"The Border" Divides—And Unites—The Southwest

Earlier issues of Fronteras described the Southwest as a region in which several cultures—especially Native American, Hispanic, and Anglo American—interact. Geographically, the Southwest is a huge area that straddles the U.S.-Mexico border. Much of the character of this region is determined by the political dualism that became a reality in the mid-19th century. For nearly a century and a half, a line drawn on maps has separated two very different political systems and cultures. North of that line, Anglo American traditions and customs dominate. South of the line, the institutions and cultures of Mexico prevail. In reality, of course, things are not that simple: There is considerable mixing of traditions on both sides of the border.

Historically, the border is a result of many developments, including the Mexican War and the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848). The border, as we know it, was formalized by the United States and Mexican Boundary Commission after the Gadsden Purchase in 1853. William Emory conducted his Boundary Survey in 1854-1857 to survey a route for a railway to the Pacific. Over the years, the border came to be defined as a fenced line studded with survey markers and crossing stations.

But is the border really a line at all? Some scholars suggest that the border is really a broad zone, perhaps several hundred miles wide, in which two cultures co-mingle. It is this zone, according to UTA Political Science Professor Dale Story, that has been considered “another country”—where ways of doing things and organizing space and activities are adjusted to two political systems that, in effect, have created a third.

The border has varied in importance through time. When first established it appeared to be a defensible “line in the sand” that kept the U.S. and Mexico separate. During periods of political turmoil in Mexico—such as the Revolutionary Period earlier in this century—the border served to separate the two countries and, theoretically, buffer Americans from vast changes sweeping the borderlands. Thus, when the bordertown of Columbus, New Mexico was attacked by Mexican bandits, the U.S. was outraged: U.S. troops have crossed the border in hot—but usually fruitless—pursuit of revolutionaries and outlaws who disappeared into the seemingly porous countryside.

Today, with relative stability and active U.S. investment in Mexico, the U.S.-Mexico border is viewed as both a reality and an anachronism. Some issues like the war on drugs help strengthen the idea of the border as a line, but others such as “free trade,” high mobility, and strong social connections of families make the border simply another intersection on an international highway.

UTA's Special Collections contains numerous maps that show the changing importance of the border through time. Some show it as a solid line; others depict it as a minor feature compared to the mountains, international rail lines, and rivers that cross it. One river in particular, the Rio Grande or Rio Bravo (called Rio Grande del Norte on earlier maps), helps define the familiar shape of the border on maps. All of these maps document the legacy of conflict and cooperation that has characterized the changing U.S.-Mexico relationship. The many journals, diaries, newspapers, and reports in the Special Collections also describe, in the actual language of the times, how people viewed the border. All of these historical archival materials reveal that the border can be interpreted both graphically and in words as it becomes part of our mental maps of the region. They remind us that the border is constantly changing in importance, and that factors such as commerce, mobility, and political relationships affect the way it will be drawn—and viewed—by people on both sides of it in the future.

An exhibit entitled "The Border - La Frontera" featuring historic maps, journals, newspapers, and other materials is scheduled to open at UTA Special Collections in October 1993. For more information contact Special Collections at (817) 273-3393.
Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site Dedication Emphasizes International Cooperation

Palo Alto Battlefield—one of the most significant sites in the history of the Greater Southwest—was dedicated on May 8, 1993 as a National Historic Site on the 147th anniversary of the first battle of the war between the United States and Mexico. Under the direction of General Zachary Taylor, American troops defeated Mexican troops under the command of General Mariano Arista on May 8, 1846. Taylor’s success at Palo Alto near Brownsville, Texas, led to a series of American victories and the occupation of Northern Mexico. The dedication emphasized the commemoration of Palo Alto as an example of how research and interpretation of international history can increase understanding between the United States and Mexico.

I had the good fortune of accompanying Mr. Jenkins Garrett to Brownsville to attend these ceremonies and to participate in the First Annual Palo Alto Conference, sponsored by the National Park Service and held on May 6-9. These ceremonies included the dedication of a city marker on Palo Alto at the Visitor’s Center, a special flag raising ceremony at a roadside park adjacent to the park, a tour of the battlefield led by a National Park Service archeologist, a dedication mass held at a local Catholic Church, and a formal ceremony held that evening at the University of Texas at Brownsville.

The vigorous support which the citizens of Brownsville and Matamoros have given to get Palo Alto designated is most impressive. This support has included grass roots community activism, political lobbying, and sustained initiative on the part of community leaders to convince Congress to pass legislation creating the park. Their efforts were successful when, on June 23, 1992, Congress established the Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site. The legislation provides for a 3,400 acre site. The land is currently in private hands, and the funds have not yet been appropriated to purchase it. The Brownsville community is currently lobbying Congress for this money.

