



Dr. Américo Paredes

When the family of the late border scholar and folklorist Américo Paredes decided to scatter his ashes at the mouth of the Rio Grande, they invited The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College (UTB/TSC) history professor Manuel Medrano to join them.

A border scholar in his own right, Medrano is both a family friend and author of a new biography on Paredes. His commitment to the Paredes legacy did not end in the pages of a book – or at the river’s edge.

When Medrano was named to UTB/TSC’s Houston Endowment Chair in Civic Engagement, he dedicated part of his award to complete a scholarship endowment honoring the respected Rio Grande Valley icon, who died in 1999.

“To me, Américo Paredes represents the essence of our community,” said Medrano. “He represents a person willing to stand up and challenge the status quo in literature and folklore ... in a way that changed how people think about the border. It was important to me to have him recognized in this way.”

Medrano has been a faculty member since 1972. A recipient of the prestigious Chancellor’s Council Teaching Award, he created the “Los Del Valle” (“Of the Valley”) oral-history project, which includes video interviews with interesting Valley characters. He has authored other books of poetry and border culture and participated in an oral-history project on Latinos in World War II.

Paredes was one of Medrano’s first “Los Del Valle” interview subjects back in 1993. Both got their start at

what is now UTB/TSC. A musician and poet, Paredes went on to become a professor at The University of Texas at Austin and helped inspire a new interest in the songs, stories and culture of “la frontera” (the border).

Medrano was a presenter at the 2010 “Américo Paredes Remembered” symposium at the Center for Mexican American Studies at UT Austin. “Américo Paredes: In His Own Words” is Medrano’s family authorized biography.

Dedicating part of his Houston Endowment award to the “Dr. Américo Paredes Scholarship Endowment” for history majors was an easy choice, he said.

“This scholarship endowment is so much a part of our university mission, of being conscious not only of our academic work but of our cultural work,” said Medrano. “Dr. Paredes represents not only academic greatness but someone, as a person, who was noble and respectful. He sets an example. ... We can use a lot more of that.”

Efforts to grow the endowment continue, Medrano said. He imagines future scholarship recipients learning about Paredes and his work and being inspired to persevere.

“To me, his story transcends ethnicity. He came from an impoverished community, went through the Great Depression and was able to follow a dream – even when that dream was delayed,” Medrano said.

“This endowment is something I had the opportunity to do, something I wanted to do and something that is necessary to do. The community will be better off for it.”



Dr. Manuel Medrano