

**Critical *Mestizaje* and National Identity: Discourse of Difference in
Americo Paredes**

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The Mexican American scholar Américo Paredes has been a pioneer in formulating theories related to the concept of *mestizaje* (race mixture), the nation state, nationality, and nationalism through a discourse of difference. The author of the ground-breaking work "*With a Pistol in His Hand*": A Border Ballad and Its Hero (1958), numerous scholarly articles, as well as a collection of poems *Between Two Worlds* (written in the 1930s-1950s but published in 1991) and the novel *George Washington Gómez* (written in the 1930s but published in 1990) left in these works a rich vein of theoretical formulations not heretofore fully explored. Embedded in both his creative works and his scholarly production are issues of critical *mestizaje* as well as theories that will surface much later in the 1980s and 1990s decades articulated by such theorists as Homi Bhabha and Benedict Anderson among others.

In this paper I examine the theoretical concept of "critical *mestizaje*" and posit how Paredes from the 1930s through the 1990s was heavily involved in developing theoretical paradigms through his writings that emphasized discourse of difference linked to ethnic and racial categories. His main theory details how much of Chicano cultural production, such as the Mexican/Chicano *corrido* or ballad is based on "culture clash" between the Mexican Americans indigenous to the American Southwest and Anglo American colonizers or what Chela Sandoval would later call "oppositional consciousness." Paredes's concept of *mestizaje* antedates some of the borderland theories posited by Gloria Anzaldúa in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). My central thesis details how Paredes's work is an early precursor of theoretical paradigms that will become popular in the late twentieth century. In this study, I specifically focus on a few key poems from his poetry collection *Between Two Worlds* and on three of Paredes' articles in which he explores issues of *mestizaje*, the nation, nationality, and nationalism published in the 1960s: "Mexican Legendry and the Rise of the *Mestizo*: A Survey," (1971); "El cowboy norteamericano en el folklore y la literature," (1963); and "Texas' Third Man: The Texas-Mexican," (1963).

Paredes evinced an interest in the topics of nation, nationality and nationalism at the very inception of his literary career. As a young man in his early twenties in the 1930s he composed a series of poems touching on the Mexican American experience. These early poems were published in 1991 in the collection *Between Two Worlds* and as the title indicates, many of the poems explore issues of nationality and of the nation-less subject. His poems express his anguish at being born in the United States where his ethnicity as a Mexican American condemned him to second class citizen status. In his poem "Flute Song" written in 1935, he cries in psychological pain:

Why was I ever born?
Proud of my southern race,
If I must seek my sun
In an Anglo-Saxon face (4).

Paredes' poetry evinces both a tragic and melancholic sense of life although we detect now and then sparks of satire and humor. His parodic poem "The Mexico-Texan" written in 1935 is deceiving because although ostensibly humorous packs a strong dose of social protest. In this satirical poem "The Mexico-Texan," Paredes caustically indicts both the United States and Mexico for the unjust treatment of Chicanos, here more specifically, of *Tejanos* [Texas Mexicans] who have been left orphaned of a nation. By using the linguistic marker of heavily accented speech, he immediately conveys the racism, classism, and harassment Mexican Americans are subjected to both in the United States and in Mexico because of the use of Chicano Spanish and non-standard English. The national language issue is painfully brought forth in the second stanza by detailing the struggles the Spanish speaker has in learning to speak English.

For the Mexico-Texas he no gotta lan',
He stomped on the neck on both sides of the Gran',
The dam gringo lingo he no cannot spik
It twisters the tong and it make you fill sick.
A cit'zen of Texas they say that he ees,
But then, why they call him the Mexican Grease?
Soft talk and hard action, he can't understan',
The Mexico-Texan he no gotta lan' (26).

The Mexican population is equally hard on the English speaking Tejano:

If he cross the reever, eet ees just as bad,
On high poleeshed Spanish he break up his had,
American customs those people no like
They hate that Miguel they should call him El Mike

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And Mexican-born, why they jeer and they hoot,
"Go back to the gringo! Go lick at hees boot!"
In Texas he's Johnny, in Mexico Juan,
But the Mexico-Texan he no gotta lan' (26).

The poetic voice underscores how the Chicano is an orphan without a Fatherland, no nation wants to claim him as his own:

And they say everywhere, "he's a burden and a drag
He no gotta country, he no gotta flag,"
He no gotta voice, all he got is the han'
To work like the burro; he no gotta lan' (27).