The park’s mission is broad: The staff is empowered not only to interpret the Palo Alto battlefield, but also to interpret the Mexican-American War from the perspectives of both countries. To this end, the park staff, led by superintendent Thomas B. Carroll, hopes to enter into joint research and interpretive projects on both sides of the Rio Grande. The “Statement for Management” produced for the park perhaps best summarizes the purpose of the park: “As a point of arrival, the commemoration of Palo Alto can serve as a poignant reminder that respect, understanding, non-intervention, negotiation, peace, unity, and brotherhood—not war—are the heritage for which all nations must strive.”

The park staff has already begun its interpretive program by sponsoring the first annual Palo Alto Conference, which brought together scholars from both Mexico and the U.S., as well as public historians, parks department staff, archaeologists, and interested lay people to discuss.
various aspects of the war. Mr. Garrett and I both addressed the conference, discussing the rich and voluminous holdings UTA has on the war. Perhaps most interesting was a two-day post conference bus tour, organized by the Historic Brownsville Museum, which took a group of thirty-two attendees into Northern Mexico to visit the Mexican War sites at Buena Vista (just outside of Saltillo) and Monterrey. The history of the war certainly came alive when we walked along the rugged foothills at Buena Vista or viewed the town plaza of Monterrey from the Bishop’s Palace approximately 1.5 miles away. The good news for those who missed the conference is that there will be other conferences, other tours, and a park which will focus attention on a significant international event which had serious and long term effects on the U. S. and Mexico.

The next Palo Alto conference is tentatively scheduled for February, 1994, once again in Brownsville. To get on the park’s mailing list, please write:

Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site
P. O. Drawer 1832
1333 E. Washington Street
Brownsville, Texas 78522-1832

Fronteras Wins CASE Award

The Center is pleased to announce that Fronteras has received a Grand Award in the category of “Periodicals/Newsletters” from CASE—the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (Southwest District IV). CASE represents about 3000 colleges, universities, elementary and secondary schools in the U. S., Canada, Mexico and 25 other countries. Fronteras is a team effort involving the Center for Greater Southwestern Studies and the History of Cartography, as well as the UTA Print Graphics Department. We thank all those who have made Fronteras so successful.

UTA Sesquicentennial Projects to Focus on Crucial Borderlands Events of Mid 1800s

Nearly 150 years has elapsed since two major events transformed the Greater Southwest in the mid 19th Century: Texas became a state in 1845, and the U.S.-Mexican War (called the “Yanqui Invasion” south of the border) was fought—and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo signed as its outcome—in 1846-48. The late 1990s will provide opportunities to remember, and better understand, these two major events. UTA’s Center for Southwest Studies hopes to focus new light on these events, not as celebrations but rather as crucial turning points in regional and international history.

Tentatively scheduled for October 1995, a sesquicentennial symposium on Texas annexation looks at the event from several perspectives—social, economic, political, geographical, and cartographic. It will feature nationally recognized scholars.

The U.S.-Mexican War/Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo is envisioned as a two day international conference that will bring together academic and independent scholars from the United States and Mexico in 1996-98. According to the Center Fellows Chair Douglas Richmond, the Mexican War and its aftermath is a subject that southwestern scholars and the public need to know more about, for it has had a profound effect in shaping the relationship between the two countries.

Jose Angel Gutierrez Joins UTA Faculty

Jose Angel Gutierrez, who is perhaps best known as the founder of the La Raza Unida Party in 1970, will join the UTA faculty as Associate Professor of Political Science in the Fall. Dr. Gutierrez has more than twenty years’ experience in public service, community organization, and teaching. A native of Texas, Dr. Gutierrez received his B.A. from Texas A & I University in Kingsville, his M.A. from St. Mary’s University in San Antonio, his Ph.D. from UT Austin, and an additional doctorate in Jurisprudence from the University of Houston Law Center. He has served as County Judge in Zavala County, and served on numerous commissions and programs pertaining to education and international studies, including the Mexican American Studies program at the University of Houston Central Campus and El Colegio de Mexico with the government of President Jose Lopez Portillo.

Dr. Gutierrez has authored numerous articles in The Progressive and The Texas Observer, co-authored A War of Words, and authored A Gringo Manual on How to Handle Mexicans, and El Politico: The Mexican American Elected Official. He has also produced video documentaries on Hispanic-American culture.

