

# GEORGE WASHINGTON GÓMEZ



★ ★ ★ AMÉRICO PAREDES ★ ★ ★

# GEORGE WASHINGTON GÓMEZ

A Mexicotexan Novel

Américo Paredes



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*Recovering the past, creating the future*

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# Introduction

Some thirty years ago, around 1958, on the corner of Eleventh and Elizabeth, Brownsville, Texas' main drag, stood Daddy Hargrove's bookstore. It was the only store of its kind then, and my sister Clarissa and I walked downtown to buy (each) a copy of Américo Paredes' *With His Pistol In His Hand*. Hargrove's had dedicated its front display window to the book, a work by a hometown boy who had made good, so to speak.

Paredes, however, was not an unknown quantity in his hometown: he'd been born and raised there, he'd graduated from Brownsville High and from the local community college once known as Brownsville Junior College. Added to this, the Paredeses on both sides of the river had lived and worked in the area, el Río Abajo, since the 18th century. And, as many Lower Río Grande Valley families, we were and are blood related. So, we had to buy the book, although it wasn't an *obligación* where we bought *Pistol* because of friendship or blood kin, however. We knew him, and we knew of his work.

As a youngster, Américo had published poetry in *Los lunes literarios* in the San Antonio, Texas *La Prensa*, in *The Brownsville Herald*, and elsewhere, but his latest effort had come when its author was a man, *un hombre hecho y derecho*: a World War II veteran, a former reporter for the *Stars and Stripes* in Japan, an administrator for the international Red Cross in China and Manchuria, and the holder of a baccalaureate, a Master's, and a Doctorate from The University of Texas.

The degrees, by the way, were earned in quick order while at the same time he and his wife, Amelia, were raising a family.

*Pistol*, of course, is a scholarly work which has stood the many tests of time. It is also a work which very early influenced many Texas Mexicans and others who followed his example as teacher-scholar-writer. As musician, too, but I'll touch on that in a minute. *Pistol* remains also as one of the most enduring of U.T. Press publications.

The present work, *George Washington Gómez*, was started in 1936 and finished in 1940. It's a first draft, and it should be seen and appreciated as an historical work, not as an artifact. Between times, from '36 to '40, Paredes continued his work on the *Herald* and would stop writing to devote time to his other love: music. The manuscript would be set aside from time to time while he practiced 8 to 10 hours on the piano. The guitar study con-

tinued too, as did his singing. Aside from working on both the English and the Spanish versions of the *Herald*, he also drove a delivery van and held other jobs until he could attend Brownsville Junior College.

A picture of feverish activity, then, but *George Washington Gómez*, *sin prisa pero sin pausa*, without haste but without rest, was being worked on. It is a dated work, but not in the pejorative sense: it is dated authentically, a first draft of a work set against the Great Depression, the onset of World War II in Europe, and set also against the over 100-year-old conflict of cultures in the Lower Río Grande Valley of Texas, not far from where the Río Grande empties into the Gulf.

Obviously, the manuscript could have been rewritten for these times; to have done so, however, would have damaged its integrity. Américo Paredes is too honest a writer to force history into some rigid mold or point of view, and so *George Washington Gómez* is published as written, and we are the better for it: the '30s are not seen through the prism of nostalgia, that half-sister of debased romanticism, but rather through the eyes of a young writer, true to the times, to his family and himself, and, ultimately, to us, the readers.

Rolando Hinojosa  
Austin, Texas

GEORGE WASHINGTON  
GÓMEZ

# Part I

## “LOS SEDICIOSOS”

### THE SEDITIONISTS

#### 1

It was a morning late in June. The flat, salty *llano* spread as far as the eye could see ahead and to the right. To the left it was bordered by the chaparral, which encroached upon the flats in an irregular, wavering line. Along the edge of the chaparral wound the road, and down the road four Texas Rangers were riding. Their horses' hooves stirred the flour-fine dust, and it rose and covered their beards, penetrated down their shirt collars despite the blue bandanas around their necks, lay in a thin film on their rifle-stocks and the big handles of their revolvers. One was a middle-aged man with a John Brown beard; two were sour-looking hardcases in their thirties; the fourth was a boy in his teens, with more dust than beard upon his face. At first sight one might have taken them for cutthroats. And one might have not been wrong.

On the road ahead a cloud of dust came into view. In the middle of it there was a buggy drawn by a pair of smart-stepping mules. Two men were in the buggy, and one of them had a rifle cradled in the crook of his arm. The driver was sitting on the right, and even at that distance the Rangers could see that his face was a very dark brown. They spurred their horses into a lope and strung out to surround the buggy, but the driver edged his vehicle against the chaparral until his side was scraping the thorny huisache bushes. The middle-aged Ranger cursed under his breath as all four of them came up on the rifleman's side of the buggy.



