

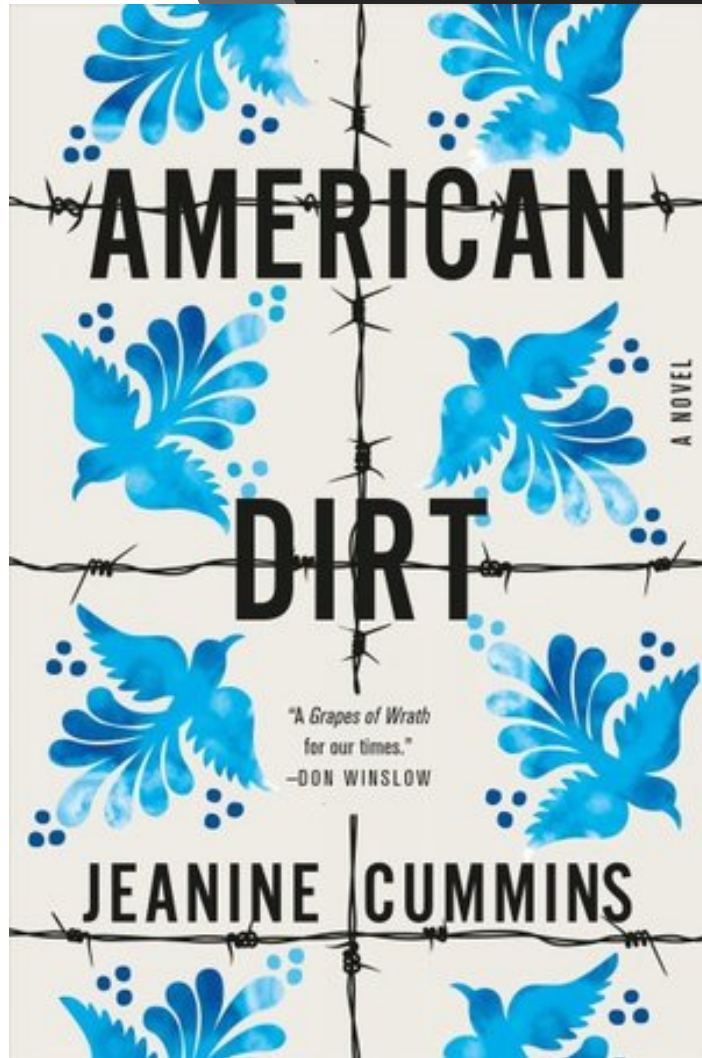


**SPAN322:  
“North of the Río Grande”  
US Latino/Chicano  
Literature**

*“With His Pistol in His Hand”* Ila  
February 4, 2020

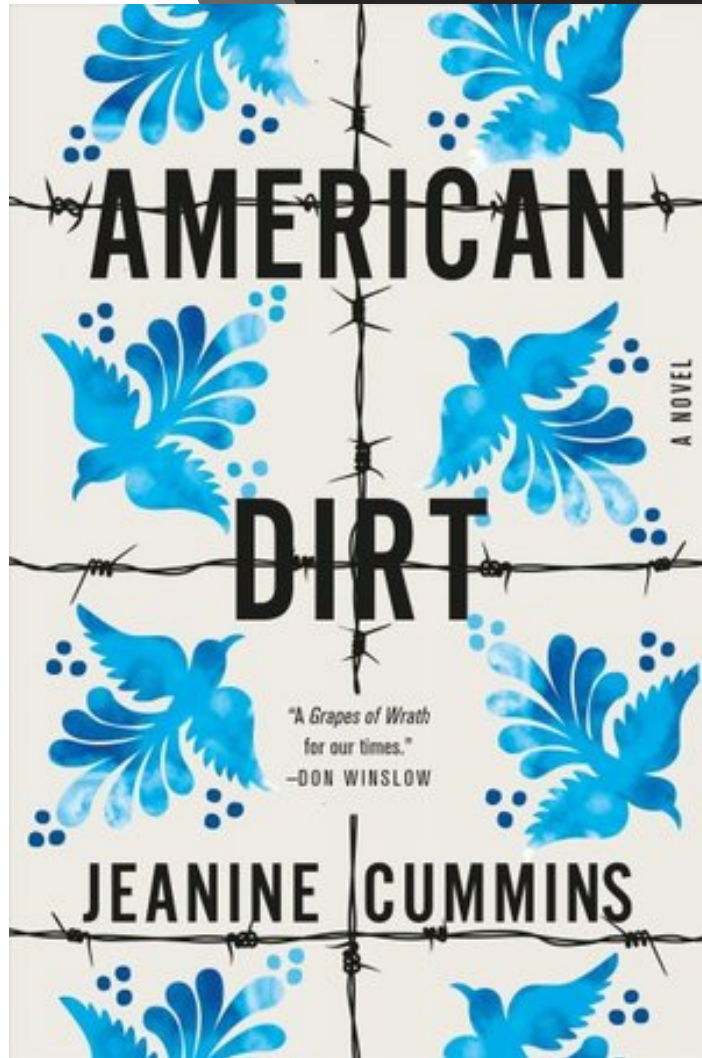
**“AMERICAN DIRT”**

# *American Dirt*



- The publisher of *American Dirt* has cancelled the promotional tour planned for the book, citing “threats of physical violence” and claiming that “we believe there exists real peril to [the author’s] safety.”
- They will now “be organizing a series of townhall meetings, where Jeanine will be joined by some of the groups who have raised objections to the book. We believe that this provides an opportunity to come together and unearth difficult truths to help us move forward as a community.”
- The publisher has also apologized for aspects of the way in which the book has been marketed and its story framed...

