

## Transnational Explorations of a Chicano Filmmaker: Views from the U.S.- Mexico Border

PAUL ESPINOSA

### ABSTRACT

This essay offers a brief overview of my filmmaking work over the last 30 years, during which I have focused on the U.S.-Mexico border region, producing films principally for PBS, the public television system in the United States. Through collaboration with many other filmmakers, I've had the opportunity to examine many key moments in the transborder history of the region. These films were broadcast to a national audience in the US and have also been screened in numerous festivals in Latin America and around the world. My films have focused on themes and periods of significance to the transnational U.S.-Mexican community, including: the war between Mexico and the United States in the 19th century (*The US-Mexican War: 1846-1848*); the fight by Mexican American miners in the early 20th century to create a labor union in the Phelps Dodge mines of Arizona (*Los Mineros*); the journey north of generations of Mexican immigrants, represented by the trail which one family followed from Baja California to San Diego, California (*The Trail North*); the dramatic raid by Mexican General Francisco "Pancho" Villa on the small community of Columbus, New Mexico in 1916, and the American expedition sent to capture him (*The Hunt for Pancho Villa*); the fascinating story of Pedro J. González, from his days in the Mexican Revolution

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with Pancho Villa to his recording stardom in Los Angeles in the 1930s (*Ballad of an Unsung Hero*); the struggle of Mexican parents in San Diego to secure equal educational rights for their children (*The Lemon Grove Incident*); the lives of undocumented Mexican families in California after the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (*In the Shadow of the Law*); the sharpening tensions between affluent suburbs in southern California and the Latino immigrants living nearby in primitive conditions (*Uneasy Neighbors*); the dramatic growth and development of Mexican border cities (*The New Tijuana*); the unfolding drama of the permeable U.S.-Mexico border (*The Border*); and the challenges of migrant workers and their children as they struggle to survive on the migrant trail (...and the earth did not swallow him).

Keywords: documentary film, US-Mexico border region, immigration, borderlands, Chicano culture, border history, transborder media.

#### RESUMEN

Este ensayo ofrece una amplia panorámica del trabajo en el cual he estado involucrado en los últimos 30 años: la producción de películas. Mi trabajo se ha concentrado en la región fronteriza U.S.-México, y he producido películas, principalmente para PBS, la cadena pública y educativa de los EE. UU. He tenido la oportunidad de examinar momentos importantes en la historia de la comunidad Chicano/México-Americana, con un enfoque en la frontera México-Estados Unidos. Esas películas fueron transmitidas a la audiencia nacional en los Estados Unidos y también se han presentado en muchos festivales tanto en Latino América como en Europa. Los temas de mis películas incluyen: la Guerra entre México y los Estados Unidos en el siglo XIX (*The US-Mexican War: 1846-1848*); la lucha a principios del siglo XX emprendida por mineros mexicanos para crear un sindicato en Arizona (*Los mineros*); la historia de generaciones de emigrantes mexicanos representada por el viaje de una familia desde Baja California hacia la vida nueva en San Diego (*The Trail North*); la dramática incursión de Pancho Villa en Columbus, Nuevo México, en 1916 y la expedición despachada para su captura (*The Hunt for Pancho Villa*); la fascinante historia de Pedro J. González, desde sus días en la época de la Revolución Mexicana con Villa hasta su estrellato en el cine en Los Ángeles de los años treinta (*Ballad of an Unsung Hero*); la lucha, en San Diego, de padres mexicanos para garantizar derechos educativos igualitarios para sus hijos durante la depresión en los años treinta (*The Lemon Grove Incident*); la vida de indocumentados en California después de la ley Simpson-Rodino que fue aprobada en 1986 (*In the Shadow of the Law*); las condiciones primitivas

cotidianas a las cuales se enfrentan inmigrantes al llegar al norte (*Uneasy Neighbors*); el aumento de inmigrantes en las ciudades fronterizas mexicanas (*The New Tijuana*); la vida actual a lo largo de la frontera entre México y los Estados Unidos (*The Border*); y la suerte de jornaleros chicanos dentro de EE. UU., y sus esfuerzos para mejorar su condición económica (...y no se lo tragó la tierra).

