

12: Will the Real El Cid Please Stand Up?

Author: Ernest O’Roark

Overview and Purpose of the Lesson:

Throughout time, myth and reality have been intertwined in our understanding of past events. In their own way, myths and legends have had an undeniable impact on history in spite of their distortions or complete fabrications of events. In this activity, students will explore the complex relationship between legend and history in a study of El Cid, one of Spain’s greatest national heroes, who lived during the critical time of the taifa kingdoms when Al-Andalus was divided, Toledo was lost to the Christians, and the Almoravids made their fateful entrance into Spain. Students will compare the myth to the history, identify differences, propose possible reasons and motives to explain the differences, and explain the effects and uses of legend in the formation of national identity.

Performance Objectives:

The student will be able to:

- Differentiate elements of legend from actual history
- Describe El Cid’s role in the history of medieval Spain, both as a historical figure and as the subject of legend.
- Describe the complex political relationships that existed in medieval Spain.
- Explain the role of legend in the formation of national identity.

Materials Needed:

- Reading Handout 12a: “El Cid – Warrior of Medieval Spain” (the history) for half the students
- Reading Handout 12b: “El Cid – Warrior of Medieval Spain” (the legend) for half the student
- Comparison Handout12c: “El Cid – History vs. Legend” one for each pair or small group of students

Time:

One class period

Procedure:

1. Pose these questions to students for discussion: What is a hero? What qualifies someone to be considered a hero? What are the qualities of a hero? Record student ideas on the board or overhead.
2. Explain to students that in this lesson they will get a close-up look at the political landscape of Medieval Spain during the time of the taifa kingdoms through a study of one of the most famous figures of the period, Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar, otherwise known as El Cid. Their task will be to decide if El Cid qualifies to be considered a hero of Spain.

3. Hand out the readings. Give the history version to half the class and the legend version to the other half. **IMPORTANT!** In order for the activity to work, *do not let students know that there are two different stories*. The handouts are designed to look identical from a distance. Students should be led to believe they are all getting the same story.
4. Assign students to read the story independently and to then answer this question in writing: Based on the story you have read, would you consider El Cid a hero? Justify your answer using specific evidence from the story.
5. Hold a full class discussion in which students share and discuss their answers. What will likely emerge will be a (perhaps heated) debate. Eventually through this discussion students will discover that the readings are different. (And be warned, they may be slightly irritated with you at this point.)
6. Ask: “Why are the two stories different? What is the difference between them?” Through discussion students will articulate the fact that one appears to be based on actual events, while the other seems more “made up.” Explain that one is the actual *history* of El Cid while the other is the *legend* of El Cid.
7. Have students get into pairs or small groups such that each pair or group has both versions of the story. Give each group a copy of “El Cid – History vs. Legend” and have students collaborate to compare the stories in detail to complete the activity.
8. Hold a final debriefing discussion in which students share what they have discovered and concluded from their comparison.

Extension:

Show students a few selected scenes from the 1961 epic film *El Cid* starring Charlton Heston and Sophia Loren. Have students identify which parts are based on fact and which on legend. This could lead to a general discussion of how Hollywood often treats history. (The film is mainly based on the legend.) Note: You may find the film difficult to locate. Although it was restored in the 1990’s by Martin Scorsese, it has not had a recent U.S. release.

Assessment:

A short essay question could be included on a unit assessment or as an individual assignment such as the two examples below:

- Describe at least two differences between the actual history and the legend of El Cid and explain why those differences exist.
- How do differences between the actual history and the legend of El Cid illustrate the changes taking place in the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Spain during the eleventh century?

Teacher Notes to El Cid

The following background notes contain points that you might want to share with students in the course of debriefing discussions.

El Cid lived during a tidal change in the relationships between Christians and Muslims in Iberia. For centuries, Christians and Muslims had lived side by side on the peninsula—sometimes as friends, sometimes as enemies. During all this time, political differences far outweighed religious ones. As the historical version of the story shows, El Cid and his contemporaries were as likely to be allied with Muslims as to fight against them. But this was changing.