The rifleman, a sallow, skinny runt of a man, had shifted ever so slightly so that his gun barrel was pointing directly toward the Rangers. The driver was a much bigger man, with Negroid features; he was holding the reins in his left hand. His right hand was out of sight. "Hello, MacDougal," the rifleman said, his sharp little nose twitching in what might have been a smile. "Old man Keene, he paying you extra these days?"

"Well, if it ain't Lupe," said the middle-aged Ranger. "Whose money are *you* taking lately?"

"Nobody's."

"Whatcha got there?"

"Groceries," replied Lupe. Then in Spanish to the driver, "Show him, Negro."

"*Sí, cómo no,*" said El Negro. He reached back with his left hand and lifted a corner of the tarp covering the back of the buggy. There were some parcels underneath, and several boxes of soap.

"Whatcha gonna do?" asked MacDougal, pointing at the soap boxes with his quirt. "Take a bath every day?"

Lupe laughed shortly and after his laugh there was a silence. El Negro dropped the corner of the tarp and put his left hand back on the reins. The three younger Rangers played with their saddle pommels. Their light-colored eyes shifted from MacDougal to Lupe and back to MacDougal. MacDougal was looking into Lupe's face; Lupe was looking at MacDougal but he was also seeing the other three. Finally MacDougal said, "Okay, Lupe, see you some other time." He spurred his horse and the other three did likewise. The buggy continued on its way until it was hidden from view by a bend in the road.

The four Rangers settled down to an easy trot, but the youngest one was very much disturbed. He kept turning in his saddle to stare at the buggy as long as it was visible. After he had done so several times MacDougal asked him, "Anything wrong, son?"

"They might of had ammunition," said the youngest Ranger. MacDougal clucked his tongue sympathetically. "That was Lupe

García," he said. The youngest Ranger thought hard, trying to remember if he knew Lupe García. "They also call him 'Lupe the Little Doll,'" MacDougal added. "About as cuddly as a coral snake. But Lupe is a business man. He steals money. Or cattle. He wouldn't join up with a crazy bunch like De la Peña's and their Republic of the Southwest. There's no money in it."

"Lupe was one of them that held up the Isabel train," continued MacDougal. "Took eighty thousand in silver off of it." The youngest Ranger

looked back again at the now empty distance, and his look was so full of indignation that MacDougal laughed.

"Let me tell you about that time," he said. "They trailed him down into the brush near Alamo Creek. About a dozen men led by Sheriff Critto, who was killed during a dance by Red Hercules. But that was later. Red Hercules was guiding them that time, since he knew the country. He was riding down the trail when he stopped and said,

'There's Lupe García.' "

The other two Rangers, who were riding ahead, slowed their horses to a walk and squinted into the distance. "A nigger," one of them said, "a nigger-greaser. What do you think of that?"

"Sure enough," MacDougal went on, "there was little Lupe walking across a clearing about a hundred yards away. Had this 30-30 in the crook of his left arm, just like you saw him back there. Red Hercules told the Sheriff, 'There he is, Sheriff, but he'll get three or four of us before we can get our rifles out. At this distance I've seen him get a deer jumping over a barb-wire fence.' Then Red Hercules laughed and said, 'And you'll be the first one, Sheriff.'"

The Rangers ahead had stopped and were drawing their rifles from their boots. MacDougal and the young Ranger slowed down to a walk and came up to them.

"Sheriff Critto wa'nt no fool," said MacDougal. "'Let him go,' he said. 'We'll catch him napping some other time.'" MacDougal reined in and took out his rifle.

The young Ranger laughed without mirth. "And for all these years nobody's caught Lupe García napping, is that it?"

MacDougal chuckled. "He's gotta sleep sometime," he said. "Better take out your rifle."

The cloud of dust came nearer. It was an automobile, a Model T Ford of the latest make. "That's Doc Berry," said MacDougal. "Put them away." The others hesitated briefly and then slid their rifles back into their boots.

Driving the automobile was an old man in a white goatee and a wide brimmed panama. Beside him, hatless, sat a stocky, red-haired man of about thirty, blue work-shirt open at the neck and sleeves rolled-up. The Model T drew abreast of the Rangers and stopped.

"Morning, gents," said the old gentleman in the goatee.

"Morning, Doc," MacDougal answered. "Seen anything of De la Peña hereabouts?"

"Who, me?" said the old man. "You look for him, I'm tired."

