

Comparing New World Traditions: Conflict and Resistance in the Appalachian Protest Song and the Mexican Corrido

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Since at least the early 20th century the Appalachian region has been largely perceived in the popular mind as a backward, isolated place. Its people too have been stereotyped as poor whites, just as culturally isolated from modern mainstream America as they are isolated geographically. Appalachian studies scholarship has increasingly challenged this universalist view of a homogenous region by highlighting its diverse economic, ethnic, social, and religious realities and its national and global connections. Folk music, once thought to be a marker of Appalachia's unique Anglo-Saxon heritage, has been revealed to come from a variety of heterogeneous sources. Thus, Appalachian folksong should be examined in a national and international context. Some scholars have indeed noted parallels between Appalachian balladry and the *corrido*, or Mexican ballad. While these traditions differ in form, there is much to compare in content. Early parallels were drawn by Americo Paredes himself, the preeminent scholar of the *corrido* of the U.S.-Mexican borderlands. Recently, others have found parallels in the seemingly misogynist violence in the lyrics of their "love songs."¹ In addition to these areas I suggest a new facet: how the border *corrido* and ballads of the Appalachian coalfields have been shaped by conflict and function as a means of collective resistance. Conflict has overwhelmingly framed the study of the border *corrido* and the protest songs of Central Appalachia, but no study has viewed both traditions under this same lens.

This essay will begin with a broad comparison of Mexican and Appalachian balladry as New World traditions influenced by Old World balladry, and summarize the historical and quickly growing presence of Mexicans in the Appalachian region. Then I will present the ballads of Gregorio Cortez and Joaquin Murrieta as typical examples of conflict and the dialectic language of the *corrido*. Next, I apply these same ideas to the pro-union songs of Kentucky folksingers like "Aunt" Molly Jackson and Sarah Ogan Gunning. Finally, I explore the marriage of the *corrido* and union song in a ballad about the 1914 strike and massacre in Ludlow, Colorado, and suggest the possibility of the *corrido* in Appalachia.

New World Traditions and the Mexican-Appalachian Connection

The popular ballad has a long oral history in Europe and was alive and well in Spain and the British Isles at the time of the European colonization of the Americas. The *romance*, or Spanish ballad, was brought to the Americas through Spanish conquest and settlement, and likewise the English-language ballad was brought to North America from the British Isles by the Scots-Irish and English settlers. For generations these European ballads were preserved in the oral traditions of the two regions.²

These European roots dominated most American ballad scholarship until the mid-twentieth century. Biased by the canon established with folklorist Francis Child's *English and Scottish*

¹ Simon J. Bronner, *Encyclopedia of American Folklife* (London: Routledge, 2015), 1052.

² Américo Paredes, *With His Pistol In His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958), 129.

Popular Ballads, the first scholars of Appalachian music like Cecil Sharp were quick to recognize the old European songs preserved in oral tradition, but largely dismissed the non-“Child” American compositions.³

Not only do the New World ballad traditions of Mexico and Appalachia draw from their respective Old World or European heritages, but the Spanish *romance* and British ballad traditions also overlap in corpus. In Spain one could find ballads of Lancelot alongside those of the Cid,⁴ and some of these parallel songs from Britain and Spain that survived the voyage across the Atlantic. One such example of an identical story and structure can be found in the Appalachian “Four Nights Drunk” (“Our Goodman” Sharp 32, Child 274) and the Spanish “*La Blanca Niña*” (“*La Esposa Infiel*”). Professor Child himself drew similarities between the two, and gave Spanish equivalents to many ballads in his collection.

