



Open Your Heart: Religion and Cultural Poetics of Greater Mexico (Latino Perspectives)

David P. Sandell

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In this ethnography of Catholic religious practice in Fresno, California, David P. Sandell unveils ritualized storytelling that Mexican and Mexican American people of faith use to cope with racism and poverty associated with colonial, capitalist, and modern social conditions. Based on in-depth interviews and extensive field research conducted in 2000 and 2001, Sandell's work shows how people use story and religious ritual (including the Matachines dance, the Mass, the rosary, pilgrimage, and processions) to create a space in their lives free from oppression. These people give meaning to the expression "open your heart," the book argues, through ritual and stories, enabling them to engage the mind and body in a movement toward, as one participant said, "the sacred center" of their lives.

Sandell argues that the storytelling represents a tradition of poetics that provides an alternative, emancipatory epistemology. Américo Paredes, for example, defined this tradition in his scholarship of border balladry. According to Paredes, storytelling with ritual elements raises a feature of performance characterized as a convivial disposition and shared sense of identity among people who call themselves Mexican not for national identification but for a cultural one, understood as "Greater Mexico." Sandell contributes to this tradition and achieves an understanding of Greater Mexico characterized by people whose stories and rituals help them find common ground, unity, and wholeness through an open heart.

"*Open Your Heart* is a major contribution to those of us working in the areas of ritual and religion, narrative, and individual life experiences. David P. Sandell is an anthropologist, and this is a beautiful, close ethnographic study of a group of people in the United States who are often badly misunderstood. He persuasively shows us how narrative and ritual work together to accomplish certain goals for the individuals who create and perform them for each other." —**Beverly J. Stoeltje, Indiana University**

"In a finely woven narrative tapestry, David Sandell illuminates key religious moments in the lives of his Fresno, California, interlocutors. Sandell examines an array of religious rituals, and in particular ritual dance as a frame for stories—heterogeneous, and uneven in their telling. The combination of ritual and stories pulls people into a constantly evolving community. Drawing from his finely nuanced ethnographic material, historical reconstructions, and a richly textured narrative style, Sandell, with great aplomb and insight, 'opens our hearts' to the contradictions of the human condition experienced by his subjects. In the process, they, and we, move from spectators to co-producers of a life made meaningful by the shuffling back and forth that emerges in the meaning-making dance this book explores." —**Richard R. Flores, University of Texas at Austin**

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