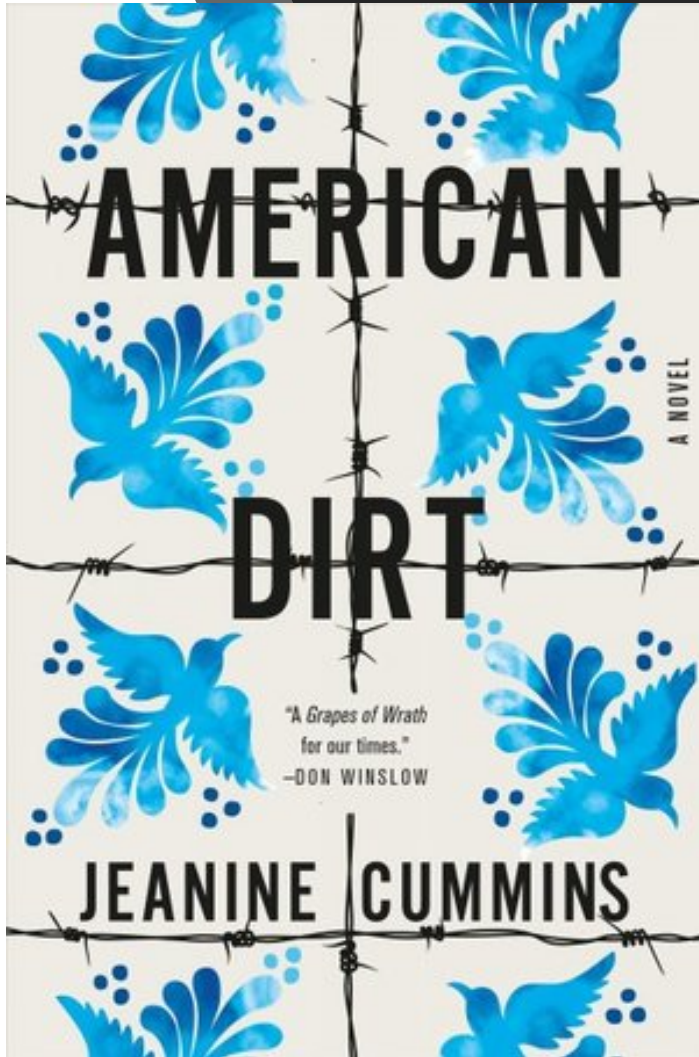
# *American Dirt*



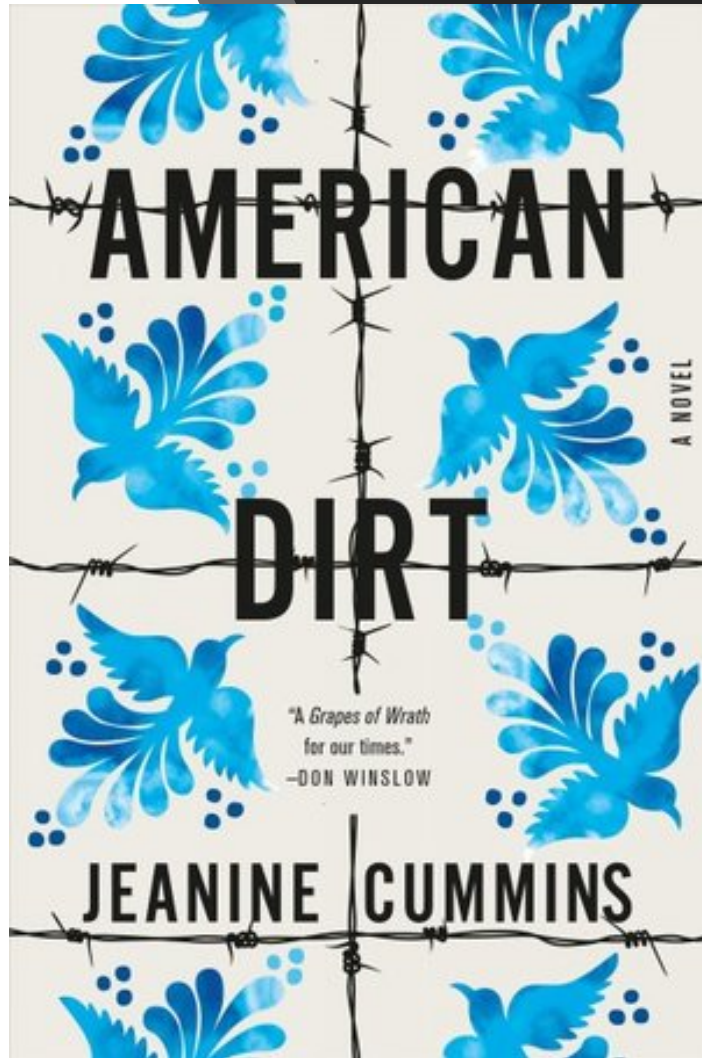
“We made serious mistakes in the way we rolled out this book. We should never have claimed that it was a novel that defined the migrant experience; we should not have said that Jeanine’s husband was an undocumented immigrant while not specifying that he was from Ireland; we should not have had a centerpiece at our bookseller dinner last May that replicated the book jacket so tastelessly. We can now see how insensitive those and other decisions were, and we regret them.”

# *American Dirt*

“The fact that we were surprised is indicative of a problem, which is that in positioning this novel, we failed to acknowledge our own limits. The discussion around this book has exposed *deep inadequacies in how we at Flatiron Books address issues of representation, both in the books we publish and in the teams that work on them.*”



