

the borders of several cultures are “trying to be honest in a dishonest world,” he says. “I think if something good were to happen, it would come from them. I think that they’re trying to live a life that’s not a lie.”

Those who might be viewed by some as having “odd histories” because they’ve spent their lives juggling codes or responding to the various influences within them are breaking down walls and erecting sturdy bridges through the mere act of living their lives. Granted, this vision appears mere chimera, almost utopian. But it is, for them, proving to be an integral component of psychic survival. In this period of uneasy transition, complicated by overwhelmingly rapid change, young people ride the periphery, and their lives do impressive battle with notions of a now-archaic “norm.” But their quiet revolution is fueled by much more than simply the adolescent ache to belong. It is a more honest, eyes-wide-open way to reach out and greet a world as confounding as they are.

ENGAGING THE TEXT

1. What, according to George, does it mean to be “gray”? How does someone become a “gray boy,” a “funky Aztec,” or an “honorary homegirl”?
2. Review several examples of the kind of “recombinant culture” that George describes. Can you think of examples of this new cultural style you have observed in your neighborhood, on campus, or in the media?
3. Working in small groups discuss whether it is possible to adopt multiple cultural styles, as George suggests, without losing your own cultural identity.
4. How does George explain the increase in racially motivated conflict within the new urban melting pot? Can you offer any additional explanations for the increase of racial tension within the new “recombinant culture”?
5. What, according to George, is the impact of college on the complex cultural identities of many entering students?

EXPLORING CONNECTIONS

6. Review the theories of prejudice outlined by Vincent N. Parrillo (p. 563) and Fred L. Pincus (p. 586). How might they respond to George’s assertion that the “concept of race” is already “behind” some young Americans — already a “clumsy piece of baggage” from the past that weighs them down?
7. Write a dialogue between Shelby Steele (p. 612) and George on the future of race relations in the United States.

EXTENDING THE CRITICAL CONTEXT

8. Collect as many media images (from films, TV shows, ads, music videos and lyrics, and so forth) as you can that reflect the “recombinant culture” George discusses. Are these images evidence of a genuine cultural shift oc-

curing in the United States or is all this talk of a “new melting pot” just a marketing ploy, a matter of fashion? What evidence do you find, if any, that America’s “racial categories” are actually changing?

9. Write a journal entry describing your personal experience of moving from the culture(s) of your neighborhood to the culture of college. To what extent does your experience confirm George’s claims that students in college often must deal with “cultural stratification” for the first time in their lives and that they are often forced to “choose sides”? Share your experiences in small groups and discuss whether you feel college works to polarize the racial, cultural, and economic differences between students.
10. Recently there has been growing controversy about whether it is possible or appropriate to speak with authority about the experience of a group whose sexual, racial, economic, and cultural background differs from one’s own. In this selection, George presents the case of Susan Straight, a white writer who has published a collection of stories featuring the experiences of African American characters. Do you agree that Straight represents a “quiet revolution” in American society? Would it be equally possible for a white professor to teach African American studies? For a man to write with authority about the experiences of women?

La conciencia de la mestiza¹ *Towards a New Consciousness*

GLORIA ANZALDÚA

*When Gloria Anzaldúa speaks of a “new consciousness,” she’s talking about creating a new self, about experiencing the world in a different way. She envisions a cultural evolution bringing new understandings of race, gender, class, and nationality. And in writing of the mestiza consciousness and the multiple cultures from which it arises, she uses a new language — a hybrid of English, Castilian Spanish, a North Mexican dialect, Tex-Mex, and the Indian language Nahuatl. Anzaldúa is editor of *Haciendo Caras: Making Face/Making Soul* (1990) and coeditor of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1983). In the last four years she has also published two bilingual children’s books. This selection is from her book *Borderlands = La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). Although we’ve provided translations, we suggest that you not consult these in your first read-*

¹*la conciencia de la mestiza: Mestiza consciousness; consciousness of the mestiza (a woman of mixed racial heritage).*

ing. Concentrate instead on Anzaldúa's main points and on her innovative blend of argument and poetry, of myth and manifesto.

