



The Festive State: Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism as Cultural Performance

David M. Guss

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If, as David Guss argues, culture is a contested terrain with constantly changing contours, then festivals are its battlegrounds, where people come to fight and dispute in large acts of public display. Festive behavior, long seen by anthropologists and folklorists as the "uniform expression of a collective consciousness, is contentious and often subversive," and *The Festive State* is an eye-opening guide to its workings. Guss investigates "the ideology of tradition," combining four case studies in a radical multisite ethnography to demonstrate how in each instance concepts of race, ethnicity, history, gender, and nationhood are challenged and redefined.

In a narrative as colorful as the events themselves, Guss presents the Afro-Venezuelan celebration of San Juan, the "neo-Indian" Day of the Monkey, the *mestizo* ritual of Tamunangue, and the cultural policies and products of a British multinational tobacco corporation. All these illustrate the remarkable fluidity of festive behavior as well as its importance in articulating different cultural interests.

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