

mestizo ^[1]

Type of Speech:

noun ^[2]

Definition:

A term that refers to a person of multiracial descent. The majority of Mexican people have multiracial lineages that include Indigenous and European ancestry, but in colonial times large numbers of African people were brought to Mexico primarily as enslaved people, and even some Asian people. Later, people from the Caribbean, North and South America, and Europe immigrated to the country. During colonial times, the Spanish used a classification system of staggering complexity to create a hierarchy based on race. So-called "whites" of European ancestry were divided into Spanish-born *peninsulares*, and Mexican-born *criollos*. A person of multiracial descent could be identified as the following: European and African ancestry was identified as *mulato*; American Indian and European was *mestizo*; African and American Indian, *zambo*. A wealthy person of any background could buy a title and thus socially "whiten" theirself. In late nineteenth and early twentieth century Mexican history, the ideal of *mestizaje* was promoted as reflecting the special character and unique qualities of Mexican identity based upon cultural and ethnic blending and hybridity.

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Links

[1] <https://ncpedia.org/glossary/mestizo> [2] <https://ncpedia.org/category/parts-speech/noun>