In Mexico as in Appalachia the Old World ballads survived for generations in the oral tradition, but meanwhile folksingers began to compose their own New World or “Native American” songs based on the old European forms. Folksingers used the simple, un-embellished, narrative style of the ballad to explore the new subjects, lifestyles, and events that developed on the new continent. Folksongs both old and new were disseminated orally and in print through broadsides (*hoja suelta* in Spanish). Between 1980 and 2000 census data shows that the Hispanic Population of Appalachia tripled to nearly 465,000. Between 2000 and 2010 this number doubled. Mexicans are the largest subgroup in Appalachia, comprising 55% of the Hispanic population. These migrants are bringing new cultures to communities with distinct cultural traditions, as well as adapting their own social practices in music and religion.⁵ Furthermore they are arriving in new areas of Appalachia that have not experienced significant immigration in the past, or counties that have experienced significant out-migration.⁶

Although it is only in the last several decades that their numbers have grown significantly, Mexicans are known to have been present in central Appalachia since at least the early 20th century. A series of photographs from 1938 in the Library of Congress shows a Mexican miner and his family in West Virginia.⁷ In 1920 there were 98 Mexicans reported among the various other ethnic groups in Harlan County, Kentucky.⁸

Mexican folksong also references their presence in the Appalachian region. In the 1920s, the Bethlehem Steel Company of Pennsylvania hired Mexican and Texas-Mexicans to work in

³ Ann Ostendorf, “Song Catchers, Ballad Makers, and New Social Historians: The Historiography of Appalachian Music,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 63 (Issue 3, 2004): 194.

⁴ José Gella Iturriaga, Ed., *Romances Viejos* (Zaragoza: Editorial Ebro, 1938), 30.

⁵ Holly R. Barcus, “The Emergence of New Hispanic Settlement Patterns in Appalachia,” *The Professional Geographer* 59 (Issue 3, 2007): 299. Daniel S. Margolies, “Latino Migrant Music and Identity in the Borderlands of the New South,” *Journal of American Culture* 32 (Issue 2, 2009): 251.

⁶ P. J. Carr, D. T. Lichter, and M. J. Kefalas, “Can Immigration Save Small-Town America? Hispanic Boomtowns and the Uneasy Path to Renewal,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 641 (Issue 1, 2012): 39; Daniel S. Margolies, “Taquerias and Tiendas in the Blue Ridge: Viewing the Transformation of Space in a Globalized Appalachia,” *Appalachian Journal* 39 (3-4, 2012): 255.

⁷ See: Marion Post Wolcott, photographer, *Mexican Miner, Bertha Hill, Scotts Run, West Virginia*, September 1938. <https://www.loc.gov/item/fsa1998011513/PP/> (accessed 10 October 2016).

⁸ Richard J. Callahan, *Subject to Dust: Work and Faith in the Kentucky Coal Fields* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 77.

their factories and mines around Bethlehem, some of them in Appalachian Pennsylvania.⁹ The song “*Corrido Pensilvanio*” or “*Corrido de Pensilvania*” describes this trip from Texas to Pennsylvania and gives a clue to Mexican workers in Central Appalachia:¹⁰

*El enganchista me dijo,
–No lledes a tu familia
para no pasar trabajos
en el estado de West Virginia–“.*

[The contractor said to me,
“Don’t take your family
so as not to pass up any jobs
in the state of West Virginia]

Apparently, there were other opportunities for Mexican workers in West Virginia. Another variant mentions changing trains in Kentucky. Thus this corrido evidences Mexicans’ passing through or even working in Central Appalachia, as well as working in northeastern Pennsylvania.

“With a pistol in his hand”: The Border Corrido and the Dialectic of Conflict

In 19th century Mexico there existed many types of folksong including the *romance*, the *décima*, the *copla*, and the *corrido*; by the end of the century, however, the corrido had come to replace the others as the dominant form on the U.S.-Mexico border.¹¹ For it was during this time that a series of conflicts of all sorts changed the lives of the border people and shaped the content of their folksong, resulting in the corrido of border conflict. The years from 1836 to the 1930s, dubbed the corrido century by Paredes, brought violence and conflict to the border with skirmishes, revolts, and civil wars North and South of the Rio Grande, including the Texas Revolution and the Mexican-American War.¹² Of course, the 1948 creation of an international border had the largest impact on border relations, as Spanish and English speakers alike found themselves subject to new laws and regulations and Mexican-Americans found themselves in an economically and culturally subordinate position. This century included the strongest racial and class subjugation of the native Mexicans and their subsistence lifestyle by the prejudice and capitalist system of the Anglos, and not surprisingly, includes some of the bloodiest conflicts and most hostile ballads.

