



TROPICS OF META

HISTORIOGRAPHY FOR THE MASSES



Pendeja, You Ain't Steinbeck: My Bronca with Fake-Ass Social Justice Literature

BY MYRIAMGURBA | DECEMBER 12, 2019



When I tell gringos that my Mexican grandfather worked as a publicist, the news silences them.

Shocked facial expressions follow suit.

Their heads look ready to explode and I can tell they're thinking, "In Mexico, there are PUBLICISTS?!"

I wryly grin at these fulanos and let my smile speak on my behalf. It answers, "Yes, bitch, in México, there are things to publicize such as our *own* fucking opinions about *YOU*."

I follow in the cocky footsteps of my grandfather, Ricardo Serrano Ríos, "decano de los publicistas de Jalisco[1]," and not only do I have opinions, I bark them como itzcuintli. También soy chismosa and if you don't have the gift of Spanglish, allow me to translate. "Chisme" means gossip. It's my preferred art form, one I began practicing soon after my period first stained my calzones, and what's literature, and literary criticism, if not painstakingly aestheticized chisme?

Tengo chisme. Are you ready?

A self-professed gabacha, Jeanine Cummins, wrote a book that sucks. Big time.

Her obra de caca belongs to the great American tradition of doing the following:

1. Appropriating genius works by people of color
2. Slapping a coat of mayonesa on them to make palatable to taste buds estados-unidenses and
3. Repackaging them for mass racially "colorblind" consumption.

Rather than look us in the eye, many gabachos prefer to look down their noses at us. Rather than face that we are their moral and intellectual equals, they happily pity us. Pity is what inspires their sweet tooth for Mexican pain, a craving many of them hide. This denial motivates their spending habits, resulting in a preference for trauma porn that wears a social justice fig leaf. To satisfy this demand, Cummins tossed together *American Dirt*, a "road thriller" that wears an I'm-giving-a-voice-to-the-voiceless-masses merkin.

I learned about *Dirt* when an editor at a feminist magazine invited me to review it.

I accepted her offer, *Dirt* arrived in my mailbox, and I tossed it in my suitcase. At my tía's house in Guadalajara, I opened the book.

Before giving me a chance to turn to chapter one, a publisher's letter made me wince.

"The first time Jeanine and I ever talked on the phone," the publisher gushed, "she said migrants at the Mexican border were being portrayed as a 'faceless brown mass.' She said she wanted to give these people a face."

The phrase "these people" pissed me off so bad my blood became carbonated.

I looked up, at a mirror hanging on my tía's wall.

It reflected my face.

In order to choke down *Dirt*, I developed a survival strategy. It required that I give myself over to the project of zealously hate-reading the book, filling its margins with phrases like "Pendeja, please." That's a Spanglish analogue for "Bitch, please."

Back in Alta California, I sat at my kitchen table and penned my review. I submitted it. Waited.

After a few days, an editor responded. She wrote that though my takedown of *Dirt* was "spectacular," I lacked the fame to pen something so "negative." She offered to reconsider if I changed my wording, if I wrote "something redeeming."

Because the nicest thing I can say about *Dirt* is that its pages ought to be upcycled as toilet paper, the editors hauled out the guillotine. I was notified that I'd be paid a kill fee: 30% of the \$650 I was initially offered for my services.

Behold my unpublishable cruelty as it rises from the dead!



In México, busy people drink licuados. Making these beverages requires baseline skills. Drop fruit, milk, and ice into a blender and voilà: a meal on-the-go.

Unfortunately, Jeanine Cummins narco-novel, *American Dirt*, is a literary licuado that tastes like its title. Cummins plops overly-ripe Mexican stereotypes, among them the Latin lover, the suffering mother, and the stoic manchild, into her wannabe realist prose. Toxic heteroromanticism gives the sludge an arc and because the white gaze taints her prose, Cummins positions the United States of America as a magnetic sanctuary, a beacon toward which the story's chronology chugs.

México: bad.

USA: good.

I pinched my metaphorical nose and read.

Cummins bombards with clichés from the get-go. Chapter One starts with assassins opening fire on a quinceañera, a fifteenth birthday party, a scene one can easily imagine President Donald Trump breathlessly conjuring at a Midwestern rally, and while Cummins' executioners are certainly animated, their humanity remains shallow. By

categorizing these characters as “the modern bogeymen of urban Mexico,” she flattens them. By invoking monsters with English names and European lineages, Cummins reveals the color of her intended audience: white. Mexicans don’t fear the bogeyman. We fear his very distant cousin, el cucuy.