*Por la mujer de mi raza
hablará el espíritu.*²

José Vasconcelos, Mexican philosopher, envisaged *una raza mestiza*, *una mezcla de razas afines*, *una raza de color* — *la primera raza síntesis del globo*.³ He called it a cosmic race, *la raza cósmica*, a fifth race embracing the four major races of the world.⁴ Opposite to the theory of the pure Aryan,⁵ and to the policy of racial purity that white America practices, his theory is one of inclusivity. At the confluence of two or more genetic streams, with chromosomes constantly "crossing over," this mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool. From this racial, ideological, cultural, and biological cross-pollination, an "alien" consciousness is presently in the making — a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*.⁶ It is a consciousness of the Borderlands.

Una lucha de fronteras / A Struggle of Borders

Because I, a *mestiza*,
continually walk out of one culture
and into another,
because I am in all cultures at the same time,
alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.
Estoy norteadada por todas las voces que me hablan
*simultáneamente.*⁷

The ambivalence from the clash of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity. Internal strife results in insecurity and indecisiveness. The *mestiza*'s dual or multiple personality is plagued by psychic restlessness.

²This is my own "take off" on José Vasconcelos's idea. José Vasconcelos, *La Raza Cósmica: Misión de la Raza Ibero-Americana* (México: Aguilar S.A. de Ediciones, 1961). [Author's note] *Por la mujer de mi raza* . . . : The Spirit shall speak through the women of my race.

³*una raza mestiza* . . . : A multiracial race, a mixture of kindred races, a race of color, the first synthetic race of the world.

⁴Vasconcelos. [Author's note]

⁵*the theory of the pure Aryan*: The myth espoused by Adolf Hitler and others of the racial superiority of white northern Europeans.

⁶*una conciencia de mujer*: A female consciousness.

⁷*alma entre dos mundos* . . . : A soul caught between two, three, four worlds. My head aches with contradictions. I'm led north by all the voices that speak to me simultaneously.

In a constant state of mental nepantlism, an Aztec word meaning torn between ways, *la mestiza* is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another. Being tricultural, monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, speaking a patois,⁸ and in a state of perpetual transition, the *mestiza* faces the dilemma of the mixed breed: which collectivity does the daughter of a darkskinned mother listen to?

*El choque de un alma atrapado entre el mundo del espíritu y el mundo de la técnica a veces la deja entullada.*⁹ Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference¹⁰ causes *un choque*, a cultural collision.

Within us and within *la cultura chicana*,¹¹ commonly held beliefs of the white culture attack commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, and both attack commonly held beliefs of the indigenous culture. Subconsciously, we see an attack on ourselves and our beliefs as a threat and we attempt to block with a counterstance.

But it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions. A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed; locked in mortal combat, like the cop and the criminal, both are reduced to a common denominator of violence. The counterstance refutes the dominant culture's views and beliefs, and, for this, it is proudly defiant. All reaction is limited by, and dependent on, what it is reacting against. Because the counterstance stems from a problem with authority — outer as well as inner — it's a step towards liberation from cultural domination. But it is not a way of life. At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes.¹² Or

⁸patois: Nonstandard dialect.

⁹*El choque de una alma atrapado* . . . : The struggle of a soul trapped between the world of the spirit and the world of technology sometimes leaves it paralyzed.

¹⁰Arthur Koestler termed this "bisociation." Albert Rothenberg, *The Creative Process in Art, Science, and Other Fields* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 12. [Author's note]

¹¹*la cultura chicana*: Chicana culture. Elsewhere in *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa writes, "*La cultura chicana* identifies with the mother (Indian) rather than with the father (Spanish). Our faith is rooted in indigenous attributes, images, symbols, magic, and myth" (Chapter 3).

¹²*see through serpent and eagle eyes*: "The eagle symbolizes the spirit (as the sun, the father); the serpent symbolizes the soul (as the earth, the mother). Together, they symbolize the struggle between the spiritual/celestial/male and the underworld/earth/feminine" (*Borderlands*, Chapter 1).

perhaps we will decide to disengage from the dominant culture, write it off altogether as a lost cause, and cross the border into a wholly new and separate territory. Or we might go another route. The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react.

A Tolerance for Ambiguity

These numerous possibilities leave *la mestiza* floundering in uncharted seas. In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, she is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries. The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche¹³ horizontally and vertically. *La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking,¹⁴ characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes.

