

Brooke Dippold

Dr. Holliday

HIST 348

15 June 2019

El Cid- Historical Legend?

Rodrigo Díaz of Vivar, popularly known as El Cid, is an important part of Valencian culture popularized by the 1960 American movie titled after him and the Franco regime of Spain from 1939 to 1975. Upon closer examination of the falsities of the American adaptation and the poem, *Cantar de Mio Cid*, as well as interviews of native Valencians, his importance and factual remembrance has seemed to transition to be a part of the past as well. All sources agreed that El Cid was a loyal, noble man who conquered Valencia and other cities on the Iberian Peninsula prior to his death in 1099, but the differences lie in the details of his execution and the exaggerations of just how accomplished he had become. The historical figure Rodrigo Díaz of Vivar has been represented in Spanish culture and in the world entertainment industry, through differing interpretations, accurate and inaccurate and serving to popularize multiple political agendas, but these discrepancies have had an affect on how he is remembered by the people of Valencia, who claim he is their hero.

In 1031, the Muslim Caliphate that had once spanned the entire Iberian Penninsula split into small kingdoms known as taifas. Since these independent kingdoms were small, they were vulnerable. In 1065, Fernando I of Castilla y León split his land and parias, or taxes paid by the Muslim kingdoms to the monarchy for protection, between his three sons. This proved to be

problematic when Alfonso conquered his two brothers to unite the land his father once controlled. Rodrigo Díaz worked for Sancho, Alfonso's brother, as a conqueror. When Alfonso conquered Sancho, Díaz received a position of power and influence, because Alfonso still trusted him, but it was subordinate to the position he previously held under Sancho.

Due to his noble upbringing, which afforded him to be literate and trained in horsemanship and weapons, Díaz was born into the ability to be a conqueror. In his personal life, he married Ximena, a relative of Alfonso's in an arranged marriage created to further strengthen Díaz's relationship with Alfonso. The couple had three children, two girls and one boy. Díaz was exiled after defending his land from Muslim invaders from Toledo. Toledo was a paria of Alfonso. By defending his own land, as any man would, Díaz jeopardized the relationship Alfonso had with the people of Toledo and a source of income for the crown. Since Alfonso needed to maintain his relationship with Toledo and Díaz had technically fought against his ruler, Díaz was exiled. During his exile, he began conquering lands beyond the boundaries of Alfonso's control for Alfonso. He was loyal to Alfonso until his death. Beginning in Saragossa and ending in the enemy strong hold of Valencia, Díaz gained more territory for the Christian empire he still supported. He donated a share of every conquest to both Alfonso, the king, and the Catholic Church after paying his loyal band of subjects, Muslim and Christian, that he gathered through his travels. After residing in Valencia post-conquest, he died of natural causes in 1099.

The earliest manuscript for *Cantar de Mio Cid* is dated 1207, over one century after the death of the conqueror. This suggests that prior to being written the tale was passed through word of mouth, leaving room for interpretation, misinformation, and exaggeration. Although

Díaz was an accomplished man, in the poem he reaches God-like feats as if the writer(s) worship him and his abilities. For this reason, in the historical sense, the purpose of this book is better analyzed through themes rather than interpreting the historical accuracy. During the early thirteenth century, the First Crusade was raging in Spain. As a way to unify and provide moral and support to the Spanish people who were fighting solely for Christianity against the Muslims, unlike Díaz, when this poem was written. It glorifies Díaz, Alfonso, Castille, and Aragon as well as their religious nature to evoke support for a similar war. If people were to band together like Díaz and his followers and do everything in the name of the royal leader and the Catholic Church, then wealth and good fortune would find them as well.

The most glaring historical inaccuracy was in Díaz's family structure. He still married Ximena and they were exiled, but it was unclear that Ximena was a relative of Alfonso and why they were exiled. Díaz's son was eliminated from the plot. After his daughters moved to Valencia with him, two nobles of Alfonso asked for their hands in marriage. Díaz was a rich man and his respected daughters possessed large dowries. Díaz agreed to give his daughters to marry these men as long as Alfonso agreed it was a good idea. Alfonso agreed and the girls were furnished with everything they needed to be wonderful wives. Soon after they were married in Valencia, the husbands asked to bring their wives home. Díaz agreed and again furnished the group with all the horses and money they would need. He even gave the husbands swords once belonging to other prestigious conquerors he had won in previous battles.