Cummins employs this “landscape of carnage,” a turn of phrase which hearkens to Trump’s inaugural speech, to introduce her protagonist, the newly widowed Lydia Quixano Perez. Police descend upon Lydia’s home, now a schlocky crime scene, to pantomime investigation. Lydia doesn’t stick around. She understands what all Mexicans do, that cops and criminals play for the same team, and so she and her son Luca, the massacre’s other survivor, flee.

With their family annihilated by narcotraffickers, mother and son embark on a refugees’ journey. They head north, or, as Cummins’ often writes, to “el norte,” and italicized Spanish words like *carajo*, *mijo*, and *amigo* litter the prose, yielding the same effect as store-bought taco seasoning.

Through flashbacks, Cummins reveals that Lydia, “a moderately attractive but not beautiful woman,” age thirty-two, operated a bookstore. Her character soon takes absurd shape. As a protagonist, Lydia is incoherent, laughable in her contradictions. In one flashback, Sebastián, Lydia’s husband, a journalist, describes her as one of the

“smartest” women he’s ever known. Nonetheless, she behaves in gallingly naïve and stupid ways. Despite being an intellectually engaged woman, and the wife of a reporter whose beat is narco-trafficking, Lydia experiences shock after shock when confronted with the realities of México, realities that would not shock a Mexican.

It shocks Lydia to learn that the mysterious and wealthy patron who frequents her bookstore flanked by “[thuggish]” bodyguards is the capo of the local drug cartel! It shocks Lydia to learn that some central Americans migrate to the United States by foot! It shocks Lydia to learn that men rape female migrants en route to the United States! It shocks Lydia to learn that Mexico City has an ice-skating rink! (This “surprise” gave me a good chuckle: I learned to ice skate in México.) That Lydia is so shocked by her own country’s day-to-day realities, realities that I’m intimate with as a Chicana living en el norte, gives the impression that Lydia might not be...a credible Mexican. In fact, she perceives her own country through the eyes of a pearl-clutching American tourist.

Susan Sontag wrote that “[a] sensibility (as distinct from an idea) is one of the hardest things to talk about” and with this challenge in mind, I assert that *American Dirt* fails to convey any Mexican sensibility. It aspires to be Día de los Muertos but it, instead, embodies Halloween. The proof rests in the novel’s painful humorlessness. Mexicans have over a hundred nicknames for death, most of them are playful because death is our favorite playmate,

and Octavio Paz explained our unique relationship with la muerte when he wrote, “The Mexican...is familiar with death. [He] jokes about it, caresses it, sleeps with it, celebrates it. It is one of his favorite toys and his most steadfast love.” Cummins’ failure to approach death with appropriate curiosity, and humility, is what makes *American Dirt* a perfect read for your local self-righteous gringa book club.

Writer Alexander Chee has said that writers interested in exploring the realities of those unlike themselves should answer three questions before proceeding. These are:

“Why do you want to write from this character’s point of view?”

“Do you read writers from this community currently?”

“Why do you want to tell this story?”

The introductory letter from Cummins’s editor answers the final question. Cummins believes she’s important, and expert, enough to represent “faceless” brown people.

Step aside, Jesucristo. There’s a new savior in town. Her name is Jeanine.

Saviors terrify me, they always fuck things up, often by getting people killed, and if you don’t believe me, look closely at the first four letters of the word messiah.

To fit the messyanic bill, Cummins re-branded herself as a person of color. A glance at recent interviews shows Cummins now identifying as

"Latinx," her claim to this identity hinging on the existence of a Puerto Rican grandmother. Cummins, however, is still breaking in her Latinx-ness because four years ago, she wasn't.

I repeat: Four years ago, Cummins was white.

"I don't want to write about race," Cummins wrote in a 2015 *New York Times* op-ed. "What I mean is, I really don't want to write about race...I am white... I'll never know the impotent rage of being profiled or encounter institutionalized hurdles to success because of my skin or hair or name."

Unlike the narcos she vilifies, Cummins exudes neither grace nor flair. Instead, she bumbles with Trumpian tackiness, and a careful look at chronology reveals how she operates: opportunistically, selfishly, and parasitically. Cummins identified the gringo appetite for Mexican pain and found a way to exploit it. With her ambition in place, she shoved the "faceless" out of her way, ran for the microphone and ripped it out of our hands, deciding that her incompetent voice merited amplification.

By her own admission, Cummins lacked the qualifications to write *Dirt*.

And she did it anyways.

For a seven-figure sum.

A seven-figure sum.

As Bart Simpson used to say, "Ay caramba!"

Dirt isn't Cummins's first book. In addition to several other novels, she wrote a highly racialized true crime memoir, *A Rip in Heaven*. I also wrote a memoir in this genre, *Mean*. *Mean* features a budding serial killer, Tommy Jesse Martinez. In 1996, Martinez sexually assaulted several women, me included, and his final victim helped police capture him.

