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Continental Shifts: Migration, Representation, and the Struggle for Justice in Latin(o) America

John D. "Rio" Riofrio

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Applying a broad geographical approach to comparative Latino literary and cultural studies, *Continental Shifts* illuminates how the discursive treatment of Latinos changed dramatically following the enactment of NAFTA—a shift exacerbated by 9/11. While previous studies of immigrant representation have focused on single regions (the US/Mexico border in particular), specific genres (literature vs. political rhetoric), or individual groups, *Continental Shifts* unites these disparate discussions in a provocative, in-depth examination.

Bringing together a wide range of groups and genres, this intercultural study explores novels by Latin American and Latino writers, a border film by Tommy Lee Jones and Guillermo Arriaga, “viral” videos of political speeches, popular television programming (particularly shows that feature incarceration and public shaming), and user-generated YouTube videos. These cultural products reveal the complexity of Latino representations in contemporary discourse. While tropes of Latino migrants as threatening, diseased foreign bodies date back to the nineteenth century, *Continental Shifts* marks the more pernicious, recent images of Latino laborers (legal and not) in a variety of contemporary media. Using vivid examples, John Riofrio demonstrates the connections between rhetorical and ideological violence and the physical and psychological violence that has more intensely plagued Latino communities in recent decades. Culminating with a consideration of the “American” identity, this eye-opening work ultimately probes the nation’s ongoing struggle to uphold democratic ideals amid dehumanizing multiethnic tension.

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