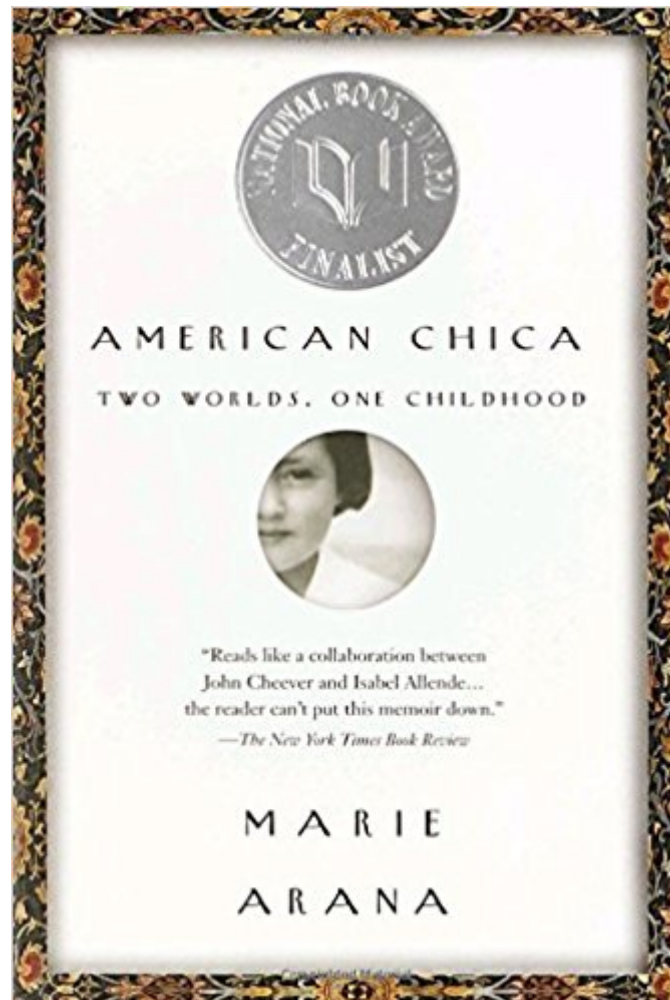




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# American Chica: Two Worlds, One Childhood



## Synopsis

In her father's Peruvian family, Marie Arana was taught to be a proper lady, yet in her mother's American family she learned to shoot a gun, break a horse, and snap a chicken's neck for dinner. Arana shuttled easily between these deeply separate cultures for years. But only when she immigrated with her family to the United States did she come to understand that she was a hybrid American whose cultural identity was split in half. Coming to terms with this split is at the heart of this graceful, beautifully realized portrait of a child who "was a north-south collision, a New World fusion. An American Chica." Here are two vastly different landscapes: Peru—earthquake-prone, charged with ghosts of history and mythology—and the sprawling prairie lands of Wyoming. In these rich terrains resides a colorful cast of family members who bring Arana's historia to life...her proud grandfather who one day simply stopped coming down the stairs; her dazzling grandmother, "clicking through the house as if she were making her way onstage." But most important are Arana's parents: he a brilliant engineer, she a gifted musician. For more than half a century these two passionate, strong-willed people struggled to overcome the bicultural tensions in their marriage and, finally, to prevail.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Though this memoir of growing up in America and Peru centers on Arana's parents' turbulent marriage, her real focus is the way cultures define, limit and enrich us. At one point, Arana, whose