In the months between my sexual assault and his capture, Martinez raped, disfigured, and bludgeoned to death Sophia Castro Torres, a soft-spoken Mexican migrant who sold Mary Kay cosmetics and performed

farm work. Martinez stole her green card, kept it as a trophy, and threw it in a trash can once it bored him.

Sophia's ghost haunts me. She's always with me, I supposed you could say she talks to me, and she has words for Cummins:

Mexicanas die en el otro lado too. Mexicanas get raped in the USA too. You know better, you know how dangerous the United States of America is, and you still chose to frame this place as a sanctuary. It's not.

The United States of America became my grave.

Perhaps Cummins fascination with borders explains *Dirt's* similarity to other works about México and migration: her novel is so similar to the works she used for research that some might say it borders on the P word. In *Dirt's* acknowledgements, Cummins announces her ignorance by thanking people for "patiently teaching me things about Mexico." She lists writers "you should read if you want to learn more about Mexico" and lists a slew of authors – Luis Alberto Urrea, Oscar Martinez, Sonia Nazario, Jennifer Clement, Aida Silva Hernandez, Rafael Alarcon, Valeria Luiselli, and Reyna Grande – contradicting her characterization of us as an illiterate horde. We not only have faces and names. Some of us have extensive bibliographies.

If Cummins had really wanted to draw attention to the assorted crises faced by Mexicans, Mexican migrants in particular, she could've referred readers to the primary and secondary sources she plundered. Let's take, as an example, *Across a Hundred Mountains*, a novel written by Reyna Grande. At age 9, Grande entered the United States as an undocumented immigrant. She "became the first person in her family to set foot in a university," and obtained both a B.A. and M.F.A. Her lived experience as a Mexican migrant inspires both her fiction and nonfiction and Grande writes intimately about a phenomenon Cummins has emphasized she knows nothing about: racism.

While recently attending a literary gala at the Library of Congress, a fellow writer misidentified Grande. Instead of assuming she was his peer, he treated her as a member of the waitstaff. Grande wrote about this

experience, stating that “feelings of inadequacy” have persisted in spite of her success. These feelings begin early. When I was in high school, I scored better on the Advanced Placement English Language and Composition exam than all of my white classmates. Instead of celebrating my success, many teachers openly insinuated that my score was suspect. I must have cheated.

While we’re forced to contend with impostor syndrome, dilettantes who grab material, style, and even *voice* are lauded and rewarded.

Dirt reads like a gringa remix of Nazario’s *Enrique’s Journey* and a sloppy mash-up of Urrea’s entire oeuvre. His early works, *Across the Wire* and *By the Lake of Sleeping Children*, echo throughout *Dirt*. The book’s cringe-inducing awkwardness reminds me of the time I walked in on my roommate dressed from head to toe in my clothes. It astonished and disturbed me to find this fellow undergrad in front of our dorm room mirror, pretending to be... me. Suddenly aware of my presence, she made eye contact with me through the reflection. Unsure of what to do, I left. We never discussed the event.

She returned my clothes to the closet, but her choice to wear them as a costume had altered them. I couldn’t wear them anymore. They smelled of my roommate. Seams were torn.

My roommate and I weren’t the same size.

Cummins did the same thing as my roommate but took her audacity a step further: she stepped out in public wearing her ill-fitting Mexican costume.

Dirt is a Frankenstein of a book, a clumsy and distorted spectacle and while some white critics have compared Cummins to Steinbeck, I think a more apt comparison is to Vanilla Ice. According to the Hollywood Reporter, Imperative Entertainment, a production banner notorious for having teamed up with the likes of libertarian cowboy Clint Eastwood, has acquired the rights to the “Mexican migrant drama novel.”

Because my catastrophic imagination is highly active these days, I can visualize what this film might inspire. I can see Trump sitting in the White House's movie theatre, his little hands reaching for popcorn as he absorbs *Dirt's* screen adaptation. "This!" he yells. "This is why we must invade." I don't think Cummins intended to write a novel that would serve a Trumpian agenda but that's the danger of becoming a messiah. You never know who will follow you into the promised land.

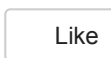


Myriam Gurba is a writer, podcaster and artist who lives in Long Beach, California. Her most recent book, the true crime memoir Mean, was a New York Times editors' choice. Publishers Weekly describes her as a "literary voice like none other." Gurba co-hosts the AskBiGrlz advice podcast with cartoonist, and fellow biracialist, MariNaomi. Her collage and digital artwork has been shown in museums, galleries, and community centers. Follow her on [Twitter](#).