The Pope in Rome considered the tolerant and often friendly relations between Christians and Muslims in Spain to be morally wrong and sought to correct the situation. His instrument for accomplishing this was the Benedictine Abbey of Cluny in France. Monks from this French monastery were sent into Spain to occupy high positions in the Spanish Church and make drastic changes to policy there. For example, when Alfonso VI took over Toledo in 1085, he promised the Muslim inhabitants that they could continue to use the city's main mosque for worship. He also appointed one of his most trusted diplomats, Sisnando Davidez, as Toledo's governor. Sisnando had lived much of his life in the service of Muslim Seville, and so he well understood the needs of Alfonso's new Muslim subjects. As historian Richard Fletcher puts it, "He was respected by the Muslim authorities with whom he had dealings." And they "...praised his shrewdness, tolerance, and regard for justice." But this was just the sort of relationship the Pope wanted to see ended. Archbishop Bernard from Cluny was therefore appointed to head the Church in Toledo shortly after it fell to Alfonso. Soon the main mosque in Toledo was turned into a Christian cathedral, and the tolerant Sisnando was replaced as governor by a much stricter man. (One of Archbishop Bernard's fellow monks from Cluny was Odo of Chatillon, who would later become Pope Urban II, the very Pope who proclaimed the first Crusade.) When El Cid took Valencia, Archbishop Bernard sent another monk from Cluny to take over the church there, with similar results.

Ironically, partly in response to Alfonso's take-over of Toledo, much the same thing would soon happen on the Muslim side. Panicked by the loss of Toledo and justifiably fearful of Alfonso's intentions, the remaining taifa rulers requested help from the North African Almoravids. The Almoravids, whose rise to power was based on a sort of revival of conservative, strict interpretations of Islam, saw Muslim woes in Spain as a symptom of the corruption of Muslims resulting from the tolerant, often friendly relations with Christians and Jews that existed in Al-Andalus. They came to Muslim Spain's rescue with an eye to fixing the situation by replacing the diverse collection of disunited Andalusian rulers with their own handpicked, conservative rulers.

There are many legends about El Cid, and the "legend" version of the story used in this lesson is a combination of several. But by far the dominant source for the legend is the epic poem *Poema de Mio Cid*, which was probably composed around 1207 or shortly before—about a hundred years after the death of El Cid. The key differences between the El Cid of history and the El Cid of legend are very clear and deliberate.

In the legend, El Cid is always a loyal servant of the king even when he is unfairly banished from the kingdom. He is a good and pious Christian and is always portrayed as fighting against the Muslims, never for or alongside them. As Richard Fletcher puts it, "The independent,

insubordinate, arrogant Rodrigo Diaz of history has been wrapped in a cloak of royalist pieties.” What brought about these differences? The poem was written during a turbulent time in Castile’s history. A child, Alfonso VIII, was king and ambitious relatives struggled among themselves to hold the reins of power in his name. Intermittent and destructive civil wars were the result, until Alfonso was old enough to rule on his own and bring an end to the strife. Meanwhile, to the south, the Almoravids had been replaced by the even more conservative and intolerant Almohads, who were seen as a very real menace.

The Crusades were just beginning in El Cid’s time. They had been going on for a hundred years, and would go on for another hundred. As Richard Fletcher puts it, “The poet reminded his compatriots of where their responsibilities lay.” Castile needed a Christian hero – a role model – who was unfailingly loyal to the king, brave and invincible in battle, and a fierce and uncompromising “holy warrior” against the Muslims. El Cid, with a few “adjustments,” fit the bill. From there, the legend continued to grow and serve later generations. Castile would eventually be the power that would unify Spain and El Cid would become a symbol of Spanish nationalism.

Sources

The Legend:

H. A. Guerber. *Myths and Legends of the Middle Ages*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993. (This is a re-publication of the original work first published in 1909.)

