

Westward Expansion and Country Music's Hispanic Influence

(Del Estado de Morelos)

Est. Time: 60-90 minutes

Subjects: History, Social Studies

Age Range: High School

See the full lesson [here!](#)

★ *TEACHROCK* ★

What was Westward Expansion, and what effect did it have on American popular music?

In this lesson you will:

- Identify the timeline for Westward Expansion, from the 1840s to the early 1900s
- Examine how Country music is inspired in part by corridos, a centuries-old singing tradition in Mexico
- Connect the annexation and purchase of territory after the Mexican-American war and how it led in part to Westward Expansion
- Trace how the Homestead Act of 1862 further incentivized citizens to move and develop agricultural land in the Western United States
- Identify how the process of Westward Expansion was justified by the philosophy of Manifest Destiny
- Investigate how Westward Expansion resulted in close and often violent contact with Hispanic and Native peoples, which influenced American musical culture

Watch [this video clip](#) by Arsenal Efectivo, a band who have coined the term “Trap

Corridos.” Consider or ask partner:

- Does this music sound like anything you have heard before? If so, what?
- Do you recognize any of the instruments? If so, which?
- What language are they singing in? What might this tell you about the music they are playing?
- When and where might the performance take place? What might that say about the band?
- What sort of audience might the band be popular with?
- Have you ever heard the term or listened to Trap music? Who are some of the artists you know who play Trap music?
- Have you heard the term “corridos” or listened to any corridos? What are corridos?

Corridos are a traditional type of song from Mexico, but they also greatly influenced popular music in the United States.

Corridos were introduced to the United States in part due to **Westward Expansion**, which brought Anglo Americans and Mexicans into closer proximity.

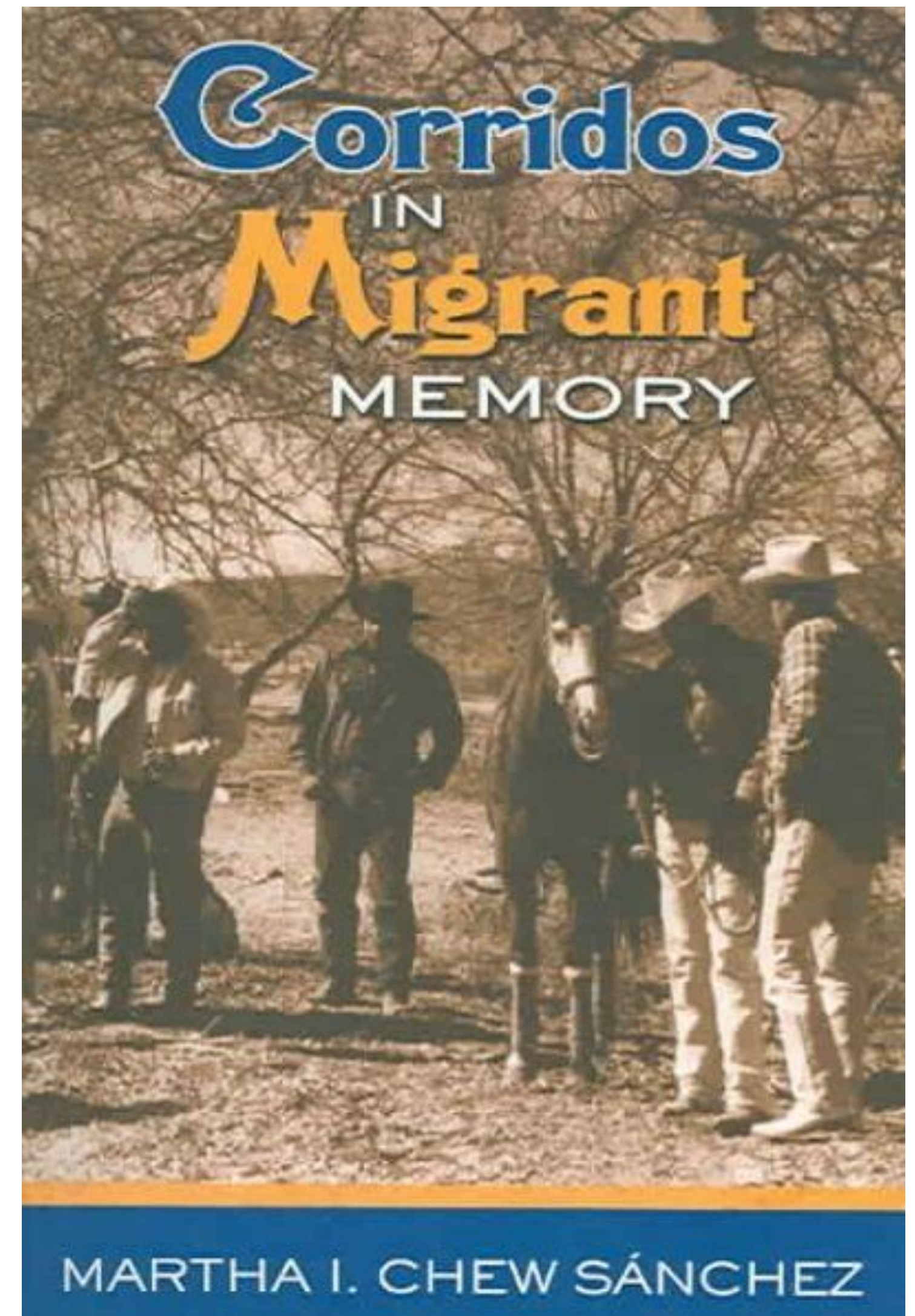
Watch [this clip](#) and fill out [this handout](#) to discover more about Westward Expansion.



