New studies in Rio Grande Valley history

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Spanglish Spoken Here

by

Mario Barrera

So I plop my tray on the counter. A cupcake, two plump conchas, an apple empanada. I watch her eyes flick over me, no expression, no hesitation. Moment of truth. Two dollars, she says. Rats. Maybe if I'd said buenos dias first, she would have said dos dolares. Quien sabe.

Couldn't be my clothes: Levis, Wrangler shirt, black leather belt. Bastante multicultural, maybe even transcultural. No one would speak English to me in Granada, Buenos Aires, DF. I know, I've been there. Maybe it's my sexy tinted bifocals, the trim beard. What if I'd kept the Zapata mustache?

Five eleven, not that tall. Relatively light skin, but come on, not exactly güero. At Taqueria La Victoria I order in Spanish: frijoles, arroz, lechuga, pollo. Or is it gallina? Para llevar. So far, so good, but then I say no quiero salsa, and totally blow it. Five fifty, he says. I refuse to accept his definition of the situation. Gracias, I say as I scoop up my change. Hasta luego.

Maybe they just want to practice their English. True, when the handyman comes to look at the door knob or the shower, I speak to him in English, not because he goes by Manny, it's that I don't want him to think that I think he doesn't know English. Because I know he does.
It's different back in South Texas, where pretty much all the Tejanos are bilingual. Or trilingual, if you count Spanglish. I love the DJs on Radio Frontera who play with language all day long. I want to dedicate this song to my niece, says the woman. The DJ: you want to dedicate a song to your rodillas?! No, not my knees, says the woman. My niece!

It's a subtle joke, because she did not call her niece her knees. But she might have called her knees her niece. I don't know. I'd have to hear it again.
LAND OWNERSHIP
AND
GEOGRAPHY
Place Identity Formation in the Lower Rio Grande Valley: The Identity of Brownsville, Texas

by

Elim Zavala

The city of Brownsville, Texas, was founded as a result of a political invention. After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo established the Rio Grande as the official border between the U.S. and Mexico, wealthy merchants, especially from the neighboring city of Matamoros, began to settle the area immediately across the river.¹ Since the signing of the treaty, on February 2, 1848, Brownsville has found itself at the edge of what has traditionally been considered America. The area that today comprises South Texas was once the center of the imperial Spanish border province of Nuevo Santander, originally colonized by José de Escandon in 1749 as a buffer zone against English, French, and American settlement.² Extending from the mouth of the river to the two Laredos, the region of South Texas known as the Rio Grande Valley became part of the United States after the Mexican-American War and remained a peripheral area throughout much of the nineteenth century. The story of South Texas in general, and of Brownsville, Texas, in particular, has been the subject of inventions, myths, and political redefinitions. But what does this suggest about the identity of the people of Brownsville? Was their identity also invented as well, or is it merely the result of such a convulsive history? And, perhaps more important, in what ways do these identities present themselves? These are the questions I will try to answer in this paper. By analyzing the geography, historical cycles, personal and literary narratives of Brownsville, Texas, I attempt to outline the characteristic features that make up the mosaic of this city’s identity.
Place-Identity and Self-Identity in Brownsville

Recent academic literature on the psychology behind the conceptions of self-identity and place-identity concludes that the two are interrelated. In *Homo Geoagraphicus*, for example, Robert David Sack argues that the “self is a composite of nature, meaning, and social relations” and “an agent of multiple or heterogeneous forces and causes inter-threaded by place.” Moreover, environmental psychologist Harold M. Proshansky maintains that place-identity is a sub-structure of self-identity consisting of specific cognitions about the physical world. This means that individuals tend to see place only in relation to how it affects their own conceptions of the self. Furthermore, Proshansky *et al.* suggest that individuals in general tend to be less aware of cognitive structures that are relevant to place-identity than to those of self-identity. This becomes important for those living in a border city like Brownsville, Texas, where cross-border interactions are predominant and where notions of both self and place tend to shift and be more fluid than in other areas of the country.

Moreover, in the context of the borderlands as a global, geographical region, Brownsville appears to have more in common with other parts of the world than it does with the United States or Mexico. In places like Brownsville, for instance, border and border-crossing interactions can have a more profound impact in some of the ways individual and collective identities are formed. Writing about the post-Soviet identities on the Finnish-Russian borderland, Tuulikki Kurki observes that “The Border, border crossings, or the mere proximity of the border have forced individuals to question their identities, sense of belonging, and loyalties.” This is important for those living in a borderland region because, as Kurki points out, “increasing cross-border contact influence the way people understand the national borderland as a place and identity construction within it.” Thus, in a city like Brownsville, Texas, understanding one’s geographic and demo-
graphic surroundings becomes essential in the construction of one’s sense of self- and place-identity.

After examining the geography, historical cycles, personal and literary narratives of the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV) and Brownsville, I find that in this region a pre-existing national identity is sometimes replaced by other forms of identities that may be more convenient to the individual. Consequently, a juxta-position between regional border identity and national identity is created in Brownsville as a result of its specific geographic location. Just as easily as they can be adopted, both types of identities can be equally ignored. Moreover, I find that both military and economic factors have contributed in heightening this contrasting sense of identity during different parts of this region’s history.

Geography of Brownsville: Twin City and River City Identity

Before any argument is outlined, it is important to mention that the history of Brownsville, Texas, has been and always will be tied to the history of Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico. This paper does not focus on the influences this neighboring city has had in the developing of Brownsville over the past 200 years, but it should go without saying that its influence was always considered while writing it. However, the primary focus of this paper is based on Brownsville’s sense of identity as a city and a community. As a twin city, Brownville’s identity will undoubtedly be forever tied to that of Matamoros; as an American one, the existence of fixed national boundaries between the U.S. and Mexico will always heighten the social, economic, and political differences between the two neighboring cities and cause for them to remain distinct.7

But Brownsville is not only a border and twin city, it is also a river city. Brownsville is located at the edge of the second largest river delta of the United States, second only to the Mississippi River Delta.8 The Rio Grande (Rio Bravo) has an approximate
length of 3,059 kilometers (or about 1900 miles), ranking twentieth in length among the world’s rivers and making it the fifth-longest river in North America. Its headwaters are fed from the San Juan Mountains in southern Colorado. Making their way through New Mexico, the waters of the Rio Grande flow all the way to El Paso before the Rio Conchos and Pecos River revive its flow and help it to reach Brownsville and the Gulf of Mexico. Like many other cities along its banks, Brownsville, Texas, would not be the city it is today without the flow of the Rio Grande.

It is no surprise, therefore, that the prosperity of a city founded along the banks of a river would come to depend so much upon it. At least two of the three most influential events in Brownsville’s history were connected to the Rio Grande itself: the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, which not only established the official border between U.S. and Mexico, but also a military presence along the river; the introduction of irrigation for the use of commercial agriculture by land speculators during the 1890s and 1900s; and the subsequent and coincidental arrival of the St Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railroad in 1904. Some of these events are interrelated and also tied to other important ones in Brownsville’s history. Even before the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo was signed, for example, American troops led by Zachary Taylor had built a military fort—first known as Fort Texas, then as Fort Taylor—on the northern bank of the river as early as 1846.

At the beginning of this paper I mentioned how the political line of demarcation established after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo helped form part of Brownsville’s identity. Yet, at the time, the idea of using the river as the official boundary between the U.S. and Mexico was not widely shared. Among other things, it was well known that the Rio Grande changed its course inadvertently from time to time. This means that for many years, until the building of dams upstream, the unpredictable flow of the river came to define the political identities, at least for those who lived along its changing paths. The scholar Omar S.
Valerio-Jiménez argues that residents of the LRGV region “did not give up local control easily or immediately assume national identities; instead, they continued transnational practices, subverted national directives, and assumed strategic identities.”

“It was the Treaty of Guadalupe,” according to the Brownsville scholar Américo Paredes, “that added the final element to Rio Grande society, a border. The river, which had been a focal point, became a dividing line.” In this region of the United States, a pre-existing patriarchal system had made the border community “more cohesive” and “minimized outside interference” prior to the signing of the treaty. When the Rio Grande would flood, for example, “the patriarchal council decided whether the levees should be opened to irrigate the fields or whether they should be reinforced to keep the water out . . . .” It is safe to assume, therefore, that the LRGV region and Brownsville had enjoyed a similar sense of autonomy prior to the arrival of irrigation, commercial agriculture, and the railroad.

Taken together, this set of geographical and historical descriptions of Brownsville serve as part of my empirical evidence to demonstrate how people have constructed a sense of self- and place-identity in this city—at least during that part of Brownsville’s history. Other, more detailed accounts of both self and place will be presented in the form of personal and literary narratives. So far, however, I have described some of the ways in which self- and place-identities can be formed in this city. But this is just part of my main argument. The real goal of this paper is to find out which characteristic features make up the mosaic of Brownsville’s identity. Let us now explore some of the ways in which the area known as the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV) has been conceived, projected, and reinvented by others from the years since 1848 to the present.
Borderlands: Brownsville on the Frontier versus Brownsville on La Frontera

Since the national boundaries of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands were established in the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, a number of what José David Saldivar has called “shifting and shifty versions of border culture” have appeared.17 In these versions, residents on both sides of the border were subjected to varying interpretations of what constitutes being American or Mexican, and what it was like to live on the fringes of the American hinterland. In River of Hope: Forging Identity and Nation in the Rio Grande Borderlands, Omar S. Valerio-Jiménez maintains that the LRGV area, for instance, “became a crucial laboratory of state formation and competing national identities during the nineteenth century because it witnessed the convergence of several nation-building processes that produced widespread political and social change.”18

Early Mexican and American attempts to control the borderlands from distant political centers of power failed. Valerio-Jiménez argues that “. . . when fixed national boundaries replaced fluid borderlands in the region, the United States and Mexico each attempted but failed to obtain hegemonic power.”19 Similarly, according to Valerio-Jiménez, in the LRGV region “the residents on both sides of the Rio Grande used the border to subvert national control, ultimately restricting and destabilizing both nations’ power in the region.”20 Thus, what Valerio-Jiménez describes is another example of how residents of the LRGV region have used their geographic location in their favor. In this case, the border served temporarily as a cultural and geographic shield against attempts to be totally incorporated into the heartland’s definition of national identity. It should not be surprising, therefore, that, during the early 1840s, border nationalists would go up in arms in an attempt to establish their own independent nation—the Republic of the Rio Grande.21 Consequently, however, state and market forces
did manage to bring about change in the region and helped to further shape the identity of LRGV borderlands residents. To better understand the American nation-building process in this borderlands region, we can examine the personal accounts of a pioneer family who lived in the LRGV immediately after the Mexican-American War.

The personal letters of Helen Chapman offer insightful comments on the life in the LRGV and Brownsville throughout the formative years of 1848 to 1852. Helen Chapman was the wife of Major William Chapman, quartermaster of the newly renamed and relocated Fort Brown and a business partner of the man credited with the founding of Brownsville—Charles Stillman. Rather than describing the area as a border region, though, Chapman depicts South Texas as an extension of the frontier, a place “distinguished for its dissipations.” For Chapman, dissipations such as drinking, smuggling, and acts of violence all seemed to be the result of a lack of religious institutions, industry, and good character. In a letter to her mother written on July 20, 1849, Chapman declares that:

*The great danger of the West is “No Religion.” The want of everything idealizing, beautifying, refining, the absence of strong moral restraints, and the urgent sense of right and wrong, when, in all times and places the hand is of necessity almost resting on the handle of a knife or the holster of a pistol. The last time we went to Fort Brown, I thought much of the influence of such things.*

Here, Chapman also compares South Texas with the Wild West and depicts it as a zone of moral decay. Moreover, in this example, Fort Brown serves as a shield from all the dangers that existed on the frontier. Chapman seems to be able to safely think and write about these dangers only when she is inside the military post.

In the same letter, Chapman also describes to her mother the first celebration of the Fourth of July in the newly acquired territory:
It was the first anniversary of real American Freedom on this soil and to hear that great paper with its firm, calm temperate statement of wrongs, read in territory just wrested from the grasp of Mexico, seeing around me a crowd of men brought up under the daily influence of such principles, seeing them on the very verge of the Union and feeling how such notions of human rights must of necessity spread through the other called republic [Mexico], seemed to give me a feeling of Destiny, a kind of pre-vision that was overwhelming. . . . Through blood, misery and moral desolation, this former part of Mexico is fairly launched into the great confederacy of States and the children’s children will see only the blessing.27

Faithful to the doctrine of nineteenth century Manifest Destiny, Chapman’s account of the first Fourth of July celebration at Fort Brown helps us to understand the historical and ideological significance that the Mexican-American War had on the developing town of Brownsville. Overall, Chapman expresses optimism about the future of this area as long as there is a military presence.

Moreover, in an earlier letter written to her mother on July 15, 1849, Chapman expresses her sympathy for individuals—like herself and her husband—who labored and sacrificed on the frontier:

This I feel to be in some degree the case with myself, and coming to this remote frontier at such a crisis. The West has become the chief object of my sympathy. . . You know how I love the refinements of civilization, how I shrink from coarseness of thought, action, or language, yet I am willing to stay here and take this for the field of my earthly labor. It is no momentary feeling, but hourly strengthening. I am fully persuaded it is the great thought of my life. The West needs men of age, character, discipline, and principle.28

For Chapman, at least, a place like Fort Brown was the ideal place where men—and, in her case, women—with the power to reshape their environment, lived.29 Formerly possessed by Mexico, this territory of “misery and moral desolation” went on to become, in turn, the responsibility of men (and women) of “age, character, discipline, and principle.”
According to the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, written accounts of explorers and pioneers were not only influential in the conceptual transformation of place, but were also necessary for them “to have home bases and rest stops along a path that opened to the horizon and led to an ultimate destination.” So far, my place-identity analysis has demonstrated that South Texas and the LRGV have traditionally been viewed as backward regions. It has also revealed an important aspect about the identity of Brownsville: the characteristics of Brownsville’s identity will never be understood without looking at them from the context of the LRGV region. It is essential, in other words, to understand the geographic, historical, and cultural characteristics of the LRGV as a region in order to understand those of Brownsville, Texas. The “shifting and shifty versions” (to borrow Saldivar’s phrase again), which were used to refer to this extension of the American Southwest over the years, are just some examples of how difficult it can be to capture an accurate sense of identity in this part of the world.

But what do these explanations suggest about the city of Brownsville itself? In Helen Chapman’s descriptions of the South Texas frontier, Brownsville appeared to be an exception to the dangers of the area. As long as there was a military presence, Chapman always felt optimistic about the potential of Brownsville as a city. But what happened at the turn of the nineteenth century after the frontier was officially declared closed? And, more important, how did outside perceptions about the area change and how did such perceptions affect the identity formation of the city of Brownsville?

The Lower Rio Grande Valley as an Exotic Landscape

Even after the 1890 United States Census revealed that the frontier no longer existed, areas like South Texas were still regarded as regions belonging to the same category of a frontier. One of the most notable examples is the writing of Captain...
John Gregory Bourke, a West Point graduate who served in the U.S. Army as a soldier, military ethnographer, and travel writer. Bourke was ordered to join his cavalry unit in South Texas, in 1891, after having also served for the Third United Cavalry as an ethnologist in places like Idaho, Texas, and New Mexico. Stationed at Fort Ringgold in Rio Grande City, Texas, “Captain Bourke traveled up and down the Rio Grande into what must have been for him and his readers the American heart of darkness.”

In an essay he wrote for *Scribner’s Magazine*, in 1894, entitled “The American Congo,” Bourke compares the region of South Texas and the LRGV to something resembling an African wilderness. Here, the LRGV borderlands are described as an exotic landscape with “chocolate soils,” mesquite trees, *nopales*, and noisy *urracas* and *chachalacas*. In *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies*, Jose David Saldivar observes that: “While Bourke painstakingly surveys the landscape, flora, and fauna, he remains oblivious to his project of imperial gazing—collecting, organizing, and aestheticizing the landscape, flora, and fauna.”

To help us more fully understand the actions of an explorer and the influence of his or her writings on the landscape, Yi-Fu Tuan makes the following observations:

*With the keeping of journals and field notes, and especially with their subsequent rewriting and publication, his private experiences—his temporary places of habitation—could gain access to and take hold on public consciousness and achieve thereby a higher degree of stability and permanence even though no physical manipulation of nature had occurred.*

Acting not only as a U.S. Army Captain and explorer, but also as a travel writer-ethnographer (or what Saldivar refers to as “frontier Americanist”), Bourke’s writing about the LRGV borderlands served to inform the northern American population about his own version of this region and its inhabitants. The main goal of his essay, after all, was “to lay before the readers of *Scribner’s* an
outline description, both of the territory under consideration, and the manners, customs, and superstitions of the Mexicans to be found within its limits.” Consequently, his collection of essays allowed for these—mostly negative—descriptions to take hold on the public consciousness of the readers of *Scribner’s Magazine* and *The Journal of American Folklore.*

As Saldivar correctly observes, “in ‘The American Congo’ there is not a simple, smoothed-over colonial discourse but a highly ambiguous and ethnically fraught study of Mexican *pelados* and *peones* who are represented by a Catholic Irish-American gunfighter like newly discovered species . . . .” For Bourke, just like for Chapman, it seems that the LRGV was still an area that remained open for American cultural incorporation. But the forces of the LRGV borderlands as both a cultural and geographic shield against the heartland’s definition of national identity are also acknowledged in Bourke’s essay. Foreshadowing the comments of Valerio-Jimenez, Bourke observes that “in general terms, the Rio Grande Mexican resists today, as he has always resisted, the encroachment of the Gringo, and the domination of his own Mexico.” Since Bourke is referring here specifically to the “Rio Grande Mexican,” however, it remains in question whether he really thought this was due more to the region’s lack of economic development than to its geographic location.

Moreover, in Bourke’s frontier (not *frontera*), border culture also becomes subjected to the powerful force of U.S. militarism. Bourke acknowledges that the area of the Rio Grande Valley remained a “sealed book, a *terra incognita*” to the rest of the United States because two “waves of North American aggression have swept across this region.” The first was the “advent of the army of General Zachary Taylor, in its march from Point Isabel, near the mouth of the Rio Grande, to Camargo, Monterrey, and Saltillo.” The second “arose during our own Civil War, when the needs of the Confederacy suggested the transportation of all the available cotton . . . across the Rio Grande to the Mexican side, and down to Matamoros . . . .” Here, Bourke correctly
highlights two specific examples where the LRGV borderland was reduced, in specific regional spatial terms, to the point of almost being erased from the national imaginary. Fort Ringgold, Fort McIntosh, and Fort Brown in South Texas, according to Saldivar, represented an imperialist military attempt to incorporate the region into the American heartland.  

Again, just like Chapman, Bourke also excludes Brownsville (and Matamoros) from his descriptions of the LRGV. Instead of including them in his generalizations of the area as a “Dark Belt,” he depicts them as places “in which are to be found people of as much refinement and good breeding as anywhere else in the world . . . .” Such exemptions about Brownsville from the rest of the region raise important questions, though: should the city of Brownsville be included in generalizations of the LRGV region? And, more important, is Brownsville’s identity affected at all by such generalizations of the region itself? After all, like many other cities along the Rio Grande, Brownsville only forms one part of this border region. However, after considering the defining role played by the military presence at Fort Brown in the founding of Brownsville and its subsequent success as a city, my own conclusions are that generalizations by the wife of the fort’s quartermaster (Helen Chapman) and those of a military captain like John Bourke are too important to be overlooked when trying to portray an accurate picture of the city’s identity.

If Chapman and Bourke have revealed something in their personal narratives about the LRGV borderlands, it is how difficult it has been to capture the identity of this region at one particular point in time. Instead, as Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp have suggested in their study of Brownsville and Matamoros, it is easier to examine the area through the context of its historical cycles of boom and bust. Kearney and Knopp identify four major factors that act as geographic determinants and affect the cycles of boom and bust in this region: a cultural factor, an economic factor, a military factor, and a spiritual
factor. So far, my place-identity analysis has focused mainly on the cultural and military factors of Brownsville, Texas. To help us characterize the historical cycles of Brownsville and the LRGV, I will replace Kearney’s and Knopp’s spiritual factor with literary narratives. But in order to understand how the economic factor can affect the place identity of the LRGV—and the identity of the city of Brownsville—let us first examine how the introduction of irrigation affected the conception of this region during the turn of the twentieth century.

The material transformation of the landscape in the LRGV borderlands—and with it, the geopolitical transformation of the region’s identity—did not take place until after the construction of military complexes like Fort Brown and Fort Ringgold. On the same note, the sociopolitical changes that resulted from the written accounts of figures like Helen Chapman and John G. Bourke contributed to the re-invention of the area as a new American region. However, starting in the late 1890s and early 1900s, former soldiers and Texas Rangers who had been stationed or had simply arrived to this area, such as William Ratcliffe, B. F. Yoakum, Sam Robertson, and H. G. Stillwell, Sr., proved even more influential in the material modification of the landscape in the LRGV than the written accounts of Chapman and Bourke. Together, their collective efforts helped to shape the modern identity of the region by truly transforming some of the ways in which residents of the LRGV lived and how they would be perceived throughout much of the twentieth century.

Creating the “Magic Valley” Myth

In “Inventing the ‘Magic Valley’ of South Texas, 1905-1941,” Christian Brannstrom and Mathew Neuman suggest that during the early-twentieth-century, land developers in the LRGV relied heavily on texts, images, and performances as a way to promote the material transformation of the landscape and to create the idea of the Magic Valley as a place myth
"Place myths," according to Brannstrom and Neuman, "are especially likely to appear when the place is relatively distant from economic and political centers, when direct experience with the place is brief, and when negative place myths have predominated." Specific written descriptions and photographic images in the form of promotional pamphlets, as well as staged performances about the LRGV were distributed as part of a collective effort to promote the idea of the “Magic Valley.” Used as a marketing strategy to increase land and water sales in the LRGV region, these place images—as Brannstrom and Neuman call them (italics mine)—were created and published by the land developers, railroad traffic managers, and magazine and newspaper owners of the region. Together, they comprise an entire literature to promote the idea of the Magic Valley place myth.

It is worth noting that the collective effort to promote the LRGV region as a “Magic Valley” began by the turn of the twentieth century, almost immediately after the arrival of the railroad to the region. Furthermore, these place images (texts, images, and performances) relied heavily on the material modifications of landscape—namely, that of the Rio Grande itself. Irrigation had already been introduced into the LRGV area prior to the invention of the Magic Valley place myth, but place images allowed for potential investors to see and read about the availability of irrigated land, irrigation water, and an abundant source of labor for the first time. Investors were not merely told about all these profitable opportunities but were also encouraged to come and see them for themselves.

As part of these performances, potential investors (or “prospects”) would arrive by train and form part of carefully choreographed tours of the region. In the case of John Shary—developer of the Sharyland farming subdivision in Mission and Alton, Hidalgo County—for example, such performances took the form of what Brannstrom and Nueman call “home-seeker tours” or “LRGV tours.” In these tours, according to the authors,
“Agents took great care to present the region according to the Magic Valley place myth by showcasing specific prospering orchards and the modernity of the irrigation and by using promotional talks by chosen community members.” On the same note, another major land developer, C. H. Swallow, even incorporated songs to accompany his own performances of the place myth after having invested heavily in pumps that were used to carry water out the river.

Another important example of how the Magic Valley place myth was created is through the reinvention of the local Hispanic population of the LRGV. Promoters succeeded in creating a “second place image of the LRGV” by describing Mexican laborers as hardworking rather than lazy and compliant rather than rebels or thieves. According to Brannstrom and Neuman, “This place image required especially careful re-inscription because of contrary Hispanophobia-infused place images.” The real challenge, then, was to replace a previously threatening place myth of the region with one that evoked a more positive, safe, and stable type of environment. In the 1918 pamphlet where the “Magic Valley” place-name was first mentioned, for example, promoters assured their potential investors that “the Mexican is very easy to get along with, and is not as treacherous and barbarous as many of our Northern friends think.”

If the essays of John G. Bourke were somewhat successful in promoting a negative idea of the LRGV into other parts of the country, they were completely overshadowed by the efforts of the “Magic Valley” place-myth advertisers. In an article by The New York Times, Wayne King highlights the importance of agriculture to the LRGV region more than fifty years after the first Magic Valley pamphlet had ever been published. Published a year after the 1983 freeze devastated the citrus production in Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy counties, King observes how great a part of the LRGV economy suffered as a direct result and how it was still largely dependent on the production of agricultural products:
The official non-farm unemployment figures are 16 percent in Cameron County, 25 in Hidalgo and 12 in Willacy. If farm workers are included, 50 percent, or nearly one in three of the workers in the four counties is unemployed. And next year the cut-back trees will bear meagerly or not at all. A third of the valley economy, for the near future, is gone. Furthermore, in a more recent article by The Brownsville Herald, experts concluded that rains caused by Hurricane Ingrid in 2013 helped LRGV farmers by raising water levels in the region’s reservoirs and by leaching salt out of previously dry soils.

My place-identity analysis about the LRGV and the city of Brownsville has focused mainly on the influence of a strong military presence in the region, coupled with that region’s economic expansion. But it is worth mentioning that Fort Brown, which provided the security that assured the success of Brownsville as a city, remained an active military post until 1944. The geographic isolation from political and economic centers of power caused the border region of the LRGV to experience periods of political and social instability as well as those of economic stagnation. Events such as the arrival of the railroad and commercial agriculture, of course, represented a boom period in the regional economy of the LRGV.

Agriculture had been an integral part of the LRGV economy for years prior to the creation of the Magic Valley place myth. Before its creation, however, the majority of South Texas residents still maintained close ties to old Spanish and Mexican ways of life. Spanish, for example, was still the predominant language throughout the region, Mexican pesos the main currency, and Hispanics or Tejanos ran cattle ranches and local politics. But after the advent of the railroad and the introduction of irrigation and commercial agriculture, the old way of life in the LRGV evolved and gave way to a new one; modernity had finally closed one of the last American frontiers.
The Literature of Brownsville

In a broad sense, literature often embraces the relationship that exists between geographical themes such as space, place, nature, and the environment. All writers, according to geographer Shelagh J. Squire, “whether intentionally or unconsciously, serve as cultural brokers, appropriating a landscape and its people and re-interpreting them for new audiences.” The important question to be raised here is to what extent can writers embrace this kind of relationship about a particular place? As it had been the case with the personal narratives of Brownsville (and the quasi-fictional representation of the LRGV), non-literary descriptions of a place can sometimes be misconceived, misguided, or simply misunderstood when taken at face value. The fictional examples that follow provide an alternative medium by which to study the characteristics of this city’s shifting identity.

Paredes’ Dialectics of History

The history of any region of the world cannot be fully appreciated without having first looked at its literature and literary figures. In the LRGV and Brownsville, Texas, no other writer has been as important in the study of this region’s history, ethnography, folklore, and identity as Américo Paredes. In 1989, Paredes was honored by the National Endowment for the Humanities as one of the first recipients of the Frankle Prize and with the Órden de Águila Azteca by the Mexican government, in 1990, for his studies of Mexican culture in the United States. Some have referred to Paredes’ work as a form of resistance to “Anglocentric hegemony” and others as a form of early Chicano narrative. Whether this is true or not, however, Paredes’ work does represent an important study about the social, cultural, and political identity of the LRGV region and the city of Brownsville. Moreover, according to Ramon Saldivar, Paredes’ work has “served as a backstop to historical memory in a period of official collective amnesia about their interrelationship.”
In *The Hammon and the Beans and Other Stories*, Paredes uses a series of short stories to illustrate the life in Brownsville at the turn of the 20th century and the struggle of its residents to identify as being Mexican or American. In “The Hammon and the Beans,” the narrator recalls his childhood in “Jonesville-on-the-Grande,” at a time when soldiers were still stationed at “Fort Jones.” The importance of the military post at Fort Brown (or Fort Jones) is highlighted in the story. Brownsville (or Jonesville-on-the-Grande), according to Ramon Saldivar, is depicted as “a place of diminished heroic quality and with all the feel of a town occupied by a conquering alien army.” Note, for example, how the presence of the fort dominates the entire community in the story, regulating even the day-to-day routine of those living outside its fences:

> Jonesville-on-the-Grande woke to the cannon’s roar, as if to battle, and the day began. At eight the whistle from the post laundry sent us children off to school. The whole town stopped for lunch with the noon whistle . . . . The post was the town’s clock, you might have said, or like some insistent older person who was always there to tell you it was time.

According to the narrator, soldiers had been stationed at Fort Jones because of “border troubles, ten years or so before.” What Paredes is referencing here is the de-railing of a train in Olmito, Texas, on October 18, 1915, by bands of Texas Mexicans that were led by Luis de la Rosa and Ancieto Pizaña; U.S. Cavalry and Texas Rangers forces were called to put a stop to these raids and to prevent future troubles on the border.

The narrator also describes how he felt whenever the bugle at the fort blew at night: “. . . it made me feel that I was all alone in the world. I would even doubt that I was really me, and that put me in such a fright that I felt like yelling out just to make sure I was really there . . . . And so we lived, we and the post, side by side, with the wire fence in between.” The only one who dared to enter the post was a poor girl named Chonita, who would watch the soldiers through the screens of the mess halls while they ate.
The narrator describes Chonita as “a poet,” who not only entered the post but also mocked the soldiers in front of a small group of kids by mimicking the soldiers “calling to each other through food-stuffed mouths.” “‘Give me the hammon and the beans!’” she yelled, “‘Give me the hammon and the beans!’”

Chonita’s staging serves to illustrate the cultural struggles that Mexican Americans living on the LRGV faced during the early 1900s. The best way for Chonita to rebel against these struggles is through language; her only option is to mix the dominant language of the soldiers with her own border Spanish. Chonita was, after all, “a poet” who later dies of “‘Pneumonia, flu, malnutrition, worms, the evil eye,’ [the doctor said] without turning around. ‘What the hell difference does it make?’” Paredes also reveals some of the dangers residents in Brownsville faced when it came to choosing a national identity during the Mexican Revolution and the raids of the Texas Rangers. This is best illustrated when the father of the narrator reveals that Chonita’s real father had been “shot and hanged from a mesquite limb” for “working too close to the tracks the day the Olmito train was derailed.”

At the end of the story, the narrator himself is still confused about his own identity. After learning that Chonita has died, for instance, he mixes current events in Mexico with what he has learned in school about Marion the Fox and the American Revolution: “I lay there for a long time while, behind my darkened eyelids, Emiliano Zapata’s cavalry charged down to the broad Santee, where there were grave men with hoary hairs.”

According to Ramón Saldivar, “The text of her story [the girl’s name is a diminutive of Encarnación or Incarnation] thus becomes . . . an occasion for the expression of a symbolically deferred solution to the determinate contradictions of history in the present.” Chonita’s tragic end, in other words, becomes the best tool for Paredes to express the contradictions that existed between this period’s past with its present.
The Use of Place in Oscar Casares’s Brownsville

In many respects, the goal of literature involves a personal quest to find one’s identity. That identity can be shaped by a variety of factors that can range from what we eat to the social interactions we might experience at different stages of our lives. In Brownsville: Stories, Oscar Casares writes about what it was like to live in a city where one’s quest for identity is primarily linked to one major factor: place. Place, as the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has observed, “. . . is a product of the physical transformation of nature.” The use of place in fiction can have a profound impact in some of the ways people might identify with their own physical and personal surroundings. Oscar Casares’s short story collection is the best example of how a sense of place in Brownsville, Texas, can be recreated by a writer through the fictional transformation of nature.

In “Mr. Z,” a story about a boy named Diego who is eager to work at a local fireworks stand, Casares’ description of place focuses on the stands’ location in relation to the landscape. Notice, for example, how Casares links nature with the firework stands in the following passage:

The fireworks stands were just beyond the city limits sign of Brownsville, Texas. The long and narrow wooden structures were scattered along the dry edge of the highway like giant matches that had fallen from the sky. Behind the stands, the flat sorghum fields stretched for a couple of miles until they reached the Río Grande.

Moreover, Casares goes on to describe the trip Diego takes with his father on his way to his first day of work. Again, note how Casares uses the environment along the ride to portray Diego’s desire to work in the following passage:

They cracked the windows open at the top to let in the cool air. The sky was ash gray, as it had been for the past week. On the way to the stands they passed the cafés along International Boulevard, the panadería and its glorious sent of fresh sweet bread, the restaurant that sold barbacoa on Sunday mornings, the service station where the father had worked as a young man.
In many works of fiction, according to Yi-Fu Tuan, “physical objects and settings are intimately woven together with human moods and behavior, as they are in real life.”

Casares uses similar descriptions of place in “Chango,” a story about a young man named Bony, who finds the head of a monkey in his front yard. Chango is the name Bony has given to the monkey’s head, and which Bony has chosen to replace a friend who has been recently killed in a car accident. Consider, for example, the trip Bony takes around the city, with Chango riding on the front seat of his car:

They travelled down Paredes, Coffee Port Road, Fourteenth Street, 802, Central, and Boca Chica. Going everywhere and nowhere at the same time. People were in a hurry to get places, but Bony and Chango were taking their time. On Palm Boulevard, they passed the big, expensive houses with trimmed lawns and then turned left at the first light. They drove another block and stopped in a parking lot across the street from the zoo.

In this passage, Casares takes the reader for a ride around the city before Bony decides to make a final stop at Lincoln Park and dump Chango at a nearby resaca. By choosing to let go of Chango, Bony has finally learned that it is impossible to recreate the past. The physical transformation of nature in this story—through the triumph of streets and parks over animals and resacas—serves to heighten the personal isolation of its main character. Here, Brownsville also serves almost as another character, a place where people can come to when they find themselves in times of trouble or personal pain.

A similar example of personal pain is when a character experiences place dislocation, or what environmental psychologist Harold M. Proshansky et al. refer to as “place aversion,” which may take place where physical settings such as the home, school or neighborhood threaten the self-identity conceptions of the individual. In Brownsville, this example is perhaps more evident in “Domingo,” a story of a Mexican immigrant who has left his wife back in Ciudad Mante after coming to Brownsville to work as a yardman. Describing Domingo’s loneliness, Casares writes how:
He wished he could go back and be with his wife, cross the bridge and buy a ticket for the next bus headed south. But he had to remind himself that he had been home less than a month earlier and getting back across was becoming more difficult with immigration authorities stationed along the river.78

According to Proshansky et al., “‘learning to live alone’ can be as much of a problem in relation to a new or different physical setting as it is to the new experience of being alone in one’s home and not being able to converse with others on a regular basis.”79 But this sense of place dislocation, however, is not the only cause afflicting Domingo. Great part of his personal pain comes from the memory of the tragic death of his daughter, Sara, who fell into a pit of burning coals when she was still a baby. Even though this tragedy happened over twenty years ago, Domingo continues to blame himself for the incident. Moreover, his relationship with God was also tarnished after Domingo prayed for a miracle to save his daughter and nothing happened. After the incident, Domingo promised never to speak to God again.

When Domingo finally decides to make peace with God, he goes to Levee Street where the Virgin Mary has supposedly appeared on the bark of a tree. After climbing to the top of the tree, he not only finds peace with God but he also finds himself in a position where both his sense of personal dislocation and loneliness are no longer necessary. As Casares explains:

> When he opened his eyes, he gazed out toward the horizon, farther than he had ever imagined he could. He looked across the river, past the nightclub lights on Obregón, past the shoe shine stands in Plaza Hidalgo, past the bus station where he caught his long ride home, past all the little towns and ranchitos on the way to Ciudad Victoria . . . and finally, past the years of sorrow he had spent remembering his little girl, past all this . . . .

80

In other words, it is in this place where Domingo is able to achieve what Proshansky et al. refer to as “place-belongingness,” the result of a physical setting that positively affects the
self-identity conceptions of the individual. Furthermore, the use of nature is also present in this story, as Casares chooses a tree instead of a church as the place for Domingo’s religious experience to happen.

These three stories offer more than mere descriptions of Brownsville, Texas. They are all set in a city that has historically thrived with the transformation of its environment—namely, that of the Rio Grande itself. In Brownsville, Casares offers a fictional representation of the Brownsville he lived in throughout his youth, a city whose identity is as ambiguous as the characters in his stories. They also demonstrate that for Casares, the ideal place is more than just somewhere where things happen; it is literally where stories are created.

Conclusion

My analysis on the geography, historical cycles, personal and literary narratives about the LRGV and Brownsville suggests that the identity of this city has been affected by a variety of factors since the U.S.-Mexico border was officially established when the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed in 1848. A major factor that continues to affect the identity of Brownsville is geography. The geography of the LRGV suggest that the Rio Grande played a fundamental role in the political, cultural, and economic development of Brownsville, Texas. The river also played an important part in the formation of a regional place-identity, which sometimes contrasted with new or pre-existing national identities (i.e., American or Mexican). Furthermore, a relative geographic isolation from political and economic centers made the LRGV region more autonomous than it otherwise would have been.

The historical cycles of the LRGV and Brownsville suggest that both military and economic factors played a strong role in the identity construction of the region. These two factors heightened the juxtaposition between regional and national
identity that existed during different periods of this region’s history. The city of Brownsville, Texas, would simply not have existed without the Mexican-American War. The construction of Fort Texas (later Fort Taylor) in 1846 helped secure the area adjacent to Matamoros, Tamaulipas, on the northern banks of the Rio Grande. After the fort was moved and renamed (Fort Brown) to the location where it would remain for almost a century, the city of Brownsville began to grow slowly next to the military post. Furthermore, the physical manipulation of the environment not only served to transform the entire economy of the LRGV but it also proved to be fundamental in the creation of the Magic Valley place myth.

Lastly, my empirical evidence on the personal and literary narratives about the LRGV and Brownsville demonstrates that it is essential to understand the geographic, historic, and cultural characteristics of the LRGV in order to understand those of Brownsville. On the one hand, Helen Chapman and John Bourke’s descriptions of the LRGV suggests that the region was seen both as an extension of the Wild West and a last frontier. Consequently, the region and its residents were also considered by both observers as backward (both culturally and economically). On the other hand, however, the writings of Chapman and Bourke reveal how difficult it can be to capture the identity of this region at one particular point in time. Finally, the fictional works of Americo Paredes and Oscar Casares reveal that the identity of the city is as ambiguous as that of the characters in their stories. For these writers, Brownsville is more than a place where events just happen. Here, Brownville can hurt, heal, or be confusing to live in, but, in the end, it is always linked with their personal quest for identity.
Endnotes


7 See Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp, *Border Cuates: A History of the U.S.-Mexican Twin Cities* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1995). Kearney and Knopp identify the unique “twin city phenomenon” that appeared along the U.S.-Mexico border over the centuries, giving birth to such border sets as San Diego and Tijuana, Caleixico and Mexicali, El Paso and Cd. Juarez, Laredo and Nuevo Laredo, McAllen and Reynosa, and Brownsville and Matamoros. Moreover, they point out the distinctions between each set of twin cities, arguing that “The story of these twin cities is as distinct from the general history of the border as the life story of human twins is distinct from the history of their family.” *Border Cuates*, 1-2.


11 When the fort was relocated and renamed (Fort Brown) in 1848, land speculator and merchant Charles Stillman decided to establish his town.
next to the new fort. Border Cuates, 61-62. Also, the arrival of the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railroad in 1904 allowed for citrus farmers such as H. G. Stillwell, Sr., to transport their local produce to other parts of the country. Handbook of Texas Online, Alicia A. Garza and Christopher Long, “Brownsville, TX,” accessed February 11, 2017, http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hdb04.

12 See Paul Horgan, Great River, 801-802. According to Horgan, “Far into the twentieth century the vagaries of the river’s course would keep an international commission at work adjusting problems of ownership and sovereignty raised by sudden storm changes in the channel.”

13 It is important to note that the political line that was established after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo did not alienate Mexicans from Americans, or vice versa; people continued to cross the river back and forth as they had done before. For many of those living in both Brownsville and Matamoros, the new border served only as a new ideological boundary between the two nations. Also, and perhaps most important, the signing of the treaty itself did not ensure the foundation of Brownsville. However, the military presence on the northern side of the river before and after the Mexican-American War did. Kearney and Knopp, Border Cuates, 71-74.


15 Américo Paredes, With His Pistol in His Hand (1958; reprinted, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003), 15.

16 Ibid., 12-13.

17 Saldívar, Border Matters, 35.

18 Velerio-Jiménez, River of Hope, 4.

19 Ibid., 9-10.

20 Ibid., 10-11.

21 Kearney and Knopp, Boom and Bust, 48-51.

22 Valero-Jiménez, River of Hope, 10.

25 It is believed that Major Chapman “provide[d] reliable information on the new location of the fort and its exact boundaries” to Stillman. Boom and Bust, 69.


26  In a letter written on October 1, 1848, Chapman assured her mother that she was safe: “He must be a bold villain who would attempt to pass a sentinel with loaded musket and into a place from where there would be no escape. Around our house and government depot, it is as tranquil and peaceful as if there were no thieves, murderers and desperate men in the world.” Exactly two years later on October 1, 1850, Chapman again assures her mother that “Inside the garrison, we are in a different world from those living in town. No thief or murder ever ventures within range of a sentinel’s musket.” *Ibid.*, 81, 186-187.


29  Comparing how things were before and after the Mexican-American War, for example, Chapman continued by writing the following lines to her mother: “Besides there is something in seeing barbarism and civilization side by side, that affects you strangely. You feel the irresistible necessity that one race must subdue the other and, where the moral precepts are not keen and delicate, they, of the superior race, can easily learn to look upon themselves as men of Destiny, impelled to conquer and subdue by the great design of Providence.” *Ibid.*, 134.


31  In a letter dated January 4, 1849, Chapman observed that compared to all the other towns in Cameron County, “Brownsville is by far the most flourishing town, and has received such a fair start that people of judgment think it cannot easily decline. Most of the houses are of a temporary character and the population is as motley as you can ever conceive — drawn together I believe from every nation on the globe.” *Ibid.*, 107.


34  Saldívar, *Border Matters*, 166.


Other essays by Bourke also include “The Miracle Play of the Rio Grande” and “Popular Medicine, Customs, and Superstitions of the Rio Grande,” published subsequently in 1893 and 1894 in *The Journal of American Folklore*.


*Ibid*.


In his study of the approximately two thousand settlers who arrived in the LRGV between 1850 and 1900 and their significant contributions to the cultural life of the region, Thomas Daniel Knight observes that “The forts also played important roles in the local economies, bolstering economic growth through federal appropriations and employing local citizens in constructing, cleaning, and supplying the fortifications. In addition, the forts provided protection against smugglers, rustlers, and disgruntled figures bent on rebellion. This protection stimulated local economic growth through protecting material property and capital investment, leading to the expansion of both Brownsville and Rio Grande City.” Thomas Daniel Knight, “Immigration to South Texas, 1850-1900,” in *Still More Studies in Rio Grande Valley History*, ed. Milo Kearney, Anthony Knopp, and Antonio Zavaleta (Brownsville, TX: The University of Texas at Brownsville, 2014), 56-57.


*Ibid.*, 139-140.

According to Brannstrom and Neuman, prospective land purchasers were encouraged by Swallow and his agents to sing to the tune of “Beulah Land”: “This Valley cares not for the rain / No drought can ever mar its name / By telephone the water comes / To grow our crops and build our home.”


57 According to Kearney and Knopp, “The concentration of U.S. military forces where they were needed for the war in Europe and the Pacific led to the War Department’s categorization on August 25, 1944, of Fort Brown as a surplus military installation, leading to its closure.” *Boom and Bust*, 237.

58 Brannstrom and Neuman, “Inventing the Magic Valley,” 126.


60 For a study on the “ethnographic and anti-imperialist literary work” of Paredes, see, for example, José David Saldivar, “Américo Paredes and Decolonization,” chapter in *Border Matters*, 36-56. Also, for an articulate analysis of Paredes’ literary themes, see Ramón Saldivar, *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 47-55.


Américo Paredes, *The Hammon and The Beans*, 4-5.

Ibid., 6.

Ibid., 6-7.

Ibid., 8.

Ibid., 9.


Casares, *Brownsville*, 64.

Harold M. Proshansky et al., “Place-Identity,” 76.

Casares, *Brownsville*, 77.