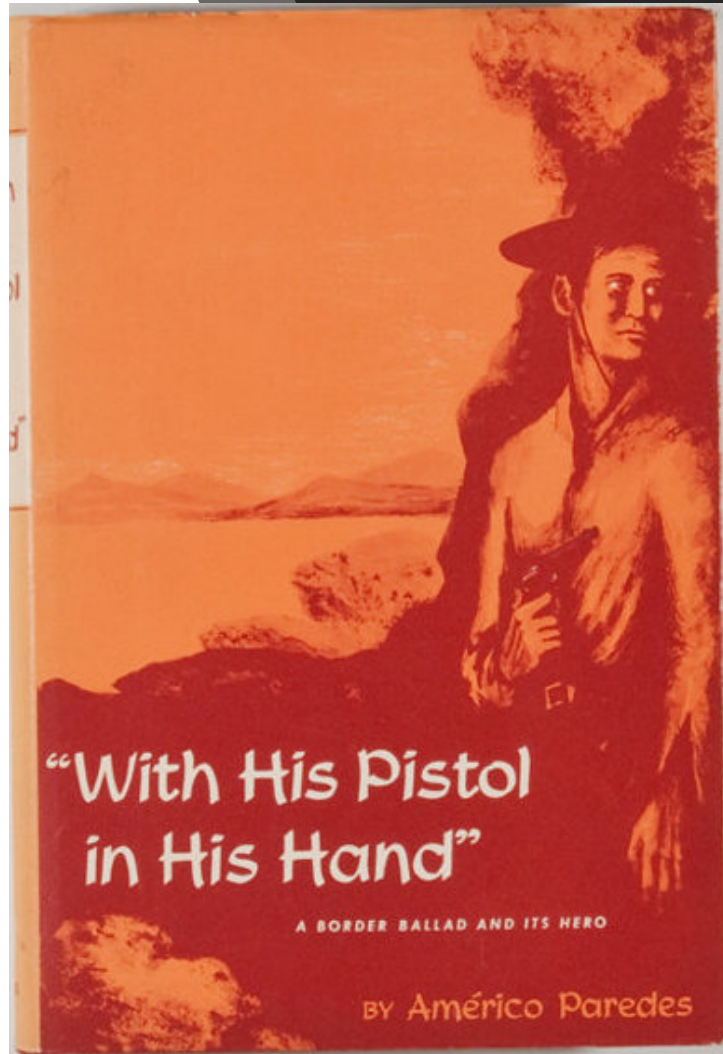
# *American Dirt*



- Oprah: “When I first started to hear your comments opposing the selection, I was asking the question in earnest: ‘What is offensive?’ I’ve spent the past few days listening to members of the Latinx community to get a greater understanding of their concerns, and I hear them. I do.”
- “What I want to do is bring people together from all sides to talk about this book and *who gets to publish what stories*. [. . .] I think it’s going to allow us to open up the conversation in unexpected and—I really hope—meaningful ways.”
- Meanwhile, critics of the book (such as Myriam Gurba) also report receiving threats.

