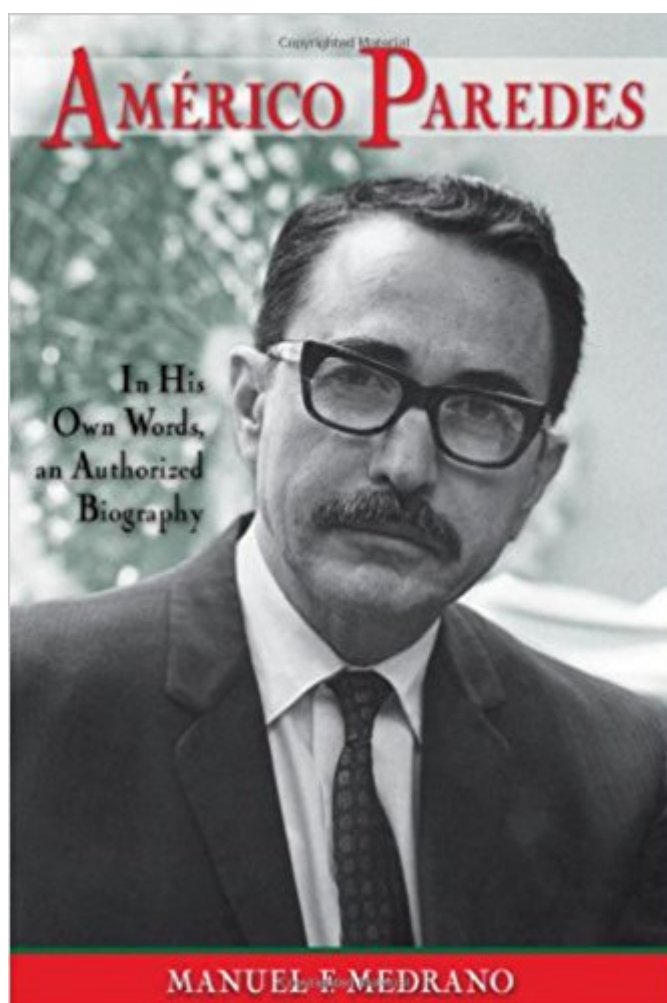


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Americo Paredes: In His Own Words, An Authorized Biography (Al Filo: Mexican American Studies Series)



Synopsis

Américo Paredes (1915-1999) was a folklorist, scholar, and professor at the University of Texas at Austin who is widely acknowledged as one of the founding scholars of Chicano Studies. Born in Brownsville, Texas, along the southern U.S.-Mexico Border, Paredes's early experiences impacted his writing during his later years as an academic. He grew up between two worlds—one written about in books, the other sung about in ballads and narrated in folktales. He attended a school system that emphasized conformity and Anglo values in a town whose population was 70 percent Mexican in origin. During World War II, he worked for the International American Red Cross and wrote for the Stars and Stripes army newspaper in the Far East. He returned to Texas with a new bride and a passion for continuing his formal education and his writing. Paredes did both at the University of Texas at Austin, where he completed his Ph.D. in 1956. With the publication of his dissertation, *"With His Pistol in His Hand": A Border Ballad and Its Hero* in 1958, Paredes soon emerged as a challenger to the status quo. His book questioned the mythic nature of the Texas Rangers and provided an alternative counter-cultural narrative to the existing traditional narratives of Walter Prescott Webb and J. Frank Dobie, among others. For the next forty years he was a brilliant teacher and prolific writer who championed the preservation of border culture and history. He was a soft-spoken, at times temperamental, yet fearless professor. He was a co-founder in 1970 of the Center for Mexican American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin and is credited with introducing the concept of Greater Mexico, decades before its wider acceptance today among transnationalist scholars. He received numerous awards, including La Orden del Aguila Azteca, Mexico's most prestigious service award to a foreigner. Paredes became a scholar of scholars, guiding many students to become academic leaders. Manuel F. Medrano interviewed Paredes over a five-year period before Paredes's death in 1999, and also interviewed his family and colleagues. For many Mexican Americans, Paredes's historical legacy is that he raised, carried, and defended their cultural flag with a dignity that both friends and foes respected.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"With the cooperation of the Paredes family, Medrano has compiled a book that focuses on Paredes's accomplishments and presents him as a man of unimpeachable integrity. . . . [He] provides new details about Paredes's personal life, including intimate glimpses of his relationship with his wife, Amelia. In this regard, Medrano's work transcends the three previous biographies on Paredes, each of which have been extremely circumspect regarding don Americo's privacy."--Southwestern Historical Quarterly

This clear and straightforward introduction to one of folklore's most notable scholars of the twentieth century provides excellent insight into the man behind the work. . . . Much like the border folk heroes depicted in the corridos that Dr. Paredes loved so much, his own character is brought to life in Medrano's words and will undoubtedly live on in the minds of those who listen to Paredes' story attentively."--Journal of Folklore Research

