



## Chicano Folklore: A Guide to the Folktales, Traditions, Rituals and Religious Practices of Mexican Americans

By Rafaela G. Castro

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Did you know that *barrio* is a term for a Chicano neighborhood, and that some of the oldest barrios can be found in major U.S. cities, like Los Angeles, Chicago, El Paso, and San Antonio? Or that *menudo* is actually a soup-type dish made with tripe, the stomach lining of a cow, and typically eaten early in the morning after big holiday celebrations to cure a hangover?

*Chicano Folklore* is replete with such interesting and often surprising facts about Mexican American culture. Even before the United States-Mexican War in 1848, when 80,000 Spanish-Mexican-Indian people suddenly became inhabitants of the United States, people of Spanish and Mexican descent had a rich and unique culture in what is now the American southwest. Understanding Chicano folklore, or the customs, rituals, and traditional cultural forms that Mexican Americans share, is extremely significant to comprehending the Chicano experience.

*Chicano Folklore* is the first reference book to focus wholly on this subject. From *burrito* (literally little burro or little donkey) to *zoot suit* (a style of suit worn by Mexican Americans, African Americans, and Filipino Americans during the 1930s and 1940s), the dictionary's more than 225 in-depth passages thoroughly explain the meaning and background of each cultural term. We learn about the music, religious practices, food, and key historical and mythical figures that make Chicano folklore so vibrant.

The detailed, immensely informative passages of *Chicano Folklore* will entertain and educate anyone interested in understanding Chicano culture and the colorful impact it has had on America as a whole.

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By *Rafaela G. Castro*

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### **Editorial Review**

From Library Journal

This inclusive lexicon offers terms associated with the Chicano population and its history, experiences, and customs, though the focus is on Mexican Americans who came of age in the 1960s in the Southwest. The entries, which combine English and Spanish terminology, include definitions, commentary, and citations to Chicano folk narratives, arts, folk drama, and popular culture as well as the broad cultural studies already available. These entries give context to expressive behaviors and artifacts (urban tales, dance steps, joke cycles, dress fads, folk remedies, spiritual beliefs, holidays, foods, etc.) as well as words that have been absorbed into everyday English (burrito, coyote, frijoles, tamales, Los Lobos, etc.). Castro, a librarian at the University of Oregon, derived her material from scholarly studies authored principally by Chicanos and recognized scholars, including such notables as Mark Glazer, Aurelio Espinoza Jr., and Americo Paredes. This work complements such reliable sources as Michael Heisley's *An Annotated Bibliography of Chicano Folklore from the Southwestern United States* (1977) and Olga Najera-Ramirez's *Greater Mexican Folklore in the United States: An Annotated Bibliography* (1987), both older books. This excellent volume will find an audience with folklorists, scholars, regionalists, and library researchers and will likely become indispensable for both educators and students. DR.K. Burns, Hatboro, PA  
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From [Booklist](#)

For the student, teacher, librarian, historian, storyteller, or researcher seeking details about Latino lore, this book provides 228 alphabetically arranged entries on literature, drama, media, art, society, religion, medicine, and history. Coverage includes the most common topics--"La Bamba," Cinco de Mayo, Quetzalcoatl, Tejanos, Tinwork--alongside less common terms, such as Curanderismo (healing), Palomilla (group of friends), Sobador (masseuse), and an entry for Teresa Urrea, a psychic and healer. A five-page introduction differentiates between Chicanos and Mexicanos and clears up misconceptions that folk culture is solely the province of the primitive peasant.

The text appears in clear fonts that pair roman with italic type for frequent citations and terms in Spanish, which Castro translates. She offers no pronunciation guides, which would benefit an English-speaking audience. Page layout is pleasant and easy on the eye. Cross-referencing and end-of-entry sources are balanced and proportional. Illustration is adequate, including black-and-white photographs and drawings as well as a spectacular, crayon-bright cover featuring a painting of a present-day couple contemplating La Virgen de Guadalupe.

Castro lacks the succinctness and punch of an experienced writer. Her diction and rhetoric are muddled; paragraphs are overlong. However, she makes up for rhetorical faults with an enthusiasm and expertise in a wide range of examples, language quirks, and data that appear to spring from extensive reading in primary sources. In entries such as *La Leyenda Negra* and *La Llorona*, she is particularly adept at dispelling false or overly hasty assumptions about Chicano culture. The 56 pages of back matter offer an impressive bibliography and meticulous indexing. The lack of Internet sites is a puzzling omission.

Overall, this useful dictionary presents basic concepts in an attractive, reasonably priced compendium. Its appearance at this peak moment in multicultural education should please purchasers seeking timely, informative reference materials that suit the needs of the general reader and student as well as the expert. The dictionary should satisfy the most discriminating researcher and find a place on shelves of public, school,

and university libraries as well as in the collections of purveyors and performers of world and Chicano folklore. *RBB*

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## Review

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