Palabras clave: película documental, región transfronteriza US-México, migración, la frontera, cultura Chicana, historia fronteriza, medios de comunicación transfronterizos.

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### 1. *THE U.S.-MEXICAN WAR: 1846-1848*



The war between Mexico and the United States which started in 1846 was the moment, according to many, when the Chicano community was born. It's the moment when the border as we know it today was established, after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. It was a moment of violence, both physical and psychically, when Mexico lost almost half of its territory. This is the moment when, as many Chicanos like to say, "we didn't cross the border, the border crossed us."

For the 150th anniversary of the war, I produced a four hour series broadcast by both PBS and Canal 11 in Mexico. This series was created with a binational advisory board which included distinguished historians from both Mexico and the United States, including Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, David Weber, Robert Ryall Miller, Jesús Velasco-Márquez, David Pletcher, Deena González, Robert Johannsen, David Edmunds and Richard Griswold del Castillo. From the beginning of the project, we were committed to presenting a binational and balanced view of the conflict.

As the Senior Producer on this series, I had the opportunity to travel widely in Mexico and the U.S. during production. It was fascinating to hear the reactions of people in both countries to the proposed project. Many in the United States had never heard of the war. They would ask, "Was that the war with Teddy Roosevelt?" Despite dramatically reshaping the North American continent, this war has received very little

public attention. If you examine high school social studies textbooks, you would likely find no more than a page devoted to the war.

Mexicans, on the other hand, are more knowledgeable about the war, often saying that this was the war in which “the gringos robbed us of our land.” Nevertheless, beyond knowing that the war took place, Mexicans are also relatively unaware of the substantive details of what actually took place during the war. Visiting museums and cultural institutions throughout the Republic of Mexico, I was always surprised at how little information was presented about the war compared to other events of the 19th century.

In many ways, this war is an event which both countries have wanted to forget, a painful moment in our respective national histories. Mexico lost almost half of its territory and the U.S. conquered a weaker sister republic, despite professing democratic values.

It’s interesting to note that in the popular imaginations of both countries, the most pervasive memories of this period are linked to national defeats. Americans know about the Alamo, which actually preceded the war by 10 years, but is nevertheless a part of the key events leading up to war. Americans have been inspired by stories of the “brave” defenders at the Alamo, all of whom were killed by the superior military forces of General Santa Anna. Mexicans, for their part, honor the Niños Héroes, the “brave” defenders at Chapultepec, the young military cadets who died in defense of their country. In both cases, these memories capture a moment of defeat for their respective countries. The 150th anniversary of the war was a propitious moment to reflect on this seminal event in our mutual shared history.

## 2. *LOS MINEROS*



For many people who lived in the U.S.-Mexico border region, the new border created by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was an arbitrary dividing line. In many respects, life went on as before. There were constant crossings back and forth across the new border but it was an open border with few restrictions.

In the first century after the war, Mexican workers often crossed the border at the invitation of U.S. companies, who actively recruited Mexican workers. They created a labor recruitment system which the U.S. desperately needed

for the building of the railroads and for mining. Mexican workers had a long tradition of working in the mining industry since Mexico had been involved in mining for centuries.

The miners who came north, or who were brought north, knew a lot about mining but they were not prepared for the way they would be treated by Americans simply because they were Mexican. In many of the mines, they found themselves in a dual wage system in which they received wages much lower than their Anglo-American counterparts. Their battle against racial discrimination and the dual wage system was the subject of the film I wrote called *Los Mineros*. It was produced in 1990 for The American Experience, the history series on PBS. Narrated by Chicano filmmaker Luís Valdéz, the film takes place in the Clifton Morenci area of southeastern Arizona in mines owned by the mining conglomerate, Phelps Dodge. In the film, we meet many of the Mexican miners who engaged in a long battle to earn rights and pay that were the equal of their fellow workers. The story runs from very early in the 20th century to just after the end of World War II when Mexican miners won important victories in the struggle for equality.

