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## Los Paisanos

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## LOS PAISANOS



### Saludo a Todos Los Paisanos:

A few years ago Irwin Edman, distinguished author and teacher, wrote a very significant article, called "Look Homeward America," in which he deplored the fact that for over a hundred years artists and writers flocked to Europe seeking inspiration for creative work. He especially stressed what has been so apparent to all concerned, namely, that college literature has meant chiefly English literature, and that young Americans have been brought up on Dickens and Scott. In regretting that only recently have Americans begun to examine the materials of their own heritage, and their own present, he concluded the article by stating that "it hardly needed the catastrophe of a world war to make Americans, especially writers, aware of the civilization in which they are living."

Professor Edman's commentaries are very interesting for us to consider in relation to regional backgrounds. For instance, the children of New Mexico know all about Robin Hood, but nothing about "Little Joe the Wrangler." They thrill over the exploits of the Knights of the Round Table, but are quite unaware of the exploits of traders to the Indians. College students generally enjoy the epic *Beowulf*, but not many of them have ever read *The History of New Mexico* written by Gaspar de Villagr  in 1610, ten years before the landing of the Pilgrims. Not many of them have even read Gilberto Espinosa's beautiful and authentic translation of this thrilling epic poem, all the events of which happened on our own doorsteps. Fortunately, the oncoming generations are becoming acquainted with their own cultural heritage to some extent, because New Mexico schools and colleges are now integrating regional materials with national and international cultural patterns and backgrounds.

Another interesting point to be made in regard to this article is that since the turn of the century many American artists and writers have not only looked "toward" New Mexico for inspiration but have found it here in a way of life crisscrossed by Indian, Spaniard, and Anglo — a pattern which presented unifying universal characteristics as well as individual ones. Consider for a moment those artists, who instead of being attracted to the great art centers of Europe, came to this state and here founded the Taos Art Colony.

When considering those writers who have been attracted to New Mexico one is confronted with a long list. Some of the following have achieved international recognition, all of them national reputation: Charles Lummis, Adolphe Bandelier, Eugene Manlove Rhodes, Mary Austin, Willa Cather, Witter Bynner, John Gould Fletcher, Haniel Long, Oliver La Farge, Conrad Richter. Some of these have written about the backdrop of our lives, and the figures, born or placed by destiny against that background, from the viewpoint of a spectator, in spite of a subjective approach. For that reason they will always be regarded by New Mexicans as "outsiders." Some of them have so passionately loved this part of America, and have so faithfully interpreted it to us, that they will never be considered as authors "who have passed this way." On rereading Mary Austin's, *The Land of Journey's Ending* recently, I had to stop and examine my conscience concerning my devotion to my native state.

The impact of contemporary relationships on our culture layers of civilization has remained practically untouched by the newcomers. Manifestations of the effect of the Atomic Age on a heritage centuries old are apparent from Taos to Acoma. For instance, a few weeks ago we took some guests to Córdoba, and Chimayó, isolated Spanish villages in the high mountain country south of Taos. The people there have always been largely self-sufficient. In their fields they raise corn, beans, chile, and melons. Wood haulers bring firewood from the hills; the wool for weaving comes from the flocks in the mountain pastures. Chimayó has been famous since the 18th century for its weavers, and Córdoba has produced some of the finest woodcarvers in the Southwest. As we approached Chimayó the only sign of activity to be seen was an old woman plastering a house. In Córdoba we saw a few children and a few women. There were no men working in the fields, or chopping wood, or relaxing in the village plazas as of old. "Where are all the

men?" we asked a young girl wearing blue jeans, and her shirt tails a la the modern co-ed. "Oh, they all work at Los Alamos," she answered. "They all leave early in the morning in great big busses, and they come home at night in big busses. They don't work here any more."

The group of writers who belong to New Mexico by virtue of having been born here is not as large as that one drawn here for literary inspiration, but their achievements are authentic and distinguished. They have fashioned poetry out of sky, mountain, and Indian dance; they have retold legend and folktale, reconstructed history from cave-man to cattleking, and brought to life gunman, trapper, missionary, and railroad builder. They have given to this generation a knowledge and an appreciation of our own past. Future generations will be grateful to them for having "looked homeward."

Hasta la próxima vez.

JULIA KELEHER