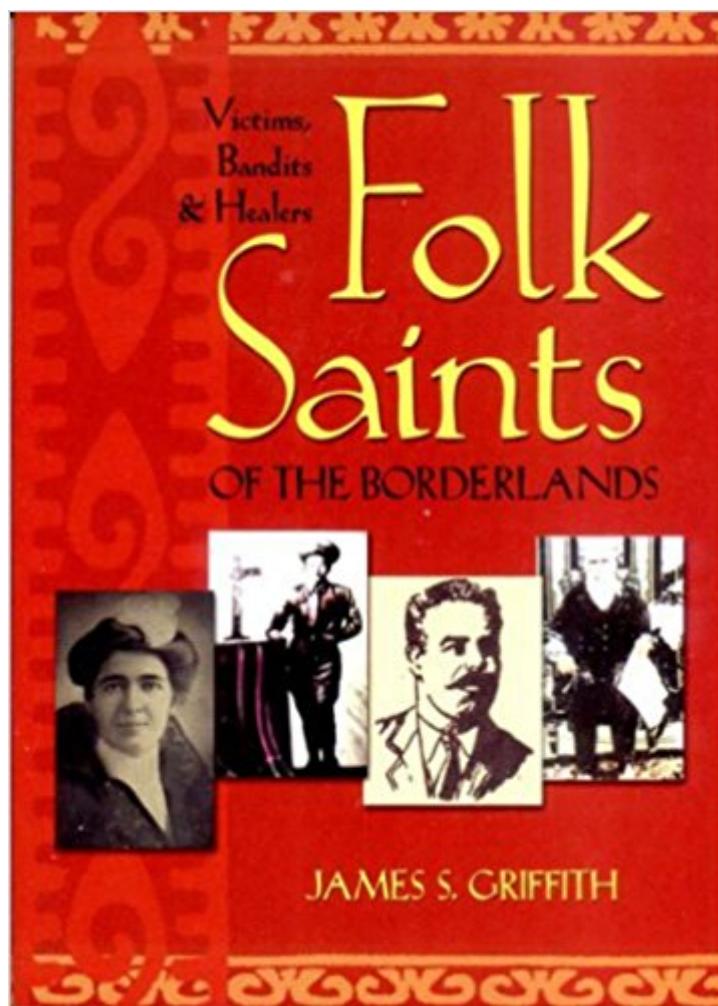


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# Folk Saints Of The Borderlands: Victims, Bandits, And Healers



## Synopsis

This extraordinary exploration of the frontiers of spirituality is by celebrated Southwestern folklorist James S. "Big Jim" Griffith. In *Folk Saints of the Borderlands: Victims, Bandits, and Healers*, Griffith introduces us to some unforgettable saints-in-the-making (or not).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"He writes of the beliefs and customs of people far different from himself with a gentle tone and spirit of restraint and simple decency."

This book does a really good job introducing a few of the primary folk saints of Mexico and the surrounding borderlands. Though not without its flaws, a great deal of research went into this book, and not just library research; author Dr. James Griffith discusses multiple trips into different locales, gleaning information which he would not have gotten otherwise. Indeed, some of this information is probably recorded for the very first time in this book- at least as far as a publication of mass distribution. There are extensive chapters on the "big three" Mexican folk saints: El Nino Fidencio, Teresita Urrea, and Don Pedro Jaramillo- famous curanderos (folk healers) widely regarded as living saints within their own lifetimes. There are also chapters on the controversial Juan Soldado, the mythical, Robin Hood-like character Jesus Malverde, and even Pancho Villa, for he too is a folk saint. There are others mentioned as well; ones less widely known whose devotion is more regionally rooted, to figures even more unknown, where the particular devotion may be limited to but

a few families. Despite the statement on the back of the book that the author "has studied traditional folkways and religious expression throughout the American Southwest and northern Mexico for four decades," there are some rookie mistakes. The most glaring being his assertion that "saints do not work miracles; only God can do that." This is one of the differences between the cosmology of Catholicism practiced in Mexico (and other lands south of the border) and of that practiced in the USA and most of Europe: saints do indeed grant miracles, and it is practical to pray to them as God is seen as often being rather distant. There is also the claim that the first saint was St. Dismas (the "good thief" crucified alongside Christ). That cannot be true, as there are prayers made to angels, most famously St. Michael the Archangel, not to mention the Santisima Muerte, whom Griffith misunderstands, "this one seems intended to be terrifying in aspect." That's a gringo misinterpretation if there ever was one! He mentions Pascual Bailon being the patron saint of cooks in Mexico, though he leaves out a very noteworthy attribute- that this saint is usually depicted as a skeleton. So there are some mistakes, but otherwise this is an excellent book, with a lot of information that would be hard to find elsewhere.

I've used chapters from this book to teach undergraduates about folk/popular religion on the U.S./Mexico borderlands. In a very readable format, Griffith presents serious research based on his fieldwork and portrays his sophisticated understanding of the religions and cultures of the region. The book is great for opening discussions with students about religious authority, competing religious narratives, concepts like 'borderlands' and mestizaje, etc. Anyone interested in the history of the region or in Latino/a religions would find this readable and enjoyable.

He really enjoyed it

This is a wonderful little book full of tales some of which are well known, many are not so well known. Having been born & raised in Arizona, I was fascinated as I was reminded of old stories & learned so many new stories. Loved this book.

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