural, postcolonial, and ethnic and minority discourse studies can take in the next millennium.

The academic community reaps the benefit of these critical studies just as the efforts of other academics toiling in these fields have borne fruit: the long anticipated second book by the godfather of Chicano studies, Rodolfo Acuna's Anything but Mexican: Chicanos in Contemporary Los Angeles (Verso); Yolanda Broyles-Gonzalez's Teatro Campesino (U of Texas P); Rosa Linda Fregoso's Bronze Screens (U of California P); Alicia Gaspar de Alba's Chicano Art Inside/Outside the Master's House (U of Texas P); Tey Diana Rebolledo's Women Singing in the Snow: A Cultural Analysis of Chicana Literature (U of Arizona P); and The Ethnic Eye: Latino Media Arts, edited by Chon Noriega and Ana Lopez (U of Minnesota P). That these books have recently appeared is a good sign; that more are shortly to follow is even better. Already on the vine are eagerly anticipated contributions from such well-known critics as Norma Alarcon, Antonia Castaneda, Angie Chabram Dernersesian, Deena Gonzalez, Chon Noriega, Emma Perez, Sonia Saldivar-Hull, and Chela Sandoval. Despite the anxious battles waged over the racialization of the United States (including such violent eruptions as California's stance on affirmative action, the increased militarization of the U.S.-Mexican border, and the privatizing of the prison industry), the future looks bright for Chicana/o intellectual labor.

Amid this wealth of cultural-critical work, the three books under review distinguish themselves because they all, with greater or lesser insistence, ask the simple question, Where are U.S. area studies headed? Interestingly, each study evokes and engages different myths in order to answer this question: Daniel Cooper Alarcon calls up the myth of Aztlan, Alfred Arteaga the myth of mestizaje, and Jose David Saldivar the myth of the borderlands. (And here it must be said up front: these topics can only be discussed because Chicana writers and theorists have questioned the foundational myths of Chicano political and cultural discourses. The hard work of many women writers, poets, artists, and critics resonates throughout these texts.) As Arteaga, Cooper Alarcon, and Saldivar evoke their various myths, they aggressively politicize and historicize their own discourses. All three studies thus engage with the vexed desires of a Chicano critical consciousness that wants both grounded, historical, practical political planning and visionary, mythical, moving cultural inspiration. For this, the books are exceptional and invaluable additions to American studies.

Daniel Cooper Alarcon's The Aztec Palimpsest: Mexico in the Modern Imagination reflects on that most...
Book Overview. Mexico is more than a country; it is a concept that is the product of a complex network of discourses as disparate as the rhetoric of Chicano nationalism, English-language literature about Mexico, and Mexican tourist propaganda. The idea of "Mexicanness," says Daniel Cooper Alarcón, "has arisen through a process of erasure and superimposition as these discourses have produced contentious and sometimes contradictory descriptions of their subject." Read Full Overview.
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