**“WITH HIS PISTOL IN HIS  
HAND”**

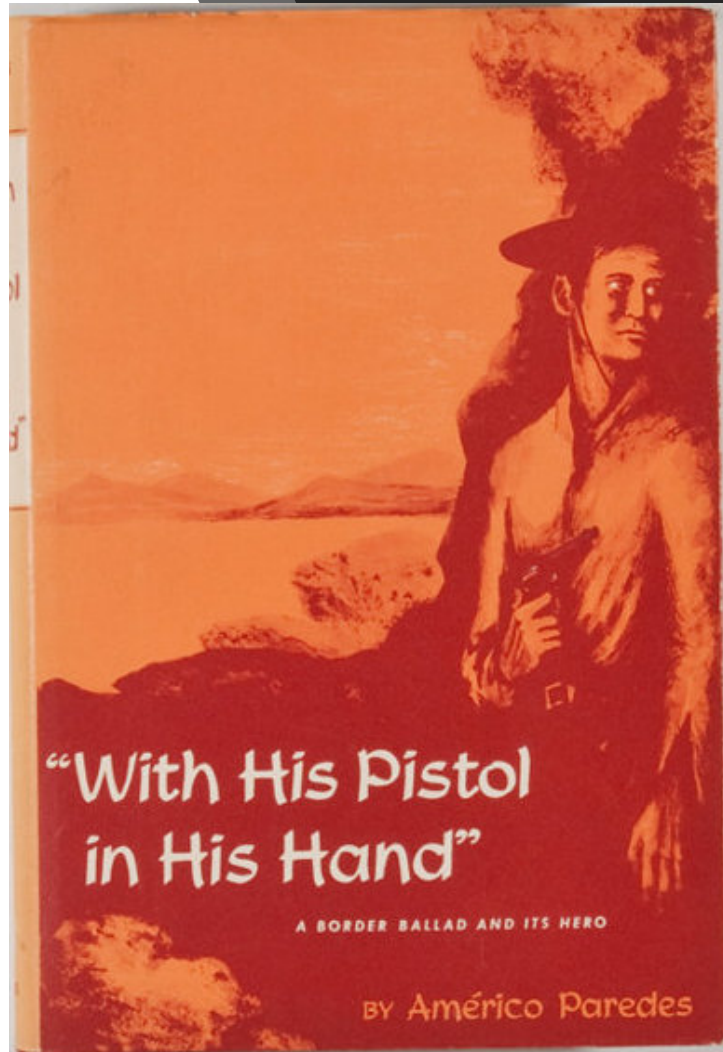
# *“With His Pistol in His Hand”*



- What are the different kinds of conflict that this book depicts?
- How does the presence of a border influence culture, politics, or history in Southern Texas?
- What is the use, purpose, or social function of a) oral “legend” and b) popular balladry? Is this “literature”?
- What does the book say about History and the best way to study Chicano history?

