



Native Speakers: Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, Jovita Gonzalez, and the Poetics of Culture

María Eugenia Coterá

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Winner, Gloria Anzaldua Book Prize, National Women's Studies Association, 2009

In the early twentieth century, three women of color helped shape a new world of ethnographic discovery. Ella Cara Deloria, a Sioux woman from South Dakota, Zora Neale Hurston, an African American woman from Florida, and Jovita González, a Mexican American woman from the Texas borderlands, achieved renown in the fields of folklore studies, anthropology, and ethnolinguistics during the 1920s and 1930s. While all three collaborated with leading male intellectuals in these disciplines to produce innovative ethnographic accounts of their own communities, they also turned away from ethnographic meaning making at key points in their careers and explored the realm of storytelling through vivid mixed-genre novels centered on the lives of women.

In this book, Cotera offers an intellectual history situated in the "borderlands" between conventional accounts of anthropology, women's history, and African American, Mexican American and Native American intellectual genealogies. At its core is also a meditation on what it means to draw three women—from disparate though nevertheless interconnected histories of marginalization—into conversation with one another. Can such a conversation reveal a shared history that has been erased due to institutional racism, sexism, and simple neglect? Is there a mode of comparative reading that can explore their points of connection even as it remains attentive to their differences? These are the questions at the core of this book, which offers not only a corrective history centered on the lives of women of color intellectuals, but also a methodology for comparative analysis shaped by their visions of the world.

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