### 3. *THE TRAIL NORTH*



The history of generations of Mexican immigrants, represented by one family's journey from Baja California to a new life in San Diego California, is the focus of another film, *The Trail North*. Narrated by Martin Sheen and filmed on location in Baja California, the half-hour film is based on the work of anthropologist Dr. Roberto Álvarez, Jr. who researched the path to the United States of his own extended family, the Mesa-Smiths.

Álvarez is descended from Thomas Smith, a Yankee sailor who was the first American to settle permanently in Baja California. In the film, Álvarez, accompanied by his 10-year-old son Luís, crosses the border at Tecate and takes viewers on an 800-mile trip to the tiny Mexican town of Las Parras, Baja California. There he meets with two elderly aunts and begins the process of retracing his ancestors' steps on their way to the U.S. at the turn of the century.

On the trail north, Álvarez visits Comondu, the town where Thomas Smith settled in 1820 with his wife, María Mesa. Further north he stops at the Baja California

mining camps founded by American and British companies at the turn of the century. These camps are now little more than ghost towns but Álvarez stops to talk with some of the old miners and to visit Calmalli, a gold mine which also was home for many of Álvarez's ancestors before they crossed the border.

At every step along the way, Álvarez and his son try to visualize what life was like for their family in the harsh Baja California desert. Says Álvarez, "I didn't want to just go back and see where people came from. I wanted to feel the experience... to sense what it was like to be a migrant."

#### 4. *THE HUNT FOR PANCHO VILLA*



Just before dawn on March 9, 1916, a band of Mexican revolutionaries loyal to General Francisco "Pancho" Villa crossed the border into the United States and attacked the town of Columbus, New Mexico. Within a matter of hours, seventeen Americans and 67 Mexicans lay dead. The next day, President Woodrow Wilson announced the formation of the Punitive Expedition under the command of General John "Blackjack" Pershing.

Within three months, over 150,000 U.S. National guardsmen and Army regulars would be mobilized, in what was the largest troop deployment in the United States since the Civil War.

*The Hunt for Pancho Villa* recounts the events that brought the U.S. and Mexico to the brink of war in the early part of the 20th century. The film draws on a wealth of visual archival materials, such as photographs, postcards, cartoons, newsreel and film excerpts found in public and private collections in the United States and Mexico. Eleven months after they entered Mexico, the Punitive Expedition returned to the U.S. without ever having caught sight of Pancho Villa. Narrated by the Academy Award-winning actress Linda Hunt, *The Hunt for Pancho Villa* was produced in 1994 for The American Experience, the history series on PBS.

#### 5. *BALLAD OF AN UNSUNG HERO*

*Ballad of an Unsung Hero* is a documentary film which dramatically captures the history and spirit of the Chicano community in the 20th century. Narrated by actor Julio Medina, this half hour film profiles the life of Pedro J. González, an 89-year-old

border resident who lives in San Ysidro, California just across the border from Tijuana, Mexico.

The story of Pedro J. González begins with his participation in the Mexican Revolution as a telegraph operator with Pancho Villa. Later he became one of the most popular radio announcers in Los Angeles in the 1920s and 30s. Finally a controversial court case, in which he was framed, sent him to a 50-year prison sentence in San Quentin prison

The film includes rare archival footage of the Mexican Revolution, historical photographs and period music of González and his recording group, Los Madrugadores (The Early Risers). González himself is interviewed along with his wife of 66 years, María Salcido de González. Using the form of the corrido, *Ballad of an Unsung Hero* chronicles a long full life of adventure, tragedy and passion, marked by a strong sense of pride toward history and culture.



## 6. THE LEMON GROVE INCIDENT



For me, working in the U.S.-Mexico border region has often been akin to archaeological excavation. Many of the stories of this region are unknown, particularly those dealing with the Chicano experience. One story I became involved with was a little known legal case which turned out to be one of the first chapters in the battle for equal educational rights in the United States. The

film evolved from the collaboration I had with Roberto Álvarez Jr. in our previous film, *The Trail North*. The case involved Mexican American immigrant parents who fought to secure the same rights for their children as those enjoyed by all other children.