References

[1] Source: *his fucking tombstone*

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Hangover Days

85 THOUGHTS



Chano Velasquez

December 13, 2019 at 2:27 am

Te la comistes viva

[REPLY](#)



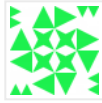
Ruben Limas

January 23, 2020 at 10:32 am

I am still trying to figure out what you wrote and all words you used. Stupendous, is the word that comes to mind. Netflix has gotten me much closer to the life of México. For example, "La Reina de la Sur" series. I am actually learning to speak Spanish from the region of where my family is from: Monterrey and Reynosa. The dialect from these regions is the dialect I was raised with. Considering that I was born in Ohio, and raised in Fresno county where at one time the people de el valle de Texas came from. To write, research is mandatory. Or, write of what you know. I probably won't read the book. I will wait till the movie comes out, hopefully

in Netflix. I might be interested in reading one of your books.
God bless you and your family.

REPLY

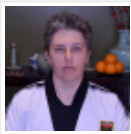


Hector Tello

January 23, 2020 at 8:55 pm

En Reynosa, y Monterey Nuevo Leon hablan en es Español.

if you were born in Ohio and your parents from la frontera de Tamalipas and Nuevo Leon and lived in el Valle, which is the Rio Grand, your parents were likely migrants workers following the crops, so did we. We were born in the Rio Grand, Primera, Texas 5 miles north west of Harlingen and became migrant in 1957 when my dad decide to leave the farm and headed to Michigan, Ohio, West Texas, and finally California, Clovis was home for us there after 1965, we have had a good life unforgettable memories my both parents are gone and left us a strong value and love for one another, thats how live was back in the days of migrant people helping one another eating in the same table, Iam 71 years and for me and my family we still practice that relationship with one another.

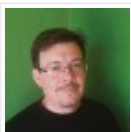


taekwondocathy

December 13, 2019 at 3:46 pm

From a white girl who grew up on the south side of San Antonio, thank you.

REPLY



David Bowles

December 13, 2019 at 8:40 pm

Boom! Amazing, incisive, devastating work. You are brilliant and spot-on.

REPLY

Enrique I. Moreno

December 14, 2019 at 5:10 am

Vos sois, señora, mean –as your recent creation is titled, y mean y harsh, y tanto –digo– que thine critica becomes an over-worked exercise in meanness; in other words: vuestra alegata adversus *Dirt* y su autora, despite being clever and certera, pierde fuerza in being so vehemente, y sobre todo in being so vulgar –and I am sure your lectores, en su mayoria, unless they were raised in a barrio bajo are not fully aware de la rude intensity of vuestra vulgaridad cuando usais el revolting lingo de una degenerate. Would it be, perchance que lo soez de vuestra expresion, both in English and Castillian goes then to make allusion a la stupidity de *Dirt*'s own title? After all, “dirt” es mugre, como la que usais cuando vuestra filthy tongue revela the anger you carry incontrolablemente inside and spews por todos lados to a numbing pitch. Mas vos valdria, señora mia, que usarais the same style and tenor que usais in la second part of your ensayo, despues de que deciis: “Dirt isn’t Cummins’s first book” etc, etc. From then on, ya less vulgar and emotional, thine writing becomes not only more palatable sino tambien quite more centrado e inteligente. Decir “pendeja” y “fucking” and all those inmundicias, is quite unnecessary for a talent like yours. Un gran brain como el vuestro does not need to appeal to the lowest and mas groseras emociones elicited by strongly disturbing language –especially in serious criticism. Asi pues, en mi humilde opinion, vuestra critica excels in its content pero adolesce in its form. Yes, the author is a gringa, but in saying so os volveis gratuitously mean (same thing as if ella called thee “a mexican”. Si, ella es una idiota, but I want to learn that from thine clever analisis y from el subtext, y no porque vos me digas que she’s an idiot.

REPLY



Chano Velasquez

December 14, 2019 at 2:33 pm

I thought by swearing she was making a point, not only to express the extreme disgust but also partly as a clap back to

safe space fragility of the type that goes hand in hand with fake SJW antics. Swearing is good for us, cathartic even.

REPLY



David Bowles

January 19, 2020 at 7:04 pm

100tc cñoro.

REPLY



Michelle Hernandez

January 23, 2020 at 8:18 pm

TL:DR also pretentious as hell. The writer has already rebuked your take on her opinion piece. In her own words from My Taco Laughs at You: On Death Threats Aimed at Women of Color Who Don't Fellate White Supremacy : " My parents took pride in my level of academic achievement, it was usually high, so I felt a little nervous about how they would respond to my D. When I showed the essay to him, Dad read it and guffawed. He said, "There's nothing wrong with your paper. You should've gotten an A. And your teacher is an asshole. Just like the one you had last year."