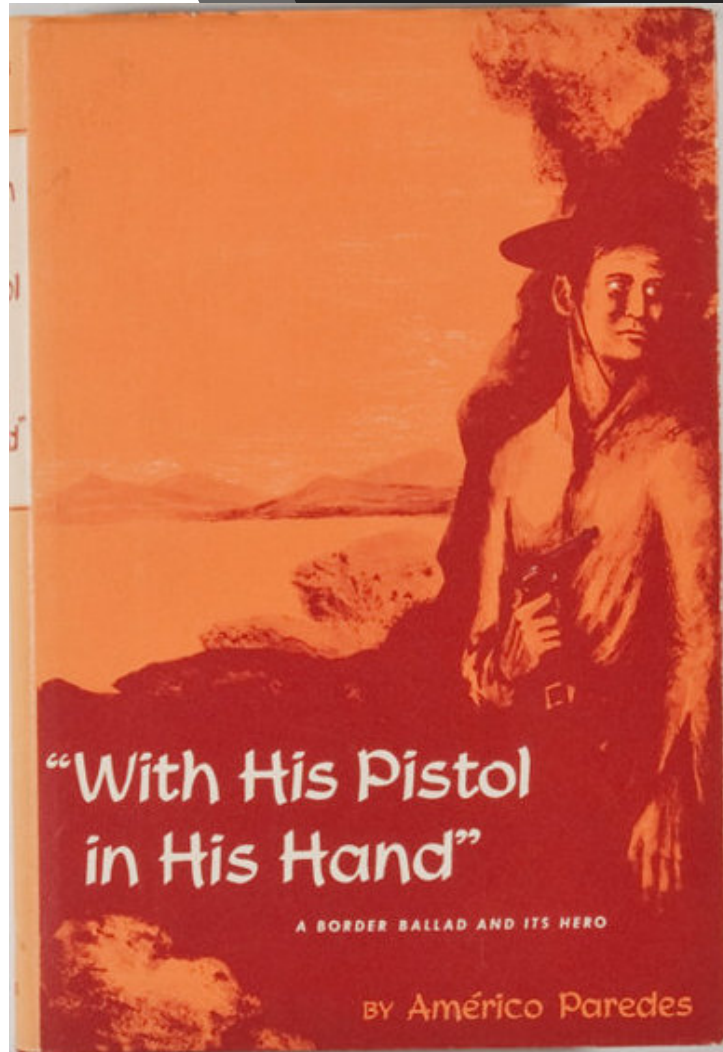


# *“With His Pistol in His Hand”*



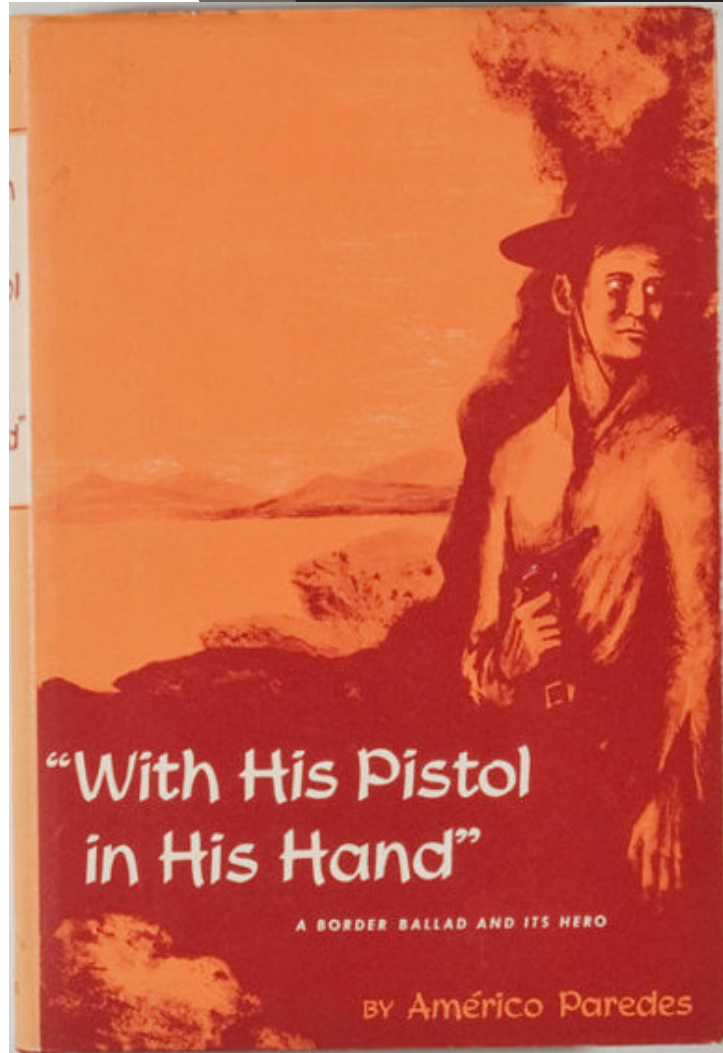
- What is the status of “truth” in this book? What is Paredes’s attitude to “legend” and its associated exaggerations and fabrications? How much does what “actually” happened matter to him?
- Paredes does give us the “true” history of Gregorio Cortez, but ultimately that doesn’t necessarily interest him so much as does what people do with that history.
- He is interested in the historical conditions or foundations and subsequent impact of a “tall tale” and an ever-mutating ballad.

