

Introduction of
The Eleventh Frank M. Coffin
Lecturer on Law and Public Service,

The Honorable Cruz Reynoso

Remarks of Senior U.S. Circuit Judge
Frank M. Coffin
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As you have read and now heard, our eleventh lecturer's curriculum vitae is not just a curriculum; it is a college catalogue. As I reflect on Justice Reynoso's background, it occurs to me that he has something in common with every one of our previous lecturers. We have had three splendid activists, Joe Rauh, Alvin Bronstein, and Alan Morrison; Justice Reynoso has been there. We have had two superb judges, Pat Wald and Ruth Ginsburg; Justice Reynoso has done that. We have seen two from the executive branch, Drew Days and Bob Reich; our speaker tonight has done that also. We have heard two outstanding professors, Arthur Schlesinger and Chai Feldblum; Justice Reynoso is still professing. Finally, although Justice Reynoso has not yet been a U.S. Senator, like Warren Rudman, he started his career as legislative assistant in the California Senate. Anyhow, Warren Rudman is not an Hispanic-American.

Wondering just how I could deal with this sparkling collection of positions, honors, and achievements, I finally decided to explore a time just before eminence settled upon Justice Reynoso, a time of testing which reveals the mettle of the man. This is also the story of Judge Reynoso's first encounter with a judge from Maine.

In 1968, at age 37, young Cruz Reynoso, after some years in California state government, was named director of newly founded California Rural Legal Assistance. CRLA, as it shall be called, was founded in 1966, the first rural legal assistance program of the Office of Economic Opportunity's War on Poverty. In CLRA's case, "war" was an appropriate word, for CLRA represented poor and vulnerable farm workers against the entrenched, powerful farm owners, their lawyers, and government officials. The pot boiled over when CLRA won 12 out of 13 appeals in welfare cases and even brought suit against Governor Reagan. Opposition quickly galvanized. A John Birch Society dedicated opponent, Lewis K. Uhler, became director of California's OEO Office for the specific purpose of putting CLRA out of business. He began a hostile investigation, and issued a 283 page report levying 127 charges against it.

Late in 1970, acting on this report, Governor Reagan vetoed CLRA's funding for 1971. The veto could be overridden only by the national head of OEO, Frank Carlucci, who had just succeeded a man bearing the faintly familiar name of Donald Rumsfeld. The American Bar Association, strongly supporting CLRA, called for a widely representative commission to investigate Uhler's charges. But President Nixon, anxious to avoid confrontation with Governor Reagan, resorted to a safer bet, a commission composed of state supreme court justices, all Republicans. The chair was a recently retired chief justice from Maine, Robert Williamson. Chief Justice Williamson's special aide was young Maine lawyer Peter Murray.

Despite considerable controversy and the urging of Vice President Agnew to recall the commissioners, the commission set about its business. For six weeks in the spring of 1971 the

commission held 20 days of hearings throughout the state, hearing 165 witnesses, often working in windowless rooms. Of course, a key witness in these proceedings was Cruz Reynoso, on whose watch this drama had unfolded. Tempers were running high. The office of a lawyer had been firebombed. Peter Murray recalls that at Salinas, just inland from Monterey, pickets paraded outside the City Council chamber, the crowd was restive and, inside the hearing room, had become unruly. A storm was brewing. Then the panel entered and Chief Justice Williamson sat down, knocked gently on the table and said, "Here, here. We'll have none of that." And they didn't.

By late spring the press had become critical of both Uhler and Governor Reagan. Support had been building from the grassroots, the bar, and from both sides of the aisle in Congress. A particularly appreciated support was a letter from Senator Margaret Chase Smith to both the President and Carlucci chastising anyone who would challenge the fairness of Chief Justice Williamson.

Well, finally the report was prepared. It dealt with all the charges, declared them unfounded, and condemned the Uhler report as "totally irresponsible." It found that CLRA had carried out its duties "in a highly competent, efficient, and exemplary manner." To assure OEO Director Carlucci enough time to study the report before acting, Peter Murray flew east and delivered it personally. The Commission followed and waited several days. Nothing happened. But eventually, when it appeared - wrongly, it turned out - that the NYT had the story, the report was allowed to be made public. The refunding of CLRA quickly was confirmed. As a face saver for Governor Reagan, the administration gave him a grant for a judicare project which proved to have a short life.

And so Cruz Reynoso, following the hard way, won vindication of his earliest major responsibility. And Chief Justice Williamson would be the first to celebrate his visit to a state which was among the first to appreciate him.

It is my happy privilege to present the Eleventh Coffin Lecturer, the Honorable Cruz Reynoso, a man of many parts.