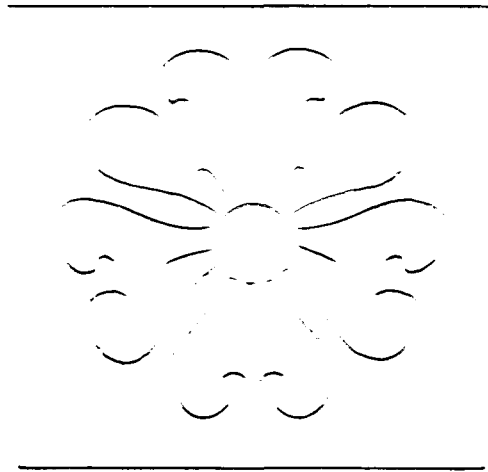


# Ernesto Galarza Commemorative Lecture



Inaugural Lecture  
1986

Stanford Center for Chicano Research  
Stanford University

Ernesto Galarza  
Commemorative Lecture



Presented by

Dr. Americo Paredes  
Professor Emeritus  
University of Texas, Austin

Inaugural Lecture

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## Preface

**W**hen a group from the Stanford Center for Chicano Research gathered to discuss possible speakers for the inaugural Ernesto Galarza Lecture, we sought a nationally recognized intellectual, a community leader, and an activist scholar. In our speaker we sought the qualities that had distinguished Galarza, a man associated with Stanford from his graduate studies in Latin American History to his work with a community health center in Alviso and his founding of a bilingual program in San Jose. We hoped to commemorate Galarza's achievements by inviting a speaker of comparable political vision and intellectual distinction.

Americo Paredes was our unanimous choice for the inaugural lecture. A distinguished activist scholar, Paredes enjoyed a career as singer, poet, journalist, and folklorist. Long before the Chicano movement, he courageously wrote on border struggles between white supremacist domination and Mexican resistance. His work has reflected with theoretical sophistication on the interplay of culture, power, and inequality. Marked by an artful amalgam of self-deprecating modesty, satire, and playful humor, his writings have persuasively articulated a vision opposed to Anglo-Texan prejudice against Mexicans. We are pleased and honored to publish Professor Paredes' lecture. It was a moving and worthy beginning for the Ernesto Galarza lecture series.

Renato Rosaldo  
Director, SCCR  
January, 1987

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# Foreword

## **Galarza: Scholar on the Ramparts**

Carlos Munoz, Jr.

**E**mesto Galarza rose from the depths of poverty and oppression to become one of the pioneers and foremost shapers of the Chicano intellectual experience in the United States. He was the first of his race to obtain a Ph.D. in History and the Social Sciences (Political Science), the first to become a noted expert in Latin American affairs and politics, the first to be a leader of a farmworker labor movement, and the first to be nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature. Dr. Galarza was not simply an activist and scholar, he was also a Renaissance man in the true meaning of the term. He produced over a hundred works that are wide ranging and diverse. He was a poet, a writer of children's literature, and a social scientist and historian who transcended rigid disciplinary boundaries. His collective works have contributed to laying the foundation for Chicano Studies as a new interdisciplinary field of critical scholarship in the academy.

Dr. Galarza was born in Jalcoctan in the state of Nayarit, Mexico, in 1905, and immigrated to the United States at the age of eight years in the company of his mother and uncles. His family settled in Sacramento, California, where they worked in the nearby agricultural "factories of the fields". As a young boy he became part of the exploitative process of child labor then common in the United States. His working in the fields, however, did not detract from his love of learning. At a time when it was difficult for most Chicano children to complete either elementary or secondary school, the young Galarza graduated with honors from high school. He was one of the few Chicanos in the country to make it to college. In 1927, he graduated from Occidental College with Phi Beta Kappa honors. In 1929, he graduated from Stanford University with a Master's Degree in Latin American

History. As had been the case at Stanford, he became the first Chicano ever admitted into graduate school at Columbia University where he completed course requirements for the Ph.D. in 1932. The Depression, the Spanish Civil War, and World War II delayed the completion of his doctoral dissertation until 1944.

To survive the Depression, Dr. Galarza and his wife Mae became Co-Directors of a private elementary school in Long Island, New York. They named it the "Year-Long School" and developed a curriculum which promoted the ideals and objectives of progressive education, considered at the time a radical approach to teaching. While teaching and co-directing the school, he took a job as a researcher for the Foreign Policy Association in order to make ends meet and keep the school going. He rapidly became

*an* expert on Spanish and Latin American politics and affairs. He wrote and lectured extensively and authored numerous works on the subject.

When the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, he joined forces with other progressives of his generation and became involved with solidarity work for the Loyalists engaged in fighting the Hitler-supported fascist forces in Spain. He was a strong supporter of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and travelled throughout the country making public speeches and assisting in fundraising activities for the Loyalists.