Bereft of country, of a nation to call his own and that accepts him as a first class citizen, the Tejano feels his only world is hard work. Within the lyrics of this poem, Paredes expounds on the issue of linguistic terrorism and by the use of parody in his poetry he provides a theoretical paradigm that explicates the oppression of the Chicano/a through language.

Gloria Anzaldúa in her book *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* has a chapter on the issue of linguistic terrorism. She describes the different registers of the Spanish and English languages that the Chicano/a speak. Nevertheless, because of the concern for language purity many people have and the hegemonic structures that affirm that the only "correct" form of communication is the language register of the ruling class the Chicano/a is constantly critiqued for his/her ability to create new languages, new registers and for being unable or unwilling to speak the standard register.

The use of pidgin English in the poem underscores the state of being without a nation for the Tejano. The dictionary defines pidgin as "a simplified form of speech that is usually a mixture of two or more languages, has a rudimentary grammar and vocabulary, is used for communication between speakers of different languages, and is no one's native language." (*American Heritage College Dictionary 3 ed.*). The use of pidgin English effectively conveys the lack of acceptance of Mexican Americans by the two nations: Mexico and the United States. The poem is a precursor to sentiments that will be expressed later on in the poetry produced in the Chicano literary renaissance in the 1960s in such works as those written by Alurista and other poets, novelists, and playwrights writing during the early years of the Chicano Movement and who continue writing in that same register such as Guillermo Gómez- Peña, Carlos Morton, and Cherríe Moraga.

The poem "The Mexican-Texan" dating from 1935 antedates by several decades a theme that will be common in Chicano/a poetry: i.e. the issue of

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language terrorism. The poem is particularly reminiscent of Pat Mora's poem "Legal Alien" in which the poetic persona explains how a bilingual/bicultural person is nevertheless perceived as a foreigner both in Mexico and the United States.

Bi-lingual, Bi-cultural,
able to slip from "How's life?"
to "*Me'stan volviendo loca,*"
able to sit in a paneled office
drafting memos in smooth English,
able to order in fluent Spanish
at a Mexican restaurant,
American but hyphenated
viewed by Anglos as perhaps exotic,
perhaps inferior, definitely different,
viewed by Mexicans as alien,
(their eyes say, "You may speak
Spanish but you're not like me")
an American to Mexicans
a Mexican to Americans
a handy token
sliding back and forth
between the fringes of both worlds
by smiling
by masking the discomfort
of being pre-judged
Bi-laterally (Pat Mora 1984:52).

As if in response to those Mexicans who view Chicanos/as as unable to speak Spanish, Paredes penned "Alma pocha" in 1936 in elegant standard Spanish. The predominant theme, as the title suggests, is again related to the notion of a subject without a nation. The words "Pocha" and "Pocho" are pejorative terms Mexicans use for Mexican Americans. The poetic persona's interlocutor is a Pocha soul who, the reader intuits, is the poetic persona's own soul. This Pocha soul has a history of suffering which has been directly caused by loss of nationhood due to the United States Mexican War of 1847-48. The poetic persona exclaims:

En tu propio terruño serás extranjero
por la ley de fusil y la ley del acero;
y verás a tu hermano colgado de un leño
por el crimen mortal de haber sido trigueño (Paredes 1991:35).
[In your own land you will be a stranger
By the law of the rifle and the law of the bullet

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And you will see your brother hanging from a tree
Because of the capital crime of being dark-skin.]

With great bitterness the poetic voice exclaims:

donde fueras el amo serás el sirviente
y en tu propio terruño serás extranjero (35).
[Whereas you were the master you will now be the servant
and in your own land you will be a stranger]

The loss of nation due to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 brought tragic consequences for the Mexican American population left behind in the United States. The last stanza, nevertheless, ends in an optimistic note for the Alma Pocha seems to be waiting for a future that implicitly will be better:

Alma pocha,
alma noble y duradera,
la que sufre,
la que espera (36).

Other poems, such as “Mi Pueblo” included in the same poetry collection cited above continue to expound on issues of national and ethnic identity.

The same concern that surfaces in his poetry with respect to issues of the nation, nationality and nationalism will be of paramount importance in some of his articles written and/or published in the 1960s. Homi Bhabha’s theoretical writings regarding literary production and the construction of the nation are particularly relevant in analyzing Paredes’ significant theorizing on Mexican national types, more specifically the mestizo, and their relation to legends. Bhabha states:

Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation--or narration--might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west. An idea whose cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force (Homi K. Bhabha 1990:1).

