

Harmonizing *Corrido* and Union Song at the Ludlow Massacre

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In Ludlow, Colorado, on April 20, 1914, anti-union state militia and hired gunmen opened fire on a colony of miners and their families. After a ten-hour assault with machine guns, dynamite, fire, and kerosene, over twenty people died and many more were wounded. The most publicized atrocity was the death of two women and eleven children who took refuge in a ground cellar only to suffocate and burn to death in what became known as the infamous Black Hole. The Ludlow Massacre became a catalyst for pro-labor movements across the nation as well as a subject of much debate by lawmakers, historians, labor activists, and writers such as Meridel LeSueur, Upton Sinclair, Zeese Papanikolas, and even George S. McGovern. More recently, the site of the Ludlow Massacre has been the focus of annual archaeological digs as scholars endeavor to find more details surrounding the history of this significant labor conflict. Each discovery and rendition of the massacre adds greater understanding to the history of the people, times, and events of the Colorado Coal Strike, but many stories remain to be told.

Throughout his lifetime Elias Baca (1895–1998) sang the history of the massacre by synthesizing *corrido* and union song forms. Taking a *corrido* form widely used for protest by Mexicans and Mexican Americans and combining it with union song elements, Baca created his own discourse to broadcast and comment on the massacre. Looking at the historical and social contexts surrounding Baca's *corrido* and at the formulas and customs of both Mexican American balladry and union song allows for several conclusions: First, *Hispano* and Mexican American culture had a distinct and vocal presence in the Colorado Coal Strike as well as in other mining conflicts throughout the intermountain West. Second, Baca used his *corrido* to rally Spanish-speaking union miners and to emphasize the unity and power of the union, making Baca's *corrido* one of the earliest pro-union *corridos* recorded, if not the earliest. Third, Baca's adaptations and additions to traditional border *corrido* forms and union songs create a new *corrido* form as well as a new social identity for

its performers. Representing the culture and history of a working-class people who had little access to other forms of expression, Baca's song is a discourse that is critical for understanding the larger history of the massacre, specifically how members of unique ethnic groups worked together to fight capitalist corruption and oppression.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Ludlow Massacre occurred after a long and disillusioning strike. Before the 14 month-long strike, the Colorado state government ruled that mine operators must give miners eight-hour days, an elected checkweighman, the right to patronize any business or doctor, and the right to organize. When none of these rulings were enforced, on September 23, 1913, an estimated thirteen thousand miners went on strike against the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company, leaving only 7 percent of the workers in the mines (Powell 1985:101). Tension rose rapidly in southern Colorado mining districts. This strike had a double impact since it also left Colorado Fuel & Iron Company's steel mill without coal, giving the strikers much needed national attention. Even Mother Jones, dear to miners and dreaded by operators around the country, trekked to Colorado and fought for the workers' demands that had been met only with unfair wages, abusive foremen, and horrendous hours and living conditions. Mother Jones was arrested and banned from Colorado four times, but she persisted. Ten days after one of her arrests on January 22, 1914, women and children led a march down the streets of Trinidad to the hospital where Mother Jones was detained. General John Chase feared a riot and went on a rampage after them, instigating what was known as "The Mother Jones Riot."

Negotiations between the union, operators, and militia were complicated and futile. Even union leaders had disagreements, and the government officials and militia members had lost their integrity. Not only was the state militia corrupt, but it was joined by the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency, a group of professional gunmen, hired by the operators as their private thugs. Because of the culminating violence and many incidents of injustice, a congressional investigation proposed by both President Wilson and Congressman Keating began its hearings on February 9. However, despite President Wilson's U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations and its investigations, no action was taken to redress the miners' complaints or restore order to the mining communities.

On April 20, 1914, the day after Easter celebrations, the Ludlow tent colony of union-supported miners and their families was attacked by the militia of state guards and the Baldwin-Felts men. After the bloody

ten-hour assault, the brutal murder of Louis Tikas (union leader), the death of women and children in the Black Hole, the shock of many more dead and wounded, and the loss of all the union families' possessions, the nation's working-class people were angered and stirred to action. John D. Rockefeller II, a co-owner of Colorado Fuel & Iron Company, was blamed by many for the strike disasters, although he adamantly denied that they ever occurred (Gitelman 1988:23). But because of Rockefeller's link to Colorado Fuel & Iron, within the years following the Ludlow conflict he had to reconcile his corporate practices with rising labor unrest across the nation. Rockefeller, the leader of America's big industries, was forced to establish and define new policies on employee representation. After seeking the counsel of Canadian sociologist Mackenzie King and of publicity agent Ivy Lee, Rockefeller developed a new strategy for employee representation; he then visited the Ludlow camps to implement this strategy directly. Thus, the Ludlow Massacre served as a catalyst for progressive albeit slow changes in employee/employer relations around the country.