A militant anti-fascist, Dr. Galarza again postponed his dissertation when Hitler invaded Poland in 1939. He decided that fighting fascism was a priority over his academic work and went to work for the Pan American Union (renamed the Organization of American States) in the Division of Intellectual Cooperation. He was soon asked to initiate the Division of Labor and Social Information for Latin America. Working for the Pan American Union enabled him to become a strong voice against fascism in Latin America and to promote the Democratic alternative during World War II. His research and travels throughout the Americas also gave him the opportunity to observe at

first hand the oppressive conditions confronting the poor and working classes and their struggles against those who oppressed them. In addition to fighting fascism, he took on the cause of the poor and oppressed workers. He lobbied for their interests in public speeches, conferences, and meetings with high ranking Latin American government officials as well as within the U.S. Congress and State Department. When the President of Bolivia was assassinated with the alleged support of the U.S. Department of State, Dr. Galarza denounced the role of U.S. foreign policy for promoting the interests of capital at the expense of democracy and against the interests of the workers. He authored numerous published works documenting the plight of Latin American workers. In 1947, he was forced to resign from the Pan American Union as a consequence of

"I don't know how many opportunities I have had to make money... Each time such a chance has come my way, my problem was whether I should take it so that I might be able to do something for those I love -- sending you to college, for instance. But I have always resolved the conflict against the advantages to my family, and always because I could not see myself cutting myself off from the world that really bore me -- my mother's world and that of her people.

his politics. In 1952, the Government of Bolivia awarded him the "Order of the Condor Medal", the highest honor given to a non-citizen of Bolivia, for promoting human rights and

Democracy in the Americas.

After resigning from the Pan American Union in 1947, Dr. Galarza was approached by numerous prestigious academic and international institutions. One of them was Harvard University and another was the United Nations. He declined to consider any of those possibilities and instead decided to accept a job as union organizer offered by the militant socialist H. I. Mitchell, the leader of the Southern Tenant Farmer's Union a multiracial union founded in Arkansas. The reason for rejecting a secure academic career or that in international diplomacy, certain to bring him fame as international statesman, can perhaps be found in a letter he wrote to one of his sisters, Nora Lawson, in 1952.

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family, and always because I could not see myself cutting myself off from the world that really bore me -- my mother's world and that of her people.

Dr. Galarza spent over ten years of his life as labor leader and organizer in the struggle to empower Chicano farm-workers. He led strikes and simultaneously researched the inner workings of the agricultural corporations, the government agencies serving the needs of private wealth, and the oppressive conditions faced by Mexican Braceros and Chicano workers. Several of his major works were seminal efforts in contributing to the critical understanding of the role of agribusiness and state political institutions in the oppression of farm workers. One of the works, *Merchants of Labor*, exposed the oppressive conditions of Braceros, the Mexican "guest" worker program created during World War II, and became a pivotal study

leading to the termination of the Bracero Program by the U.S. Congress. In *Spiders in the House and Workers in the Fields* Dr. Galarza shows how laws, government regulations, and government agencies were manipulated to undermine the struggle to unionize farm workers. His last major work, *Farm Workers and Agri-Business in California*, captures in dramatic

fashion the rise of agriculture corporate power in California. In his conclusion to that study, he expresses the essence of the nature of his scholarship.

"The past can be a compost pile of recollections of the disasters of the many and the triumphs of the few. In it anyone may dig out of curiosity to uncover some missing piece of lore, to fertilize a silting nostalgia, or to settle with faded

chronicles a scholarly controversy.

History practiced in this way can satisfy those who view the past in residue, as a postmortem of successive epochs in which most men appear as subjects of history, not as its agents. The past can also be prologue to those who are willing to learn from it. But to what purpose? To offer such minds a place and a role at the forward edge of the search for meaning where time, place, nature, culture, men and their conflicting interests and even disasters mingle to resolve their never-ending tensions... Even more important is the sense and the will that, once a historical process is understood, a choice can be made as to one's place in its next moment, and the realization that the best history is that in which one has had an effective part. A mind placed at the forward edge of events and guided by knowledge uses the past, affects the present, and possibly helps form the

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Dr. Galarza retired from the labor movement in 1960. His retirement did not mean the end of his activism. He became part of the "War on Poverty" as a staff member of the Economic and Youth Opportunities Agency where he began to

observe and critically assess the struggles of the urban Chicano. With Dr. Julian Samora and Herman Gallegos, he became a consultant to the Ford Foundation and persuaded it to fund community programs aimed at resolution of social and economic problems in the urban barrios. The first grant ever awarded by the Foundation was for the creation of a community health center in

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Alviso, a barrio near San Jose, California, under seige by the "imperialists," as he called them, behind urban renewal programs. He became deeply involved with Alviso's community struggle for survival. He also argued persuasively for the funding of Chicano youth programs and organizations. The Mexican American Youth Organization and other organizations were able to get Foundation funds for their community activities.

After Alviso, he immersed himself in the arena of bilingual education. He founded a bilingual program in 1971, the Studio Laboratory for Bilingual Education, which became a resource for the San Jose Unified School District. The primary motivation for his involvement in this arena was his deep concern that Chicano children be able to retain their Mexican culture and identity in the midst of their acculturation process. He wrote a series of what he called "Mini-Libros" featuring his poetry and photography. He enjoyed calling himself the "Father Goose" of Mexican children. In his autobiography, *Barrio Boy*, Dr. Galarza states that his primary

motivation for writing it was to show that Mexicans as a whole did not suffer from an identity crisis. He believed that they "had an abundance of self image and never doubted that it was a good one." In this work he wanted to show that it is possible to remain a Mexican in spirit and consciousness in the midst of a society that does not respect cultural diversity.

Dr. Galarza's life and work has left Chicano scholars with a vibrant intellectual legacy. He proved it possible to be a scholar and an active citizen. He was a "man of fire" but also a man of quiet dignity, deeply committed to social justice. He was moved by his love for the common working man and woman and his ideals of a genuine social democracy. His most cherished dream was that some day his people would indeed be the beneficiaries of democracy, freedom, and justice.

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Carlos Munoz is an Associate Professor in the Department of Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. He is currently working on a biography entitled *The Life and Times of Ernesto Galarza*.