On January 5, 1931, Jerome Green, principal of the Lemon Grove Grammar School, barred 75 children of Mexican descent from entering his school. Outraged that their children were being segregated from the Anglo American children, the Mexican American community of this San Diego suburb sued the Lemon Grove School Board and won. The story of the nation's first successful legal challenge to school segregation is told in this film.

Using a combination of dramatized scenes, archival footage, and the recollections of witnesses, the film weaves together the story of a group of people determined to fight what, in their view, was an injustice and an insult. Former students recall the barn-like school they were supposed to attend class in, and the heated community meetings that resulted in a boycott of the segregated school. Robert Álvarez (the father of Dr. Roberto Álvarez, Jr.), in whose name the suit was filed, remembers his day in court when he testified as a boy of ten.

In dramatized scenes based on school board minutes, the Lemon Grove School Board meets to decide to go ahead with the new school and to keep the purpose of the school hidden from the Mexican American community. The trial is also dramatized, as are meetings with the Mexican Consul, and the community meetings of Mexican American parents.

Many of these stories and experiences from the Chicano community have never made their way into the history books. To recuperate them required talking directly with the people who lived these experiences, and recording their oral histories. Because of the scarcity of visual information (like photographs and archival footage), I decided to dramatize certain parts of the story, using actors to bring the story to the screen. Nevertheless, the final film is a hybrid text which includes interviews with real people who lived those experiences, mixed with dramatized scenes.

In one scene, people who were then children remember those days when their parents fought for their rights. The parents met to discuss how they would respond to the effort of the School Board to segregate their children. Later in the film, reflecting the transnational nature of the story, we see the important role which the Mexican consul played when the parents went to meet with him. The consul had to be very careful that he not be seen as interfering with the domestic affairs of the U.S. Nevertheless he was able to provide the parents with legal suggestions including steering them toward a Spanish-speaking lawyer he knew who was very capable.

For many people in the U.S., when they think about segregation, they consider it a black and white affair, something which only affected African Americans. Many people are not aware that many other non-white children, including Asians, Native Americans and Mexican Americans, were also segregated. The Lemon Grove case precedes the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* case by almost 25 years and it is the first successful legal challenge to school segregation anywhere in the U.S.



## 7. IN THE SHADOW OF THE LAW



The movement of Mexicans north across the border has been one of the most important transborder phenomena throughout the 20th century and it promises to continue to be significant in the 21st century. The combination of employment in the U.S., and difficult economic conditions in Mexico, has created a dynamic transnational economic system of labor migration.

One result has been generations of men coming north for many years, living apart from their families and bearing the personal stress that comes with being part of this transnational labor system. The burden of migration has been born in large measure by Mexicans who not only have to put up with difficult personal sacrifices but also have had to live, in many cases, for years as undocumented persons, virtually second-class citizens without full civil rights.

In 1986, after many years of heated debate, the U.S. Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act. Broadly speaking, the Act had two principal provisions: penalties for those who employed undocumented workers and an amnesty provision, legalizing those who could prove they had been in the U.S. since before 1982.

One of the principal motives for the amnesty was to bring undocumented people out of the shadows, with the belief that it was not healthy for society to leave large numbers of people without rights. In 1987, one year after the passage of the law, I produced a film, *In the Shadow of the Law*, which profiled four families who had lived in the U.S. for many years without documents. The hour-long documentary examined the daily dilemmas faced by undocumented families, from constant worry about being apprehended by the U.S. Immigration Service, to being taken advantage of by many who capitalized on their vulnerability.

The film explored the lives of these families at work and at home, allowing them to describe their aspirations for the future. The new immigration law was a source of both hope and uncertainty for them. They didn't know if they would qualify for amnesty and become part of American society, or if they would have to remain in the shadows.

In one family's story, we see how daily activities are accompanied by nagging uneasiness. Benita Vásquez, who works as a maid, recalls, "Every time I left my home, I was afraid that I would get caught." According to her husband, Ignacio, who works as

a cook's helper six days a week, "Without papers you have to tolerate everything – humiliation, low wages, long hours at work."