Immediately following the Massacre and the end of the Colorado Coal Strike, however, the Colorado union was devastated. Estimates counted 66 people dead and many more wounded, and the relief funds for strikers had been depleted. But union members did not quit fighting. Pearl Jolly, Mary Thomas, and Mary Petrucci, widowed survivors of the massacre, traveled the country speaking at pro-labor rallies. Upton Sinclair wrote *King Coal* (1917), and his wife escorted Mary Thomas and her two daughters to see Rockefeller. Although the union in Colorado was silenced for a season, the union's cause was not. The massacre was a "watershed event," according to Wallace Stegner; it touched the national conscience giving corporate gun-law a bad name and making corporations much more careful (1991:xvii).¹

ELIAS BACA, UNION *CORRIDISTA*

Elias Baca was born in Trinidad, Colorado, in 1895. Growing up in Aguilar, Colorado, he was the son of a half-Cherokee woman, Soledad Lopez, from Espanola, New Mexico, and Vicente Baca from Madrid, Spain, a mail courier riding between Santa Fe and Colorado. Vicente Baca was a fiddler, and he taught his son to play both fiddle and guitar. Together they played at many open-air dances. Elias Baca's daughter, Eva Martinez, remembers growing up in segregated mining camps. She was warned not to go into camps of people of other ethnicities, but when there was a dance everyone came together in harmony. Baca learned early about music's power to unify and mobilize people (Martinez 1996).

At eighteen Baca started working in the coal mines of Colorado, and he was actively involved in strikes and union activity. Too many times he worked without pay or earned only enough for bread and water for lunch. Baca vividly recalled fighting scabs, the deaths of the women and children trapped in the Ludlow Black Hole, and marching through town in protest with only wood boards shaped to look like intimidating rifles since the militia had taken away their real weapons. He worked for sixty-six years as a miner in Hastings, Colorado, Rock Springs, Wyoming, and after 1949, in Wattis, Utah, surviving two large explosions and eventually developing black lung. In an interview with historian Nancy Taniguchi in 1986, Baca at ninety-one still expressed his devotion to the union, "The union is good. If it weren't for union, we wouldn't get nothing. I am still for the union. If you weren't in the union, your work was for nothing. There were days when we worked for nothing." Despite the hardships, Baca never quit singing his mining and union *corridos* and only quit playing guitar when his hands were disabled with arthritis. He spent his last years in Price, Utah, where he died in 1998.

SONGS OF THE STRIKE

According to folklorist George Korson, music has long been a tradition in the mining industry. In his book, *Coal Dust on the Fiddle*, Korson recorded hundreds of songs commemorating disasters, streaks of luck, legendary characters, union struggles, and so on. He explains, "Music was not discouraged by operators when it helped to keep their employees contented. Some even subsidized local bands and provided mining sinecures for bandsmen" (1943:17). Not surprising, then, is the fact that archaeologists have found an abundance of bandstands in the Colorado coal camps dating after the strike. "Obviously," says Mark Walker, leader of one of the digs, "someone thought that the miners went on strike because they were not getting enough musical entertainment" (1999a:5). Korson explains that music in mining camps came from many origins: Welsh, Scottish, Irish, English, African American, Italian, Mexican, Hispanic. "When they began to express their feelings . . . , the miners adapted the bardic and minstrel arts which were part of their racial heritage," but, Korson asserts, "there is no doubt of their originality. Their local color stamped them as of the American scene; the mark of coal dust was upon them" (1943:19–20).

In Korson's collection, "The ballad of discontent bulks large . . . because discontent was a dominant note in [the miners'] way of life. Strike ballads are numerous . . . , but not in disproportion to the rôle

strikes played in the coal regions” (1943:23). Likewise, throughout the Colorado union uprisings from 1913 to 1915, miners composed songs that voiced their frustrations. Writer Agnes Smedley describes the conditions of the Colorado coal towns in her novel *Daughter of Earth*, “I walked fearfully along the dirty winding streets and looked into the homes of the miners. Bare little rooms with a table, a chair or two, a few pots and pans—and a musical instrument. Sometimes books. In the evening many of them sat outside their houses and played melancholy folk music” (1987:102). In addition to their soothing effect, union songs were sung continually by the marchers, strikers, and prisoners to protest their oppressors, voice injustices, and propagate the cause of the union. One of these songs is “We’re Coming, Colorado,” by Frank J. Hayes, International President of the United Mine Workers of America. Frances Nelson Vallejo, a young witness of the strikes, remembers Mother Jones and “every child in Walsenburg” singing this song written only five days before the 1913 strike (Vallejo 1998:89). The chorus is sung to the tune of “The Battle Cry of Freedom”:

We will win the fight today, boys,
 We’ll win the fight today,
 Shouting the battle cry of union;
 We will rally from the coal mines,
 We’ll battle to the end,
 Shouting the battle cry of union.

Chorus

The Union forever, hurrah, boys, hurrah!
 Down with the Baldwins, up with the law;
 For we’re coming, Colorado, we’re coming all the way,
 Shouting the battle cry of union.

We have fought them here for years, boys,
 We’ll fight them in the end,
 Shouting the battle cry of union.
 We have fought them in the North,
 Now we’ll fight them in the South,
 Shouting the battle cry of union.

