

verse *Since 1788* (Academica Press 2010). As Thomas Ferguson, longtime collaborator and co-editor of the volume, put it, “Among the thousands of political scientists who are now active, those whose work is likely to be widely consulted a hundred years from now can be counted on the fingers of one hand. I am sure that Walter Dean Burnham will be among them” (12).

We close with reflections by three of Dean’s former students on him as a scholar and mentor:

Burnham taught us to be diligent, unquenchable, and omnivorous. Searing childhood reflections on political identity in the early 1940s could segue into a lecture on plate tectonics. Dense hand-drawn charts and tables of hand-collected county-level voting data revealed soulful joy in physical archive research. Graduate students were awed by WDB’s academic lineage and stature. We also delighted in his quirks. Seminar anticipation was palpable right after the 1994 midterm elections—my first semester at UT-Austin. Did the dramatic result signal the start of a realignment? Before getting to the substance, Burnham implied Newt Gingrich pronounced his own name incorrectly.

— *Jasmine Farrier, University of Louisville*

Being Dean’s student was like wandering through an enchanted forest: discovering hidden glens of insight

and inspiration, time-traveling through centuries, following unanticipated but deeply compelling connections. Dean was such a remarkable combination of attributes—sharply analytical, wildly creative, awe-inspiring, and yet deeply encouraging—and I miss him every day.

— *Cathie Jo Martin, Boston University*

Before today’s professionalization and methodological sophistication, there was Walter Dean Burnham, a giant of the discipline, with his broad and formidable intellect and a disciplined and deep commitment to improving the world with research. His encyclopedic grasp of data and ability to observe and contextualize patterns in that data illuminated the macro-historical currents of American politics. To be a student of his was to be on a roller coaster ride zigzagging across place and time as well as data and theory from seemingly every discipline. It was exhilarating and at times disorienting. But his tireless inquiry and his commitment to his students yielded so many of us who continue to ponder and thrive on his ideas about socio-political tensions, disruption, and transformation. ■

— *Nicole Mellow, Williams College*

— *Jeffrey K. Tulis, University of Texas, Austin;*
Peter Trubowitz, London School of Economics;
and Bartholomew Sparrow, University of Texas, Austin

Francisco Cantú

Francisco Cantú was born in Puebla, Mexico, in 1982. Throughout his life, he displayed a deep love of learning and discovery. He graduated with a bachelor’s degree in political science with highest honors from the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM). He earned one of the highest GPAs in the institution’s history and to this day is remembered as one of its brightest alumni. He then pursued and received a PhD in political science from the University of California San Diego (UCSD). As a doctoral student, he made significant contributions to the study of electoral integrity, particularly in his dissertation, parts of which were subsequently published in top academic journals. Francisco sought to explain the conditions under which electoral irregularities take place. Exploiting the random assignment of voters to different polling stations in Mexico (based on their last names’ alphabetical order), he identified those places where unusual turnout rates were recorded. He then focused on these polling stations and examined which party stood to gain from those anomalous patterns. His results demonstrated that, despite the efforts to remove electoral fraud after the fall of the PRI in 2000, the liberalization of the political system in Mexico did not fully eliminate the fraudulent behavior of political machines. His scholarly work, in addition to its academic rigor and novelty, was very committed with real-world problems and became a critical resource for journalists, activists, and politicians in Mexico. At UCSD, he was more than just an exceptional graduate student; he was a beloved colleague, a true friend, and an inspiration to all.

After completing his PhD, Francisco became a faculty member in the Department of Political Science at the University of Houston (UH). Over the course of a decade, his tenure at the

institution was exemplary. Francisco provided inspiration and mentorship to the diverse student body at UH, a significant portion of whom are first-generation college attendees. His courses were very popular, leaving an enduring impression on the fortunate students who had the privilege of being taught by him. Francisco also devoted numerous hours to his students, providing them with valuable guidance for their academic and professional aspirations, and he was always ready to lend them a compassionate ear. From the outset, Francisco proved to be an invaluable asset to the department and a generous colleague. In recognition of his exceptional research contributions, outstanding caliber of his work, and his excellence in teaching, he earned tenure in 2019 and was awarded the Senator Don Henderson Chair in 2021. In addition to his contributions to the department of political science Francisco had a prominent role in the University of Houston: he co-directed the Hobby School’s Survey Research Institute, served as instructor for the Empirical Implications of Theoretical Problems (EITM) Summer Institute, co-hosted of the University of Houston’s Political Economy Speaker Series, convened major academic conferences, and contributed to joint research activities of the Center for Public Policy and UH Energy. His intellectual prowess, cooperative spirit, and benevolence made him a cherished and respected figure among his peers at the University of Houston.