Perhaps the most common of border corridos are those of inter-ethnic conflict, which criticize the poor and often unjust treatment of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans by Anglo-Americans. In these corridos there is an overwhelming theme of defiance and resistance, usually an individual standing up for his own rights against an aggressive American authority. Indeed, the social and political interactions between Anglo-Americans and Mexicans have been laden with conflict and created a particular atmosphere that became extremely influential in the development of the border corrido tradition. Manuel Peña calls this the “dialectic of

⁹ Jamie Javier Rodriguez, “El ‘Adios Tejas’ in El Corrido Pensilvanio: Migration, Place, and Politics in South Texas,” *MELUS* 40 (Issue 1, 2015): 76.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹¹ Paredes, 149.

¹² *Ibid.*, 132.

conflict”, or a clash of ideological, economic, class, and racial forces that served as a main creative influence in the various musical traditions of the Southwest.¹³

This dialectic perspective of conflict is most evident in the language and imagery of the border corrido. The hero is always a Mexican or Mexican-American driven to violence by the unjust actions of white Americans, who then fights to defend what he believes is right, usually with his pistol in his hand.¹⁴ The hero is always referred to by name while the Americans are reduced to a nameless other as either *cherifes* (sheriffs) or *rinches* (rangers), which refer to any sort of sheriff, deputy, Texas Ranger, law-man, or posse. Even though he may be captured or killed, the border hero goes down fighting to defy the aggressing Anglos and to defend his rights. Perhaps the most typical example of this pattern is that of “The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez.” The real-life Gregorio Cortez shot and killed the sheriff of Karnes County, Texas after a misunderstanding left his brother dead. He fled and the law gave a miraculous chase; by the time he was captured he had killed two sheriffs, ridden hundreds of miles, and evaded countless men.

While the spoken legends of Cortez add other events to the story, the song closely follows the actual events of the ordeal: the wounding of his brother Romaldo and the killing of Sheriff Morris (referred to as the Major Sheriff or *el Cherife Mayor*), the chase, and the capture. It is in the song’s description of Cortez’s flight that both the dialectic language and typical corrido themes are most prominently presented. It is at the beginning of his flight, in the fifth and sixth stanzas that the most important message, and main theme of the border hero corrido, is given:

*“Decía Gregorio Cortez
Con su pistola en la mano:
-No siento haberlo matado,
Lo que siento es a mi hermano.*

Then said Gregorio Cortez,
With his pistol in his hand:
“I don’t regret that I killed him;
I regret my brother’s death”.

*Decía Gregorio Cortez
Con su alma muy encendida:
-No siento haberlo matado,
La defensa es permitida”.*

Then said Gregorio Cortez,
And his soul was all aflame:
“I don’t regret that I killed him,
A man must defend himself”¹⁵

After quickly setting the scene (typical of corrido style), the narrative focuses mostly on the heroics of Cortez and the cowardice of the Texans, drawing a strong contrast that is developed throughout. This pattern is repeated throughout the corrido, in which Cortez taunts the *rinches*, performs a daring feat of escape, and kills another sheriff, all while riding ahead.

These alternations that build on the contrast between the brave Mexican and cowardly, inept Rangers function primarily as a form of role or status reversal, in which the celebrated, no-nonsense Texas Rangers do not emerge victorious as expected.¹⁶ Instead, it is the lone Mexican who comes out victorious. This victory, however, culminates as a symbolic one.

¹³ Manuel Peña, *The Mexican-American Orquesta: Music, Culture, and the Dialectic of Conflict* (Austin, TX: The University of Texas Press, 1999), 4.

¹⁴ Paredes, 147.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁶ Manuel Peña, “Folksong and Social Change: Two Corridos as Interpretive Sources,” *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 13 (1 – 2, 1982), 26.