We are fighting for our rights, boys,
 We are fighting for our homes,
 Shouting the battle cry of union;
 Men have died to win the struggle;
 They’ve died to set us free,
 Shouting the battle cry of union. (Korson 1943:388–89)

Using patriotic metaphors and familiar tunes, the writers of these union songs align their causes with those that have been nationally approved and, thus, take on an authoritative and confident tone. And because the melodies were popular, they were also more easily remembered and transmitted. Another song, “Our Cause is Marching On,” was published in the *United Mine Workers Journal* on December 11, 1913, and is sung to the tune of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” Below I’ve included the first stanza, chorus, and fourth stanza:

There’s a fight in Colorado for to set the miners free,
 From the tyrants and the money kings and all the powers that be,
 They have trampled o’er the freedom that was meant for you and me,
 But right is marching on.

Chorus

Cheer, boys, cheer the cause of union!
 The Colorado miners’ union!
 Glory, glory to our union!
 Our cause is marching on.

There were union men at Lexington and famous Bunker Hill,
 At Valley Forge and Brandywine, to curb a tyrant’s will,
 And the union men at Gettysburg displayed the greatest skill,
 To keep this nation whole. (Korson 1943:389)

Union songs, especially those distributed by the *United Mine Workers Journal*, served as a “print language” to promote what Benedict Anderson calls an imagined community. Although Anderson is talking about a nation-state with physical borders and hegemonic governorship, his definition can still be applied to the United Mine Workers as they represented themselves in “national” terms. For Anderson, the nation is “*imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1991:6). As union songs were distributed throughout the country, they facilitated a “mass ceremony” of “simultaneous consumption” (1991:35). These songs, like national anthems, facilitated “a special kind of contemporaneous community which language alone suggests—above all in the form of poetry and songs. . . . No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody,” and for Anderson this creates an image of

“unisonance” (1991:145). The leaders and members of the United Mine Workers were not foolish in their use of song. They chose the most effective way to rally miners and their families from diverse races, cultures, and regions.

Other songs of the time protested the tyranny of particular owners, such as John D. Rockefeller, about whom Alred Hayes composed this song,

John D. he was a Christian,
 John D. the psalms he sung;
 But he'd no mercy in his heart,
 He shot down old and young.

One night when all were sleeping,
 all wrapped up in their dreams,
 We heard a loud explosion,
 We heard most terrible screams.

“Oh, save us from the burning flames,”
 We heard our children cry;
 But John D. laughed and shot them down
 Right there before our eyes. (Greenway 1953:14–15)

Rockefeller did not even visit his Colorado coal mines until a few years after the Ludlow Massacre; still, Hayes effectively uses “John D.” to vilify the greedy powers behind the massacre (“John D. he’s stacks of money, / John D. he’s stacks of gold”) and to get the attention of those who might stop such future injustices (Greenway 1953:14). Rockefeller’s name served perfectly as a synecdochical representation of all monopolistic American corporations. But there were also songs that commemorated and applauded the sacrificial participation of individuals such as Mother Jones and Louis Tikas, the famous Greek leader and Ludlow martyr. These songs resemble the heroic *corrido* tradition of the Texas lower border, a balladry tradition that, according to well-known Mexican American scholar Américo Paredes, works “toward one form, the *corrido*; toward one theme, border conflict; toward one concept of the hero, the man fighting for his right with his pistol in his hand” (1994:149).

CORRIDO: FORM FOR NEWS, PROTEST, AND RALLY

After the Mexican Revolution when “the *corrido* again sprang into life and entered its second and its best epic period,” the *corrido* tradition became well-documented and analyzed by scholars such as Vicente T.

Mendoza, Américo Paredes, José E. Limón, and María Herrera-Sobek, to name only a few (Paredes 1993:130).² In this article I am primarily concerned with how Baca used *corrido* elements for a union song. So, as I did with union songs, I will only briefly outline some characteristics of *corridos* for comparative purposes. *Corridos* originated from *romances*, epic songs that the Spanish brought with them to the Americas. Structurally, *corridos* follow strict patterns of octosyllabic, alternately rhyming four-line stanzas. “Thematically,” writes Ramon Saldivar “the *corrido* typically relates significant events, such as social conflicts, natural disasters, political issues, or individual crises” (1987:12). Since the *corrido* narrates historical events very significant to a close community, it “focuses on those events . . . that are capable of producing a heightened reflexive awareness of the mutual values and orientations of the collective” (Saldivar 1987:13).

“The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez” is one of the most well-known *corridos*, especially since its translation and publication in 1958 by Américo Paredes. Paredes uses this *corrido* to represent the “[b]order ballads that have been most widely accepted” and therefore contain the previously mentioned factors: “*corrido* form, border-conflict theme, and a hero who defends his right” (1994:150). This *corrido* was most likely sung primarily in the years following the time of the events narrated, 1901:

En el condado del Carmen
este caso ha sucedido,
murió el Cherife Mayor
quedando Román herido.

In the country of El Carmen
This occurrence has taken place;
The Major Sheriff died,
Leaving Román badly wounded.

Decía Gregorio Cortez
con su pistola en la mano:
—No siento haberlo matado,
al 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.”

Venían todos los rinches,
venían que se mataban
porque se iban a ganar
diez mil pesos que les daban.

All the rangers were coming,
They were coming at breakneck speed,
Because they were going to get
Ten thousand dollars they were offered.

The rest of the *corrido* includes details and dialogues from the chase and capture of Cortez. The *corrido* ends with the traditional closing farewell:

Ya con ésta me despido
a la sombra de un ciprés
aquí se acaba cantando
el *corrido* de Cortez.

