

VALDEZ IS COMING
(1970, 91 Minutes)

Spanish and Mexican settlers had been present in the Southwest for 300 years prior to the arrival of Anglo-Americans in the Nineteenth Century. Soon many of the Mexican-American small farmers and sheep herders found themselves dispossessed and relegated to second class status by the newcomers.

Elmore Leonard portrayed this period of the oppression of Mexican-Americans in a gritty novel entitled **Only Good Ones**, subsequently adapted into the Hollywood film *Valdez is Coming* starring a mature Burt Lancaster. Valdez is a world weary Mexican-American stagecoach guard and part time marshal with an unknown past in a town seething with racism and greed. In the eyes of the town establishment, Valdez is a “good Mexican” -- an agreeable, well-liked, subservient man who never “causes any trouble.” His name is a joke, mentioned with grins and shrugs.

In the beginning of the film, Valdez appears as a tired man who knows the wrongs of the world and has learned to come to terms with them. After Valdez mistakenly kills a black fugitive and subsequently is humiliated by local Anglo-Americans, he returns to his former persona and terrorizes his oppressors as he corrects at least one small wrong in the world. The “good Mexican” has become a terrible, avenging force which strikes fear into his opponents with the mantra: “tell him Valdez is coming.”

It was ironic that Hollywood featured a white actor in brown makeup to play a wronged minority, but Burt Lancaster created a wonderful and effective character in Valdez.