Ultimately Cortez takes responsibility for his actions and gives himself up willingly for the sake of his people. Though he is finally captured, it is only after facing overwhelming odds and exacting heavy casualties. Even in defeat Cortez, and more importantly, the corrido hero in general, achieve a victory for their people by defying negative stereotypes and exemplifying heroic virtues like bravery and cunning, all while single-handedly resisting or defeating Anglos of superior numbers. Whether or not the corrido hero is defeated, it is always in contrast to the negative reality of the border people. It is in this contrast that, “a sharp reversal of the historical Anglo-Mexican relationship, in which the Anglo dominates, is achieved. In the corrido, instead of the Mexican being the downtrodden, powerless victim of Anglo American exploitation, it is he who assumes the role of victor.”¹⁷

Unfortunately, the symbolic victories of the corrido hero rarely reflected victories in the real-life struggles of Mexicans. Nevertheless, these songs gave cultural meaning and importance to an oppressed group. Even though the actual men of corridos may have been defeated or imprisoned, the symbolic hero of the songs remained an exemplar of cultural values that transcended the defeat or oppression of actual events on the border: “In short, Greater Mexican epic-heroic balladry, as songs of triumph over a racially/culturally distinct enemy, now appears at a cultural/ideological level as a compensatory form of resistance for a lack of victory in the material realm.”¹⁸

Another example of cultural resistance is the corrido of the legendary bandit Joaquín Murrieta. Legend holds that soon after Murrieta arrived in California during the Gold Rush he lost his land-claim to American miners. Later he is said to have witnessed the lynching of his brother and the rape and murder of his wife, which caused him to form a band of men to rob and pillage white Californians out of revenge. While his actions may or may not seem justifiable in the eyes of the law, they inspired a ballad that praises him for his individual initiative and vigilance in response to the personal offenses he suffered.

Although atypical in corrido form and structure, in content the song represents the same themes of an individual defending his rights and his actions:¹⁹

*A los ricos avarientos
Yo les quitaba el dinero.
Con los humildes y pobres
Yo me quitaba el sombrero.
Ay, qué leyes tan injustas
Con llamarme bandolero.*

[From the greedy rich,
I took away their money.
With the humble and the poor
I took off my hat.
Oh, what unjust laws
To label me an outlaw.

*A mí la ley no me asusta
Ni tengo miedo morir.
Vengo a vengar a mi esposa
Se los vuelvo a repetir.
Carmelita tan hermosa,
Cómo te hicieron sufrir.*

The law does not frighten me
Nor am I afraid to die.
I come to avenge my wife,
And I say again,
My lovely Carmelita,
How they made you suffer]

¹⁷ Ibid., 31.

¹⁸ José E. Limón, *American Encounters: Greater Mexico, the United States, and the Erotics of Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 106.

¹⁹ Grant Evans and Jesse De Zamora, "Joaquin Murrieta," *Joaquin Murrieta* (University of Texas at Austin, 2002).

Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez explains that “rather than a ‘social bandit’ he should be considered, as others of the period, a ‘cultural hero and leader’ because Murrieta organized resistance with an alternative ‘auxiliary’ political authority and generated community approval and legitimacy for his actions.”²⁰ In his ballad he is not treated as an outlaw or criminal, but as a figure that defended his family and community values through organized and armed resistance in opposition to Anglo authority.

There are examples of similar figures in United States folksong, but in the context of Appalachian culture a more real example of this independent spirit may be seen in the real-life moonshiner. Although there are many folksongs about moonshine, there are few that praise it outright. Most lament its harmful effects or celebrate its euphoric effects, but some do comment on the government’s disapproval (e.g. the revenue officers coming to tear down Darling Cora’s still-house). For many whiskey making had a double-edged nature:

Whiskey was both a boon and a curse to the mountain people: it provided financial support, which allowed many to endure the worst of the postwar hardships; but it did so at great cost. Some... ..fell prey to ‘moonshine’s’ adverse pleasures; others served time in prison for breaking various prohibition laws; a few died while defending what they felt to be their birthright: whiskey-making.²¹

Similarly, the real life character of Appalachian bandit Otto Wood and the folklore surrounding him parallel the border raiders and folk heroes of the Mexican tradition.²² In recent decades, the popular corrido has spawned its own sub-genre of *narcocorridos*, which detail the stories of drug traffickers and the like. Here, however, is a distinction between the hero and a mere outlaw. Whereas the smuggler may simply break the law for personal gain, both the moonshiner and the border corrido hero do so not out of contempt for the law but as self-preservation to defend his rights after his culture, livelihood, or people have been threatened.