Víctor Gámez and his family were preparing for a relaxing day at the beach in Oceanside, California in 1980. Instead, they were arrested while parking their car. Gámez, who entered the U.S. illegally in 1972, had been working in Escondido, California, on an avocado ranch, first as a field hand, later as ranch supervisor. Eventually, at the urging of his boss who disliked his annual trips south to see his family, Víctor brought his family from Mexico to California. They blended into their community and became well-liked by their neighbors.

Amalia is an undocumented, single mother who migrated to the U.S. from Mexico in 1979. Because her daughter has cerebral palsy, she receives a monthly payment of disability for her daughter. "I feel bad about receiving the help they give us. We always paid for what we ate by earning it." The fact that the government may view her as a possible burden on society lessened her chances for legalization.

Isabel and Jesús have lived without documents in the U.S. since 1974. Their two sons were born in San Diego and are U.S. citizens. "I always try to encourage my children to study," says Isabel, who is determined to stay in the U.S. because of the opportunity for her sons. Jesús is a successful independent contractor specializing in brick masonry and tile work. In 1983, confident that they could come out of the shadows, their lawyer went to court to try to legalize their status, arguing that if the family were forced to return to Mexico it would be an extreme hardship for their sons. But the judge disagreed and, leaving Isabel and Jesús to remain among the millions of people living in the U.S. illegally, day to day, caught between a difficult past and an uncertain future.

## 8. *UNEASY NEIGHBORS*



Many immigrants who first arrive in the United States often live a marginal existence for months or even years. Not only do they live in primitive conditions, but the treatment they receive from other Americans is very discriminatory. In the 1980s, we saw the acceleration of this trend.

By the beginning of the 1990s in Southern California, migrant camps dotted the landscape of many affluent communities.

The poor conditions of these camps produced many complaints from residents living nearby who didn't like having migrants living so close to them. Many of them had never been inside a camp.

In 1989, I produced a documentary, *Uneasy Neighbors*, which opened a window onto this issue, giving voice to the Mexicans living in these conditions. The film profiled cultural and economic tensions between desperately-poor, migrant worker camps and affluent homeowners in southern California. Exposing living conditions which most Americans expect only in the Third World, this film chronicled the life and death of one settlement, the Green Valley camp, which was home to thousands of workers for more than a dozen years.

At that time, San Diego County was one of the fastest growing areas in the U.S., with 40,000 new residents arriving every year. However, not everyone came from back East and not everyone moved into quarter-million dollar homes. Scattered throughout the sprawling wealth of north San Diego County were hundreds of makeshift migrant camps. Living here were other newcomers, mostly from Mexico and Central America, many of whom had been legalized under the 1986 immigration bill.

Employed as gardeners, housekeepers, and construction workers by area homeowners, they lived in primitive shelters of plywood and plastic. For months, even years at a time, they went without the basic necessities most Americans take for granted, like running water, toilets, and electricity. Despite the animosity of many neighbors, who would prefer that the migrants disappear at the end of the day, the residents of the Green Valley camp were able to create a semblance of normal community life.

The increasing visibility of the camp raised a chorus of complaints from nearby homeowners, concerned about sanitation and property values. In the ensuing war of words, troubling questions were raised for the larger society. Can the rich look the other way, while the poor, who contribute to this wealth, live in desperate conditions? What kind of community can exist when two groups face such different realities? Are there any alternatives to living side by side as "Uneasy Neighbors?"

## 9. THE NEW TIJUANA

Although much of my work has focused on the American side of the border, I have had the opportunity to examine the Mexican side as well. The border zone has been a magnet for thousands of Mexican migrants coming from the southern part of



the country. Although many of them eventually cross the border, many also prefer to stay in Mexico. In the past half century, northern Mexican border cities like Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez have witnessed a tremendous increase in their populations.

In 1989, I produced a documentary profile of Tijuana, Mexico, in the year the city was celebrating its 100th anniversary. *The New Tijuana* is a profile of Tijuana, Mexico, one of the largest cities on the West Coast after Los Angeles. As this booming border town struggled between its heritage as a Third World city with a sordid past, and its promise as a modern center for international finance and high technology, it was rapidly emerging as the political, economic, and social leader for the rest of Mexico to follow.

