

## History Access Reading Group

Meet with Professor ADAM WARREN

to discuss

Paul Vanderwood, *Juan Soldado: Rapist, Murderer, Martyr, Saint*

Tuesday, February 28, 2006

1:30–3:00, Smith 320

This book is widely available at most bookstores and through Amazon.com.

Paul J. Vanderwood offers a fascinating look at the events, beliefs, and circumstances that have motivated popular devotion to Juan Soldado, a Mexican folk saint. In his mortal incarnation, Juan Soldado was Juan Castillo Morales, a twenty-four-year-old soldier convicted of and quickly executed for the rape and murder of eight-year-old Olga Camacho in Tijuana in 1938. Immediately after Morales's death, many people began to doubt the evidence of his guilt, or at least the justice of his brutal execution. There were reports of seeing blood seeping from his grave and of hearing his soul cry out protesting his innocence. Soon the "martyred" Morales was known as Juan Soldado, or John the Soldier. Believing that those who have died unjustly sit closest to God, people began visiting Morales's grave asking for favors. Within months of his death, the young soldier had become a popular saint. He is not recognized by the Catholic Church, yet since 1938, thousands of people have made pilgrimages to his gravesite.

In addition to extensive archival research, Vanderwood interviewed central actors in the events of 1938, and many present-day visitors to the shrine at Morales's grave. Vanderwood puts the events of 1938 within the context of Depression-era Tijuana and he locates people's devotion, then and now, within the history of extra-institutional religious activity. In *Juan Soldado*, a gripping true-crime mystery opens up into a much larger and more elusive mystery of faith and belief.

*Study Questions on Reverse*

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543-5691, [histadv@u.washington.edu](mailto:histadv@u.washington.edu)

<http://depts.washington.edu/history/studying/access/reading.html>

### *Study Questions:*

- 1) As practicing Catholics, how do devotees of Juan Soldado reconcile their belief in Soldado's miraculous powers with the Catholic Church's indifference towards the case and failure to canonize him as a saint?
  
- 2) What sort of role do folk saints such as Juan Soldado play in devotees' lives? How does the role or function of a folk saint differ from that of a canonized saint?
  
- 3) How have people in Tijuana understood the meaning of miracles since Soldado's execution? What constitutes a miracle and what is the process by which miracles are identified and confirmed at the popular level?
  
- 4) What can this book tell us about society and daily life in Tijuana during the 1930s and 1940s? In particular, how did residents understand the meanings of "law" and "justice?" As residents of a peripheral territory on the northern border, how did they perceive their relationship with the Mexican state?
  
- 5) The United States and the notion of "the border" loom in the background throughout much of this narrative. What can this book tell us about the shifting meanings of the border in the twentieth century? How do border politics and policies shape daily life and popular religiosity in Tijuana?