Timothy Brennan concurs with this view stating: “Nations, then, are imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of

cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role” (Timothy Brennan 1990:49).

Paredes’s concern with national types, and “mestizo consciousness,” in particular, are evident in his article “Mexican Legendry and the Rise of the *Mestizo*: A Survey.” The study was published in 1971 but was first read at a University of California, Los Angeles conference on American folk legends in 1969. This essay which explores the mestizo personality and his role in asserting himself as a national type in Mexican society antedates Gloria Anzaldúa’s internationally renowned theories posited in her book *Borderlands/ La Frontera* on the New Mestiza and *mestiza* consciousness by eighteen years. Paredes’ main thesis in the cited article is that “the rise of the mestizo as representative of the Mexican nationality may be illuminated by the study of Mexican legendry” (p. 98). His study, of course, differs in many respects from Anzaldúa’s work but he was the first Chicano scholar to link narrative discourse with the construction of social identity. Anzaldúa’s work on *mestizaje* focuses on La Chicana and *mestiza* consciousness. She privileges this mode of thinking because in her view the convergence of various ethnicities and racial groups allows the individual to view the world through a multicolor prism and thus is able to attain multiple perspectives instead of a monologic view of the world. Paredes, likewise, privileges *mestizos* because he sees that even though they were a marginalized group in Mexican society during the colonial period, their strength in numbers and aggressive spirit helped them overtake both the Indian and the *criollo* [creole] and become the prototype of the Mexican nation as well as assume political leadership. But while Anzaldúa views *La Mestiza* (woman of mixed race) as a marginalized, oppressed entity in contemporary U.S. society where miscegenation, sexism, hybridity, and the confluence of races and ethnicities is perceived as negative, Paredes’ analysis places contemporary *mestizos* in Mexico as the hegemonic group holding political, social, and economic power in Mexican society. *Mestizos*, by their sheer numbers, became the dominant group, the hegemonic class. More recently, I submit, the *criollo* class is ascending as can be seen in contemporary *telenovelas* or soap operas where Europeanized Mexicans predominate.

Nevertheless, Don Américo is correct in positing the rise of the mestizo in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century and in particular after the Mexican Revolution of 1910-17. The future, as Paredes saw it “belonged to the Indianized creole, the hispanicized Indian, the negro slave through their progeny” (99).

The national discourse constructing the *mestizo* is particularly evident in Mexican legendry and the corrido according to Don Américo. Social cohesiveness and the crystalization of the *mestizo* as a group is evident in the

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colonial legends related to La Malinche, La Llorona and even more specifically, the legends surrounding the Virgin of Guadalupe popularly known as “Madre de los Mexicanos” [the mother of all Mexicans]. These three legends foreground the Indian and Spanish heritage of Mexicans. La Malinche is a historical figure of Aztec extraction. She was sold as a slave to Mayan traders and eventually was given to Hernán Cortez, the Spanish Conquistador, in 1519. She aided Cortez in the conquest of Mexico and bore him a son. Thus Malinche has become known as the foremother of *mestizo* Mexico. La Llorona or Wailing Woman, is also supposed to have been an Indian woman or a *mestiza* and had children by a Spaniard. When he spurned her for a Spanish woman, she killed their children and was condemned to look for her children wailing in the night. The Virgin of Guadalupe in turn, appeared to an Indian, Juan Diego, and sought to have a chapel built in the Cerro del Tepeyac near Mexico City. She privileged an Indian (Juan Diego) and her physiognomy is that of an Indian or *mestiza* woman.

The seeds of the future Mexican nation, the foundational narratives supporting the development of a national identity began to sprout in the colonial period with the widespread dissemination of the above three legends. These foundational fictions imagined the nation as *mestiza* with Malinche’s first *mestizo* child from Cortés and La Llorona’s *mestizo* children who according to legend were products of an Indian or *mestizo* mother and a Spaniard. While the United States’ national consciousness imagined itself as white in spite of the Chicano/a, the Native American, the African American and Asian American among the many ethnic and racial groups present in this country, Mexico began to imagine itself *mestizo* privileging Spanish and Indian, in spite of the heterogeneity of other races and ethnic groups populating the Mexican nation.