MacDougal laughed and the other Rangers grinned. "Keeping you busy?" asked MacDougal.

"Obstetrical case," said the Doc. "This fellow's wife," he added, jerking a thumb at the man sitting beside him.

"That so," said MacDougal. "A serious case, eh?"

Doc Berry smiled. "Oh, I think she'll be all right," he said.

The two sour-faced Rangers were staring at the red-haired man, as though trying to place him. The man fidgeted in his seat and avoided their eyes. Finally one of the Rangers spoke, "What's your name, feller?"

"He doesn't speak much English," Doc Berry said.

"Mexican, eh?" said MacDougal. "For a minute there I thought he was a white man." He looked steadily at the man, who began to show signs of nervousness.

"He's a good Mexican," Doc said. "I can vouch for him."

"He's okay if you say so, Doc," MacDougal answered. "But it's getting kinda hard these days to tell the good ones from the bad ones. Can't take any chances these days. But he's all right if you say so."

"Thanks," said Doc Berry. He stepped on the clutch, and the Model T began to move away. "So long, gents," he said. He waved and MacDougal and the youngest Ranger waved back. The Ford continued on its way.

The man with Doc Berry rubbed at the reddish stubble on his chin. "Quicker, doctor," he said in Spanish. "Please!"

The doctor laughed. "No hurry, Gumersindo. They won't hurt you now."

Gumersindo clasped and unclasped his hands. "It's not that; it's my wife. Can't you go any faster?"

"Fast as she can go. Don't worry."

They rode in silence until the shacks on the outskirts of San Pedrito appeared in the distance. "We're almost there," said the doctor brightly. Gumersindo wet his lips.

About a half mile from town the Ford turned off the road, pattered up a rutted lane and stopped before a one-room shack made of mud, sticks, and pieces of lumber, and roofed with flattened-out tin cans. Flanking it some distance back were a pigsty and an outhouse, while beside its only doorway grew a flowering rose bush, and on the other side was a papaya plant, fruitful and slender, like a many-breasted girl. Farther back and to one side was a small corral built around a shady mesquite, and in the corral a well-fed horse and a pair of skinny mules stood sleeping.

As the men climbed out of the car a baby's wail came out of the shack, mingled with a woman's moaning. Gumersindo rushed inside, and immediately an old woman appeared at the threshold screaming angrily at the doctor, "*¡Viejo cabrón! ¡Pendejo! ¡Ándale!*"

"Shush, shush," said Doc Berry, handing her his bag. He entered, dropping the curtain of burlap bags which served as a door. Inside the woman was still moaning. From behind the house came a man, flat-chested but wide-shouldered, long and tough like a leather quirt. His drooping black mustache curved down the sides of his cheeks. Slowly and thoughtfully he took a cornhusk cigarette from his shirt pocket. He squatted down a few paces from the doorway and lighted the cigarette, his eyes on the burlap-covered doorway. Now the woman was screaming, and the doctor's voice spoke low and soothingly. The curtain was pushed aside, and Gumersindo came out, his face pale and sweaty.

"Feliciano," he said unsteadily. The other man rose from his haunches effortlessly. The woman in the shack screamed piercingly, and Gumersindo jerked around and stared at the burlap curtain. Then he turned and looked pleadingly at Feliciano. "He's sewing her up," he quavered. Feliciano's face tightened. Gumersindo stumbled over to the flivver and plumped down on the running board. Feliciano came and sat beside him.

"She's all bloody," complained Gumersindo weakly, "all bloody, all bloody."

"You should have got the midwife, like you did with the other two," said Feliciano harshly, "but you had to have a Gringo doctor." Then more softly, "It sometimes happens that they have to be sewed up."

The woman had stopped screaming. Gumersindo looked at Feliciano curiously. "How do you know?" he asked.

Feliciano shrugged. "What was it?"

"A boy this time!" Gumersindo went suddenly from grief to joy. "A boy, a boy. The doctor says he weighs nine pounds if he weighs an ounce."

Feliciano slapped Gumersindo on the back. "Fine!" he said, his face twisting into a smile. "It's like the Gringo game where you have strike one, then strike two, and the third time you hit the ball."

"Yes." Gumersindo was sad again. "A son, an orphan maybe."

"Don't be a fool. This is her third child. Did you bring any newspapers?"

"In the car."

Feliciano reached into the Model T and brought out a handful of papers. He shuffled them angrily. "You went and bought Gringo newspapers again!" he said. "Why didn't you bring some reading matter in a Christian language?"

Gumersindo smiled. "I've got to practice," he answered.