mother is American and father is Peruvian, recalls her first lesson in the color politics of Latin America. She was living in a gated house, in a factory town high in the Andes, and wanted to invite the daughter of the family cook to her birthday party. Of course she can come, said Arana's mother, but if she does, none of the mothers of the other little girls will allow them to attend; an Indian girl is not accepted at a party of aristocratic schoolchildren. "I am reminded of my political innocence," Arana writes, "when I go to Latino conferences in [the U.S.]. When I see the children of Spanish-blooded oligarchs line up alongside migrant workers for a piece of affirmative action." It is this willingness to slice through convenient classifications, to see the rifts in every group, that distinguishes Arana's account of how she learned to navigate between a culture that encouraged family loyalty and another that fostered independence. She writes beautifully, whether describing hunting for ghosts in Peru's highlands, chewing tobacco in Wyoming, attending an American school in Lima or finding friends in New Jersey. Arana, the editor of the Washington Post Book World, blends a journalist's dedication to research with a style that sings with humor. Her memoir is an outstanding contribution to the growing shelf of Latina literature. Agent, Amanda Urban. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Adult/High School-Arana, editor of the Washington Post Book World, recently described this memoir as a love story. It is fraught with the tension of two worlds colliding: her North American mother's independent, free-spirited individualism crashes into her South American father's traditional, family-based orientation. Their children formed the bicultural bridge between them. In rich, lyrical prose, the author details her privileged, Peruvian childhood, watched by amas, and schooled at home. She writes of her grandfather who lived like a hermit in his own house, and further back the ancestors who played a horrifying role on Peru's rubber plantations. She describes the scent of sugar, "raw, rough, Cartavio brown" from her father's factory; the sounds of "El Gringo," the crazy blind man on his daily rounds; and the surreal world of los pishtacos, the ghosts, so mystifying, but terrifyingly real to Arana. She also writes of her mother and her former marriages, and finally of her life in America. Here Arana is an American Chica, where she leads not a double life, sometimes in her "American skin" at other times she is a Latina, but a triple life in which she makes up a "whole new person." While this book, filled with humor and insight, will be of special interest to Hispanic teens, it is a sparkling addition to the story of America's "salad bowl" and will appeal to young people of all heritages. Jane S. Drabkin, Chinn Park Regional Library, Prince William, VA Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Marie Arana writes an engaging memoir of her childhood growing up in her father's Peru and, later, her mother's United States. Life is a happy one for little "Marizi". She comes from an old, affluent family of European descent which includes a house full of servants and every privilege granted to a family of status. A typical child, Marizi is very fond of role playing, drama, getting into mischief and learning a thing or two from the servants. Life centers around her mother and father--the dashing Peruvian engineer and her mother, the beautiful, mysterious American. But not everything is perfect in Marizi's world. Every now and then she is subject to the reverse racism of being half-foreign. Nevermind that she is a native of Peru. Yet, when she moves to New Jersey with her mother, she is subject to racism from those who see her as an intruder--(insert racist slurs here); a person who doesn't belong. Nevermind that she is as American as those who insult her for being different. That sense of belonging sets the tone of this memoir. How well-adjusted is a child who is constantly told that she is different? She is half Peruvian, half North-American. She carries the richness of both cultures and speaks two languages. The conclusion Ms. Arana draws of being made to feel insincere because she is neither one thing nor another is a very powerful one, which only someone who is the offspring of parents of different nationalities can understand. Ms. Arana tells her story with prose that draws you in. Sometimes, though, it is over the top and the pace of the novel seems to slow towards the end. Yet, she recounts the story of her childhood with the heart-felt affection of one sharing her most special memories

I was interested in reading this book because I too come from two and for a moment on time three cultures. I'm not quite sure what I expected, but I enjoyed what I got. I recognized a lot of the challenges faced by the author because I'm still feeling them. In my case it was reversed, my father a single son naturalized American, my mother a Colombian from a family of eleven children and the very matriarch grandmother.

This is a subject that is dear to my heart. What a delight to also discover a magical writing style, descriptions so real you felt you had experienced them yourself, poignant details of a life worth reviewing. I loved this book.

As an American and Peruvian I found this book amazing, it transported me to my childhood in the Highlands of Trujillo and Lima. After 40 years in this country I am proud of being bicultural. Marie Arana has done a wonderful job reminding me of the duendes and pishtacos of sopa de albaca and agua de Azar. I highly recommend this book.

The book was phenomenal; I even wrote Marie a letter on all the synchronicities between her life and mine. Such masterful use of allegory; what a memory to have put it all together with so much detail... delightfully interesting for people who have lived in Peru... with historical and sociological insights, too.. I have purchased it for others who would enjoy it as well.

Very descriptive memoir about life as a third culture child, reflected with adult insight.

as described from a child's memory....I am familiar with the geography and thoroughly enjoyed the author's reminisces.....great read!!! Five Stars!!

Multi-cultural families and children trying to figure it all out. Thoughtful and intriguing. Family secrets revealed. Very good read.

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