The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode — nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else.

She can be jarred out of ambivalence by an intense, and often painful, emotional event which inverts or resolves the ambivalence. I'm not sure exactly how. The work takes place underground — subconsciously. It is work that the soul performs. That focal point or fulcrum, that juncture where the *mestiza* stands, is where phenomena tend to collide. It is where the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs. This assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers. In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness — a *mestiza* consciousness — and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm.

¹³the psyche: The soul or self.

¹⁴In part, I derive my definitions for "convergent" and "divergent" thinking from Rothenberg, 12–13. [Author's note]

En unas pocas centurias,¹⁵ the future will belong to the *mestiza*. Because the future depends on the breaking down of the paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. By creating a new mythos — that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave — *la mestiza* creates a new consciousness.

The work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war. . . .

El camino de la mestiza

The Mestiza Way

Caught between the sudden contraction, the breath sucked in and the endless space, the brown woman stands still, looks at the sky. She decides to go down, digging her way along the roots of trees. Sifting through the bones, she shakes them to see if there is any marrow in them. Then, touching the dirt to her forehead, to her tongue, she takes a few bones, leaves the rest in their burial place.

She goes through her backpack, keeps her journal and address book, throws away the muni-bart metromaps.¹⁶ The coins are heavy and they go next, then the greenbacks flutter through the air. She keeps her knife, can opener, and eyebrow pencil. She puts bones, pieces of bark, *hierbas*,¹⁷ eagle feather, snakeskin, tape recorder, the rattle and drum in her pack and she sets out to become the complete *tolteca*.¹⁸

Her first step is to take inventory. *Despojando, desgranando, quitando paja*.¹⁹ Just what did she inherit from her ancestors? This weight on her back — which is the baggage from the Indian mother, which the baggage from the Spanish father, which the baggage from the Anglo?

¹⁵*En unas pocas centurias*: In a few centuries.

¹⁶muni-bart metromaps: Maps of bus and rail transportation in the San Francisco Bay area.

¹⁷hierbas: Herbs.

¹⁸Gina Valdés, *Puentes y Fronteras: Coplas Chicanas* (Los Angeles: Castle Lithograph, 1982), 2. [Author's note] *tolteca*: The Toltec empire predates the Aztec in ancient Mexico. Anzaldúa associates the Toltecs with more woman-centered culture and religion than those of the warlike, patriarchal Aztecs.

¹⁹*Despojando, desgranando, quitando paja*: Stripping, removing the grain or the straw.

*Pero es difícil*²⁰ differentiating between *lo heredado*, *lo adquirido*, *lo impuesto*.²¹ She puts history through a sieve, winnows out the lies, looks at the forces that we as a race, as women, have been a part of. *Luego bota lo que no vale*, *los desmientos*, *los desencuentos*, *el embrutecimiento*. *Aguarda el juicio*, *hondo y enraizado*, *de la gente antigua*.²² This step is a conscious rupture with all oppressive traditions of all cultures and religions. She communicates that rupture, documents the struggle. She reinterprets history and, using new symbols, she shapes new myths. She adopts new perspectives toward the darkskinned, women, and queers. She strengthens her tolerance (and intolerance) for ambiguity. She is willing to share, to make herself vulnerable to foreign ways of seeing and thinking. She surrenders all notions of safety, of the familiar. Deconstruct, construct. She becomes a *nahual*,²³ able to transform herself into a tree, a coyote, into another person. She learns to transform the small "I" into the total Self. *Se hace moldeadora de su alma*. *Según la concepción que tiene de sí misma, así será*.²⁴

*Que no se nos olvide los hombres*²⁵

"Tú no sirves pa' nada"²⁶ —
you're good for nothing.
Eres pura vieja.²⁷

"You're nothing but a woman" means you are defective. Its opposite is to be *un macho*. The modern meaning of the word "machismo," as well as the concept, is actually an Anglo invention. For men like my father, being "macho" meant being strong enough to protect and support my mother and us, yet being able to show love. Today's macho has doubts about his ability to feed and protect his family. His "machismo" is an adaptation to oppression and poverty and low self-esteem. It is the result of hierarchical male dominance. The Anglo, feeling inadequate and inferior and powerless, displaces or transfers these feelings to the Chicano by shaming him. In the Gringo²⁸ world, the Chicano suffers from excessive humility and self-effacement, shame of self and self-deprecation. Around Latinos he suffers from a sense of language inadequacy and its accompanying discomfort; with Native Americans he suffers from a racial amnesia which ignores our common blood, and

²⁰*Pero es difícil*: But it is difficult.

