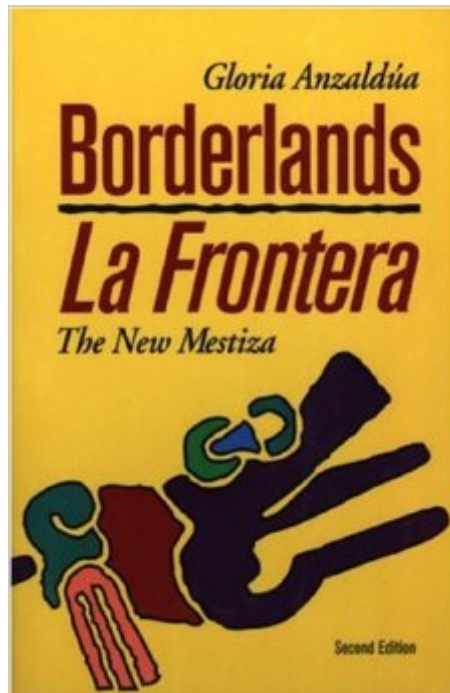


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Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera



Synopsis

Experimental, inventive, provocative and above all visionary, Gloria Anzaldúa's work is widely recognized among scholars of Chicano/Latino, Gay and Lesbian, Women's, Postcolonial, Ethnic and Cultural Studies as a foundational elaboration of the politics and poetics of cultural hybridity. Both *Borderlands/La Frontera* and *Making Face/Making Soul: Haciendo Caras* are all about understanding the complex and competing social, political and cultural forces that shape-sometimes quite brutally-the experiences of women of color in the U.S., and they are all about taking that understanding and mobilizing it toward creative and revisionary efforts for making social change. "One of the 100 Best Books of the Twentieth Century"-Hungry Mind Review (Spring 1999) "Anzaldúa's voyage of discovery, focused on the border and the new mestiza, is a preparation for the future. The border is a bundle of contradictions and ambiguities... This hybrid crossroads is just the right kind of training ground. It is fertile area for mutations and transformations. In *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa is our guide with an all-encompassing vision to charge the border with meaning."-The Americas Review "[She] explores in prose and poetry the murky, precarious existence of those living on the frontier between cultures and languages. . . .she meditates on the conditions of Chicanos in Anglo culture, women in Hispanic culture, and lesbians in the straight world. ...a powerful document."-Library Journal A "Best of 1987" Library Journal selection. "Anzaldúa's vision encompasses spiritual and experiential aspects of female power, as well as the day-to-day courage and struggle that has characterized Chicano survival."-The San Francisco Chronicle

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Anzaldua weaves a richly complex tapestry which explores many facets of "mestiza" -- of being "caught between" a variety of binary oppositions. Of course, the complicated cultural issues of mestiza are thoroughly addressed in this brilliant, spell-binding book. Also, issues of language (as she weaves a variety of languages and linguistic modes of expression in her text), sexual identity (as a lesbian woman), shamanic consciousness (which she describes as her "waking dream" or the Coatlicue state," and later as the "shamanic state"), and more. The political implications of the book are powerful and engagingly complex. Yet at the same time, the personal and spiritual dimensions of the book are intensely satisfying. I find this book opening up doors of consciousness for me in my own spiritual and creative life. I strongly recommend reading this book at night before going to sleep. It is the kind of literature that expands in the dreaming consciousness.

Borderlands/ La Frontera: the new Mestiza by Gloria Anzaldua is a wonderful piece of literature that refreshes and revitalizes the image of both Chicana/os and lesbians in a refreshing manner that exalts the power and possibilities immanent in both these marginalized perspectives. To reader who are skeptical of the legitimacy behind these positions beware, the immediacy of her prose and poetry may just convert you. But, regardless of ones knowledge of either contemporary issues in the more academic realm of queer theory and Chicano studies. The book is a wonderful achievement and insight into both of these very different and yet connected worlds, which are interlaced throughout the work. The English speaking reader may be wary of a book that does not cater to us as a reader-the book contains both passages in English and Spanish-however, even without access to the Spanish passages the book is a good way of getting to know a very different world than what most straight white middle class America is used to. The Book is composed of seven essays, which is followed by selections of her poetry. However, do not make the mistake that these essays are only dry theoretical, or historical tales, to inform the reader about the plight of lesbians and Chicana/os, even though this is in some sense what these pieces are about. But Anzaldua's means of presenting of factual material is more akin to the poetry in the second half of the book than what we might normally expect. Her mixing of these genre's serves simultaneously to explore new frontiers both in an aesthetic sense and to truly give new life to her subject matter. The result is a work which defies traditional modes of classification while simultaneously breathing an electric passion into the representation of peoples we might easily not have an opportunity to see or