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## The Undying Love of "El Indio" Cordova: *decimas* and Oral History in a Border Family

Americo Paredes



Photo by Alan Pogue, ©1981

**I**t is indeed an honor for me, to be chosen as the person to give the first annual lecture in memory of Ernesto Galarza. Galarza was a man deeply involved in the struggle for the betterment of our people. His achievements were so impressive, so clearly addressed to the root of our problems, that they make the efforts of those of us who follow him seem insignificant by comparison.

As I stand here before you, I do so with a sense of diffidence--that I have come to honor the author of *Spiders in the House and Workers in the Field* with a little love story from my own oral traditions.

I am also saddened by the fact that Ernesto Galarza and I never met. I learned about him rather late in life, and I am not sure that he ever knew I existed. That was the lot that we mejicanos in the United States faced in earlier days: isolation from each other. Among the many achievements of the Movimiento Chicano of the 60s and 70s, there is one deserving of special recognition: that it brought a lot of us together.

May the difficult times we are now undergoing not succeed in tearing us apart.

**W**hen I was invited to talk before you this afternoon, I was faced with a particular problem. I did not know how many of you might be familiar with the *decima* or *espinela*, the *glosa*, the *redondilla*, the *contrapunto* or *canto a desqfio*. So, just in case, I have asked my hosts to distribute the hand outs that are before you. (See Appendix A)

At the top is the *planta*, as many *decimeros* call a stanza to be glossed. Most often, as in our handout, it is a *redondilla*, an octosyllabic quatrain rhyming *abba*. It is glossed (explained or expanded upon) by two sets of *decimas espinelas*: octosyllabic ten-line stanzas rhyming *abbaaccddc*. You may notice that the rhyme scheme forms a mirror, sometimes called the *decima* mirror. The first set of *decimas* in our handout was composed by a man known in Lower Rio Grande Border tradition as "El Indio" Cordova, who sent them to Don Santiago Maria Cisneros, a member of one of the large extended families in the area downriver from Brownsville, Texas, and Matamoros, Tamaulipas. Don Santiago Maria regarded Cordova's *decimas* as a *desqfio* or challenge, and he answered them using Cordova's own *redondilla* as his *planta*.

But the *decimas* also are a pair of messages. Cordova asks for Don Santiago Maria's daughter in marriage, and Don Santiago Maria refuses in no uncertain terms. And thereby hangs a tale, which is the true subject of my talk. But first it is necessary to say a few words about the origins of the *decima* and its universality in Hispanic oral tradition. I will be very brief, at risk of oversimplification.

The *decima*, or *espinela*, or sometimes *decima espinela* dates from the Spanish Golden Age and supposedly was invented by the poet and musician Vicente Espinel in 1591, although this supposition has been challenged. In passing, it is worth mentioning that the *decima* often is sung, but we do not have time to go into its music and performance on this occasion.

The *decima* quickly spread to the Spanish colonies in America. It was cultivated in the viceregal courts of Lima and Mexico City, and it was also used by the friars in their evangelical labors. The *redondilla* glossed in *decimas* is common in the shepherds' plays that have survived in some parts of Greater Mexico. From the Church and the colonial aristocracy, *decimas* soon passed to the people. In Mexico, it was the *decima* and not the *romance* that along with the *copla* became the dominant form of folk poetry until it was overwhelmed by the impact of the *corrido* at the beginning of the 20th century. In some other parts of Hispanic America, the *decima* has continued to flourish.

*Cantos a desqfio* have also been popular both in Spain and in America, in ritual and in festive occasions, though the verse forms used have more often been four-line *coplas* rather than *decimas*. Some of these poetic encounters have become legendary, such as the contest between El Mulato Taguada and Don Javier de la Rosa in Chile.

The *decima* on the Lower Texas-Mexican Border has been part of the Greater Mexican tradition, of course, but in the area downriver from Brownsville and Matamoros it took special characteristics, to a great extent because of the *decima* text that is before you, the locally celebrated *decimas de pedimento* between "El Indio" Cordova and Don Santiago Maria Cisneros. In its initial stages, the tradition of Cordova and Don Santiago Maria resembles the also semilegendary encounter between Taguada and Don Javier de la Rosa in Chile. Taguada is supposed to have committed suicide because he lost to Don Xavier de la Rosa. There is a hint of racism in that Don Xavier was white-skinned and Taguada was black. The way Chilean scholars have seen it is as a triumph of the city over the country. Don Xavier was a city man and Taguada was a man from the country. But the encounter between Cordova and Don Santiago Maria did not become a closed chapter in oral history. Other family traditions developed around it, leading to an extended family prefer-

ence for the *decima* in certain social situations, a preference that kept the *decima* alive even during the heyday of the Revolutionary *corrido*, not only encouraging the further composition of the genre but setting it in a series of anecdotes about members of the family, so that individual *decima* compositions survive as poetic endings to passages of oral history. And the root from which these later narrative-poetic phenomena grow is the story about "El Indio" Cordova, Don Santiago Maria Cisneros, and his daughter, Francisca Cisneros Gomez, best remembered as "Panchita" Cisneros.

I heard the story as a child during my summers on the ranches downriver from Matamoros—in hundreds of evening gatherings in darkened patios where the old men of the Cisnerada clan gathered to talk about the past and of what the future would be like,

now that Villa had made his peace with the government and the Great War was over; and on sleepy afternoons when the women of the ranches passed the

time sewing and embroidering (and talking) until it was time to start supper for the men, who would be coming home from the *campo* at nightfall. And so I learned it, in tantalizing fragments. But like some work of embroidery wrought into shape over weeks and months, it was all of one piece when it was finished. At times *decimas* were recited with the stories, at times they were sung. But the narrative, which the *decimas* adorned like colorful motifs on a larger design—the narrative as the important thing, because it bound the *decimas* together, and all of us as well.

