

The social history of the concept of the mixed-race mestizo

In Mexico [most people] think of themselves as mestizos, a term that emerged during the colonial period to explain the blend of ethnicities — especially between Indigenous peoples and the Spanish colonizers.

The process of fusion, referred to as *mestizaje*, has been so intense that a lot of Mexicans say it no longer makes sense to talk about race or racism. The idea of a post-racial society drew important support from early genetic research in the twentieth century and modern human genomic studies, which show that most humans come from a mix of different ancestries.

This unifying vision took hold across Latin America, shaping public policies and conceptions about race.

But like all other race-based labels, the mestizo is a social construct, not a well-defined scientific category of people who share similar genetic characteristics.

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Some call for banishing the mestizo label in human genetics and adopting much more specific terms not connected with colonial concepts. Others say that the mestizo idea is not as problematic as critics argue.

One thing is clear, says Vivette García Deister, an ethnographer of science at UNAM, who has studied how mestizo ideology has influenced genetic studies in Mexico. “There’s no easy solution.”

[**This is an excerpt. Read the original post here.**](#)