# *“With His Pistol in His Hand”*



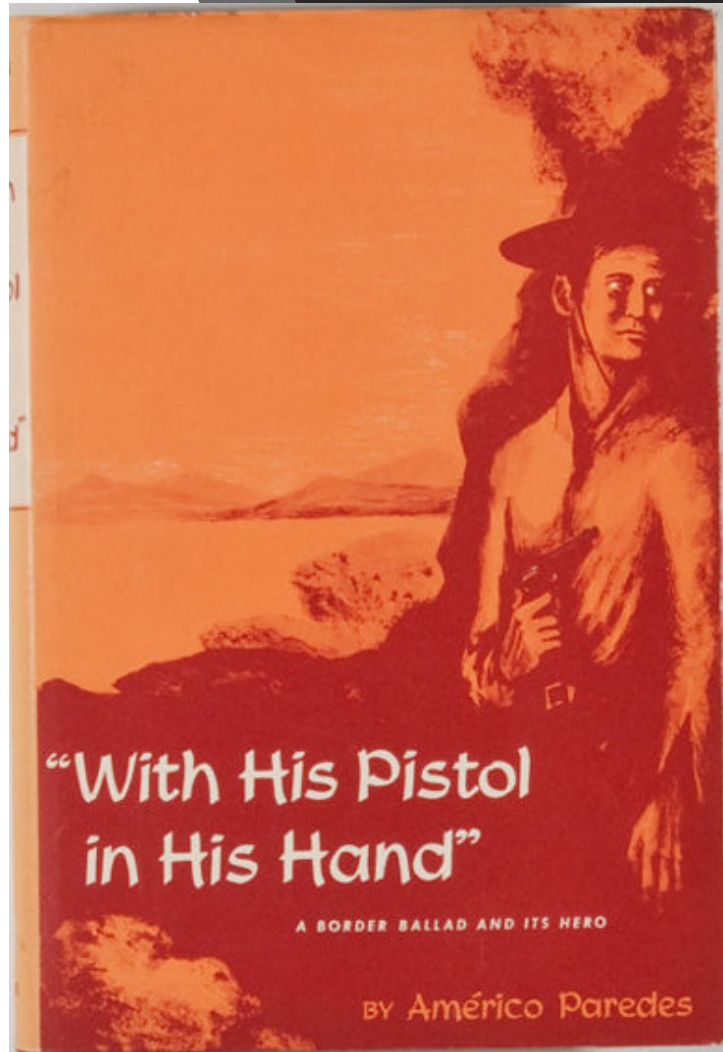
- What are the different kinds of conflict that this book depicts?
- A long-term historical conflict between Anglos and Mexicans over land, territory, and resources.
- Sporadic concerted rebellions and social movements.
- Individual incidents of violence and criminality.
- Both lynching (extra-judicial punishment) and the violence of the law, and of unjust conviction and incarceration.
- Perhaps above all, or most interestingly (for Paredés), conflicts over representation and interpretation.