It was 1865, during the darkest days of the resistance against French occupation of Mexico. Benito Juarez,

symbol of that resistance, had been pushed farther and farther north toward the border with Texas. Texas was one of the Confederate States, in sympathy with the emperor Maximilian, who had arrived in Mexico in May of 1864. But the Civil War in the United States was coming to an end, and Juarez had good reason to expect aid in arms and ammunition from the victorious Union. So it was not surprising the *juarista* officials should be frequent visitors to the Mexican cities bordering Texas, from Matamoros to El Paso del Norte, later to be known as Ciudad Juarez.

It was about this time, in 1865 or 1866, that Juarez's minister of war visited Matamoros on some affair of state. His last name was Cordova, but oral tradition has not preoccupied itself with his first name. It is affirmed that he was an *indio puro*, a genuine Indian like Juarez himself; so that he

came to be known simply as "El Indio" Cordova.

There was no one alive who remembered what Cordova's business was as a Juarez agent in Matamoros.

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He disguised his mission by passing as a civilian and engaged in the social activities of the *municipio*. Cordova attended a dance at the village of El Ranchito, downriver from Matamoros. And it was there that he met the beautiful Panchita Cisneros and promptly fell in love with her. Francisca Cisneros Gomez was about sixteen at the time, a rosy-faced beauty with green eyes and light-brown hair. She was the daughter of Santiago Maria Cisneros and Isabel Gomez, both members of the area's large landowning families, the "Thirteen Families" that had founded Matamoros and held extensive tracts of land between that city and the Gulf. If there was anything resembling a

gentry among the rancheros of the Rio Grande country, it was families such as these.

At that time they had a reputation for clannishness. They could be gracious enough with outsiders who visited their domains, but they steadfastly and sometimes fiercely opposed having their daughters marry *fuereños* or outsiders, whatever their origins or rank might be.

So it was no surprise to anyone that Panchita's father looked on Cordova's suit with disfavor, despite his high rank in the Juarez government. He was a *fuereño* and, like Juarez himself, an *indio* from southern Mexico as well. Don Santiago Maria did not even give Cordova's marriage proposal the dig-

gnity of a formal refusal, as custom demanded. But Cordova was not easily put off. He changed his tactics and sent

Don Santiago Maria did not even give Cordova's marriage proposal the dignity of a formal refusal, as custom demanded. But Cordova was not easily put off. He changed his tactics and sent Don Santiago Maria a written petition for Panchita's hand in the form of a set of *decimas con planta*.

Don Santiago Maria a written petition for Panchita's hand in the form of a set of *decimas con planta*. The Cisneros family had a local reputation as oral poets and improvisers, and among them Don Santiago Maria was considered one of the best. Coming from a similar *decima* tradition, and a skilled *decimero* himself, Cordova knew that Don Santiago Maria would have to answer or lose prestige in his own community, because Cordova's *decimas* were at the same time a plea for Panchita's hand and a poetic challenge. Don Santiago Maria's answer was not long in coming, in *decimas* glossing Cordova's *planta*, and the answer again was "No." Copies of the exchange between Cordova and Don Santiago Maria were circulated beyond the confines of the Matamoros downriver area, usually with the glosses paired in parallel columns and the *planta* at the head, as shown in our handout. They came to be known as the *decimas del pedimento*, and it was generally conceded--among the Cisnerada, at least--that Don Santiago Maria had vanquished Cordova in their poetic contest.

Cordova apparently did not see it that way, for he persisted in his suit, vowing that his love for Panchita Cisneros was eternal, and that he had enshrined her in his heart as his patron saint. Meanwhile, the war continued to go badly for the Republican forces. Matamoros fell to the Imperialists, and Cordova joined *juarista* forces farther west. But the Civil War in the United States ended, and North American arms and ammunition poured across the border to the Juarez forces. Napoleon III, threatened at home by the growing power of Prussia, decided it was time to withdraw his troops from Mexico. Maximilian was captured, tried, and executed--the first "war criminal" of

modern time, (because he had signed decrees that any Mexican caught with arms in his hand was to be summarily shot;

his troops often burned villages in which they had been sniped at; in others they did not burn, but executed the *presidente municipal* and the council)—and Juarez entered Mexico City in triumph.

Somewhere in all of this, "El Indio" Cordova was doing his part for the Republic, his heart still full of love for Don Santiago Maria's daughter, and still writing *decimas* to Don Santiago Maria. One of these compositions, supposedly Cordova's last, has been preserved. It is not a *decimas con planta* poem, being merely two *decimas* long. In it Cordova again expresses his eternal love for Don Santiago Maria's daughter and asks (not for the first time it is certain) why his suit was rejected by her father. Cordova also mentions that he has been wounded in battle at a place called Santa Clara. Don Santiago Maria dismisses Cordova with a quatrain, accusing him of having been afraid during the battle. After that Cordova drops out of sight. According to family tradition, he died of his wounds, his heart still full of love for Panchita Cisneros. Panchita, meanwhile, had

married a member of another of the "Thirteen Families", Prudencio Hinojosa Salinas, to whom she bore twelve children.

But the romantic story lived on: of the urbane, cultured Indian, love-sick for a beautiful country girl who was denied to him in marriage even though he was the nation's minister of war, and of his heroic death fighting the invaders of this homeland. And the *decimas de pedimento* were recited over and over in countless gatherings of the Cisneros extended family, as part of that story of love unfulfilled or unrequited, until most members knew them by heart. The *decimas* became a kind of substitute for an ID card among members of the widespread Cisnerada and their allied families.

