

Translation Nation: American Identity in the Spanish-Speaking United States



Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Hector Tobar takes us on the definitive tour of the Spanish-speaking United States—a parallel nation, 35 million strong, that is changing the very notion of what it means to be an American in unprecedented and unexpected ways. The year 2005 will mark Latino-Americans first year as the largest minority in the United States. By the middle of the century, Spanish-speaking Americans will make up 25 percent of the population. Never before has a group been as poised to make so substantial an impact on American culture and identity. And not just in California and Texas—but also in Georgia, Alabama, New York, and Idaho. As a Guatemalan-American journalist, Hector Tobar has grown up with and chronicled this parallel nation, surrounded by its people and their collective experiences, complexities, and contradictions. In *Translation Nation* he introduces us to its past, the present—and our future. Tobar begins on familiar terrain, in his native Los Angeles, with his family's story, along with that of two brothers of Mexican origin with very different interpretations of Americanismo, or American identity as seen through a Latin American lens—one headed for U.S. citizenship and the other for the wrong side of the law and the south side of the border. But this is just a jumping-off point. Soon we are in Dalton, Georgia, the most Spanish-speaking town in the Deep South, and in Rupert, Idaho, where the most popular radio DJ is known as El Chupacabras. By the end of the book, we have traveled from the geographical extremes into the heartland, exploring the familiar complexities of Cuban Miami and the brand-new ones of a busy Omaha INS station. Sophisticated, provocative, and deeply human, *Translation Nation* uncovers the ways that Hispanic Americans are forging new identities, redefining the experience of the American

immigrant, and reinventing the American community. It is a book that rises, brilliantly, to meet one of the most profound shifts in American identity.

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