I smiled and laughed with Dad. I'm glad he gave me a profane lens through which to regard my teachers and in doing so, Dad taught me a lesson best articulated by Hannah Arendt: "The greatest enemy of authority [...] is contempt, and the surest way to undermine it is laughter."

TOMA!!!!

REPLY

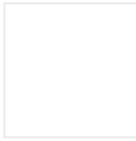


rmduenas

January 23, 2020 at 11:38 pm

Enriquito, no seas mamila. Myriam escribió su crítica como a ella mejor le pareció. Si quieres otra versión, escribe la tuya propia

REPLY

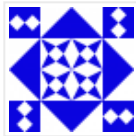


Enrique I. Moreno

December 14, 2019 at 5:18 pm

@Chano Velasquez: notice I'm not objecting to filth in a fiction narrative; de hecho, mi objeccion se basa en que esta pieza es critica literaria –y no ficcion (in which case I wouldn't say nada). I am encouraging her to stop being juvenile and grow to the next stage: mas profesional en su criticism. Tu estas encouraging her to think that her current shortcomings are cute –not so.

REPLY



ellid

December 15, 2019 at 2:19 pm

Enrique? Stop tone policing the author.

REPLY



DGC

January 21, 2020 at 8:54 am

Ellid. Stop police policing Enrique.

REPLY



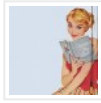
cinemaceelee

December 16, 2019 at 8:13 pm

Great review, love your wit. I usually just avoid novels written by non natives when it comes to any culture. I don't understand why you'd want to read a Mexican immigrant novel written by someone who isn't Mexican – doesn't make sense. What does she know? She's literally not from there. "She's humanizing brown people/immigrants" – the fuck?? I'm white and can see how fucked up that sentence is, jesus. It's a damn shame they think a whitey is the only one capable of humanizing a race or presenting it in a easily digestible fashion. It's like when everyone read fucking Shogun but Taiko

exists, written by an actual Japanese person. The 5 star reviews are nauseating on Goodreads.

REPLY



Erin

January 21, 2020 at 5:12 pm

"I don't understand why you'd want to read a Mexican immigrant novel written by someone who isn't Mexican – doesn't make sense. What does she know? She's literally not from there."

I agree with you. It's just coming across as opportunistic to cash in

REPLY



Victor v

December 18, 2019 at 1:29 am

Fantastic review. And you have every right to call cummins a pendeja.

REPLY



Field

December 19, 2019 at 10:13 pm

Hell yeah, love the cold blast of pure truth you are giving. You got a new fan here.

REPLY

Pingback: [Weekly Roundup: What to Read Each Week in January – The Wrangler](#)



Leslee Aba Sharon Wills

January 3, 2020 at 7:44 pm

Loved your reference to her false-ness as being like when you found your flatmate dressed up in your clothes..here in the U.K some of us refer to these frauds as 'professional' blks or black for pay !

In Guyana, South America she may have been likened to someone who steals 'ole higue's' skin, a phrase my mother often uses.

The best review of this type of sell-out literature that I've ever read!

REPLY



Alicia Butcher Ehrhardt

January 3, 2020 at 11:19 pm

Spot on. And you were relatively mild in your critique. I'm still laughing – but she had some nerve. 7 figures? No wonder they keep doing it.

I believe autistic readers often had the exact same reaction to *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, Mark Haddon pretending to understand – and portray – an autistic kid: WTF!?!

REPLY



Lorna

January 9, 2020 at 7:51 pm

A great review that should be read. Cummin's wants to give voice to Mexican people, yet the publishers silence your review. That says it all.

REPLY



lornabrown

January 9, 2020 at 7:52 pm

A great review that should be read. Cummin's writes the book to apparently give Mexicans a voice, yet the publishers silence your review. That says it all.

REPLY



Francisco Ortega Hernandez

January 14, 2020 at 3:22 am

I suspect a 23&Me took place between this book and that last one...."Oh, look, I'm ethnic! Now I know which restaurants to frequent!"

REPLY

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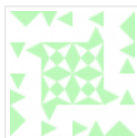
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Bill Crawford

January 19, 2020 at 3:53 am

Animo!!! Great review!! Dirt is totally jodido ... you are right about the lack if humor ... thats the difference between mexicans and gringos ... I'm a gringo who lives in cadereyta nuevo leon ... its totally screwed up but everyone shrugs laughs about it, goes to work, plays softball and drinks

michelob ultra .. echamos cheves sometime ... you are a great writer

REPLY

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Pingback: [The Problem With Jeanine Cummins' 'American Dirt' Migrant Novel Is Pretty Obvious](#)



derangedbutastute

January 21, 2020 at 11:31 pm

Whoever wrote this sounds insecure, hate-filled, and ignorant as fuck. Jesus Christ.