Now with this I say farewell
In the shade of a cypress tree,
This is the end of the singing
Of the ballad of Cortez. (1994:169B71)

This *corrido* accurately reflects the difficult situation of Mexican Americans living along Texas's lower border after the Treaty of Guadalupe was signed in 1848. Cortez's involvement in the shooting of the sheriff began when a translator incorrectly transmitted Cortez's answers to the sheriff's questions. Thus, misunderstandings as well as racial motivation instigated the murder of Cortez's brother. In popular *corridos*, commemorating heroes such as Cortez served as a way for the collective voice of Mexican Americans to be heard.

María Herrera-Sobek has also collected, analyzed, and published hundreds of *corridos*. In her collection *Northward Bound*, she includes *corridos* from 1848 to 1964, about cowboys and outlaws, working and traveling on the railroad, revolution and hard times, migration, repatriation, deportation, and the Bracero program. From 1910 to 1920 when Baca composed his song for the union, narrating his struggle in "the land of the free," many popular *corridos* narrated the Mexican Revolution or emigration to the north. One of these is "*Consejos a los nortteños*" (Advice to the Northerners"); here are the first four of twenty-seven stanzas:

Ahora sí llorarán
vayan juntando el transporte
Muchachos aficionados,
esos que les gusta el Norte.

Now you can cease your crying
Start saving money for your ticket
All of you young men
Who love the North (USA).

Arreglen su maletita,
ya váyanse preparando
cepillen bien la gorrita
para entrar de contrabando

Get your luggage ready
Start preparing yourselves
Brush well your hat.
So you can cross illegally.

Porque si entran por el puente
les han de tronar los huesos
ahora no entran de gollote
les cobran dieciseis pesos.

'Cause if you cross the bridge
Your bones will creak
You can't cross free no more
The fee is sixteen pesos.

Bañense hasta con legía
pa' quitarse lo mugroso
ya no den en qué decir
con el gringo pretencioso

Bathe well even with lye
To get the dirt off
Don't get a bad reputation
With those pretentious gringos.
(1993:70B71)

As Herrera-Sobek points out, this *corrido* informs us that a significant number of young men were moving north, that crossing the border is dangerous and expensive, that racial snobbery and prejudice are not easily avoided, but finally, that you can earn “good money / ‘Cause the big-footed ones / Need (machine) operators” (1993:71). This example reiterates the variety of uses for *corridos*. Basically, “Everything that moves, disturbs, or affects the common spirit, everything that influences the lives of the masses; that which produces unforgettable commotion or excitement, becomes subject matter for the *corrido*” (Martínez in Griffith and Fernández 1988:131).

Herrera-Sobek considers César Chávez responsible for the popularity of today’s use of the *corrido* as a song “to air grievances and simultaneously record the events of time” (1993:190). During the 1960s, Chávez recognized the importance of the *corrido* as a tool to rally and unite the farm workers as well as to broadcast their messages. The United Farm Workers sang “The Ballad of César Chávez,” “The Farmer Worker’s Ballad,” and “The Ballad of the Cause,” a *corrido* reminiscent of the Colorado Coal Strike’s “Our Cause Is Marching On,” as it rallies the farm workers around the union “cause”:

La fecha tengo presente
la recordarán ustedes
fue el mero 6 de enero
el día de los Santos Reyes
veinte patrullas llevaron
repartiendo unos papeles.

The date is clear in my mind
You too will recall
It was the very 6th of January
The holiday of the Three Wise Men
Twenty policeman’s cars came
Giving out some papers.

Como estaban en inglés
se los tiramos al suelo
hablan de leyes injustas
que nos ha puesto el ranchero
hermano viva la causa
my familia está primero.

Since they were in English
We throw them on the ground
They talk about unjust laws
That the farmer has imposed on us.
My brother long live the cause
My family comes first.

(Herrera-Sobek 1993:182B83)

Similar to how union songs joined miners to an imagined community through “nation” rhetoric, in the above *corrido*, the *corridista* links family with the cause by making reference to “our children,” “my people,” and “our leader, César Chávez.” Not only are the farm workers joined to a community through a cause, but they are also joined to a larger *familia*.

As a result of Chávez’s use of the *corrido*, Luis Valdez began to incorporate the *corridos* in his *Teatro Campesino*, a farmworkers theater troupe

that promoted the grape boycott and strike. Through the United Farm Workers and *Teatro Campesino*, the *corrido* tradition gained national attention as union propaganda. *Corridos* were even written about the Kennedys, the political heroes of the farm workers. Using the *corrido* for union purposes was not particularly innovative; as previously mentioned, the *corrido* had been used for protest since before the Mexican American War. It thrived in Mexico during the Revolution, and after the Revolution, singers protested the U.S. exploitation of Mexico's petroleum industry, the hypocrisy of America's justice system, and many other political/social issues. For example in the *corrido*, "Vida, proceso, y muerte de Aurelio Pompa," the singer warns Mexicans not to come to the United States by decrying the incarceration and execution of innocent immigrants (Herrera-Sobek 1993:100). But not until the 1960s, with Chavez's strike, was the *corrido* used on a wide scale to support labor organizations and unions in the United States.