# “With His Pistol in His Hand”



- Is the ballad “literature”?
- Not strictly, because it is not written. (Though some canonical texts, e.g. Homer, were once oral.)
- Not in that it has an antagonistic relationship to official culture.
- But Paredes *treats it* as literature: he shows that it stands up to close and careful analysis.
- It *is* literature in that it is a complex and dense use of language.
- It *is* literature in that it enshrines and conveys a set of values and views important to a community.

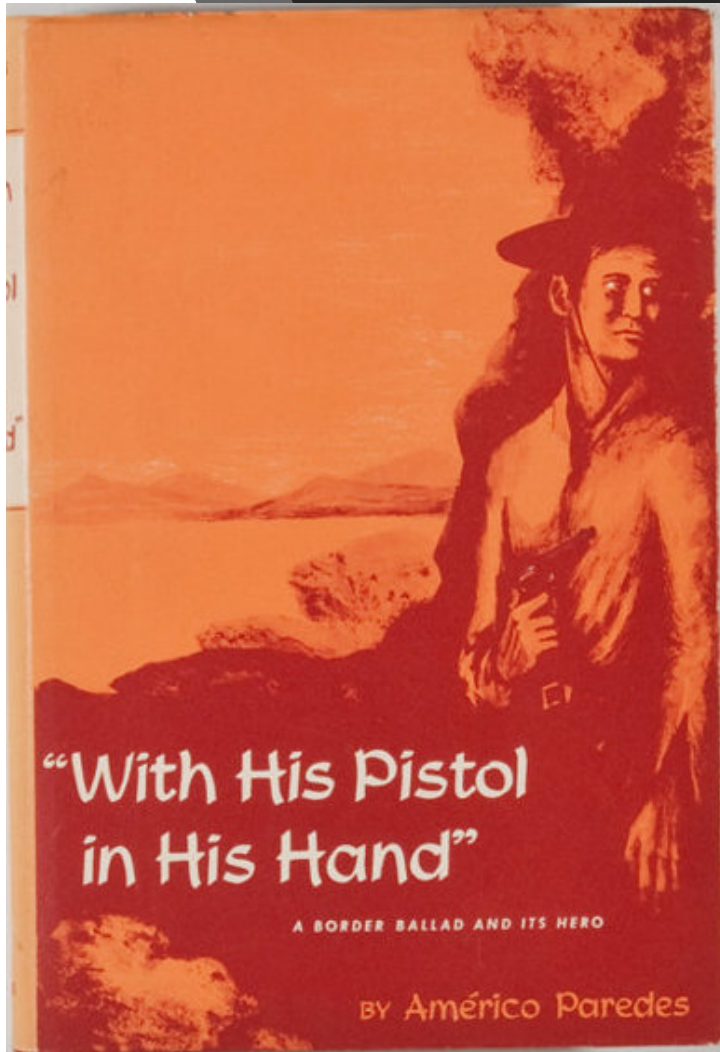
# “With His Pistol in His Hand”