REPLY



Cesar T

January 22, 2020 at 3:08 am

Exactly.

REPLY



Marie Micaela

January 22, 2020 at 5:05 am

This Pendeja has no clue as to the fact that a captivating story can be written by anyone. You don't have to to be a

Mejicana to write a polemical story about what is happening on our borders. There was a book, "Famous All Over Town", written by Danny Santiago, a pseudonym for Daniel Lewis, a social worker. This book was amazing, and true to the ELA culture of graffiti. "Full of poverty, violence, emotional injury...all realistically portrayed, yet, like a spring feast day in a barrio, it is nevertheless relentlessly joyous. -The New York Times Book Review. American Dirt is just that, a page turning, past paced, anxiety involving book, that I had to put down several times to just get up and move. Do I care that a Latina/Mejicana didn't write it? No I don't.

REPLY



Miguel

January 22, 2020 at 3:48 pm

I agree with you. Anyone can write about anything. But the point of this review is to underline that the author of American Dirt, Jeanine Cummins, lacks the research and sensibility to do so. And it's right there in the book. Just one example: Cummins is supposedly writing about a Mexican woman who's lived in Mexico her whole life. But then, that very Mexican woman is surprised that something as trivial as an ice rink exists in Mexico. That just speaks volumes of what Cummins is really portraying on the page: not a Mexican character, but a proxy, a stand-in of a non-immigrant person who's never been in Mexico, "seeing the country for the very first time". That's what's enraging. Someone who didn't take the time to learn, nor took the right approach to write about Mexico. The book's pacing might be good. The intentions to portray a Mexican's (the so-called "faceless brown masses") plight might be sincere. But the kernel, the heart of the book, the literary attempt to convey something of value, that's what's put in danger when you discover that its author didn't really try to see the story through Mexican eyes.

It's as if me, a male, tried to write a female character while thinking of her as someone less able than a man.



Buddy the Boogie

January 22, 2020 at 10:13 am

You sound like your fragility got broke.

Article is dope as fuck.

REPLY



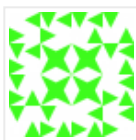
Matt Stowell

January 22, 2020 at 12:26 am

Brava for this article and for your review. As a sometime journalist, I've had the same sort of problem with running-scared, middle-class editors and publishers since about 1974. But I'm 70 now and basically retired from journalism/feature writing and working on my own shit here in Mexico City (soon moving to Xalapa). I'm going to be looking for your books and more of your pieces on the Internet. Keep up the good work. Matt Stowell (aka Alexander Lowell)

REPLY

Pingback: [American Dirt controversy, explained. – Slate – Bee Bee Bu](#)

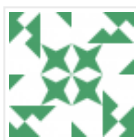


Chavonne Long

January 22, 2020 at 1:31 am

Brilliant!!! You are amazing....“these people”, my people, need to stop this shit.

REPLY



LuleBelle

January 22, 2020 at 2:16 am

Yo, tone piggy, sit the fuck down pendejo!

REPLY



Cesar T

January 22, 2020 at 3:07 am

You talk about stereotype, have you NOT seen any Mexican novela? La rosa de Guadalupe, maybe? As a Spanish born, NY based student I can tell you that us Spanish people are the first ones to stereotype ourselves all the time. Another thing, to shit on other people's work is a very Spanish quality for what I have expletive here, so you just fir the stereotype yourself. If you don't like her work find a constructive way to say it, criticize her work not destroy her character. You are not Gordon Ramsay and this is not Hell's Kitchen. You make it easy to see that you dislike her just because she's white and that's sad.

Also, your Spanglish does not impress anyone.

REPLY



Nephtali De Leon

January 22, 2020 at 7:10 am

Great Review in Super Chicana truth, tone and Power ! Keep talking Myriam Gurba ! First they stole our land, then our culture, now our clothes.

REPLY



Normandie Kent

January 24, 2020 at 6:46 pm

Yes, the Yanks stole the land from Mexico, but Mexico and its Spanish, Indian and Mestizo colonists stole the land from the Native Americans like the Chumash, Tongva, Kumeeyaay, Hopi, Zuni, Ohlone, Apache, Navajo, Comanche, and all other Indigenous people of the American Southwest. So it didn't belong to Mexico in the first place. Though it was invaded by Mexican and Yankee colonists, it didn't belong to any of them. This is why it is dumb for Mexican Americans to bring this up because of the hypocrisy, a colonist is a colonist, and one colonist is not better than the next, because thousands of Native Americans were massacred, genocided, enslaved,

infected with diseases and raped and lost their homelands at the hands of both invading Mexican and Yankee colonizers.