¡QUE VIVA LA NACIÓN!

Baca's *corrido*, *¡Que viva la nación!*, recorded in 1986 and 1987, is unique as one of the earliest pro-union songs recorded in Spanish.³ As Baca migrated from mining community to mining community within the intermountain West, he continued to sing his *corrido* and contribute to the lore and history of the massacre and of labor conflicts in general. Baca's unique use of the *corrido* form, specifically, adds richly to the tradition of Mexican American protest music. Folklorist Merle E. Simmons writes that the *corrido* is the best means "of penetrating the collective mind of Mexico's masses. . . . [C]orridos do undoubtedly mirror with a high degree of fidelity the trends and directions of popular thought, and they reveal truth as the pueblo has seen it" (1953:34). Baca's song does accurately mirror the borderland in which he lived, a borderland of ethnic and class division. His song also ensured that future generations of miners throughout the West understood the "truth" of the Colorado Coal Strike as he saw it. Here is Baca's *corrido* as it was recorded in 1986 and 1987 by David Stanley and Nancy Taniguchi. (The translation is mine, and the brackets indicate unclear passages or passages that changed between recordings.)

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

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

Chorus:

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

Las mujeres allá en Denver
 y en alta voz gritaban
 que firmen las compañías
 que ya el carbón faltaba.

Chorus

En el [hospital] de Denver
 la gente estaban entrando
 [entraba toda la gente]
 A ver al C.F. & I.
 que estaba [organizando].

Chorus

En el depot allí [de Lin]
 estábamos formados [estaba un tren formado]
 que íbamos a pelear [que iban a pelear]
 y a Ledlo, Colorado.

Chorus

Estos guardias [allá] de Hastings
 que guardias tan suaves.
 Quedaron por las lomas
 comidos de las aves.

Chorus

Estos guardias de Delagua
 que guardias tan Hombrotos.
 quedaron por las lomas
 comidos de los coyotes.

*That the nation may live!
 That the nation may live!
 We're here fighting
 in this powerful union.*

The women over there in Denver
 in loud voice cried out
 that the companies sign
 now that coal was lacking.

In the Denver hospital
 the people were entering
 [entered all the people]
 to see the C.F. & I.
 which was [organizing].

In the depot there in [Ludlow]
 we were in line [there was a line]
 that we would fight [they would fight]
 and in Ludlow, Colorado.

Those guards from Hastings,
 those cool guards,
 they stayed up by the hills
 eaten by the birds.

Those guards from Delagua,
 such big, manly guards,
 they stayed up by the hills
 eaten by the coyotes.

Baca wrote his *corrido* soon after the Ludlow Massacre; he significantly anticipated Chavez's use of the *corrido* as a union tool. Perhaps because of the widespread use of the *corridos* in the Mexican Revolution, which was happening concurrently with the Colorado Coal Strike, or because of the union's use of song, Baca knew the power that *corridos* rendered in unifying the miners.

Que Viva La Nación

(That the Nation May Live)

Elias Baca
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Although we think of Joe Hill much sooner than Elias Baca when remembering union song writers and singers, the fact that Baca continued to sing his *corrido* to family and friends at community gatherings reiterates that Baca did not underestimate the power of song in raising awareness of social and historical events.⁵ In her chapter on *corridos* about poverty, petroleum, and amnesty, Herrera-Sobek comments on the awareness that immigrants have of their role in society:

They are conscious of their position as subjects in the historical process. Immigrants force this self-reflexive consciousness on the pages of history through the Mexican ballad, the only viable instrument they have at their disposal; it is the only medium they have for articulating their condition in the world. They are not helpless spectators in the flow of historical currents but very much aware of their selves as acting subjects. (1993:234)

Although Baca was not an immigrant, he was a minority and very much aware of his contribution to the mining community. This is especially obvious in the interviews as he demonstrates his pride in being a singer and supporter of the union. In both interviews by folklorists David Stanley and Nancy Taniguchi, the interviewers only had to mention Ludlow, and Baca immediately broke into song. To Stanley, Baca said, “I fought for this union myself, and I fixed this song myself.” Baca clearly believed in the purposes and power of the union and considered himself an active member of the larger union community.

Baca's *corrido* follows most of the prescribed formulas of a *corrido*, and it provides a stirring, journalistic account of a significant event in Mexican American and Hispanic labor history. Herrera-Sobek refers to Armand Duvalier's research and his list of both primary and secondary formulas for ballads. Two of his primary formulas apply to Baca's *corrido*. In the first stanza the *corridista* gives the date and place of the narrative: the 23rd of September. Also in the same stanza the *corridista* gives the theme and message: the mining is to be stopped. Of Duvalier's secondary formulas, Baca's *corrido* contains the following: a reiterated phrase, an exclamation or reflection of the *corridista*, and a summary and synthesis of the main theme (1993:xxiv). While strict adherence to rhyme and meter are not a requirement for *corridos*, Baca's *corrido* follows a definite pattern. Each stanza has octosyllabic lines and the second and fourth lines rhyme, and in Baca's *corrido*, the text is often manipulated to pull this off. The pronunciation of the words alters continually so that the lines will remain octosyllabic. For example, in the penultimate line of the refrains, Baca sings "aquí 'stamos" instead of "aquí estamos." If Baca sang "estamos," he would have an extra syllable. Similarly, Baca uses slang like "que" and "y" to create octosyllabic lines. The use of such slang also keeps Baca's song in the vernacular speech of his peers.