Divided into four segments, the documentary opens with "The Legacy of the Past," tracing Tijuana's history with photographs and fascinating archival footage of Hollywood stars like Rita Hayworth and William Powell. "The Promise of the Future" examines the phenomenon of maquiladoras, or assembly plants, which are transforming Tijuana into the new Hong Kong, as part of Mexico's drive to attract foreign investment.

"The Price of Independence" focuses on the emergence of a fiercely independent weekly newspaper, Zeta, which has taken serious risks in publicly criticizing the power structure. "The Challenge of a Generation" chronicles the extraordinary state elections that produced the first opposition victory in the history of Mexico. In 1989, National Action Party candidate Ernesto Ruffo won the governorship of Baja California in a victory reflecting Tijuana's participation in the dramatic struggle for democracy that was sweeping the globe.

## 10. *THE BORDER*



At the U.S.-Mexico border, the First World meets the Third World, forming a region where economic disparities are glaringly evident. In urban centers this international boundary is protected by steel walls and concrete reinforcements, while in some rural areas the border is marked only by the slow trickle of the Río Grande. In spite of these physical barriers, the two cultures mesh until what is Mexican or American is indistinguishable and the region takes on a culture of its own.

*The Border* presents six stories of this unique region, and personalizes the evolving relationship between

the United States and Mexico. The two-hour PBS documentary produced in 2000 features slice-of-life, character-driven vignettes narrated by journalist John Quiñones from ABC's 20/20.

The Border de-emphasizes the sensational, avoiding reports of violence, illegal crossings, and corruption. These hyped and dramatic tales have historically overshadowed the cross-cultural voices of the more than 15 million people who are simply engaged in their everyday lives. Taking up their stories, the program focuses on contemporary and relevant issues facing the border region: the global economy, water shortages, land disputes, and cultural misunderstandings. The series attempts to present a new paradigm for how we look at this region.

Rather than pursuing the traditional storylines of border tensions, *The Border* goes off the beaten path to unearth compelling and diverse stories which represent the complexities of this heterogeneous region, ultimately proving that there's more to the border region than drugs and immigration. In Baja California, *The Border* examines how the production of the most expensive film of all time, *Titanic*, transformed a small fishing village 30 miles south of San Diego into a mini-Tinseltown. After searching from California to the Czech Republic, Twentieth Century Fox studios built a multimillion-dollar, state-of-the-art production facility in Popotla, outside of Rosarito, Mexico.

The lure of cheap labor, a moderate, year-round climate and the proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border made Baja California an ideal spot for movie locations, but the long term impact on the region and the local film industry is uncertain. *The Border* questions whether Mexico's involvement will be limited to providing workers for the low-end jobs in production, or whether a more balanced partnership will form between Mexican and American filmmakers.

"It is a challenge for Mexico, not just to be an assembler of images – just as we are assemblers of televisions or refrigerators – but to go beyond, like other countries have been able to do," says Dr. Norma Iglesias, professor at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.

Mexico's aggressive pursuit of foreign investment in conjunction with international companies' never-ending quest for low-cost labor fuels industry growth at the border. The consequences of this growth are apparent in Juárez, Mexico and its sister city El Paso, Texas. Home to hundreds of assembly plants known as maquiladoras, thousands of Mexicans flock to Juárez each year straining the region's resources, especially water. In 25 years, the underground aquifer that supplies the area's water will be exhausted.

The Border introduces viewers to the Aguilar family, a Rancho Anapra family

of five, faced with the challenging task of living in a home with no running water. The Juárez municipal water authority only delivers water to their neighborhood once a week. Husband and wife Enrique and Aracely Aguilar are consumed with the struggle to keep their family's water supply safe and clean. "On two occasions I have seen children who had parasites in the stomach, and that is because they don't boil the water or because the water barrels are dirty," says Aracely Aguilar.

