



Cultures of Devotion: Folk Saints of Spanish America

Frank Graziano

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Spanish America has produced numerous "folk saints" -- venerated figures regarded as miraculous but not officially recognized by the Catholic Church. Some of these have huge national cults with hundreds -- perhaps millions -- of devotees. In this book Frank Graziano provides the first overview in any language of these saints, offering in-depth studies of the beliefs, rituals, and devotions surrounding seven representative figures. These case studies are illuminated by comparisons to some hundred additional saints from contemporary Spanish America. Among the six primary cases are Difunta Correa, at whose shrines devotees offer bottles of water and used auto parts in commemoration of her tragic death in the Argentinean desert. Gaucho Gil is only one of many gaucho saints, whose characteristic narrative involves political injustice and Robin-Hood crimes on behalf of the exploited people. The widespread cult of the Mexican saint Nino Fidencio is based on faith healing performed by devotees who channel his powers. Nino Compadrito is an elegantly dressed skeleton of a child, whose miraculous powers are derived in part from an Andean belief in the power of the skull of one who has suffered a tragic death. Graziano draws upon site visits and extensive interviews with devotees, archival material, media reports, and documentaries to produce vivid portraits of these fascinating popular movements. In the process he sheds new light on the often fraught relationship between orthodox Catholicism and folk beliefs and on an important and little-studied facet of the dynamic culture of contemporary Spanish America.

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