Because *corridos* are often written to send messages that cannot be easily transmitted by paper or by other means, they have a predictable rhyme and meter that facilitates recitation. Nonetheless, Baca mixed up stanzas or repeated a verse or two; I also question whether lines were taken from various stanzas and combined out of chronological order for these recordings. Baca's age made it somewhat difficult to get a complete or consistent recording of his song. His *corrido* was recorded three times, and each time it had notable alterations, though they never disrupted the rhyme and meter scheme or changed themes. Note the biggest variance when Baca sings, "we were in line, that we would fight." Another time he sings, "there was a line, so that they would fight." The listener is not sure if Baca actually participated in the act of defiance or if he is using "we" to associate himself with the larger union. In the interviews with Stanley, Baca recalled standing in line with other strikers with only wooden rifles in their hands (because of their lack of weapons, wood ones were made to try and intimidate the militia). This could be the same line he refers to in his *corrido*, but the listener is unsure of Baca's participation. Américo Paredes reminds us, "It is up to the individual hearer to put the separate parts together, and to choose from among the versions those he prefers or those that seem the true ones to him" (1994:109). Variation is a key

element in the folk process, and departures from previously recorded versions of Baca's song do not reduce its credibility; instead, they provide for more ways to interpret meaning.

One of the ambiguities in Baca's song is found in stanzas three and four, where I believe Baca is referring to Mother Jones's arrival in Trinidad when she was immediately arrested and sent back to Denver. She again headed back to Trinidad, and this time was arrested and detained in the Mt. San Rafael Hospital. This provoked the march by women and children in the streets of Trinidad, which was followed by "The Mother Jones Riot." Though "Six women were injured. . . . Ultimately, the protest turned out to be a moral victory for the women" (Vallejo 1998:94). Either Baca places the demonstration incorrectly at a hospital in Denver, or the meaning of the fourth stanza continues to elude me. But while the details seem sketchy, the significance of these stanzas is not. Women were present and participated at every level of the Ludlow conflict. They left company houses for tent dwellings and led protests in the streets. Some lost their lives or the lives of loved ones during the massacre, and others traveled the country to speak on behalf of the union. Baca's song pays tribute to some of the most important members of the union community: women.

Another interesting element to Baca's song is that each stanza begins with a location. Baca's detail to both time and place emphasizes the far-reaching effect and magnitude of the Ludlow conflict, as well as the unity of purpose within the United Mine Workers of America. Across the nation, members of the union as well as coal mining operators simultaneously participated in this conflict. In the first stanza, Baca ties the Ludlow conflict into the national interests of the union, "From West Virginia came very similar telegrams." West Virginia was not only the home of the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency, but it was also host state to the 1913 United Mine Workers of America strike in Paint Creek. The conflict brewing in Ludlow paralleled that of the one in West Virginia in an uncanny way. Historian Zeese Papanikolas comments on the ominous similarities, "in Paint Creek, West Virginia, . . . not that many months before [Ludlow,] an armored train had sped by a colony laid out, like Ludlow, along a line of tracks and fired machine gun bursts into the tents of sleeping strikers" (1991:93). Those same tents were then sent by train to the Colorado coal camps to shelter the families of Ludlow. Mother Jones was a fiery participant at Paint Creek and Ludlow. And finally, the antagonists continued to be coal mine operators along with the hired Baldwin-Felts men who again brought the "Death Special," an armored car designed to protect the Baldwin-Felts men as they shot at

strikers. From the very beginning of his song, Baca effectively bridges the East and West, connecting participants from various geographical locations and strengthening the numbers of the union.

In the final stanzas, Baca triumphantly declares that those “big, manly guards” were left “up by the hills/eaten by the birds” and coyotes. The truth is that the union did not win the battle in Ludlow, but Baca’s song remains true to *corrido* tradition by championing the underdog. The Baldwin-Felts men and coal operators might have left the hills of Ludlow somewhat unscathed, but for Baca’s audience they were left for the birds of the air and the beasts of the field by the mighty strikers of Ludlow.

Although Baca’s *corrido* has difficult elements to interpret and may be incomplete, it is a very important contribution to *corrido* and union song scholarship. It maintains its essential elements that confirm, as Theresa McKenna explains, its “political functionality: (1) the overt and implied ‘other’ and (2) the emphasis on event or on narrativity to transform that event into larger social action” (1991:188). But Baca’s *corrido* also has two characteristics that mark it as distinct from its *corrido* contemporaries: first, the “we” narrating this *corrido* is composed of union workers, not the more traditional Mexican American “we” represented by a border hero fighting the Anglo *rinche* (ranger), and second, after each stanza a chorus is sung. These differences mark a critical change in the narrative voice of this *corrido*. In Richard R. Flores’s article “The *Corrido* and the Emergence of Texas-Mexican Social Identity,” he marks a similar transition in the narrative voice of the 1915 *corrido* “*Los Sediciosos*.” He argues that in this text, “a new social experience and identity . . . shifts the formal boundaries of the *corrido* by adding a second voice to its mono-vocal form” (1992:166). Formerly, lower border *corridos* were narrated by a singular, authoritative voice which represented the collective community, much like Gregorio Cortez, “[t]he hero[,] . . . the peaceful man who defends his right” (Parédes 194:150). But in “*Los Sediciosos*,” there are “two authorial voices”—those *de este lado* (from this side) and those who are *puros mexicanos* (1992:172). Flores suggests that this new voice is “an ‘internally persuasive’ discourse that is not backed by authority, tradition, or form, but one ‘born in a zone of contact’” (1992:174).