“Which Side Are You On?”: Protest Songs of the Kentucky Coalfields

Like the U.S.-Mexico border, Appalachia has a long history as a cultural borderland that has been home to multiple ethnic groups. Joining or displacing the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw and other indigenous groups were various Europeans like English, Scots-Irish, German, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, Swiss, French, and others. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries many African-Americans and Eastern and Southern Europeans (and a few Mexicans) migrated to the coal-producing counties of Central Appalachia.

Considering the majority white, English-speaking (though certainly not ethnically homogenous) population of Appalachia, its narrative songs of conflict are better viewed through the lens of intra-ethnic conflict, or conflict among members of the same culture based on social or economic class differences. Nevertheless, the region has fostered its own dialectic

²⁰ Carlos C. Vélez-Ibáñez, *Border Visions: Mexican Cultures of the Southwest United States* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1997), 100.

²¹ Ted Olson, “Agricultural Themes in Appalachian Folk Songs: ‘The Farmer is the Man Who Feeds Them All’,” *Journal of the Appalachian Studies Association* 4 (Issue 1, 1992): 66.

²² Trevor McKenzie, “‘Robin Hood of the Blue Ridge’: The Life, Legend, and Songs of Otto Wood, the Bandit,” Master’s Thesis: Appalachian State University, 2012.

of conflict: "There is a rich lode of American industrial folklore composed by women in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. It can be attributed in part to a combination of cultural, economic, historical, and psychological factors: a rich musical tradition, an economic disaster of mammoth proportions, a history of radical unionism, and the independent, pioneer spirit of the people."²³ In short, these factors unique to the region created their own two-sided perspective, with a different thematic relationship for a different conflict.

This "rich lode" refers to New World songs composed about coal mining. Central Appalachia has long been one of the most productive regions for bituminous coal extraction, and has been the ground for conflicts between coal companies and labor unions. Indeed, labor activism has long dominated written accounts of coal town life.²⁴ The frequent and often bloody strikes in these areas have led to the composition of many songs that take this hostile and dialectic view, in most cases viewing the union workers as oppressed socially and economically by the coal companies.

There are countless songs that describe the harsh economic realities of the coal-mining camps and towns. The small pay that miners received (usually credit at the company store) was often insufficient to feed a family, and company dwellings offered poor shelter from the elements. Thus extreme poverty was the reality for many mining families. Ballad singers like Sarah Ogan Gunning, who grew up in a Kentucky coal camp, sing of the suffering that they witnessed firsthand. Take Gunning's "Dreadful Memories" as an example:

Dreadful memories! How they linger;
How they pain my precious soul.
Little children, sick and hungry,
Sick and hungry, weak and cold.

Dreadful memories! How they haunt me
As the lonely moments fly.
Oh, how them little babies suffered!
I saw them starve to death and die.²⁵

Songs such as this make a strong emotional appeal to the listener as they depict in vivid detail the hard lives of miners' families. Other songs describe the hard, dangerous lives of the miners themselves. Although they comment on the suffering and poor conditions of mining communities and make a compelling case for the plight of the miner, they offer no solution or alternative to the problems established.

To find a solution some miners turned toward labor unions, a movement which produced a wealth of pro-union songs characterized by the same dialectics found in border corrido of conflict. The most powerful example is that of "Which Side Are You On?" by Florence Reece, written about the "Bloody Harlan" struggle for unionization in Harlan County, Kentucky in the

²³ Henrietta Yurchenco, "Trouble in the Mines: A History in Song and Story by Women of Appalachia," *American Music*, 9 (Issue 2, 1991): 209-224.

²⁴ Crandall Shifflett, *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 116.

²⁵ Chesla R. Sharp, "Coal-Mining Songs as Forms of Environmental Protest," *Journal of the Appalachian Studies Association* 4 (Issue 1, 1992): 53.