²¹*le heredado*, *lo adquirido*, *lo impuesto*: The inherited, the acquired, the imposed.

²²*Luego bota lo que no vale* . . . : Then she discards whatever is useless, falsehoods and brutality. She waits for the deep, probing common sense of the ancient people.

²³*nahual*: Sorceress.

²⁴*Se hace moldeadora*, . . . : She is able to mold her soul. Whatever image she has of herself, so she will be.

²⁵*Que no se nos olvide los hombres*: Let us not forget men.

²⁶*Tú no sirves pa' nada*: You're good for nothing.

²⁷*Eres pura vieja*: You're nothing but a woman.

²⁸*Gringo*: Anglo.

from guilt because the Spanish part of him took their land and oppressed them. He has an excessive compensatory hubris²⁹ when around Mexicans from the other side. It overlays a deep sense of racial shame.

The loss of a sense of dignity and respect in the macho breeds a false machismo which leads him to put down women and even to brutalize them. Coexisting with his sexist behavior is a love for the mother which takes precedence over that of all others. Devoted son, macho pig. To wash down the shame of his acts, of his very being, and to handle the brute in the mirror, he takes to the bottle, the snort, the needle, and the fist.

Though we "understand" the root causes of male hatred and fear, and the subsequent wounding of women, we do not excuse, we do not condone, and we will no longer put up with it. From the men of our race, we demand the admission/acknowledgment/disclosure/testimony that they wound us, violate us, are afraid of us and of our power. We need them to say they will begin to eliminate their hurtful put-down ways. But more than the words, we demand acts. We say to them: We will develop equal power with you and those who have shamed us.

It is imperative that *mestizas* support each other in changing the sexist elements in the Mexican-Indian culture. As long as woman is put down, the Indian and the Black in all of us is put down. The struggle of the *mestiza* is above all a feminist one. As long as *los hombres* think they have to *chingar mujeres*³⁰ and each other to be men, as long as men are taught that they are superior and therefore culturally favored over *la mujer*,³¹ as long as to be a *vieja*³² is a thing of derision, there can be no real healing of our psyches. We're halfway there — we have such love of the Mother, the good mother. The first step is to unlearn the *puta/virgen*³³ dichotomy and to see *Coatlapopeuh-Coatlicue* in the Mother, *Guadalupe*.³⁴

Tenderness, a sign of vulnerability, is so feared that it is showered on women with verbal abuse and blows. Men, even more than women, are fettered to gender roles. Women at least have had the guts to break out of bondage. Only gay men have had the courage to expose themselves to the woman inside them and to challenge the current masculinity. I've encountered a few scattered and isolated gentle straight men, the beginnings of a new breed, but they are confused, and entangled with sexist behaviors that

²⁹*hubris*: Exaggerated pride or self-confidence.

³⁰*chingar mujeres*: Fuck women.

³¹*la mujer*: The woman.

³²*vieja*: Old woman.

³³*puta/virgen*: Whore/virgin.

³⁴*Coatlapopeuh-Coatlicue* in the Mother, *Guadalupe*: A reference to the dual identity (Indian/pagan and Spanish/Christian) of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Anzaldúa argues that "after the conquest, the Spaniards and their Church . . . desexed Guadalupe, taking Coatlapopeuh, the serpent/sexuality, out of her" (*Borderlands*, Chapter 3).

they have not been able to eradicate. We need a new masculinity and the new man needs a movement.