Cantar de Mio Cid. 2007. University of Texas at Austin. 19 Jan 2007 retrieved at <http://www.laits.utexas.edu/cid/main/index.php?v=eng> (Excellent site – contains the entire text plus very helpful and interesting commentary.)

The History:

Richard Fletcher. *The Quest for El Cid*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Reading Handout 12a: El Cid – Warrior of Medieval Spain

*Mighty victor, never vanquished,
Bulwark of our native land,
Shield of Spain, her boast and glory,
Knight of the far-dreaded brand,
Venging scourge of Moors and traitors,
Mighty thunderbolt of war,
Mirror bright of chivalry,
Ruy, my Cid Campeador!
Medieval Spanish Ballad*



Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar was the greatest and most famous Spanish Christian knight of the Middle Ages. His Muslim enemies gave him the title “El Cid” meaning “sir” or “lord”—an Arabic title of respect. His Christian followers called him “El Campeador,” a Roman military term which literally means “teacher of the (military) field.” If one wanted to learn how to fight, this was the man you wanted as teacher.

Rodrigo was born into a minor noble family in the town of Vivar in Castile around 1043. Little is known of his childhood. He was literate, which suggests that he attended school in the nearby city of Burgos, or that he had a tutor. At about the age of fourteen he was sent to live in the household of King Ferdinand’s eldest son Sancho. There he underwent the long process of learning the skills needed to become a knight. Rodrigo’s first action after attaining knighthood was to fight with Sancho’s army in a conflict with Sancho’s uncle Ramiro, the king of Aragon. Ramiro had taken the town of Graus from the neighboring Muslim taifa kingdom of Zaragoza, which was a tributary of Castile. Zaragoza was one of many Muslim taifa kingdoms that had come into existence after the disintegration of the Cordoba Caliphate, which at one time had ruled most of Spain. The taifa kingdoms often fought over territory and resources with one another, as well as with neighboring Christian kingdoms. Weaker taifa kingdoms sometimes sought protection from their enemies by paying an annual tribute (money and goods) to stronger kingdoms in return for a promise of protection and aid if attacked. Often, taifas made this arrangement (or had it forced upon them) with the kingdoms that most threatened their survival. Stronger kingdoms could gain a great deal of wealth by “protecting” weaker neighbors in this way. Zaragoza was thus under Castile’s protection. Since Aragon had attacked Zaragoza by seizing one of its towns, King Ferdinand of Castile sent his son Sancho and his army to take the town back. During the battle, Christian knights of Castile, including Rodrigo, fought alongside Muslim warriors of Zaragoza to defeat and kill King Ramiro.

As a young knight, Rodrigo went on to defeat two skilled warriors in single combat, one a Christian knight from the kingdom of Navarre and the other a Muslim. The reason for the fights is unknown, but feuds of various sorts among the nobility were common and often led to such one-on-one contests. In any case, young Rodrigo showed great skill as a warrior. In 1065, King Ferdinand died. He divided his kingdom among his three sons—Sancho, Alfonso, and Garcia. Sancho, the eldest, made it clear to everyone that he thought the entire kingdom should be his. Before long, a series of civil wars broke out among the three brothers. In these wars, Rodrigo served as Sancho’s *armiger*—the overall commander of his army. In time, both brothers were defeated and exiled—Alfonso to Toledo and Garcia to Seville—both Muslim cities. But Sancho’s reign was short. An invasion, probably by the Muslim taifa of Toledo, captured the city of Zamora in the southern part of Sancho’s kingdom. The invasion may have been planned and perhaps even led by Sancho’s exiled brother Alfonso. Sancho’s army quickly rushed to Zamora and surrounded

the city. Sancho was murdered in his camp outside the city. Since Sancho had no child, the kingdom automatically passed to Alfonso. Following Sancho's funeral, Rodrigo pledged his loyalty to Alfonso, who accepted him as his vassal. Although no longer *armiger*, Rodrigo became a loyal knight in the king's service. His literacy served him well. The king on several occasions directed him to serve as a judge to hear cases in the king's court. Rodrigo was also permitted by the king to marry one of the king's relatives, a noble lady named Jimena, in 1074. Things were going well for Rodrigo.