Harold M. Proshansky et al., “Place-Identity,” 80.


Harold M. Proshansky et al., “Place-Identity,” 76.
The Complexity of Land Custody in 19th Century Deep South Texas

by

Eugene Fernandez

The following treatise concerns itself with the factual conditions and events that addressed land ownership, literally from the Post-Conquest Period of Mexico up to and including the initial development of the town site of Brownsville, Texas. The zone of influence is centered geographically on the area which encompasses the limits of the 1781 Spanish Land Grant—“El Potrero del Espíritu Santo” and its juncture with the Rio Grande River frontage of the Villa de Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico.

This paper addresses a goodly number of individual subjects which heretofore may have been shrouded in confusion, mystery, and/or even misconception for historians and non-historians alike. It is both recognizable and understandable that such vagueness has surrounded the general topics addressed in this discussion, primarily for reasons that they are intrinsically complex, by their incursions into the fields of international treaties, foreign and domestic laws as apply to real estate, and seemingly unfathomable references into the genealogy of very intricate and expansive Hispanic lineages.

To issue a valid starting point for this discussion, we rightfully should begin with a brief focus on the activity surrounding the Spanish Land Grant that was issued to José Salvador de la Garza in 1781, entitled the Espíritu Santo Grant. These original lands consisted of 59 leagues, or approximately 261,275.6 acres of territory, and encompassed the range from a bit less than eight miles downriver of present-day Brownsville, to about where present-day San Pedro, Texas, is situated, upriver by slightly more than eight miles, then northward to the Arroyo Colorado.¹
As time passed, this region endured a series of changes in national sovereignty, and, with each change, came the responsibility by the grantee to register their holdings with the successive governments. Bear in mind, from 1781 New Spain, to 1821 Mexico, to 1836 Republic of Texas, and finally to 1845 United States, the requirement of formal land registration was rigidly demanded of all claimants at each separate passage.

Thus enters the first huge vulnerability by the heirs of this tract (Espíritu Santo), to threaten title throughout the period which began with the formation of the Mexican Republic and ended with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The specific point in this scenario being, the historical record reveals a series of defaults on the part of the continuance of heirs to these lands to properly secure land title rights by registration, occurring between 1821 through 1848. Many accounts reflect that María Josefa Cavazos, in particular, was defiant on the point that she held what was referred to as a “Forever Document” - that is, the King of Spain vested ownership in her and all heirs of her lineage “forever to hold these lands…,” unless they transferred by sale or legal abandonment. This point was eventually defended by both Mexican and United States authorities, but the exhaustive legal process extended into very lengthy proceedings. Of the numerous menacing “Clouded Title” junctures that hovered over these lands, this was the first and foremost hurdle that was in need of settlement, but the issue became moot, as far as Mexico was concerned, in the aftermath of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Dona Josefa no longer had an obligation to bow down to the demands of Mexico, but the burden of proof of rightful ownership just shifted from her facing south to her now facing north. In the fall of 1850, the newly organized Bourland-Miller Commission arrived in South Texas from Austin to positively carry out the formal registration of all lands, and there was no way that Madam Cavazos’ simple argument about a forever document would hold any weight in this new arena. She was compelled to yield a complete and formal registration or suffer consequences of her property being reclassified as public lands.
The Land Grant Partitions Must Not Be Confused

The Espiritu Santo Land Grant, as it was issued to José Salvador de la Garza in 1781, was one finite parcel of land, and was maintained as such throughout his lifetime. In 1802, this property carried down to his three offspring, Francisca Xaviera de la Garza, Blas María de la Garza, and María Antonia Margarita de la Garza. Thus, three major divisions of the grant lands were formed at that point. Of major importance in this conversation is the focus on specifically two major segments of the original grant:

a. Share #1 (remaining as such numeration), which was eventually given to the possession of José Salvador’s granddaughter, Estefana Goseascochea Cavazos-Cortina through her mother, José Salvador’s daughter, Francisca Javiera. These were the lands that were directly associated with Estefana’s side of the family (Juan Nepomuceno Cortina’s mother). They are better known as the Rancho Viejo, or Rancho del Carmen lands.

b. Share (which was to become numbered) #22, which was given to José Salvador’s grandniece, María Josefa Cavazos, indirectly through his son, Blas María.

In error, some written accounts mistakenly tie these two property divisions together, and several accounts even go so far as to claim that María Josefa illegally sold off the Cortina inheritance without consideration for a second marriage’s progeny. There was no second marriage. This confusion involved reference to Estefana’s marriages to Francisco Cavazos and then to Trinidad Cortina. In actuality, Cortina was fully aware of how the major divisions of the Espiritu Santo were split up at the time that this movement was occurring. It was his successive biographers who got confused, most likely over the two separate Cavazos entities. In actuality, Estefana’s first husband, José
María Francisco Vicente Cavazos is virtually unknown to have any tie to any other branch of this greater family group, by prior relation or afterwards, and certainly not by any inheritance. No verifiable genealogical evidence supports a connection. Of Doña Estefana’s second husband, Trinidad Cortina, he begins and ends with no further information of his pedigree other than that he was a lawyer, and that he once was the mayor of Camargo.⁷

Dona Josefa’s father, Maximo Cavazos Gutierrez, is traceable as being the son of José Narciso Cavazos González, the Grantee of the San Juan de Carricitos Grant. Upon the 1802 death of José Salvador’s son, Blas María (who had no children), began the partitioning of his particular assets into two segments, of which 4/5ths were distributed to his widow, María Francisca Cavazos, and the remaining 1/5th to her niece, María Josefa Cavazos. That configuration was further memorialized through a united family council action of formal partitioning that took place in the year of 1835, yielding all of these lands over to María Josefa.⁸ Throughout the years there has been much confusion over who sold what land, and the two afore-mentioned matriarchs were definitely juxtaposed and confused on points of attributes by successive historians and biographers.

All through the period that the legal battles were raging through the courts for parcels of Espiritu Santo lands, María Estefana’s son by a second marriage, Juan N. Cortina, witnessed this milieu at close range. His being illiterate did not help matters, so he did not have the benefit of being able to research the written record. What he did see was his mother and her cousin, María Josefa (separately) locked constantly in fierce battles over land. Ironically, the saving grace for them was their strong will and high intuitive intellect, which ultimately allowed them to stave off the major portion of the legal assaults. Irony exists indeed, however, that the main complaint that motivated Juan Cortina to lash out against the social injustice of land-transfer trickery, did not hold any great weight in connection with extreme south Texas grants. The grants pertaining to lands
situated further north and inland, such as the San Juan de Carrecitos (relative to the King and Kenedy ranches), is a whole separate story.

**New York-Brownsville Land Company Enters the Picture**

This article begins with a forewarning of the complexity surrounding the acquisition and maintenance of land title rights, and true to form, the preceding was just the first step in arriving at a point whereby one could even rightfully contemplate presenting any real estate into the legal commercial current. Advancing to the forming of the Townsite of Brownsville in June of 1848, the commencement of a verbal contract between parties (as opposed to a formal pact signed on December 9, 1848)\(^9\) launched an enterprise which bound Connecticut-born capitalist Charles Stillman, Simon Mussina, and Samuel Belden together as partners to acquire real property for trade and development. Stillman was the earliest of this trio to arrive by far, having been brought to Matamoros, Mexico, by his father, in 1828. The afore-mentioned group were among the first to lead the rush to secure lands, abruptly on the heels of the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (May 30, 1848), which ended the Mexican-American War.

The “Stillman Purchase” which essentially founded the Townsite of Brownsville, was consummated with the heirs of Maria Josefa Cavazos, niece of Blas Maria De la Garza, son of the original Grantee. The reported value of this sale was approximately $33,000.00 in 1848 currency, contrasting with the realistic value of the land at that time which was $214,000.00.\(^{10}\) To further complicate the issue, there is no record of Stillman ever having surrendered payment for said lands. This original Townsite Purchase took in 4,676 acres of what had formerly been termed the “*labores*” (pastures) of Matamoros, on the north bank of the Rio Grande. These parcels possess special titles and are called in legal terms, emphyteutic titles (a leasehold
possession). They can be inherited, but “terminable at will by the grantor.” These were technically “Possessory Rights” for the labores, following the most credible point of custody from a qualified seller.

An interesting and cunning way by which Stillman “hedged” his purchases and sales of the Brownsville Townsite lands, knowing full well that there were troubling issues of valid ownership, incorporated the simultaneous buy-up of Texas Land Script and Headrights on the open market for pennies on the dollar (about $0.50/acre), to stand as “insurance” for his prospective buyers. He openly offered this form of security, knowing full well that the issue of valid land titles was a concern in the marketplace at the time.

Upon the conclusion of negotiations with the Cavazos interests, Stillman took the immediate and pre-emptive initiative to hire Nueces County Deputy Surveyor George Lyon to lay out the townsite by survey in mid-1848 and this settlement was named Brownsville. The Brownsville-New York Land Company, as they styled their union, then stepped forward to petition the State of Texas for rights of civic development at some point within that same year. Cameron County had just received approval to exist by the Second Texas State Legislature on February 12, 1848. This first attempt to register the township was quickly nullified by the State of Texas on “Clouded Title” issues, drawn from a lawsuit filed on January 12, 1849 by Rafael Garcia Cavazos, husband of Maria Josefa Cavazos. It was not until February 7, 1853, that the incorporation rights were reinstated, although the larger issue of title problems associated with the Brownsville site was not brought to settlement until the year 1879 and various aspects of perfected registration lingered yet for an additional decade.

Confusion arose quickly over hierarchies of ownership, considering the large overlay of terrain of Matamoros’ municipal labores upon the Stillman Purchase. The focus now shifts to those “famous” two parcels of land which were part of the “ejidos” (town commons) of Matamoros: the Federal Reserve of Fort
Brown (358.08 acres) and the future Townsite of Brownsville (4,676 acres). To digress, in the 1826 period of the laying out of Matamoros, certain lands were legally appropriated for municipal purposes. The four square leagues of land that were surveyed for total municipal acquisition extended in the four directions aligned from Matamoros’ main plaza. The northern range of boundary lay across the river into what would become Texas in 1836. María Josefa’s cousin, María Estefana Cavazos-Cortina, having possession of Share #1 of the Espiritu Santo lands, negotiated a carve-out to exclude her affected ranch lands at Rancho Viejo and Rancho San José.¹⁵ Similar accommodations were made within María Josefa’s Share #19.

This property on the north bank of the Rio Grande was governed by the State of Tamaulipas and the city of Matamoros, to be leased as pasture lands in its “ejidos” to individuals. This practice was carried out all the way up to 1846, when Taylor came into the area, mainly due to the fact that the lands of “The Nueces Strip” were held in dispute up to that point and Mexico claimed the benefit of the doubt. The Fort Brown range, as an example, was held under active lease (título de labor) issued by the State of Tamaulipas, through the Villa de Matamoros, to the Antonio Salinas family,¹⁶ and the large portion situated within the center of the future Stillman Purchase lands located in the heart of the townsite was controlled by a similar arrangement to an individual by the name of Felix Fuentes who resided in Matamoros at that time.¹⁷ By all evidence, when Stillman and other early land speculators first sought out the “owners” of these lands, they were shown “valid” grants issued by the Government of Tamaulipas to individuals by the names of Ramírez, Salazar, Farías, Zamora, Salinas, and Fuentes as proof of ownership, all of which held title to labores that skirted the river across from Matamoros. The trouble with that equation was three-fold:

1.) Labores in question were not recognized after 1848 by the State of Texas, being that the national boundary clarification
was cemented by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. All of the immediate Texas/Mexico border settlements which had commons that extended across the Rio Grande experienced the forfeiture of those lands. Texas laws recognized the ancient title as superior over a leasehold appropriation.  

2.) Most importantly, the initial appropriation of municipal lands required that the Government of the State of Tamaulipas pay the holder of the property a reasonable fee prior to the taking of the property.

3.) The appropriated lands were never paid for. This issued a condition of default by the Mexican state which ultimately voided the transfers, and reverted title back to the original grantee, the Cavazos heirs. The Clouded Title condition prevailed from the time of Stillman's contract initiation and was finally lifted by the United States Supreme Court ruling of October Term 1879, in favor of Cavazos by virtue of the title custody as explained above.

It must also be added that the Municipality of Matamoros formally bowed out of any claims or interest therein by a congressional resolution which prescribed that: “In no case could an expropriation be established (by Matamoros) without previous compensation, and as this had not been made for the ejidos situated on the left bank of the Rio Grande, the corporation of Matamoros had not acquired any property in them, and that in consequence they were preserved to their ancient owners”. The “ancient owners” in this case awarded back to the grantees Cavazos.

To punctuate the final attitude of the courts as applied toward the shift in favor of honoring “ancient title” rights, it was not said any better than was seen in the case of Salinas v. William Kellogg et al. (1886). This case addressed the disposition of the Fort Brown land that was pressed into use by an act of war. The jury award stated, “….judgement was rendered to the effect that
.....they take nothing by their suit or pleas therein excepting James Stillman, Thomas Carson, Administrator Estate of María Josefa Cavazos... that all right, title, and interest and to the premises and property be divested out of all parties and vested in said Stillman, Carson and Cavazos.... are also entitled to have and recover all rents, etc., for use and occupation of said premises from the year 1846”. Or in Brownsville v. Cavazos (1879), “.... had not acquired any property in them, and that in consequence they were preserved to their ancient owners”.

There again, the Salinas interests held an inferior title that ultimately came to be recognized as an action of trespass over land that was owned, stemming back to the original land grant, and then onward to the inheritor (from the grantee), María Josefa Cavazos.

The Texas Constitution Prohibits Federal Public Land

To clarify a colossal misconception about how land title registration was carried out after the 1836 formation of the Republic of Texas, a statute was issued which decreed that “... the Spanish and Mexican Land Grants were to be maintained and confirmed, along with the Spanish system of land measurement and division as well.” To follow upon Texas’ entry into the Union in 1845, Texas retained its public lands, not the federal government.19 Hence there may be some confusion over the removal of Article X of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, as applies strictly to Texas. Then, in September of 1850, Texas moved to confirm land grants by statute, and created the Bourland-Miller Commission to summarily register and award these lands a proper title, if sufficient legal proof of prior ownership were submitted.

Please allow a moment in this discussion to more fully explain the ramifications of the action that were sanctioned by the Texas Constitution for the state’s retention of public lands. This provision differs immensely from what was policy as applied to the Great Plains states, in the Western Expansion.
“Public Lands” were the norm in Colorado, Utah, the Dakotas, and such. These territories were absorbed as “Indian Territory” in the Great Migration of the Manifest Destiny movement. There were no pre-existing claims through state sanction, as would have been construed as such by a European “civilized” system. The ancient titles are relative to a European system, as was perpetuated by Spanish development of the Southwest. Both the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the Texas Constitution, and to some degree those states of Arizona and New Mexico (at least in the southern ranges), honored the Spanish system of land title and measurement. This system was similar enough to comprehend, in that it drew parallel roots to English Common Law; hence, it could be easily embraced by the new national order.

On the other extreme, for those states that did not retain state control over public lands, this great land mass was funneled into the domain of the Federal Land Office. This is where the confusion embedded itself in the minds of the settlers that entered into extreme South Texas after 1848. They were under the impression that the former lands of Mexico were ripe for the picking, under squatter’s rights. There were even elaborate local movements led by personages such as Rice Garland that fomented such an atmosphere. Formidable a task as it appeared to be, the movement was quashed within a relatively short period, not to mention how much effort was needed to dismember the filibustering movement of José María de Jesús Carbajal, and his ill-fated plan to form a splinter territory for eleven months of 1840, known as the Republic of the Sierra Madre.20

The Building of a Community

The preceding explanation was necessary to set the foundation for how Brownsville had to “get its house in order” and unravel the mayhem of land ownership, before it could even contemplate coming into compliance with state laws regulating such matters. However, now that the break with Mexico, the
granting of statehood, and the ratification of City Charter were all issues of the past, there were still to be found the loose ends of improper land title registration within the townsite. Nowhere in the entirety of what was to become Texas’ Lower Cameron County in the 1850’s, was there a more convoluted title path to real property than was seen in the settlement of Block #87 of Stillman’s Original Purchase, otherwise known as Market Square. To ascertain what went into the final “appropriation” of the land on which the Market House and City Hall were to come to be situated, it is important to go into detail over what manner of dealings were performed to culminate in city ownership of that site. This makes for an interesting yet confusing story, much more intense a profile than that which was typically maintained throughout many of the land transactions within the Rio Grande Basin.

Commencing in 1848 and somewhat stabilizing by 1852, the layout of Market Square slowly and confusingly materialized. Many of the first claims of lot ownership reflect back to entities such as Felix Fuentes, who was listed as Grantee of lands from the labores of Matamoros (Grantor being the State of Tamaulipas), and then one witnesses the entry of characters like William Patterson, Thomas Buchanan, Adolphus Landolt, Charles McDonald, and J.B. Devillers, as these lands or portions thereof transferred away from the holders of the labores. This second wave were obviously early land speculators from which Basse and Hord had to wrest some semblance of proper title possession for this property, so as to allow for induction into the townsite.

By the fact that Maria Josefa was reticent, even defiant in her reluctance to respond to the pleas of the State of Tamaulipas, post-independence from Spain, the state took it upon itself to issue not only títulos de labores, but full-fledged land grants to portions of her lands. In the case of that apron of lands which constituted the (future) Brownsville labores, the overlap was extremely confusing, and nobody contested the authority of the Mexican government in that active period from 1821 through
1848. A prime example can be observed in the case of the Salinas (Miguel) heirs and the Fort Brown land. They out-right resisted any claims that they were not fully possessed of ownership to these lands. Because the national/political landscape had been turned on its ear from when they had first invested in these parcels, they were proven to be wrong in their assumption.

As applied to the real estate that lies within the Original Townsite of Brownsville, settling the issues of title for the Fort Brown land was simplistic, as was to be compared to what was to unfold in the process of registering the “appropriated land” of the Market Place/City Hall development into the hands of the city. It is now that “appropriation” enters the picture again, through the maneuvering whereby the Land Company acquired property for municipal use, through its intermediary (if not *De Facto*) agents, Basse and Hord. Of the twelve lots affected within Block #87, the future Market Square would emerge by absorbing an alleyway and consume seventy feet of property on either side of that centerline. This parcel would effectively be 140 feet in width, by the length of a standard city block (300 feet). The record is replete with QCD’s (Quit Claim Deeds) and the results were manifested by October 31, 1850. It is obvious that the various owners of those twelve lots of Block #87 conceded to the 70-foot appropriation encroachment, through the reasoning that the 50’ x 50’ lots remaining would increase in property value by virtue of proximity to the center of commerce that the market/city hall would provide. By decree, the Stillman Land Company “donated” the public space. However, technically, the individual lot owners surrendered the property by QCD. Appearing as somewhat of an afterthought, on the 18th of April of 1899, more so perhaps as a legal finale (or housekeeping effort), was the formal deed to the “Market House” from the Township Company to the City of Brownsville.
Was the “Forever Document” Really Forever?

Arriving into the present moment, surely the salient question would be, what was the final outcome of the tangled legal mess that presided over the lands of the Espiritu Santo Grant? The answer to that question would be, that it did not take very much time at all for a leveling effect to occur. In fact, the 19th Century was barely even drawn to a close before the real property accounts were completely transferred out of the possession of the original “forever ownership” hands. Land title records of Cameron County were entered in a fast and furious manner as the dawn of the Twentieth Century came upon us. These recorded transactions memorialize a chain of custody from a society which was land rich and cash poor, over to a segment which had deep pockets and were driven into intoxication with the thought that the land boom would last forever.

María Josefa’s branch were all but spent out of their inheritances by 1910, as is sadly revealed by a public affidavit that was recorded by Franklin Cushman Pierce, President of Brownsville Title Company. The fairness of Stillman’s (and others) dogged pursuit over lands which had seemingly been perfected to her by due process from 1852 by the State of Texas, can be questioned, in retrospect. By comparison, other landed families, such as the Hinojosa, the Longoria, the Treviño, were essentially through with the burden of proof of land ownership directly after the Bourland and Miller registration process completed its mission.

The branch that represented her counterpart, María Estefana, was in the same condition, and the Juan N. Cortina element stood out starkly, in that it took naught. Charles Stillman, in a deposition that he gave, in 1859, before Governor Sam Houston, stated, “...Juan Nepomucino Cortinas, the leader and principal actor in all these difficulties, has never owned any land in Texas, nor has any of his comrades or members of his band; nor is any citizen, of Mexican origin, who
is a land owner in Cameron county, an aider or an abetter of Cortinas. They have always considered themselves belonging to Matamoras (sic), and have always hailed from there when abroad. The records of Cameron County do not show that they, or any of them, have ever lost, or even had a lawsuit for land in Texas.”

Time showed that the courthouse steps was the last place that Cortina would have been likely to frequent, being that he had cast his lot totally in contradiction to the system that would otherwise have provided him comfort for the entirety of his born days. One would suppose that it might have been hard to shake five indictments for murder, one indictment for assault with intent to kill, three indictments for cattle-stealing, and one for treason, all within a span of seven years between 1859 and 1866, and only for Cameron County.

The Brownsville History Association

Endnotes


13 Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Secretary of State, Statutory Documents Section, 1848-1994.

14 U.S. Supreme Court, Brownsville v. Salinas, 100 U.S. 138 (1894), Syllabus, Justia.

15 U. S. Supreme Court, Brownsville v. Cavazos 100 U.S. 138 (1879), Syllabus, Justia, p. 115.

16 U.S. Supreme Court, Brownsville v. Salinas, 100 U.S. 158 (1894), Syllabus, Justia.


19 *Ibid*.

18 Jerry Thompson, *loc. cit*.

19 Galen Greaser and de la Teja, *loc. cit*.

20 Jerry Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

21 Cameron County Miscellaneous Deed Records.
22  Betty Bay, *op. cit.*


25  Cameron County Deed Records, general search.

26  United States Congressional Serial Set, Volume 1709, Appendix C, No. 7, Texas Frontier Troubles, People of Brownsville to the President, Affidavit of Charles Stillman.

“Not in Kansas Any More”:
Selling Midwesterners the ‘Magic Valley’
of South Texas

by

Craig H. Roell with Ruth May Euler Roell

About 1913, William Francis (“W. F.”) Arnold, a 60-year-old successful dairy, orchard, and crop farmer in Doniphan County in extreme northeastern Kansas (and the author’s great-grandfather on his mother’s side) bought a ticket on a special excursion train to Texas. The train took him and other hopeful Midwestern entrepreneurs to look at investing in the new “Promised Land” of South Texas—what boosters would call the “Magic Valley” of the Rio Grande. It quite likely was the late October excursion by famed Valley promoter John H. Shary (1872-1945), who was himself a Midwesterner from Nebraska, an officer of the National City Bank of Omaha, and head of the Southwestern Land Company. The commemorative panoramic photograph of this October 1913 excursion depicts 58 hopeful people—women in fancy hats and fine dress, and all of the men in hats or caps, almost all wearing ties, with some wearing vests and even suits. There are several children, also dressed up, and a dog. The brick home of Indiana-born Charles J. Volz, pioneer advocate of citrus and vegetable farming in the Valley, served as the photograph’s backdrop. Volz’s impressive orchard was a requisite stop as a showplace for excursion train visitors. Rose Volz—as enthusiastic a promoter as her husband—allowed visitors to pick grapefruit for twenty-five cents apiece. Scrutinizing the oversize 37”x7” photograph, one can almost sense the excitement and potential prosperity in which these folks were allowing their hearts and minds to engage.
To Midwesterners in October, this location would have looked and felt wonderful! The extended Arnold family knew firsthand through long experience that winters in northeastern Kansas were harsh and could be downright brutal. As Doniphan County’s historian recorded, temperatures in the county could dip to 30 degrees below zero. Hail occurred as late as May—and even on one memorable Fourth of July in 1899—often damaging structures, injuring or even killing animals, and sometimes reaching “heaps three to four feet deep for many days.” Snow commonly fell from October through April, and was known to reach twenty-six feet deep (in 1876), stopping trains for days or even weeks. “Digging out the snow was as difficult as taking out the original dirt.” The Rio Grande Valley of Texas would offer warmth, an appealing subtropical landscape, and a long growing season, plus the promise of good fortune through affordable and fertile irrigated land, which (if boosters could be believed) grew crops “with magic speed.” “What made this magic Valley the Paradise it is instead of a jungle? Just three things,” boasted one promotional that was specifically aimed at freezing Midwesterners: “1. The most matchless climate in the United States. 2. The most fertile soil in America. 3. The richest water (for plant food) in the world.” Indeed, “Science proves that the silt or sediment of the Rio Grande is 1000 times richer than the historic Nile in ancient Egypt. HENCE NO FERTILIZER IS NEEDED. This magic water is pumped from the Rio Grande and distributed over the land. The irrigation system is elaborate—simple in principle—unfailing in practice. . . . You don’t pray for rain in the ‘Valley’—you phone your pumping station.” Moreover, the faithful entrepreneur could expect “$1000 per acre net from the fifth year on as the Valley average on Grapefruit.” Surely, even the Almighty would declare this Eden of Texas to be the finest!

W. F. Arnold’s wife, Sarah Thornton Arnold, at 55 years of age in 1913, was not so sure about her husband’s idea of relocating to the Valley, “magic” or not. The couple had three grown children. Lorena was the oldest (b. 1885), married to John Euler (b.
1884), a successful farmer in Doniphan County, whose family had emigrated from Germany. As the Eulers already had two children (the first of six), Lorena was even more disinclined than her mother to leave Kansas—especially since their comfortable farmhouse boasted a parlor, a dining room, a den, bedrooms and guest bedroom, a pump bringing fresh water into the kitchen, a cellar, a big porch, ample storage, plus a spring-fed water supply, a smokehouse, dairy cows, horses, pigs, and, of course, the crop fields, fruit orchard, and garden. Lorena’s two younger siblings, however, would move to the Valley and become prosperous: May (b. 1888); and Russell (b. 1898), whose middle name, Dewey, was inspired by U.S. Navy Admiral George Dewey, famed hero of the battle of Manila Bay of 1898 in the Spanish American War. The Arnold, Thornton, and Euler families were well established in Kansas, and uprooting to South Texas would be an unsettling life-changing event. After all, Kansas was “home,” and deep South Texas would be a “foreign” land. Nevertheless, by 1917, W. F. Arnold and his 19-year-old son Russell would be living in Hidalgo County, Texas, as budding citrus growers near the town of Pharr; W. F.’s wife, Sarah, joined him by 1918. Arnold initially purchased 100 acres and made plans to purchase 200 more, the idea being to give 100 acres each to his three children.

This article is not intended to be labor history or race-relations history, though it comments on these, nor a history of the Valley’s citrus industry, though naturally it fits into this historiography. Multiple historians—many cited in the endnotes—have published an impressive body of work exploring these avenues of research. Nevertheless, the distinctive questions that this article explores do contribute to an ever-growing body of research. In the larger historical context of marketing and business history, how did marketing citrus and the “Magic Valley” parallel national advertising and marketing trends emerging in the early twentieth century? Why move to South Texas instead of relocating to Florida or Southern California, which were better established and similarly marketed as a land of sunshine and a paradise for
growing vegetables, citrus, and fruit? In the more localized historical context, how smoothly did relocation to South Texas occur for these Midwesterners? How did boosters promote the “Magic Valley” and what made it attractive to Midwesterners, especially to a well-established (and aging) one like W. F. Arnold? What was it about historical land promotion in Kansas and W. F. Arnold’s own history that might have influenced him to consider relocating to the Rio Grande Valley? Why did Midwestern farmers, who had little or no previous experience with citrus, decide that citriculture was the way of the future success? What challenges or regrets did these “land pioneers” have once they began living and farming in this “Magic Valley”? Compared to other Midwesterners who also relocated to the Valley, how typical was W. F. Arnold’s experience?

W. F. Arnold was born in 1853 in Virginia, but moved to Missouri, near Clarksdale in DeKalb County—where his future wife, Sarah Lucy Thornton, was born in 1859. The Thorntons had long been established in this county; both of Sarah’s parents were Missouri-born. DeKalb County was only two counties across the Missouri River from nearby Doniphan County, Kansas, where the Eulers—and later W. F. himself—were established as successful farmers. The decade into which W. F. and Sarah were born was exceedingly tumultuous as the United States dealt with expansion, sectionalism, slavery, and other issues that led to the Civil War. Virginia, of course, was prominent in American and southern history, and central to the Confederacy. Farther west, Missouri had been a slave state since 1820, made famous in the Missouri Compromise. But DeKalb County was among Missouri’s counties with the fewest slaves. The 1860 census reveals that, among the county’s modest total population of 5,224 people in 1860, only 137 were slaves—less than two percent of the county’s population and only about one-tenth of one percent (.001) of the entire slave population of the state. When W. F. was a toddler, the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act changed the landscape of Kansas Territory from being “forever free” (as the Missouri
Compromise had established) to allowing slavery according to “popular sovereignty”—the will of the people. Thus, in 1855, Kansas found itself in the midst of an exploding national crisis. Violence between the pro-slavery and anti-slavery factions erupted almost immediately in Kansas, resulting in a bloody civil war within the territory, popularly called “Bleeding Kansas.” Across the river in Missouri, in DeKalb County—where Sarah Thornton Arnold was born and raised—there were pro-slavery and Confederate sympathizers. But the county’s historians noted that the population “being largely composed of Northern people,” the Union sentiment predominated. In fact, the county furnished six to eight hundred men for the Union during the Civil War.\(^{10}\) In family lore, the Arnolds, Thorntons, and Eulers were proud that they hailed from northeastern “Free” Kansas and “Unionist” DeKalb County, Missouri.

About 1882, W. F. Arnold married Sarah Lucy Thornton in Clarksdale, DeKalb County, Missouri.\(^ {11}\) The couple moved across the river to Doniphan County, Kansas, setting up a 40-acre farm between the county seat of Troy (incorporated in 1860 and lacking “only two miles of being the geographical center of the county”) and the community of Wathena (whose the charter in 1861 was signed by Abraham Lincoln, and which was named for “a well-known chief of the Kickapoo Indians,” whose village was earlier located on the town site). Lured by W. F.’s example, Sarah’s brother Jeptha Thornton also left DeKalb County and moved to Doniphan County. Given that Doniphan County was bordered by Nebraska to the north and Missouri to the east, Troy was distinguished as the first stop on the Pony Express out of nearby St. Joseph, Missouri, and was the place where horses were changed at the end of the first relay at Smith Tavern (which still stands).\(^ {12}\)

Stereotypes to the contrary, Kansas farming wasn’t just about raising corn, rye, barley, oats, and wheat. W. F. Arnold advertised Ohio seed potatoes and yellow seed corn for sale, as well as varieties of apples and peaches from his orchards. Doniphan County
was long known for fruit trees, especially apple-and-peach-growing, even blackberries, grapes, and winemaking (which a contemporary Kansas chronicler commented, “command high prices from those who desire a strictly pure article for medicinal purposes”). This offers a hint as to why W. F. Arnold would have considered moving to Doniphan County, Kansas, in the first place, and then, later, to South Texas to grow citrus. As his granddaughter (my mother) Ruth Euler Roell related: “Grandpa figured if he could successfully grow fruit trees in Kansas, he could successfully grow citrus trees in Texas.” Family history recounts that, in addition to corn, grains, and vegetables, the Arnold farm in Doniphan County cultivated a variety of apples, plus peaches, pears, plums, cherries, grapes, and cantaloupe. A notice in the September 12, 1895 issue of The Kansas Chief, the local newspaper published in Troy stated: “Doniphan County has produced a considerable quantity of good peaches, this year. Mose Cox and W. F. Arnold, of this Township, have brought in peaches, in the past few days, that are as good as any we have seen anywhere.” That would have been good since earlier that same year, in March, W. F. Arnold’s barn was burned down (reportedly “the work of an incendiary, for revenge”), with the loss of seven horses and all the barn contents, including “implements, harness, grain, hay, and much other property.”

In Kansas, the Arnolds were successful and prosperous, living in a comfortable eight-room farmhouse, close to extended family in Doniphan and nearby DeKalb counties, and not far from the “big city” of St. Joseph, Missouri. Life was hard, but life was good. It is understandable why Sarah had misgivings, later in 1913, when her 60-year-old husband was toying with the idea of moving the family to South Texas. The history, culture, and climate of northeastern Kansas underscore how different South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley would be to the Arnolds, essentially making it a foreign land. Texas had a much different history than Kansas, especially northeastern Kansas. Not only had Texas been part of Mexico (and previously, New Spain),
but, in the decade that W. F. and Sarah were born and raised, Texas was a slave state and had been part of the Confederacy during the Civil War. The post-Civil War history of the two states was also vastly different, although both were economically and culturally connected with the cattle industry through the famous Chisholm Trail and the Shawnee Trail, on which hundreds of thousands of cattle were driven north from Texas into Kansas (including Doniphan County) and beyond to the major railheads. Kansas was historically white and predominately Evangelical Protestant, the home of Rev. Charles Sheldon, who coined the phrase “What would Jesus do?” as well as of Baker University, founded as a Methodist affiliate in 1858, the oldest in Kansas. Doniphan County in 1910 was completely rural, with 81 percent of the 1,771 farms being medium sized (between 50 and 500 acres). Around 95 percent of the county was white and native-born; by far, Germans (like the Eulers) made up the majority of foreign-born residents, and the county enjoyed 98 percent literacy—nearly the same for Kansas as a whole.\textsuperscript{16}

In great contrast, the Rio Grande Valley and South Texas were historically Mexican and Catholic, especially since Matamoros, with its impressive Catholic cathedral and customs house, was long the economic, political, and religious hub for the region since before the Texas Revolution.\textsuperscript{17} Mexico had always considered the Nueces River, not the Rio Grande, as the border between Tamaulipas and Texas. The U.S.-Mexico War settled the international boundary at the Rio Grande only with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. On the Texas side of the river, Brownsville, the county seat for Cameron County, quickly rose as a center and symbol of Anglo-Texan and American intrusion into the Valley. The history of next-door Hidalgo County—to where W. F. Arnold would move and establish citrus orchards—was tangentially connected to the river towns of Reynosa and Camargo established in the eighteenth century by the “Father of the Rio Grande Valley,” José de Escandón, and became part of the vast ranchlands of Juan José Ynojosa
de Ballí’s Llano Grande grant (1790) and José Manuel Gómez’s Santa Anita grant (1798).\textsuperscript{18}

In 1852, when Hidalgo County was formed, the area had about 40 ranches, raising cattle, sheep, and other livestock, and until about 1870, Mexican-American ranchers were still the primary landholders of the county.\textsuperscript{19} But, into the 1890s, thanks to increasing racism and violence, almost half of the Mexicans living in the county fled northward or into Mexico, and the county was known as a haven for outlaws and suffered cattle rustling, border raids, and extreme political turmoil. Still, Hidalgo County, like her sister counties in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, remained a ranching, not farming economy, despite early attempts at irrigation. As Texas Department of Transportation historian Kila Knight notes, commercial farming was not successful until several things converged: dependable railroad connections to markets; efficient and reliable irrigation able to deliver water over the high banks of the Rio Grande with centrifugal pumps; infusion of capital from investors for developing the region; a consistent supply of cheap farm labor; and the emigration of farmers to purchase the irrigated farmlands.\textsuperscript{20}

The county’s first newspaper, \textit{The Hidalgo Advance}, debuted in 1903, and, as Alicia A. Garza writes in the \textit{Handbook of Texas}, “was published for the sole purpose of advertising the county and attracting a railroad.”\textsuperscript{21} Thanks to railroad-promoter Benjamin Franklin Yoakum, the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railway reached the Valley in 1904. Irrigation was commercially pioneered by Yoakum and sugar-cane-grower John Closner. In addition to developing the railroad, Yoakum established the American Rio Grande Land and Irrigation Company in 1905, which integrated the development of irrigation, the operation of the railroad, the sale of farmland, and establishing the town of Mercedes. In historian Kila Knight’s assessment, Yoakum’s company became “the largest and most successful irrigation company in the Lower Rio Grand Valley, with land holdings of 104,000 acres.”\textsuperscript{22} The economic effect of all this was revolutionary.
In Hidalgo County, land had sold for twenty-five cents an acre in 1903, but sold for fifty dollars an acre by 1906, skyrocketing to as much as $300 an acre by 1910. Although the first crops that dominated were cotton and sugarcane, commercial farming of citrus fruits and vegetables significantly increased, especially through land promotions by entrepreneurs like Benjamin Franklin Yoakum, “Colonel” A. J. McColl, and John H. Shary.

Iowa-born McColl (“only a ‘Colonel’ by courtesy”) was reportedly “the most successful colonizer ever to operate in the Southwest” and president of his A. J. McColl Land Company as well as president of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Land Men’s Association. He “has the distinction of having sold within a few years more than thirty million dollars’ worth of agricultural and citrus fruit lands in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, colonizing more than fifteen thousand people—prosperous and successful farmers from the northern and middle western states.” McColl, like John Shary, organized regular train excursions to the Valley. “The McColl Excursions, which are open to any home-seeker, are run twice a month from Kansas City, Missouri, and are so arranged as to provide relaxation and entertainment as well as to break the monotony of the trip.” McColl, whose office was in Kansas City but considered his home to be McAllen, Texas, financed a “gravity” irrigation and canal system, and was reportedly the “human dynamo” who “transformed a country that was carpeted with cactus and mesquite ten years ago [c. 1911] into a miniature California.”

In promotional literature, the famed John Shary “has been to the citrus industry of the Valley what Henry Ford has been to the automotive industry.” He was not only the head of his Southwestern Land Company and developer of Sharyland, but also brought irrigation to his land promotions by acquiring the Mission Canal Company in 1914 and the United Irrigation Company in 1915. Moreover, Shary was partners with Harry B. Seay, president of the American Rio Grande Land and Irrigation Company. As Valley historian Timothy Bowen notes, the develop-
ment of irrigation was crucial, especially for citrus and vegetable farming. In the 1910s, Hidalgo County experienced a 663 percent increase in irrigated lands, from 21,041 acres to 160,532 acres. From 1910 to 1920, such developments more than doubled the county’s population (which increased six-fold if measured from 1900), and increased the number of farms sevenfold from 1890. Moreover, the amount of Valley fruits and vegetables shipped in railroad boxcar-lots skyrocketed from 1,064 in 1915-1916 to 16,016 in 1925-1926—impressive numbers that reflect, in part, W. F. Arnold’s relocation there by 1917.27

The areas of Texas that could have offered Midwesterners like the Arnolds more cultural familiarity—Houston, Galveston, Austin, Fort Worth, Dallas, Abilene, Amarillo, Texarkana, Nacogdoches, and even German New Braunfels and Fredericksburg—were, by Kansas standards, far, far away from the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. Hidalgo County, like Doniphan County, Kansas, was overwhelmingly rural in 1910. But, unlike Doniphan County, Hidalgo County was historically almost exclusively Mexican throughout the nineteenth century in both population and culture, and Mexicans remained the great majority throughout the twentieth century. Nevertheless, as historian Cristina Salinas has noted, throughout the Valley, Anglo land developers:

organized the towns, from their inception, as segregated towns, with the Anglo residential spaces and the Mexican Town or Mexican Colony clearly defined and delineated in their blueprints. Thus, Mexicans’ spaces were relegated to small, dense corners of townships, marginalized from new spaces of public and social engagement. . . . Mexicans soon occupied a social space in which their movements were limited by public, residential, and educational segregation, all of which combined to place them in a position at the bottom of the new society.28

Plus, as Timothy Bowen notes, Valley boosters tended to play down Mexico and Mexican culture except to sell its quaint and exotic splendor, rich in romance and history—the “heroic” city of Matamoros, with its fiestas, bull fights, and beautiful señoritas—or to emphasize Mexican passivity, its eager laborers “accepting
of their low wages and separated status.” “Uninformed readers would never have guessed from such portrayals that Mexico had recently concluded a decade-long bloody revolution.”

Again, quite different than Doniphan County, in 1910, 39 percent of Hidalgo County’s population of 13,728 was foreign-born—almost 98 percent from Mexico, not surprisingly. German-born residents, the second highest group, numbered only 1 percent. Hidalgo County farms were mostly small (under 50 acres), although, over the next two decades, the number of farms of medium size, 100 to 500 acres (like W. F Arnold’s would be), rose significantly, thanks largely to entrepreneurs like John H. Shary selling the “Magic Valley.” Hidalgo County’s population was significantly poorer and suffered much greater illiteracy than did Doniphan County, Kansas, in 1910. Even as late as 1950, 82 percent of Hidalgo County’s population had less than a high school education.

But, despite this “opposite ends of the earth” comparison, Kansas and Texas both enjoyed a rich history of land promotion and entrepreneurialism. Texas had long attracted settlement through land promotion, notably by the Mexican government’s empresario system, and, later, the promise of land in exchange for military service during the Texas Revolution. Indeed, Texas used cheap land, of which it had in abundance, as a drawing card throughout the days of the Republic and Statehood. Such prospects had inspired David Crockett to write his family, in 1836, “I must say as to what I have seen of Texas, it is the garden spot of the world. The best land & best prospects for health I ever saw is here, and I do believe it is a fortune to any man to come here. There is a world of country to settle.” Or, later, as one railway company sales brochure claimed in 1889:

*It shall be the chosen land, perpetual sunshine shall kiss its trees and vines, and, being storied in luscious fruits and compressed into ruddy wine, will be sent to the four points of the compass to gladden the hearts of all mankind. . . . They will breathe the pure and bracing air, bask in the healing sunshine, drink the invigorating wine, and eat the life prolonging fruit.*
In this same vein came the fabulous booster promotions for the “Magic Valley” that many, including W.F. Arnold, found deliciously enticing:

*No one who has not personally visited the Rio Grande Valley can have any adequate conception of its beauty, the variety of the climate, soil, and products, or comprehend what irrigation has accomplished in the way of transforming a barren wilderness into ‘The Valley of Sunshine and Roses.’ The Rio Grande Valley has been called many things in an attempt to describe it. It has been called ‘The Magic Valley,’ but is more than this. It is California, France, or Southern Italy in miniature.\

As Christian Brannstrom and Matthew Neuman emphasize:

*To sell land and water, early-twentieth-century land developers and boosters created the Magic Valley as a place myth comprising claims of abundant irrigation water, pliant and abundant labor, and modernity overtaking wilderness.*

The good life and a secure investment were seemingly there for the taking. Master promoter John H. Shary knew very well how to market this place myth. His sales subdivision, located between the towns of Mission and McAllen, was a land grant dating back to New Spain. It “consists of three original Spanish porciones numbered 58, 59, and 60, having an area of approximately 20,000 acres. The water rights … are unexcelled” and “the old Spanish grant of 1767 included, with the land, the express right to the use of the water of the Rio Grande River for irrigation purposes. This right passes with the title and the two are inseparable.” One of Shary’s earliest pamphlets titled *The Treasure Land of the Lower Rio Grande: Where Nature’s Smiles Are Brightest*, with its meaningful illustrations of cornucopias overflowing with crops and coins, boasted that “bounteous crops can be grown and harvested every month of the year” by local labor, which was “peaceful, honest, polite and religious,” unwilling to “mix up in other society.” And the Valley’s magic soil would be “indefinitely” fertile because it was “constantly
renewed with each application of the river water in irrigation.” In posing the question of “Why run the risk of failure from drought and floods?”, Shary captured the image of modernity by assuring his audience that, on his lands, one could “order [water] by telephone and be prepared to receive it to the best advantage when it arrives at his headgate.”

Published about 1914, this brochure well could have been among the promotional literature W.F. Arnold saw that reinforced his excursion trip about 1913 to see the magic for himself.

Such promotions of western promised lands have a long history. As historian David M. Wrobel observes in his superb book, Promised Lands: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West (2002), land promoters and boosters literally imagined places into existence. Regardless of differences in specific promotional content, regardless of particular place or period, “there is a consistent pattern in the contours of western booster literature over time and place. The same characteristics—unrestrained optimism, effusive language, and ostensibly altruistic claims—emerge again and again, from the Great Plains, to the Pacific Coast, to the Great Basin, the Southwest, and the Rockies” and were “well established by the early post-Civil War years” with “little need to change the formula.”