Lumping the males who deviate from the general norm with man, the oppressor, is a gross injustice. *Asombra pensar que nos hemos quedado en ese pozo oscuro donde el mundo encierra a las lesbianas. Asombra pensar que hemos, como feministas y lesbianas, cerrado nuestros corazones a los hombres, a nuestros hermanos los jotos, desheredados y marginales como nosotros.*³⁵ Being the supreme crossers of cultures, homosexuals have strong bonds with the queer white, Black, Asian, Native American, Latino, and with the queer in Italy, Australia, and the rest of the planet. We come from all colors, all classes, all races, all time periods. Our role is to link people with each other — the Blacks with Jews with Indians with Asians with whites with extraterrestrials. It is to transfer ideas and information from one culture to another. Colored homosexuals have more knowledge of other cultures; have always been at the forefront (although sometimes in the closet) of all liberation struggles in this country; have suffered more injustices and have survived them despite all odds. Chicanos need to acknowledge the political and artistic contributions of their queer. People, listen to what your *jotería*³⁶ is saying.

The mestizo and the queer exist at this time and point on the evolutionary continuum for a purpose. We are a blending that proves that all blood is intricately woven together, and that we are spawned out of similar souls.

Somos una gente³⁷

*Hay tantísimas fronteras
que dividen a la gente,
pero por cada frontera
existe también un puente.*³⁸
— GINA VALDÉS³⁹

Divided Loyalties

Many women and men of color do not want to have any dealings with white people. It takes too much time and energy to explain to the downwardly mobile, white middle-class women that it's okay for us to want to

³⁵*Asombra pensar que nos hemos quedado . . .*: It's astonishing to think that we have stayed in that dark well where the world locks up lesbians. It's astonishing to think that as feminist lesbians, we have closed our hearts to men, to our gay brothers, as disinherited and alienated as we are.

³⁶*jotería*: Gayness.

³⁷*Somos una gente*: We are one people.

³⁸*Hay tantísimas fronteras . . .*: There are so many borders / dividing people / but through each border there / passes a bridge.

³⁹Richard Wilhelm, *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, trans. Cary F. Baynes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950), 98. [Author's note]

own "possessions," never having had any nice furniture on our dirt floors or "luxuries" like washing machines. Many feel that whites should help their own people rid themselves of race hatred and fear first. I, for one, choose to use some of my energy to serve as mediator. I think we need to allow whites to be our allies. Through our literature, art, *corridos*,⁴⁰ and folktales we must share our history with them so when they set up committees to help Big Mountain Navajos⁴¹ or the Chicano farmworkers or *los Nicaragüenses*⁴² they won't turn people away because of their racial fears and ignorances. They will come to see that they are not helping us but following our lead.

Individually, but also as a racial entity, we need to voice our needs. We need to say to white society: we need you to accept the fact that Chicanos are different, to acknowledge your rejection and negation of us. We need you to own the fact that you looked upon us as less than human, that you stole our lands, our personhood, our self-respect. We need you to make public restitution: to say that, to compensate for your own sense of defectiveness, you strive for power over us, you erase our history and our experience because it makes you feel guilty — you'd rather forget your brutish acts. To say you've split yourself from minority groups, that you disown us, that your dual consciousness splits off parts of yourself, transferring the "negative" parts onto us. (Where there is persecution of minorities, there is shadow projection. Where there is violence and war, there is repression of shadow.) To say that you are afraid of us, that to put distance between us, you wear the mask of contempt. Admit that Mexico is your double, that she exists in the shadow of this country, that we are irrevocably tied to her. Gringo, accept the doppelganger⁴³ in your psyche. By taking back your collective shadow the intracultural split will heal. And finally, tell us what you need from us.

By Your True Faces We Will Know You

I am visible — see this Indian face — yet I am invisible. I both blind them with my beak nose and am their blind spot. But I exist, we exist. They'd like to think I have melted in the pot. But I haven't, we haven't.

The dominant white culture is killing us slowly with its ignorance. By taking away our self-determination, it has made us weak and empty. As a people we have resisted and we have taken expedient positions, but we have never been allowed to develop unencumbered — we have never been allowed to be fully ourselves. The whites in power want us people of color to barricade ourselves behind our separate tribal walls so they can pick us off one at a time with

⁴⁰*corridos*: Ballads or narrative folk songs of Mexico.

⁴¹*Big Mountain Navajos*: Big Mountain is an area in New Mexico at the center of a Navaho and Hopi dispute over land rights and treaty conditions.

⁴²*los Nicaragüenses*: The Nicaraguans.