Corridos weren't just songs for entertainment - they had a social purpose. Read [this excerpt](#) from *Corridos in Migrant Memory* by Martha I. Chew Sánchez.

Consider or ask a partner:

- Based on the reading, what is a corrido? What are some of the functions of a corrido?
- What might be some of the topics corrido lyrics are about?
- What kind of people perform corridos? Can everyone sing them, or only trained musicians?
- Are corridos important to Mexican culture? How do you know?



“The Music I listened to as a child was Mexican music-rancheras, like Lola Beltran. So country it is, but it just doesn’t happen to be this country.”

- Linda Ronstadt

Popular musicians across the United States, but especially from the Southwest (like Linda Ronstadt), have been greatly inspired by corridos.

In order to trace the corridor's influence on country music specifically, choose 1-2 of the following options that compare a corrido with a Country song on the next slide.

Use this [Corrido Narrative Format Checklist](#) to guide your comparison of the corrido and Country song.

Choose two:

Document Set 1: Early Songs about Life on the Texas Border

Document Set 2: Songs of Immigration and Labor

Document Set 3: Songs Regarding Women

Document Set 4: Songs About Crime and Criminals

Consider or ask a partner:

- Based upon the lyrics you read, would you say corridos inspired Country music? Why or why not?
- Did the songs you examined all adhere to the corrido formula, or did they diverge from it? What might this say about the corrido as a style of music?
- In what way did the topics of the songs address life on the Mexican border? Are the stories and issues brought up in the songs still relevant today? Why or why not?

SUMMARY

- The California Gold Rush was the initial start to Americans moving west starting in 1849
- Settlers later moved west of the Mississippi River for the prospect of farming and were incentivized by the government with land from the Homestead Act of 1862
- The idea of Manifest Destiny (America's God-given destiny to move west) also encouraged settlement out west
- Native Americans were forcibly and violently removed from their homes and put on reservations as a result of colonists moving west
- Western states had many Mexican influences at the time of Westward Expansion due to the fact that they were annexed from Mexico
- Corridos became part of culture in the west and influenced later Country music

BE CREATIVE

Scenario: You are a writer for an online music and culture magazine, and have decided you want to write an article about corridos. Draft an email or text message to your editor pitching the idea and explaining why you think readers today would be interested in an article about corridos.

Bonus points: try to educate your editor about Westward Expansion in the process.

BE CURIOUS

Listen to the songs discussed in this lesson in [this YouTube playlist](#).

Write your own Corrido using the [following formula provided by the Kennedy Center](#).

Research the story of Gregorio Cortez and the Texas Rangers or the 1948 deportee plane crash in California. Then compare the historical account with what is described in the song or corrido lyrics.

Conduct research on Johnny Rodriguez, Freddy Fender, or another Mexican American popular music artist, and write a brief biography about them and describe how they influenced American music.

Learn more about the figure of the cowboy in American history and how it is changing with the TeachRock lessons [The Myth of the American Cowboy](#) and [The Reclamation of the American Cowboy](#).

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