REPLY

Pingback: [Why critics are calling Oprah's book club pick exploitative and divisive | TheTop10News](#)



Leftbanker

January 22, 2020 at 12:53 pm

Why don't we just put you on a panel of judges who get to decide what gets published and what doesn't? It's fiction, you can write about anything you want. There are no qualifications necessary to write a novel, at least there weren't the last time I checked.

REPLY



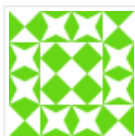
Fergus Kane

January 24, 2020 at 1:41 pm

Have you never heard of a book review. This is a book review (and more) and it's hilarious.

Perhaps you don't like a certain section of the world's population to open their loud mouths? Or do you do this whenever someone posts a book review?

REPLY



Georgette Connell

January 22, 2020 at 3:18 pm

This is brilliant! I would read a review about toilet paper written by you. I am looking for Mean as soon as I press send. I am so sorry that you had to experience that trauma.

REPLY



Pablo

January 22, 2020 at 4:42 pm

You are doing the same thing the Dirt woman is doing, thinking that by dropping a bunch of poorly-used Spanglish you gain authenticity. I think deep-down you know that your Mexican-American experience is as alien to actual Mexicans living in Mexico as their experience is to the Dirt author. It's nice you have tried to connect with the culture, but actual Mexicans are more than able to speak for themselves and it's not necessary for you to be the gringo avatar of their frustrations with their unfair portrayal in some dumb novel. Gracias.

REPLY



Leftbanker

January 23, 2020 at 3:38 pm

Exactamente, Spanglish es solo un inglés malo y un castellano peor aún para las personas que probablemente no dominan ninguno de los dos.

REPLY



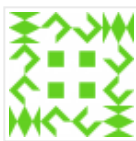
Fergus Kane

January 24, 2020 at 1:42 pm

Don't you think... That... Could.. Be.. Deliberate.

And very very funny?

REPLY



Ringo Beaumont III

January 22, 2020 at 8:18 pm

And Steinbeck wasn't an Okie, either. Didn't stop him. Newsflash: You can write about people who aren't you. It's called fiction.

REPLY



RussophileReads

January 24, 2020 at 6:18 pm

You certainly can, but if you do, you have to do a good job in order to create a convincing work of art. And Cummins apparently did a very poor job, which is why she's being criticized for it.

[REPLY](#)



Wolf

January 23, 2020 at 3:51 am

So what's the solution offered by Gurba? Writers are going to write. It's possible—and you don't even have to try hard—to divorce politics and social agendas from art. I'd read anything, just for the experience of seeing how the author pulled it off. You're offended only if you choose to be. Treat it as one writer's effort to see through different eyes from her own, and see if the work holds up as literature.

[REPLY](#)

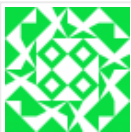


Gudrun

January 23, 2020 at 1:48 pm

God bless you for reading this horrible book so we can enjoy this epic destruction of it. I'm also really pissed your editor told you you weren't "famous" enough to publish this? But Cummins is famous enough that her editors let her do whatever she wants? Grab 'em by the culture?

[REPLY](#)

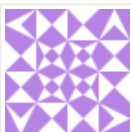


Evelyn

January 23, 2020 at 6:32 pm

Thanks for this. I shouldn't be shocked so many white people want to read this torture porn by a white author depicting Mexican people yet here I am.

[REPLY](#)



socrates2

January 23, 2020 at 8:00 pm

!Te aventaste, hija! De que eres apasionada, !no me cabe la menor duda! La (o el) imbecil que no acepto tu critica porque careces de "nombre" o celebridad ("I lacked the fame"), te barajeo una gachada. Pero creo que el/la erro. Luego me explico.

Para empezar, no te encabrones con la seudopocha, Cummins, nomas porque le ofrecieron un millon por su obra y a ti no te ha caido esa loteria. Relacionate mas, o como dicen en gringolandia: "network, baby." O consigete un agente mas movido o con conocidos adinerados. Trabas y barreras existen hacia el exito economico y literario, pero en EEUU no son racistas; son clasistas... Mira a Slim: pago sus millones y le vendieron acciones en el New York Times. "Poderoso caballero es don Dinero." No se fijaron en su tez; se fijaron en su cartera.

That said, no se si leer esta novela o no. No diste resumen de la obra, pero si detalles que te enrabiaron, como la escena choteada de la "balacera-en-una-quinceañera" o como revela la personalidad profundamente ingénua de su protagonista. De acuerdo, no muy original (ya que hasta yo tengo parientes cuyos amigos sufrieron algo parecido y sus pobres perros, no teniendo culpa de nada, fueron acribillados). Desgraciados narcos.