Similar to Anzaldúa’s conceptualization of La Mestiza and *mestiza* consciousness, Paredes views the *mestizo* national type in a positive manner. As Mexican nationalism begins to coalesce at the inception of the twentieth century, the *mestizo*, son of the dispossessed, the marginalized, becomes a dynamic force in Revolutionary Mexico. Paredes asserts that after centuries of struggle, the *mestizo* survived and “has found his identity in the nation rather than in his saints” (p. 107). And it is the Mexican legends encompassed in the triptych of Malinche, La Llorona and Guadalupe that tell the story of his victory in permeating Mexican national consciousness and becoming the national prototype of its citizenry.

Paredes’s concern with national prototypes is also evident in his article “El cowboy norteamericano en el folklore y la literatura” [The North American Cowboy in Folklore and Literature] published in 1963 several

years before Benedict Anderson's book *Imagined Communities* (1983), appeared. Paredes' work lead us to comprehend that Anderson's imagined communities do not have to be imagined only from traditional lore hundreds of years old but can be constructed from fairly recent events and in a short span of time. Don Américo's central thesis in this essay on the American cowboy is that the currently idealized figure of this entity arose out of the intensive publicity campaign eulogizing the cowboy and his way of life by capitalist concerns intent on raising funds for the cattle drive enterprises emanating from Texas. And, most importantly, asserts Paredes, the idealized figure of the cowboy was constructed out of a nationalistic spirit that arose during the late nineteenth century. During this nation-building period, scarcely forty years after acquiring more than half of Mexican territory which comprised a huge part of today's American Southwest, the incipient nation needed a national figure to mythologize. The cowboy's apotheosis in the American national landscape was a result of this nation-building enterprise. Paredes perceptively indicates:

[the] national sentiment was reaching its apex and soon it would end in the isolationist and xenophobic period after World War I. As is expected, the desire for a strong national identity gave rise for an equally strong desire to have traditions of a private nature (235). [my translation]

These psychological drives and desires for a national identity perceived the figure of the cowboy in idealized terms and imagined him as "a copy of warriors from the Spanish ballad tradition and as a descendent of the warriors from the ancient frontiers of England and Scotland" (235).

Paredes, nevertheless, deconstructs the cowboy myth by carefully researching the historical antecedents of this now legendary and heroic figure in the national imagination of the United States. The Texas scholar begins his studious probing by comparing the Argentine *gaucho*, the Mexican *jinete* or horseman, and the cowboy. He perceived certain similarities between the gaucho and the cowboy even in their negative origins. According to Paredes, both the gaucho and the cowboy were viewed in a pejorative manner by the general population. A dictionary definition of the gaucho cited by Paredes indeed offers an extremely degrading view of this group of people: "a vagrant horse rider who because of his living on the margins of the law, is viewed as a bandit and as a brawling lout." (227). [my translation]

The origin of the cowboy is likewise detailed. Evidently the word cowboy was first applied to those men fighting during the War of Independence in 1775-1783. However, the cowboy appellation was not given

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to heroic types but to those who stole cattle from the various colonists under the guise of revolutionary fervor. The term cowboy continued to have a negative acceptance during the Texas Mexican War in 1836 since during this period and up to 1848 mercenary soldiers were involved in the various conflicts and battles along the Rio Nueces area and the Rio Grande border. These mercenary soldiers were called cowboys. Longhorn cattle were plentiful here and cowboys tended to appropriate them. Thus the pejorative “robavaca” or cattle rustlers were frequently applied to these early cowboys.

Paredes points out how the image of the cowboy became sanitized under the pressures of a nation trying to forge a positive and heroic self identity and national consciousness. For Don Américo, the period 1866-1890 was crucial for both the rehabilitation of the cowboy and for his rise to prominence as a symbol of national identity. The cowboy surpassed the miner, the farmer, the mountain man, the buffalo hunter, the skin trapper, the Indian hunter and the sheep herder among other many players competing in the national stage. Crucial in the cowboy’s reconstruction and his being imagined as a national symbol of America, were the works of song collectors and folklorists such as Nathan Howard, J. Frank Dobie, John Lomax, and Allan Lomax. Paredes brings to task two of the folklorist, J. Frank Dobie and John Lomax for their sloppy work in folklore scholarship. In their zeal to find a heroic national type for the United States, they neglected to exercise scholarly caution and apply strict scholarly precepts in collecting and classifying folksongs. As a consequence of this error in judgment some of the collected songs were not part of a long tradition of cowboy lore but were written by newspaper men and dime store poets. Don Américo asserts that twenty-four years was just not long enough to produce a large corpus of cowboy folklore. In addition, external factors that aided and abetted the consolidation of the cowboy’s myth and legend were the world of film, radio, and novels, in particular, the Western novel.