Knowing the *decimas*, or at the very least parts of them, established you as someone who belonged in a special poetic and familial circle. I had the experience of

meeting on a street in Brownsville a lady that I always considered an Anglo (she had an Anglo name), and she said, "Yo soy Cisneros...Oye, Santiago Maria/Cisneros de Apelativo..."

So did I hear the story told. Tracing it in detail, and collecting all known *decimas* composed by members of the Cisnerada became one of my dream projects by the time I was in high school, around 1933. But life leads us where it will, and though I picked up *decimas* and bits of information in the intervening years, it was not until half a century later, in 1983, that I was able to attempt some serious work on the subject. By that time, much of the information I had counted on was lost. I had expected to get reliable oral accounts from the old people I had known in my childhood, who had personally known some of the principals in the story. But by 1983, I was a *viejo* myself, and all the *viejos* of my youth were gone. Still, the family

history had been passed on to those members of the extended family who had remained on the Lower Rio Grande Border, especially among those who had retained much of the old way of life. Besides, there would be some documentary materials I could draw upon to fill out what I knew from oral accounts.

My first preoccupation was to learn more about the mysterious Cordova, Juarez's minister of war. I had been told by reliable informants that his name probably was Antonio. This was a good beginning; even secondary sources could tell me something about an Antonio Cordova who was Juarez's minister of war during the 1860s.

Printed sources, however, gave me nothing at all. President Benito Juarez, I discovered, had several ministers of war in the ten years of virtually continuous warfare the Mexican Liberals endured in defense of

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constitutional reform. But none of them was named Cordova. I knew that in oral transmission names may be distorted or replaced by others that resemble them. But the names recorded for Juarez's ministers of war did not bear the remotest resemblance to the name of Panchita Cisneros' poetical admirer. Score one against oral history.

So Cordova did not hold the exalted position attributed to him by oral tradition. Still, he could have been an aide to one of Juarez's ministers, stationed in Matamoros during 1865-1866 on some special assignment. Again, documentary evidence contradicted oral tradition. In August 1864 French naval forces occupied the Mexican port of Bagdad at the mouth of the Rio Grande. A month later, Mexican Imperialist forces under General Tomas Mejia marched into Matamoros. Mejia occupied the city until June 1866, when he surrendered

it to General Jose Maria Carvajal. Mejia, by the way, was said to be of Indian origins and also was known, at least on the Border, as "El Indio" Mejia.

Four days after Mejia evacuated Matamoros a Liberal city government was established, but Antonio Cordova's name does not appear among its constituents. At all events, if Cordova met and courted Panchita Cisneros "about 1865 or 1866" it could not have been until after June 1866, when the Liberals were again in control of the city.

The genealogical charts available to me in 1983 are really records of land ownership and inheritance among the old downriver families. Though they clearly show lines of descent, they do not give dates of birth, death, or marriage. The clergy in Matamoros is

notoriously uncooperative with descendants of anticlerical freemasons, while the municipal archives are so organized that I would have had to reside in Matamoros

for a goodly length of time (more than I can spare at this stage of my life) to unearth the few bits of information I desired. For having, very tentatively, established the date of the *decimas de pedimento*, I now wanted to make the date less tentative by discovering the approximate birth and death dates of the principals in this piece of oral history. There still were a few family members in Brownsville who had been born at the end of the 19th century, and they had some idea about the date of Dona Francisca's death. "She was an old lady in her seventies when she died at the beginning of this century," I was told. And that was the sum of information I could get until one of them mentioned, quite casually, that the old family cemetery of the Hinojosas at La Burrita probably still existed. "You will have to hunt for it in the underbrush," I was told, "because it has been abandoned for many years."

On June 17, 1983, I made the trip to the Hinojosa cemetery at the site where La Burrita once had been. I was in for some surprises. Though it stood isolated, with no houses anywhere in sight, the cemetery was clear of brush and well tended. A notable thing about the tombstones in the Hinojosa family cemetery, as well as in that of the Cisneros in La Carrera, is the simplicity of the inscriptions carved upon them.

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remarkable that they did not exercise their talents on the graven stones placed over their dead. They did memorialize their deceased relatives, but they did so in *decimas*,

some of which have remained in oral tradition for several generations.

My most interesting find, of course, was the grave of the muse of "El Indio" Cordova. Her name was on a large, stela-like marble slab, below her husband's and above three other names. The stone read, "Francisca C. Vda. de Hinojosa, born 1836, died May 25, 1902."

This was a second and a more serious blow to the traditional dating of the *decimas de pedimento* in "1865 or 1866". True, the juaristas had retaken Matamoros in June 1866. And, war minister or not, a man named Antonio Cordova could very well have met and fallen in love with a young country beauty named Francisca Cisneros after the Imperialists evacuated the city. But by 1866 Francisca Cisneros, though probably still a beautiful woman, would have been thirty years old. And according to the stan-

dards of the time, an unmarried woman of thirty was an old maid and not a "young virgin" as she is called in some of the *decimas*.