El que la protagonista, Perez, se asombre al enterarse de detalle equis, i-griega o zeta, nos dice algo de la profunda ignorancia cultural de la autora, Cummins, como investigadora de la vida cotidiana de una librera, casada con un cronista, cuyos ojos se abren despues de vivir una existencia a semejanza de monja de convento. En esto estoy de acuerdo. Pero superemos este defecto y describa el proceso mental y afectivo de la protagonista segun progresa en su odisea.

Como evoluciona el personaje central, Lydia Q. Perez? Que epifanias y cambios siente al avanzar su "aventura" hacia El Norte? Quienes son los sub-personajes y que papel desempeñan en la obra? Con estos detalles tendríamos una critica autentica.

Me quede con la curiosidad de saber el porque comparan esta obra con *_Grapes of Wrath_*. Y, pues, !nada! zip, zilch,

goose-egg. Get on with it, young lady! Is Cummins' book really the next immigrant "classic?" I really, _really_ want to know and, I strongly suspect, an authentic voice such as yours can cut through the hype and to the chase! I came here for a review and walked away with resentment. Come on, we're all adults in the room. Y al que no le guste, que se vaya mucho a la...

Subrayo: El criticar la buena fortuna de una oportunista mas, no llega a nada y adolece como critica literaria.

Haganos el favor...

Be well.

[REPLY](#)



Elizabeth C.

January 23, 2020 at 10:55 pm

Toward the end Ms. Gurba writes, "... while some white critics have compared Cummins to Steinbeck, I think a more apt comparison is to Vanilla Ice." I think that amply explains the title.

[REPLY](#)



Kukuli

January 23, 2020 at 8:27 pm

Brilliant and true.

[REPLY](#)

Pingback: [Oprah's Controversial Book Club Pick, AMERICAN DIRT, Casts a Long Shadow](#)

Pingback: ["American Dirt" has American problems - USA Breaking News](#)

Pingback: ['American Dirt' has an American problem - Diplomacy24.com](#)

Pingback: [Continuing | Pattern and Outrage](#)



Elizabeth C.



January 23, 2020 at 10:57 pm

Thank you so much for writing this.

REPLY



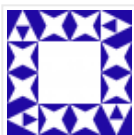
RussophileReads

January 24, 2020 at 12:13 am

I'm usually the type who will defend the right of anyone to write about anything — that's what imagination is for — but even I have to admit that this novel sounds like a serious misfire. The cultures of Latin America have produced writers of absolute genius who can speak for themselves about their triumphs and problems, and Mexico is no exception. Mexico does not need to be "rescued" or given a "voice" by a white writer who thinks writing melodramatic, cliched drivel is the way to make Americans care about the plight of immigrants/migrants, and the very fact she thinks they are somehow "faceless" without her speaking on their behalf makes my skin crawl.

It sounds as though Cummins was given an eye-watering advance by the publisher just for the sake of cashing in on a current hot topic in the news, not because her work merited it in terms of artistic quality and depth of understanding. Really disappointing. Maybe that money could have gone towards funding more translations of great Spanish-language works from Mexico instead.

REPLY



Frankie

January 24, 2020 at 1:29 am

if you don't like the novel then write your own. The tearing down of this female author is disturbing and undermines everyone. Smells like jealousy.

REPLY



sljones1128@gmail.com

January 24, 2020 at 2:29 am



I'm going to make your review my screen saver! Take everything you said, double it, and apply it to white people who have misappropriated, ripped off and out right stolen from black folk since the founding of this country. Whites have no problem taking our music, art, style, food, language or anything else without acknowledgement, recognition, gratitude or compensation. They fetishize our culture while at the same time treating us as "less than" or "other." Thank you for your fierce truthfulness. By the way, I felt the same rage when that grotesque book "The Help" was published a few years ago.

REPLY



sljones1128@gmail.com

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REPLY

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Pingback: [Oprah's new book club pick is fueling a debate. It's not just about the story. It's who's telling it – modimize](#)



Martin Boyd (@DialogosTrans)

January 24, 2020 at 3:45 pm

“American Dirt” sounds like a textbook example for my thesis on the ideologically motivated re-framing of Mexican culture for consumption by the gringo hegemony. This goes all the way back to the propaganda used to vilify Mexico in the Mexican-American War, right back to Walt Whitman and his nasty little dig at “inefficient Mexico” to justify the lie of “Manifest Destiny” US imperialist expansion, the forcible appropriation of swathes of Mexican land... 170 years later, closet imperialists continue bleating the same idiotic tropes found in gringo dime-store novels of the 19th century. Yuri Herrera’s “Señales que precederán el fin del mundo” is a good antidote to this gringo illness, turning the whole “US promised land/Mexico inferno” trope on its head. It should be required reading for every Anglo-American.

REPLY

Pingback: ['American Dirt' and the Unbearable Whiteness of Publishing](#)

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