Again predating Homi Bhabha and Benedict Anderson, Dr. Paredes underscores that nations need their foundational narratives in order to build a national identity since “foundational fictions are necessary in establishing the legitimacy of the emerging nation” (39).

Social reality is erased and reconstituted via literary discourses as new national characters are imagined in order to whitewash and re-frame history. Don Américo’s scholarly study on cowboy imagery deconstructs the American national foundational fictions by carefully reconstructing the history of the cowboy. Thus through this process the ideological underpinnings of this mythic figure are contested and exposed. In this manner, Don Américo offers us strategies for social resistance by indicating how the analysis and deconstruction of national myths can be used to

challenge and rupture false national symbols and nationalist ideologies which tend to be oppressive and exclusionary of subaltern groups such as the Chicano/a, the Native American, the African-American and others who are not included in these Anglo Saxon national narratives. By deconstructing, rupturing, and putting into question the national narrative of the cowboy, we have the possibility of opening up a monologic national discourse and transform it into a heterologic one thus offering subaltern groups the opportunity of inserting self and others in a more inclusive national discourse. This in turn can be more conducive for the creation of a new, heterogeneous, and more powerful national identity.

Paredes is not only content to disrupt and challenge American nationalist ideologies but zeros in on the concept of national boundaries configuring a nation. In the article "The Folklore of Groups of Mexican Origin in the United States" first published in Spanish in 1966, Paredes deconstructs Mexico and the United States as unitary nations with non permeable boundaries when it comes to cultural production and peoples itself. Challenging the lyrics of the song "Como México No Hay Dos" [There Is Only One Mexico], Paredes responds that in fact there are two: the "real" Mexico and "el México de Afuera" (Mexico Abroad or the "other" Mexico). He anticipated the Mexican government's present acknowledgment of Mexican nationals abroad and granting citizenship to those Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the United who were born in Mexico (but had become American citizens) or to the sons or daughters of a Mexican citizen. The Texas scholar continues to erase political boundaries established in 1848 when he asserts that regional Mexican American folklore in south Texas is part of a greater cultural complex that encompasses Northern Mexico. He caustically asserts: "limits are not defined by the customs and immigration officers at the border" (7)

Folklorists in the past have been interested in the "nationality" of Mexican American folklore: is it Spanish as the Hispanophiles of yore adamantly insisted; is it Mexican as Mexican nationalists claimed or is it a regional variety of American folklore? Paredes believes all three stated positions are partly correct. In transnational societies, as are Mexico and the United States, folk items, like people, traverse boundaries and insert themselves in the social economies of those new societies into which they come in contact. In this manner, Mexican folklore has been migrating to the United States with the immigrants that bring it with them, whether documented or undocumented, as part of their cultural capital.

However, in specific regions, such as international border areas groups form their own cultural "nation." Here, folklore is commonly shared on both sides of the respective national borders. An excellent example of this is in the

lower Rio Grande Valley here in Texas and Northern Mexico. In this area Mexican and Mexican Americans have shared a rich cultural heritage for centuries. Thus Don Américo furnishes Ernest Renan, the French historian, a concrete example of the difficulty in defining what a nation is. In a now famous lecture delivered at the Sorbonne March 11, 1882 titled "What is a Nation?" Renan questioned the specificity of the term stating at the inception of his talk that "What I propose to do today is to analyze with you an idea which, though seemingly clear, lends itself to the most dangerous misunderstandings." (Renan 1990:8). He then proceeds to enumerate what he calls "vast conglomerates" of men found in "China, Egypt or ancient Babylonia, Hebrews and Arabs, [city states such as] Athens or Sparta...the various territories in the Carolingian Empire,...nations such as France, England... confederations such as Switzerland or America..." and after enumerating all this "nation" surmises that race is not a significant factor for any of these peoples since they all have numerous races within their territories. And in fact in many countries, it is what Renan calls "the fusion of their component populations" which is in the final analysis their "defining feature" (10). Other nations, on the other hand, are composed of various ethnic groups such as the Magyars and the Slavs in Hungary. He therefore views those that would seek race as the defining characteristic of nation to be in "very great error, which if it were to become dominant would destroy European civilization" (13). The French thinker proved prophetic if we recall Germany's attempt at race purification in the German state during Hitler's regime in the 1930s. Renan proceeds to dismiss other prevailing concepts such as "dynasty" and "language" associated by many with the notion of nation. With respect to the latter he underscores the pernicious danger to the intellect if one is a language chauvinist. In splendidly eloquent terms he admonishes: "Let us not abandon the fundamental principle that man is a reasonable and moral being, before he is cooped up in such and such a language, before he is a member of such and such a race, before he belongs to such and such a culture. Before French, German, or Italian culture there is human culture" (17).