Unfortunately, the good times did not last. In 1079, King Alfonso sent Rodrigo with a group of knights to the Muslim taifa of Seville to collect payment of tribute. The king sent another group of knights to the Muslim taifa of Granada for the same reason. The two groups arrived just in time to get involved in a fight between Seville and Granada. To Alfonso's great dismay, his two groups of knights found themselves facing each other on the battlefield. In the ensuing skirmish, Granada was defeated and Rodrigo managed to capture several high-ranking nobles of Castile. Among them was Count García Ordóñez, who was Alfonso's *armiger*. Rodrigo held the captives for three days, took from them a ransom in weapons and other gear, and then let them go. García Ordóñez was humiliated. Rodrigo had made a powerful enemy.

Some time later, a group of bandits, probably from the taifa of Toledo (but not sent by its ruler), made a surprise raid into southern Castile and made off with a lot of plunder. Such cross-border raids were not uncommon. The ruler of Toledo at the time was very weak and unable to control his subjects near the border. Rodrigo's response was extreme. On his own initiative, he gathered together an army of knights, invaded Toledo and, as Rodrigo's biographer puts it, "pillaged and laid waste the land." Alfonso was not pleased. Toledo was under Castile's "protection" and was paying huge amounts of tribute to Castile. (Toledo had also supported Alfonso in his earlier war with Sancho.) Rodrigo's formidable enemies at court, including García Ordóñez, urged the king to make an example of Rodrigo. Alfonso banished Rodrigo from the kingdom.

Rodrigo left his wife and children behind and set off with a band of followers to become a mercenary – a soldier for hire. He found employment with the ruler of the taifa of Zaragoza, al-Mu'tamin, who was under threat of attack from several enemies, both Christian and Muslim, including his own brother. Rodrigo did his job well, defeating each of Zaragoza's enemies in turn. On two occasions, Rodrigo's forces faced a combined army of knights from Aragon and rebel Muslim forces under the command of al-Mu'tamin's brother. The outcome of both battles was an overwhelming victory for Rodrigo and the capture of many high-ranking nobles. Rodrigo's fortune (through ransom and plunder) and reputation were made.

Meanwhile, in the taifa of Toledo, things were not going well for its ruler al-Qadir, who was weak, corrupt, and generally hated by his own people. Unrest in Toledo had become so great that al-Qadir's downfall was clearly imminent. Alfonso, taking advantage of the situation, laid siege to Toledo, and accepted its surrender in 1085. Confident that he could just as easily take other taifas, Alfonso began to threaten Seville, Granada, and Zaragoza. For a while, it looked like Rodrigo might have to go to war against his former king. But suddenly the situation changed completely. The Muslim taifa rulers, panicked by Alfonso's success in Toledo, appealed for help to a powerful North African Muslim dynasty known as the Almoravids. The Almoravids crossed into Spain with a huge army, intent on recapturing Toledo. Alfonso rushed out to meet them and was soundly defeated. Alfonso now needed every good knight he could find, and so Rodrigo was pardoned and welcomed back into the service of Castile. For a time, the Almoravids, distracted by events back in Africa, withdrew from Spain. They soon returned and laid siege to a castle in the south owned by Castile. Alfonso raised an army and headed for the castle. At the same time, he sent word to Rodrigo, who was busy defending one of Castile's tributaries, to come with his troops to reinforce the royal army. For some reason, the two armies failed to find one another.

Alfonso arrived without Rodrigo's men and the Almoravids withdrew. Alfonso was angry with Rodrigo for not meeting him as ordered, Alfonso listened to the urging of Rodrigo's enemies at court, and banished Rodrigo from Castile.