1930s. In her song she describes the Harlan County strikes as a two-sided battle and compels workers to join the “right” side. In contrast to other coal-mining ballads (and many border corridos) that merely describe social problems but offer no solution, the goal of “Which Side Are You On?” is to convert listeners to a movement and commit them to action.²⁶ This active intention is clearly stated in the song’s lyrics, which spell out “its two-valued orientation, its class consciousness and its feeling that time is on its side.”²⁷

Come all of you good workers,
Good news to you I’ll tell,
Of how the good old union
Has come in here to dwell.

Refrain: Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?²⁸

The song sets the dialectic tone from the very beginning, and removes any moral ambiguity. Immediately the struggle is divided into two sides, with the union on the “good side” which the listener is implored to join:

We’ve started our good battle,
We know we’re sure to win,
Because we’ve got the gun thugs
A-lookin’ very thin.

Unlike other songs that lament the conditions of miners and their families, this song is overly optimistic and predicts a sure victory. This faith in the strength of the union acts as another form of status reversal. Here it is the company gun-thugs and not the miner’s family that are thin and weary rather than the miner’s starving children.

They say in Harlan County
There are no neutrals there;
You either are a union man
Or a thug for J. H. Blair.

Oh workers, can you stand it?
Oh tell me how you can.
Will you be a lousy scab
Or will you be a man?

Again the struggle is split in two sides with no possibility for neutrality: there are only workers loyal to the Union and the “thugs” loyal to the company. Although Harlan Sherriff J.H. Blair is mentioned by name, here as in “Gregorio Cortez” and other corridos, the others are reduced to cowards and treated as un-manly. A clear distinction is drawn between the “real” men of the

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 54.

²⁸ Ibid.

Union and the scabs and gun-thugs of the company. Ultimately the listener is faced with two choices: be a man and join the winning side, or be a lousy thug.

Another example of this dialectic sentiment is seen in “Aunt” Molly Jackson’s “I Am a Union Woman,” which offers the same optimistic call to arms coupled with its two-sided class-conscience:

I am a union woman
Just as brave as I can be
I do not like the bosses
And the bosses don't like me.

Refrain: Join the NMU, Join the NMU [National Miners Union]

We are many thousand strong,
And I am glad to say
We are getting stronger
And stronger every day.

The bosses ride fine horses
While we walk in the mud,
Their banner is the dollar sign,
Ours is striped with blood.²⁹

Here the antipathy between the two sides is more outspoken, and the call to join the union is again immediate. The speaker praises herself as brave and the union as a strong, ever-growing organization. More importantly, it provides an extremely vivid depiction of the class-based nature of the conflict: the bosses enjoy wealth and riches at the expense of the workers.

Sarah Ogan Gunning’s “Down on the Picket Line” offers a much stronger contrast between the bravery of the strikers and the cowardice of the scabs, similar to the pattern found in “Gregorio Cortez”:

We went out one morning before daylight
And I was sure we'd have a fight,
But the scabs was cowardly, ran away,
But we went back the very next day.

We all went out on the railroad track
To meet them scabs and turn them back
We win that strike I'm glad to say
Come on, and we'll show you the way.³⁰

These songs praise the strikers for resisting the intimidation tactics of mine operators who harassed union workers and organizers, and give a moral legitimacy to their side in the struggle. Coupled with the staunch defiance and active organization of the union workers we can again see the ballad as a form of organized communal resistance by an auxiliary authority against an

²⁹ Yurchenco, 215.

³⁰ Ibid., 216.

oppressive group, like in the ballad of Joaquín Murrieta. Again, the victories achieved in these ballads are merely symbolic ones. Unfortunately, most of the strikes by labor unions like the UMW and NMU were not ultimately successful.³¹ Nevertheless, songs like “Which Side Are You On?” have become anthems for labor, and even civil rights, movements everywhere.

Corrido and Union Song at Ludlow: Hints for the Future of Appalachia

According to the similar functions that they serve for marginalized groups, one can expect a marriage of the corrido and the union song. The life of miner and *corridista* Elias Baca showed just that. His song “*Que viva la nación*” (That the Nation May Live) described the Ludlow Massacre of 1914, in which state militia and gunmen hired by Colorado Fuel & Iron Company fired upon a group of miners and their families. Like any good folksinger who will compose a song according to formulas and motifs of their tradition, Baca combined border corrido form and conventions with pro-union themes to create a new hybrid form. Per tradition, he begins with a place and date, but moves beyond conventions with the addition of a chorus:

*De West Virginia llegan
telegramas muy iguales.
Que el 23 de septiembre
se paran los minerales.*

*Coro:
¡Que viva la nación!
¡Que viva la nación!
que aquí 'stamos peleando
y en esta fuerte unión!*

[From West Virginia came
very similar telegrams
that the 23rd of September
the mining would be stopped.