As proven also in the promotion and sale of patent medicine and consumer products by advertising, people are gullible because people are willing, even eager, to believe that the thing being promoted will make for a better life. Historian Walter Nugent observed that according to land promotions typical in the West, “one would think that women and men had to hardly work at all.” Land promoters like John Shary were not unlike his contemporaries in the advertising business, such as Richard Warren Sears, Claude C. Hopkins, J. Walter Thompson, and Albert Lasker, who were masters at tapping into (critics would say exploiting) human needs, wants, dreams, and hopes. As Chicago ad man Leo Burnett later famously summarized the tactic, “Good advertising does not just circulate information. It penetrates the public mind with desires and belief.”
In his Pulitzer Prize-winning classic, *The Americans: The Democratic Experience*, historian Daniel J. Boorstin put this in the larger perspective, asserting that the promotion of images through marketing and advertising was “destined to be the omnipresent, most characteristic, and most remunerative form of American literature,” creating a “central place in the consciousness of the community. . . . The proportion of the national ingenuity, energy, and resources that went into advertising was unprecedented.”

Product advertising can become a circular process in which promotions led to sales and sales led to promotions, whereby a consumer “becomes” or takes on the qualities being advertised. That’s why branding is paramount—a consumer becomes branded and even becomes the brand. Similarly, in the promotion of Promise Lands, the “imagined landscapes” inscribe “the actual landscape with the place myth . . . so that the landscape comes to resemble the place myth.”

The imagery—or the brand, if you will—of the “Magic Valley” of the Rio Grande that promoters were selling to Midwesterners, a transformation from untamed wilderness to bountiful garden, inspired many, like W. F. Arnold, to make it a reality.

Kansas’ promotional history started as early as the 1640s, when the Spanish conquistador and explorer Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, who managed to traverse much of what is now the state of Kansas, wrote in his report to the King of Spain, “The soil itself is the most suitable that has been found for growing all the products of Spain, for besides being rich and black, it is well watered by arroyos, springs, and rivers. I found plums like those of Spain, nuts, fine sweet grapes, and mulberries.”

In late nineteenth-century marketing literature—which might have caught W. F. Arnold’s eye when he lived in DeKalb County, Missouri—Kansas was proclaimed as “The Best Enterprise in the West” according to one promotion of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad in 1873 for settlement in the Sunflower State. The famous railroad company built its route along the historic path of the Santa Fe Trail. Atchison County, whose county seat, the city of Atchison, gave
the railroad its name, bordered neighboring Doniphan County, where the Arnolds would own their farm. Throughout the late nineteenth century, the railway company offered dreams for sale in the form of Kansas land. As one brochure put it, “in tracts to suit purchasers, on ELEVEN YEARS’ TIME, and at low prices... Superior Farming Lands, for fruit farms, grain farms, splendid stocks farms and lands of every grade” — “An opportunity for the Poorest Man to obtain a Farm and pay for it from the Products of his Land.” “The best soil and the best climate,” the literature boasted.45

Another railway sales brochure about Kansas land offered the almost irresistible (if not plainly exaggerated) promise that “The climate is temperate and healthful, and the summer is one long season of sunshine and fruitfulness, probably affording more days’ work without exhaustion in the open air than any State not in the same latitude. You can plow in nearly every month in the calendar.” Moreover, the land, though “presenting a variety of local peculiarities, but everywhere partaking of the common characteristic of extreme fertility, and is easy to cultivate,” especially since “water abounds” and is “readily reached from ten to forty feet.” Further, “It is the best stock country in the West, for feeding especially. But little shelter is required. Losses on the range are never very heavy. Winters mild and open.”44

Winter feeding optional.” Plus, there are “plenty of schools and churches” and “the cost of living is not much above that in the Eastern States.”45 The town of Wathena (just a couple of miles from where W. F. Arnold would establish his farm) was described as “one of the most enterprising towns in Northeastern Kansas. There never has been a time when the town took a backward step.” There was even talk of it “becoming, someday, a suburb of St. Joseph [Missouri].” One Doniphan County farmer was so successful that he proclaimed, “I’m going back to Ohio where I won’t be bothered with such big crops of corn. A man will get rich too quickly out here in Kansas.”46 Of course the reality was that a season of draught could follow one of plenteous rain, never mind devastation by “myriads” and “plagues” of grasshoppers (as
Doniphan County locals described them), destructive cyclones, and debilitating winters. Kansas was largely settled with such marketing of land and opportunity. Just reading these historic land sales promotion brochures, I wanted to move there myself!

The point is this—a young man such as W. F. Arnold would have grown up during this exciting Kansas land entrepreneurialism and westward expansion, and therefore have been prone to the promising marketing schemes of Kansas and, later, those that similarly touted the new Shangri-La of the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. And, as Timothy Bowman stresses, “the language of old-school pioneering appeared throughout Valley booster literature.”47 Land promotion hype to the contrary, there were climate issues with Kansas. Thus, key ingredients to entice settlers—primarily Midwestern farmers tiring of harsh winters and destructive cyclones—to buy land in “The Magic Valley” were the milder climate, irrigation, and railroads. Land companies in the Valley built model farms demonstrating what one historian called “the lush potential of the fertile lands of the delta.”48 Charles J. Volz’s impressive orchard, a requisite showplace for John H. Shary’s excursion train visitors, was just one example. Of course, brochures did not mention the problems in this potential paradise, such as the high operational costs of the irrigation systems—especially the constant maintenance and repair of boilers, engines, and pumps—or the lack of icing facilities or refrigerated railroad cars to transport produce, or that the fertile soil and subtropical climate also grew weeds, cacti, and thorn scrub with “magic speed.” Beyond this, a major problem was that the best markets were not in the sparsely populated Rio Grande Valley—Brownsville was the largest city in the Valley with a population of only ten thousand in 1914. Rather, the best markets were far away in Houston and San Antonio, and in the nation-wide distribution centers in Kansas City, St. Louis, Omaha, Chicago, and St. Paul. Thus, spoilage of fragile produce was common.

As Valley historians Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp recount, another problem was simply aggressive hucksterism
coupled with “hoodwinking techniques” of the promotion and advertising agents. Besides making promises of irrigation to fields which, once bought, received none, it is said that one trick was to drive carloads of buyers past an unworked field of chaparral and ask the visitors to remember the site. At the end of a week of touring, the same people would be brought back to the field, to find it not only cleared and planted, but already producing lettuce. The agents had cleared the land, all right, but then had transplanted heads of lettuce from another field!  

Still, people are tempted to believe what they read—a phenomenon that has propelled the advertising industry to great success and riches. For example, it would be W. F. Arnold’s contemporary, the advertising revolutionary Albert Lasker, owner of Chicago’s Lord & Thomas agency and the creator of “salesmanship in print” and “reason why” advertising, who essentially invented demand for Lucky Strike cigarettes, Kleenex and Kotex products, Palmolive soap, Pepsodent toothpaste, and, notably for our story, “Sunkist” brand oranges, lemons, and orange juice.

So why choose the “Magic Valley” of South Texas, as W. F. Arnold did, and not Florida or California? Both Florida and California enjoyed a longer history of citrus culture and were also heavily marketed as land and farming investment opportunities. Florida’s association with citrus dates back to the earliest decades of Spanish exploration (perhaps even with Ponce de León in 1513), for orange trees were growing wild in Florida by the time Saint Augustine was founded in 1565, spread in part by itinerant Indians spitting out seeds. Commercial cultivation of oranges in Florida dates to the 1760s, and, though it died out (literally, from harsh winters), was revived after 1835, and was booming by the 1870s. Citrus other than oranges were introduced soon thereafter. Similarly, citrus in California was first recorded in 1769, again by Spaniards, and after historical ups and downs, was a booming crop also by the 1870s. At least, according to citrus historian Pierre Laszlo, this embodied the classic Jeffersonian agrarian dream of independent small farmers earning wealth from their
The point is that the citriculture was thriving in both Florida and California much earlier than in Texas.

Nevertheless, as historian Timothy Bowen makes clear, although Florida and California led the way, the budding Texas citriculture was able to unite in this economic phenomenon that helped the United States “become one of the leading producers of citrus in the world.” From 1925 to 1930, Bowen states, the U.S. was the top producer of oranges in the world, Spain second, Japan third, and Italy fourth, followed by Brazil, Australia, Algeria, and South Africa. So, by the time W. F. Arnold was influenced to pursue the dream of growing citrus, Texas had not only joined Florida and California in the construction of a place myth, but Texas promoters were effectively touting the Valley’s advantages—the “Magic Valley” brand—over the two competing sister states. Booster literature naturally promoted land opportunities as an Edenic paradise, drawing upon the imaginations and yearnings of consumers to fulfill not only their individual dreams, but to be part of a larger movement and expansion of culture.

In all three states—Florida, Southern California, and South Texas—irrigation and railroads were crucial to such settlement and inspired, if not outright promoted, boosterism. For example, as early as 1883, a widely-circulated 76-page pamphlet by I. H. Hoag, the Immigration Commissioner for Southern Pacific Railroad, proclaimed on its colorful cover (which was also popularly used as a decorative poster): “California, the Cornucopia of the World” with “room for millions of immigrants.” Decorated throughout with woodcuts, especially of crops and citrus, the pamphlet also stressed that California offered “A climate for health and wealth, without cyclones or blizzards”—an idea surely attractive to stalwart Midwesterners who nonetheless were tiring of these extremes of nature that were so characteristic of their region. Similarly, even if 31 years later, Union Pacific’s 1914 brochure, *California Calls You*, proclaimed that “oranges gleam like rich gold” in “this Land of Sunshine,” where “That glamour of romance which has attracted Americans to the old countries is
abundant here; it is not a raw land without historic traditions.” Prospective Midwesterners read that, “While the midland plains were still peopled only by roving bands of paint-daubed aborigines, California’s valleys were graced by scenes of civilization and religious devotion.” Moreover, “Monotony is banished from this bright land. . . . Whatever you desire most in the way of living, it awaits you in California.” Even in the late nineteenth century, so effective were such promotions that one sanguine “Eastern gentleman smitten with ‘California fever’ used to regale his friends with stories of what he would do when he reached the goal of his desires. One of his favorite projects was to “lie under an orange-tree in the middle of winter, when you fellows here are freezing! When I get thirsty all I have to do is kick the tree, and down comes a ripe, juicy orange.”

Similarly, in Florida, the Seaboard Air Line Railway (which by the 1920s offered a special excursion train appropriately called the “Orange Blossom Special,” connecting New York City with Miami) boasted that, along its tracks, especially in Manatee County, “the orange and the grapefruit reach the highest perfection.” “Here nature is at her best,” the brochure continued, accompanied by glorious photographs of citrus, one showing 52 grapefruit on one tree limb, “there being no spot in this county on which this juicy fruit will not furnish an opportunity for the profitable investment of money by the grower.” Moreover, the railway proudly proclaimed that, “fast freight schedules operated daily . . . enable growers to reach the New York market in 3 days.” The brochure offered impressive statistics of how many boxes of citrus had been harvested since 1884, when 600,000 boxes of citrus fruit crop were harvested, skyrocketing to over 4.2 million boxes in 1893, and, despite a decline due to harsh winters, reached over 8 million boxes by 1913. All of this was heady stuff to contemplate for pioneering Midwesterners tiring of severe winters and dreaming of increasing prosperity.

In the citrus and fruit industry of Southern California, imagery depicting a romanticized Spanish heritage of the state would
be portrayed on brand-name fruit crate labels, a colorful form of advertising (and now highly collectible) that was similarly used in Florida and Texas. In the larger context, these creative fruit labels paralleled the growing dominance of brand names in all national advertising. Professional ad men and graphic artists created the colorful illustrations appearing on the labels, which mirror similar techniques and trends in the national advertising industry in which New York and Chicago ad agencies were creating artistically pleasing images, complete with trademarked icons and slogans, for national brands. These thoroughly modern print ads represent a revolutionary change in the types and strategies of advertising that were common in American popular magazines, posters, and signs even by the late 1910s and early 1920s. As historian Timothy P. Bowen states, “California growers clearly hoped to impress upon their consumers direct ties between orange growing and the state’s Spanish, Mexican, and colonial pasts.”

California citrus brand names creatively drew upon this romanticized Spanish heritage with names like “Caballero,” “Paisano,” “Arden Villa,” “El Pavo Real,” “Mission Inn,” “La Verne Rancho,” “Sierra Vista Rancho,” “Alhambra Don Quixote,” “Adios,” “Mexicana,” “Rancho,” “Real,” “Carreta,” “El Camino,” “El Primo,” “El Oso,” “Favorita,” “La Paloma,” “Marquita,” “El Señor,” “Campana,” “Corona Queen,” “Las Fuentes,” “Romana,” “Senorita,” among many others. The illustrations are beautiful and served as miniature billboards selling concepts as brands. The king of all, however, was “Sunkist”—decidedly not Spanish-themed—evoking California’s modern sunny reputation and the brainchild of a Jewish-American advertising genius in Chicago, Albert D. Lasker and the Lord & Thomas agency.

By great contrast, Florida citrus brands tended to pay homage, not to Spanish themes, despite Florida’s Spanish history, but, instead, to the state’s southern heritage and, less so, to coastal or Indian themes. Colorfully-illustrated fruit crates bore labels named “Aunty,” “Mammy,” “Old Black Joe,” “Dixie Boy,” “Dixie Delite,” “Old Man River,” “Banjo,” “The Blue and the

The themes reflected in these fruit crate labels shed some understanding on what drew a Midwesterner, especially a Kansan like W. F. Arnold, to South Texas instead of California or, especially, Florida. A Midwesterner from “Unionist” Missouri or “Free” Kansas could well see Florida as uncomfortable. Though having a Spanish background and being part of Spain until ceded to the United States in 1821, Florida had been a slave state (although the least populated of the southern states) and one of the first seven states to create the Confederacy. Images of this popular and well-known Southern heritage were echoed on Florida fruit crate labels. This alone would have seemed especially foreign to a proud northeastern “Free State” Kansan—raised in “Unionist” DeKalb County, Missouri—considering that the national sectional conflict and Civil War was still in living memory.

Nevertheless, Florida had begun to pull itself apart from the “Old South” by the late nineteenth century by advocating its coastal attractions for vacationers, pioneered especially by Standard Oil founder and railroad tycoon Henry Flagler, the “father” of both Miami and Palm Beach, Florida. Flagler’s creation of what became the Florida East Coast Railway allowed vacationers to sojourn comfortably to stay at the luxurious Ponce de León Hotel (now part of Flagler College) and Hotel Alcazar.
(now the Lightner Museum), which he built in St. Augustine. Flagler also purchased the Casa Monica Hotel in the same city, renaming it the Cordova Hotel (still operating). Soon Flagler created a new “American Riviera” in Florida by extending his railroad and hotel building to Palm Beach (and notably, the opulent Breakers Hotel), West Palm Beach, and eventually to Biscayne Bay, which became Miami, and even all the way to Key West, to draw upon trade and tourism with Cuba. Flagler’s sumptuous 100,000-square-foot winter home in Palm Beach, Whitehall (now the Flagler Museum), boasted 75 rooms and, as one of the most opulent mansions of the Gilded Age, was described by the \textit{New York Herald} in 1902 as, “More wonderful than any palace in Europe, grander and more magnificent than any other private dwelling in the world.”\textsuperscript{59} By the time Flagler died in 1913, modern Florida, which Flagler had essentially invented, had been transformed from being one of the poorest states—and an ex-Confederate one at that—into a vacationland of tourism, with a flourishing agricultural economy that Flagler’s railroad, along with competitor Seaboard Air Line Railway, nourished and provided with national markets.\textsuperscript{60} Then, between 1915 and 1927, the construction of a series of roads called the Dixie Highway eventually connected Chicago to Miami, bringing endless streams of vacationing motorists from the Midwest into the South and Florida.\textsuperscript{61} To this day, Florida still benefits from this new image, created to separate it from the rest of the “Old South” into a tourist and retirement Mecca of the South Atlantic coast. Simply crossing the state line from Georgia or Alabama into Florida is perceived—not unlike crossing into Texas—as entering (in the popular Texas tourist slogan) “a whole other country.”

But, ironically, this enormous success also hints at what could make a Midwesterner like W. F. Arnold uncomfortable with relocating to Florida. For all its successful farming, booming tourism, wealth, and wonderful images that advertisers promoted as America’s sun-kissed ocean playground, Florida would have become something very foreign to a small Kansas farmer and
dairyman, whose sodbuster Midwesterner values still resonated with the traditional western traits of independence, hard work, religion, abolition, a tendency toward prohibition yet progressivism, simple living, and simple pleasures. Did “vacationing” even fit into this mindset, much less living in the Eastern seaboard’s vacationland paradise? Still, thanks to such boosterism, Florida’s population increased by over 224,000 (42%) from 1900 to 1910, and by over 215,000 (29%) by 1920, then skyrocketing by almost 500,000 (52%) during the early 1920s. Unfortunately, this resulted in a huge inflation of land values and in the property market. Word of this real estate bubble spread rapidly, creating bad publicity for the state. This in turn was exacerbated by news of racial tensions between whites and blacks in Florida. The state’s black population made up 44% of the population in 1900, 41% in 1910, and 34% in 1920, declining to 29% during the 1920s. Racial violence, lynching, riots, and property damage, notably culminating in the Rosewood massacre of 1923, were widely publicized. In addition to cultural, racial, and economic issues, Florida had a history of hurricanes. In 1906, Pensacola, then recovering from a yellow fever epidemic, was hit particularly hard by the “Great Hurricane,” which left 3,000 people homeless and 134 dead. In 1926, another hurricane devastated Palm Beach, causing severe flooding throughout Palm Beach County, with damages estimated at $2.5 million (about $461 million today as a percentage of GDP). Only two years later, in 1928, South Florida was hit by a Category 4 hurricane, killing 1,836 people in Florida after killing 1,575 people in the Caribbean. Florida might be right for some as an investment opportunity or a vacation spot, but for many Midwesterners, especially small farmers like W. F. Arnold, it just wasn’t the proper place to relocate a family.

So, if not Florida, the “Sunshine State,” why not beautiful, sunny California, the “Golden State”? Advertising genius Albert Lasker had already turned southern California’s orange growing industry into one of the biggest money-makers of the early twentieth century. Lord & Thomas’s connections with the
California citrus industry, especially the California Fruit Growers Exchange, as Lasker’s biographers put it, “was remarkable for its durability and relative tranquility”—and specifically remarkable how Lasker’s advertising persuaded Midwesterners to eat oranges. Even by the late nineteenth century, when year-round production was enticing entrepreneurs to California, railroad connections (Southern Pacific as well as the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe lines) had linked the Los Angeles area to the Midwest and East Coast. The same railroad companies promoted land sales depicting California as a Garden of Eden. Moreover, technological advances such as the “ice bunker” car, allowed for the safe shipment of citrus. Lasker’s Lord & Thomas advertising agency was headquartered in Chicago, the terminus for the railroad lines serving California, making it a natural ally.

By August 1907, Lasker had invented the “Sunkist” brand name, created “Orange Week” in Iowa as a Midwestern test case, and created similar festivals in California, as Lasker-inspired trains decked with advertising banners hauled oranges from California to Iowa, drawing unprecedented attention to the burgeoning Southern California citrus industry to anyone watching the long trains go by. Southern California was soon exporting out of state an estimated 10 million boxes of oranges (around 30 thousand boxcars), five times the production of 1893—nearly an 18 percent increase across the country and a 50 percent increase in Iowa alone. By 1909, the California Fruit Growers Exchange increased their advertising budget with Lasker to $25,000, with which Lord & Thomas soon inundated the northern United States with ads. By 1910, CFGE increased its advertising budget with Lasker to an impressive $100,000 and to an astounding $250,000 by 1915—about $13 million today when measured as a “contemporary opportunity cost” relative to what an average household or business spends annually! The result? Americans were consuming 80 percent more oranges (about forty oranges per person per year) compared to 1885. Plus, the consumption of orange juice skyrocketed with the agency’s classic “Drink
an Orange” campaign. Lord & Thomas also excelled in selling California lemons, notably the Sunkist brand, capturing nearly 90 percent of the national market by 1924. Then came similar promotions and success for California raisins (Lord & Thomas invented the Sun-Maid brand), as well as walnuts, avocados, apples, grapes, honey, olives, peaches, pineapples, plums, prunes, nectarines, even butter, eggs, milk, and lima beans. So successful were these endeavors that Lasker opened a branch of Lord & Thomas in Los Angeles just to focus on promoting California agriproducts, particularly the mega Sunkist brand.66

Southern California obviously attracted entrepreneurs and others seeking to pursue the “California Dream.” Citrus farmers were transforming the landscape with seemingly endless citrus “ranches.” Thanks to the railroads and the refrigerated car, California produce could reach the East Coast markets within a week’s time. The Southern California Fruit Growers Association (established 1895, and now Sunkist Growers, Inc.) emerged as a powerful cooperative for harvesting, packaging, and marketing of their products, and, together with the genius of the Lord & Thomas advertising agency, dominated the nation’s fruit and citrus industry. Truly, the California fruit industry was an international powerhouse. What was not to like? Why would a Kansan like W. F. Arnold not have chosen Southern California? Some of it was timing. So much of the Southern California farming industry was already well established and powerful, and would be harder for a newcomer entrepreneur (at age 60 like W. F. Arnold) to enter —especially given that the industry was already dominated by the SCFG and their powerhouse brand, Sunkist. Moreover, although farm labor in Southern California was supplied by whites, Mexican-Americans, and Mexican nationals, there was also a significant population of Asian and Asian-American workers—Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Filipinos—who were vital to the agribusiness of Southern California. In addition to a major conclave of Chinese in Los Angeles, there were substantial “Chinatowns” throughout the agricultural towns of the San Gabriel
Valley, including San Bernardino, Riverside, Redlands, Ontario, and Cucamonga—all vital to the Southern California fruit industry. Still, these people not only experienced racism and prejudice within California, but also would have lent a significant “foreign” quality to this region for many Midwesterners who were considering relocation as hopeful citrus farmers.

Moreover, Southern California was becoming known as the sunny vacationland, sort of a Florida on the Pacific Coast. For many of those living there, elite beach clubs, yachting clubs, polo clubs, and country clubs, with their tennis courts, expansive rolling green golf courses, and characteristic snobbishness, became numerous and well publicized. As California’s foremost historian Kevin Starr puts it, “With its attendant mentality, the country club became in the 1920s a dominant mode of Southern California social expression among the arrived and the aspiring.” Thus, like Flagler’s Florida, Southern California was fast getting the reputation not just as a sunny vacation spot but also as a home or get-away for millionaires. On top of this, the burgeoning new movie-making industry in Hollywood, dominated early on by Warner Brothers, Columbia, RKO, Paramount, and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, was already the fifth-largest industry in the United States by the 1920s. The film companies’ mindboggling budgets, luxury, glamour, movie stars, fame, partying, and notoriety would only add to this portrait of Southern California as a home for the rich and elites, with very different values than typically found in Kansas and the Midwest.

Spurred by California winegrowers, but dating even to the nineteenth century, the state’s image was also increasingly portrayed as an “American Mediterranean.” Kevin Starr notes that, “As a metaphor, Mediterraneanism urged Californians to achieve something better in the manner of American living.” Far different than the projected historical and cultural identities of New England, the Old South, and certainly the Midwest, Southern California projected Spanish, Italian, French, and Greek metaphors, with an emphasis on leisure, enjoyment of life, and
improved health and longevity. Mediterranean themes abounded in architecture, agriculture, literature and the arts, and marketing (San Diego even called itself the “Naples of America,” echoing two of Florida’s cities, Naples and also Pensacola, the “Naples of America”). This encouraged “new attitudes toward work and leisure and what was important to live for. As a metaphor,” continues Starr, “it stood for a culture anxious to foster an alternative to the industrial ethic . . . . a people animated by a full play of sense and spirit.”

Southern California might be right for some as an investment opportunity or a vacation spot, but, for many Midwesterners like W. F. Arnold, it just was not the proper place to relocate a family or risk a business venture. Southern California’s version of the American Dream carried with it serious questions of affordability, “foreignness,” and just plain fitting in. It is not that Midwesterners did not get “California fever.” Many did relocate, especially to Los Angeles. Indeed, wealthy Midwesterners (especially from Chicago) built or bought grand residences, especially on Orange Grove Avenue, and even took to “riding to hounds” at the Valley Hunt Club. But these folks typically would not have hailed from the deeply rural areas of the Midwest, like Doniphan County, Kansas, or DeKalb County, Missouri. Moreover, as California historian Kevin Star notes, “Many observers noted a lost, pathetic quality to the Folks [Midwesterners] as they lived out their American Gothic lives in the sunshine, as if the move to Southern California could never fully meet the hungers of the Midwestern heart.”

Finally, even though Doniphan County, Kansas, was directly and historically connected to Southern California’s centers of economic growth—Los Angeles, San Diego, Barstow, Riverside, and San Bernardino—by the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe Railway, the projected imagery of Southern California by 1915, the time W. F. Arnold was looking for new opportunities, was about as far from Kansan and traditional rural Midwestern values and affordability as one could get—especially if South Texas was an option.
Booster literature asserted that the Valley, particularly Hidalgo and Cameron Counties, “present the appearance of the most permanently and highly-developed section of the citrus region of California or Florida.” Plus, farmers in the Valley “have many advantages over other farming regions” by being 800 miles nearer the eastern markets than the California farmer. Moreover, “their crops mature earlier and they get top prices for their products. They have an abundance of water at the minimum rate and get cash prices for everything they sell and have ample transportation facilities.” As if this weren’t enough, Valley farmers “have perfect all-year-round temperate climate, and an unlimited supply of cheap labor,” plus “good schools, churches, and homes, [and] harmonious citizenship working toward mutual ends.” All of this was aided by the incredibly fertile soil and a river, “fed by innumerable mountain streams,” which has been tamed “to prevent damage by floods or overflows.” The result? “Everything grows in the Valley” — grapefruit, oranges (“a commercial industry”), vegetables, and “staple crops” of cotton, sugar cane, broom corn, Rhodes grass, alfalfa, and dairy crops and hogs. “Every month is planting season as well as marketing time.” Indeed, “nowhere else in the United States have improved lands brought such handsome returns to their original owners as in the practically new country where irrigation makes three and four crops a year the general rule—and this without the use of any kind of fertilizer.”

As previously mentioned, there was a natural historical connection between Texas and Kansas that would have made relocation for W. F. Arnold easier to contemplate. Briefly, among the earliest Anglo settlers coming to Texas were those brought in by empresario Stephen F. Austin of Missouri, who was called, already in W. F. Arnold’s generation, “The Father of Texas.” After Texas independence from Mexico, the Republic of Texas had claimed lands along the Arkansas River in what became Kansas. Midwesterners had long participated in the settlement of the Lone Star State. Though, like Florida, Texas was a slave
state and seceded during the Confederacy, after the Civil War the Lone Star State increasingly and effectively distanced itself from a “southern” association to a “western” one—with a uniquely Texas image and heritage. This transformation of geographical and cultural image—essentially a “rebranding”—would culminate in the Texas Centennial of 1936. As U.S. Senator from Texas William Arvis “Dollar Bill” Blakely (1898-1976) would famously quip, “Texas is neither southern nor western. Texas is Texas.”

The great post-Civil War cattle drives from Texas to Kansas on the Chisholm Trail and Shawnee Trail had long united the two states (directly including Doniphan County). Later, railroad lines made that connection even easier. It is easy to envision that traveling from Kansas and the Midwest to Texas by the early twentieth century would be as convenient and rapid then as airline travel today. The “pioneer spirit” and western history of Texas and the Midwest, particularly Kansas and Missouri, also resonated as well. Plus, John H. Shary, land promoter extraordinaire, was himself a Midwesterner from Nebraska, and in fact was born in Saline County, which was only four counties diagonally from Doniphan County, Kansas. Even the darling of Midwestern Populist ambitions, William Jennings Bryan of Nebraska, purchased land in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, and built a winter home in Mission, Hidalgo County, in 1909. Such things made a move from Kansas to Texas seem almost natural.

But the window of opportunity even in the budding “Magic Valley” of Texas seemed to be getting narrow. As one Valley promotional put it, which underscored that time could be running out for potential (and aging) fruit-growing entrepreneurs like W. F. Arnold, “There Is Just So Much of This Earth—Better Get Some—In The Right Place—Then Hold On To It.” And, according to the Southwestern Land Company, “Sharyland” in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas was called “The Right Place.” Moreover, the harsh and unforgiving landscape of prickly pear cactus and other thorn scrub that historically blanketed
Hidalgo County and the Valley was rapidly being replaced with profitable fruit and vegetable farming, as Hidalgo County—thanks to John H. Shary—quickly became of hub of the Valley citrus industry. Shary’s development model, which was widely adopted by others, offered “investment properties” instead of just homesteads to Midwesterners. Through Shary they purchased land, then the trees from Shary’s nurseries, and water from his irrigation companies. Shary’s company sourced labor for cultivation and harvesting, offered packing plant facilities, and even the final marketing of the products. Through his Texas Citrus Fruit Growers Exchange, Shary sought (quoting historian Silvia Zulema Silva-Bewley) “to ensure that all fruit was graded, shipped, and marketed at a fair price to yield a premium for both his investors and, of course, himself.”

Promotional literature touted that profits from a mature citrus grove could allow the owner to retire within just a few years after his trees matured. As Texas Department of Transportation historian Kila Knight puts it, in such a sales scenario, “The property owner simply sat back and watched the profits pour in.” One can easily see how a 60-year-old farmer like W. F. Arnold could find this attractive.

As historian Timothy Bowman recounts, a booster, representing a land company based out of Kansas City, Missouri, wrote in 1913 that the Valley, “rich in historic romance and native resources … is being developed from unprofitable plains and jungles of cactus, mesquite, and ebony into the richest agricultural and garden spot in the United States.” Plus, the “inexhaustible supply” of Mexican labor was hardworking, loyal, cheap, “always available,” and content to live in “his own little bungalow of brush or of gunnysack over a mesquite bush” or in an inexpensive “one or two-room shed” provided by Valley farmers. As one promotional film put it, while showing pictures of contented if not happy Mexicans living in “primitive native Mexican homes”—“Mexican labor in the Valley is ideal: abundant, peaceful, obedient and cheap.” Similarly, Cristina Salinas stresses that promotional brochures and pamphlets “discursively
reduced Mexicans to being part of the landscape . . . a natural resource comparable to the quality of the soil, and a commodity just like acreage.” Thus, “Pamphleteers conflated Mexicans with wilderness landscape by emphasizing their ‘primitiveness’ often represented through photographs and descriptions of their houses.” As Bowman makes clear, promoters “built a preexistent racism [dating to the Texas Revolution] into potential colonists’ designs on the bottom line of commercial farming.” Essentially, boosters convinced Midwestern land tourists and potential Valley farmers that any rumored “Mexican situation” was not to be feared. Indeed, “what underpinned this whole modern system . . . was the ethnic Mexican farm laborer.” Moreover, as historians have established, Valley land promotions tapped a long history and experience of American westward expansion. Older notions of Manifest Destiny, a sense of mission, an indomitable frontier spirit mastering the landscape, were now coupled with Populist Midwestern values and Progressive Era notions of a modernizing future, progress, reform, opportunity, efficiency, and rural uplift—all of which magnified triumphant American virtues. All of these are revealed in W. F. Arnold’s own experience of moving from Missouri to Kansas, and finally to Texas.

W. F. Arnold was only one of many potential investors and entrepreneurial farmers who rode the special excursion trains, set up by such land promoters as A. J. McColl and John H. Shary to see the Texas land of promise. The business of selling the “Magic Valley” was itself an industry that required a significant number of people to pull it off. To find people willing to ride the excursion trains, Valley sales agents, who often were typically from the Midwest themselves, traveled their home regions in search of prospective settlers. This face-to-face selling added a “personal touch” to the groundwork already laid by newspaper advertising and promotional literature, including pieces written by hired Associated Press reporters for popular magazines like The Outlook. Colorful pamphlets showed photos and illustrations of the Valley, echoing the “power of the picture” being seen in
national brand advertising. One source estimated that from 75 to 90 percent of prospective settlers had seen pictures of the area.

These “home-seekers,” as prospective settlers were called, “were brought down, first by the carload and later by full train-loads.”

Typically, the three-day excursions were packaged as both a vacation and a potential investment opportunity, in which prospective buyers were showered with colorful brochures, scripted sales pitches, and wonderful entertainments. Riding in (segregated) Pullman cars, the groups feasted on veal chops, beef short ribs, or other wonderful foods, and were waited on by staff that created an atmosphere of luxury and privilege. They sang songs from songbooks provided by the promoters—patriotic tunes, folk songs, old standards, and, of course, Texas-themed songs—all calculated to create a spirit of camaraderie and even to invoke “the spirit that led the earlier pioneers of the [18]40s and the [18]50s to cross the continent in prairie schooners.”

Such “impromptu” singing, often accompanied with prayer, also tended to coincide with agents pulling down the train’s window blinds to hide the unsightly poverty-stricken and overwhelmingly Hispanic environs of South Texas—all part of strategic and effective sales tactics.

Once at their destination, the prospective buyers were chaperoned throughout their trip, being driven around to see the “Magic Valley” for themselves—albeit at prearranged locations. They sampled some fruit in a beautiful and already productive grove of citrus and viewed the modern irrigation pumps and concrete water channels that provided life to this Edenic enterprise. According to one account:

_They were taken to the finest groves and farms in the community; and at each place the owner made a speech, telling of his success. The drivers—all successful growers—were very enthusiastic boosters. After these tours, the guests were taken to commodious clubhouses where they ate all their meals and where they slept. During that evening, lavish entertainment was provided; and further sales talks were made. An opportunity was given to all to sign sales contracts. So full were their schedules and so careful the supervision over their activities that it was almost impossible for guests to make any contact with outsiders._
Such close chaperoning by sales agents not only kept the visitors’ camaraderie going, it allowed them to see for themselves how the “frontier” and “unproductive” landscapes were being dramatically altered and modernized, and were now serving the nation. Moreover, such escorting limited any possibly negative outside sources of information that could potentially dissuade these wide-eyed potential buyers. “This is one reason why clubhouses were built in secluded areas away from disappointed investors known as ‘knockers,’” writes Silvia Zulema Silva-Bewley. “One land developer even resorted to hiring two ex-prize fighters to accompany each excursion. It was their job to keep the knockers away.”

Timothy Bowman, documenting the region’s long-lasting paternalism, marginalization, segregation, and repression of ethnic Mexicans, puts it strongly:

Valley boosterism not only helped Anglos reconstruct their own identities, but it also encouraged them to forge new identities for local ethnic Mexicans, without their knowledge or consent. The Valley’s native population became passive members of the Old World who would give way to the dictates of modern, white America.

That said, this currently popular generalization does not fit with W. F. Arnold’s own character or his worldview that had been forged in “Unionist” DeKalb County, Missouri, and anti-slavery Doniphan County, Kansas, as demonstrated in his family’s history. This does not necessarily contradict the sad assessment of historian Timothy Bowman, who concluded that even those Anglo “colonizers” of the Valley who “did not outwardly exhibit any stark anti-Mexican prejudices,” still accepted the firmly entrenched vision of segregation, passivity, and “stark racial hierarchy.” Perhaps, but again, this is not conspicuously evident in Arnold or Euler family history. The emotional reluctance of W. F. Arnold’s wife Sarah, or their oldest daughter Lorena Euler and her family, including their most reluctant daughter Ruth, to relocate to the Valley was less about anti-Mexican prejudice than it was simply that South Texas was most certainly not Kansas—“home”—where family, family history, and familiarity still flourished.
In selling Midwesterners the “Magic Valley,” as Cristina Salinas notes:

*Companies designed the entire experience to hew as closely as possible to the images and narratives of progress, development, opportunity, and ease outlined in sales brochures. . . . Prospective buyers’ glimpses of South Texas were as constructed and carefully cultivated as the glossy brochures themselves. . . . Every moment of the trip acted as a tightly organized extension of the sales pitch.*

Promotional brochures emphasized “before” and “after” photographs of the landscape, typically showing one photo captioned as “raw cactus land” with its historic thorn scrub of prickly pear and mesquite, juxtaposed with another photo showing the stark contrast—now, in place of the primitive thorn scrub wilderness, grew a citrus orchard with rows and rows of fruit trees in tight grid formation. Of course, nothing was said about how the prickly pear, with its delicious fruit, had been utilized as a food source for centuries, or how the landscape was breathtakingly beautiful with colorful flowers when the cactus was in bloom. The first citrus shipments out of the Valley occurred in the winter of 1921. Farmers planted 300,000 fruit trees in 1920-1921, and perhaps half a million orange and grapefruit trees by 1923. There were two million citrus trees in the Valley by 1925, reaching over six million by 1930.

Advertising for “Magic Valley” opportunities typically were selling two commodities. First was the land itself, with its potential to be overflowing with fruit trees—especially grapefruit, to distinguish South Texas from the orange and lemon markets dominated by Southern California and Florida. Closely associated with promoting the land itself was selling the Valley’s location as the geographical center of North America and (unlike Florida and California) convenient to markets throughout the country. Moreover, nearly one-half million acres were waiting to be tapped by entrepreneurs, all potentially irrigable from the rich waters of the Rio Grande. The second commodity being sold
was a prosperous, leisurely, and modern lifestyle made possible with the landscape and the profits from the fruit and produce. This was typically communicated through personal testimonies, which itself was a powerful marketing technique utilized to great success in all national advertising. This in turn dovetailed with the idea of the Valley as idyllic, productive, tamed, even modern, with a sense of community among the Midwestern newcomers—what boosters called the “Valley Spirit.” In the branding of “Magic Valley,” this “Valley Spirit” was perhaps the ultimate place myth, ostensibly a real and tangible, transforming force. “Almost invariably, men who come to the Valley are seized with The Spirit of the Valley, that contagious, infectious, breathing, palpitating Something, which in itself embodies Magic,” proclaimed one railroad promotion. This powerful force even healed those homesick, particularly women, longing to return to the Midwest. “But, strange to relate, having become inoculated with the Magic of the Valley, hundreds of them—even the erstwhile disconsolate women—gradually drifted back, content to settle in a land that, by comparison with most sections of the country, seemed like the land of Canaan. Many of them are now the Valley’s most satisfied, prosperous citizens, and its best boosters.”

Thus, through the “Valley Spirit,” not only did the actual landscape come to resemble the place myth, so did the entrepreneurs and land consumers. All of this reflects the heart of modern marketing and advertising—to present a carefully manipulated picture to potential buyers so that they see a product being sold through the seller’s vision, with the result that the consumer becomes the brand—and forges or reconstructs their own identities. It is important to see this in the context of marketing and advertising history, which even as early as the 1910s and 1920s gave the culture powerful national brand names with such memorable sales pitches as “Good to the last drop” (Maxwell House coffee), “When in doubt—Look it Up” (Encyclopedia Britannica), “Skin you love to touch” (Woodbury’s Facial Soap), “Often a bridesmaid but never a bride” (Listerine), “Ask the man who
owns one” (Packard), “Breakfast of Champions” (Wheaties), “I’d walk a mile for a Camel” (Camel cigarettes), “Exhilarating, Invigorating, Aids Digestion” (Pepsi-Cola), “The pause that refreshes” (Coca-Cola), and of course, “Drink an orange” (Sunkist). In advertising’s wonderful “magic,” consumers became “branded” with the images, slogans, and trademarks that advertising conveyed through the brands, thus building brand loyalty. It is no coincidence that the term “branding,” which historically in ranching culture meant to distinguish and show ownership of livestock, was the same term that business used in advertising and marketing to distinguish products, create consumer loyalty, and essentially imply ownership.

This is vividly seen to this day with current consumers’ devout and zealous attachments to brands, distinguishing and characterizing Coca-Cola devotees from Pepsi’s, Ford truck loyalists from Chevy’s, Mac enthusiasts from PC’s, Budweiser fans to Miller’s, iPhone users to Samsung’s, ad infinitum. As advertising historian and consumerism apologist James B. Twitchell put it, “On Madison Avenue it is often said that we consume the advertising not the product, that we drink the commercial not the beer, drive the nameplate, not the car, smoke the jingle not the cigarette.” Experimental psychologist Ian Zimmerman, writing in Psychology Today, in an article titled “We Are What We Consume,” pulled no punches—“We not only use consumption to construct our own identities, but we use it to infer the identities of others. Products represent our identities by the meaning attached to them.”

The marketing and promotion of a brand initially serves to entice (perhaps persuade) new consumers to join the brand family. While continuously targeting potential new consumers, marketing also continuously reinforces consumer converts, constructing brand loyalty. Whether Sunkist or “Magic Valley,” consumers want to feel good about their purchases, and by extension, themselves. John H. Shary in particular was a master at this, dedicating much creative energy to national magazine and newspaper publicity campaigns for (in his words) “placing the Valley before
the world.” “It would be no idle talk to say that money grows on trees’, he quipped. Yet his equal energy devoted to the successful productivity of the Valley backed up his claims.96

The “Valley Spirit” of South Texas evidently played its vital role successfully because what W. F. Arnold saw in 1913 obviously inspired him. Upon his return to Kansas, he declared his intent to move the family to the Rio Grande Valley, despite his being sixty years of age, despite his having lived most of his entire life in DeKalb County, Missouri, and Doniphan County, Kansas, despite his success as a dairy, orchard, and crop farmer in Kansas, and despite that he and his wife Sarah had extended family in both counties. For example, in May 1912, W. F. and Sarah Arnold hosted a Thornton family reunion at their home, which the local newspaper called “a big kin dinner.”97 In addition to convincing his family, especially his wife, of his intentions to relocate to the “Magic Valley,” W. F. Arnold also had to do something with the farmland and dairy in Doniphan County. In November of 1915, he put the family’s eight-room house up for rent—a keen strategy that if things in Texas didn’t work out, they could return. The local newspaper notice described Arnold’s house as “modern in every way.”98 By 1917—during the same tumultuous time that President Woodrow Wilson ordered the U.S. Army to participate in the Border War with Mexico during that country’s civil war and revolution, and then, thanks in part to the Zimmermann Telegram, engaged the United States to participate in what Wilson called “the war to end war”—the Arnolds moved to Texas with hope, apprehension, and prayers. They settled in Hidalgo County near the new town of Pharr, their new “home.” W. F. Arnold initially bought 100 acres to plant citrus, and then bought 200 more acres, as his plan was to give each of his three children 100 acres. Over the course of years, W. F. and his son Russell, together with Mexican labor garnered through employment agencies in Pharr and McAllen, successfully raised citrus, including lemons, grapefruit, oranges, and tangerines, as well as vegetables like spinach, radishes, cabbage, onions, and
carrots. To maintain consistent and reliable labor, W. F. Arnold constructed a home for his Mexican farm manager. Eventually, Russell and his sons were farming 700 acres of land, some of which is still going to this day.

By most measures, W. F. Arnold’s relocation to the “Magic Valley” would be seen as a success. But W. F.’s wife Sarah could not resign herself to life in this “foreign” land. They just were not in Kansas anymore. Not only was the South Texas climate, culture, and indeed entire way of life so different, Sarah still had family in Kansas and Missouri. She chose to return to the Sunflower State alone for an extended stay (family stories differ about the length of her sojourn—months or even years). This difficult, even painful family experience underscores the usually overlooked difficulties of transition as families resettled in various parts of our country. One person’s dream of excitement, promise, and success was another’s hell of frustration, isolation, foreignness, and identity crisis. Yet, the chronology of relocation is vague. Family lore and newspaper evidence suggest that, at first, only W. F. Arnold and his nineteen-year-old son Russell moved down to set up the new farm near Pharr. W. F.’s wife Sarah certainly joined her husband and son by 1918, though not without major misgivings. By 1920, their middle daughter, May Arnold, moved down and would take up residence in McAllen. But the Arnold’s oldest daughter, Lorena, her husband, John Euler, and their family remained in Kansas until about 1942. There were visits back “home,” of course, sometimes by both W. F. and his wife; other times (perhaps more often and for extended stays, according to family lore), Sarah went alone. After all, in addition to her oldest daughter, Lorena, and her family still living in Doniphan County, Kansas, Sarah’s extended family still lived in either Doniphan County or DeKalb County, Missouri.