Similarly, Baca’s *corrido* is definitely “born in a zone of contact.” The mining districts of southern Colorado were very much a borderland, as Gloria Anzaldúa says, a place “wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (1999:cover). “Fifty-four lan-

guages and dialects were spoken in the counties of Huerfano and Las Animas, and many of the miners were first brought into the area as strikebreakers during the 1903 strike" (Vallejo 1998:87). The Ludlow Colony was no different than other mining communities; archaeologists participating in the Colorado Coal Field War Project have already mapped out "a number of geographically distinct areas, including areas associated with different classes and ethnic groups" (Walker 1999b). In Berwind, the nearby Colorado Fuel & Iron Company town, archaeologists have "discovered twenty-one geographically distinct residential/use areas, including areas [for] African-Americans, Italians, and Hispanics" (Walker 1999a:3). Archaeologist Mark Walker writes that a primary emphasis of the Colorado Coal Field War Project is to research the relationship between class and ethnicity, and he comments that

[o]ne notable aspect of the Ludlow colony, and the strike as a whole, was the solidarity of the different ethnic groups who made up the strikers. The diversity of ethnic groups in the mines and mine camps was a continual source of comment by historical observers. It was a source of concern, for example, for the union, who suspected that the companies were importing a variety of different ethnic groups to hinder communication and increase divisiveness among the miners. (1999:6)

In the Colorado Coal Strike borderlands, members of the mining community certainly became what Anzaldúa calls a "crossroads." They understood that "to survive the Borderlands" one must live without borders and "be a crossroads" (1999:217). For example, for the purpose of clear communication among the distinct mining groups, the Ludlow camp police force was organized into squads with a man from each of the colony's main languages (Papanikolas 1991:92). Prejudices and differences were overlooked, so that headway could be made on the issues that needed the most attention.

Walker writes that recent "labor historians have stressed the rootedness of class in contexts such as community networks and informal organizations. This approach [situates] class formation in the material conditions of everyday life" (1999:6). The "everyday life," "community networks," and "informal organizations" of the Colorado Coal Strike miners certainly contributed to the solidarity of a working class even within ethnic differences. But ethnicity factored into that solidarity. While working toward the larger cause of the union, there is evidence that miners and their families organized within their ethnic groups creating "informal organizations." One of the primary heroes and martyrs of the massacre was Louis Tikas

“The Greek,” first a leader for the Greek miners but later for the entire Ludlow colony.⁶ In a similar fashion Baca’s song is primarily understood by Spanish miners, but in a broader sense it commemorates all the striking members and families of the Colorado Coal Strike.

In Richard Flores’s analysis of “*Los Sediciosos*,” he says there is “an emergent identity trying to speak in an expressive, formal voice, over and above the voice of the authoritative ‘Mexican’ hero. And although this voice does not yet represent that of an autonomous ‘group,’ we have the beginnings of a differentiated, neither Mexican nor American, community” (1992:174–75). This same emergent identity is also present in Baca’s *corrido*. Considering the constant influx of new immigrants into the mining community, the miners likely became flexible in their work, living, and singing patterns. In an effort to contribute solidarity to the union and future mining communities, Baca’s *corrido* embraced an emergent identity, the union musical form of the chorus, and the patriotic theme, “¡Que viva la nación!” Because Baca, and most likely his Spanish-speaking co-laborers, recognized the need for a union and solidarity, they were willing to overlook the dividing walls of the camps, the language barriers, and their different musical traditions. Mark Walker points out that

many of the immigrants in the Colorado coal camps were Greek and Italian. Greece during this period is in the throes of nation formation. Italy had recently completed it. While people from these areas may have thought of themselves in some abstract sense as belonging to a larger nation, they lived their lives as being from certain villages or regions. . . . So paradoxically it was in the US that these diverse ethnic groups became, not only ‘Americans’ and ‘workers,’ but also ‘Greeks’ and ‘Italians.’ The formation of these new ethnic identities was part and parcel of the formation of class-consciousness. (1999a:6)

Members of the mining community did become more conscious of their ethnic and class divisions, but they still aligned themselves with the identity of the union. A good example of this is in the song written to honor Louis Tikas the “Ludlow Martyr:”

Oh, Louis Tikas, gallant soul,
 Defender of the helpless, weak;
 Knight of humanity, you were
 More than American or Greek. (Korson 1943:390)

Tikas is neither American nor Greek, but he is a “Knight of humanity,” “good brother,” and “noble comrade” with “the blood of Pericles”

flowing in his veins (Korson 1943:390–91). At Tikas's funeral all the striking miners from every ethnic camp, not just the Greeks, created a processional line a mile-long through the Trinidad business district demonstrating a unity that reached beyond ethnic barriers (McGovern and Guttridge 1996:239).