Religion, likewise is disdained by Renan as a defining characteristic. Finally he rejects natural geographic boundaries as an integral ingredient in the construction of a nation. Neither rivers nor mountains in the final analysis are the primary limiting factors in a nation's borders.

Renan defines nation in more reified terms. He asserts:

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principal. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day

consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form.... The nation...is a culmination of a long past of endeavors, sacrifices, and devotion.... (19).

Paredes's concern with the exclusion of the Mexican American from national discourse is evident in his essay "Texas' Third Man: The Texas-Mexican" published in 1963. The United States began its ascendancy in the world stage as an economic power to be reckoned with at the beginning of the twentieth century. As stated earlier regarding the emergence of the cowboy as a national symbol and prototype, the new nation imagined itself as white, Anglo Saxon. However, the Black civil rights movement from the 1950s and 1960s prodded the nation into a reevaluation of itself and its citizenry. The efforts of the Black civil rights movement created in the national consciousness a White/Black binary with the Mexican American being erased. Being erased from the national landscape can have serious consequences both for purposes of self esteem and strong self identity as well as for economic and educational reasons. Paredes offers the concrete case of the Mexican American in Texas or the Texas-Mexican. He points out how in spite of a few Texas-Mexicans that are successful "the great mass of Texas-Mexicans are often below the Negro—the other great minority in Texas—in their economic, educational and general social development" (49). Paredes examines the root causes for the economic and social oppression of the Texas-Mexican. He states in the above cited article: "An important cause of the Texas-Mexican's anomalous position is his proximity to the Republic of Mexico, not only geographical proximity but cultural and historical as well" (50).

Thus the concepts of national identity, racial identity and nationalism play a role in the discriminatory practices that have been extant in Texas in the twentieth century and perhaps continue in our twenty-first century. Paredes informs us that there are "three species of humanity" in Texas: white, African American, and Mexican. A strong antipathy for the Mexican is due from cultural and historical reasons, i.e. the Spanish language, the Catholic religion, and the wars with Mexico. National narratives of the Alamo, the Goliad Massacre, and the Mier Expedition served to inflame feelings against the Mexican.

Paredes wrote several other essays focusing on issues of nation, nationality and nationalism. Studies such as "Texas Third Man: The Texas Mexican" cited above and "The United States, Mexico and Machismo" center their optic on the construction of national types, stereotypes, and the ethnic configurations within political and cultural citizenship. Paredes was acutely

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aware of the national status of Mexican Americans and their subaltern status in American society. His writings sought to dissect, explicate, comprehend, and theorize on political issues configured through the national imaginary. In this study I demonstrate how this incisive scholar's writings early on posited theoretical paradigms which can be used to deconstruct discursive modes of oppression at times sanctified and promoted by the state. In his article "Texas Third-Man: The Texas Mexican" discussed above Paredes recounts an instance where a governor of the state of Texas protested vociferously against Robert Kennedy's observation that the war with Mexico may not have been a just and moral war. As stated earlier, the myths of the Alamo, Goliad, as well as others related to the U.S. Mexican War stoked the flames of a pernicious nationalism that often led to racial insensitivity and bigotry and in this manner increased anti Mexican and Chicano sentiments.

In spite of the seriousness and often painful topics Don Américo expounded on, he never lost his wry sense of humor. His writings express a keen sensitivity for the sometimes absurd nature of human behavior. In the "Texas Third Man..." article Paredes details the racial and cultural prejudice against the Mexican and points out how people forget that Mexicans are *mestizos* and as such they are part white and part Native American. He states that most white people are very proud to have Indian blood and therefore by definition, they too are *mestizos*. Paredes recounts the anecdote about how a Mexican American by the name of Juan Aguilar told a head waiter at a fancy restaurant his name was Johnny Nest of Eagles. By this subterfuge he was able to be seated at the restaurant. Paredes was a humanist of the highest order, who through his scholarship and literary writings sought to raise our consciousness to a higher level. He was a precursor of contemporary theories on critical *mestizaje* as well as theories on the construction of national imaginaries.

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