Early Life

• She was born in France, where her father was worked on relief efforts following World War II.

• France Córdova’s father was a Mexican-American West Point Graduate and her mother was Irish-American.

• France Córdova found physics at an early age. However...
Pathway to Physics

• ...she was drawn to the humanities.

• France Córdova graduated cum laude from Standard, with a degree in English.

• She began a career in journalism.

• After watching the Apollo 11 Lunar Landing and learning about neutron stars, she decided to pursue physics.

• Listen to France Córdova share her journey to physics in this video.
Los Alamos & NASA

- France Córdova completed her Ph.D. in Physics at Caltech.

- After receiving her PhD, Dr. France Córdova took a job at Los Alamos where she worked on rocket launches, strong gravitational fields, and multiwavelength observations of astronomical events.

- She went on to work for NASA as a chief scientist.
Educator & Administrator

Institutions:

- Pennsylvania State University, professor, department head and vice-president
- University of California Santa Barbara, professor and vice-chancellor
- Purdue University, president
- University of California Riverside, chancellor

Selected Contributions:

- Advanced research
- Encouraged interdisciplinary collaboration
- Laid groundwork for programs in health and medicine

Image Courtesy of the Emilio Segrè Visual Archives
In 2014, Dr. France Córdova became the first Latina to serve as Director of the National Science Foundation.

She retired from this position in 2020.
Advice

France Córdova encourages those hesitant to jump at a new opportunity to try nonetheless.

Sources

Content

• Gale Biography Resource Center, “Notable Hispanic American Women”  

• National Science Foundation, “Biography: Dr. France A. Córdova,”  

• Contributors to Wikipedia, “France A. Córdova,  
  <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France_A._C%C3%B3rdova>  
  (Accessed 2 July 2020).

• “The Long View: France Córdova (PhD ‘79),”  
  <https://www.techer.caltech.edu/france-crdova#france-cordova-3>  
  (Accessed 6 July 2020).

• Prism, “Down to Earth” <http://www.asee-prism.org/2017/02/>  
  (Accessed 21 July 2020).

• National Society of Hispanic Physicists,  
  (Accessed 20 July 2020).

Videos

• Nautilus, "France A. Cordova," This video production by Not To Scale was created as part of the “Spark of Science”  
  series  
  <http://spark.nautil.us/video/105/france-a-cordova>  

• Inspirefest, “A Life in Science: Dr France A Córdova,”  
  2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_oeHAIh200Q>
Reflection Question

Dr. France Córdova was interviewed by *The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education*. In this interview, she offered advice to Hispanic American youth, saying, “At all steps of my career there was someone saying, you’re too old, too young, too inexperienced. There are naysayers. Ask yourself: What is important to me? What is my vision?”

What is your vision (this can be short term or long term)? What steps can you take now towards it?