On his own yet again, Rodrigo and his followers traveled up the east coast of Spain, eventually confronting and defeating the army of Count Berenguer of Catalonia. The defeat and capture of Count Berenguer (this was the second time Rodrigo had captured the count) allowed Rodrigo to collect tribute from Catalonia's tributaries along the coast. While he was at it, he also extorted payments from some of Castile's tributaries. This Rodrigo did with great energy, amassing a huge fortune. Alfonso was greatly angered by this, and so the king immediately started making plans to invade the coast and punish Rodrigo. Unfortunately for the king, Rodrigo struck first. To Alfonso's complete surprise, Rodrigo invaded Castile, laying waste and pillaging the lands of his old enemy García Ordóñez before returning to a castle belonging to his ally, the Muslim ruler of Zaragoza.

Before Alfonso could respond, he learned that the Almoravids were on the offensive again. Frustrated with the feuding taifa princes, the Almoravids overthrew them one by one and took over their kingdoms. It looked like the Almoravids would take the valuable coastal city of Valencia—a Muslim city that had been paying Rodrigo for his "protection." Rodrigo wished to keep this prize, so he decided to take the city for himself. He besieged the city. In 1094, Rodrigo became master of Valencia. The people of Valencia clearly did not like Rodrigo. Rumors circulated that some preferred Almoravid rule, although the Almoravids were far from popular, even among the Muslim population. Rodrigo ruled Valencia with an iron hand, cruelly taxing and oppressing its Muslim residents. Meanwhile, Almoravid armies attacked Valencia repeatedly. Despite being greatly outnumbered, Rodrigo twice routed armies sent against him. This reinforced his reputation as an invincible warrior even more.

Rodrigo held Valencia for five years. During this time, his wife and daughters joined him, and he married off his two daughters to noblemen of Aragon and Catalonia, gaining valuable allies for Rodrigo. In July 1099, Rodrigo died—in the same month that the Christian Crusader armies took the city of Jerusalem. Rodrigo's wife Jimena continued to rule and defend Valencia, but with the death of El Cid, the end was inevitable. The Almoravids, encouraged by the death of their greatest enemy, refused to give up. In 1102, Jimena ordered the evacuation of Valencia in advance of the arrival of the Almoravid army. She took the body of Rodrigo Diaz, El Cid Campeador with her when she left Valencia. He was buried at the monastery of Cardeña. Never once defeated in battle, today El Cid is still revered as a great national hero of Spain.



Reading Handout 12b: El Cid – Warrior of Medieval Spain

*Mighty victor, never vanquished,
Bulwark of our native land,
Shield of Spain, her boast and glory,
Knight of the far-dreaded brand,
Venging scourge of Moors and traitors,
Mighty thunderbolt of war,
Mirror bright of chivalry,
Ruy, my Cid Campeador!*
Medieval Spanish Ballad



Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar was the greatest and most famous Spanish Christian knight of the Middle Ages. His Muslim enemies gave him the title “El Cid” meaning “sir” or “lord”—an Arabic title of respect. His Christian followers called him “El Campeador,” a Roman military term, which literally means “teacher of the (military) field.” If you wanted to learn how to fight, this was the man you wanted as teacher.

He was born into a minor noble family in the town of Vivar in Castile around 1043. When still a young and untested warrior, he was forced to defend his family’s honor when Count Don Gomez, a powerful noble, insulted and struck his elderly father. Don Gomez was an experienced knight who had defeated many enemies in battle. In spite of this, young Rodrigo vowed to avenge his father’s humiliation and challenged Don Gomez to fight in single combat. The Count admired the boy’s bravery, but was confident his victory would be an easy one. As soon as the fight began, Don Gomez realized he was wrong, as the young Rodrigo ferociously wielded the great sword of his ancestors, blocking every great thrust of the Count’s and forcing Don Gomez to defend himself against a barrage of heavy blows. Finally, as the Count staggered backward under this assault, Rodrigo made one mighty thrust at his enemy’s heart and fatally impaled him with his sword. Victorious, Rodrigo cut off Don Gomez’s head and rode home to present it to his father, who had not been able even to eat since he had suffered the grave insult at the Count’s hand. The story of Rodrigo’s stunning defeat of such a great warrior quickly reached the ears of the king and young Rodrigo soon found himself in the service of Prince Sancho, one of the king’s sons.