Dr. Gutierrez has most recently practiced law in Dallas and served as adjunct professor of Political Science at UT Dallas. The Center and UTA extend a warm welcome to Dr. Gutierrez.
Sam Haynes Joins UTA History Faculty, Center

The hiring of Dr. Sam Haynes to fill the position in Borderlands History reaffirms UTA’s interest in the Southwest. According to Center Fellow David Narrett, who chaired the Search Committee, Dr. Haynes holds a B.A. from Columbia University (1978), and did his graduate work at the University of Houston (M.A., 1984; Ph.D., 1988). He is the author of Soldiers of Misfortune: The Somervell and Mier Expeditions (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990)—a study of failed Texas incursions into Mexico during the period of the Texas Republic. Dr. Haynes is also editor of Thomas Jefferson Green’s Journal of the Texian Expedition Against Mier, a contemporary account of that invasion. He is currently writing a biography of James Knox Polk under contract from HarperCollins, and his future research interests include a study of nineteenth century American filibustering ventures into Central America and a study of U.S.-Mexico relations from 1821 to 1848. He is the recipient of a Dobie-Paisano Writers’ Fellowship for 1992-1993 from the Texas Institute of Letters. Dr. Haynes has a broad range of teaching experience gained at the University of Houston and as an instructor at the Kinkaid School, a private academy in Houston where he has won teaching awards. At UTA, he will teach a number of history courses, including Texas and the Spanish Southwest, United States History, and Historical Methods.

As noted elsewhere in this newsletter, Dr. Haynes will also serve as a Center Fellow effective September 1, 1993. The Center and the community extend a warm welcome to Sam Haynes and his wife Lupe, a native of Monterrey, Mexico.

“Discovering Arlington’s Heritage” A Success

When originally conceived by the Center’s Program and Research committee, no one anticipated how popular the two day symposium “Discovering Arlington’s Heritage” might be. The committee hoped for 100 participants, but had to turn that many away. Center Director Richard Francaviglia noted that the symposium and field trip became irresistible when “local history was presented as a kind of detective work involving the search for clues to the past.” Nine presentations, a round table discussion/panel, and a field trip on March 27th and 28th exposed participants to the city’s history. According to Dorothy Rencurrel of the Texas State Museum of History (formerly the Fielder Museum), who was one of the presenters and co-host of the symposium, the popular symposium has encouraged UTA and the Museum to begin planning another symposium next year to accommodate those who missed out this year. Contact the Center to be put on the mailing list for notification.

♦ NOTICIAS ♦

♦ Center Relocation Completed

An early Fall reception is planned to mark the Center’s move to the 6th Floor of the UTA Main Library. The Center’s new office (Room 650) is in the offices formerly occupied by the Robertson Colony Papers. The move, according to Center Director Richard Francaviglia, puts the Center in closer proximity to UTA’s Special Collections Division. Visitors are always welcome, but are urged to call ahead.

♦ Jose Delgado Serves as Center Graduate Research Assistant

Jose Delgado began serving as the Center’s Sandra Myres Graduate Research Assistant in February 1993. He brings a wide range of experiences to the Center, including a familiarity with the region and its cartographic history.

Mr. Delgado is an interdisciplinary Humanities doctoral student, and his studies emphasize history and politics. Fluent in Spanish, he is assisting several Center faculty with research projects, including: George Green—A History of the Ft. Worth Iron Workers; David Narrett—A Comparative Study of Two Frontier Republics (Texas and Vermont); and Doug Richmond—Yucatan During the Liberal Era, 1855-1876. Additionally, he has assisted Center Director Richard Francaviglia in compiling information about early 19th Century maps of the Southwest. In assisting the faculty with these projects, Jose Delgado has made extensive use of UTA’s Special Collections.

♦ New Center Fellows Named

Two new Center Fellows were appointed September 1, 1993. Sam Haynes, Assistant Professor of History, began serving a three year term as a replacement for Charles “Ike” Smith, Professor of Geology who retired on May 31st. Brooks Ellwood, Professor of Geology, will fill the unexpired term of Dale Story, who is currently serving as Acting Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and on the Center’s Executive Committee.
BOOK REVIEWS

Where North Meets South
Documents Urban Geography of the Border

The U.S. - Mexico border stretches for nearly 2000 miles. Much of that countryside is sparsely populated, but it is the border cities—places like Calexico/Mexicali, El Paso/Juarez, and “Ambos Nogales” that give the border much of its character. Students of Southwestern cities will want to read Where North Meets South: Cities, Space, and Politics on the U.S.-Mexico Border by Lawrence A. Herzog. Its eight major essays describe and interpret the way cities have developed and interact along the border—and how they continue to function in the context of two cultures and an increasingly global economy. Where North Meets South is published by the Center for Mexican American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, CMAS 59200, Austin, Texas 78712. Phone (512) 471-4557.