⁴³*doppelganger*: A double.

their hidden weapons; so they can whitewash and distort history. Ignorance splits people, creates prejudices. A misinformed people is a subjugated people.

Before the Chicano and the undocumented worker and the Mexican from the other side can come together, before the Chicano can have unity with Native Americans and other groups, we need to know the history of their struggle and they need to know ours. Our mothers, our sisters and brothers, the guys who hang out on street corners, the children in the playgrounds, each of us must know our Indian lineage, our *afro-mestisaje*,⁴⁴ our history of resistance.

To the immigrant *mexicano* and the recent arrivals we must teach our history. The 80 million *mexicanos* and the Latinos from Central and South America must know of our struggles. Each one of us must know basic facts about Nicaragua, Chile, and the rest of Latin America. The Latinoist movement (Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and other Spanish-speaking people working together to combat racial discrimination in the market place) is good but it is not enough. Other than a common culture we will have nothing to hold us together. We need to meet on a broader communal ground.

The struggle is inner: Chicano, *indio*,⁴⁵ American Indian, *mojado*,⁴⁶ *mexicano*, immigrant Latino, Anglo in power, working class Anglo, Black, Asian — our psyches resemble the bordertowns and are populated by the same people. The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the “real” world unless it first happens in the images in our heads.

⁴⁴*afro-mestisaje*: Mixed-blood Latino people of African descent.

⁴⁵*indio*: Indian (of Mexico/Central America).

⁴⁶*mojado*: Wetback.

ENGAGING THE TEXT

1. What does Anzaldúa mean by “*mestiza* consciousness”? Why does she think such a new consciousness is necessary? What risks and rewards does she associate with a *mestiza* consciousness?
2. The concept of the *mestiza*, like the myth of the melting pot, involves the coming together of two or more cultures. How does the idea of *mestiza* consciousness differ from the melting pot metaphor?
3. How does Anzaldúa define the concept of *machismo* in this essay? How does it connect to the idea of *mestiza* consciousness? Why, according to Anzaldúa, are homosexuals important to this new way of thinking?
4. In paragraph 7, Anzaldúa distinguishes between a western mode of thinking, which she considers narrow and inadequate, and a more comprehensive “divergent” mode of thought. Do you think a person trained in traditional western thought can or should learn to think differently?

5. Discuss the effects of Anzaldúa’s frequent use of Spanish, her mix of prose and poetry, her references to Mexican/Indian deities and folktales, her movement between vivid image and broad generalization, and other distinctive elements of her essay.

EXPLORING CONNECTIONS

6. Compare the idea of “recombinant culture” described by Lynell George (p. 652) with Anzaldúa’s concept of “*mestiza* consciousness.” Would Anzaldúa be likely to agree that the kind of cultural mixing experienced by the teens in George’s essay actually involves a “new consciousness”?
7. Review the essays by Leslie Marmon Silko (p. 594) and Paula Gunn Allen (p. 520) and discuss the cultural, racial, and sexual borderlands that they inhabit as women of Native American and European descent. To what extent would you say that either writer displays the kind of “*mestiza* consciousness” Anzaldúa describes?
8. Anzaldúa and Ellis Cose (p. 635) both suggest the possibility that “the future will belong to the *mestiza* (para. 10). What advantages does each of them see in such a future, and what obstacles must be overcome in order to achieve it?

EXTENDING THE CRITICAL CONTEXT

9. What advice do you think Anzaldúa would give to an American whose experience and family background are essentially monocultural?
10. Anzaldúa suggests that one option for the *mestiza* is “to disengage from the dominant culture, write it off altogether as a lost cause, and cross the border into a wholly new and separate territory” (para. 6). What would it mean to disengage from the dominant culture? Do you think this is possible?

Child of the Americas

AURORA LEVINS MORALES

This poem concentrates on the positive aspects of a multicultural heritage, as Morales celebrates her uniqueness, her diversity, and her wholeness. It's an up-to-date and sophisticated reinterpretation of the melting pot myth and a possible illustration of Gloria Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness" finding voice in poetry. As this autobiographical poem states, Aurora Levins Morales (b. 1954) was the child of a Puerto Rican mother and a Jewish father. She moved to the United States when she was thirteen and now writes, performs, and teaches in the San Francisco Bay Area. "Child of the Americas" is