hear. The metaphor of the Borderlands is an apt description of the book as a totality, while within the text this in-between space is central to her understanding of herself as a Queer Chicana writer. Anzaldúa resists the temptation to stand in either the sexually exclusive camp of Lesbian, or within the Ethnic label of Chicano. Indeed much of the book deals with the discrepancy and reconciliation between these two, and many other, seemingly irreconcilable positions. However, the author does not want to leave either of these positions by the wayside. Seeing instead that the uniqueness of her position gives her a power to critique her culture while simultaneously doing so from the very position that often removes her from it, i.e. her sexual orientation. Thus the uniqueness of the work grows out of this lively and powerful acceptance of herself and though we might believe that such a position is foreign to "us," whoever this "us" might be. The reality is that this desire to not lock-down her identity into neat and tidy closed categories might serve to benefit all people regardless of sexual preference, ethnicity, class, gender, age, etc. Beyond this central theme the essays also present a good source of understanding part of the Chicana/o experience through the dynamic sharing of their mythology, language, and culture. Though we might preface these essays with the notion that this is a creative work the scholarship behind them is evident as well, though not in any sense dry or boring, as some might "naturally" come to associate with academically acceptable material. And though some might come to her book with the assumption that it's "just another whining minority voice," such a claim would find little grounds for support within the text, whose tone is more close to political forthrightness than complaining. But politics aside the reason it is a great read is that it does not fall into an easy category, while at the same time stimulating a lot of thought particularly with regard to assumptions all of us make about sexuality and ethnicity, but also about language and religion. It challenges many and most of our usual way of looking at things. And though it does question traditional western/American institutions it does so in a way that opens up the possibility for change rather than decrying America as an innately evil, rather it gives us quite an impetus to rethink what we have learned about Chicana/os and people of alternative sexual orientation. The book is a must read, ultimately not because of who is writing it, but rather because it has something, an energy and authenticity about it, that should appeal to any open minded reader out there. This is not to try to nail her down in a traditional sense as speaking from one selective pulpit, because the authenticity and legitimacy really is something that bleeds out of the truth of her own experiences. As a middle-class white heterosexual man I find the piece refreshing rather than threatening, precisely because it more fully articulates a way of tolerance and understanding of all people, and yet doesn't lead us into a position of losing a foundation from which to speak words which challenge and insight.

The US- Mexican border es una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country, a border culture. --Anzaldua

This is a superb book. It approaches the themes relating to Chicano identity, and does so through poetry that extends from the included poems to the cultural-socioeconomic exploration that the body of the text undergoes. In response to negative reviews posted: yes, *Borderlands* does confront emotional and cultural issues brought up in other Chicano/ border-culture texts. So what. Not enough books have been written about this, especially in this format that reacts to Chicano/ border-related issues in both an intellectual and emotional/ artistic manner. The book does this with a beautiful poeticism that carries the essence of the hispanic literary tradition, bringing the culture of the written Spanish world into a primarily English-language book. The Spanglish included is intended for an English-speaking audience, and is not in my opinion of the true transient nature which is inextricable from spoken Spanglish. So at times the language of the writing does feel a tad contrived; using Spanish as a highlighter for key words of certain themes as opposed to allowing it even-handed participation in the exploration of the author's thesis. While somewhat obnoxious, this choice points to Anzaldua's desire to make this work accessible to people with little or no knowledge of Spanish. This can be seen as a beacon to draw in people who do not as yet see themselves as connected to the Chicano / Hispanic world. If you like this book, check out the other collections put out by Aunt Lute (the book's original publisher), as well as writings by author/ playwright / performer Cherrie Morraga, playwright Magdalia Cruz, poet/ artist Ivan Silen.

Other reviewers have covered many of the qualities of the work, so I want to dwell on just one point - don't be fooled into thinking that this work is useful only as a personal study on Anzaldua's cultural/gender/queer theory. Anzaldua is of high importance to any philosophy of the social; within her writing you can find the key insights of figures such as Derrida and Nietzsche, as they relate to personal identity crafted out of a fractured heritage. Her point is that we are ALL borderlanders given that the human condition involves being stretched across a chasm of self-alterity. Only through a full recognition of this can a critical inventory of the self be undertaken, which is a prerequisite to responsibility and genuine care of the self.

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