



"With His Pistol in His Hand": A Border Ballad and Its Hero

Américo Paredes

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Gregorio Cortez Lira, a ranchhand of Mexican parentage, was virtually unknown until one summer day in 1901 when he and a Texas sheriff, pistols in hand, blazed away at each other after a misunderstanding. The sheriff was killed and Gregorio fled immediately, realizing that in practice there was one law for Anglo-Texans, another for Texas-Mexicans. The chase, capture, and imprisonment of Cortez are high drama that cannot easily be forgotten. Even today, in the cantinas along both sides of the Rio Grande, Mexicans sing the praises of the great "sheriff-killer" in the ballad which they call "El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez."

Americo Paredes tells the story of Cortez, the man and the legend, in vivid, fascinating detail in "With His Pistol in His Hand," which also presents a unique study of a ballad in the making. Deftly woven into the story are interpretations of the Border country, its history, its people, and their folkways.

"With His Pistol in His Hand": A Border Ballad and Its Hero Details

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Author : Américo Paredes

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From Reader Review "With His Pistol in His Hand": A Border Ballad and Its Hero for online ebook

Lisa says

If the only work Paredes gave us was Chapter 7: Gregorio Cortez, A Study, we could still never repay him.

Nicolas Shump says

This is one of the classic precursors of Chicana/o studies, but it stands on its own as an early work of interdisciplinary scholarship on the border, on vernacular culture, as a work of anthropology, and as an revisionist attempt to counter very negative representations of Mexicans and Mexican Americans especially in Texas by academics like Walter Prescott Webb.

Esther Cervantes says

Why I decided to read this in August 2014, a week and change into the police brutality crisis in Ferguson, Missouri: "respectable citizens transformed into outlaws by the application of 'Ranger law,' according to which a man was killed if he did not defend himself, or was tried for murder and hanged if he did."

Beyond its topical relevance, at least the first part of Américo Paredes' classic of Border exceptionalism is a joy to read. I'm just old enough to have been raised by mid-century Texas Mexicans, and the cultural assumptions and quirks that Paredes both relates and implies, through his own biases, feel strangely cozy to me. Reads like a good warm bath.

Christine Granados says

Finally, someone is writing the truth. Loved this book for its honesty and Paredes for putting history down on paper.

Arin says

NOPE

Sonia says

An informative, historical read...one of the missing pieces of American history or generally American Studies. I cherish the new information and the addition of a new 'hero' to American, if Mexican/Texan-

American literature. I was not particularly attracted to the formatting and structure of the book.

Vtlozano says

In methodical, restrained prose, Paredes marshals forensic evidence for how Gregorio Cortez out-rode the Texas Rangers and passed into legend. Fifty years after publication, “Pistol” is still like watching a masterful expert witness change the mood in the courtroom where southwestern history is being tried.

Brandon Milton says

An enjoyable presentation of the legend and facts regarding Gregorio Cortez and his valiant life on the run. This work not only explains how the legend and corrido differ from the facts, but also attempts to explain why they differ.

Further, Paredes puts the corrido into a wider scope and analyzes its effects on the greater ballad scene as a whole. He also analyzes how it was affected by earlier ballads and styles.

Overall, Paredes presents the legend and correlated facts in an entertaining fashion, where the book reads like a fictional tale rather than a recounting of events. He does so in a way, however, that makes the reader continuously question the relation between fact and legend. How did this fact lend itself into the legend? Was it altered? What affected the alterations?

The latter half of the volume, containing Paredes' analysis of the larger corrido and ballad scene and its relation with El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez (and its many variants) is solid. Although its language is mostly academic, it is an interesting and seemingly objective analysis that makes the reader ponder the workings of the oral story, one that is no longer in wide popularity today.

While reading, the importance of this work should also be kept in mind. The volume was written in the 1950s, when Academia was usually exclusive to white males. Paredes, by presenting a detailed academic analysis of factual events that were usually portrayed through a racist lens, broke ground with this volume.

Although it is dry at times, this is an exceptional read.

Patrick Cook says

This is an excellent work of historical ethnography. I'm from South Texas but I knew nothing of the events, or the oral tradition, described.

Kathy says

For my World Music class. The story of how a ballad was written and sung about the events surrounding this man.

Aubrey says

Study on Gregorio Cortez and the surrounding legend, turned into a well-known corrido, or border ballad. Includes examinations and interpretations of border culture, history, and folklore. Well put together and engaging read.

Rachel says

Nothin' like a good ballitt is what us hillbillies say.