But, in keeping with W. F. Arnold’s conservative financial strategy, given that it took about five years for citrus trees to begin bearing fruit, he wisely kept the farmlands in Kansas should the whole Texas enterprise not have worked. Significantly, this means that W. F. Arnold avoided a more typical experience of
transplanted Midwesterners to the Valley—one certainly not touted in promotional literature—the humiliation and economic trials of repossession. According to one historian, the repossession rate for lands sold by Shary’s Southwestern Land Company between 1912 and 1930 was an astonishing 70 percent! On the other hand, as an historian notes, “absentee landowners always outnumbered those who decided to move to South Texas” and “the vast majority of the people who took advantage of the special rates to travel to South Texas and witness the marvels of rapid agricultural transformation . . . never purchased a single acre.” Thus, in becoming a successful citrus grower who resettled his family from Kansas to the Valley, W. F. Arnold not only beat the odds, he bucked the norm. Compared to other Midwesterners who also relocated to the Valley, certainly prior to the 1920s, W.F. Arnold’s experience was not typical.

In August 1918, in the uncomfortable heat of the South Texas summer, The Kansas Chief newspaper of Troy printed as news that W. F. and Sarah Arnold “of Pharr, Texas, arrived at the home of their daughter, Mrs. John Euler, Friday Evening” for a visit. It is significant that the local newspaper presented the Arnolds, once long-term residents of Doniphan County, now as residents of Pharr in Hidalgo County—and were now merely visiting. Their relocation to the Rio Grande Valley was seemingly complete. However, even though the Arnold’s son, Russell, and their middle daughter, May, had followed them to live in Hidalgo County, Texas, their oldest daughter Lorena and her husband John Euler continued living on their farm in Doniphan County, Kansas, raising six children—all born in Kansas between 1910 and 1921. Ruth May (b. 1921), the author’s mother, was the Arnold’s youngest child and only daughter, who not only still loved Kansas but, at the tender age of 18, had been certified to teach all eight grades in a one-room school house in Doniphan County, which she did for three years.

W. F. Arnold’s wife Sarah died in 1933 at age 74. She was buried in the “foreign” land of Hidalgo County, Texas, in Roselawn Cemetery in McAllen. About 1942, her oldest daughter, Lorena,
and Lorena’s husband, John Euler, were finally persuaded to relocate their family from Doniphan County, Kansas, to the Rio Grande Valley to join the remaining Arnolds. The main motivation was not so much the promise of the “Magic Valley” as it was financial problems during the Great Depression that led to losing the farm in Kansas. The Eulers emigrated with two sons, Joseph and Kennard, and daughter, Ruth. Their son Chester had already joined the U.S. Army Air Corps and was stationed in the South Pacific, and, tragically, of the younger sons, Lewis had died at 18 months and Lawrence had been killed in a hunting accident at age twelve in Kansas. Ruth, a veteran teacher, found that the schools in the Valley were already consolidated, so despite her three years experience in Kansas, she could not teach in Hidalgo County without getting another degree and further certification. More importantly, this young Kansas woman, like her grandmother Sarah, found the Valley too much of a “foreign” country. She identified with the character of Dorothy in the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, the sensation of 1939-1940, whose nostalgic and sole wish was to return “home” to Kansas. Thus, she was determined to return to the Sunflower State, even if it meant leaving behind her mother, father, and brothers, plus her Aunt May and Uncle Russell, and her grandfather W. F. Arnold, all of whom were now working and profiting from the land in which W. F. had invested in the “Magic Valley.” Alas, unlike the character of Dorothy, Ruth had no ruby slippers to click together to quickly return to Kansas. As a strategy, she sought employment first in Brownsville as a credit manager at Montgomery Ward, then, after nine months, transferred to McAllen for three years, then transferred again to a new Montgomery Ward catalog store that had just opened farther north, in Victoria, Texas. At least Victoria was on the way back to Kansas! But there she met a World War Two U.S. Army Signal Corps veteran now working for Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, Henry R. Roell (himself only a second generation Texas German), who was installing the telephones in the new Ward’s store. The couple married and Victoria became her new and permanent home—and
that’s how the author of this article came to be. But in her heart, Ruth, now a robust 96-years-old, is still a Kansas girl.

Historian Robert Lee Maril wrote, “The Midwestern farmers were, of course, far from stupid. They were attracted by what seemed a dream that could not fail.” True to this sentiment, W. F. Arnold had moved from Virginia to Missouri, married, and moved again to Kansas, and finally, even in his 60s, moved again to the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. Each time he sought to pursue the American dream of success and betterment through hard work and proven Midwestern values. As noted above, W. F. Arnold bucked the typical experience of most enterprising Midwesterners who rode the excursion trains to the “Magic Valley” in that he not only purchased land there, he actually moved and relocated his family to the Valley, plus he did not go bankrupt and have his lands repossessed, but instead, he prospered, as did his family. Thus, for him, the dream did not fail—although neither did the dream pan out quite the way intended. His wife Sarah was never reconciled to their new life in this foreign land of South Texas, nor was his oldest daughter Lorena, nor especially was his granddaughter Ruth. Nevertheless, W. F. Arnold, a successful Kansan colonist in the “Magic Valley” and a widower for 15 years, died in 1948 at the ripe old age of 96. He, along with his wife Sarah, and later their children, Russell (d. 1987), May (d. 1982), and Lorena (d. 1958) and husband John Euler (d. 1972), occupy real estate in Roselawn Cemetery in McAllen, Hidalgo County, Texas.

The questions put forward at the beginning of this article have hopefully been addressed to the reader’s satisfaction. While it is crucial to locate the lives of an individual like W. F. Arnold and his family within the larger historical context, and to draw conclusions about patterns, culture, economics, trends, motivations, and the like, in the end, it comes down to what Ralph Waldo Emerson said so long ago: “All history becomes subjective; in other words, there is properly no history; only biography.”

Georgia Southern University
Endnotes

1 These details are provided by my mother, Ruth May Euler Roell (b. 1921), whose mother was Lorena Arnold Euler, the eldest child of W. F. and Sara Thornton Arnold, as well as information obtained by other family members, and from information on Ancestry.com, the U.S. Federal Census, and local newspapers.

2 As Valley historians Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp observed, “The name of ‘Magic Valley’ was attached to the delta to make it seem more attractive, the modifier ‘magic’ referring to the fertility of its soil where three crops a year could be grown, and its noun ‘valley’ dishonestly suggesting a topography of greater, more picturesque relief than the delta affords.” Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp, Boom and Bust: The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1991), 223-24.


7 My mother, Ruth Euler Roell, remembers this fine home, as it’s where she and her siblings were born and raised.


12  Gray, Gray’s Doniphan County History.


14  Apple growing around Troy dates at least to 1869. According to promotional history, “Doniphan County apples beat all the world at the [Philadelphia] Centennial, in 1876.” By 1882, one grower alone raised and sold more than 10,000 bushels grown on 160 acres of land and 13,000 trees, 11,000 of which bore ten different varieties of apples. In 1886, 27,000 barrels of apples were shipped out of the county. Gray, Gray’s Doniphan County History, 69, 92, 94; The Kansas Chief, Troy, Kansas, September 12, 1895, p. 3. https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/67707974/ [Accessed August 24, 2017].


17  See Craig H. Roell, Matamoros and the Texas Revolution (Denton: Texas State Historical Association, 2013).

18  The starting place for the history of the Rio Grande Valley, particular-
ly the Brownsville and Matamoros area, is the classic by Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp, *Boom and Bust: The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville* (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1991). This should be supplemented by the many books in the history of the Rio Grande series edited by Milo Kearney, Anthony Knopp, Antonio Zavaleta, and more recently, Thomas Daniel Knight. The number of books in this series, now called the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Regional History Series, numbers sixteen, including this current volume. There is no other region in Texas that enjoys such ongoing, diverse, and comprehensive historical coverage as this series provides.


23 Garza, “Hidalgo County.”


28 Cristina Salinas, “Contesting Mobility: Growers, Farm Workers, and U.S.-Mexico Border Enforcement During the Twentieth Century” (PhD diss. University of Texas at Austin, 2011), 27.

29 Bowen, *Blood Oranges*, 75.

31  David Crockett to his son and daughter, January 9, 1836, Special Collections Library, University of Tennessee, quoted in Lisa Waller Rogers, A Texas Sampler: Historical Recollections (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1998), 22-23.


35  John H. Shary, Sharyland Orchard pamphlet, c.1925, quoted in Bowman, Blood Oranges, 79.


39  Leo Bennett, Communications of an Advertising Man: Selections from the Speeches, Articles, Memoranda, and Miscellaneous Writings of Leo Burnett (Chicago: [privately printed], 1961), 82.


41  Brannstrom and Neuman, “Inventing the ‘Magic Valley’ of South Texas,” 125, 127.


My mother, who grew up in Doniphan County, Kansas, chuckled at this claim especially!


Gray, *Gray’s Doniphan County History*, 25-29, 93.


Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, 224.


Seaboard Air Line Railway, *Seaboard Air Line Railway Shippers Guide for the


57 These and many other examples of fruit crate labels at http://www.ListAdapter.com [Accessed August 24, 2017].

58 Ibid. For an early study, see Jacob Lee Stambaugh, “The marketing of Perishable Farm Products Grown in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas.” M.A. thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1924.


63 For example, see Marvin Dunn, A History of Florida: Through Black Eyes (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2016). Despite the author’s issues with plagiarism, his work is informative.


69 See Michael Pokorny and John Sedgwick, eds., An Economic History of Film (London and New York: Routledge, 2004); and Gerben Bakker, “The Economic History of the International Film Industry,” E.H.Net Encyclopedia,


74 As an example of this railroad corridor of convenience connecting Texas and the Midwest, the author owns a Steger & Sons grand piano, made in Chicago in 1915—the same time period W. F. Arnold came to investigate the Rio Grande Valley. The piano was originally purchased by a wealthy Texas rancher for his church in Edna, Texas, 30 miles from the author’s hometown of Victoria in Southeast coastal Texas. In 1915, the rancher took the train from Edna to Chicago (through Kansas) to purchase the piano from the Steger & Sons showroom located on Wabash Avenue, called “Piano Row,” in Chicago. That a rancher from Southeast Texas traveled all the way to Chicago by rail to buy a piano for his church demonstrates how convenient the trip seemed at the time—no different than our hopping on a plane today.


Salinas, “Contesting Mobility,” 33-34.


Salinas, “Contesting Mobility,” 30-31. Salinas also invokes gender theory in this trope: “For the most part … boosters preferred to downplay overt violence and employed the other dominant myth of frontier expansion—that of a virgin land waiting to be inhabited, giving passive consent to its use by white men. The land itself was gendered feminine, and descriptions of the processes by which agricultural development altered the landscape often shaded into sexualized language. … This narrative portrayed the river delta of the Rio Grande as a female reproductive organ that had lain chastely untouched until white colonization had opened up the land for agricultural production” (32). Not only the land, but in the promoters narratives of conquest, even the Mexican laboring population “were rendered feminine and docile” (36).


Bowman, Blood Oranges, 85.


Silva-Bewley, Legacy of John H. Shary, 27.

Bowman, Blood Oranges, 76. Bowman pulls no punches in asserting that “The establishment of commercial citrus during the 1920s came at a great cost for ethnic Mexicans in the South Texas borderlands—it cost them their homeland” (107).

Ibid., 102-03.

Salinas, “Contesting Mobility,” 45-46, 50, 53.

See Craig H. Roell, Matamoros and the Texas Revolution (Denton: Texas


100 Salinas, “Contesting Mobility,” 61.


103 Roselawn Cemetery, McAllen, Texas [https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&grdId=46906025c3](https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&grdId=46906025c3) [Accessed August 24, 2017].

19th AND EARLY
20th CENTURY CONFLICTS
Alexander Headley, Public Servant or Scoundrel?

by

Norman Rozell

Since its recorded history began in the mid-17th Century, the Lower Rio Grande Valley has had its share of “characters.” Certainly, Alexander Manford Headley ranks in the top tier of these. His story, unfortunately, is fraught with inconsistencies, omissions, and outright speculation.

His grandson George Headley Edgerton, in writing up his grandfather for the Handbook of Texas Online, relates that Alexander was born to “William and Isabel Hedley in Rothbury, England, in April 1836, and baptized in the old Anglican church there.”¹ He was later to change the spelling of his surname. Although some historians have attributed an aristocratic background to Headley, the 1841 census in Rothbury, England, reveals that his father’s occupation was a tinman, a maker or worker in tinplate, or, by a second definition, someone who supervises the weighing of cloth or yarn with a tin solution.² Alexander completed prep school in the year 1853. Being only fifth in line for a family inheritance, if any, Alexander joined the British navy as did many a young man without means who sought a secure and honorable profession.³

He was soon assigned to a ship traveling to South America. On the voyage he had heated words with the captain, his commanding officer. He was then unceremoniously deposited ashore in the first port reached, which was in in Central America. He somehow managed to travel north through Mexico and eventually landed in Louisiana.⁴

Seemingly with an inborn wanderlust, he is next documented to be in Cincinnati, Ohio, where, in 1856, he entered the Eclectic Medical Institute (later College). This was an unusual college
for its time. Its stated purpose was “Eclectic—excluding all such medicines and such remedies as, under ordinary circumstances of their judicious use, are liable to produce evil consequences or endanger the future health of the patient.” It emphasized botanical (vegetable) along with other substances and physical therapy practices, popular in the latter half of the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries rather than mineral medications. In short, it was a reform movement against the medical practices of its day. The college existed from 1845 until 1910. Although his grandson, George H. Edgerton, reports his graduation in 1859, Headley is not listed in the school’s matriculation records. Therefore, he may not have fully completed his studies. He may have, in fact, moved on to other adventures.\(^5\)

Next we learn that Headley, in 1858, had supposedly acquired land in Porción 50 of an old Mexican land grant. University of Texas historian John J. Leffler, who authored *Refuge on the Rio Grande: A Regional History of Bentsen-Rio Grande State Park*, states that, if Headley did indeed acquire the parcel in 1858, “a dubious proposition, it is unlikely that he took possession of the property until much later.” Leffler later relates, “In 1878 he [Headley] helped to clear his title to Porción 50, which had been clouded after the sheriff’s sale, by paying $24.50 to Burbois. He undoubtedly spent at least some of his time at Las Nuebas, the small ranch community on the property.”\(^6\) The name Las Nuebas was later changed to Las Nuevas.

The following year, 1859, according to an account by Virgil N. Lott and Virginia W. Fenwick in their book *People and Plots on the Rio Grande*, Headley became involved with the affairs of the nefarious Juan N. Cortina. Cortina had, for some time, been wreaking havoc on the Texas side of the border.\(^7\) In exasperation, the U.S. Government finally, in November 1859, issued orders to Major Samuel Peter Heintzelman at San Antonio to go to the border and neutralize Juan Cortina and his cohort. This army unit became known as the Brownsville Expedition. “After arriving in the Lower Rio Grande Valley the
major attempted to gather intelligence about Cortina, and some of his forces engaged part of Cortina’s army with good results. On December 27, 1859, the major with 150 regulars composed of infantry, cavalry, and artillery ... and 198 mounted [Texas] Rangers confronted Cortina and his army at Rio Grande City and overwhelmed Cortina’s force of 590. Later the major continued pursuing Cortina to south of San Miguel, Nuevo León, Mexico.”

Lott and Fenwick then purport that:

“At this place Heintzelman met with Dr. Headley, Cortina’s surgeon and emissary who acted then as a spokesman for Cortina. Headley proposed that Cortina be granted amnesty and be permitted to return to Texas on the promise that Cortina would abandon his raids on Texas ranches and retire to his mother’s ranch near Brownsville to live happily ever afterward and cooperate in the development of the country. The major immediately rejected this offer and told Headley that Cortina would return only as an arrested prisoner to be tried. Naturally, Cortina refused these terms and retired to the Burgos Mountains of Mexico until the Mexican Civil War against Maximilian commenced.”

From this account we are to believe that the young Dr. Headley, who had entered Cortina’s services as a surgeon to his forces, had acted both as a spokesman emissary and, incidentally, as Cortina’s ambassador extraordinary to the U. S. and Texas forces on the Rio Grande. The end result was failure.

Whether many of these events actually occurred or are an “urban legend” is a question to be asked. Certainly the timeline involved is questionable. Furthermore, some other historians fail to mention Headley in their Cortina accounts. These include Dr. Jerry Thompson in his Cortina, Defending the Mexican Name in Texas, Dr. Michael L. Collins in Texas Devils, Rangers & Regulars on the Lower Rio Grande, 1846-1861, and Dick D. Heller, Jr. in his unpublished Merchants, Masons and Mauauders on the Texas Border; The Lower Rio Grande Valley 1856-1866, The Story of Henry Clay Davis.

In the early 1860s, Headley moved to Arkansas, where he purchased property and joined the Arkansas State Forces. Upon
the start of the Civil War and Arkansas’s secession, Headley, then age 25, was mustered into the army of the Confederate States of America.\textsuperscript{10}

In was in this stage of his life that the tall, blue-eyed, ruddy-complexioned Headley’s appearance was strikingly transformed into an individual with completely white hair and beard.\textsuperscript{11} Later, in Texas and Mexico, he would be nicknamed \textit{el doctor canoso}, the grey-haired doctor. In the military service, Headley first served as an assistant surgeon, then as a senior surgeon. His units included Company F of the 30\textsuperscript{th} Arkansas Infantry and the 7\textsuperscript{th} Arkansas Volunteer Infantry, also known as the Bloody Seventh. Both units fought many engagements east of the Mississippi River, including major ones at Shiloh and Bragg’s Kentucky Campaign.\textsuperscript{12}

Upon the end of the conflict, Headley became involved in a most unusual event. This is termed by historians “The Shelby Expedition.” Rather than surrender to Union forces, Brig. Gen. Joseph Orville (Jo) Shelby organized a group of volunteers of “undefeated rebels” to go to Mexico. He had been the commander of the “Iron Cavalry Brigade” of Missouri. When Lee surrendered, Shelby and his troops, numbering about 1000, were in Marshall, Texas, having crossed the Arkansas River into Texas in October 1864. He was determined to continue the conflict from a base in Mexico. With his well-disciplined and orderly men, with all their cannons, arms, and ammunition, he marched through Corsicana, Tyler, Waxahachie, Waco, Austin, Houston, and San Antonio, declaring martial law and forcibly quelling local outbreaks of looting and rioting where they found it. Eventually they reached Eagle Pass. The force then crossed the border at Piedras Negras. During the river crossing, Shelby buried, in a funereal memorial, the Confederate guidon (a type of specialized flag) in the riverbed in order to keep it from falling into federal hands. This action was forever remembered as the “Grave of the Confederacy Incident.” The event is depicted in a painting displayed at the Eagle Pass City Hall. Readers
may also view a fictionalized portrayal of Shelby’s retreat in the 1969 movie *The Undefeated* starring John Wayne and Rock Hudson.¹³

Upon encountering the army of Benito Juárez, Shelby’s followers sold all their arms to the rebels except their revolvers and carbines, and then they were permitted to pass to the south to Mexico City, arriving August 1865. Once here, the majority chose to align with Emperor Maximilian. Their offer was rejected, but some were awarded land as colonists, and others continued different pursuits. Headley had other ideas.

After staying briefly in Mexico City and Córdoba, Headley traveled north to the border city of Camargo opposite Rio Grande City. In this bustling Mexican city, Headley set up his medical practice and a large mercantile business called *Casa de Comercio* in early 1866. His military experiences were recognized, and he was later appointed military commandant of Camargo by Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, who succeeded Benito Juárez as president of Mexico. While practicing medicine in Camargo, Dr. Headley provided yeoman service in combating yellow fever during the epidemic of 1882–83.¹⁴

Mary Margaret McAllen Amberson, in her comprehensive Valley history book *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas*, had this to say about Headley’s return to the border:

*Shortly afterward, Headley returned to the border at Camargo where he befriended a curious array of political leaders, all of whom were foes to each other, and he reportedly worked as a surgeon for Juan N. Cortina’s troops. Headley though described as a gentleman, understood and often defended the rights of the average man. He was highly regarded along the border. Then, when Porfirio Díaz fomented his coup against Lerdo de Tejada, he asked Headley to join him, but he refused, in deference to Lerdo de Tejada. After Díaz’s ascendency to the presidency, Headley moved to Hidalgo County and became active in Hidalgo politics in the mid-1870s, owning a ranch near Edinburgh [the present-day town of Hidalgo].*¹⁵
Headley was still involved in Mexican affairs, despite taking up residency in the United States. Once more he played a role in an international incident. This was in November of 1875, when Texas Ranger Capt. Leander H. McNelly crossed the Rio Grande with 26 rangers to retrieve stolen cattle near Rancho Las Cuevas (also referred to as Los Cuevos) while Col. A. J. Alexander of Fort Brown waited on the north bank with his cavalrymen. McNelly was met with a band of men coming out of the brush with a white flag tied to the barrel of a carbine that had a letter inserted under the gun’s hammer. According to Amberson, the leader was none other than Headley, who “was a tall man of ruddy complexion and blue eyes, and that day wore a white linen suit and a broad white hat.” Although the Rangers believed that Headley was behind some of the cattle rustling, they did not challenge him, as he was acting as spokesman. The letter was from the governor of Tamaulipas ordering the Rangers to leave Mexico. Amberson, in her book, relates that:

Headley, who believed McNelly was about to burn the town (San Miguel), argued with the Rangers, telling them ‘You have invaded Mexico and killed our beloved alcalde of Camargo and eighty other citizens.’ McNelly was determined to stay until the cattle were returned to him. He told Headley, ‘We’ll negotiate when we get that herd of stolen cattle. We’ll stay in Mexico until we do.’ Headley promised them the cattle and after a skirmish with a Mexican customs official, McNelly took possession of the fifty-two head and returned to Texas. The number of cows was far less than the number that had been rustled.

Amberson continues: “Thirty-four years later in a newspaper interview Headley was quoted about the incident. ‘I made them acquainted with the fact that they would meet with desperate resistance should they make an attack upon the town. I agreed to have as many of the stolen cattle delivered up to them as I could find.’” Amberson wrote:

When Colonel Alexander asked him what he would have done if they crossed and the cavalry had attacked the town, Headley replied ‘I would have taken my 600 armed men and started a march through Texas ....
I told Colonel Alexander that had he crossed the Rio Grande with his armed force he would have brought war between Mexico and the United States .... The Mexican population of the lower border territory were greatly aroused by Captain McNelly’s attack upon San Miguel."^7

Author Chuck Parsons, in his book *John B. Armstrong Texas Ranger and Pioneer Ranchman*, has a slightly different account of McNelly’s raid:

And stay they did. McNelly crossed back to the Texas side of the river to communicate with President Grant about his actions in crossing and creating a potential political crisis. During his absence a group of Mexicans under a white flag and led by Dr. Alexander Manford Headley, an English doctor who practiced on both sides of the river, approached the troop with the intention of convincing the Rangers to return to Texas soil to save their lives. The doctor and his group were rebuffed. Three times the truce party approached the Rangers, each time requesting the same thing: return to Texas. But each time the response was the same: they would leave only with the stolen cattle. Ultimately, McNelly did agree to return to Texas on condition that the stolen cattle and the horses and saddles of Armstrong and Hall be returned the next morning at Rio Grande City, a few miles up the river. McNelly almost certainly agreed to this because of Dr. Headley’s involvement. It was Dr. Headley who negotiated the terms of peace which allowed McNelly to save face by returning to Texas and who promised that at least part of the stolen herd would be returned." McNelly recorded this in a telegram dated November: “I withdrew my men last night upon the promise of the Mexican authorities to deliver the cattle to me at Rio Grande City this morning.” But when the next morning came, no cattle were produced, so again McNelly crossed, but this time he met with a delegation of citizens who informed him that the cattle could not be crossed because they had not been inspected. McNelly saw this as a delaying tactic and threatened that he “would kill the last one of them” unless the cattle were produced within five minutes.^8

Pidge recalled that “the Mexicans needed assistance to cross the cattle, and McNelly and ten men, Armstrong one of them, went over.” Then another excuse was provided, that there was no permit allowing the cattle to be taken across the river. Pidge Robinson was one of the ten who helped with the crossing and recalled the following:
Capt. McNelly—exhausted all arguments with these gentlemen, except one, which he reserved for the very last, and which, as a dernier ressorte [sic] in this country, is considered 'a clincher;' then he exhausted that; ‘Prepare to load with ball cartridges—load!’ The ominous ‘kerchak’ of the carbine levers as the long, murderous looking cartridges were chambered home, satisfied them as to the permit and the cattle were allowed to cross over without one; such is the power of a fifty-calibre argument, such the authority of Sharp on International law.\textsuperscript{15}

The cattle were miraculously produced under this threat, although the number amounted to only sixty-five head. McNelly telegraphed Adjutant General Steele that the Mexicans would produce “more [cattle as] soon as captured and the delivery of the thieves.” The sixty-five head of cattle were delivered, and Armstrong and Hall recovered their horses, saddles, and bridles without further incident. No thieves were delivered, however, in spite of the promise of the Mexicans. The cattle were returned to their owners, many of them ranchers in the immediate area. Those of cattleman Richard King were also returned, with volunteer Rangers Durham, Callicott, Rudd, and Pitts herding them back to the Santa Gertrudis Ranch. A greatly surprised King had never expected to see them or any of the Rangers again, as he anticipated that McNelly and his invading force would become “another Alamo.” He was so grateful that he ordered the right horn of each of the recovered cattle to be sawed off and the cattle turned loose on the range to live out their days in peace. King’s vaqueros called these special cattle \textit{los viejos} (“the old ones”).\textsuperscript{20}

Yet another and differing account comes from long-time King Ranch’s El Sauz Division foreman, George Durham. He was a 15-year-old when he became part of Captain McNeely’s 29-man Texas Ranger outlaw pursuit company. Durham, the last living survivor of the company, related his experiences to Clyde Wantland, a San Antonio newsman. It was published as “On the Trail of 5,100 Outlaws,” appeared in the magazine “West,” and was later serialized in the \textit{Valley Morning Star} in 1959.

Durham gives the reported figure of 80 rustler bandits killed at Los Cuevos and a figure of 400 stolen cattle. He also added
that a Sgt. Leahy had turned loose that Gatling gun at Los Cuevos, “saving our necks.” Durham also voiced the skepticism made by Sergeant George Hall. He writes, “If them damn cut-throats deliver them four hundred cattle like they agreed to, you know what I’ll do? I’ll take one of them steers by the tail and eat him raw. That’s what I’ll do.” “Then you don’t think they’ll do like they agreed to?” “Hell, no. Captain had old Doc Headley and his caporals in a tight place, and they would sign anything to get out. But that don’t mean they’ll make any effort to deliver the cattle they promised.”

After the Mexican authorities dragged out the immediate return of the cattle, Durham was one of the ten men ferried across the river to expedite their return. At first, McNelly was all smiles and graciousness with the Mexican head customs man. Matters suddenly took a turn for the worse, as Durham remembers:

And then the big señor told the captain that, before the crossing tomorrow, the regular duty would have to be paid on each head. And he was getting along fine with this talk. Lieutenant Robinson, signaling with his eyes, had told us all to glue our eyes on him and be ready for something. And it happened like a bolt of lightning. “Cover ‘em,” Captain barked. Ten pistols leaped from holsters; ten hammers were cocked; and ten pistols were aimed at that big señor. Then Captain done something he never done before or since. With his feet he hit this officer in the belly and sent him sprawling. And then he landed one or two good kicks to his ribs. “Tell him,” Captain said, “that if there’s a shot fired from anywhere he will die with ten bullets in him.” The intimidated customs chief then spoke in English telling McNelly “You can have the cattle; go to the pens and get them.” McNelly snapped back, “No, You get them damn cutthroats out of the brush, and you swim them across. Well take delivery on the Texas bank where they were stolen from.”

There is yet another variation in the first-hand account by George P. Durham, who accompanied McNelly into Mexico. In this account as rewritten in Brian Robertson’s *Wild Horse Desert, The Heritage of South Texas*:

At five o’clock on the afternoon of November 19, a white flag appeared from the south and the carrier produced a letter from the “Chief Justice
of the State of Tamaulipas” pledging complete cooperation. The cattle would be returned to the Ringgold Barracks the following morning and everything would be done to stop the thievery.” U. S. Army Captain James F. Randlett had crossed into Mexico with forty soldiers in the belief that McNelly’s Rangers would be massacred. Once his superior, Major Alexander, learned of this he ordered Randlett and his soldiers to return to U. S. soil. In any case Randlett had been suspicious of the offer. Durham names the courier as “Doc Headley”. In this confused history McNelly recounted that the document was addressed to “Officer Commanding the Forces invading Mexico” and its tone was anything but cordial. Robertson puts the number returned at 75 head, 35 of which bore the King Ranch brand.\(^2^3\)

Yet another account about the Mexico incursion is provided by Ranger Bill Callicottt. After the raid on the Las Cuevas Ranch and the ranger retreat to the river, Callicott relates:

I went and relieved the guard. I hadn’t been there a little while till I saw coming down the river about a half-mile, five men with a white flag raised. I went and told the Captain that they were coming down the river with a white flag, five of them. He said, “All right. There is no danger in white flags.” He said, “If they start down here, halt them. I don’t want them to find out how few men we have.” They came up opposite me and stopped. The Captain took five men and went to them. It proved to be the governor of the state of Mexico we were in and a white man from Arkansas [Dr. A. M. Headley]. He told Captain McNelly he came to get General Juan Flores’ body that was killed this morning. The Captain told him yes; that his Mexican pilot and his Mexican ranger Camilo Sandoval knew him and said it was General Juan Flores, the owner of the Las Cuevas Ranch.\(^2^4\)

Callicott goes on to relate that, the next day, the governor returned and again urged McNelly to retreat across the river before he was attacked by at least 250 armed Mexicans. McNelly, once more, refused, adding that he was not about to leave before the stolen cattle and gear were recovered. The following day, the governor had changed his tune and promised on his word of honor to return the stolen items the next day.\(^2^5\)

The 1880 U. S. Census of Hidalgo County, taken June 12, provides interesting information on Headley’s marital status and
Rancho Nuevas at the time. Headley, age 42, lists as his wife 26-year-old Ramona Álamos. However another source notes their marriage in Starr County as June 18, 1883, when he was 47-years-old. Living with them were Jesus Vargas, stepson, age 8, and born in Mexico; William Headley, age 4, born in Mexico on January 2, 1876; and Isabel (Ysabella) Headley, age 2, born in Texas. Employed on the ranch were two laborers, one with a wife and three children and the other with only a child. The ranch had 4,665 total acres, of which 60 were tilled. This real estate was valued at $1,500, along with $50 worth of machinery, and $520 worth of livestock. William, by the 1930 census, was a farmer living in Rio Grande City and married to Delfina, 49, a washerwoman. He died in Rio Grande City on March 9, 1931, at age 55. Ysabella married Jacob Francisco Miller in Starr County on October 29, 1894. They had one child. Ysabella died on November 19, 1914, at age 36, in San Antonio.

It was also in the year 1880 that Headley gained citizenship in the United States of America through the naturalization process. His immigration year, by one census report, is given as 1870. He did, however, continue to practice medicine on both sides of the river. That is likely how he met and married, in 1884, the fourth of his wives. She was Maria del Pilar Treviño-Olivárez of Camargo. Conflicting birth dates for her are 1855, 1858, and 1860. The 1855 date is the likely one, as one reliable source gives her age at marriage as 28. According to the 1900 census, they had married in 1882. This may have been a clerical error on the part of the census interviewer, as Headley’s stated birth date of January 1845 certainly was. By that date, Pilar’s mother, likely widowed 60-year-old Eugenia Olivares, was living with them in Rio Grande City. The same year as his fourth marriage, Headley was among about one hundred individuals in the Valley counties who tried to organize the Brownsville, Rio Grande, and Laredo Railroad. It never reached fruition.

Leffler in his history of the Bentsen-Rio Grande State Park tells us how Headley had come to possess the ranch:
The chain of title for Porción 50 during the mid-19th century, broken and clouded by missing transactions and inexplicable omissions, mirrors the confused and confusing state of real estate sales in the Valley during this period. Although the Bourland-Miller Commission had confirmed the Porción 50 grant to Servana Quirva in 1852, there is no record that Quirva ever transferred the title to anyone. Yet in March 1858, Manuel Villareal y Zamora, Manuel Ramirez, and Maria Lorenza Villareal (all of them illiterate), all claiming to be grandchildren of José Antonio Zamora, sold their undivided shares of Porción 50 (or 5/12 of the entire tract) for $75.00 to James Walworth, a friend of Richard King, founder of the legendary King Ranch. Two weeks later, Maria Louisa Villareal, Francesca Villareal, and Manuel Villareal sold their shares, totaling 1/9 of Porción 50, to Walworth for $33.00. Their claims to the property may have been spurious. Although Walworth recorded the deeds in the Hidalgo County courthouse, he never seems to have sold them or received anything for them from the next owner of record, one Pacifico Ochoa Cornelio Villanueva. Villanueva sold the entire Porción 50 tract at an unspecified date to one Estephanio Mungia, who resold it to Ramona Benavides on a deed signed May 4, 1858, at “el Rancho de las Nuebas” (the ranch village then located within the present boundaries of the Park). That very day, Benavides sold it to one Segundio Recio, who that same day sold it to Dr. Alexander M. Headley for 1,400 pesos. Headley did not file the deed until many years later, however, and in 1878, Leo J. Leo, the sheriff of Hidalgo County, sold the property—all 4,725 acres—at public auction to one John B. Burbois for $6.75—the exact sum due on the property for back taxes supposedly unpaid by Recio back in 1875.32

Because of the obscure property title, events would eventually see Headley lose the ranch. Leffler relates “Meanwhile, the actual ownership of Porción 50 was apparently still in doubt. In 1890, a person named G. Zamora sold the title to 3,814 acres of the tract to S.V. Rios. And about that same time, Headley was embroiled in a lawsuit brought against him by Henrietta King, who claimed she owned all or part of Porción 50. When the suit was finally settled in 1893, she was awarded 1,500 acres of the property, and Headley received 3,814 acres, the rest of the porción.” Leffler adds, “It is quite possible that Mrs. King’s claim to the land was based on the derechos purchased by James Walworth in the 1850s. Walworth was a friend of Richard King, and both were active in the real estate market in south Texas during the late 19th century.”33
The decades from the 1870s to the 1890s and even later were wild ones for the politics of Hidalgo County, and that is an understatement. In 1873, in Hidalgo County, the Democratic Party was popularly called the Reds, while the Republican Party affiliates were called the Blues. Leaders of the Blues included John McAllen, as well as two English immigrants, A.M. Headley and Jesse Dennett. It was during his ranch ownership period that Headley became entangled in Hidalgo County politics. Headley was county commissioner of Precinct 3 in 1890. This is the year that remarkable and highly unusual events were to transpire. There are numerous historic accounts of what befell Hidalgo county, but this essay will focus on the one written by Ruth Griffin Spence, *The Nickel Plated Highway to Hell: A Political History of Hidalgo County [Texas] 1852-1934*. Her 1989 history relates:

 Violence occurred about 1890 when Thaddeus Rhodes, first County Clerk of Hidalgo County and a veteran of the Mexican War, retired as county judge after having served for many years. There were two strong factions in the county, the “Reds” and the “Blues,” so designated so that the illiterate voters, both citizens and aliens of the county, would know in which column to place their mark. The factions disagreed over Rhodes’ successor. As a compromise, both groups agreed on a man named McCabe who was supposed to be a member of neither faction. Soon, however, District Judge John C. Russell removed McCabe, possibly for incompetence. Judge Russell, himself, had been involved with Valley politics since his arrival there before the Civil War. He had come to the Valley from Illinois where he had studied law with Abraham Lincoln. He replaced McCabe with Max Stein, but the friends and family of McCabe were vindictive and bent on revenge.

The horrific outcome was that as Mr. and Mrs. Stein and their daughter walked in the public plaza in Reynosa, in August of 1890, Mrs. McCabe emptied her pistol into Max Stein, killing him instantly.

Ruth Griffin Spence relates that “Judge Russell again was remembered in Hidalgo County politics for his action when a group of men, determined to capture the courthouse and the county records, gathered on the outskirts of Hidalgo (formerly
Edinburgh). Judge Russell, with only an interpreter to help him, went out into the crowd of men and persuaded them to go home. This was called the Conspiracy of 1890.”

Again, about 1890, another political revolution occurred soon after Judge Rhodes, a Democrat, stepped down and was finally permanently replaced by Judge W. P. Dougherty, who continued the Democratic domination of the county courthouse. Dr. Alexander M. Headley and his Republican followers decided to take over the courthouse by force. The county officials, fearing they might be murdered, put in a hurried call for the Texas Rangers and fled across the river to Reynosa. Dr. Headley ruled the county for several days, calling his government the Independent Republic of Hidalgo. He could not gain possession of the records, however, because they were locked in an iron box. He also tried to collect duties at the border, but at that invasion of federal prerogatives, a United States Marshall from Brownsville came up the river with a posse, and Headley fled back to his home in Starr County.

The story omits several important details. Amberson wrote, “Headley was usually a man behind the scenes when it came to Hidago County politics, but, in 1878, he organized Blue Party members to oust elected Red county officials. Around 800 men seized the town of Hidalgo (it had officially changed its name from Edinburgh in January 1876) and the county courthouse. They remained in control for six months.” Governor John Ireland dispatched sixty rangers to arrest Headley, but they encountered Headley’s forces on guard and surrendered the warrant. Eventually Sheriff John Closner interceded and arrested about sixty conspirators while McAbe and Headley fled across the Rio Grande.

This wild account does not end there, however. Mrs. McCabe was arrested and taken to a jail in Matamoros. She was incarcerated for three days until Headley, who with others were accused of being co-conspirators in the murder (but never indicted), took it upon himself to free her and allow her
to escape punishment. One account has her leaping from the police station’s second story balcony where she had supposedly gone to obtain a breath of fresh air. She then leaped to the street breaking her ankle as she hit the cobblestones. Headley awaited her on horseback. She and Headley fled across the river to the safe haven of Texas, where her husband, H. T. McCabe, awaited her.\[38\] And who exactly were Headley’s associate McCabe and his wife? H. T. McCabe was born in Nokomia, Illinois, around 1864. He had married O. M. Lester in Bandera, Texas, on October 9, 1886. Strangely enough an O. M. Lester is also recorded as marrying a Riley Kelly in Bandera a month later. His gun-toting wife was likely his second wife, Mary Inez Buckalew, whom he had married in Bandera, Texas, on October 16, 1887. She would go on to marry Orlando G. Davenport in Bandera on October 19, 1893. Juanita Dios Ramírez of Brownsville was his third wife, and he apparently went on to marry a fourth time, although he had a son and a daughter by Juanita who, for a time, anglicized her name to Jeanette. Juanita was to become a court interpreter, according to the 1920 US Census of Houston, and, still later, a legal notary.\[39\]

In a weird, possibly apocryphal, story recounted by Leffler,

On the way back to his ranch at Las Nuebas, however, one of his “friends” gave him a cup of coffee poisoned with arsenic. Headley saved himself by ingesting a massive dose of castor oil and upheaving the poison, however, the experience apparently convinced him that he had enemies in Hidalgo County. Soon afterward he moved from Las Nuebas to Rio Grande City, where he remained active in Republican politics and practiced medicine until his death in 1912."

Leffler goes on to add:

Headley sold his 3,814 acres of Porción 50 in 1902 for $4,767 to G. Bedell Moore, a wealthy and influential San Antonio lumberman, businessman and banker who was investing widely in Texas real estate and ranch land. Ironically, Headley gave John Clooney, one of his old political enemies, his power of attorney to conclude the sale.\[40\]
That Headley was one “cool customer” is validated by a story told of him in the Lott/Fenwick book. One day while standing in the door of his drug store, a Rio Grande City “bad man” approached him, drew his six-shot .45 pistol, and fired away in the direction of Headley, who nonchalantly remained composed. Headley then drew his own .45 pistol from his holster and shot his assailant dead. After his appearance in the Starr County district court he was declared “not guilty.”

While residing in Rio Grande City, Dr. Headley and Pilar were to have one child, Maria, born in 1886. Her first schooling was likely at the Incarnate Word Convent in Rio Grande City. In the early 1900s, she attended public school and followed teacher Professor Thomas Hart to a San Ygnacio school from which she likely was graduated. She enrolled in the University of Texas in Austin, in the summer of 1906, and was one of only two women students from Texas enrolled in the sophomore medical class in Galveston. It is reported that Maria was the first physician to have been born in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. She would marry George William Edgerton Jr., and they would parent a daughter and three sons. Edgerton, who was also a doctor, would have a practice in Rio Grande City. The couple resided for a period in the 1894 Rio Grande City house that Dr. Headley had constructed. It was built by the famed German mason Heinrich Portscheller. It still stands today as an historic building in that city at 705 E. Second Street.

Maria and George’s son, George William Edgeton III, became a doctor and surgeon. He had an office in the Baxter Building in Harlingen in the second half of the 1930s. His wife Hazel was noted for both her singing and her organ playing.

Alexander M. Headley died in Rio Grande City, on February 28, 1912, at age 75. His physician son noted the cause of his death as epithelioma on the left side of his face. This was a type of skin cancer. Headley is buried in the Catholic Cemetery of Rio Grande City.
Endnotes


5  Eclectic Medical School of Cincinnati Matriculation Records as noted at www.lloydlibrary.org/EMI-1845-1939.pdf.


7  *Ibid*; Lott, p. 31.

8  Jerry Thompson, *Cortina, Defending the Mexican Name in Texas* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2007), pp. 72-80.


14  *Ibid*; Leffler, FN 46.


21 George Durham, as told to Clyde Wantland and serialized as *On the Trail of 5,100 Outlaws* in the *Valley Morning Star* (Harlingen) October 2, 1959 through November 15, 1959.


24 Bill Callicott, *Reminiscences*, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin as transcribed by Chuck Parsons for Texas Ranger Hall of Fame E-books, p. 68.