Chorus:
That the nation may live!
That the nation may live!
We're here fighting
in this powerful union].³²

Once again, a corrido links Mexican-American workers to Appalachia. Here the mention of West Virginia refers to the 1913 UMWA strike in Paint Creek, WV. There as in Ludlow, gunmen hired by Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency fired upon miners. Moreover, famous labor organizer Mother Jones was active in both the Paint Creek and Ludlow strikes. Thus, Baca calls for a trans-regional union for the benefit of miners across the nation. In this song we see the same political function of the border corrido and the protest songs of Central Appalachia: an overt other, and

³¹ Sharp, 54.

³² Sarah M. Rudd, “Harmonizing Corrido and Union Song at the Ludlow Massacre,” *Western Folklore* 61 (Issue 1, 2002): 31-32.

the emphasis on an event to transform it to social action.³³ Furthermore, the song calls upon miners to overcome racial or class divisions in a multiethnic, national union.³⁴

Baca gives just one example of possible interaction and hybridity of folk traditions among multiethnic communities. Given the presence of Mexican workers in the coal industry of Appalachia, it is surprising there have been no corridos composed on the subject. Hispanics have certainly been involved in labor struggles in the region. In the 1990s, a group of Guatemalan and Mexican workers staged a decade long strike in Morganton, North Carolina.³⁵ Neither are they strangers to the protest song and Appalachian music traditions. Latino residents in the region attend local music events like fiddler's conventions, and some mariachi fiddlers even emulate bluegrass fiddlers.³⁶ Compared to unaccompanied ballads singing among Anglos the corrido has found extreme mainstream success among Latinos, so the corrido and corridistas can be expected to be found among Mexican immigrants to Appalachia. As Mexican immigration continues in the region and communities become more integrated we can expect more interaction between cultural traditions. For as the history of the banjo shows, music in Appalachia has shown a high degree of cultural exchange and hybridity. To be sure, Mexican migrants to Appalachia are bringing the same music found in the Southwest like *conjunto*, *norteño*, *corridos*, *mariachi*, and religious music like the *corito*. What remains to be seen is how these traditions will incorporate into or be influenced by the existing Appalachian traditions. Case studies by scholars like Daniel Margolies show that cultural interchange is already occurring among Latino musicians, who use music to adapt to life in the United States while also affirming their own ethnic identities. Few of these studies, however, point to Appalachia and to date there has been no academic work focused specifically on Latino music in Appalachia. Exactly what kinds of music are being played by Mexicans and other Latinos in Appalachia remains largely undocumented. Future research in this topic will help to determine what kind of music Latinos in the region are playing and the extent of cultural exchange.

Still, the ballad remains an important tool in the struggles of the Appalachian-American and the Mexican-American. Since World War II the corrido has shifted from depicting lone heroes and cultural heroes to those of victimization that evoke outrage in order to bring active political resistance.³⁷ In Appalachia protest singers on both sides of the Mountaintop Removal mining debate are evoking their musical traditions and history of coal mining to give place-based legitimacy to their arguments.³⁸ These songs may speak to new conflicts, but the forms are the same. Considering the shared history of conflict and symbolic functions of the corrido and Appalachian coal-field balladry, it seems that the Appalachian corrido is inevitable.

³³ Ibid., 36.

³⁴ Ibid., 39.

³⁵ Leon Fink and Alvis E. Dunn, *The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South* (Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

³⁶ Margolies 2012, 122.

³⁷ Peña 1982, 38.

³⁸ Travis D. Stimeling, "Music, Place, and Identity in the Central Appalachian Mountaintop Removal Mining Debate," *American Music* 30 (Issue 1, 2012): 19.