

my parents became engaged, in 1948, in Flagstaff, Arizona, public petitions against their marriage were circulated (my mother was not only Anglo, she was also the mayor's daughter—you can see why my dad liked Zorro, who always put one over on the *alcalde*), and at one point, my mother's high-school English teacher took her aside and said, "You can't marry that man—your children will be idiots!"

In recent years, it has struck me as funny (both in an ironic way and just that it's really funny) that both Zorro and Speedy are now perceived (by the sorts of people who spend their time thinking about such things) as racist stereotypes, because I've never personally met a "Mexican" who thought that. When does a positive identification with iconic virtue become a racist stereotype? I suppose it depends on the viewpoint of the person concerned.

Personally, as a child I liked the Zorro sword, but the hat with the dangly bobbles wasn't me. Just as well: Given the crack about idiots, my dad wouldn't have let me run around dressed like Zorro. I had a gender-appropriate Annie Oakley costume, complete with fringed skirt and pearl (plastic)-handled six-guns with holsters. The whole family liked Speedy Gonzales, though—especially Dad, an award-winning high-school athlete who became a state senator.

My dad liked outlaws, but he played it straight; he worked hard and was good at what he did. One reason for the popularity of outlaw-heroes is that they're competent. Joaquín has that one down. Nobody outshoots, outrides, or out-flamboyants him, and the only man ever to get the drop on him (until The End) is an Indian chief.

Americans, all without moving a step. (My maternal ancestors—mostly English, with one odd German branch—didn't arrive in America until the 1700s, the laggards. . . .)

But there's got to be a bit more to it than the simple joy of seeing a job well done, even if said job is robbing and killing Chinese miners. I did a quick search for "Mexican folk heroes," as, frankly, off the top of my head, I couldn't think of any—unless you count Pancho Villa (in my youth, I could sing—in Spanish—all the verses of "La Cucaracha," but that would be the sum total of my cultural associations with *Señor* Villa). I suppose we could include Don Quixote, for the sake of argument, but, really, there aren't any Hispanic folk heroes to speak of until we get to the twentieth century and Cesar Chavez (whom I met at the age of sixteen or so—I was sixteen, I mean; he was in his fifties)—and he was an American, not a Mexican, and not generally an outlaw.

So we're kind of back to the fictional Mexican/Latino/Hispanic/whatever heroes. Most of whom seem to be outlaws. This is reasonable: A good folk hero defends common people against the oppression of the local (usually corrupt) power structure, and it's generally the power structure that's making the laws.

Likewise, nothing creates a sense of fellowship more than a joint sense of oppression by a common enemy. This is why outlaws often have a gang (or at least a sidekick to whom they confide their plans). And in most cases, these gangs share an identity, whether it's based on race, social class, or merely having the sort of personality that keeps you from holding down a job.

Zorro and Speedy were pretty much loners, though they did have valets, sidekicks, or friends to help out with the incidental logistics of their plans. Don Quixote, of course, had Sancho Panza. Joaquín's plans are a bit more grandiose, though, and he has a large gang, though he mostly operates with just a few close confederates—all of them Mexicans.

Now, we have certain requirements of heroes. They

social bandit