26 Ancestry.com, data from U. S. Census of 1880, Hidalgo County.

27 Ancestry.com, data from U. S. Census of 1930, Starr County.

28 Ancestry.com death notices, Starr and Bexar Counties.

29 Ancestry.com, data from U. S. Census of 1900, Starr County.

30 *Ibid.*, ancestry.com data from U.S. Census of 1900, Starr County

31 Amberson, p. 387.

32 Leffler, footnote 39.


36 Amberson, pp. 372-377


39 Ancestry.com data from U. S. Census of 1920 and other records dating 1870, 1886, 1887, & 1893.

40 Leffler, footnote 46.

41 Lott, p. 32.


44 Ancestry.com data from U. S. Census of 1900, Rio Grande City, Starr County.


46 Harlingen directories for years 1937-1939, Wilmot Directory Service, Inc.

47 Ancestry.com, newspaper reference, late 1950s.


Rebels at the Rio Grande: Naval Actions on the International Border in 1863

by

Walter E. Wilson

The American Civil War was an unequal contest. In practically every objective measure of military might, the Federal forces had an overwhelming advantage over their Confederate adversaries. This disparity was most obvious in their respective navies. At the outbreak of hostilities, the Southern army had numerous forts and weapons in its possession and thousands of militia men. By contrast, the Confederate Navy came into existence with plenty of officers, but practically no ships or sailors. It is little wonder that most Confederate naval initiatives were defensive in nature.¹

On the Texas frontier, however, the Federal naval advantage was not as pronounced. Texas was at the far end of the Union’s supply line, and the Texas coast offered little in the way of food, forage, fresh water, shelter, or fuel. The harsh environment and difficult logistical situation created opportunities for Southern success that were not as readily apparent in other areas of the Confederacy.²

Predictably, Texas was the last Confederate state to be blockaded. The Union initiated the blockade of Texas when the USS South Carolina suddenly appeared off Galveston in early July of 1861. Even with the arrival of large Federal warships, Texans continued to sail dozens of small sloops and schooners into and out of the shallow rivers and inlets of the Western Gulf of Mexico. During the first year of the war, the blockade was practically nonexistent south of Galveston Bay and did not extend to the Rio Grande until early February 1862. It was
not until August of 1862 that Federal blockaders made regular visits to the Rio Grande.\textsuperscript{5}

The primary impediment for the Federal blockaders at the Rio Grande was the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This international treaty guaranteed the right of non-belligerents to conduct trade at the neutral Mexican ports.\textsuperscript{4} Commander Melancthon B. Woolsey of the USS \textit{Princess Royal} succinctly summarized part of the Navy’s legal and operational dilemma,

\begin{quote}
...there is an immense trade in cotton at this place. It is shipped at Matamoras [sic], comes off in Mexican lighters to foreign vessels lying in Mexican waters; it is supposed to come originally from Texas, but of that we have no proof. It is impossible for a naval force to stop it, as the lighters keep on the Mexican side of the river all the way out. The river is not deep enough for gunboats to go up to Matamoras [sic], nor even to enter the Rio Grande.\textsuperscript{5}
\end{quote}

Although the U.S. could not legally blockade the Rio Grande, its Navy still managed to capture a number of blockade runners in its vicinity. The Navy’s presence and actions in South Texas amounted to a \textit{de facto} blockade, but the Confederates were powerless to oppose them. They had no gunboats or coastal artillery that could hold the enemy at bay. As a result, the big ships of the U.S. Navy could intercept and capture any vessel they pleased off the Texas coast without fear of Confederate intervention or retaliation. To check occasional Federal excesses against British flagged vessels, the Royal Navy established a routine presence at the Rio Grande. The French Navy also maintained sporadic patrols to hold the U.S. Navy accountable and to prevent imports of war materials to revolutionary Juarista forces in Mexico. Yankees and Rebels alike discovered that nearly every aggressive maritime operation near the Rio Grande would have international ramifications.\textsuperscript{6}

The U.S. Navy also learned that capturing vessels at the Rio Grande was one thing; keeping them was much more complicated. Of the 31 vessels the U.S. Navy seized near the Boca del Rio (the common contemporary name for the mouth of the
Rio Grande) between 1861 and 1863, the U.S. admiralty courts only condemned eight of them (plus one captured cargo). The courts released most of the vessels and returned them to their owners. The admiralty court even restored the Union-salvaged cargo of the schooner *Amelia Ann* that ran ashore near Brazos Santiago in November 1863.7

### Vessels and Cargoes Seized by the U.S. Navy near the Boca del Rio, 1861-1863

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Seized</th>
<th>Condemned</th>
<th>Cotton Bales</th>
<th>Prize $</th>
<th>Released</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bark</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>All released</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brig</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>+1 recaptured by crew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schooner</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>124,695.63</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>+1 wrecked, cargo restored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sloop</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3,572.22</td>
<td>1*</td>
<td>+1 burned; cargo seized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steamer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>All released</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>31</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>563</strong></td>
<td><strong>$128,265.85</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>10 successful seizures</strong>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total appraised values of the condemned vessels and cargoes added up to $128,265.85 (equivalent to $2.6 million in 2017). Considering the time and effort expended for only ten successful seizures (8 condemned, 1 cargo condemned, and 1 burned), the experience of the U.S. Navy in South Texas was mostly tedium and frustration.

Although the blockading fleet failed to directly profit from the vast majority of the vessels it captured at the Rio Grande, its efforts were not without effect. The disruption of Confederate commerce was considerable. No vessel flying the Confederate flag was safe from the blockading fleet near the Boca del Rio. Mifflin Kenedy, Richard King and other ship owners also had to reregister their river lighters and transports under the Mexican flag to avoid seizure.9

The vessels that were sent away to admiralty courts in Key West or New Orleans suffered considerable delays in delivering their goods. The owners had to absorb the associated expenses;
very few received even a partial payment for damages or losses. The courts typically ruled that the blockading fleet had been justified in capturing the vessel, but the evidence did not support condemnation. As a result, owners of the vessel and its cargo were forced to pay extra wages to the crew and absorb losses due to cargo spoilage and schedule disruption.

The very lack of Confederate naval power south of Corpus Christi may have inspired at least some of their creative offensive operations at the Rio Grande. They could not directly retaliate against Federal warships, so they had to explore other options. These options began to develop as U.S. shippers and textile manufacturers began to exploit the Rio Grande as an important, albeit quasi-legal, source of cotton.

By 1862, it was becoming obvious that the Rio Grande could be a relatively safe and profitable outlet for Texas-grown cotton. However, before shippers and merchants could take advantage of the international border, there were a number of obstacles to overcome. The transportation infrastructure between the Rio Grande and the rest of Texas was practically nonexistent.

Before the outbreak of hostilities, there had never been a need to export commodities from the fertile Central or East Texas river basins via the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Texas had few railroads, and those were centered on Houston. Connections only extended east to Beaumont, south to Galveston and to Columbia on the Brazos River, and as far west as Alleyton near Columbus on the Colorado River. As of July 1861, there were no operational lines south of the Brazos and no rail connections at all with neighboring states.

There were minimal port facilities at the southern end of the inland waterway. This shallow, but navigable channel stretched from Matagorda Bay and south to the Laguna Del Madre as far as Corpus Christi, Flour Bluff, and finally Penascal on Baffin Bay. Shallow draft vessels could use this route without venturing into the dangerous waters of the Gulf. For the overland routes, there was a constant shortage of carts, mules, oxen, and
draft-exempt men to haul cotton through the arid and sandy Wild Horse Desert. Just as important, merchants had to find trusted partners in Brownsville and Matamoros that could handle complex international shipping arrangements and geo-political conditions. All this took time.¹⁰

By late 1862, however, sufficient logistic arrangements were in place for a massive surge in the amount of trade into and out of the Rio Grande. The movement of goods naturally meant that ocean-going vessels began to descend upon Matamoros and its down-river port city of Bagdad. Observers began to report an unprecedented number of vessels at the Boca del Rio anchorage. The primary reason for this boom in maritime commerce was the export of Texas cotton to New York and Liverpool. Large shipments of cotton also went to Havana, but mostly for transshipment onto larger vessels for more distant ports.

A number of factors added to the congestion at the Boca del Rio anchorage. As Commander Woolsey correctly observed, the bar guarding the entrance to the Rio Grande was shallow. Most vessels drawing more than three feet of water had to anchor offshore and await a lighter to transfer cargo. At the anchorage, vessels often had to wait for weeks or months to complete the offload of inbound cargoes and embark outbound bales of cotton. There was no protection from the elements making the anchorage a hazardous one. Gale force winds, called “northers,” and the volatile geo-political situation at the border often slowed or stopped the movement of lighters entirely. The demand for cotton and myriad delays resulted in a steady increase of merchant ships reported at the Boca del Rio anchorage in 1862 and through the spring of 1863. The following table depicts merchant traffic at the Rio Grande in 1862 and 1863.
Most of the vessels anchored offshore were British flagged, but there were representatives from almost every seafaring nation. About 20% of the merchant vessels flew the Stars and Stripes, making it a target-rich environment from the Confederate perspective. However, with U.S. Navy warships nearby and no combatant vessels of their own, the Confederates had no easy access to the unarmed U.S. merchants offshore. They would have to find other means or hope that Mother Nature might lend a hand by driving a U.S. flagged vessel onto a Texas beach. In the winter of 1863, a cold February norther provided just the opportunity the Confederates needed.¹²

**Brig Young Harry**

On the evening of February 23, 1863, a strong norther blew the *Young Harry* ashore at Boca Chica about 6 miles north of the Rio Grande. It was the first U.S. merchantman to fall into Confederate hands in South Texas. The *Young Harry* was a brig-rigged sailing vessel that had been trading between New Orleans, Vera Cruz, and Matamoros. It was captained by master mariner Henry J. Ellems and had just arrived from New Orleans. Ellems had a cargo hold full of flour, corn, clothing, shoes, and dry goods for the Matamoros market, which during the Civil War years usually meant Texas.¹³

Confederate General Hamilton Bee ordered his troops from Fort Brown to investigate the wreck. As the *Young Harry* broke into pieces in the surf, all nine of its crewmen safely made it to the beach at Boca Chica. General Bee’s men promptly arrested
the sailors and escorted them to Fort Brown. The general immediately paroled eight of them and released the ninth man, a Mr. McDonald of Galveston. The Federal forces in New Orleans recently had paroled McDonald, who most likely had been captured while running the blockade and was making his way back to Confederate lines.¹⁴

The *Young Harry*’s corn was a total loss, but General Bee’s soldiers braved the wet, freezing conditions and succeeded in saving at least 400 barrels of flour and about half of the other dry goods. They loaded the captured cargo onto Government wagons and delivered it to the Army quartermaster’s yard in Brownsville. As the men were cleaning and preparing to sell the goods for the benefit of the troops, Cameron County’s Marshal Edwin Martin filed a protest in the Confederate court. In response, Judge Thomas Devine issued an injunction to halt the process. Marshal Martin argued that the captured goods belonged to the Government and not to the Army. The presiding judge agreed. Captured enemy goods were supposed to be condemned through the courts. Only then could they be offered at an auction that Marshal Martin would supervise.¹⁵

With the *Young Harry*’s cargo either in the hands of the Confederate authorities or in Davy Jones’ locker, the shipment was a total loss for its owners. However, the $14,000 insurance policy on the cargo offered some relief. The owners also had war-risk insurance that allowed them to collect the full value of the policy. Without war-risk insurance, the value of the salvaged cargo would have been deducted from the payment.¹⁶

The merchandise in the *Young Harry* was indeed intended for Confederate markets in Texas. The principal consignee of those goods was José San Román of Matamoros. San Román, who also had an office in Brownsville, would have been responsible for receiving and selling the merchandise, a good portion of which had been shipped by James A. Miller of New Orleans. Miller arrived in Matamoros a few days later only to learn of the loss of the *Young Harry*.¹⁷
Although San Román and Miller made no claim for the property, they were not happy with Captain Henry Ellems. They believed that the captain could have avoided the loss if he had taken his ship to sea when it became clear that the northerner was a strong one. Captain Ellems may have been under fire from San Román, but he decided to fire back as well. He protested the capture of his crew and their cargo to the Governor of the Mexican State of Tamaulipas.¹⁸

Back on the Texas side of the border, it would take more than a letter to settle the Confederate Army’s grievance with Judge Devine and the Confederate marshal. General Bee argued that any cargo captured from a vessel under the enemy’s flag should be a prize to his soldiers. If they had not risked their own lives and saved it, all of the cargo would have been lost. The general believed that the civilian members of the Confederate Government in Brownsville were motivated by greed. The bureaucrats seemed to be more interested in collecting fees rather than administering justice. The General’s protests were to no avail. Judge Devine agreed with the marshal, and the army reluctantly yielded to the court’s ruling, leaving the Army with nothing for their efforts … or so it seemed.

When the marshal offered the goods for public auction, it soon became apparent that any citizen who valued his life should not enter a bid. The army’s coercion stopped the sale in its tracks. The auction did not generate a single bid. Cooler heads eventually managed to avoid what could have been an unfortunate civil–military confrontation. Authorities on both sides reached a gentleman’s agreement that granted General Bee’s troops the first right of refusal for the prize cargo. The men could select and purchase any item at the appraised value. The balance of the goods was then auctioned off to the general public. This amicable settlement resulted in an amusing spectacle. A long file of soldiers paraded through the streets of Brownsville sporting brand new silk parasols.¹⁹
Sloop **Lapwing**

Buoyed by their success in securing the cargo from the *Young Harry*, Confederate soldiers were alert for new opportunities to capture U.S. merchant vessels and cargoes. In late April, as the U.S. sloop *Lapwing* attempted to enter the Rio Grande, it became briefly immobilized when it struck the shallow bar.

The “rebels from the Texas side” immediately boarded the sloop, captured the crew, and offloaded the cargo onto the Confederate shore near the mouth of the river. General Bee paroled the ship’s master who reported his misfortune to Leonard Pierce, Jr., the American consul in Matamoros. This time, the Confederate marshal had no opportunity to interject himself into the army’s disposition of the *Lapwing* or its cargo.²⁰

Consul Leonard Pierce quickly protested the capture and voiced his concerns to Secretary of State William Seward. Pierce was certain that more American vessels would be seized. U.S. vessels were now reluctant to hoist the Stars and Stripes “for fear of some similar outrage.” It was a valid concern.²¹

**Schooner General C.C. Pinckney**

The next Federal vessel to fall into Confederate hands was the *General C.C. Pinckney*. It was a 38-ton schooner built in 1854 for the river trade between Charleston and Beaufort, S.C. The Federal Navy had captured the schooner in May of 1862 as it attempted to run into Cape Fear, N.C. with a load of 94 bales of cotton. It was taken to New York City where the admiralty court duly condemned and sold the schooner at auction. By January of 1863, it was back in business under the U.S. flag sailing from New York to Matamoros via Key West. The schooner finally reached the Rio Grande anchorage in March of that year.²²

Unfortunately for the owners of the *General C.C. Pinckney* and its crew, one of the paroled sailors from the *Young Harry* named Smith recognized the schooner. Smith had been a part-owner of this same
schooner when the Federal Navy captured it the previous May. Smith now saw a perfect opportunity to recapture his vessel and its cargo. He colluded with Confederate Marshal Edward Martin and a Captain Brian to reclaim “his” schooner. Smith and the other two men surprised the crew at the Boca del Rio anchorage while the schooner’s captain was ashore. The three men, “hoisted anchor and made a straight wake for the beach.” The vessel landed high and dry on a Boca Chica sandbank with a cargo of flour, corn, and coffee. The men started immediately for General Bee’s headquarters, where they filed a salvage claim for prize money estimated at $25,000.23

The schooner’s captain naturally protested to Consul Pierce, who got the Mexican Captain of the Port to certify that the vessel had been anchored in Mexican waters. The captors naturally argued that it was in Texas waters. Colonel Philip N. Luckett, acting on behalf of General Bee, paroled the captured crew on March 24 and turned the case over to Judge Devine’s Confederate District Court for adjudication. Marshal Martin then had the schooner taken into Brazos Santiago.24

The subsequent actions of the Confederate marshal in Cameron County seemed to confirm General Bee’s allegation of corrupt practices. The profit-minded marshal offered the services of the General C.C. Pinckney to anyone who would give him and Captain Brian an “interest in the adventure.” A willing buyer could obtain the services of the schooner by giving a bond for 1500 Confederate dollars. This was a bargain price since the seriously devalued Confederate currency was only worth about $150 to $185 in specie (i.e., gold or silver). James W. Zacharie and Mr. G.L. Dolsen of New Orleans and John W. Jockusch of Brownsville decided to take the marshal up on his offer.25

J.W. Jockusch had been the Prussian Consul in Galveston and was now a partner with the Galveston firm of R. & D.G. Mills. He had moved his business to Brownsville after Galveston was blockaded in July of 1861. Jockusch hired John Fogarty of Galveston to run the General C.C. Pinckney through the
blockade and into the Brazos River. The plan was to consign the cargo to his partner, R. & D.G. Mills. However, when Zacharie proposed taking the schooner out of Brazos Santiago and loading goods from a lighter at the Boca del Rio, Jockusch and Dolsen balked. This maneuver added risk and both men attempted to back out of the deal without success.26

Events soon confirmed Jockusch’s fears when the General C.C. Pinckney ran aground and was lost coming out. Making the situation even worse, Jockusch was responsible for covering the $1500 bond on the schooner and $28.50 in court costs. Judge Devine again presided over the case, this time convening his court in Corpus Christi. As the only partner still in South Texas, Jockusch not only had to pay the full amount, but he also had to pay in specie rather than devalued Confederate dollars. His choices were to pay up or go to jail. He paid $1500 in hard currency; half of this (minus court costs) went to Marshal Martin and the rest to Captain Brian and his partners.27

Diplomatic Crisis at the Border

This latest Confederate provocation prompted Consul Leonard Pierce to file another protest with the Mexican Governor of Tamaulipas: first, the Young Harry’s cargo, then the Lapwing, and now the General C.C. Pinckney. Within a matter of days, all were in the hands of the rebels. In response, Governor Albino Lopez of Tamaulipas wrote a letter of protest to General Bee. In addition to the questionable maritime seizures, the Governor was upset over yet another, clearly egregious violation of Mexican sovereignty: Confederate troops had crossed into Mexico and kidnapped five men.28

The kidnapping occurred on March 15th when a group of Confederate soldiers crossed the Rio Grande to capture U.S. Colonel Edmund J. Davis. A former South Texas Judge, the Unionist Davis had arrived at Matamoros in January to recruit soldiers for the Federal Army. He was believed to have
sponsored a murderous raid into Texas the previous December. By March, the colonel had collected some 300 Confederate deserters and refugees. He and his recruits were camped at Bagdad waiting for the weather to clear. Davis had a transport anchored offshore that was preparing to sail his men to New Orleans.29

With little to do but wait, Yankee and Rebel soldiers passed the time by exchanging taunts across the narrow river. These verbal provocations grated on the Confederates. The epithets originating from Colonel Davis’ aide, Captain William W. Montgomery, were particularly vexing. In retaliation, in the early morning hours of the March 15th, an off-duty Confederate force of 150 volunteers crossed into Mexico by ferry. They captured Colonel Davis, Captain Montgomery, and three U.S. Marines. After safely crossing back into Texas, the Confederate soldiers summarily lynched Captain Montgomery. They spared Col. Davis (and the three marines), perhaps out of sympathy for Davis’ wife, who had been with the Colonel at Bagdad.30

Although General Bee was pleased that his men had avenged the acts of the Federal renegades, he publicly disavowed the kidnapping and lynching. He released Davis and the three marines the next day. It was within this explosive context that the capture of the Young Harry’s cargo, the Lapwing, and the General C.C. Pinckney occurred. As a result of these collective events, Governor Albino Lopez anticipated “great evils for the frontier from the present indications of feeling on this (the Confederate) side of the Rio Grande.”31

In reply, General Bee dismissed the Davis and Montgomery kidnapping as “a mistaken view of the rights of belligerents to invade a neutral territory to attack the enemies who were sheltered there.” The general was careful to point out that the maritime cases were distinctly different. The capture of the Young Harry’s cargo was the result of an act of nature that wrecked the vessel on the Texas shore. The seizure of the C.C. Pinckney was “simply a legal question to be decided by the proper tribunals.”
In short, the courts would decide the fate of the *C.C. Pinckney*, but General Bee had already decided the fate of the *Lapwing* and *Young Harry’s* cargo for the benefit of his troops.\(^3^2\)

To help mollify the situation, and keep the cotton and money flowing across the border and into Confederate coffers, Major General John Magruder visited Brownsville in late April. As the commanding general of the Texas District of the Confederacy, Magruder’s presence was a noteworthy event. The citizens of Brownsville hosted a ball in his honor and the Mexicans gave the Confederate general a military salute. Magruder returned the favor upon the visit of Governor Lopez to Brownsville as an honored guest.\(^3^3\)

**Rumors of Privateers in South Texas and the U.S. Navy’s Response**

In the midst of this diplomatic storm, Consul Pierce was spreading rumors that the Confederates were converting their prizes into armed privateers at Brazos Santiago. Pierce voiced his concern to Secretary of State William Seward that, “the rebels have two or three small armed vessels in Brazos Santiago.” The U.S. Consul in Havana forwarded similar reports about the Confederates transforming the *Lapwing* and *C.C. Pinckney* into privateers.\(^3^4\)

A newspaper correspondent at Matamoros added to their concerns. Under the date of April 28, he falsely reported that the schooner *West Florida* [aka *Hanover* and *Cephize*] also had fitted out as a privateer in South Texas. The correspondent warned that the Confederates only needed crews to begin operations.\(^3^5\)

These reports and pressure from the State Department finally prompted the U.S. Navy Department to take action. By mid-May, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles and Admiral David G. Farragut decided to investigate. The admiral had no way of knowing the true situation since the Texas coast south of Corpus Christi had been clear of Federal blockaders for months. In response, Farragut ordered his commodore in charge of the
Texas blockade, Henry H. Bell, to investigate and establish a periodic patrol there.\textsuperscript{56}

Rather than delegating the task, Bell decided to see for himself. In late May, he sailed in his flagship, the 21-gun sloop-of-war USS \textit{Brooklyn}, from its blockade station off Galveston to the Boca del Rio. On May 27\textsuperscript{th}, when still about 70 miles from Brazos Santiago, Bell captured the sloop \textit{Blazer}, that was loaded with 39 bales of cotton. Early the next morning, the \textit{Brooklyn} captured a small sloop named \textit{Kate}, just 8 miles from the Point Isabel lighthouse. The \textit{Kate} had a two-man crew who had loaded 18 bales of cotton at Houston and “came out at Velasco.”\textsuperscript{57}

After seizing the \textit{Kate}, Commodore Bell observed two large schooners and two sloops “inside of Brazos Santiago.” He suspected that these might be the privateers he had heard about, but wanted to consult with the Matamoros Consul before taking action. The rumors of privateers were false, but, like most of the U.S. Consuls at Confederate blockade running destinations, Leonard Pierce desperately wanted the presence of U.S. Navy Warships at his port. His patriotic motivation was to curb Confederate trade and importation of war materials. His deeper personal motive was self-preservation.\textsuperscript{38}

When Commodore Bell invited the consul to come aboard the \textit{Brooklyn} to provide an update on the situation, Pierce declined. The consul concluded, “As most of the loafers at the mouth of the river are rebel cut-throats and have no friendly feeling toward my person, I do not think it would be prudent for me to go down without a large escort, which can not be got here, as they are all gone to fight the French.”\textsuperscript{39}

The next day, Bell organized a raiding party of 87 sailors and marines and armed them with swords, rifles, and pistols. The men crowded into four small boats armed with two howitzers from the \textit{Brooklyn}. Their mission was to enter the Laguna del Madre at Brazos Santiago and, “attempt the capture of two schooners and two sloops . . . If you can’t bring out the vessels you will burn them.”\textsuperscript{40}
The expedition set out under a full moon at 2 AM on May 30\textsuperscript{th}. At daybreak, a watchful but undermanned detachment of eleven Confederate cavalrymen at Point Isabel observed the approach of the \textit{Brooklyn}'s four boats. They detected the on-rushing Yankees in time to burn the schooner \textit{Eager}, that was at the Point Isabel wharf and was loaded with merchandise belonging to the Confederate Customs-House. The Confederates also attempted to destroy the light-house, but only blew out the fixtures. The Federal raiding party then fired one of its howitzers, encouraging the Confederates to quickly move out of range.\textsuperscript{41}

The Federals came ashore at Point Isabel where they captured 12 boxes containing medicines, tin, saltpeter, and spelter. Omitted from Bell's official reports, but listed in his dairy, were several boxes of brandy that the sailors loaded onto the \textit{Brooklyn}. Bell disingenuously reported to Secretary Welles that his sailors "broke up and threw into the water the rest of the goods." These "goods" had come from the sloop \textit{Victoria}, which had arrived three weeks earlier from Jamaica via Havana. The Federal sailors had boarded the sloop and captured its three crew members. As the men were sailing their prize sloop to the \textit{Brooklyn}, they ran it aground. They had to burn the \textit{Victoria}, leaving it in the Laguna del Madre, but they were able to rescue the brandy.\textsuperscript{42}

On the way into Point Isabel, the Yankees had captured a "worthless" Texas scow sloop with two fishermen aboard, the owner and his son. The raiding party also captured the other large schooner. It was the 100-ton \textit{Star}, abandoned and devoid of papers, colors, and cargo, but very seaworthy. Nine hours after the sailors had set out, they returned to the ship with their loot that they had loaded aboard the schooner \textit{Star}. Their only casualty was a seaman from the \textit{Brooklyn}, John Newman, who was killed as a result of an "accidental discharge" of the musket from a marine.\textsuperscript{43}

Bell quickly paroled all of the captured Confederate sailors, with the exception of Captain Delaney and Seaman Frank Luis
of the Blazer. He needed those two as witnesses to testify at the Vice-Admiralty Prize Court in Key West. Bell transferred the rest of the sailors onto the Kate along with a two day supply of water and provisions. He sent them into Point Isabel just a few hours after their capture, “deeming this the most economical manner of disposing of them.”

Commodore Bell loaded the cotton from the sloops Kate and Blazer onto the schooner Star. He then outfitted the schooner with a 12-pounder howitzer and placed a prize crew onboard. Their orders were to capture any blockade runners encountered on their way up to the blockading fleet off the Galveston Bar, where they arrived without incident on June 1, 1863. Commodore Bell returned to his blockade station off the Galveston bar a few hours later.

The Federal expedition into Brazos Santiago resulted in the destruction of two sloops (Blazer and Victoria) and a schooner (Eager) and the capture of a large schooner (Star), now loaded with cotton. After condemnation at Key West, the Star and the 57 bales of cotton from the Blazer and Kate earned prize money netting a total of $11,353.55. The Federal government received half that amount, while Admiral Farragut, as the overall commander, and the officers and men of the Brooklyn received the other half. The prize money would not be paid out until after a final audit in July, 1864, but it was a nice bonus for the entire crew. Commodore Bell, whose monthly salary was $333, received $144. Crewmen of the Brooklyn who were earning only $14 a month received about $5 each. Prize money would remain a powerful motivator for the Federal Navy’s blockading fleet.

It had been a profitable trip. Bell also gained useful intelligence that confirmed there were no armed Confederate vessels present or fitting out at Brazos Santiago. Confederate authorities did consider capturing or purchasing vessels that they could convert into privateers or commerce raiders in South Texas. After the USS Brooklyn departed, General H.P. Bee finally got around to offering a privateer commission to a
schooner on the Rio Grande named the *Santiago*. Intelligence about such fruitless schemes sometimes filtered across the border. Despite the alarmist claims and reports of Consul Pierce and other Yankee informers, the Confederates never followed through with any of their nascent privateering plans.\(^{47}\)

**Capture of Charles Chase, U.S. Navy, Captain of the USS *Antona*\(^{48}\)**

Even though there were no active privateers in Texas, there was a significant level of maritime activity in the Western Gulf of Mexico. Accordingly, Admiral Farragut continued to increase the number of blockaders along the coast of Texas. On July 13\(^{\text{th}}\), he ordered Acting Master Charles T. Chase to sail the USS *Antona* from New Orleans toward Galveston and report to Commodore H.H. Bell. The *Antona* was a converted blockade runner and Farragut hoped it might trick others into lowering their guard. In addition to interdicting Confederate trade in South Texas, Farragut was particularly interested in catching the suspected privateers *Edward Hawkins* and *Sir William Peel*, whom he believed were near Boca del Rio.\(^{48}\)

On the way to Galveston, Chase discovered the British flagged schooner *Cecelia D* and its crew of three heading north from Matamoros. Finding an irregularity in its papers, he seized the schooner and placed a prize crew on board. Chase sent his prize to New Orleans for adjudication, where it was later condemned and sold for $5,399.88.\(^{49}\)

Off Galveston, Commodore Bell instructed Chase to cruise between the Brazos River (Velasco) and the Rio Grande. Warming to his task, Acting Master Chase decided to go ashore at Bagdad shortly after arriving at the Boca del Rio anchorage. He hoped to consult with Consul Leonard Pierce at Matamoros. Curiously, Chase decided to travel in civilian clothes. Seeing the turbulent surf over the bar and not wanting to endanger his crew, he transferred to a more seaworthy civilian lighter. Landing on
the Mexican side of the river, Chase made observations and forwarded his dispatches to Matamoros. In the late afternoon, he hired another lighter, the Mexican sloop *Margarita*, to return him to the *Antona*.\(^{50}\)

Just before crossing the bar, the river narrowed to about 40 yards wide. At this point, the river channel also passed close to the Texas shore. Unfortunately for Chase, a Confederate officer with “seven or eight armed men sprang out from behind a low sand hill, and leveling their muskets ordered the boatmen to land.” The officer was Hispanic and spoke little English. Chase spoke no Spanish, and his protests were to no avail. He spent the night as a prisoner under close guard at Brownsville.\(^{51}\)

The next morning, General Bee met with Chase and offered to parole him. When Chase refused a parole (which would have prevented him from returning to active duty for several months), Bee granted his unconditional release. The Confederate general also generously offered to return Chase to the mouth of the river where he could rejoin his ship, but he again refused. Instead, Chase decided to cross the river into Matamoros and call on Consul Pierce.\(^{52}\)

Chase’s decision proved to be a poor one. As he visited with Consul Pierce, the officer who was second in command on the *Antona*, Acting Master Spiro Bennis, confirmed the report that his captain had been kidnapped. Following orders, Bennis then sailed the *Antona* to Galveston to report to Commodore Bell. Chase was stranded in Bagdad, where he remained for over three weeks until the U.S. gunboat *Cayuga* arrived (August 12th). By the time Commodore Bell filed a protest with Governor Lopez of Tamaulipas, the situation already had been resolved.\(^{53}\)

Acting Master Chase’s professional problems, however, had just begun. When his former command reached Galveston, Commodore Bell discovered that the *Antona* was not ship-shape. In addition to crippling mechanical problems, the steamer was in “very bad condition as to cleanliness and discipline.” Given
the old Navy adage, “I’ve seen clean ships that couldn’t shoot, but I’ve never seen a dirty one that could,” Bell’s report was a damning indictment of Acting Master Chase’s leadership skills. As a result, when the Antona sailed to New Orleans for repairs, Charles T. Chase was aboard as a mere passenger.54

Brig Atlantic

Before he departed the Boca del Rio on the USS Cayuga, Acting Master Chase met with Commander Woolsey of the USS Princess Royal, the Antona’s replacement on blockade duty in South Texas. Chase had uncovered intelligence about the British flagged, 118 ton Brig Atlantic of Nassau. It had loaded cotton directly from the Texas shore. However, due to “a misunderstanding between him and the parties chartering the vessel,” captain John M. Lussan of the Atlantic was willing to make a deal.55

Armed with this information, Woolsey seized the Atlantic and waited for Captain Lussan to return to his ship before sending the vessel to New Orleans for adjudication. When Lussan appeared, the presence of armed guards did not intimidate him. The captain indicated that the papers documenting ownership of the ship and cargo were with the George Coppell, the British Consul in Matamoros. Lussan also admitted that the Atlantic had been captured earlier in the year and taken into Key West. He then bragged about fooling the U.S. admiralty court there into releasing his vessel and its cargo, even though he had “contraband of war on board.”56

Continuing to taunt his captors, Lussan added that he received $10,000 in restitution, and had just finished delivering the same cargo to Brownsville via Matamoros. In a final challenge, Lussan said that he had been in the blockade-running business a long time, “and if you are not very sharp I will get to windward of you again.” Woolsey dutifully reported Lussan’s bravado, no doubt hoping that his superiors would
share his amusement at the prisoner’s audacity, and expedite the condemnation of this valuable prize. Unfortunately for Woolsey and his prize crew, Lussan proved to be as good as his word.\textsuperscript{57}

As a harbinger of future events, two of the brig’s seamen managed to escape to the Texas shore via one of its lifeboats. After impatiently waiting three days for the brig’s documents to appear, Woolsey finally placed Acting Ensign F. Augustus Miller and six crewmen onboard the Atlantic as a prize crew. They were armed with pistols, cutlasses, and a revolver.\textsuperscript{58}

The prize crew got the Atlantic underway on August 14\textsuperscript{th} and headed for New Orleans and the admiralty court there. As the Atlantic sailed north, Acting British Consul Paul Zurn of Matamoros protested Commander Woolsey’s “illegal and arbitrary” acts. Consul Zurn reminded Woolsey of the “outrage committed against the British steamer Labuan” in February of 1862.” The Labuan had been restored to its owners after a lengthy delay and several diplomatic protests. Zurn noted the similarity of the Labuan case with the seizure of the Atlantic and other British flagged merchant ships that had been anchored off the supposedly neutral Rio Grande waterway.\textsuperscript{59}

The hydrography at the Boca del Rio made it virtually impossible to enter or exit the river without crossing north of the mid-point of the river at some point. The Rio Grande made a bend toward the north as it emptied into the Gulf of Mexico. Since the deepest channel was also near the north shore, there had to be some kind of practical arrangement to enable routine commerce at the Rio Grande. After the Labuan incident, the British Vice Consul and the captain of the USS Montgomery had reached a verbal agreement that permitted vessels to safely anchor north of the river channel as long as “they carried no contraband of war.” Consul Zurn argued that the Princess Royal’s actions had violated this understanding.\textsuperscript{60}

Although Woolsey swore that the Atlantic had been captured in Texas waters, Confederate General Bee noted with pleasure that the U.S. Navy’s actions amounted to a \textit{de facto} blockade of a
neutral port. General Bee hoped that the Union’s heavy-handed antics might be enough to antagonize the British into recognizing the independence of the Confederate States.  

The diplomats and courts, however, would not be the final arbiter of the Atlantic’s status. Three weeks after it sailed, the Atlantic had failed to appear at New Orleans. Commander Woolsey feared that his prize had either been lost at sea or re-captured. The good news was that the Atlantic was safe. The bad news was that the brig was in Havana, once again under the command of Captain Lussan with the Union Jack of the United Kingdom flying at its stern.

Despite Commander Woolsey’s order to keep the prize crew armed at all times, Acting Ensign Miller had no confidence in the abilities or loyalty of the men under his command. As a result, he refused to arm his men and imprudently allowed them to mingle with the prisoners. Miller did, however, accept Captain Lussan’s offer to provide a competent helmsmen. Ensign Miller’s only proviso was that he or Petty Officer Alexander Gordon would oversee their performance. Gordon had charge of the deck at night and Miller took the day watch.

On the third day out, Miller imagined that Gordon and Lussan were conspiring to commit mutiny. Instead of taking alternating watches, Miller visited the helm every two or three hours and spent the rest of the time walking about the deck or in the small captain’s cabin that was open fore and aft. He slept on top of a trunk containing the pistols and leg irons. Ensign Miller slept with his revolver lying halfcocked at his side and his sword within reach.

In the early morning hours of August 23rd, Miller said that he awoke with a sense of being suffocated. Captain Lussan was holding the Ensign’s head between his knees and was choking him with a towel. The rest of Lussan’s crew helped restrain the former prize master and placed him in leg irons. The remainder of the Navy men were allowed to remain on deck but were confined to the forward part of the vessel. Lussan was diligently
implementing the precautions that Acting Ensign Miller had failed to follow.\(^{65}\)

Captain Lussan’s version of the story was slightly different. According to Lussan, he first subdued the man at the helm and then went forward and captured two more sailors. He then called out to the other three who were sleeping below. As they came up from the forward part of the vessel (forecastle), he took them one at a time. One stout Navy seaman brandished an iron bar and struck a glancing blow on Lussan’s head. The captain then felled the sailor with a captured cutlass and forced him to surrender. With the entire prize crew under his control, Lussan then went into the cabin, and informed Ensign Miller of his fate. According to Lussan, all the men were kept in irons for the sixteen days it took to reach Havana.”\(^{66}\)

When the *Atlantic* arrived in Havana on September 3\(^{rd}\), Lussan released Miller and the rest of the American sailors. Miller immediately reported to the U.S. consul general at Havana, Thomas Savage. Consul Savage dutifully issued a petition to the Spanish authorities in a futile attempt to return the brig to U.S. control.\(^{67}\)

Rather than accepting responsibility for the loss of his prize, Miller claimed that he had been drugged and proceeded to blame his sailors. At best, he faulted them for not crying out the alarm, failing to resist, and refusing to help him escape. At worst, he called them cowards and traitors in the employ of Captain Lussan. Miller’s only kind words were for Captain Lussan who treated him “upon the whole very good, much better than one would naturally expect.”\(^{68}\)

Miller finally left Havana for Key West on September 30\(^{th}\) and, with Petty Officer Gordon, rejoined the USS *Princess Royal* at New Orleans ten days later. The remainder of his crew deserted in Havana. Although not quite willing to accept Ensign Miller’s accusations at face value, Commodore Bell agreed that the enlisted crewmen were willing captives and may have assisted Lussan in the recapture of the *Atlantic*.\(^{69}\)
Predictably, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles was not amused. He demanded that Commander Woolsey explain why he had sent the *Atlantic* to New Orleans with an inadequate prize crew. Woolsey countered that there was no fault in the number of men, their level of experience, or in his explicit instructions. The prize master and six men were all hand picked, fully armed, and supplied with leg irons to control the prisoners. The senior petty officer, Alexander Gordon, was one of Woolsey’s best sailors. In short, Woolsey argued that the prize crew he placed on the *Atlantic* should have been fully capable of managing the vessel and controlling five prisoners: Captain Lussan, three seamen, and a boy.  

Woolsey acknowledged that Ensign Miller seemed to be a reasonably bright officer, but that he had acted stupidly. First, he distrusted his own men and disarmed them. He then allowed the prize crew to fall under the influence of the engagingly confident Captain Lussan.  

U.S. Consul Thomas Savage reported that Captain John Lussan departed Havana en route to Matamoros in late May of 1864. Savage suspected that Lussan was intent on capturing a U.S. transport steamer. However, there is no evidence that Captain Lussan played any direct role in the capture of additional U.S. vessels near the Rio Grande. Lussan’s brig, the *Atlantic*, returned to service in 1864 under a new master. It sailed back to its home port of Nassau and on to Halifax before returning to Matamoros in 1865.  

**Schooner *Joseph L. Gerety*, aka *Eureka***

The final Confederate capture at the Rio Grande in 1863 was also the first to have been a preplanned military operation. The 106-ton schooner *Joseph L. Gerety* was a regular trader between New York and Matamoros. It made two round-trip voyages between October of 1862 and August of 1863. On its first voyage to Matamoros, the crew experienced a brief problem with Mexican authorities. It seems that the Confederates tried
to bypass Mexican Customs and take direct possession of its inbound cargo.\textsuperscript{75}

Fortunately for the crew of the \textit{Joseph L. Gerety} and its owner, Francis Gerety of New York, the Confederate and Mexican officials amicably resolved the issue. The voyage ended successfully in April as the schooner delivered its outbound cargo of 87 bales of Texas cotton, 50 bales of wool, and 134 slabs of copper at New York. Its uneventful second voyage was much shorter (May--August 1863), returning to New York with 107 bales of cotton for four different consignees.\textsuperscript{74}

In mid-September of 1863, the captain of the \textit{Joseph L. Gerety}, Thomas H. Davis, again set his course for Matamoros. He arrived at the Boca del Río about three weeks later and commenced loading cotton for what he hoped would be a routine return trip.\textsuperscript{75}

Just after Captain Davis completed loading the schooner, his shipping agent in Matamoros approached him with an urgent request. The captain of the 304-ton bark \textit{Marion} had died, and the company needed an experienced captain. Davis would have to finish loading the \textit{Marion} with 443 bales of cotton and sail it back to New York. Davis eagerly accepted the promotion to a larger vessel. He turned over command of the \textit{Joseph L. Gerety} to Captain James S. Nicholas, but not before agreeing to accommodate six paying passengers. On the 16\textsuperscript{th} of November, Captain Davis escorted six male passengers aboard the schooner. They hailed from Baltimore, Canada, New York, and Ireland.\textsuperscript{76}

Davis’ parting act could not have been popular with the new captain and his crew; they had to give up their own rooms to accommodate their guests. Other than resentment for their crowded berthing spaces, Captain Nicholas and his four man crew had no apparent apprehension about taking six healthy, if somewhat hard-looking, young men on board. Men of military age often sought passage out of Matamoros. Some were Confederate deserters or draft dodgers, while others were intent on joining the Federal army.\textsuperscript{77}
The apparent leader of the group was Thomas E. Hogg of Baltimore. He looked the part. Hogg was tall with sharp features on a slender frame and a fair complexion that matched his blonde hair and blue eyes. His bearing and manners were gentlemanly and he sported a mustache and whiskers in the stylish imperial cut that was popular among the mid-nineteenth century upper class. By contrast, the Canadian James F. Brown was short and stocky, a “sun burnt rough sailor-looking person.”

The New Yorker, who claimed to have been imprisoned for slave running, was Thomas Wilson. He was a short and thick man, with only one good eye. He resided in New York but had Alabama roots. The Irishmen were Patrick Toonan, George McMurdoch, and Daniel O’Brien, all of whom had immigrated to the South and had matching sympathies. Toonan was slim and slightly stooped, aged about twenty-five years with black hair and eyes. McMurdoch was tall and stout with a sailor’s broken nose and was missing the ring finger of his right hand. Finally, O’Brien, like McMurdoch, was a ruddy-faced Irishman with a full red-beard.

As soon as the passengers were loaded aboard, Captain Nicholas got the *Joseph L. Gerety* underway from the Boca del Rio. He was bound for New York with a load of 122 cotton bales and six paying passengers. At about midnight on the second day out, the captain was on deck with one of the sailors at the helm and another aloft. Suddenly, all six passengers rushed on deck, armed with revolvers. They knocked Captain Nicholas down and threatened to kill him if he made any noise. Three of the men took the captain forward, locked him in the forecastle, and placed him under guard.

The other passengers went aft and captured the mate when he came on deck to investigate the ruckus. Walter Greenough, the supercargo (commercial agent), was next. The Confederates struck him a blow, and he fell back into the cabin. As Greenough attempted to retaliate, Toonan fired two shots at him, but missed. Greenough finally submitted to his fate without
further injury. Hogg had him confined to his berth and gave orders for the guards to shoot if he made any further resistance. Hogg then told Captain Nicholas and the rest of his crew that, “You are to consider yourselves Confederate prisoners.” Hogg showed them documents signed by General Bee that authorized him to conduct the operation on behalf of the Confederate Government.  

Hogg identified himself both to his men and to the prisoners as a Confederate major. His actual status and standing with the Confederacy, however, was a bit murky. He had resigned his commission as a quartermaster captain in the Louisiana militia in December of 1861. After leaving Louisiana, Hogg’s former command noticed irregularities in his accounts. In the spring of 1863, they learned that he was in Texas traveling between Houston and Beaumont. Louisiana officials asked General Magruder to have him arrested. The only record of Magruder’s response to this request was a cryptic note, “attended to.”

By the fall of 1863, Hogg was in South Texas and acting with the approval of the collector of customs and General Bee. However, he had no official standing or orders from the Confederate Government in Richmond. As an “acting major,” Hogg was the officer-in-charge of the J.L. Gerety operation, with Brown as his second in command. Wilson was the vessel’s sailing-master. Toonan was the ship’s mate, while O’Brien and McMurdoch were carpenters and seamen.

Hogg and his men steered the schooner south along the Mexican coast for eight days before releasing their prisoners from confinement. They loaded all five of them into the schooner’s lifeboat and gave the men three days provisions and best wishes for a safe passage to shore. As Nicholas and his men cast off, Hogg and his crew hoisted the Confederate flag and fired off their pistols as a salute. They foolishly boasted that they were bound to the British colony of Belize to sell the vessel and cargo.