The Spanish Frontier in North America
Offers New Synthesis/Interpretation of Borderlands History

For more than a decade, historians of the borderlands have considered David Weber’s numerous essays and books on the northern frontier of New Spain and Mexico to be essential reading. The recent publication of Weber’s long-awaited book on The Spanish Frontier, however, marks a major watershed in the scholarship of the borderlands. Published by Yale University Press, The Spanish Frontier in North America is rapidly becoming recognized as a social/political history that will join the ranks of earlier, but now dated, classics such as Herbert E. Bolton’s The Spanish Borderlands: Chronicle of Florida and the Southwest (1921), and John F. Bannon’s The Spanish Borderlands Frontier (1970).

David Weber’s The Spanish Frontier accomplishes several major tasks. First and foremost, Weber has written a highly readable history that will appeal to scholars, students, and the public. Weber’s engaging narrative is supplemented by many contemporary quotes—thus helping history come alive. Secondly, this book is beautifully illustrated: original lithographs and photographs of historic sites, and—very importantly—maps are used to tell the story of Spanish colonization. Weber includes contemporary maps of locations and communities that reveal the state of the art of cartography of the Crown. Also included are several maps drawn specifically for this book: These show important features and conditions—such as forts, missions, and ever-changing political boundaries.

The Spanish Frontier is more than well written and well illustrated. Its major contribution lies in its focus: In interpreting the borderlands frontier history, Weber recognizes the significance of both the natural environment and the indigenous peoples—Native Americans—in shaping policy. The borderlands emerge as a constantly shifting zone of interaction between Native Americans, Spanish, French, Russians, English, and Anglo Americans—all of whom also interacted in physically diverse settings that ranged from tropical lowlands to desert and mountainous uplands. The borderlands may have a dual Hispanic-Anglo character today, but Weber shows us that, and why, other people have also affected it through time. The Spanish Frontier is available from the Yale University Press, 92A Yale Station, New Haven, Ct. 06520.

Borderlands Sourcebook
Definitive Regional Guide Still Available

Ten years ago, the University of Oklahoma produced a massive encyclopedic volume called the Borderlands Sourcebook: A Guide to Literature on Northern Mexico and the American Southwest. Over the years, the Borderlands Sourcebook, which was edited by Ellwyn Stoddard, Richard Nostrand, and Johnathan West, has proven to be an invaluable guide to the region’s environment, culture, and history. Although many changes have occurred in the region, the Borderlands Sourcebook contains crucial “base line” information that can serve as a yardstick when comparing more recent developments. As of Summer 1993, the publisher still had a few dozen in stock; readers interested in purchasing Borderlands Sourcebook should contact the University of Oklahoma Press at P.O. Box 787, Norman, Oklahoma 73070 (Phone 1-800-627-7377).
Center Faculty Present Papers on History of Cartography

Three UTA historians were among more than sixty scholars who made presentations at the 15th International Conference on the History of Cartography in Chicago on June 21-25.

- Gerald Saxon (Director of UTA’s Special Collections) presented a paper entitled “How the West Was Taught: School Geographies and Their Treatment of 19th Century U. S. Expansionism.”
- Dennis Reinhardt (Associate Professor of History) spoke on “Maps From Inspections of the Northern Frontier of New Spain in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century,” and also served as a panelist in the session entitled “Teaching the History of Cartography.”
- Richard Francaviglia (Associate Professor of History and Center Director) addressed the subject of “Cartography and Landscape: Early 19th Century Texas Maps.”

Meet the Center Faculty

George N. Green joined the UTA faculty in 1966. As a specialist in Texas and labor history, he was primarily responsible for establishing the Texas Labor Archives and the Texas Political Archives, two major components of the Special Collections Division of the UTA Library. He was named the Outstanding Teacher in the College of Liberal Arts in 1983.

Dr. Green is currently researching and co-authoring two books. One is a history of the labor movement in Texas, in which he will focus on the difficult Depression years, the rise of the CIO, the merger with the AFL, and labor’s role in politics. The other project is a history of Texas during World War II, which will concentrate on economic trends and politics on the home front.

Dr. Green is the author of The Establishment in Texas Politics (Greenwood Press, 1979), which the University of Oklahoma Press has published in paperback and is still in print. He has written some two dozen scholarly articles, two booklets, and ten popular essays. His recent manuscript on the history of Hurst, Euless, and Bedford is being considered for publication. He has written nearly thirty encyclopedia articles, many of them for the prestigious Handbook of Texas project. Dr. Green has served as a Center Fellow since 1991.

Center for Greater Southwestern Studies and the History of Cartography

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