

'The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez, produced by Moctezuma Esparza, added into the National Film Registry

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CHICANO WINS NATION'S HIGHEST FILM HONOR

Following its induction into the National Film Registry, 'The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez,' produced by Moctezuma Esparza, will have a special screening at the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television



Cortez

Described as the most authentic Western ever made, The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez, produced by

“

I grew up hearing of the slaughter of Mexicans by the Texas Rangers; between 1900-1915, thousands of Mexicans were lynched or murdered”

Moctesuma Esparza

Moctesuma Esparza, has been added to the National Film Registry by the Library of Congress. Each year, 25 films are selected based on their cultural, historical and aesthetic significance. Starring Edward James Olmos, The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez is a real-life story that was released in 1982 as an independent American Playhouse film for \$1.2 million. It was the first film to feature a Latino hero. To date, only 85 productions have been chosen for the National Film Registry; this is the third film produced by Esparza that has been honored after 1970's Requiem-29

and 1997's Selena.

Esparza is a two-time graduate of the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television and a current member of their Executive Board. To celebrate his major achievement, the school will host a free community screening of The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez at UCLA's James Bridges Theater on

Wednesday, April 26. A fireside chat with Esparza follows the screening.

The story of Gregorio Cortez is that of a Tejano vaquero (cowboy) who is wrongly accused of stealing a horse during a translation misunderstanding with a sheriff at his ranch. During a heated exchange of words in Spanish, Cortez's unarmed brother is gunned down by the sheriff. Cortez kills the sheriff in self-defense. Running for his life and leaving his family behind, he is hunted by a posse of hundreds of Texas Rangers hell bent on revenge. He eludes them for 13 days by riding circles around them. Cortez is finally captured when he learns his family is being held behind bars, and following a Texas courthouse conviction, he is sent to prison. His story inspired the narrative ballad "El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez."

Esparza was compelled to produce *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*, which was directed by Robert Young, because "it is part of American history in the West that has been ignored and suppressed," he says. "I grew up hearing of the slaughter of Mexicans by the Texas Rangers; between 1900-1915, thousands of Mexicans were lynched or murdered."

Forty-one years after its theatrical release, *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* still resonates. Mexican Americans have endured second-class status, neglect, wage theft and violent attacks because of their skin color or just because they "look Mexican" since the Mexican-American War (1846-1848). Latinos continue to be on the receiving end of racism and unequal treatment under the law. *Gregorio Cortez* is a reminder that Mexican American history and culture should matter to all people, as Texas, California and the entire southwestern portion of the United States were once part of Mexico, land taken in a military conquest. Since then, Latinos have been made to feel like outcasts in their own ancestral lands.

Media Contact

Luis Vasquez-Ajmac

Luis@LAVALosAngeles.co

(310) 421-6479

Screening: *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* Wednesday, April 26, 2023, 6:30 p.m.

James Bridges Theater

UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television 235 Charles E. Young Drive East

Los Angeles, CA 90095

luis Luis A Vasquez-Ajmac

LAVA

3106431730 ext.

[email us here](#)

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