On the morning of December 11th, the U.S. Consul at Belize, Charles A. Leas, noticed the arrival of a schooner flying
the Confederate flag. Its name was the *Eureka*. The schooner’s
captain claimed to have loaded his cargo of cotton in Texas at the
Brazos River, but unfavorable winds had delayed the *Eureka*’s
arrival for several days. Not knowing that the whole story was
a lie, except the part about being delayed, Leas protested the
schooner’s use of the Confederate flag. Belize authorities forced
its nominal Captain, James F. Brown, to enter under the Stars
and Stripes.85

Charles Leas was a career diplomat who had just arrived in
Belize after a long tour of consular duty at St. Petersburg, Rus-
sia. He was egotistical, but competent and passionately devoted
to the Union cause. In response to a caution from U.S. Secretary
of State Seward about taking personal risks, Leas described him-
self as a “bold, determined, and energetic” spirit. He would not
“shrink from grappling on to the rebels” who were nothing more
than “curs and traitors.” Leas meant every word.86

Realizing that his delay in reaching Belize and the zealous
meddling of Consul Leas, would soon lead to questions that
he did not care to answer, Major Hogg sprang into action.
He quickly made arrangements to sell the vessel and its 122
bales of cotton for a total of $22,000. When Hogg had collected
$7,000 as a down payment from a buyer, he split $3,000 among
O’Brien, Toonan, McMurdoch, and Wilson. All of them, with
the probable exception of O’Brien, boarded a German (Ham-
burg) flagged brig named the *Carlos*. The three men and 111
bales of *Eureka*’s cotton were on their way to Liverpool within
three days. O’Brien went his own way and was never heard from
again. Hogg and James Brown retained $4,000 for themselves
and anxiously awaited payment of the remaining $15,000.87

Four days after the *Eureka*’s arrival at Belize, a local
merchant informed Consul Leas of the schooner’s true identity
and the circumstances of its capture. Leas fired off a series of
demarches to the Acting Lieutenant Governor of Belize, noting
that both the *Eureka* and *Joseph L. Gerety* had burdens of 106
tons, departed port at the same time, and had identical cargoes.
The original captain, James Nicholas, was expected from Sisal in a few days. When he arrived, Nicholas would verify the allegations. In the meantime, the U.S. Consul demanded the seizure of the schooner and its 122 bales of cotton, plus the detention of Thomas E. Hogg and his six accomplices to prevent their escape.\textsuperscript{88}

Leas further noted that the ship’s Confederate register appeared to be fraudulent. It identified the Canadian James F. Brown as captain and Thomas Hogg as the supercargo and owner of the cotton. Local merchants became reluctant to purchase the remaining cotton or complete payments to Hogg for fear of having to forfeit everything to the true owners. The British authorities promptly issued an arrest warrant for Hogg and his men, charging them with “piracy on the High Seas” and offering a $500 reward. But in the days before satellite communications or even underwater telegraph cables, it was too late. At least three of the Confederate “pirates” already had absconded and were well on their way to Liverpool on the brig \textit{Carlos}. The others also had abandoned the \textit{Eureka} and were headed to parts unknown.\textsuperscript{89}

To help conceal their identities, several of the men were using aliases to throw the authorities off their trail. The former slave trader Thomas Wilson used the aliases John Wilson, Warren Quincey, and Quincy Sears. The transplanted Irishmen also used aliases, including Patrick Toonan (alias James Ferran, James Clements, and John Tevena), George McMurdoch (alias Kelly), and Daniel O’Brien (a possible alias).\textsuperscript{90}

Adding to Consul Leas’ frustration, the former captain and crew of the \textit{J.L. Gerety} never appeared in Belize to bear witness to the truth of the charges against the “pirates.” Instead, the crew went directly to New York on the schooner \textit{Horace E. Bell}. Captain Nicholas and supercargo Greenough traveled to Havana aboard the Spanish brig \textit{Carmencita}, arriving there on December 15\textsuperscript{th}. After making their report to Consul Thomas Savage, Nicholas and Greenough departed the next day for New York on the U.S. Mail steamer \textit{Morning Star}.\textsuperscript{91}
Captain Nicholas made headlines throughout the country when he and Greenough arrived in New York City. Some editors were unable to resist embellishing his swashbuckling account. They claimed that the Confederates “killed the steward of the Gerety, who resisted them.” By mid-February the British Governor at Jamaica confirmed the true ownership of the schooner. He directed the authorities in Belize to turn the Eureka/Joseph L. Gerety over to U.S. Consul Charles Leas.

Leas sent word to New York for the owner of the schooner, Francis Gerety, to come to Belize and reclaim the Joseph L. Gerety. However, sometime after the schooner departed for Matamoros, Mr. Gerety drowned. In his place, Gerety’s executors and the insurance underwriters dispatched the schooner’s former captain, Thomas H. Davis, armed with a power of attorney. By mid-April, Davis had the Joseph L. Gerety back in New York Harbor with a load of logwood. Although nobody had been killed and the vessel and its crew had resumed normal operations, the manhunt was on for the Confederate “pirates.”

**Rio Grande Rebels in Liverpool**

Gerety’s executors selected Captain Davis for the voyage to Belize because Captain Nicholas had already departed for Liverpool. Nicholas was in pursuit of the Carlos and the 111 bales of cotton taken from his schooner. Captain Nicholas, along with a letter from Secretary Seward to the U.S. Consul in Liverpool, Thomas Dudley, both arrived about two weeks after the Carlos reached port. Secretary Seward ordered Dudley to petition the British Government to arrest the men for piracy and have them extradited to the United States. By February 25th, all three men were in British custody. One of the men, Patrick Toonan (alias James Ferran), was still carrying a loaded revolver, but he offered no resistance. When the prisoners went before the magistrates, they all claimed to be acting under the orders of Major Hogg, and on behalf of the Confederate States.
At first, the Confederate officials in Europe had no direct knowledge of the operation and, like their U.S. counterparts, had no instructions on how to proceed. The Confederate Commissioner in London, James Mason, asked Commander James D. Bulloch to investigate. Bulloch was the Confederate Navy’s trusted agent in Liverpool. He verified the *bona fides* of the men and Mason agreed to hire a solicitor who would conduct a vigorous defense, “in the best manner for the safety of the men.” If convicted, the men would have been sent to the U.S. and sentenced to hang for piracy.  

The British court debated the issue at length, but eventually decided that the seizure of the *Joseph L. Gerety* was not piracy. Although the essential facts of the case were not in dispute, the U.S. refused to admit that a state of war existed with the Confederate States. However, in the eyes of the law, President Lincoln’s declaration of a blockade gave the Confederacy belligerent rights as a *de facto* nation. The six men had acted under orders from the Confederate Government for the purpose of inflicting injury upon the enemy. The court ruled that if a group of passengers had seized a vessel in peacetime it would be piracy; however, during war, the boarding and seizure was a legitimate *ruse de guerre*. The court acquitted the Confederates of all charges and released them.  

**Acting Master Thomas E. Hogg’s Escape and Capture**  

Meanwhile, back in Central America, Brown and Hogg were proving to be more elusive. From Belize, they sailed south about 130 miles to Omoa in Honduras. They arrived in a small boat taken from the schooner *Cora* that had been anchored near the *Eureka* in Belize. With the help of a generous donation to the authorities there, the Confederates again eluded capture. Like Christopher Columbus 361 years earlier, their next landing was in the beautiful Bay of Trujillo in Honduras, about 150 miles east of Omoa.
At Trujillo, they called on the British Consul for help and related an imaginative, but improbable story about escaping from a merchant vessel. Suspecting their ulterior motives, the consul offered to send the men back to Belize or have them arrested as deserters. Alarmed by the prospect of certain imprisonment, the two men immediately departed. The consul observed that they left “in the same small boat down the Mosquito shore, and no person believes that they will ever reach civilization alive.”

But they did, traveling south to Greytown, Nicaragua, before crossing over to the Pacific side of Panama. From there they crossed back over to the Gulf of Mexico and arrived in Nassau by late April. From Nassau, Hogg ran the blockade into Wilmington, North Carolina, and was in Richmond by early May.

Confederate Secretary of State Judah P. Benjamin tried to disavow Hogg’s actions. In his view, the military officials in Texas had exceeded their authority by approving and supporting the seizure. However, Secretary of the Navy Mallory was impressed by Hogg’s initiative and near-success with the Joseph L. Gerety. He commissioned him as an Acting Master in the Confederate Navy and authorized Hogg to recruit another, larger team of men, run the blockade, travel back to Panama, book passage on a steamer to San Francisco, and capture it. No small task, and once again Hogg was almost successful. He and his team made it to the Pacific side of Panama and were on the verge of capturing the steamer San Salvador.

Unfortunately for Hogg and his men, there was a traitor in their midst who divulged their plan to the Consul Savage in Havana. Alerted to the threat, the Captain of the USS Lancaster placed a number of his sailors and marines aboard the San Salvador as it was getting underweigh. On November 11, 1864, the San Salvador sailed into international waters and came alongside the USS Lancaster. The Navy boarding party captured Hogg and his men without incident.
Conclusion

Confederate and Federal offensive naval operations off the Rio Grande invariably had international implications. In addition to protests from U.S. and Mexican stakeholders, the impact of these operations often rippled through the Gulf and across the Atlantic. The Confederate crewmen of the Joseph L. Gerety boasted that their operation was just the first of several plans to capture enemy merchant vessels at the Boca del Rio. They claimed that “there are four other parties in Matamoras [sic] waiting for vessels and chances like this, and that they are sure to get them.”

The success of Confederate maritime initiatives in 1863 spurred additional planning for covert operations at the Rio Grande. However, Confederate authorities had to put these plans on hold. By early November of 1863, Federal forces had consolidated their hold on Boca Chica, Brazos Santiago, and Brownsville. Ten months later, the tactical situation changed again, as the Union Army withdrew from the Texas coast except for their desolate toe-hold at Boca Chica. This vacuum would enable renewed Confederate offensive naval operations at the Rio Grande.

During the first three years of the war, Confederate maritime activities in South Texas were primarily opportunistic responses to targets of opportunity. By 1863, they slowly began to exploit the vulnerability of unarmed U.S. merchant vessels at Boca del Rio. Inspired by the relatively well-organized capture of the Joseph L. Gerety, government officials set about absorbing lessons learned and preparing for similar operations in the coming year.

Between August and November of 1864, Confederate mariners would capture five more Union merchant ships at the Rio Grande. At least four of those seizures were preplanned covert operations, and all of them were successful.

Author of James D. Bulloch and of The Bulloch Belles
Endnotes

1. Abbreviations used are:
   BCAH: Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, Texas
   GPO: Government Printing Office
   JSR: Jose San Roman
   NARA: National Archives and Records Administration
   RG: Record Group

2. Ralph A. Wooster, Texas and Texans in the Civil War (Austin: Eakin Press), 66-70.


7. U.S. v. Schooner Amelia Ann, Jan 09, 1863, NARA M1360, Admiralty final record books, Southern District of Florida, Roll: 0008; Vol. 7; Deposition of Acting Master’s Mate Wm. E. Cannon, Dec 1, 1864, NARA SW Region, RG: 21, New Orleans Admiralty Case File 7933, U.S. v. Schooner Neptune. Five of the seized cargoes were outbound from Texas and three were inbound. One schooner was in ballast and had no cargo. The other four outbound captured schooners were loaded with between 88 and 170 bales of cotton.
8. United States Government. *Compilation of Laws and Decisions of the Courts Relating to War Claims* (Washington: GPO, 1908), 235-253. U.S. Admiralty courts condemned 7 vessels and their cargoes, 1 vessel with no cargo (the schooner *Star*), and 1 cargo of cotton (18 bales from the sloop *Kate*) that the Navy had released. The Navy also burned 1 vessel (the sloop *Victoria*). Not included in the seizure totals are vessels such as the *Blazer* that the Navy captured 70 miles from the Rio Grande or the schooner *Eager* that the Confederates burned. One of the released vessels was the schooner *Neptune* that the Navy set adrift as unseaworthy, but the Confederates recovered and returned to service. The 10 successful seizures include: 8 condemned + 1 burned + 1 condemned cargo from the *Kate*.


11. Leonard Pierce, Jr. to William H. Seward, Jul 21, 1863, *ORA* I: 26/1, 718-719. The table compiles 42 separate reports from 14 different sources. Each report contains an estimate of the number of merchant vessels sighted at the Boca del Rio. There were no reports for 9 of the 24 month, 6 months had only a single report, and the remainder reflects the average of multiple reports. Factors accounting for the decline in the summer and autumn of 1863 include: an increase in the number of lighters, improved weather, concern about virulent tropical diseases, U.S. Navy and Confederate harassment, General Hamilton Bee’s embargo on cotton exports in July, and the Federal occupation of South Texas in November.

12. *NY Times*, Apr 05, 1863.

13. “San Antonio *Herald*, Mar 28, 1863; New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, Jan 01, 1863. A brig-rigged sailing vessel typically had two square rigged masts, with a small fore-and-aft sail on the main (aft) mast. A brigantine was similar but often had a larger fore-and-aft rigged sail on the main mast. A British-flagged Brig named the *Icarian* was blown ashore at Boca Chica in September of 1861. It was owned by J&N Smith of New York, who were partners with Charles Stillman.”


16. Simon Celaya to JSR, Feb 26, 1863, JSR Papers Box 2G 63; JSR to McGrath, Tweed & Co., Mar 04, 1863, JSR papers Box 2G 120, BCAH.

17. Simon Celaya to JSR, Feb 26, 1863, JSR Papers Box 2G 63, BCAH.

18. Bill of Lading, Feb 2, 1863 & Simon Celaya to JSR, Feb 26, 1863 & McGrath, Tweed & Co. to JSR, Feb 06, 1863, JSR Papers, Box 2G 63, BCAH; Bee, to Dickinson, Mar 11, 1863, *ORA* Ser. I, Vol. XV, 1012-1013; San Antonio *Herald*, Mar 28, 1863; JSR to S Roca, Mar 12, 1863, JSR Papers Box 2G 120, BCAH.


20. Pierce to W.H. Seward, Apr 26, 1863, Matamoros Despatches, Ramsdel Collection, BCAH.


22. *NY Tribune*, May 20, 1863; *NY World*, & *Boston Post*, Feb 02, 1863; *NY Times* Mar 08, 1863.


25. Wm. G. Hale to Charles Stillman, Jul 30, 1861, Charles Stillman business papers, MS Am 800.27, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; Houston *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, Nov 02, 1864. Note: Jockusch opened his own trading office at Rio Grande City in November 1864.


27. Statement of facts, Jockusch v. Zacharie, May 27, 1864, Ballinger Papers, 2A 188b, BCAH.


34. Bell to Farragut, Mar 27, 1863, *ORN* I: 20, 103; Savage to W.H. Seward, May 50, 1863, Havana Despatches, Ramsdel Collection, BCAH; Pierce to Bell, May 28, 1863, *ORN* I: 20, 289; Pierce to W.H. Seward, Apr 26, 1863, Matamoros Despatches, Ramsdel Collection, BCAH (quoted material);


36. Farragut order to Bell, May 13, 1863, *ORN* I: 20, 187; Secretary Gideon Welles to Farragut, May 21, 1863, *ORN* I: 20, 204.


39. Pierce to Bell, Mar 28, 1863, *ORN* I: 20, 290. Note: The French were blockading Bagdad/Matamoros on behalf of Emperor Maximilian to prevent the importation of arms for Benito Juárez.

41. Col. James Duff to Lt E.R. Tarver, May 31, 1863, ORN, Ser. I: 20, 281; Bell to Farragut, Jun 02, 1863, ORN I: 20, 285-287; Bell to Welles, Jun 02, 1863; Bell Diary, May 28, 1863 – May 30, 1863, ORN I: 20, 757-758; Ellis, “Maritime Commerce in the Far Western Gulf, 1861-1865,” 189-193. The schooner that Col. Duff identifies as the *Eager*, Commodore Bell identifies as the *Relief*. Since the Confederates owned the vessel and burned it prior to the raiding party’s arrival, the Confederate name seems most credible.

42. Note: In the 19th Century, ingots of zinc known as “spelter” were used as an inexpensive substitute for bronze for casting decorative pieces. Saltpe- ter (potassium nitrate) was used for making gunpowder.


44. Bell to Robert Beardsley, Jun 01, 1863, ORN I: 20, 820-821; Bell Diary, May 28, 1863 – May 30, 1865. Bell considered the sloop *Kate* “unsafe for distant navigation” and returned it to its Master and half owner, Peter Miller.

45. Bell to H.D. Jones, May 30, 1863, ORN I: 20, 279-280; J.R.M. Mullany to Bell, Jun 01, 1863, Bell to Farragut, Jun 02, 1863, ORN I: 20, 286. Note: The *Blazer*’s survey value was $100.

46. U.S. Navy Department. *Annual Reports of the Navy Department: Report of the Secretary of the Navy*, Dec. 1865 (Washington: GPO, 1865), 517; New York Legislature Assembly 89th Session, *Documents of the Assembly of the State of New York*, Vol. 4. (Albany: C. Wendell, Legislative Printers), 520; Rodman L. Underwood, *Waters of Discord: The Union Blockade of Texas during the Civil War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2005), 35; James M. McPherson, *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 1465. Note: Prize money was divided as follows: 10% to the Admiral ($568), 2% to Commodore Bell ($114), and 88% to the crew of the *Brooklyn* which was further divided into 20 equal shares disbursed to the Captain (3 = $750), Officers and Midshipmen (10 = $2,500), and the enlisted men (7 = $1,750).

47. Bee to E. P. Turner, Sep 14, 1863, ORA I: 12/2, 229; Bee to H. S. Bell and Frank Brown, Sep 18, 1863, and E. Kirby Smith to J. B. Magruder, Sep 20, 1863, ORN I: 20, 840-841.


52. Chase to Mullany, Aug 13, 1863, *ORN* I: 20, 415; Pierce to W.H. Seward, Jul 25, 1863, Matamoros Consular Despatches, Ramsdel Collection, BCAH.


70. Welles to Bell, Sep 16, 1863, ORN I: 20, 447; Woolsey to Bell, Oct 02, 1863, ORN I: 20, 447-448.

71. Woolsey to Bell, Oct 12, 1863, ORN I: 20, 449.


78. Leas to Lt. Gov. George Berkely, Dec 16, 1863, Belize Consular Despatches, Ramsdel Collection, BCAH.


83. Affidavit of James Nicholas, Feb 05, 1864 & Greenough to Murray, Jan 14, 1864, from U.S. Government. Correspondence Concerning Claims against Great Britain, Vol. IV, 351-408; NY Times, Dec 21, 1863; Special Orders, No. 81, Feb 21, 1863, ORA I: 50/3, 333; Benjamin to Henry Hotze, May 05, 1864, ORN II: 3, 1112-1115.


85. Leas to W.H. Seward, Dec 11, 1863 & Leas to Berkely, Dec 15, 1863, Belize Consular Despatches, Ramsdel Collection, BCAH.


87. Leas to W.H. Seward, Dec 17, 1863 & Feb 01, 1864, Belize Consular Despatches, Ramsdel Collection, BCAH.

88. Leas to Berkely, Dec 15, 1863, Belize Consular Despatches, Ramsdel Collection, BCAH.

89. Leas to Berkely, Dec 15, 1863 & Dec 16, 1863 (quoted material) & Leas to W.H. Seward, Dec 17, 1863, Belize Consular Despatches, Ramsdel Collection, BCAH.

90. Greenough to Murray, Jan 14, 1864 & Dudley to Adams enclosing Affidavit of James Nicholas, Feb 10, 1864, from U.S. Government. Correspondence Concerning Claims against Great Britain, Vol. IV, 351-408; NY World & NY Times, Jan 16, 1864; NY Shipping & Commercial List, Jan 20, 1864; Mason to Benjamin, Apr 12, 1864, ORN II: 3, 1082-1084; London Guardian, Feb 27, 1864 & Apr 26, 1864.

91. Leas to W.H. Seward, Jan 09, 1864, Belize Consular Despatches, Ramsdel Collection, BCAH; Savage to Bell, Dec 16, 1863, ORN I: 20, 727-728; NY Times, Dec 21, 1863; Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph, Jan 13, 1864.

92. NY Times, Dec 21, 1865; NY Herald, Jan 16, 1864 (quoted material); Leas to W.H. Seward, Feb 11, 1864, Belize Consular Despatches, Ramsdel Collection, BCAH.


97. Leas to W.H. Seward, Jan 11, 1864 & Jan 14, 1864 & Feb 01, 1864, Belize Consular Despatches, Ramsdel Collection, BCAH.

98. Leas to W.H. Seward, Feb 01, 1864, Belize Consular Despatches, Ramsdel Collection, BCAH.


102. Leas to Berkely, Dec 16, 1865, Belize Consular Despatches, Ramsdel Collection, BCAH.
Matamoros en la Época de la Constitución de 1917

Por

Rosaura Alicia Dávila

ANTECEDENTES

Eventos importantes y trascendentales se desarrollaron en nuestra ciudad en los años previos a la expedición de nuestra Carta Magna. El 22 marzo de 1915 el Presidente Municipal de Matamoros C. Amado Chapa Gómez fue llamado por el general Emiliano P. Nafarrate, Jefe de la Línea Fronteriza del Estado, y le comunicó que la plaza se encontraba seriamente amenazada por fuerzas de la facción villista que se acercaban y le pedía su ayuda. El C. Chapa se excusó, aseverando que, según su forma de pensar, la autoridad civil no debería intervenir en asuntos militares. Para sustentar su tesis, le expresó múltiples razones. No obstante, el general insistió y, para complacerlo, decidió lanzar una convocatoria dirigida al pueblo a fin de pedir su opinión sobre este asunto.

No tenemos información de los resultados de esta convocatoria, pero descripciones de la batalla demuestran que la población colaboró en el cuidado de heridos y alimentación de las tropas. Tres días después, el general Nafarrate ordenó cavar trincheras en el poniente y sur de la ciudad, debido a que el resto estaba protegida por el Río Bravo y los esteros o lagunas. También puso alambradas que a su debido tiempo electrificó, inundó el canal de desague, y desmontó los alrededores. Contaba con unos 300 hombres entre aduanales y policías mientras que los villistas eran unos tres mil.

Un hecho fortuito, hizo que la suerte favoreciera a los constitucionalistas: habían llegado de Estados Unidos con destino
a Veracruz, donde se encontraba Venustiano Carranza, 16 ametralladoras, 6 mil rifles 30-30, dos millones de cartuchos, y mil granadas. Nafarrate los empleó para defender la ciudad. Siguiendo instrucciones de Carranza que comisionó al entonces coronel Raúl Gárate Legleu para que adquiriera para la defensa un aeroplano “Morán Soulner” que ayudaría a “bombardear” al enemigo.

Vecinos de Matamoros y Brownsville se prepararon para ser testigos de la “guerra moderna,” pero, desgraciadamente, la pista de aterrizaje no fue lo suficientemente grande y al hacer el piloto, Coronel Pedro A. Chapa, Jefe del Estado Mayor del General Nafarrate, el primer aterrizaje, tuvo un accidente en donde él resultó con heridas leves, pero el aparato quedó inservible.

El 26 marzo, los villistas acamparon en Estación Rosita. Nafarrate se entera y envía un furgón con dinamita con una máquina, pero explotó antes de llegar a su destino. Al día siguiente, avanzan a Las Rusias, y el general ordenó a sus tropas no disparar hasta que los villistas estuvieran a una distancia de 60 metros, lo que significó un magnífico blanco para las ametralladoras, y el enemigo tuvo que sortear zanjas y cercas electrificadas. Los constitucionalistas recibieron también refuerzos de 300 indios juchitecos al mando del general Teópulo Ramírez y otros al mando del general Ildefonso Vázquez. Después de 20 días de combate las tropas de Francisco Villa fueron derrotadas completamente.

Desde Faros, Veracruz, el C. Gral. de Brigada Luis Caballero, Gobernador y Jefe Militar del Estado, envió un telegrama, fechado el 12 de junio, a la Secretaría de Gobierno, pidiendo que se prohibiera la circulación en la región dominada por los constitucionalistas del papel moneda emitido por Francisco Villa y Eulalio Gutiérrez, y ordenaba a los presidentes municipales que los billetes decomisados fueran enviados a la Secretaría de Hacienda.

El Presidente Municipal en turno Amado Chapa Gómez se quejó amargamente con el Gobernador del Estado que la noche del 19 de junio dos hombres, en completo estado de ebriedad y montados en un caballo, se metieron a una cantina frente a la plaza. La policía los aprehendió y los puso presos. Pasada una
hora se presentó el Mayor, Antonio Cavazos expresando que por órdenes del Jefe de Armas se pusiera en libertad a dichos individuos a lo que el Presidente Municipal se opuso terminantemente por haber cometido éstos faltas que deben castigarse, y se retiró. Después, volvió Cavazos con una escolta y carabinas preparadas mandaron abrir la cárcel y se los llevaron. Al poco tiempo, se presentó el Jefe de Armas, Coronel Pedro A. Chapa, con el Comandante de Policía, reclamando el motivo por el que no se obedecieron sus órdenes, aseverando que en la ciudad no había más autoridad que él.

Con azoro de su parte se percató que para las 10 de la noche Guerra y Cisneros habían vuelto a las andadas escandalizando en la misma cantina. Por prudencia, Chapa Gómez los dejó en paz, y la sociedad se mostró escandalizada y alarmada y pedía al gobernador sus órdenes a fin de dictaminar sobre lo acontecido. El Presidente Municipal pidió también que ordenara se cumpliera el Decreto del Primer Jefe sobre la libertad de los municipios y que ordenara que las Autoridades Militares no se entrometieran en asuntos civiles pidiendo además su apoyo para castigar a los responsables.

El asunto ameritó que el alcalde citara a su cabildo a una sesión extraordinaria, el martes 20 de julio, en donde se trató el caso, se puso a discusión, y se debatió, acordándose: manifestar al C. Gobernador del Estado que esa Corporación veía con mucho desagrado y desaprobaba la conducta del Jefe de Armas de la Plaza Coronel Pedro A. Chapa y pedían se cumpliera el Decreto del Primer Jefe sobre la libertad de los municipios.

Aún no terminaba el mes de julio cuando el Presidente Municipal, en contestación al oficio #1 del Coronel Procopio I. Elizondo, en el que le enteraba de haberse hecho cargo de la Jefatura de Armas de esta plaza en sustitución del Coronel Pedro A. Chapa, lo felicita por la confianza con la que había sido honrado, le daba la más calurosa bienvenida y le expresaba su satisfacción por su nombramiento. El juez de Primera Instancia recibió del alcalde a Jesús María Cisneros y a Protasio Guerra
a fin de practicar las averiguaciones correspondientes y se les aplicara la pena a la que se hicieran acreedores.

Fue a principios de agosto durante la presidencia del C. Alejandro López que el Gobernador del Estado envió un telegrama comunicando estar enterado del proceder del Jefe de Armas al que le envió un enérgico mensaje en donde le ordena poner a disposición del presidente municipal a los involucrados y le recomendaba que en el futuro no interviniera en asuntos de la autoridad civil ya que éstas servían para apoyarlas cuando éstas lo solicitaran. Que en lo relativo al Decreto del Primer Jefe acerca de la autonomía municipal comunicaba que el decreto no había sido sancionado por su gobierno, agregando que estimaba no había llegado el momento adecuado para dar tal libertad y aseguraba que su gobierno estaba dispuesto a apoyar a todas las autoridades civiles que el Ejército Revolucionario había colocado al frente de sus comunidades.

A mediados del mes de octubre de 1915, el C. Presidente Municipal Alejandro López informó que el General Eugenio López, Jefe de la Línea Fronteriza, comunicó haber recibido aviso de sus superiores de la próxima visita a este puerto del C. Carranza. Días después en sesión extraordinaria se integró el Comité de Festejos para recibir al C. Primer Jefe encargado del Poder Ejecutivo de la Nación encabezado por el C. Mauro Uribe, administrador de la Aduana de Matamoros.

Carranza visitó Matamoros el 28 y 29 de noviembre. La ciudad lució sus mejores galas, los edificios de la ciudad estaban cubiertos con los colores de la bandera y una gran cantidad de arcos que fueron diseñados y confeccionados por la maestra Eduvigis González Celhay, consistentes de flores de papel con hojas de palma natural. Carranza se hospedó en el segundo piso de la Aduana, situada en Quinta y Morelos, y, a las diez de la noche, asistió, en compañía de su esposa e hija, a un baile que ofrecieron en su honor en el Teatro Reforma.

Al día siguiente, desde el balcón, pronunció un discurso, donde dio a conocer los principios internacionales de la Revolución y
donde sentó las bases de la Doctrina Carranza. También tuvo una entrevista con los principales hombres de Brownsville, encabezados por el Coronel Blocksom, en las inmediaciones del Puente Viejo.

**ELECCIONES DE DIPUTADOS**

En el decreto del 19 de septiembre de 1916, del C. Primer Jefe, encargado del Poder Ejecutivo de la Nación, convocando al Pueblo Mexicano a elecciones de Diputados al Congreso Constituyente que se instaló en Querétaro el 1° de diciembre de 1916. Se publicó por bando el decreto y se nombró a empadronadores e instaladores de las mesas electorales que recibieron el sufragio en las elecciones a las que se convocó.

A fines de octubre de 1916, las distintas secciones daban a conocer sus resultados para elegir diputado propietario y suplente para representar a nuestro distrito en el Congreso Constituyente, siendo los resultados de lo más variado:

En la sección 11 a cargo de los señores Arturo Rodríguez y R. Carpio, informaron al Presidente Municipal haber cumplido con la circular # 499 relativo a que esa autoridad lo nombró instalador en la mencionada sección de la mesa electoral que debía recibir la votación para diputados al Congreso Constituyente. A las nueve de la mañana, se abrió el local, y la mayoría del día transcurrió sin haber suficiente número de personas para integrar la Mesa Electoral. A las cuatro de la tarde se dio por terminada la jornada sin recibir votación. Se quejaban de carecer de la Ley Electoral vigente y que desconocían el procedimiento a seguir en estos casos.

La sección 8 tuvo mejor suerte y tuvo como presidente a José Torres. Se instaló la mesa correspondiente de conformidad con lo que marcaba el Artículo 14 de la Ley Electoral vigente, y, a las tres de la tarde, se procedió a realizar el cómputo de los sufragios resultando electos Pedro A. Chapa como propietario y Alejandro Guerra como suplente.
En la sección 16 del Rancho El Soliseño, se presentaron siete ciudadanos que habían recitado cita que los acreditaba como encargados del desarrollo de la votación bajo la presidencia del Sr. Doroteo G. García para instalar la mesa, que finalmente no se realizó porque los presentes manifestaron su inconformidad con emitir su voto cuando, en la boleta correspondiente, no aparecía el nombre de los candidatos objetos de la elección y que como carecían de la Ley Electoral donde pudieran encontrar datos para resolver alguna duda se acordó no llevar a cabo la votación.

En el Teatro Iturbide de Querétaro, a fines de noviembre de 1916, se celebró la quinta reunión preparatoria del Congreso Constituyente para integrar la primera y segunda comisión revisora de credenciales. El C. Rivera Cabrera dio lectura del dictamen expedido por Tamaulipas en donde se informa que, por el 1º de Tamaulipas con sede en Matamoros, propietario, Pedro A. Chapa; suplente, Alejandro C. Guerra, se expide credencial a favor de los citados señores. Que en Tula, se reunió la junta computadora de votos del 3º Distrito Electoral y arrojó 57 votos para el C. Emiliano P. Nafarrate como diputado propietario y como suplente, José María Herrera. El diputado propietario por el 4º Distrito Electoral era el C. Fortunato de Leija y suplente el C. Félix Acuña.


Zeferino Fajardo nació en villa de Quintero, Tamaulipas, el 26 de agosto de 1885. Se tituló de profesor de educación primaria en 1906 y de abogado en 1913. Se unió a Francisco I. Madero, fundó el periódico “Tamaulipas,” también fundó una Notaría Pública, el Colegio de Notarios, y colaboraba con los periódicos de la región. Se suicidó en 1954.
Emiliano P. Nafarrate nació en Yecorato, distrito del Puente, Sinaloa, el 29 de julio de 1882. Al estallar el movimiento revolucionario encabezado por Pascual Orozco contra Madero, huye de Hidalgo del Parral, Chihuahua. Se incorpora al “21” Cuerpo Rural y pasa a prestar sus servicios a Cd. Victoria. Asistió a la hacienda de Los Azules, Durango; San Francisco, Hidalgo; Cd. Victoria, Tamaulipas; Toma de Matamoros, con el grado de Coronel; en Capuchinas, los Herrera, en Ycamole y Toma de Tampico. En el Congreso representó al III Distrito con sede en Tula.


La Constitución de 1917 tiene su raíz en la de 1857 y, a pesar de las muchas reformas que ha sufrido, conserva el espíritu liberal que le dio origen. La mayoría de los constituyentes de 1917 pertenecían al Partido Liberal Constitucionalista y se guiaron para sus trabajos en el Programa del Partido Liberal Mexicano que se había dado a conocer en San Luis Missouri, Estados Unidos, once años antes.

Labor del Diputado Chapa a Favor de su Distrito

En correspondencia particular, el Diputado Pedro A. Chapa dirigió una misiva al Sr. Rafael González, Presidente Municipal, al finalizar mayo de 1917, contestando el oficio #166 que el alcalde había enviado tanto al Gral. Nafarrate como a él, y le manifestó la justicia de la iniciativa presentada al Poder Ejecutivo por su conducto. Agregó que hizo una carta para los diputados y senadores para que la firmaran, porque, si esperaban hasta que el Sr. Presidente los recibiera, iban a desperdiciar un tiempo valioso. Ha hecho propaganda en la Cámara sobre el proyecto
de la Zona Libre que presentarían a la primera oportunidad y le suplica enviar un exhaustivo estudio.

En la sesión de Cabildo, de finales de enero 1917, se leyó un telegrama del Gobernador del Estado, que recomendaba celebrar con el mayor esplendor la fecha del 5 de febrero, aniversario de la Constitución Política de 1857. Agregaba que era la probable fecha de protesta del Nuevo Código Fundamental que se estaba discutiendo en Querétaro. Se determinó nombrar la Junta Patriótica que se encargaría de estas celebraciones y se nombró como presidente al C. Remigio Gómez, vicepresidente, Conrado Gutiérrez y tesorero a José Martínez.

El Gobernador Ramón Guerra decretó la creación de la Zona de Libre Comercio en la frontera, el 17 de marzo de 1858. Tuvo gran importancia en la época de los algodones. Poco a poco fue desapareciendo cuando se empezó a poner impuestos a algunos productos hasta que desapareció totalmente con la llegada del ferrocarril a Matamoros en 1905. Fue el presidente de la Cámara Mercantil y Agrícola, Baldomero Urtusástegui, quien, doce años después, discutió de manera exhaustiva en su sesión ordinaria la conveniencia de promover la Zona Libre en esta frontera y, siendo asunto de vital importancia para ellos, acordó nombrar una comisión a fin de conseguir el apoyo del Ayuntamiento y el del Gobierno del Estado y quedó integrada por: Leocadio Montemayor, José E. Gazca, Pedro Lozano García, Leopoldo Palacios, Servando Hernández, y Alfredo Laurents.

El 30 de abril, 1917, el Presidente Municipal en turno R. García expidió un Aviso, comunicando que el Ayuntamiento hace saber a todo el público que al día siguiente se daría a conocer por medio de un Bando Solemne el Decreto de la Cámara de Diputados al Congreso de la Unión referente al Ciudadano Electo para Primer Magistrado de la Nación del 1° de diciembre 1916 al 30 noviembre 1920. El acto daría inicio a las 10 de la mañana frente a la Presidencia Municipal. También se hacía saber que, para celebrar la exaltación al poder del ciudadano electo, que tendría lugar a las cinco de la tarde en el Salón de
la Cámara de Diputados al Congreso de la Unión, se efectuaría una serenata en la Plaza Hidalgo tarde y noche, se darían exhibiciones cinematográficas gratuitas en el Teatro Reforma.

El Presidente Municipal y el Cabildo mandaron un telegrama al gobernador, pidiendo subvencionar con $1,500.00 mensuales por lo que restaba del ciclo escolar con motivo de que, a partir del 1º de mayo, el Gobierno del Estado decretó que las escuelas primarias y elementales del Estado dependerían de los municipios.

A esta petición el Gobierno del Estado contestó que no podía acceder a la petición porque se encontraban en una situación precaria. El Ing. Pedro A. Chapa, Diputado al Congreso de la Unión por este distrito, en oficio dirigido al alcalde, manifestó que recibió el memorial en el que se solicitaba el 3% sobre exportación de esta Aduana a fin de mejorar el salario de los profesores, y que, junto con el Senador Nafarrate, lo entregaron al Presidente Carranza. El presidente de la República respondió que la solicitud la turnó a la Secretaría de Hacienda quien dictaría el acuerdo correspondiente.

El Presidente Municipal Rafael González, en una carta dirigida al Coronel e Ing. Pedro A. Chapa, manifestó haber recibido copia del oficio que la Representación de Tamaulipas en el Senado y en el Congreso de la Unión dirigió al Presidente de la República, adjuntando el memorial que esa Corporación Municipal y la Junta de Instrucción Pública envió por conducto de la Presidencia Municipal. Le patentiza su agradecimiento y con esta respuesta confirma el interés que tiene para ayudar a resolver los problemas de los habitantes de la región y le suplica hacerlo extensivo al C. Emiliano P. Nafarrate y los demás miembros de la representación de este Estado, que han hecho un gran trabajo para lograr una respuesta positiva a su petición, añadiendo que ya se había informado a la Cámara Agrícola y Mercantil los logros obtenidos.

El Presidente Municipal de Matamoros envió un oficio al C. D. Alarcón, presidente del R. Ayuntamiento de Ciudad Juárez,
en donde le dió a conocer el nombramiento del Presidente Municipal de Matamoros, Rafael González, como delegado a la Cámara Nacional de Comercio en la Cd. de México, para tratar ante el Gobierno la iniciativa del restablecimiento de la Zona Libre. El 4 de diciembre, se nombró una comisión integrada por: Lic. Albino Hernández, Ing. Leopoldo Palacios, y Juan B. Zolezzi para confeccionar la petición que se debía hacer al Gobierno del Estado concerniente al restablecimiento de la Zona Libre. Días después y finalizada ésta, fue enviada al Gobierno del Estado.

La Cámara Mercantil y Agrícola, por medio de su presidente Leopoldo Palacios, contestó un oficio de la presidencia municipal en el que transcribió uno recIbid del Ayuntamiento de Cd. Juárez, en el que se refiere a los trabajos realizados por ellos para restablecer la Zona Libre en toda la frontera norte del país. Afirmó haber enviado una copia a la Comisión Permanente del Primer Congreso de Comerciantes, a fin de que cuando se presentara el voto de los comerciantes en la Cámara de Diputados se les hiciera saber que los Ayuntamientos también están de acuerdo con la propuesta.

El alcalde de Chihuahua informó al de Matamoros que los municipios con los que estaban en contacto eran, de Tamaulipas, Camargo, Mier, Matamoros y Nuevo Laredo; de Nuevo León, villa Colombia; de Coahuila, Piedras Negras. Además, Chihuahua, de Sonora, Ojinaga, Agua Prieta, y Nogales; y, en Baja California, Mexicali. Todos ellos tenían la misma finalidad que era iniciar el asunto referente a la Zona Libre y obtener el apoyo de los comerciantes asistentes en la Cd. de México a su Primer Congreso y que hicieran suya esta iniciativa al pedir a la Cámara de Diputados declarara el restablecimiento de la Zona Libre para toda la frontera norte de la República Mexicana. La delegación de Matamoros estuvo formada por el presidente municipal Rafael González y el Cónsul de México en Brownsville, Texas, José Z. Garza, y fue recIbid en audiencia especial por el Presidente de la República, quién les ofreció su apoyo y mostró
gran entusiasmo por este asunto. Pero finalmente la propuesta no fue aprobada.

Consecuencias Que Se Dejaron Sentir en Matamoros

Una de las consecuencias de aplicar la nueva Constitución fue exigir a empresas extranjeras tener un domicilio en el país para cumplir con sus obligaciones con el gobierno. Por ejemplo: el mensaje que el Presidente Municipal envió a los C.C. Lic. Frank C. Pierce y Antonio Barreda en Brownsville, Texas, en el que comunicó que el Sub-Colector de Rentas del Estado le pide notificarlos como apoderados que eran de “Tamaulipas Land & Cattle Co. S.A.” pasaran a pagar sus contribuciones a Hacienda debido a que la organización de esa sociedad bajo las Leyes de la República Mexicana les imponía a los integrantes la imprescindible obligación de tener en esta ciudad de Matamoros su domicilio y despacho de todos sus negocios y pedía acuse de recibo y que le dieran a conocer la dirección de ese despacho para que en el futuro se le enviaran allí las notificaciones.

El nacionalismo y anticlericalismo de los constituyentes fue el prohibir a los extranjeros desempeñar o dirigir cultos religiosos y enseñar como la circular que giró el C. Gobernador Interino del Estado al Presidente Municipal Rafael González diciéndole que: el Artículo 130 de la Constitución de la República decía que en todo templo debía haber un encargado de él, responsable ante la autoridad del cumplimiento de las leyes sobre disciplina religiosa en ese templo, agregando que el encargado en unión de 10 vecinos avisará a la autoridad de la persona responsable y que todo cambio debería avisarse por el ministro entrante y saliente, que la autoridad municipal debería llevar un libro de registros de los templos, los permisos expedidos para abrir uno nuevo y que se necesitaba ser mexicano por nacimiento.

De 1885 a 1917, funcionó en Matamoros el Instituto Hussey, ubicado en 13 Herrera y Bustamante. El dinero para su construcción fue donado por Charles Hussey, filántropo de
Brownsville, quien estableció una escuela misionera cuáquera, mixta y con su instrucción en inglés. Eran los norteamericanos los que pagaban al profesorado y su mantenimiento. Entre sus directores y profesorado estuvieron: Samuel Purdy, Julia L. Ballinger, Nancy L. Lee, Mary Picket, Auretta Thomas, Sara R. Charles, Genaro G. Ruiz, Nardo Mancilla, y Sabina González.

El 21 de marzo de 1875, el misionero del Presbiterio de Texas, Anthony Thomas, fundó la Primera Iglesia Presbiteriana, llamada Príncipe de Paz. 17 años después, entró en funciones el Colegio Presbiteriano, situado en las calles Quinta y Gonzáles. Entre sus directoras estuvieron Ana Dysart y Alicia McLellan.

Para mayo de 1917, el Director General de Educación Pública envió al Presidente de la Junta Patriótica de Matamoros la contestación de un oficio que le había enviado la Directora del Instituto Hussey, en el sentido de seguir trabajando hasta el mes de junio en que se terminaba el ciclo escolar lo que le fue negado, arguyendo que no estaba facultado para permitir que se violara la Constitución vigente en la República Mexicana, y ordenaba se enviaran esas órdenes a la Directora de esa institución así como a C.A. Gutiérrez, director de la Escuela Primaria Presbiteriana.

Otra fuente de conflicto fue la aplicación del descanso semanal obligatorio, garantizado por el Artículo 123. Cuando se aplicó, significó gran dificultad para la gente del campo, pues el domingo era el único día con el que contaban para comprar sus provisiones en la ciudad. Finalmente, el descanso se cambió para el martes.

La Sociedad Tamaulipecana de Historia, Geografía, y Estadística
Fuentes

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Padre Island Impression

by

Ralph Martin

Day’s strand shifts fully to ebon night.
Only indistinct crackling campfire penetrates its omniscient veil of pitch.

Ocean explodes, pounds awaiting beach, drowning out whistling whine of gale. Nocturnal scavenger crabs scurry, oblivious to all.

Moon slides from behind cloud camouflage, exposing slumbering sand and coruscating water.

Sparks leap from aromatic mesquite flame, touching looming shadows who take their cues: become energetic, elusive dancers, darting erratically.

Gnarled soggy palm log rests on solitary shore, breaking monotonous pattern of uneven, gritty sand. Seaweed heavily scents damp salt air pervasively.

Wan moon in inky sky shyly hides, darkness overcoming cloaked scene once more.
NOTABLE 20th CENTURY FIGURES
César Chávez’s Pan American College
Campus Visit and its Aftermath

by

Rolando Avila

In early 1971, a few days after the Pharr, Texas, Riot, César Chávez visited Pan American College (PAC) in Edinburg, Texas. Reactions to his visit and speech were felt into the summer of 1972. First, critical student newspaper editorials fueled tensions. Then, a caption in the 1972 student yearbook resulted in the largest student demonstration in the school’s history. Tensions subsided only after Pan American University (PAU) President Ralph Schilling submitted a formal apology to all those who found the caption offensive. Placed in proper historical context, the campus events of 1971 to 1972 can be seen as part of the school’s growing pains as its principal enrollment transitioned from an Anglo to a Mexican American student body.

Historical Context

A few years after Columbus’s arrival in the New World in 1492, Texas became a Spanish possession, and it remained so for more than 300 years. When Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, Texas was part of Mexico. The Texas Revolution (1835-1836) and, later, the Mexican American War (1846-1848) did little to reduce the Mexican presence in the region. In fact, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), which formally ended the Mexican-American War, ceded the northern third of Mexico to the United States. A provision of the treaty allowed Mexicans to stay on their lands if they so chose. In other words, before the treaty was signed, these Mexicans were in Mexico, but, after the treaty was signed (although they had
not moved), these same Mexicans were in the United States. Ultimately, this provision in the treaty was responsible for the formal creation of the first Mexican Americans. It was not until the middle to late 1800s and early 1900s that Anglo land speculators and farmers began to arrive in the region.

