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The Borderlands of Culture: Américo Paredes and the Transnational Imaginary (New Americanists)

Ramón Saldívar

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Poet, novelist, journalist, and ethnographer, Américo Paredes (1915–1999) was a pioneering figure in Mexican American border studies and a founder of Chicano studies. Paredes taught literature and anthropology at the University of Texas, Austin for decades, and his ethnographic and literary critical work laid the groundwork for subsequent scholarship on the folktales, legends, and riddles of Mexican Americans. In this beautifully written literary history, the distinguished scholar Ramón Saldívar establishes Paredes's preeminent place in writing the contested cultural history of the south Texas borderlands. At the same time, Saldívar reveals Paredes as a precursor to the "new" American cultural studies by showing how he perceptively negotiated the contradictions between the national and transnational forces at work in the Americas in the nascent era of globalization.

Saldívar demonstrates how Paredes's poetry, prose, and journalism prefigured his later work as a folklorist and ethnographer. In song, story, and poetry, Paredes first developed the themes and issues that would be central to his celebrated later work on the "border studies" or "anthropology of the borderlands." Saldívar describes how Paredes's experiences as an American soldier, journalist, and humanitarian aid worker in Asia shaped his understanding of the relations between Anglos and Mexicans in the borderlands of south Texas and of national and ethnic identities more broadly. Saldívar was a friend of Paredes, and part of *The Borderlands of Culture* is told in Paredes's own words. By explaining how Paredes's work engaged with issues central to contemporary scholarship, Saldívar extends Paredes's intellectual project and shows how it contributes to the remapping of the field of American studies from a transnational perspective.

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