This story analyzes the factors that have led to the growth of this particular border region: the Río Grande, the maquiladoras, and the promise of a better life. The Border interviews the region's residents to discover the realities of living in an area where the lack of water makes it barely possible to survive.

Another segment explores a Latino comedy troupe called Culture Clash as they develop a theater piece named Bordertown commissioned by the San Diego Repertory Theatre. Through behind-the-scenes footage and interviews with the members of Culture Clash, Richard Montoya, Herbert Siguenza, and Ric Salinas, this segment unveils the shaping of a play about the border region.

Life along the U.S.-Mexico border is as diverse as the region. The documentary's multiple-perspective approach gives viewers the freedom to draw their own conclusions about the complex, multi-layered, issues which affect the entire border.

## 11. ...AND THE EARTH DID NOT SWALLOW HIM



Much of my film work has been in the documentary genre but I also had the opportunity to work on a long form narrative feature film when I produced *...and the Earth Did Not Swallow Him*. This film was an adaptation of the novel *...y no se lo tragó la tierra*, a moving and powerful portrait of the life of a poor Mexican American boy and his migrant farm worker family, as they struggle to adapt to life in American society. The novel, written by Tomás Rivera and published in 1971, is a semi-autobiographical work of fiction from the first wave of the Chicano movement.

Rivera and his family were farmworkers who migrated every year from South Texas into the Midwest, following the crops. Rivera went on to become the highest ranking Mexican American in higher education as the Chancellor at the University of California, Riverside.

The film was produced for American Playhouse, PBS's weekly drama series. For the first time in theaters and on American television, the film presented the perspective of migrant workers as told by one of their own. Told through the eyes of Marcos, a twelve-year-old boy,... *and the Earth Did Not Swallow Him* emphasizes Marcos' desire to educate himself. Through its many human stories of growing up as a Mexican American, the story exposes the rich cultural traditions which have given shape to life in the American Southwest.

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During the last 30 years, I've had the opportunity to explore the U.S.-Mexico border region and many moments in our joint history. This essay is an introduction to that work dealing with our long, complex relationship in this dynamic region. You can learn more about all of these productions by visiting [www.EspinosaProductions.com](http://www.EspinosaProductions.com).

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#### PAUL ESPINOSA: FILMOGRAPY

The Dawning of Liberty: Padre Martinez & the Making of America - Producer/Director (in progress)  
 Chunky and Los Alacranes - Producer/Director (in progress)  
 The Price of Renewal - Producer/Director/Writer (2006)  
 California and the American Dream - Executive Producer (2006)  
 Taco Shop Poets (for *Visiones: Latino Art in the U.S.*) - Producer/Writer/Director (2004)  
 The Legacy of Family - Producer/Director (2004)  
 Necessary Theatre: Josefina Lopez - Producer (2003)  
 The Border - Producer/Writer/Executive Producer (2000)  
 Culture Clash (for *The Border*) - Producer/Director/Writer (2000)  
 Factory of Dreams (for *The Border*) - Producer/Director/Writer (2000)  
 The U.S.-Mexican War: 1846-1848 - Senior Producer (1998)  
 ...and the Earth Did Not Swallow Him - Producer/Executive Producer (1996)  
 The Hunt for Pancho Villa - Producer/Writer (1993)  
 Los Alacranes in Concert - Producer (1993)  
 Chicano! History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement - Consulting

Producer (1993)

1492 Revisited - Producer/Director (1992)

Los Mineros - Writer (1991)

The New Tijuana - Producer/Writer (1990)

Uneasy Neighbors - Producer/Director/Writer (1989)

In The Shadow of The Law - Producer/Writer (1988)

The Lemon Grove Incident - Producer/Writer (1986)

Ballad of An Unsung Hero - Producer/Writer (1984)

Luís Valdez on Corridos - Producer/Host (1984)

Susan Meiselas on Nicaragua - Producer/Host (1984)

The Trail North - Producer/Writer (1983)

Los Madrugadores in Concert - Producer/Host (1983)

Fronteras - Producer/Host (1983)

Junior Robles: Tribute to A Champion - Producer/Writer (1982)