The Rio Grande Valley (RGV) is located on the north side of the Rio Grande that serves as the geographical border with Mexico. The proximity of the Valley to Mexico has historically facilitated legal and illegal Mexican immigration. The region has remained somewhat isolated from the rest of the state, and this isolation has further encouraged a Mexican American majority in South Texas. During the 1920s and 1930s, the economy of the RGV was primarily based on agriculture. Interestingly, the 1927-1939 Edinburg College’s Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) General Report includes a detailed yearly account of the “Tons of Fruit and Vegetables Shipped from the Valley by Seasons” from 1920 to 1935. Even into the 1940s and 1950s, the majority of field hands in the RGV were Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Picking crops did not require a college education, and crop pickers were in great demand. The region suffered from a high poverty rate, and, in the 1950s, financial aid for college was non-existent. Some school administrators discouraged Mexican Americans from applying to college, because they could not afford it. The U.S. Census data shows that Hispanics (Mexican Americans) accounted for 70.7 percent of the Hidalgo County population in 1950, but they only accounted for 38 percent of Edinburg Regional College’s enrollment in 1952. (See Tables 1 & Table 2)

In the early 1960s, President Schilling began an effort to bring Pan American College, which was a locally funded and controlled school, into the state system. However, Schilling was met with a lot of resistance from the community, for two main reasons. First, if the school went into the state system, a board appointed by the governor would govern it, and the local powerbrokers would lose control. The second reason was closely
related to the first. If the school became state funded, it would open the school doors to more Hispanics in the area. Dr. Miguel A. Nevarez (former PAC faculty member, PAU vice-president, PAU president, and, later, UTPA president) recalled the historical context in which these events transpired: “There was a lot of racism! There really was. And, that was the context. . . . There was a lot of opposition to that. . . . I remember one time [Schilling] showed me a student newspaper [with the headline]: ‘Why Does Pan American College Want to Educate Cotton Pickers?’ There’s no place for that.”

Dr. Lino Garcia, Jr., a former PAC faculty member and Dean of Men, elaborated:

Let me tell you something about Dr. Schilling…. When he came here in 1960, he promised he was going to bring in more money and help the school grow. There were a group of Anglo families here in the Valley who did not want this university to grow, particularly one student who was here who harassed him no end. He took pictures of his car wherever he went. Harassed him with letters to the editor. He was protesting, because he did not want this university to grow, because that was going to help the Mexicano (Mexican).

In spite of opposition, in 1965, Schilling was successful in bringing the school into the state system. Coupled with the enrollment-enhancing effects of the G.I. Bill, the schools’ transition into the state system began a continual trend in enrollment that better represented the Hidalgo County Mexican American population. The official history of the school states, “Pan American University saw the student population diversify during the 1970s, reflecting a predominately Mexican-American population.”

MECHA

During those years, PAC had a tradition of an Activity Period. Former PAC Professor Dr. Martha May Tevis recalled, “We didn’t have many students living around here. Almost everybody was a commuter…. So, the way you could keep people involved
was to give them a time during the day...so that they could be active. The only thing that could be scheduled [during Activity Period] were student organizations.\textsuperscript{7} During the 1970-1971 academic year, PAC faculty members Dr. Gilbert Cruz and Dr. Milo Kearney sponsored the establishment of a new student organization: MECHA (\textit{Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan}).\textsuperscript{8} Joe R. Rodriguez (a MECHA student leader, PAC student body president, and future Democratic member of the Texas State Senate) explained the purpose of the student organization to a school newspaper reporter:

\begin{quote}
The main purpose of MECHA is to create an awareness and understanding of Chicano culture. By Chicano culture we...mean...some of the problems faced by the Chicano in the fields of education and race relations that tend to arise as a result of a dominant Anglo society not able to understand the Chicano.\textsuperscript{9}
\end{quote}

Rodriquez also explained how MECHA hoped to accomplish its purpose:

\begin{quote}
We expect to carry it out through a free exchange of ideas. We hope to do this through speakers, films, seminars, and any other open discussion.\textsuperscript{10}
\end{quote}

However, the organization was viewed with suspicion by some groups. Kearney recalled:

\begin{quote}
The atmosphere was tense regarding the club. There was some hesitation over our founding of MECHA. The nervousness over the founding of MECHA of which I was aware was from the administration (President and History Department). Having been at the University of California at Berkeley during the Free Speech Movement, I was warned by...President [Schilling] not to contemplate such a movement on the Edinburg campus. Dr. Schilling made the comment to me at a faculty reception, as I recall. He was very friendly to me, but I think the concern was real, due to the cancellation of our first scheduled MECHA event (a Mexican dance group, as I recall).\textsuperscript{11}
\end{quote}

A reporter stated to Rodriguez, “Most of the people around campus believe the members of MECHA to be radicals and
militant.” The reporter then asked, “Who are the members of MECHA?” Rodriguez responded:

The members of MECHA are students who are interested in finding out about Chicano culture.... We are not forcing [people] to come to our meetings. What we have is a fluid type of organization in which you have people coming to listen to what we have to say or what somebody else has to say.... The organization is opened to anybody who is interested in joining whether he be Anglo, Black, or Chicano. My opinion on why Anglos are not coming to the organization is because of fear. They think we are militants.... At the same time, some of them are not interested in Chicano Culture.15

Invitation

César Chávez (1927–93), a Mexican American farm workers’ union leader, first gained national attention in 1968, when he conducted a twenty-five-day fast and outdoor Catholic mass, which was attended by more than 4,000 farm workers and Senator Robert Kennedy, D-N.Y. Greatly inspired by Martin Luther King Jr.’s non-violent strategy of protest, Chávez organized a strike and boycott against grape growers and winemakers in 1965. The strike lasted five years, and, in August of 1970, Chávez spent twenty days in Salinas County jail for refusing to obey a court order against the union’s lettuce boycott. Ultimately, the growers relented, and twenty-three California growers signed an agreement, in 1970, with Chávez’s newly-named union, the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC).14 However, more needed to be done. Low wages and poor working conditions continued to plague farm workers. In late 1970, the UFWOC filed a lawsuit to prevent the use of non-union-grown lettuce by the U.S. Defense Department. In addition, the union organized a boycott of non-union grown lettuce. In 1971, Chávez went on a national speaking tour to promote his cause.

Kearney recalled, “We tried to schedule one MECHA activity a month. That year MECHA helped to sponsor Chávez’s [campus] visit.”15 Chávez accepted the invitation. The largest
The students’ idea is to give Chávez a platform where he might present and discuss the issues of the times as he sees them. The speech is an educational and academic venture rather than a rally, they said. CCPC members added that the organization did not necessarily support or endorse the views of Chávez, UFWOC, or any other organization, but wants to give students an opportunity to hear this side of the issue.

Chávez at PAC

At noon on Monday, February 8, 1971, Chávez met briefly with President Schilling before the event. Then Richard Smith, a member of the CCPC, escorted Chávez and his entourage to the PAC auditorium filled with about 1,200 people. Tevis recalled, “I got in just in time to be on the back row of the auditorium…. So, Chávez takes the stage. He’s introduced [by Smith] and he’s up at the podium, and he’s beginning to make his speech. In the audience, you could hear a pin drop.” However, audience silence did not last long. Kearney stated,

“At its peak,” Chávez responded, “the union [had] 50,000 members, which was composed of a Mexican American majority. But, African Americans were also members.”
Chávez explained to the audience that “he came with a message of peace and justice and with the purpose of informing his listeners on behalf of the poor and disadvantaged persons who put most of the food on the tables of the United States.” With a smile, he told the audience, “Eat tacos with cabbage [instead of lettuce].” He said that his work was mostly “an economic struggle—to get the agricultural employers to recognize the rights of workers.” He stated:

The economic struggle of a minority group is one of the poor and without power. The struggle will be non-violent, not because of the lack of strength but because we are trying to build, not destroy. The economic boycott is the perfect weapon to change society and do it non-violently. The economic boycott gives men and women who want change a concrete form of struggle.

After his brief speech, Chávez turned the session over to a question-and-answer period conducted by Smith. He answered several questions about his cause, which received loud applause from the audience. The Pharr, Texas, Riot, which had occurred a couple of days before, was still fresh on the minds of audience members. When questioned about his views on the riot, Chávez responded, “The grievances of the oppressed must be heard or there will be violence.” This answer also “brought loud applause.” At the end of the event, Chávez said that he was “tremendously pleased with the reception he received on campus.” Kearney assessed: “MECHA was a success on campus...[and]...sponsored activities through that year.”

Burning of Student Newspaper

Not everyone was pleased with the event. In fact, the effects of Chávez’s visit to campus in early 1971 would be felt into the summer of 1972. A critical editorial concerning Chávez’s visit appeared in the next issue of the student newspaper:
It was not a holiday, but it should have been. Call it César Chávez Day. Call it some form of hero worship. Put them together, wind them up, and call it a pseudo-intellectual three-ring circus. Billed as the main attraction in the center ring, spotlight included, was César Chávez. His visit was, according to one Pan Am instructor, "the biggest thing to ever happen on this campus." The blame award goes to the hoof-clappers who freely and happily applauded everything... and hissingly protected him from any villains who might have slithered under the door into the audience... Their applause shouldn’t be the biggest thing on campus. But the ‘silent majority’ is defeated by apathy. So, don’t hold your breath waiting for the next unplanned holiday, featuring Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey. A real circus couldn’t be any more entertaining, or cheaper, than the last one.  

The editorial did not sit well with the new campus Mexican American student majority. Tension kept building over the next few months, and dissatisfaction with similar views, often expressed in the student newspaper, boiled over in May of 1972.

In early May, about 150 people witnessed the public burning of the school newspaper around an Intercollegiate Knights’ garbage can. According to Dr. Lino Garcia, Jr., who was Dean of Men at the time, he “had given the students permission to use the loudspeakers for a protest, but he did not know they were going to burn the newspaper." Surrounded by many supporters, about ten students took an active part in the burning. The students explained that they were carrying out the activity in protest of “racism and discrimination in the student paper....” One student added, “The only other way to communicate is to burn a building down....”

After about twenty minutes, Garcia broke up the protest, and “made the students extinguish the fire.” Garcia then asked the leaders of the protest to follow him to his office. About fifty students followed them into the University Center. But, when the crowd arrived, it found the doors to the Dean’s office locked. Consequently, the crowd waited on the floor of the University Center foyer. After a few minutes, protestors began “clapping and banging on the walls." Dr. Arnulfo Martinez, Vice-President for Student Affairs, went to the foyer to attempt to stop
the protest, but he “was cut short when the students emerged from Garcia’s office shouting, ‘We’re going to change it, people. We’re going to get something done.’”

38 Garcia later explained to a local newspaper reporter that neither he nor Martinez “had any authority over the newspaper.”

39 He explained that the newspaper was “directed by Dr. Schilling (and the board of regents) through the public information office.”

40 Garcia recalled, “It was a peaceful demonstration. I stood by, supervising to make sure that they didn’t get out of line. Some of the leaders of the demonstration became prominent attorneys. One of them became Assistant U.S. Attorney.”

1972 Yearbook Controversy

That same month, about 300 students staged another peaceful demonstration. The students gathered in front of the University Center and marched in a double column through the administration building to return their copies of the school yearbook, *El Bronco*. Protestors explained that the yearbook, which was funded with student fees, was marred by “racism and discrimination.”

42 More specifically, the students were protesting the placement of a photograph taken of César Chávez (as he walked into the campus auditorium to give his speech in early 1971) above the lines from the song of Desiderata: “Avoid loud and aggressive persons for they are a vexation to the spirit.”

43 On the other page was a clenched fist (symbol of the Chicano), which was flanked by a picture of a priest leading a mass with the caption, “If you compare yourself with others, you will become vain and bitter. There are greater and better persons than you.”

44 Garcia recalled, “That caption was indirectly referring to [César Chávez]. Some students took it very personally. And, they decided to return the *Bronco* yearbook…. We never had some of the riots that other universities had. We just never did…. It was all done in a peaceful way.”

Nevarez recalled the peaceful demonstration:
It was a time of unrest.... I forget the name of the poem, but there was a part in the poem that said, “Avoid loud and vindictive people.” And, under that part of the poem they had a picture and that picture was of César Chávez, because César Chávez had been on campus the year before. And the students demonstrated against the yearbook. They would come in through one door of the administration building...and there was a table there...and...the students went in and returned their yearbook. They quietly marched out.\(^{46}\)

A local newspaper reporter who observed the protest recorded conversations he overheard:

One Anglo student remarked to another: “I think the whole thing is foolish.” He was answered by a Chicano sympathizer: “It isn’t either.” A Chicano leader said: “We’re all in this together. Let’s be orderly and not let it get out of hand....” A history professor said: “I think that the picture of Chávez was uncalled for. He showed a very orderly manner to the students.” Another professor commented: “If it was a mistake, it was great, but if it was someone’s ingenuity, it was beautiful.”\(^{47}\)

Luis Olivares, the recently-elected president of the student body, was among the first to enter the building and return the yearbook. That same day, Olivares met with the Faculty-Student Publication Committee and presented the committee with a resolution consisting of four major demands:

- A public apology should be made by President Schilling to César Chávez, the student body, and the RGV community.
- A refund for the yearbook should be supplied to all students who request it, and the purchase of the yearbook should no longer be compulsory.
- The censorship of the Pan American student newspaper should be turned over to a committee of both faculty and students.
- Vernon Davis (director of the PAU Information Office) should be terminated.\(^{48}\)
The resolution also accused Schilling and Davis of misrepresenting the student body as “being militant, violent, and irresponsible.” That same day, Jody Perkes, a co-editor of the yearbook, released a statement: “Charges of bias, bigotry, prejudice, and discrimination have been leveled against the 1972 El Bronco for its portrayal of the theme of this yearbook. The wording of the song Desiderata could not be changed, but perhaps the selection of the photographs chosen by the editorial staff to illustrate each point was unwise.”

After an investigation conducted by the PAU Board of Regents, the board agreed to meet only one of the four student demands: They instructed Schilling to send Chávez a letter of apology. Schilling wrote (in a letter he mailed to Chávez in June 1972):

> It has been brought to my attention...that a certain picture of you as well as the language of a poem which fell by the side of your picture in the 1972 annual of Pan American University, at Edinburg, Texas, might have been offensive to you, and perhaps, in bad taste. It is my desire on behalf of this grand educational institution to extend to you as well as to those residents of the Rio Grande Valley, and those students who feel that said picture and language are offensive, a sincere apology. Please be advised that you, as well as all other prominent national figures, are always welcome to visit Pan American University.

**Conclusion**

Placed in historical context, Chávez’s visit to the PAC campus in 1971 served as a catalyst that brought long-standing racial issues to the surface. Once exposed, they could be confronted. In this respect, MECHA accomplished its mission of creating opportunities for open dialogue. Even after tensions subsided in the summer of 1972 with the president’s formal apology, it would have been incorrect to believe that racism had been vanquished. However, the president’s formal letter accomplished the goal of setting the tone for what kinds of race-related behaviors were and were not acceptable on campus. In addition, the
experiences of 1971 and 1972 influenced some students’ lives forever as they, for the first time, realized that they too, like Chávez, could do their part to change the world through peaceful means. In some cases, the fruits of these campus experiences did not become evident until many years later when graduates took on positions of leadership in society.

Tables

Table 1: Comparison between Non-Mexican American and Mexican American Student Enrollment at Edinburg Regional College (1945-1953)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Total Fall Enrollment</th>
<th>Non-Mexican American Students</th>
<th>Mexican American Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1945-1946</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>173 (82%)</td>
<td>38 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946-1947</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>417 (85%)</td>
<td>74 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947-1948</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>572 (88%)</td>
<td>78 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952-1953</td>
<td>1,537</td>
<td>953 (62%)</td>
<td>584 (38%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Comparison by Decade between Non-Hispanic and Hispanic Population in Hidalgo County (1950-1970)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>1970</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>46,585 (29.3%)</td>
<td>51,136 (28.4%)</td>
<td>36,508 (20.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>112,449 (70.7%)</td>
<td>129,092 (71.6%)</td>
<td>143,611 (79.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Percentage of Mexican American Enrollment (1952-1984)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Mexican American Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>1,537</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>4,092</td>
<td>59.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>6,896</td>
<td>79.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>8,833</td>
<td>87.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The University of Texas – Rio Grande Valley
Endnotes

1  The school’s name has changed over the years. During the 1950s, it was named Edinburg Regional College. Then, it was named Pan American College in the 1960s. In the Fall (August) of 1971 it transitioned to Pan American University.

2  Edinburg College. (1959). President’s Office, 1927-1939 SACS General Report. (Folder 1-10, Box 1 of 1, Room 105). Lower Rio Grande Valley Archives and Special Collections, Edinburg, Texas.


4  Miguel A. Nevarez, Interview by Rolando Avila, August 30, 2012.

5  Lino Garcia, Jr., Interview by Rolando Avila, October 28, 2016.


7  Martha May Tevis, Interview by Rolando Avila, May 15, 2017.


10  Ibid.


13  Ibid.

14  In 1972, the union was renamed the United Farm Workers (UFW), and it continued to conduct boycotts of various products in an effort to secure better wages and better working conditions for farm workers. In 1975, the union’s influence was evident when the California legislature passed the Agricultural Labor Relations Act, a landmark statute in U.S. labor law, which established collective bargaining for California farm workers.


23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 "Full Scale Rioting Sweeps Pharr Streets," *Valley Morning Star*, February 7, 1971, p. 1. At the time of the Pharr Riot, the city was divided along economic and ethnic lines. Anglos lived on the south side of the city while all others (mostly Mexicans and Mexican Americans) lived on the north side. Schools were segregated by residential patterns. The city, which had a Mexican American majority, was governed by a small group of Anglos. The ethnic makeup of the police force was predominately Anglo, and over the years the police station had received charges of police brutality against Mexican Americans. On February 6, 1971, local Mexican Americans demonstrated in front of the police station, and police officers fired on the crowd killing a bystander. An investigation resulted in a restructuring of the city government.


29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.


*Ibid*.

*Ibid*.

*Ibid*.

*Ibid*.

*Ibid*.

*Ibid*.

*Ibid*.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Lino Garcia, Jr., Interview by Rolando Avila, October 28, 2016.


*Ibid*.

*Ibid*.

*Ibid*.

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*Ibid*.

*Ibid*.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Brownsville’s Ruben M. Torres in the Midst of the Texas Prison Crisis

by

Noe E. Perez

When Ruben M. Torres Sr. passed away from leukemia on November 23, 1989, he was immortalized by a poem adapted from Dr. Jim Granberry, former member of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles (TBPP).¹ Not long thereafter, the Texas Senate from the 2⁰th Called Session of the 71⁰th Legislature passed resolutions honoring his public service.² A House Resolution was introduced in his honor by Brownsville state Rep. Eddie Lucio Jr., who is now one of the Valley’s state senators.³ A state prison unit in Hondo, Texas, was named in Ruben Torres’ honor.⁴

Why was Ruben M. Torres a significant historical figure? To get a better understanding of this person, an examination of Torres’ public service at the local and state level is required as well as a better understanding of his Brownsville and PERSONAL life background. Torres was born on November 1, 1929, in Brownsville.⁵ Raised in a Roman Catholic family in Brownsville, Ruben M. Torres Sr. married Maria Elida Rodriguez, and they had four children. After being honorably discharged from the United States Marines in 1952, Torres worked for the Brownsville Independent School District (BISD) as a teacher from 1955-61. While teaching with BISD, he received his Bachelor of Science degree from Texas A & I University in 1958 with a major in secondary education and a specialization in history.

In 1961, he started working for the Point Isabel Independent School District (PIISD). During his stint with the PIISD, he enhanced his educational background, which would wind up being a crucial step along the way to becoming a key historic
figure in the 1970’s and 80’s. For example, in 1967, he received his Master of Arts degree in Educational Administration with a minor in government and history. Torres worked as a teacher, coach, assistant principal, and principal, before accepting the Superintendent position offered to him by the Board of Trustees for PIISD in 1970. His service as Superintendent of PIISD lasted until 1974.6

In 1974, he received his Doctorate of Education from Western Colorado University, where he majored in education administration. Torres also attended other universities.7 This propelled him on a course which would have an impact on Brownsville and Texas history. It was that year, in 1974, that Ruben M. Torres made a fateful decision to run for elective office as a state representative for the Texas Legislature. Based on his educational background and with access to his legislative record, he likely decided to run for office to boost education issues. During his election for state representative, Torres rented a place to conduct what Valleyites refer to as a pachanga, which is a political party usually associated with festive music, food, and, sometimes, beer.8 He called his family together to ensure “unity,” even though such unity was not in doubt. If anything, the pachanga was more of a rally.9

Torres’ legislative service began after being elected in a landslide in November of 1974.10 Unofficial tallies from the election indicated he received broad-based support from most precincts. He won 20 out of 27 precincts and lost in the absentee ballot box. The total vote count was 6,168 votes for Torres to 3,987 for Darrell Hemphill of Brownsville.11 The largest number of votes received came from precinct 1 in Port Isabel and from many Brownsville precincts, which were considered his home base since he grew up and went to school in Brownsville.12 When elected in 1974, his primary concern was education. Torres hoped to sponsor educational initiatives aimed at expenditures and improving instruction. While being a member of the legislature, he worked for Massey and Associates in Brownsville
handling public relations.\textsuperscript{13} It is standard for legislators to take up work in the private sector, in large part because the Texas Constitution specifies “a salary of Six Hundred Dollars ($600) per month,” with the Texas Constitution also allowing legislators to receive “mileage.”\textsuperscript{14}

During the 64\textsuperscript{th} Regular Session, Torres introduced several bills of different subject matters. In all, he authored or sponsored ten bills.\textsuperscript{15} The only bill to become law from that session was a Senate bill he sponsored, which was Senate Concurrent Resolution 42, introduced by then Senator Raul Longoria, which allowed certain parties to sue the state regarding the Boyle’s survey of Padre Island.\textsuperscript{16} S.C.R. 42 was special interest legislation which attempted to rectify a conflict between Cameron and Willacy County property owners and the state regarding the exact location of the so-called “mean higher high tide line” of the Laguna Madre. Local property owners, according to S.C.R. 42, believed that their property lines extended east of the line set by the Boyle’s survey. According to S.C.R. 42, the parties wanted to have their controversy resolved by a district court. The resolution specifically stated which parties would be allowed to sue the state. The resolution contained specific legal descriptions of the tracts of disputed lands. The venue for the lawsuit was set in any court in which a tract or tracts of land were located. S.C.R. 42 specified that court processes such as “citation of service” be required to be made to the Attorney General and General Land Office Commissioner. However, as per legislative precedent, S.C.R. 42 stated the resolution was not an admission of guilt by the state or any political subdivision of the state. The resolution was signed by Governor Dolph Briscoe on June 1, 1975.\textsuperscript{17}

As a matter of Texas legislative history, it is commonly understood that a substantial amount of work done by legislators involves passage of so-called “local bills” and bills establishing so-called “special districts.” S.C.R. 42 typifies work usually done by legislators.
In 1976, Torres easily won re-election. For the 65th Regular Session in 1977, Torres authored or sponsored 18 bills or resolutions.\(^1\) Four of those bills or resolutions were Senate bills and a resolution authored by the Senators Brooks, Mauzy, and Longoria. This probably indicated a broadening of political friendships between Torres and his legislative colleagues. This undoubtedly helped him later.

For the 65th Regular Session, most bills and resolutions authored and sponsored by Ruben M. Torres dealt with educational issues. H.B. 245 passed the House but died in a subcommittee in the senate; the bill related to the calculation of school attendance (always a thorny financial issue). S.C.R. 57 by Senator Mauzy died in the House Resolutions Calendar and was sponsored by Torres. The goal of S.C.R. 57 was to set up an interim committee to study educational programs for migratory children.\(^1\)

What is significant about the 65th Regular Session for Torres was not only the legislation that he passed into law, but also bold legislation which he attempted to pass. Torres championed the idea of getting a medical school in the Valley in 1977, and he almost succeeded, something which was later accomplished by future Valley legislators. Ahead of his time, Torres authored H.B. 878, which would have established a Texas Women’s University Medical School in the Rio Grande Valley.\(^2\) H.B. 878 died in committee.\(^3\) However, another bill, H.B. 1695, which related “to the location of a medical school to be established by The University of Texas System,” got traction.\(^4\) The Valley (“Cameron or Hidalgo Counties”) was specified in the language of H.B. 1695.\(^5\) H.B. 1695 passed the House, but died in the Senate Committee on Education.\(^6\) Torres was close to being successful at getting a medical school for the Valley. Senators Juan “Chuy” Hinojosa and Eddie Lucio Jr. built on past efforts by Torres when they succeeded in establishing a medical school as part of the new University of Texas – Rio Grande Valley.\(^7\)

While only one resolution passed into law during the 64th Regular Session for Torres, the 65th Regular Session saw five
bills pass for Torres (no concurrent resolutions). The 65th Regular Session witnessed greater success for Torres. All five bills passed were “90-day bills.”

The first bill to be filed or become law was S.B. 283 by Senator Chet Brooks which was sponsored by Torres in the Texas House. S.B. 283 was a bill “relating to technical-vocational education.” S.B. 283 changed the composition of the state “Advisory Council for Technical-Vocational Education” and also clarified the “terms” and “duties” of the members of that state council.

Another Torres bill to become law was H.B. 248. The new law created by H.B. 248 was his most relevant legislative achievement for the Brownsville and Cameron County area. The bill required the establishment of Pan American University at Brownsville in the fall of 1977. Since 1973, Pan American University had had a campus in Brownsville. The act creating PAU-B specifically amended Chapter 112, Education Code by adding Subchapter D, which defined the scope, facilities, courses, and degrees to be offered by PAU-B. The act ensured that the Board of Regents’ power would not be curtailed by the new law. Later, in 1989, Chapter 112, Education Code would be replaced with the establishment of the University of Texas–Pan American-Brownsville under Chapter 77, Education Code.

Torres will be remembered for his PAU-B enabling legislation. As previously noted, Valley legislators built on his past efforts with the establishment of a medical school at the University of Texas – Rio Grande Valley. Legislative progress regarding changes in institutional structures takes time, with such changes occurring incrementally. The establishment of a medical school in the Rio Grande Valley is a testament of how long that process can take. Historically, the Texas Legislature is cautious in enacting major substantive or institutional changes, especially when those changes entail increasing governmental breadth or structure. What is significant in retrospect is how
Ruben M. Torres was successful in getting such medical school legislation passed out of the Texas House back in 1977.

Torres also initiated H.B. 247. Later, reflecting back on his legislative service, he disclosed in an “Espejo” interview (Houston Post article) how H.B. 247 was his most controversial issue, one which he might “be criticized for the rest of his life.”

During the interview conducted by the Houston Post reporter, Torres discussed his appointment to the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles (TBPP) by then Governor Dolph Briscoe and the significance of his appointment as being “the first and only Mexican-American on the three-member Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles.”

The article noted how Torres promoted legislation “prohibiting the enrollment of undocumented aliens in public schools” (referencing H.B. 247). The article noted how H.B. 247 “may be tested in court.”

H.B. 247 gave the legal authority for determining residency of an application for admission to a school district to the board of trustees of the school district. H.B. 247 was aimed at preventing illegal aliens from attending public schools at taxpayers’ expense. The Houston Post reporter noted how Torres thought “54,000 alien students” would be a financial burden to “schools along the Mexican border.”

Because H.B. 247 affected illegal aliens, there could be no doubt that it was contestable in court. Later, in 1994, the issue became a hot political topic with the passage of Proposition 187 in California, that attempted to restrict public services to illegal aliens. Today, the issue of funding illegal alien services provided by local, regional, and state governments continues to remain controversial.

Torres sponsored S.B. 1037 in the House, which was a bill by Senator Mauzy. S.B. 1037 was a non-controversial bill “relating to the time for appointment of the State Textbook Committee.”

S.B. 1037 gave greater flexibility in scheduling a meeting with the Commissioner of Education with the State Board of Education in order to appoint members to the State Textbook Committee. S.B. 1037 required public notice be given by the State Board
of Education whenever it met for the purpose of continuing or discontinuing of any or all state-adopted textbooks.\textsuperscript{46}

S.B. 1103 by Senator Longoria was sponsored in the House by Torres, and was Torres’ last bill to become law.\textsuperscript{47} S.B. 1103 was a non-controversial bill which redefined the term “issuer” for the purposes of refunding bonds issued by a city, and it also removed the clause restricting the definitions’ application to municipalities of 60,000 or less, thereby including all municipalities.\textsuperscript{48} Incidentally, S.B. 1103 contained a severability clause.\textsuperscript{49}

Although the legislation enacted by Torres appears limited, he also carried amendments to bills (riders). He carried an amendment designed to give a $1600 across the board pay raise to teachers.\textsuperscript{50} He carried another amendment which placed vocational counselors on an eleven-month basis.\textsuperscript{51} Another of his amendments allowed personnel units to be earned in the average daily attendance of the best five six weeks period.\textsuperscript{52} He worked in other areas of school law.

In 1978, Torres was appointed to the Governor’s Office of Migratory Affairs (GOMA) by then Governor Dolph Briscoe.\textsuperscript{53} This appointment did not last long, since a scandal brewed with GOMA.\textsuperscript{54} Since Torres had a “business relationship” with a person associated with GOMA, he decided to resign from his gubernatorial appointment.\textsuperscript{55} Upon leaving office, he worked as “an educational consultant” and as the “Director of Vocational Instruction for Pan American University in Edinburg.”\textsuperscript{56}

Before Gov. Dolph Briscoe left office, he appointed Torres to the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles (TBPP) with “an annual salary of $33,600.”\textsuperscript{57} A few months after being appointed, he told a \textit{Houston Post} reporter in an interview, “I’m not the kind of guy that carries the Mexican flag. I like to work within the system because I feel the system can be changed. It is a very slow process and very frustrating, but that happens to be my approach.”\textsuperscript{58} Torres’ cautious tone and voice in public affairs undoubtedly helped him in landing an appointment to the TBPP especially considering, as noted, that he was the first Mexican-American to be appointed to
the TBPP, which now consists of seven members. According to a statement by Torres, he claimed he was not seeking appointment to the TBPP and instead was pushing for someone else to get the position before it fell on his lap.

Next, this author will explore the significant role that Ruben M. Torres played during the Texas prison crisis created by the federal court case of *Ruiz v. Estelle* and how that case affected the Texas political system to which Ruben M. Torres became a part of when he joined the TBPP. Torres’ appointment to the TBPP and eventual rise to chair of that board further enhanced his public service record. Torres appeared to be the right person at the right time and place of Texas penal history. The reader may recall that, at the time Mr. Torres was appointed to the TBPP in the early part of 1979 by former Governor Dolph Briscoe Jr., the Texas Department of Corrections (TDC) was in the midst of a major federal civil rights suit known as *Ruiz v. Estelle* which actually began as a petition by a state inmate in 1972, only to be consolidated in a “class action” suit later. The civil rights trial, resting on Eighth Amendment grounds, began in 1978 with a preliminary ruling issued in the winter of 1980. After that initial ruling by former federal Judge William W. Justice, the Texas penal system remained under federal judicial control until 2002. In 2002, the federal Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals “dismissed the *Ruiz* lawsuit” against the State of Texas. Famed former federal jurist Reynaldo G. Garza, who also hailed from Brownsville, acknowledged: “This case has to be ended.” When the *Ruiz* case began, Torres was still Superintendent of the Point Isabel Independent School District and, by the time he was appointed by Gov. Dolph Briscoe in February of 1979, the actual trial with testimony in the *Ruiz* case was still ongoing in Houston. As a result, the *Ruiz* case was a significant legal backdrop to Mr. Torres’ tenure on the TBPP with *Ruiz*’ impact felt not only on the TBPP but on the entire state political establishment.

Trying to cope with federal Judge William Wayne Justice’s 1980 consent decree, the TDC resorted to using tents to keep
prisoners, beginning in 1982.\textsuperscript{67} That same year, inmates were sent to county jails because Judge Justice proscribed the state from keeping inmates in tents at state prisons.\textsuperscript{68} Texans appeared tougher on crime than their elected representatives were, thereby making decision-making difficult in dealing with the prison crisis, especially since the “not in my backyard” mentality pervaded discussion on where to construct “new prisons.”\textsuperscript{69}

Texans’ tough no-holds-barred approach to justice can be documented, for example, in Texas voter approval in 1977 of Proposition 3 to amend the Texas Constitution, in which the amendment authorized the “denial of bail to a person accused of a felony in certain circumstances.”\textsuperscript{70} Essentially, the proposed constitutional amendment expanded the number of alleged felons that could be denied bail. The journal of the Texas House of Representatives shows that Ruben Torres voted in favor of that constitutional amendment to deny bail.\textsuperscript{71} Under the Texas Constitution, the Texas Legislature must first approve a proposed constitutional amendment by a vote of at least two-thirds of those elected to each chamber before the measure is sent to voters for their final approval or rejection based on a simple majority of the ballots cast.\textsuperscript{72}

Later, in 1985, the Texas Legislature and Texas voters approved Proposition 6, which was a constitutional amendment that authorized “the placement of state inmates in the penal or correctional facilities of other states.”\textsuperscript{73} According to the minutes of the Senate Committee on Criminal Justice meeting held on February 5, 1985, for Senate Joint Resolution 6, which proposed the transfer of prisoners to other states, the Senate Committee on Criminal Justice not only unanimously passed the proposed constitutional amendment but also agreed to get “a briefing on Ruiz v. Estelle/Procunier” with such briefing to be held “at a later date.”\textsuperscript{74} The minutes of the meeting indicated that “Mr. Charles Sullivan representing CURE” spoke in favor of the proposed constitutional amendment. C.U.R.E. began in 1972 and still continues to operate in Texas; a portion of its
mission statement reads as follows: “TX-CURE monitors and interacts with elected officials and political candidates to raise their awareness of the value of preventive rehabilitation, restorative policies, and programs that prevent crime.”

Throughout the 1980s, the state grasped for ways to resolve the prison overcrowding issue and other prison issues, and had to do so during times when the “annual average domestic crude oil prices” (per barrel) dropped dramatically thereby affecting state coffers. From 1980 till 1986, the annual average price of oil fell from $37.42 to $14.44 per barrel. In 1987, voters approved a constitutional amendment which allowed for “the creation, operation, and financing of jail districts” at the county level. Of greater relevance was voter approval of a constitutional amendment in 1987 authorizing $500 million in general obligation bonds “for projects relating to corrections institutions and mental health and mental retardation facilities.”

During the 1980’s, the prison crisis did not go unnoticed by the media, especially by Texas Monthly, a monthly media publication regarding all things relating to Texas including its culture and politics. In May of 1985, for example, the monthly publication produced a scathing criticism of how Ruiz affected the Texas prison system. In fact, the title of that article was “How They Ruined Our Prisons” and was written by Dick Reavis. In the article, Reavis stated: “Judge Justice is wrong. The governor is wrong. The Legislature is wrong. And the reformers are wrong. The answer to the Texas prison crisis is to run the jails the same way we did twenty years ago.”

In 1989, Texas voters approved a proposed constitutional amendment authorizing $400 million in “general obligation bonds for projects relating to facilities of corrections institutions, youth corrections institutions, and mental health and mental retardation institutions and for the expansion of statewide law enforcement facilities.”

In 1991, Texas voters approved a proposed constitutional amendment authorizing “$1.1 billion in general obligation
bonds for acquiring, constructing, or equipping new prisons or other punishment facilities to confine criminals, mental health and mental retardation institutions, and youth corrections institutions, for major repair or renovation of existing facilities of those institutions, and for the acquisition of, major repair to, or renovation of other facilities for use as state prisons or other punishment facilities.”

One argument in favor of the constitutional amendment was contained in a publication entitled “Analyses of Proposed Constitutional Amendments,” which was created by the Texas Legislative Council for the 1991 constitutional amendments election in which it read as follows: “Authorizing the issuance of general obligation bonds and the use of bond proceeds for acquiring, constructing, or equipping new facilities and repairing existing facilities will make it possible for the state to comply with federal court orders.”

Undoubtedly, the Ruiz federal case was a heavy and powerful legal backdrop in the 1980s and early 1990s as a result of Judge Justice’s rulings and consent decree.

With that political and media backdrop in mind, the work of the TBPP of which Mr. Ruben Torres was a member becomes significantly relevant. Noticeably, there appeared to be a moderate to high turnover rate for parole commissioners and appointed members to the TBPP during the 80’s and 90’s. Additionally, during Torres’ tenure on the board, membership on the TBPP increased from 3 to 6 members.

On February 1, 1979, the TBPP, in open meeting, created several panels to deal with paroles. Minutes from several TBPP open meetings over time during Torres’ tenure on the board indicate the TBPP had to work in overdrive in setting up multiple review panels and work expeditiously to release inmates in order to meet the demands of Ruiz due to prison overcrowding. On February 21, 1979, Ruben Torres was appointed to vice-chairman of the TBPP. The month prior to Torres’ appointment as vice-chairman, Governor William P. Clements pressured the TBPP vis-à-vis a letter requesting the reduction
of TBPP staff to which the TBPP responded to the Governor with a letter signed by then Chairman Connie L. Jackson, a portion of which read as follows:

Your letter of January 10, 1980, asks that each agency reduce its numbers of full-time classified employees by 5% and further requests that the Board pass a resolution to this effect. We cannot with complete honesty and integrity of intent pass such a resolution, nor can the agency operate at a reduced personnel level without adversely affecting the responsibilities of the agency. Statutory and constitutional provisions set forth the legal responsibilities of the Board of Pardons and Paroles…The primary factors which have determined the workload of the agency have been the number of Texas Department of Corrections inmates, along with the statutory responsibility to give them timely and equitable consideration for parole; the ever-increasing number of parolees who must be supervised; and the constitutional requirement to consider all requests for acts of executive clemency…The prison population is rapidly increasing, which in turn is rapidly increasing the number of inmates becoming eligible for parole and mandatory release consideration.89

With the cloud of the Ruiz case hanging over the entire Texas penal system, the state records show ongoing pressure to release inmates under “mandatory supervision” and one can better appreciate the job Mr. Torres and other state panel members were entrusted with which was undoubtedly a burdensome and strenuous task. Mr. Torres was essentially thrust in the midst of the biggest political and historical firestorm of the past half-century. In fact, Torres dealt with one of the larger issues of contemporary Texas political history. During that half century, we can cite the following major issues: (1) the “Sharpstown stock fraud scandal” leading to substantial revision of Texas open government laws,90 (2) the Ruiz case and its subsequent impact on the penal system, jurisprudence, and the Penal Code of Texas (which included recommendations from the Texas Punishment Standards Commission),91 and (3), last but not least, the ongoing state court cases involving the constitutionality of the Texas public school finance system.92 During such time of legal turmoil, Ruben M. Torres persevered amid the chaos and was still in office at the time he died.
State records are rife with the pressure cooker that was *Ruiz*. On April 7, 1981, Governor Clements’ Office issued “for immediate release” much information indicating the impact of the Ruiz case on the Texas criminal justice system. The information provided by Governor Clements contained much legal information designed to quell public concerns and provide information as to how the state was handling the prison crisis. A portion of the release read as follows:

*Governor Bill Clements today announced a new conditional parole program designed to get 1,500 of the 3,000 inmates who now sleep on Department of Corrections floors into halfway houses on parole by July 1. “I have been informed by Attorney General Mark White that the State’s ability to obtain a stay order in the Ruiz v. Estelle lawsuit will be severely impaired if prisoners are housed in facilities requiring inmates to sleep on the floor of the Texas Department of Corrections,” Governor Clements said … Board of Pardons and Paroles contracts with participating halfway houses and individual parolee contracts will be tightly drawn under stringent criteria to insure protection of law-abiding citizens. Ruben Torres, Board of Pardons and Paroles chairman, and TDC Director Jim Estelle, strongly support the new program and will work to begin it immediately rather than waiting until September 1 when SB 125 becomes effective … I am encouraged that, based on my April 21 meeting with U.S. Attorney General William French Smith, head of the U.S. Department of Justice and his Deputy Ed Schmultz, the Reagan administration is re-examining their position in the Ruiz v. Estelle lawsuit … There is no doubt that we are in a crisis situation—a situation that was not chosen by the elected officials of this state or its citizens.*

On May 6, 1981, the TBPP granted the governor’s request to establish a mechanism by which to get the “1,500 inmates” off the prison floors. About a week later, on May 14, 1981, Governor Clements signed into law S.B. 125, which was “emergency legislation” designed to deal with the issue of prison overcrowding by the establishment of halfway houses; the bill “[related] to the organization of the Board of Pardons and Paroles; the administration of the parole and mandatory supervision systems; certain requirements for parole or mandatory supervision; and to
certain orders in probation revocations.” For his part, TBPP Chairman Ruben Torres testified in favor of the “emergency” legislation when hearings were conducted in both chambers of the Texas Legislature.

In August of 1981, as Chairman of the TBPP, Torres met in an open meeting with Governor Clements, members of the TDC board, and Director Jim Estelle of the TDC in which they discussed “solving the overcrowded conditions at the Texas Department of Corrections.” Later that year, in October of 1981, Ruben Torres indicated, in an open public meeting of the TBPP, that “he had received a telephone call from the office of the Governor and was informed that Governor William P. Clements has designated him, Ruben Torres, to serve as Chairman of the Board of Pardons and Paroles and George G. Killinger, Ph.D., to serve as Vice-Chairman of the Board.” The designations made by then Governor Clements were made possible via S.B. 125, which was the “emergency” legislation previously discussed.

Due to other legislation enacted during the 67th Regular Session in 1981, the TBPP began the move towards implementing “conditional work furlough parole.” On April 1, 1982, the TBPP adopted rules necessary for the implementation of “conditional work furlough parole.” As can be determined from numerous other state records, the general idea of state officials with the TBPP, TDC, and the elective branches of state government was to release inmates necessary to meet the needs of Ruiz and to do so in a manner so as not to burden public safety. For example, on May 7, 1982, Governor Clements sent a letter addressed to Chairman Ruben Torres and the TBPP regarding the serious state of affairs that existed regarding “the number of inmates entering the Texas Department of Corrections.” In the letter, Governor Clements stated:

*The number of inmates entering the Texas Department of Corrections has been larger than they or anyone anticipated. This unanticipated increase had filled our prison to the extent that if any more inmates are accepted by*
them, they could be in violation of the Court’s order in the Ruiz v. Estelle case … In view of the circumstances, I suggest that you consider exercising the authority granted you by law to immediately release to mandatory supervision all qualifying inmates who are within six months of their sentence expiration date and who, in your judgment, are not violent offenders and the like who would constitute an undue risk to society.104

The prison drama that TBPP Chairman Torres had to deal with continued when on September 27, 1982, TDC Director Estelle sent a telegram to Torres via the Western Union stating:

FOR THE LAST SIX WEEKS, OUR NET INCREASE IN POPULATION HAS BEEN OVER TWO HUNDRED PER WEEK. IF THIS CONTINUES, WE WILL REACH MAXIMUM CAPACITY EARLY IN NOVEMBER. ANYTHING WITHIN YOUR POLICIES WHICH OFFER SOME RELIEF TO THIS SITUATION WOULD CERTAINLY BE APPRECIATED.105

In the spring of 1982 while on the TBBP, he decided to seek election in a “newly formed 27th Congressional District,” which had been created “by a three-judge panel appointed by the U.S. Justice Department” after reapportionment by the 67th Regular Session of the Texas Legislature in 1981.106 The announcement to run for Congress came on Saturday, March 6, 1982, by Torres.107 At his “Fort Brown Motor Hotel” press conference, Torres hoped “that we here in Cameron County can unify.”108 The outcome of the race may have been pre-determined in that voters well before the election had already expressed concerns about being “lost in the shadow of Corpus Christi.”109 During the same press conference, Torres admitted his chances hinged on making a run-off, knowing that, at that time, Cameron County had “34 percent of the registered voters in the district.”110 His decision to run was made after he had consulted with County Judge Ray Ramon and Rep. Hector Uribe.111

During Torres’ press conference, he stated that he wanted “to revive the declining housing and auto industries” and that “he [favored] the development of the northern part of Padre Island.”112 A Corpus Christi Caller-Times article indicated that Torres
lived in Irving, Texas, and that Torres would move to Brownsville if elected.\textsuperscript{115} Rene Torres (his brother) stated that the \textit{Corpus Christi Caller-Times} article falsely asserted that Torres lived in Irving at the time.\textsuperscript{114} The article may have been biased since the article was published by a Corpus Christi newspaper especially since most candidates came from the Corpus Christi area.