Then my research assistant in Brownsville, Humberto Cisneros Hinojosa, came up with an hoja *suelta* or broadside that reprinted the *decimas de pedimento*, with the title "Decimas Cambiadas el Año de 1848 entre los Senores Antonio Cordova y Santiago Maria Cisneros". If one was to believe the broadside, Cordova had asked to marry Panchita Cisneros in 1848, when she was twelve years old. There is no date given for the broadside, but the printer is identified as the "Preciado Pub. Co.-

Brownsville." La Imprenta Preciado (not the "Preciado Publishing

Company") was an old institution in Brownsville by the time I became aware of it on my way to and from grammar school. Its printing was done

with handset type on a flatbed press. Among its publications were a small newspaper, *El Porvenir*, and the usual output from the typical "folk" press: broadsides of different kinds, *novenas*, and such. But the Preciados also published occasional documents of historical interest. At one time they had reprinted the *Informe de la Comision Pesquisidora de la Frontera del Norte* (1877), a book that had become a rarity in Texas because some wealthy South Texas ranchers bought and destroyed most of the copies in circulation. But as far as the *decimas de pedimento* were concerned, the Preciados seemed to be in error. It was not uncommon in mid-19th century times for girls to marry at fifteen, but it seemed inconceivable that Cordova would want a twelve-year old girl for his bride.

I then made my way to the Barker Texas History Center of the University of Texas, Austin, which possesses photostatic copies of parts of the Matamoros archives. They are not in chronological order, and the quality of

reproduction is uneven. But it was here that I found traces of that elusive character, Antonio "El Indio" Cordova.

The signature of an "A. Cordova, Secretario" appears in entries dating from 1844 to 1849, in association with the names of Colonels Leonardo Manso and Francisco Lojero. Manso and Lojero had served in their country's armed forces since the beginning of Mexico's war of independence; and more than forty years later, in an army noted for an abundance of generals, they had not risen above the rank of colonel. The reason may have been that they were among the few survivors of the original officers who had fought for independence. Most of the others were captured and executed by royalist forces led by Mexican

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criollo aristocrats. With the notable exception of Nicolas Bravo, the Mexican generals of the period from 1821 to the 1850s were ex-

royalist officers, who had worked assiduously to exterminate the insurgents but who switched sides and became "insurgents" in 1821, when Spain adopted a liberal constitution that threatened the privileges of the Mexican *criollos*.

Nevertheless, in the 1840s Manso and Lojero were still giving faithful service to their country. The 1830s and 1840s were turbulent years for the Lower Rio Grande area of Tamaulipas—with revolt in Texas, intensified Indian raids, attacks by Texan filibusters, and finally the U.S. invasion of Mexico by troops under Zachary Taylor. To all this was added the quarrelsome character of the local chieftains, who very often fought among themselves. It is not strange, then, to find military men serving in high civilian post along the Rio Grande.

Lojero served as *alcalde* or mayor of Matamoros during this period, while Manso, apparently headquartered in Ciudad Victoria, at times was sent to the Rio Grande to serve as arbitrator between feuding Mexican factions.

Later he became *jefe politico* for northern Tamaulipas, a kind of military supervisor for the area. It is in connection with these events that we find "A. Cordova's" signature in the Matamoros archives, as secretary or representative of Colonel Manso. From June 19, 1844, until November 6, 1849, the Matamoros archives record communications to Manso and Lojero from A. Cordova, who reported on civilian and military matters from Mier, Matamoros and Ciudad Victoria.

A letter of November 6, 1849, is the last reference to "A. Cordova" that I have been able to find. In his last verse communication with Don Santiago Maria Cisneros, "El Indio" Cordova says that, after being denied Francisca Cisneros' hand he became a soldier, "accompanied by others," and that he was wounded in battle. Oral tradition has him dying of his wounds, and assumes that Cordova took part in one of the last battles against the Imperialist forces seeking to

perpetuate Maximilian's rule, perhaps in 1866 or 1867. This assumption is put in great doubt, if the "A. Cordova" whose name appears in the Matamoros archives is the same man as Antonio "El

Indio" Cordova who loved Panchita Cisneros. And there is no other Cordova whose existence I have been able to document, either in the 1840s or the 1860s. So if Antonio Cordova did participate in combat it must have been soon after 1849, and not against Maximilian's forces but in the fratricidal conflicts that continued to rack Mexico between the North American invasion and the French invasion in 1861.

All this left me with three pieces of "hard" documentary evidence that, put together, did not seem to make sense: a broadside stating that the *decimas de pedimento* were composed in 1848; parts of the Matamoros archives showing that *a fuereno* or

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outsider named A. Cordova, a man of some consequence at the time, had been in Matamoros during the period from 1844 to 1849; and a tombstone showing the birth date of Francisca Cisneros de Hinojosa as 1836. So Cordova must have courted Panchita Cisneros in 1848. Yet, it seemed highly improbable that a man would court a child of twelve, especially a cultured man such as Cordova seems to have been. Furthermore, in his answer to Cordova's plea, Don Santiago Maria refers to the object of Cordova's love as a woman: "la mujer de tu conquista/creo sera bella dama." This time "solid" documentary evidence seemed to be in conflict.

This invited another, more critical look at what literally was the most solid piece of evidence, the stone over Francisca Cisneros' grave at La Burrita. It is a rectangular marble slab, arched at the top and bearing five names. [Immediately below the arch that tops the slab is the legend "Familia

Hinojosa," followed by a semirecumbent Latin cross with the initials Q.E.P.D. (*Que EnPaz* Descansen), each letter occupying one of the four angles made by the cross. At the bottom

of the slab is a single word, "Recuerdo." There is no other decoration or inscription except for the names of those buried there.] The fifth and last name is that of Emilio Hinojosa, born September 14, 1882, and died October 26, 1948. The stone shows little wear by the elements, and the names incised upon it evince an equal degree of weathering; so it seems clear that the stone was cut and placed over the grave as it now stands some time after October 26, 1948, the date of Emilio Hinojosa's death.