It was not long before Rodrigo proved himself a great warrior. Leading a company of soldiers, he bravely confronted a superior force of Moors (Muslims) who had dared to attack a village in Castile. He soundly defeated the Moors, capturing five of their kings in the process. The captives were brought back to Vivar, where they expected to be turned over to the king and executed. But Rodrigo instead offered to release them provided they pledged never again to make war on Castile and also promised to pay a ransom. The Moors were surprised at this act of mercy and readily agreed, calling Rodrigo “El Cid.” Some other warrior nobles, hearing of Rodrigo’s victory over the Moors and his mercy toward their leaders, were at once jealous and angry. They tried their best on many occasions to discredit Rodrigo with the king. As a result, Rodrigo was forced to defend his honor against false accusations several times, once in a trial by combat in which he defeated the king’s champion. In spite of this, Rodrigo remained loyal to the king and continued in the service of Prince Sancho, winning many victories against Castile’s enemies.

Meanwhile, Lady Jimena, daughter of the slain Count Don Gomez, journeyed to King Ferdinand’s court to ask justice against Rodrigo for the death of her famous father. But upon meeting Rodrigo and hearing of his bravery and nobility, she decided instead to ask the king to give her Rodrigo as a husband. This pleased Rodrigo greatly and so the king granted her request and they were married. Shortly after this, Rodrigo set off on a holy pilgrimage to the shrine of

Santiago de Compostella, the patron saint of Spain. Along the way he paused to pray at every church and generously gave alms to the poor. Rodrigo then went on to win more victories for his lord Prince Sancho, including the siege of the Muslim city of Zaragoza, which only ended when the inhabitants agreed to pay tribute to King Ferdinand and never to make war on Castile.

In time, the old king died leaving his kingdom divided in parts to his three sons. Sancho, the eldest son, made it clear that he thought the entire kingdom should be his. Soon a civil war broke out between the brothers. Rodrigo was dismayed by this turn of events for he did not wish to fight against his fellow countrymen. But he was loyal to King Sancho, so he reluctantly went to war against Alfonso and Garcia, Sancho's rebel brothers. In a brilliant series of battles, Rodrigo won a swift and decisive victory for his king. Both of the defeated brothers were banished into exile: Alfonso to Toledo and Garcia to Seville, both Muslim cities. While in exile, Alfonso encouraged the Muslim ruler of Toledo to invade Castile. The town of Zamora was captured by the invaders, prompting King Sancho and Rodrigo to surround the city with their army. While they were camped outside the city, an assassin murdered Sancho. Since Sancho had no children, the kingdom automatically passed into the hands of Alfonso. Rodrigo immediately suspected that it was Alfonso who had hired Sancho's assassin. Angrily, Rodrigo seized Alfonso and forced him to swear an oath that he had no hand in his brother's murder. Rodrigo accepted Alfonso's word and then pledged his loyalty and service to the new king. Alfonso, however, distrusted Rodrigo and so, with the help of some jealous nobles, he brought false charges of disloyalty against Rodrigo and banished him from the kingdom.

Greatly saddened by this turn of events, Rodrigo left his wife and children and set off with a band of loyal soldiers. Needing money to maintain his small army, Rodrigo began successfully attacking and plundering Moorish towns and castles. After one of his victories, he sent a treasure to King Alfonso as a present, showing his loyalty. Alfonso was pleased with the present and with Rodrigo's victories against the Moors and so made a proclamation that any knight of Castile could join Rodrigo's band if they wished. This swelled Rodrigo's army and his successes against the Moors continued. Finally, after a second treasure arrived from Rodrigo, Alfonso pardoned the knight and welcomed him back to Castile. Soon after this, the Muslim ruler of Toledo died, leaving his kingdom to his son, who was greatly disliked by the people. Alfonso, familiar with the city from his time in exile, saw his chance and with Rodrigo's help, attacked and conquered Toledo. In spite of this great victory, jealous nobles again conspired to cause an argument between Rodrigo and the king. Rodrigo suddenly found himself banished once again. Soon after his departure, the Moors, angered by the loss of Toledo, amassed a huge army and savagely began an assault on Christian lands. The city of Valencia quickly fell to the invaders. Hearing of this, Rodrigo and his men immediately rushed to Valencia and recaptured the city. Alfonso was overjoyed at this news and once again pardoned the valiant knight.