As their trek began, it was revealed the the husbands had no intentions of taking good care of their wives. They stopped in the forest and despite Díaz sending his nephews and soldiers for protection, his daughters were in danger. The husbands brutally beat them and left

them as dinner for the animals. Luckily, they were rescued before nightfall and cared for in a local village until they could be transported home. Since Díaz was the Medieval equivalent of a celebrity, everyone was more than happy to help his kin. Díaz and Alfonso got justice in the court, as the now ex-husbands had to return all the gifts and pay back the dowries. Alfonso also arranged two new, better marriages for the girls. Now, they would be queens. Historically, his daughters did not become queens. The drama along with the exaggerated size of the armies Díaz defeats with great speed and his amazing ability to always escape combat unscathed serve to show that as long as Díaz was loyal to the crown and God, then good things would come his way. He was given great wealth and beyond-human capabilities to enhance the power of faith in the Lord during a period of history where war on earthly territories was seen as conquest for the heavens if there was a religious motive, like conversion and religious territory.

In 1960, Francisco Franco was the dictator of Spain, but apart from other Cold War Era dictators he rejected communism. Since he rejected communism, the United States of America supported his regime in accordance with their firm desire to rid the world of communism. At that time the American cinemas were capable of creating world-class movies including a flair for the dramatic that other countries typically shied away from. The 1960 *El Cid* the movie seems to be based off of the events described in the poem. The daughters are not a large part of the plot, instead the entire focus is on how wonderful of a man Díaz was. He was strong, tough, capable of fighting what seemed like entire nations on his own, while also being firm standing in his faith and compassionate and caring toward his wife and daughters. In the cinematic feature, Díaz dies defending his city of Valencia in the middle of a multi-day battle with the Muslims. His men

stage his dead body on his horse and he rode off into the sea. In reality, he died of natural causes.

The glamorization of Díaz in the American movie shows how important the relationship between Franco and the United States was at the time. The US was including Franco's agenda in popular culture. Franco wanted the nation to return to its roots, to the values of people like Díaz who glorified God and their nation. He even considered himself a modern day El Cid.

Nationalism was an essential characteristic of Franco's Spain, to the extent of depleting the economy due to lack of foreign trade. Díaz displayed nationalism in the sense that he was willing to and did die for the greatness of his kingdom without thought. He was also extremely religious. Franco promoted catholicism and desire that his Spain return to the true religion. The US created a movie with a historical hero displaying the characteristics of a model citizen in a nation they allied with which ultimately was mutually beneficial. The United States profited off of the movie while Franco was able to see that his ally was truly in support of his ideas.

Meanwhile Franco was able to display his ideal Spanish citizen while also preserving the history that had been previously looked over. While the movie was not historically accurate it did display the themes of Franco's regime and Díaz's life correctly.

"The Purest Knight of All" by Jancovich, analyzes the 1960 film as a clear product of Cold War tensions that served to empower citizens of Spain and the United States and their allies. While elements of traditional American masculinity and power are clearly present in the movie, that does not undermine the battle between morality and immorality present. The conflict's focus on correct and incorrect instead of Christian and Moore while historically accurate, shows how Spain and the United States were moral in rejecting communism. Other

nations such as Vietnam and the Soviet Union, while they were unlikely to see this film, were represented by the immoral side and often brutally defeated by the forces of Díaz, Alfonso, and Spain. The mega-Hollywood level production was created in a way that doesn't attract intellectual debate, but instead serves as the typical hero based movie for entertainment purposes that would appeal to the type of person willing to follow a dictator like Franco.

Today, culturally, Díaz is seen as a Valencian hero, but most younger generations know minimal about him. Most people under the age of fifty know minimal beyond he is a historical figure who conquered Valencia from the Muslims. Some people incorrectly identified the century he lived in. Overall, people over fifty knew some information about his conquests most likely from the book or the movie. It was also likely that Franco included Díaz in his curriculum. One individual over fifty correctly identified the church Díaz was married in. Children in school today are not taught about Díaz, mostly likely because of a shift to more modern or world history classes. Spain is not currently in a state where the citizens need to unite under nationalism with a hero to mimic like during Franco's regime. The significance of Díaz in Valencia can be debated due to the lack of knowledge. Citizens tend to honor and learn about their national heroes-- in the same way we have President's Day. Although some claimed he was a Valencian hero, his legacy is dying and without that, he will no longer be a recognized hero.

Historical inaccuracies are included in the American movie and thirteenth century poem. While each source was created to serve its individual purpose according to the time period it was produced, the inaccuracies and contradictions do not undermine the major themes of each work. Díaz is not popularly recognized in the city that claims him as their hero, but his characteristics are present in their culture. His historical significance is lesser known, but his cultural

significance can be seen through the presence of religion, work ethic, and community within Valencia.