Above Emilio's name is that of Celedina C. de Hinojosa, born February 3, 1857, and died February 17, 1926. A daughter-in-law rather than a daughter, she probably came from one

of the branches of the Cisneros family. Her husband, a son of Prudencio Hinojosa and Francisca Cisneros, must have been born in the 1850s as well, evidence that Prudencio Hinojosa and Francisca Cisneros were married and having children by the 1850s, and further proof that Cordova did not court Panchita Cisneros in the mid-1860s. This also supports the Preciado broadside's assertion that the *decima* exchange between Cordova and Don Santiago Maria occurred in 1848.

Yet, the gravestone also tells us that Panchita Cisneros was twelve years old in 1848. But even messages inscribed in stone may bear some scrutiny, and looking at the three names above Celedina's gives us a clue. Just above her name is that of Quintin Hinojosa, born October 31, 1878, and died February 4, 1898. Above his name is that of his mother: Francisca C. Vda. De Hinojosa, born in 1836 and died May 25, 1902. Above hers, at the very top of the list, is her husband's name: Prudencio Hinojosa, died January 25, 1893.

The story of Panchita Cisneros and "El Indio" Cordova as it has survived for almost 140 years is fundamentally true, though a couple of key facts have been rearranged to make it a more satisfying whole in the minds of Panchita's descendants.

Evidently, the members of the Hinojosa family who put up the stone after Emilio's death in 1948 did not have verifiable records of family births and deaths prior to the 1850s. Complete dates are given for the three children. But for Francisca Cisneros Vda. de Hinojosa, only the date of her death is fully recorded. For her birth date the year alone is given. And for her husband even less information is recorded. Only the date of his death appears on the stone. Apparently even the year of his birth was unknown to his descendants, at least to the ones concerned with the erection of the stone.

With that in mind, it seems highly probable that the year of Dona Francisca's birth was handed down orally rather than preserved in some family document. And that, of course, allows for a significant margin of error. Oral transmission of dates sometimes can be quite precise, especially if the date records an event within living

memory or one of great historical import. The Border *corrido* "La toma de Matamoros," for example, records the precise date, day of the week, and time of day when revolutionary chief Lucio Blanco's forces began their attack on the city. The *corrido* begins, "*Dia martes trece de junto de mil novecientos trece a las diez de la manana Lucio Blanco se aparece.*" And you go to the records and it was a Tuesday that thirteenth of June, and at ten in the morning. The only difference is that he did not appear before Matamoros. The assault of Matamoros began at ten that morning. There oral tradition gives you historical fidelity. But some versions of the *corrida* about the capture and death of the celebrated smuggler Mariano Resendez set the events in 1900, when they did happen, while others locate them in 1800. In oral transmission "ano de mil novecientos" can easily become "ano

de mil ochocientos." I think that the key there is that "ochocientos" and "novecientos" sound alike enough so that in oral tradi-

tion they could be changed. It is even easier for such a thing to happen in the transmission of prose oral narratives, which are not as tightly structured as is folk song. It is much more likely that Panchita Cisneros was born in 1833, and that "el Ano de treinta y tres" became "el ano de treinta y seis" in oral transmission. She would then have been fifteen in 1848 when Antonio Cordova fell in love with her, and 69 when she died in 1902. Her descendants who were living when she passed away would later describe her as "an old lady about seventy years old." The preference for the year 1836 in oral tradition is understandable, considering the devastating events visited on the Border people for a long period of time beginning in 1836—Indian raids, Anglo Texas raids, followed later by Zachary Taylor's invasion, and so on.

The story of Panchita Cisneros and "El Indio" Cordova as it has survived for almost 140 years is fundamentally

true, though a couple of key facts have been rearranged to make it a more satisfying whole in the minds of Panchita's descendants. The most important is the changing of the date of Cordova's courtship from 1848 to 1866. The change has served the function of identifying Antonio "El Indio" Cordova with Mexico's greatest "Indio," Don Benito Juarez. But there is more to the legendary aspects of this family tradition than the switching of a couple of dates. In the development of a historical occurrence into a romantic story, some important parts of family history have been forgotten or simply ignored.

Though he did occupy an important post as Colonel Leonardo Manso's secretary in the 1840s, Antonio Cordova never was Juarez's minister of war. But a relative of Prudencio Hinojosa, Panchita's husband, did occupy that post. Don Pedro Hinojosa (1822-1903) was Juarez's minister of war in 1861.

During the Porfirio Diaz regime, General Hinojosa again was minister of war from 1884 to 1896. All this I have learned from documentary sources, not from family oral tradition.

The tradition has suppressed all of this, and given Cordova (in tradition) the honor of being minister of war. An interesting vagary of oral history that could only be explained by a detailed study of national and family attitudes, if such were available.

Both the Cisneros and the Hinojosas were active in political and military affairs during the 1850s and 1860s. In 1855, under the leadership of liberal officers like General Ignacio Zaragoza and Colonel Leonardo Manso, the state of Tamaulipas declared its support for the Plan de Ayutla, which permanently expelled Santa Anna from Mexican politics and initiated the Liberal reforms that Juarez would soon implement. The Matamoros archives for 1858 include a list of persons from

the Matamoros area who had supported the "liberation of the State in 1855." Among those listed is Prudencio Hinojosa, who must have been a married man by that time, since Panchita Cisneros would have been about twenty-two by then.