During his academic career, much of his intellectual attention was devoted to research on electoral integrity, legislative politics, and Latin American politics. He addressed these different topics using a wide range of methods, including formal models, statistical methods for large and complex data, machine learning, image analytics, Bayesian inference, spatial modeling, item-response models, and time-series analysis. In his research Francisco combined some of the best qualities of

field work with his impressive analytical and statistical skills. For example, in his article “The Fingerprints of Fraud: Mexico’s 1988 presidential election,” published in the *American Political Science Review*, he investigated the notorious “crash of the system” incident, when the Mexican government interrupted the public vote count after the first vote tallies showed adverse results for the incumbent party’s candidate. Francisco retrieved the original forms with precinct level vote tallies from the 1988 Mexican presidential election stored at the country’s National Archive; managing this massive amount of information required “Indiana Jones-like” skills. At the archives he photographed the vote tally forms from more than 53,000 polling stations and applied cutting-edge machine learning and convolutional neural networks (CNN) techniques to identify the returns that were disrupted during the official count at the district councils. He systematically showed that electoral manipulation did not occur in a centralized way, but rather at the polling stations and district councils. His work was also very influential in overcoming a common informational problem of the Mexican Congress: the partial, non-random publication of voting records. His Bayesian approach created solutions not only to compute unbiased estimations, but to make trustworthy analyses about legislative

behavior in his home country.

Francisco was recognized not just for his academic accomplishments but also for his genuine warmth and compassion that charmed everyone he encountered. He had a soft-spoken manner, demonstrated a genuine interest in others, and had an ability to make everyone feel valued. These qualities endeared him to all—colleagues, friends, and family alike. As we bid farewell to Francisco, we remember not only his academic contributions but the essence of the man himself. A devoted husband to Lucero and a loving father to Sol, his family was his foundation, and his legacy will forever echo through their lives. Francisco embodied wisdom, decency and humility, leaving an enduring testament to the profound impact one person can have on the world. His absence will be deeply felt. ■

— Eduardo Aleman, University of Houston;

Jeffrey Church, University of Houston;

Juan Pablo Micozzi, Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México;

Pablo M. Pinto, University of Houston;

and Sebastian M. Saiegh, University of California San Diego

On the evening of July 6, 1988, when Francisco Cantú was five years old, a poll worker in his hometown of Puebla wrote *sesenta y cinco* on a tally sheet in small, blue print, recording 65 votes for the presidential candidate of the PRI. Later that night, a person with a black pen made changes. The person with the black pen wrote *novcientos* in dark round cursive, right over the original tally in blue.

To look at this tally sheet, to look at others like it, is to see quite plainly—in a way that obviates the likes of Benford’s law—both the presence and the magnitude of the electoral fraud that changed the course of Mexican history. Yet no one did look, and so no one did see, for more than two decades, as myths and mysteries about that infamous election spiraled through the public sphere.

I am convinced that destiny wanted me to learn from Francisco in multiple dimensions. We interacted before I was and while being a graduate student, as a new and as an “advanced” assistant professor, before and after being a mother, as colleagues and friends. I can write about a very powerful and memorable lesson that he taught me in all those stages. For example, after his flawless presentation as an invited speaker at Washington University in St. Louis which left the audience speechless, I, a first-year grad student, thought “I wish to write a paper like that; I want to be *this* type of researcher.” He truly was one of the greatest academics I have ever met and still, the most impactful lessons I cherish come from witnessing him in his roles as father and husband.

There was this time when my husband and I gave Francisco’s daughter, Sol, a big chocolate chip cookie and she had a massive sugar rush for which Lucero still needs to have revenge. Sol could not stop running and laughing while trying to play

In that time Francisco grew up, and he became a political scientist. Francisco looked in the archive, and he saw the crossings-out and the writings-over, and then he trained a neural network to look and see: to tell us which of the 53,000 tally sheets had been altered, and by how many votes. The results remain, to my mind, among the greatest reveals in all of social science. Myths were undone. Mysteries solved.

One might think that such a scholar would have little time for others. But when, in the early days of the pandemic, I wrote to ask for help, he responded to me—a junior person and a stranger—with curiosity, generosity, insight, even enthusiasm. And I am grateful. ■

— Dorothy Kronick, University of California Berkeley

soccer, Francisco’s passion, with her dad. Seeing them chase each other and laugh to tears on the grass is one of the purest moments of joy and love I have ever witnessed. I did not have kids back then, but I thought “I wish I could have this moment one day; I want to be *this* type of parent.” A respectful, kind, empowering, honest, and loving parent who creates magic with their kid even in the simplest moments. Who teaches her about kombucha and dances “Soy yo” with her; and who guides her way with love and kindness as their main principles.

It is extremely hard to find people who are so exceptionally brilliant, kind, hardworking, generous, and humble as Francisco was. But I hope that the example he set will inspire and guide our own actions as teachers, researchers, and human beings. That will be the best way of continuing his legacy and honoring his memory. ■

— Michelle Torres, University of California, Los Angeles

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