

10-2007

Review of Corridos in Migrant Memory

Jose A. P. Alaniz

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/hist_fac



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Alaniz, José A. P. Review of Corridos in Migrant Memory. *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 111, no. 2 (2007): 241-242. doi:10.1353/swh.2007.0097.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts at ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. For more information, please contact justin.white@utrgv.edu, william.flores01@utrgv.edu.

that education could improve the lives of black Americans in the rural South" (p. 10). Between 1912 and 1932, the Rosenwald building project, with the donations of Rosenwald and the matching funds raised largely by African Americans in communities where the schools were built, reached a combined total of more than \$9 million and established well over five thousand schools, of which one in five was African American.

In writing her account, Hoffschwelle has undoubtedly benefited from the latest trends in material, social, and cultural history. Washington and Rosenwald tapped into the progressivist pedagogy of the early twentieth century that paid close attention to the relationship between material conditions and social development. The actual physical layout of the school, the lighting, sanitation, and ventilation were essential in shaping individual "experience and values" and advancing communities toward "social progress" (p. 3). More importantly, the Rosenwald schools were so impressive that they became models for southern public education in general, which then, Hoffschwelle argues, "created a visual vocabulary for southern rural schools that crossed the color line and suggested that all students could and should learn in professionally designed instructional environments" (p. 113).

The project's administration revealed the racial structures endemic to Jim Crow America with whites holding top positions and blacks occupying lower ones. But the spatial, cultural, and class distance between white and black agents did not undermine the project's overall goal: the building of new schools and organizing a southern educational infrastructure. Furthermore, as contemporary theory emphasizes, effective social change rarely occurs neatly from the top down, but from a discursive interplay between the top, middle, and bottom. Hoffschwelle highlights the activities from below. The success in spreading more than five thousand Rosenwald schools over fifteen states depended on the determined efforts of local African Americans, who used the project to advance their own ideas of racial uplift. At the bottom, therefore, the Rosenwald school building program became a "space of pride and achievement" (p. 6).

Readers will face great difficulty finding weak points in Hoffschwelle's meticulously researched and well-written book. This reviewer is motivated to explore a greater dialogue between Hoffschwelle's argument and those that deal with other movements that challenged (directly or indirectly) southern segregation. Indeed, the book would be complemented by a reading of Peter Ascoli's latest biography on Julius Rosenwald. Whatever the outcome of such a comparative analysis, readers must credit Hoffschwelle for elevating from obscurity the material and pedagogical persuasion of Rosenwald schools "as historical places of community achievement" (p. 271).

University of California, Irvine

RYAN MCILHENNY

Corridos in Migrant Memory. By Martha I. Chew Sánchez. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006. Pp. 246. Illustrations, maps, appendix, notes, references, index. ISBN 0826334784. \$29.95, paper.)

As a Mexican American academic, I found that this study hits home. Professor Chew Sánchez's book deals with the power and influence that traditional Mexican

ballads known as corridos have on Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and specifically, Mexican immigrants in the United States. The aim of the author is to examine the role of corridos in shaping the cultural memories and identities of transnational Mexican groups, focusing on transnational communities from northern Chihuahua through northern Texas and New Mexico.

In proving her argument, Chew Sánchez begins by discussing and comparing certain details, such as the recorded history, characteristics, identities, immigration, and migration of Mexicans living in the American Southwest and in Mexico after the U.S.–Mexican War. The second chapter defines the corrido, focusing particularly on corridos about immigration and how those ballads impacted migrants culturally, socially, personally, and collectively. The author's third chapter analyzes how her interviewees of Mexican descent, whether migrants, songwriters, singers, disc jockeys, or others, understand the meaning of life through the corrido. Chew Sánchez uses the fourth chapter of her study to describe how corridos are transmitted to the Mexican migrant populace in transnational communities. The last chapter focuses on the importance of Los Tigres del Norte, the most popular Mexican musical group, famous for performing corridos about immigration, in preserving the migrant memory through their music.

The author's work is well organized and presented. She provides a Spanish phrase or sentence with almost each chapter title and subtitle that gives the Spanish reader an understanding of what to expect. Chew Sánchez also focuses on issues relevant to this study, such as migrant women, clothing, female singers of corridos, and *narcocorridos* (ballads about drug trafficking).

There are some items in the work that need attention. Although the book focuses primarily on Texas and New Mexico, it would have been beneficial to add migrant viewpoints of corridos from Arizona and California to assure balance among all states that border Mexico in further proving the argument. The author might have interviewed adolescents of Mexican descent to see whether corridos are important to their migrant memory. Chew Sánchez might also have attempted to ascertain Anglo American perceptions of corridos, especially of some who understand Spanish or are acquaintances of Mexicans living in transnational communities.

Despite these omissions, this historical analysis is a grand achievement because historians, particularly those focused in Chicano, Mexico, borderlands, Southwest, and/or immigration studies, have not previously ventured into this territory. Immigration is a timely issue, and reading Dr. Chew Sánchez's work will help Americans and Mexicans understand life for transnational migrants. What better way to understand a group of people than by listening to music that truly defines them. "*Si con mi canto pudiera derrumbaría las fronteras para que el mundo viviera con una sola bandera en una misma nación.*"

University of Texas–Pan American

JOSÉ A. P. ALANIZ

South of the Guadalupe: A History of Nixon and Southern Gonzales County. By Donald D. Hoffman. (Privately printed, 2006. Pp. 292. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 0978737008. \$39.95, cloth.)