- What does the book say about History and the best way to study Chicano history?
- History is not simply written history: “documented old men’s tales.” There are other stories / *historias*.
- History is multiple. It requires access to multiple sources, and multiple kinds of source.
- Legend (“legenda”) can also be read with care and attention.
- History and memory are not the same, though they overlap, reinforce, or contradict each other.
- There may be a “subaltern” history, in tension with mainstream or dominant history.

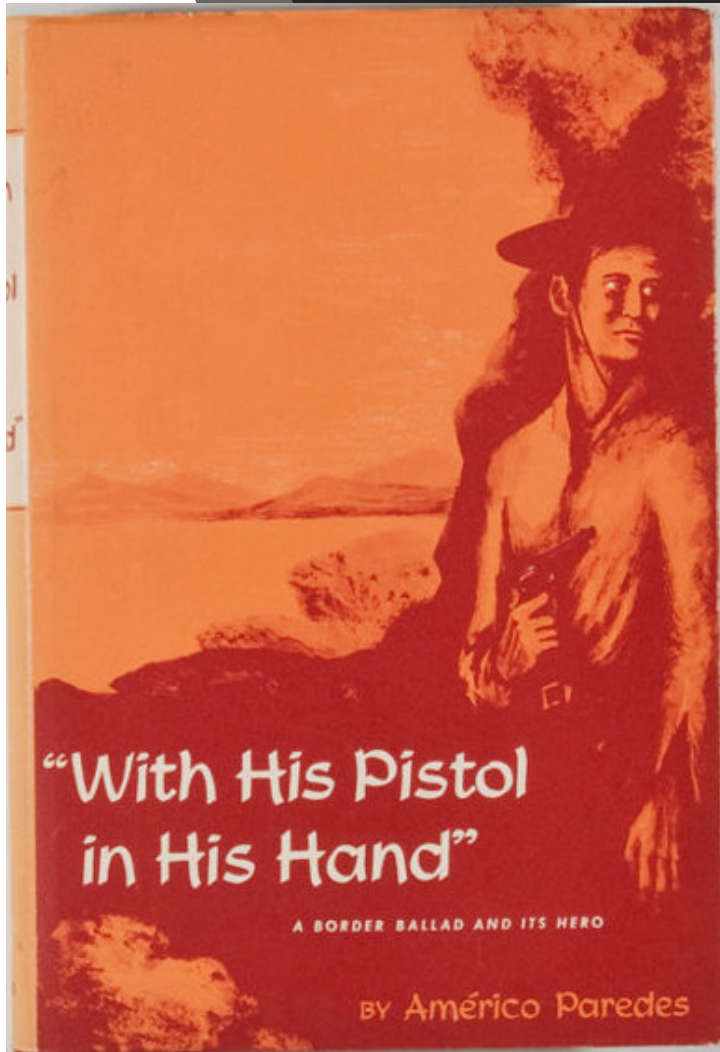
# *“With His Pistol in His Hand”*

- Is it important that Paredes is himself a Chicano, and indeed a “Border Mexican”?



# *“With His Pistol in His Hand”*

- What are the “kinks” in this book?



**NEXT STEPS**

# For Thursday

- Bring laptop (if you have one) to class.
- Make two edits on Wikipedia.
- By February 6, each Wikipedia group should have assembled a bibliography that is as comprehensive as possible, and written it up on their article's talk page.
- Make two edits on Wikipedia.
- Write brief comments on two of your classmates' blog posts. Especially on Blogger, make sure you sign them.