In order to defend it from further attack, Rodrigo then made Valencia his home and so had his wife Jimena and daughters brought to the city. As master of Valencia, Rodrigo had become very rich. Soon young noblemen of Castile sought to marry his two daughters. Two high-ranking counts of the county of Carrión were recommended by Alfonso. Seeking to please the king, Rodrigo allowed the two counts to come to Valencia. After some negotiations, the double marriage took place. But Rodrigo did not much like his new sons-in-law, who remained in Valencia for two years. In one incident, a lion belonging to Rodrigo escaped from its cage and entered the great hall where Rodrigo was asleep, surrounded by his guests, who were playing chess. Immediately the cowardly counts fled. One accidentally fell into a vat used for crushing grapes, and the other hid behind Rodrigo's couch. Rodrigo awoke, wrapped his cloak around his arm as a shield, and went after the lion, grabbing it by its mane and forcing it back into its pen. As a result of this and other events, it became clear to all that the two counts were great cowards. The counts were very much ashamed and angry that Rodrigo could not hide his dislike for them. So

they left Valencia with their wives and headed for Castile. But on the way, they decided to get revenge on Rodrigo for the dishonor they had suffered. One morning on the road, they assaulted their wives, beat them severely, and left them for dead. Fortunately, the two women were soon rescued by El Cid's nephew. Rodrigo was enraged by the news and immediately appealed to King Alfonso, who had recommended the two counts. Alfonso convened a court at Toledo and the Counts of Carrión were forced to attend. The counts defended themselves on the grounds that Rodrigo's family was of inferior rank and therefore his daughters were not worthy of them. But just as this defense was being offered, representatives of the kings of Navarre and Aragon arrived requesting the hands of Rodrigo's daughters for the princes of those kingdoms. The princes of Navarre and Aragon far outranked the counts, so the count's defense came to nothing. Alfonso then forced the counts to face two of Rodrigo's men in a trial by combat. Both of the cowardly counts quickly surrendered and were then banished from the kingdom. Rodrigo's daughters were soon happily wed to the princes of Navarre and Aragon.

Back in Valencia, the Moors once again tried to retake the city with a large force. Again, Rodrigo fought valiantly to completely defeat the invaders. But Rodrigo was now getting old and began to sense that he would soon die. Fearing that the territory would be lost without him to lead the soldiers, he made a plan and entrusted it to his closest supporters. He asked that when his time came, his dead body should be suited up in his own full armor. Thus equipped, he should be placed on his horse and bound into the saddle, sword in hand. In this way, he would be able to lead his men into battle one last time—in spirit at least—and without them knowing he was no longer alive. This was done. When the Moors attempted yet another assault, El Cid's lifeless body led the charge that sent them fleeing in terror. In spite of this victory, it was clear that the city could not be held for long without Rodrigo. The Lady Jimena ordered the evacuation of Valencia. Rodrigo's followers returned to Castile. El Cid was buried at the monastery of Cardeña. Never defeated in battle, always loyal to his king, and a great warrior in the Christian struggle against the Moors, El Cid is still remembered as the greatest of Spain's medieval heroes.



Handout 12c: El Cid – History vs. Legend

Compare the specifics of the two stories.

How do El Cid's relationships with the Muslims of Spain differ between the two stories?

How do El Cid's relationships with his fellow Christians, particularly his relationship with the king of Castile, differ between the two stories?

Why do you think the authors of the legends (the story is based on several legends) made the changes to the real history that they did?

What other differences do you see between the two versions of the story? Explain, if possible, why you think these differences exist.