In 1861, with French ships already before Veracruz, a dispute over a gubernatorial election led to bloody warfare in Matamoros between adherents of the two Liberal candidates. Other Liberal leaders mediated the dispute, and both factions became part of a "Division del Norte"--antedating Francisco Villa's better known Division del Norte by half a century--which marched south in 1862, to take part in the Cinco de Mayo victory over the French at Puebla. Among those participants in the bitter fratricidal struggle in Matamoros who did not march to Puebla was Prudencio Hinojosa. He was seriously wounded in 1861 and appar-

Perhaps Antonio Cordova died as a result of wounds suffered in a skirmish at a place called Santa Clara, though his final *decimas* to Don Santiago Maria do not sound like the work of a dying man. More than likely he survived, got over his infatuation for Panchita Cisneros, and married someone else. But in Border tradition he remains the image of the steadfast lover who dies with the name of his beloved on his lips, a sacrifice to his country's independence from foreign domination.

ently survived because of the care given him by his brother-in-law, Jose Maria Cisneros. In June 1866, after the Imperialist General Tomas Mejia evacuated Matamoros, a

Liberal city government was established with men of the juarista forces as its members. The chief of police was Jose Maria Cisneros.

The wound he received in 1861 apparently did not dull Prudencio's appetite for feats of arms. In a set of *decimas*, undated but obviously composed some time after 1867, Jose Maria takes his brother-in-law to task for wanting to join in another "revolution:" *?Prudencio que te motiva I meterte en revolution? / ?Que te queda o con que action / mueres tu por que otro viva?*

None of these details, which I have gleaned from scattered documentary sources, was part of the stories I used to hear in the downriver ranches when I was a boy. As with Pedro Hinojosa,

who in fact was one of Juarez's ministers of war, Cisneros family traditions have ignored the deeds of their own members and even attributed some of them to the romantic (and distant) figure of the legendary "Indio" Cordova.

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Cordova swore undying love for the woman who "imprisoned" him when he danced with her in "El Ranchito." Millions of other lovers have done the same. But "El Indio" Cordova has been fortunate in having others see to it that his love be an undying one. It still lives to this day, 138 years after he wrote his *decimas* to Don Santiago Maria Cisneros and was put down by the old *decimero*. The irony is that it has been the extended family of the woman he loved, the family who considered him an unfit husband for one of their own, who have seen to it that Cordova and his love for Panchita Cisneros continue to live for almost a century and a half.

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History (oral and written) is a dynamic process that is always open to change: and like the Martian in Ray Bradbury's story, it tends to reshape itself according to the half-conscious desires and yearnings of those who behold it, changing a detail here, a name there, making itself less what probably was and more what we wish it should have been. Our crucial question is "why". What particular emotional needs of the Cisneros extended family are fulfilled by the story of "El Indio" Cordova's deathless

love for Panchita Cisneros. It is a question I am not prepared to explore today.

On the other hand, I think again of Ernesto Galarza, who we are honoring today. Retold a richer and fuller family history in *Barrio Boy*. And for his epigraph he

chose a passage from Henry Adams about the past remembered. Memories are like that; with the passing of the years they change a bit. But the memory is all that matters.

## Appendix A

Oye, Santiago Maria  
Cisneros de apelativo,  
te ruego no seas esquivo  
con esta consulta mia.

1.

No te juzgo hombre de ciencia  
como el mejor, sin segundo  
tienes algo y mucho mundo  
y mas que yo de experiencia;  
quiero que esa tu indulgencia  
me saque de esta porfia  
que me tiene en agonía  
como hombre y apasionado,  
y tu seras mi abogado,  
*oye, Santiago Maria.*

Recibi las expresiones  
que le fiastes al papel,  
donde me dices en el  
te de algunas instrucciones;  
no te ciegues de pasiones  
por seguir en tu porfia,  
yo no se cual sea la guia  
de tu amor, que a mi me avise,  
pues solo en el papel dice:  
*-Oye, Santiago Maria*

2.

Amo a una bella criatura  
cuya vista al sol sujeta,  
de aquella que el Sabio Poeta  
hizo una fina pintura:  
no la iguala en hermosura  
la luna en el cielo vivo,  
y si sus gracias describo  
por Dios que me fatalizo,  
imagen que divinizo,  
*Cisneros de apelativo.*

La mujer de tu conquista  
creo sera bella dama,  
mas siempre el que feo ama  
se le hace la nuncavista;  
entre tu pecho registra  
si encuentras un atractivo  
que te sirva de motivo  
de donde tu amor proviene,  
pues solo advierto que tiene  
*Cisneros de apelativo.*

3.

La amo, y mal haya mi vida  
cuando la imagen que adoro  
vio pasarme, triste lloro  
sin darse por entendida;  
esta es causa que te pida  
consejo por tal motivo,  
dame un golpe decisivo  
en tal batalla de amor,  
y al pedirte este favor  
*te ruego no seas esquivo.*

La vida nunca renance,  
tu la maltratas hablando,  
siempre viviras penando  
y a ella que ni fuerza le  
hace es muy justo que te  
pase un golpe bien decisivo  
y si pierdes el sentido  
voy a pedirte un favor,  
que al sufrir este rigor  
*te ruego no seas esquivo.*

4.

Para lograr lo que quiero  
mujer a tu consejo me atengo,  
seguro que ya prevengo  
valor, constancia y dinero;  
estudia de cuero a cuero  
tu historia de vida impia,  
por si te ocurrio algun dia  
cuando joven arrogante  
algun caso semejante  
*con esta consulta mia.*

Todo hombre que por  
arriesga plata y firmeza  
cuando no cae de cabeza  
de narices suele caer;  
es cosa que vas a ver  
si sigues en tu porfia,  
gastas la ultima cuartilla  
y entonces sera el atraso,  
quedaras como un bagazo  
*con esta consulta mia.*

—"El Indio" Cordova

—Santiago Maria Cisneros