"Paredes played an important part in legitimating the study of Mexican culture as it crossed the border into the United States and valorizing the work of Americans of Mexican descent. . . . [I]t will be read and enjoyed by Paredes' friends and family, grateful students, and other scholars of folklore and Mexican American Studies."--Journal of the American Studies Association of Texas

MANUEL F. MEDRANO is a professor of history at the University of Texas at Brownsville and the coauthor of *Medieval Culture and the Mexican American Borderlands* and *Charro Days in Brownsville*. He has written three bilingual poetry books and has produced and directed *Los del Valle*, an oral history of Rio Grande Valley people. Medrano lives in Brownsville, TX.

this is a great read and would highly recommend it to anyone interested. The author shows what it take to become a classic

I gave it away as a gift. But I perused it and found it interesting.

The first, long awaited biography of Mexican-American Scholar Americo Paredes is on the shelves. However, before running out and purchasing *Americo Paredes: In His Own Words, An Authorized Biography* be wary. Dr. Manuel Medrano of the University of Texas-Brownsville wrote the book over a ten year period from interviews he conducted with Dr. Paredes over the last few years of Paredes's life. The book, for a comprehensive and authorized biography, weighs in at a mere 136 pages of biography and very scant bibliographical research. For Texas literature scholars, folklorists, Mexican-American scholars, or music scholars, the book adds very little in the way of probing scholarship. Americo Paredes (1915-1999) is considered one of the leaders of 20th Century Mexican-American studies, and his work as an educator for Anglo- and Hispanic-descent students alike earned him a stellar reputation amongst educators. Paredes's work as a folklorist, especially his explorations of the Texas/Mexico Border corridos, earned him international fame. His 1958 University of Texas at Austin Master's Thesis, *With a Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero*, challenged the Anglo version of the Gregorio Cortez story and the hegemony of Texas literature and history scholars such as J. Frank Dobie and Walter Prescott Webb. In fact, Paredes two most recognized books, *With a Pistol in His Hands* and *George Washington Gomez*, challenged the reputations of Webb and Dobie by attacking the scholarship of Webb's *Texas Rangers* and poking fun of Dobie as a bumbling, old Texas cowboy named K. Hank Harvey in *GWG*. After earning his Phd in English from Austin, Paredes became a professor of folklore and spent the rest of his academic career with UT, where he founded the Center for Intercultural Studies of Folklore and Ethnomusicology. As Virginia Woolf writes in "The Art of Biography," she states, "Almost any biographer, if he respects fact, can give us much more than another fact to add to our collection. He can give us the creative fact; the fertile fact; the fact that suggests and engenders" (259). Woolf's view frees the modern biographer from the constraints of sticking solely to the black and white facts. It gives biographers the ability to bring their subjects to life and bring the reader closer to the subject's mien, rather than just a distanced look at artifacts such as IRS returns and grocery lists. Dr. Medrano falls victim to the fact-train and fails to give the reader the man, Americo Paredes, as a breathing and sentient human. We leave the biography with a sense Paredes created himself without the help of mentors and struggled against currents working to hold him down his entire life. In fact, Medrano paints a man, in some sense, as one who was simply angry and reactionary. Medrano neglects to plumb any of Paredes essential relationships, and we seldom see a multidimensional character arise from the biographical narrative. Early relationships, like those

with Texas author Hart Stilwell (who gives Paredes his first job as a writer at the Brownsville Herald), are glossed over with little mention of rather these relationships developed Paredes or not. In fact, there is strong anecdotal evidence Stilwell introduced Paredes to Dobie during the high school graduation ceremony Paredes parodies in *George Washington Gomez*. The relationships with influential students and colleagues, like Jose Limon and Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, are only mere mentions. "Writing this book for me was a labor of love and respect for Dr. Paredes," says Medrano. "It's a story that needed to be told, and I wanted somebody who lived and grew up in the Valley to tell it." We only wish Dr. Medrano had parlayed his respect and love for Dr. Paredes into an evocative and thought-provoking narrative and told the story of Americo Paredes. Moreover we wish Dr. Medrano had better explored the environments and relationships which developed the man and scholar Dr. Paredes represents. Although this biography fails as a scholarly work and a erudite narrative of an interesting life, it does provide one glimmer of hope: it allows future Paredes scholars a starting point to delve deeper scholarship.

America is a melting pot of culture, and no part of that culture should be shunned. "Americo Paredes: In His Own Words, An Authorized Biography" tells the story of Americo Paredes, a key figure representing Latino culture along the American and Mexican border, when in his days such influence was minimized. An influential scholar and teacher, his progress is still felt in the modern day. "Americo Paredes" is a key addition to any biography collection focusing on major Hispanic intellectuals in America.

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