Flores says, "once identity is constructed from the social borders of socioeconomic and historical conditions of marginalization between two cultures, the expressive, discursive form of that identity also changes" (1992:176). Baca's *corrido* illustrates how discursive forms change. Unlike the traditional voice of a *corrido*, the "we" is joined with other ethnic camps and voices for the purposes of the union. *Corrido* scholar Alfred Arteaga writes that "The *corrido* of the Southwest is characterized by the intense nature of the Chicano-gringo relationship," and Arteaga asserts, "not until World War II when the U.S. and Mexico first became allies, is there a positive image" (1985:77, 81). But Baca's *corrido* challenges that characterization by commenting on the intense relationship of the miner-owner relationship. And by adding a chorus to his *corrido* he appropriates an anglo form and therefore is inclusive in his style, even though the song is still sung in Spanish. His song is a "transformation of forms which [Victor] Turner explains when he writes, 'one genre might supplant or replace another as the historically or situationally dominant form of social metacommentary. New communicative techniques and media may make possible wholly unprecedented genres of cultural performance and thus new modes of self-understanding'" (McKenna 1991:191). Baca's song is more than a protest against the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company, it is a song that redefines Hispanos' and Mexican Americans' *corrido* voice, as well as a song that identifies them to a certain extent with the multiethnic and national community of the union.

The Ludlow Massacre was indeed a "watershed event," and Elias Baca, like so many other individuals, contributed to its significance. His *corrido* reminds us that the voice of the Hispano was not silent during the Colorado Coal Strike, nor was it silent as it moved from mining community to mining community. Baca's *corrido* also tells us that the voice of the Hispano miner was changing and merging in many ways with the collective voice of the multiethnic mining community (despite the fact that interracial tension rose immensely whenever foreign scabs were brought in to do strikers' work). The *corrido* form, as new social identities were necessary for survival, changed. Imagining the events surrounding the Ludlow Massacre requires more than a look at two conflicting parties: the union and the Colorado, Fuel, & Iron Company. Instead, by studying the

contributions of the various cultures represented, we learn from a broader perspective and find new understanding of what it meant to live in the camps of the Colorado Coal Strike. For Elias Baca, that meant using popular *corridos* along with union songs to unify an imagined community as well as to create “new modes of self-understanding.”

Salt Lake City

NOTES

Many thanks to David Stanley at Westminster College of Salt Lake City for encouraging me to study Baca's *corrido*. I also thank the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies for supporting the fieldwork and research necessary to complete this project.

1. For a summary of the Colorado Coal Strike history I have used Barron B. Beshoar's *Out of the Depths: The Story of John R. Lawson, a Labor Leader* (1957), Howard M. Gitelman's *Legacy of the Ludlow Massacre: A Chapter in Industrial Relations* (1988), George S. McGovern's and Leonard F. Guttridge's *The Great Coalfield War of 1913–1914* (1996), and Zeese Papanikolas's *Buried Unsung: Louis Tikas and the Ludlow Massacre* (1982). For the Hispanic perspective M. Edmund Vallejo's "Recollections of the Colorado Coal Strike, 1913–1914" in *La Gente: Hispano History and Life in Colorado* (1998), edited by Vincent C. De Baca, has been especially helpful. And finally, the Colorado Coal Field War Project has a beautiful web site complete with photographs, maps, histories, teacher lesson plans, and more at <http://coloradodigital.coal-liance.org/cfindex.html>.
2. See Américo Paredes's history of *corrido* scholarship in "The Mexican *Corrido*: Its Rise and Fall" in his *Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border* (1993) and María Herrera-Sobek's bibliography on *corrido* scholarship in her book *Northward Bound* (1993).
3. George Korson has documented three mining songs about "Spanish-Americans" in *Coal Dust on the Fiddle* (1943). "El Minerito" was written in 1935 to celebrate the victory of a strike (89); "Rufeno, the Mexicano Boy" is an English tune in memory of a heroic "Mexicano lad" who saved the lives of other men in 1912; and the third song, "Mi Mulita," motivates a ranchero's mule to "get on with this little load" (193).
4. Américo Paredes says that "[t]he Greater Mexican *Gregorio Cortez* is obviously a broadside, and it is doubtful that it was widely sung;" however, I wonder if the line "Que viva nuestra nación" from that broadside influenced Baca's *corrido* (1994:175–76). Paredes does say that "[i]n New Mexico the *corrido* never was an important native form, most of the better *corridos* collected in that area being Greater Mexico importations" (1993:130).
5. Baca also sang an interesting rendition of "El *Corrido* de José Lizorio." But in Baca's rendition, the demise of José happens when a mine foreman fires

him for refusing to go into the mine and sends him off to find a replacement. The two stanzas narrating the episode at the mine were created for a mining community and illustrate the adaptability of *corridos* for new purposes and audiences.

6. An excellent history on Louis Tikas's leadership in the Colorado Coal Strike and on Greek involvement in the West's mining industry is *Buried Unsung: Louis Tikas and the Ludlow Massacre* (1991), by Zeese Papanikolas.

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