The run-off for the 27\textsuperscript{th} congressional district did not include Torres.\textsuperscript{115} Solomon P. Ortiz and the other Corpus Christi candidate for Congress approached Ruben Torres to ask for his support for the run-off election.\textsuperscript{116} Ruben Torres decided to endorse Solomon P. Ortiz for Congress.\textsuperscript{117} The endorsement may have benefited Ortiz since Ortiz won the election.\textsuperscript{118} Ortiz remained in office for 28 years representing Congressional District 27 in Texas after that initial victory in 1982.\textsuperscript{119}

After the election loss, Torres continued his work on the TBPP, which indicated his continued enthusiasm to remain on the TBPP despite the previously mentioned ongoing legal drama instigated by the \textit{Ruiz} case. In a recent email interview, the following question was posed to Maria Elida Torres (wife of the late Ruben M. Torres): “What do you recall from Ruben Torres’ service on the Board of Pardons and Paroles?”\textsuperscript{120} Maria Elida Torres responded as follows: “I know that he liked the work because, in some ways, it reminded him of the need to keep students in schools. Sometimes he would come across some of our former students incarcerated in the state prison system.”\textsuperscript{121} Based on his tenure on the board and statement by his wife, Torres clearly “liked his work” and demonstrated a gritty enthusiasm for working within a Texas penal system that was in a midst of a crisis.

The TBPP also worked with cases involving felons awaiting execution since the death penalty had, at that time, only begun to manifest itself in Texas after the United States Supreme Court case of \textit{Gregg v. Georgia} from 1976.\textsuperscript{122} On December 3, 1982, the TBPP went into “executive session” to hear from attorneys for an inmate to which the media “voiced a protest against the ex-
ecutive session.” The inmate being considered “for a reprieve of execution” by the TBPP was Charlie Brooks, Jr.

On December 6, 1982, the TBPP held a meeting to consider Charlie Brooks, Jr.’s request when Chairman Torres “recessed” the meeting to take a phone call, only to convene four minutes later to inform the public and board “that the Fifth Circuit Court had denied a stay of execution for Charlie Brooks, Jr.” The TBPP then proceeded to wait until later that day to resume consideration of the inmate’s reprieve request so as “to allow time for the United States Supreme Court to act on the request for a stay of execution.” When the TBPP reconvened later that day, Dr. Killinger made the following motion, which was seconded when Chairman Torres vacated the chair to second the motion: “After a complete, objective and thorough study and evaluation of the all aspects of the case of Charlie Brooks, Jr., it is my recommendation that his request for Reprieve of Execution scheduled for December 7, 1982, be denied.” The significance of Chairman Torres and the TBPP, in this case, was that Charlie Brooks, Jr., was the first inmate executed in Texas after the reinstitution of capital punishment resulting from the United States Supreme Court case of Gregg v. Georgia. The inmate was executed on December 7, 1982. According to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice website, the web page containing “Offender Information” for Charlie Brooks, Jr., includes a “Summary of the Incident” which reads as follows: “Brooks went to a car lot under the pretense of wanting to test-drive a car. A mechanic accompanied him on the drive. Brooks stopped to pick up a co-defendant. The mechanic was put in the trunk of the car. Brooks and his co-defendant went to a motel. The mechanic was brought out of the trunk and taken into a motel room. The mechanic was bound with coat hangers, gagged with adhesive tape, and shot in the head, causing his death. Brooks and the co-defendant fled the scene.” During Torres’ tenure on the TBPP, a total of 32 inmates on death row were executed.

The issue of immigration, one which Torres tried coping with in the Legislature with his H.B. 247, dealing with the
“determination by the board of trustees respecting residency” for school-aged children, resurrected itself in September of 1983, when the TBPP held a broad-based intergovernmental hearing in an open meeting of the TBPP “to address the problem regarding illegal aliens confined in the Texas Department of Correction.” The meeting resulted in several areas by which the TBPP would work with the United States Immigration authorities, as would TDC. To put it simply, the meeting appeared designed to prevent a situation where the left hand does not know what the right hand was doing by ensuring adequate interagency communication between the TDC, TBPP, and the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service.

To deal with ongoing overcrowding issues in the penal system, Governor Mark White wrote in a letter to members of the TBPP the following:

> I am persuaded that a review of the sentences of non-violent habitual offenders who are not eligible for parole should be undertaken and recommendations made for commutation of sentence in line with the new sentence structure where appropriate. You are hereby requested to review as expeditiously as possible those cases of conviction of habitual offender which might receive a lesser sentence under the new law and to make recommendations to me in accordance with the law.

Chairman Ruben M. Torres responded as follows:

> In response to your request of September 26, 1983, the Board has implemented a procedure to investigate and review for possible commutation the sentences of the non-violent habitual offender who are not eligible for parole consideration. Recommendation for commutation in deserving cases will be made by the Board in accordance with the law passed during the 68th legislative session which permits sentence variation from 25 years to life.

Ruben Torres dealt with three Texas governors—Dolph Briscoe, Bill Clements, and Mark White. Torres was in the middle of it all during the Texas prison crisis at a time when the penal system was substantially strained by reduced oil prices,
attempts to alleviate the constraints imposed by federal Judge William Wayne Justice, and by a legal system which gave too much leeway for prisoners to engage in frivolous litigation. The latter issue was not formally resolved until the United States Congress intervened in 1996 with the passage of the Prison Litigation Reform Act of 1995.¹³⁶

Not all litigation was frivolous. In Brown, et al. v. Estelle, et al., the TDC and TBPP had to deal with inmate transfers to federal custody because there were “witnesses or potential witnesses for Eroy Edward Brown in his first or second criminal trials for the murder of a Texas prison warden and a farm manager.”¹³⁷ On March 12, 1984, the TBPP denied a request for commutation to life in prison for an inmate on death row; the inmate was executed two days later.¹³⁸

As if Brownsville native Ruben Torres did not have enough to deal with, the Austin American-Statesman filed suit against TBPP, alleging violations of the Texas Open Meetings Act, with a settlement agreement reached in the case in the spring of 1984.¹³⁹ The TBPP agreed to revise its rules as well as its meeting notices among other things.¹⁴⁰ For its part, the TBPP had relied on its “General Counsel Charles E. Walker, Jr.” for going into “executive session” despite media objections.¹⁴¹

In 1985, the TBPP had to deal with the sheer number of inmates within the TDC because TDC was approaching the 95% population capacity imposed by federal Judge Justice.¹⁴² On at least three occasions in 1985, interoffice memoranda indicated requests being made by Executive Director John W. Byrd of the TBPP “to expedite the release” of “deferred parole cases.”¹⁴³

Due to pressure from victim rights’ groups, the Texas Legislature passed H.B. 235 during the 69th Regular Session in 1985.¹⁴⁴ The bill “[related] to the rights of crime victims and the effect of those rights on the sentencing and availability of bail and release to parole for defendants and to victim assistance coordinators and their duties.”¹⁴⁵ H.B. 235 was designed to give victims of crime a say-so in the criminal justice system,
and since the law included the parole process, the TBPP was also affected.  

Torres was re-appointed to the board by Gov. Mark White in July of 1986. During that time, Torres was Chairman of the Cameron County March of Dimes and director of the Amigo Savings and Loan in Brownsville.  

During his tenure on the TBPP, Torres had many achievements which had an impact on Texas history and on his own legacy. A statewide halfway house program was created during Torres’ leadership as chairman of the Parole Board. He helped the board expand from three to six members. The position of executive director was started under his leadership. Legislation authorizing the administrative revocation of parole based on new convictions was overseen by Torres. His accomplishments garnered him the respect and friendship of political figures.

The history of Ruben Torres' career seems to confirm that it is not the man that makes history but the history or movement that makes the man, with Torres’ being of the right temperament and at the right place and time of Texas history to wisely play the hand he had been dealt (without fanfare). He laid the groundwork for other Rio Grande Valleyites to be entrusted in high positions of authority.

In 1989, Ruben Torres was diagnosed with leukemia. Due to his health, Torres resigned from the TBPP; Gov. Bill Clements accepted Torres’ resignation with great regret. Although his resignation was to take effect on November 30, he died on November 23, 1989. In Torres’ passing, several political figures wrote condolences to Marie E. Torres (Ruben Torres’ wife) indicating positive relationships with Ruben Torres. Former state Rep. Allen Hightower (D-Huntsville) wrote in a card to Maria E. Torres, “This great state and I grieve with you at the loss of our trusted friend and statesman.” In investigating the relationship between Rep. Hightower and Torres, it became obvious that the two must have worked on correctional issues together. Rep. Hightower served in the Texas Legislature from
68th Regular Session in 1983 until the 76th Regular Session in 1999 and was a well-respected figure at the Texas Capitol. Rep. Hightower’s credentials have been documented by Texas Monthly magazine. In July 1993, Texas Monthly listed Rep. Hightower in its top ten list of best legislators of the 1993 regular session for his role in shepherding legislation revising the punishments contained in the Texas Penal Code. Rep. Hightower was chairman of the House Corrections Committee. Rep. Hightower wrote the following in response to a question about Ruben M. Torres’ role on the Parole Board: “Ruben Torres was a good friend of mine and he did a very good job in his capacity.”

While many have made statements regarding Torres’ public record, a political contemporary of Torres, former Rep. Allen Hightower, stands out as a credible and reliable source on Torres’ public service. On December 15, 1989, then TBPP Chairman Henry B. Keene sent Torres’ wife a letter of condolence. In the letter, Chairman Keene wrote, “I have worked with many outstanding people, but none were more outstanding than Ruben.” On December 17, 1989, another credible source on Torres’ public service record by the name of Chase Untermeyer wrote the following to Dr. Ruben Torres, Jr. (son): “He was a friend both before and during my service with him in the legislature, and I valued that friendship as well as Ruben’s consistently sound advice. Though it deprived the House of a great leader, his subsequent-service on the Board of Pardons and Paroles further demonstrated his concern for people.” At the time Mr. Untermeyer wrote to Dr. Ruben Torres, Jr., he was a White House aide in the administration of former President George H.W. Bush.

Mr. Chase Untermeyer, who now serves on the Texas Ethics Commission, had first-hand knowledge of Ruben M. Torres’ service to the state since they both served together during the 65th Texas Legislature. In fact, they both served on the Special Committee on Illegal Immigration in Texas together in the Texas House of Representatives. Ruben Torres served as
Chairman while Chase Untermeyer served as Vice-Chairman on the Special Committee on Illegal Immigration.\textsuperscript{162} The special committee created by Texas House Speaker Bill Clayton created an intriguing interim committee report as part of its charge to “Study the problems of illegal immigration of aliens into the state; the effect thereof upon units of local government, the economy and the labor market; with detailed analysis and recommendations of suggested proposals, both state and federal, to remedy the situation.”\textsuperscript{163} One of the recommendations of the special committee was to pass legislation as follows:

\textit{The terminology relative to “legal aliens” under current education statutes is unclear. The law should be amended to modify the term to “legal resident alien,” i.e., one who has established legal residence in the United States. This change would significantly assist schools in determining who is, and who is not, eligible to attend Texas public schools.}\textsuperscript{164}

The influx of illegal aliens into the United States and its effect on the legal, penal, and education systems in Texas and elsewhere continues to be a divisive issue today. For his part, Torres clearly realized the financial burden placed upon local and state governments by illegal aliens, which explains his authorship of H.B. 247 during the 1977 Regular Session of the Texas Legislature in which that legislation “[provided] for determinations by the board of trustees respecting residency.”\textsuperscript{165}

In evaluating Mr. Torres’ overall record, it would be superficial to analyze his governmental service without considering his background, character, and environmental upbringing, especially considering our Western notion of humans born in a state of tabula rasa.\textsuperscript{166} In order to get a better understanding of the whole man from a non-political angle, two individuals were interviewed to acquire first-hand knowledge of Ruben M. Torres.

The first person interviewed was Mr. Joe A. Rodriguez, current elected member of the board of trustees for the Brownsville Independent School District (BISD).\textsuperscript{167} Since Mr. Rodriguez has been and continues to be involved in the Brownsville com-
munity, he seemed a likely choice to provide valuable knowledge on Mr. Ruben M. Torres which turned out to be true, as can be read in the interview.168 We met for lunch at Fina’s Restaurant located on Old Port Isabel Road in Brownsville, a popular local eatery with traditional local Tex-Mex dishes.169 Mr. Joe Rodriguez was kind to respond to several questions regarding Ruben M. Torres as follows:

Author: Did you ever meet or know of Mr. Ruben Torres and what was your impression of him?

Rodriguez: I coached with Ruben and he just got back from the service and I coached with him. He was at Cummings. I played for the Joe Davis Ginners (Mayor who owned them and owned a gin) and probably Number 1 semi-pro team in South Texas, and he played for Brownsville Charros and changed to Regal Barbers. The Charros changed their name to some other name. They were coached by Frank Maldonado. He can tell you more about Ruben. He knew Ruben better.170

Author: Were you and Mr. Torres ever involved in similar or the same political, family, neighborhood, or school or sports/coaching activities together?

Rodriguez: I was AD for 27 years and had no other job. I only coached with him for two years. He went on to PI superintendent and then a state representative. I coached his younger brother by the name of Ricardo and he was a great pitcher and one of the best in the Valley, and Rene Torres was a shortstop and hit a home run heard around the state against Carrol with two outs and went to state and lost in the state finals in 1965.

Author: Did you support Mr. Torres when he ran for office for state representative?

Rodriguez: I was so busy coaching, but I did support him.

Author: What kind of support did Torres have in the community when he ran for office?

Rodriguez: It’s a family that had a lot of roots here and stayed out of controversy, and being a former teacher and coach means that he was a well-rounded individual and was a serviceman. He was a good athlete in the service and played baseball in the service.
Author: Did you and Torres ever have any differences of opinion?

Rodriguez: Nothing. We had no disagreement and I looked up to him as an experienced guy and older than I was. I looked up to him.

Author: In your opinion, what are any positive or negative attributes of Mr. Torres?

Rodriguez: I have no negatives about him. He was a man that pulled himself up by the bootstraps. He accomplished without a silver spoon in his mouth and succeeded by his guiles and talents.

Author: When Torres died in 1989, many governments including the Point Isabel Independent School District, Texas Department of Corrections, and City of Brownsville named facilities or roads after Ruben Torres. To the best of your knowledge, was there any effort to have a school named after him within B.I.S.D and if so, what prevented it?

Rodriguez: There was some talk about naming a school after him but it never came to fruition. Ruben epitomized and personified all that is great in America. A person works hard and pursues their dreams and earns himself the opportunity of success.

Regarding Joe Rodriguez’ baseball past and his recollection of him and Ruben M. Torres playing baseball with distinct teams, this author went on to pursue an interview with another local baseball legend mentioned and suggested by Mr. Rodriguez by the name of Frank Maldonado. The interview with Frank Maldonado occurred at his residence in the Southmost area of Brownsville. He provided another perspective on Ruben M. Torres that gave an intriguing sketch of Torres’ character, background, and environmental upbringing, as can be read in the following interview.

Maldonado: The amazing thing is this is that his father was limited in finances and welcomed other ball players into their home and got baseball fever going in Brownsville and with the Edelstein furniture business which helped out. His father recruited baseball teams. They are a true legend for what they did in baseball here in Brownville. I started playing
when in Brownsville and because of the WW2 they needed ballplayers and I came in as a first baseman and was 17 at the time.

Author: What year?

Maldonado: 1943.

Author: When did you first meet or know of Mr. Ruben Torres and what was your impression of him at that time and did that impression of him ever change?

Maldonado: Well, he was a bat boy for the team I played on. On the team over the years, he got to coach in the poorer section of Brownsville what was East Brownsville Elementary, and of course, he was a bat boy and through that association, I got to know him. He got involved in other sports and we got to talking sports and got to see each other every day because of the coaching situation.

Author: So you were a few years older than him?

Maldonado: Oh yes. Right now I’m 93.

Author: Were you and Mr. Torres ever involved in coaching activities together?

Maldonado: Yes, when I was coaching in Brownsville and he was at East Brownsville Elementary, which is now Longoria Elementary. When Brownsville had one semi-pro team sponsored by Regal Barber Shop. He asked me, “I can’t handle it...can you help me run the team.” I played first base and he played second base on that team. I was a veteran in the service (I was in the U.S. Army medical corps) and he was just coming out of the Marines. The Regal people got in contact with Ruben and he asked me to help him with the team and I did.

Author: Was there anything unusual or interesting that happened during a baseball game or going to or from a baseball game that you can think of?

Maldonado: The Lord knows what he is doing and put two people of low income together - Elida and Ruben - and that to me is unusual, and by the “mano de Dios” the Lord was strong in putting them together because of what they achieved together. They went on to help many youngsters through their achievements and success.
Author: Were you and Mr. Torres involved in family or community activities together or any other activities together?

Maldonado: One time when we were in the coaching business together, he asked me to go to a political rally cause he was going to run for office and I didn’t even know Ruben was going to run and it was a real surprise to me that Ruben was going to run for office and Ruben gave a very powerful speech and I saw a part to Ruben I had never seen before.

Author: What was powerful about the speech?

Maldonado: He got up to make a speech and was so confident and positive in what he was saying and it was surprising cause I had never seen that side of Ruben Torres before.

Author: Do you remember anything from that speech?

Maldonado: Well, he was so positively strong in what he was saying and believed in what he was saying.

Author: Would y’all ever talk or have a beer together?

Maldonado: No! I don’t drink beer. I would drink mineral water or coke with Ruben.

Author: How often did you meet?

Maldonado: In coaching, just about every day.

Author: Were you and Mr. Torres involved in political activities together?

Maldonado: I never liked politics and I’m just not into politics and don’t care for it. It surprised me that he was involved in it and that the people got behind him in the Port Isabel area. There were strong political people that got behind him in the Port Isabel area and I forgot the name of the man that got behind him.

Author: Did you support him when he ran for state representative in 1974?

Maldonado: I was on his staff and he asked me to be on his staff that helped him along (campaign). Not only me but several others were on his staff. A man running has several people helping him.
Author: By chance, did you and Ruben have any political disagreements on issues that you worked on together?

_Maldonado:_ I can’t think of any.

Author: What kind of support did he have in the community when he ran for office?

_Maldonado:_ Well, I’m guessing now … being a Latino, he had a lot of support.

Author: In your opinion, what are any positive or negative attributes of Mr. Torres?

_Maldonado:_ The positive was that he was so committed politically in what he was doing and in coaching as well and he wanted to go ahead in coaching. He wanted to learn as much as he could.

Author: When Torres died in 1989, many governments including PIISD, TDOC, & City of Brownsville named facilities or roads after Ruben Torres. There was some effort to have a school named in his honor. Was it appropriate to have those things named after him and did you support efforts to name a school in his honor?

_Maldonado:_ Being that he came up from the bottom the way that he did, it was a tremendous achievement. He was from a very low-income family and made great achievements and started from the lowest beginnings in the school and came up. He started low academically in the school system at the elementary level, and then he eventually became Superintendent of the Port Isabel Schools. His wife also became Superintendent. They together created a good team because they came from low incomes. They reached heights in the school system. The main thing is this is that two people from low-income came together to achieve what they did to help others achieve.

Mr. Frank Maldonado, in addition to Mr. Joe Rodriguez, gave an analysis of Mr. Torres, bolstering Torres’ relevance to the community during and prior to his political career. Clearly, the impression left by these two coaching and baseball legends was that the story of Mr. Ruben M. Torres was like a “rags to riches” biographical sketch of a Brownsville and Valley native who made it to the pinnacles of state politics.
Torres, Maldonado, and Rodriguez undoubtedly knew one another on and off the baseball fields of South Texas, as can be viewed in a book entitled *Mexican American Baseball in South Texas* in which Mr. Maldonado graces the front cover.\(^{173}\) In the book, we see the young Joe A. Rodriguez mentioned playing for the Joe Davis Ginners, as he discussed in the interview.\(^{174}\) We also see a young Ruben M. Torres pictured in uniform for his Brownville Regals baseball team in 1956, with the team picture including his younger brother Rene Torres as a batboy.\(^{175}\) We even see a younger Ruben M. Torres as a batboy for the Edelstein Furniture semi-professional baseball team.\(^{176}\)

As for the baseball coach and legend Frank Maldonado, his photo and place in Rio Grande history are documented extensively in the book. He played for the Colorado Buffaloes in 1949 and 1950.\(^{177}\) Prior to playing for the Buffaloes, Maldonado played for the semi-professional team of the Donna Cardinals, and upon returning from Colorado coached the McAllen Bulldogs High School team to their first district championship in a decade.\(^{178}\) Coach Maldonado was recently featured in an article in *The Brownsville Herald* entitled “Sporting Life Frank ‘Pancho’ Maldonado, longtime coach, looks back.”\(^{179}\) The article detailed his baseball life and even his service in the military during World War II.\(^{180}\)

Ruben M. Torres did not appear to have any major open political enemies, nor did any information appear which indicated a break from the local or Texas political establishment. It appeared Torres worked well within the establishment. After Ruben M. Torres died, his brother, Rene Torres, wrote a letter to then Superintendent Dr. Jack Ammons of the Brownsville Independent School District, in December of 1989.\(^{181}\) The letter requested the naming of a public school in Ruben Torres’ honor.

Joe Rodriguez is a trustee with B.I.S.D. today.\(^{182}\) As noted in the interview with Joe Rodriguez, the naming of a school simply never came to “fruition.” Despite the efforts of Ruben Torres’ relatives, a school was not named in his honor.\(^{183}\) Ruben Torres’
outstanding public service on the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles explains Torres having been honored by his peers at the city, county, and state level. In light of his achievements with the Texas criminal justice system, it would not surprise this author if B.I.S.D. revisited the issue of naming a school, criminal justice facility, or sports facility in honor of Ruben M. Torres.

Torres’ positive impact on the criminal justice system as a state official came at a time of tumult within the penal system due to the *Ruiz* case. In hindsight, even his legislative service included ambitious programs which eventually became law later by contemporary legislators such as Senators Eddie Lucio Jr. and Juan “Chuy” Hinojosa.

Ruben Torres was the first Mexican-American Texan to be nominated and selected to the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles. His attitude of not being radical and not “[carrying] the Mexican flag” indicated Torres, as well as other Mexican-Americans, could “work within the system” as he once stated. It may be reasonably concluded that Torres enhanced political opportunities for future Mexican-American citizens statewide, especially in the Rio Grande Valley. It is usually the work of cautious citizens who do not overplay the hand they have been dealt that leads to incremental steps in achieving progress, especially in a complicated Texas constitutional and statutory framework that actually leads to legal or institutional reform.

For example, contemporary Valley legislators worked on getting legislation enacted to bring a medical school to the Valley, an idea originally proffered by Torres. When current Senator Eddie Lucio Jr. first arrived in Austin as a state representative, he apparently approached Ruben Torres for counsel and advice. The fact that Senator Lucio asked Torres for advice showed some maturity on the part of Lucio and that Ruben M. Torres was well regarded in establishment circles. Upon Torres’ death, then Railroad Commissioner Kent Hance sent a letter of condolence to Ruben Torres’ wife indicating that Ruben M. Torres, in Kent Hance’s words, “was a great Texan.”
Ruben M. Torres appealed to politicians from both sides of the aisle and his public service on the TBPP demonstrated that the Brownville figure had a historic impact. His service opened the doors for other Valley natives to serve on state boards. Later, another Brownsville resident and former police chief named Victor Rodriguez became the chairman of the Board of Pardons and Parole. Lending credence to Torres as an effective member of the TBPP was his reappointment by former Governor Mark White.

In hindsight, Torres’ original appointment to the TBPP by conservative Democrat Governor Dolph Briscoe speaks volumes. As some may recall, a significant attempt was made by legislators in 1974 to come up with a “new constitution” during a constitutional convention, but legislators remained deadlocked during the convention only to reattempt at a “new constitution” in 1975. Former popular Governor Dolph Briscoe was instrumental in saving the Texas Constitution by “warning” Texas voters of an attempt at a major governmental power grab. Specifically, according to a Texas Politics online web page, “The revision effort also was not helped by Governor Briscoe’s warning that adoption would result in passage of a state income tax, increased cost of state government, an overly powerful Legislature, and adoption of a Missouri Plan form of judicial selection.” Texas voters responded by soundly rejecting efforts to amend the Constitution with “250 of Texas’s 254 counties” completely renouncing efforts to substantially revise the Constitution. In fact, “not a single proposition passed” in the “250 counties” that rejected --- not just some --- but all proposed amendments. Just in case the members of the Texas Legislature did not get the clear message from voter rejection of constitutional amendments on November 4, 1975, Texas voters rejected “authorizing an increase of $400 million in the amount of Texas Water Development Bonds that may be issued on approval of two-thirds of the legislature” in a November 2, 1976 election.
Torres’ service on the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles confirmed that appointments to high governmental positions from the border can be safe. Torres’ service was honored by the placement of his name on a state prison building in Hondo, a school administration building in Port Isabel, a county detention center in Brownsville, and a city street in Brownsville, because many felt that his service to the public was admirable and distinguished. Undoubtedly, he paved the way for future medical school legislation and future appointments to state boards from the Valley. His positive impact on Brownville included public school service, PAU-B enabling legislation, efforts to curb illegal aliens from attending public schools, and long-term service as well as many changes he made to the Parole Board and parole process. In assessing Mr. Torres, we can appreciate his accomplishments and role he played at a critical juncture in contemporary Texas History at a time when the establishment in Austin was roiled over the *Ruiz* case and budgetary crunch of the 1980’s in Texas, a time in our history we best not forget if we are to get a better understanding of the Penal Code and penal system as we have come to know today.\(^{195}\) We can now look back with gratitude and recognition to a Valleyite who reached the pinnacles of power at the state level and reflect on the poetry adapted from Dr. Jim Granberry, one of his colleagues on the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles. A portion of the poem reads as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
It \text{ mattered not how tough the job,} \\
Or how much criticism received \\
In his role. \\
He stood high and mighty \\
Above the mob. \\
And lifted others, as part of his goals. \\
\end{align*}
\]

“*Torres, Torres, Torres,*” we called \\
As he left us here, \\
Hoping and wishing. \\
*He would linger a while.*
But with time drawing.
So fast and so near,
He walked from our presence
In his gracious style.

Our colleague, our confidant,
Our dear friend.
He will be missed in near and
Far places.
We will always remember;
However, his presence led
To good will and friendship among
Old and young faces.\textsuperscript{196}

From the dusty baseball playing fields of the Rio Grande Valley and from humble and “low-income”\textsuperscript{197} beginnings in Brownsville, Ruben M. Torres “pulled himself up by the bootstraps”\textsuperscript{198} to become an educator, coach, principal, superintendent, legislator and then reached the pinnacle of state power as a member of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles during the midst of the Texas prison crisis of the latter 20\textsuperscript{th} Century only to persevere and have a positive historic impact on those around him and on a penal system we usually take for granted as citizens of Texas.\textsuperscript{199}

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Endnotes

\textsuperscript{1} “In Memoriam Ruben M. Torres,” \textit{Austin-American Statesman}, 1989, Obituaries.

\textsuperscript{2} “S.R. 99, 71st Legislature, 2nd Called Session” Legislative Archive System Advanced Search, access February 15, 2017, \url{http://www.lrl.state.tx.us/legis/billsearch/searchresults.cfm}.


\textsuperscript{4} “Torres Unit,” Texas Department of Criminal Justice, accessed February 15, 2017, \url{http://tdcj.state.tx.us/unit_directory/te.html}.  

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See Note No. 1.


“Torres Is Awarded a Doctorate,” *The Brownsville Herald*, Sunday, August 11, 1974, p. 4-A.


Rene Torres, interview by author, spring of 1997.


Ibid.

See Note No. 10 regarding the election and No. 6 regarding his educational background.

See Note No. 10.


“Final Legislative Master List for the Sixty-fourth Legislature, Regular Session,” Texas Legislative Council, Author: Torres.

From the Texas Legislature Online website click the Legislative Archive System. A direct search may be done for all information pertaining to S.C.R. 42 from the 64th Regular Session. “SCR 42, 64th Regular Session,” Legislative Archive System Direct Search, accessed February 18, 2017, http://www.lrl.state.tx.us/legis/BillSearch/BillDetails.cfm?legSession=64-0&c3billtypeDetail=SCRc3-billNumberDetail=42c3billSuffixDetail=c3startRow=1c3IDlist=105099,c3unClick-list=c3number=50.

Ibid. Click “Actions” to see dates for actions taken on the bill.

“Final Legislative Master List for the Sixty-fifth Legislature, Regular Session,” Texas Legislative Council, Author: Torres.


Ibid. Click “Actions” to see actions taken on the bill.


Ibid. See Section 1 of the bill by clicking “Text” and then opening the file for the bill.

Ibid. Click “Actions” to see actions taken on the bill.


90-day bills are ones which become effective 90 days after Sine Die in accordance with Section 39 of Article III of the Texas Constitution. The relevant constitutional provision can be viewed online by clicking Article 3 and then scrolling to Section 39. Go to the Texas Legislature Online website. “The Texas Constitution Article 3 Legislative Department,” Texas Constitution and Statutes Home, accessed February 19, 2017, http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/CN/htm/CN.3.htm.

The text, history, actions, and other pertinent information can be viewed online with the Legislative Archive System found on the Texas Legislature Online website. “SB283, 65th Regular Session,” Legislative Archive System.

28 *Ibid.* See the caption of the bill.  

29 See Note No. 27. See sections 1, 2, and 3 of the enrolled bill or “Session Law Chapter.”  


38 *Ibid*, paragraph 16.  


40 See Note No. 34. See Section 1 of H.B. 247.
See Note 36, paragraph 17.


Ibid. See the caption of the bill.

See Note No. 43. See section 1 of S.B. 1037.

See Note No. 45. See section 2 of S.B. 1037.


Ibid. See Section 1 of S.B. 1103.

See Note No. 47. See Section 2 of S.B. 1103. Severability clauses are no longer used because Section 311.032 of the Government Code requires severability for all statutes unless the statute was enacted with a severability or non-severability provision, in which event, such provision prevails in interpreting the statute. Section 311.032, Government Code may be viewed at the Texas Legislature Online website by clicking “Statutes.” “Chapter 311, Government Code,” Texas Constitution and Statutes Home, accessed February 20, 2017, http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/GV/htm/GV.311.htm.

See Note No. 6, p. 3.

Ibid. p. 4.

Ibid. p. 4.

See Note No. 36, paragraph 19.

Ibid, paragraph 19.

Ibid, paragraph 19.

Ibid, paragraph 20.

Ibid, paragraph 21.

59 Ibid, paragraph 2.


61 See Note 36.


63 Ibid.

64 Ibid, paragraph 22.

65 Ibid, paragraph 20.

66 Ibid, paragraph 7. The website briefly discusses the time period and length of the trial.

67 Ibid, paragraph 11.

68 Ibid, paragraph 11.

69 Ibid, paragraph 10.


71 Ibid. Click the “Additional sources” and then click “House” under the heading of “House and Senate Journals” and then click the date of “Wednesday, May 11, 1977” which is the date of the record vote. The record vote for S.J.R. 3 was Record No. 17 for the day of May 11, 1977 where the votes of the yeas and nays are shown (including those who members present or absent).


Ibid. Click the “Committee information” link.


See a website entitled “Historical Crude Oil Prices (Table)” which gives the price per barrel of oil from 1946 till the present with their current inflation adjusted prices. “Historical Crude Oil Prices (Table),” Inflation Charts and Graphs, accessed August 20, 2017, https://inflationdata.com/Inflation/Inflation_Rate/Historical_Oil_Prices_Table.asp.

Ibid.

The constitutional amendment was Proposition 18 on the November 3, 1987 ballot. The website has a link for the enabling legislation for the constitutional amendment which was H.B. 400. Enabling legislation is a general law designed to implement the constitutional amendment once approved by voters. Go to the Texas Legislature website. “HJR 18, 70th Regular Session,” Legislative Archive System Direct Search, accessed August 20, 2017, http://www.lrl.state.tx.us/legis/billsearch/amendmentDetails.cfm?amendmentID=457&legSession=70-0&billTypeDetail=HJR&billNumberDetail=18.

The proposed amendment was Proposition 8 on the November 3, 1987 ballot. The website also has the link for the enabling legislation for S.J.R. 56 which was S.B. 1407. Go to the Texas Legislature website. “SJR 56, 70th Regular Session,” Legislative Archive System Direct Search, accessed August 20, 2017, http://www.lrl.state.tx.us/legis/billsearch/amendmentDetails.cfm?amendmentID=457&legSession=70-0&billTypeDetail=SJR&billNumberDetail=56.


Ibid. See the byline or subtitle to article.

The constitutional amendment was Proposition 4 on the November 5, 1991 ballot. The website contains relevant information regarding H.B. 64 which was the enabling legislation for the constitutional amendment. Go to the Texas Legislature website. “SJR 4, 72nd 1st Called Session,” Legislative Archive System Direct Search, accessed August 20, 2017, http://www. lrl.state.tx.us/legis/billsearch/amendmentDetails.cfm?amendmentID=496&legSession=72-1&billTypedetail=SJR&billNumberDetail=4.

Ibid. Click the link for the “Texas Legislative Council” under the headline of “Analyses of proposed amendments.”

“Board Member Lists,” Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, dated July 7, 2000. Also provided by the Texas Board of Pardons & Paroles public information officer was a list of board members and parole commissioners appointed from 1985 to 1991 which included Ruben M. Torres. “Board Members/Parole Commissioners,” Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles.


Meeting minutes of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, February 1, 1979, Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles.

Meeting minutes of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, February 21, 1979, Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles.

Connie L. Jackson, Chairman, Governor William P. Clements, January 22, 1980.


The 2nd Called Session of the 72nd Regular Session of the Texas Legislature passed broad legislation under H.B. 93 which “[related] to the efficient operation of the state criminal justice and judicial system, including the punishment of offenses, probation and parole, criminal justice services, and the issuance of general obligation bonds for criminal justice facilities; making appropriations.” Such legislation included the creation of a Texas Punishment Standards Commission under Section 11.14 of the bill to “revise punishments for criminal offenses” and included a provision under Section 11.17(a) that prospectively repealed almost all provisions of the Texas Penal Code. S.B. 1067 from the 73rd Regular Session made major substantive revisions to the Penal Code. “HB 93, 72nd 2nd Called Session,” Legislative


94 Ibid.

95 Meeting minutes of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, May 6, 1981, Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles.

96 The website contains comprehensive information including “Action” and “Committee Information” as well as information regarding the gubernatorial documents which declared the legislation as “emergency legislation.” Go to Texas Legislature website. “SB 125, 67th Regular Session,” Legislative Archive System Direct Search, accessed August 30, 2017, http://www.lrl.state.tx.us/legis/billsearch/BillDetails.cfm?legSession=67-0&billTypeDetail=SB&billnumberDetail=125&submitbutton=Search+by+bill.

97 Ibid.

98 Minutes of the August Meeting with the Texas Department of Corrections and Board of Pardons and Paroles, August 1981, Texas Department of Corrections and Board of Pardons and Paroles.

99 Meeting minutes of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, October 29, 1981, Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles.

100 Ibid. See meeting minutes where S.B. 125 is mentioned.

101 The meeting minutes include discussion regarding legislation from the 67th Regular Session. Meeting minutes of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, November 5, 1981, Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles.

102 Meeting minutes of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, April 1, 1982, Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles.
103 “Letter to Ruben Torres Chairman, Mrs. Connie Jackson Board Member and Dr. George Killinger Board Member,” Governor William P. Clements, Jr. to Chairman and Board Members, May 7, 1982.

104 Ibid.

105 Texas Department of Corrections Director W.J. Estelle Jr. to Mr. Torres, Chairman Board of Pardons and Paroles, telegram, September 27, 1982.


107 Ibid, paragraph 2.

108 Ibid, paragraph 11.

109 Ibid, paragraph 8.

110 Ibid, paragraph 7.

111 Ibid, paragraph 12.

112 Ibid, paragraphs 23 and 24.


114 During the interview with Rene Torres, he indicated the article was false and was probably done to make Torres “look bad.” According to Rene Torres, Ruben Torres’ wife Elida was the one who lived in Irving. Rene Torres, interview by author, Brownsville, Texas, spring 1997.

115 Ibid.

116 Ibid.

117 Ibid.

118 Ibid.

119 See past members of the United States House of Representatives at the official website of the United States Congress at www.congress.gov with the specific webpage at https://www.congress.gov/members?q={“congress”:”all”, “chamber”:”House”, “party”:”Democratic”, “member-state”:”Texas”}.

120 Maria Elida Torres, interview by author, August 28, 2017.
121 Ibid.


123 Meeting minutes of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, December 3, 1982, Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles.

124 Ibid.

125 Meeting minutes of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, December 6, 1982, Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles.

126 Ibid.

127 Ibid.


129 Ibid.

130 Ibid. Click the “Offender Information” link for Charlie Brooks, Jr. who is listed as the first inmate executed, then scroll down the webpage to read the “Summary of the Incident.”

131 Ibid. Since Mr. Ruben M. Torres died on November 23, 1989, his tenure included 52 executions.

132 See Note No. 34. Meeting minutes of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, September 14, 1983, Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles.

133 Ibid. For more information, the reader may read the six “items agreed upon” at the meeting.

134 “Letter to Ruben Torres, Chairman, Dr. George Killinger, and Ms. Connie Jackson,” Governor Mark White to Board of Pardons and Paroles, September 26, 1983.

135 “Letter to Governor Mark White,” TBPP Chairman Ruben M. Torres to Governor Mark White, October 13, 1983.

136 The Act of Congress was embedded in a much larger measure passed in 1996. The law is also referred to as the Prison Litigation Reform Act of 1996 even though the title of the law has “1995.” The law is found in Title VIII of Public Law 104-134. Go to www.congress.gov and then click “Public Laws” and

137 In the letter, the Ruiz case is mentioned as well since “the proposed final order of dismissal” was modeled after the Ruiz case. “Letter to Charles Walker, General Counsel of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles,” Douglas M. Becker to General Counsel Charles Walker, January 3, 1984.

138 Meeting minutes of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, March 12, 1984, Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles. Also, see Note No. 128 which has the TDCJ list of those executed by Texas along with the date of execution.

139 The court settlement provided by the TBPP is not dated but has a handwritten date indicating it was for TBPP minutes for April 24, 1984. Cox Enterprises, Inc. d/b/a Austin American-Statesman vs. Board of Pardons and Paroles, 261st Judicial District, Travis County, Texas, April 1984.

140 Ibid. There was a short list of three enumerated items to which the TBPP agreed with the Austin American-Statesman with the newspaper agreeing to “dismiss” the case and agreeing to not obtain attorney fees.

141 See Note No. 123. Read the minutes discussing the “executive session.”


143 Executive Director John W. Byrd to TBPP Chairman Neal Pfeiffer and Executive Director John W. Byrd to TBPP Chairman Neal Pfeiffer and Executive Director John W. Byrd to TBPP Chairman and Board Members, memoranda, April 10 and 12, 1985 and June 18, 1985.

144 Go to the Texas Legislature Online website. “HB 235, 69th Regular Session,” Legislative Archive System Direct Search, accessed September 1, 2017, http://www.llrinterstate.tx.us/legis/billsearch/BillDetails.cfm?legSession=69-0c\TypeDetail=HBc\billnumberDetail=235c\submitbutton=Search+by+bill.

145 Ibid. See caption of bill.

146 Ibid. Click “Text” and then see analysis to the bill.

147 “Torres re-appointed to Parole Board,” The Brownsville Herald, 16 July 1986, p. 6A.

148 Ibid.
See Note No. 6, pg. 8.

See Note No. 9.


See Note No. 153.


Ibid. Also one may follow the procedure from Note No. 160 then click “Texas State Cemetery” for a detailed biographical information including public service in the administration of former President George H.W. Bush during the time of the passing of Ruben M. Torres.


See Note No. 160 where the membership and work product of the Special House Committee on Illegal Immigration in Texas can be viewed online by clicking the name of that committee at Chase Untermeyer’s legislative

162 Ibid.

163 Ibid.

164 Ibid. Click “View Report” from the committee website.

165 See Note 34.


169 Ibid.

170 During the beginning of this interview, he indicated his wife had passed away after 56 years of marriage which occurred three years ago. His face lit up with pride regarding her.

171 The author contacted Mr. Rene Torres on August 3, 2017 who is the surviving brother of Ruben M. Torres, to see if he had contact information for Mr. Frank Maldonado, which he did, and Mr. Torres was kind enough to help set up an interview via his helper named “Tita.” Rene Torres was also available throughout August for discussions. Rene Torres, discussion with author, August 3, 2017 and throughout August.

172 Frank Maldonado, interview by author, Brownsville, Texas, August 9, 2017.


174 Ibid. 11.

175 Ibid. 28.

176 Ibid. 32.
177 Ibid. 30-31.

178 Ibid. 32-33.


180 Ibid.


182 See Note No. 167.

183 See Note No. 9 and Note No. 168.

184 See Note No. 36, paragraph 26.

185 See Note No. 9. In the interview with Rene Torres, Rene Torres indicated Ruben Torres told him that Eddie Lucio had approached him for advice and counsel.

186 See Note No. 9. In the interview with Rene Torres, Rene indicated Ruben also got along well with former U.S. Rep. Solomon P. Ortiz and got along well with former Sen. Hector Uribe.


188 Roster of Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, received from Office of former House Corrections Committee Chairman Allen Hightower, spring of 1997, p. 244.


191 Ibid, paragraph 14.

192 Ibid, paragraph 13.


The author expresses gratitude to his wife Diane Perez for assisting him in reviewing scores of state records to ascertain which records may be of historic value and for proofreading. The author expresses gratitude to Frank Maldonado of Brownsville for engaging in an extensive interview regarding Ruben M. Torres as well as Rene Torres for taking the time in 1997 and again recently in 2017 to be available for discussions regarding Ruben Torres. This author expresses gratitude to Joe A. Rodriguez. Mr. Rodriguez is currently a school trustee for the BISD as well as a former coach and athletic director. Also, the author thanks Elida M. Torres for engaging in a brief email interview.


See Note No. 171.

See Note No. 168.

The author thanks Rene Torres for providing some documents and useful information, including contact information. The author also thanks Frank Maldonado’s helper “Tita” for providing a newspaper clipping and information regarding a baseball book. See endnotes 120, 170, and 172.
Eva Ybarra: *Siempre la Reina*

by

Manuel Medrano

*Conjuntos* (“groups,” small musical ensembles in Latin American tradition, including the Mexican *norteño* and *tejano*, performed by dance bands comprising an accordion, a bass guitar, a double bass, and drums, based on polka, waltz, and bolero rhythms) originated in deep South Texas during the late 1920s. They provided a musical respite for working-class *Tejanos* at outdoor and indoor dance venues. Rigid gender roles and *machismo* dictated that *conjunto* ensembles be all male. Tradition and lore also suggested that only men could play the accordion. While some females provided vocals, virtually all were excluded from playing musical instruments. Thus, if a young *Tejana* wished to pursue a musical career, her most acceptable choice of instrument was the piano. On March 2, 1945, a baby girl was born on Brighton Avenue in San Antonio, Texas. Her name was Eva Ybarra, and throughout her life, she has challenged *conjunto* tradition. From an early age and through all her peaks and valleys as an accordionist, Ybarra continues to break new ground. Her talent, dedication and resiliency have earned her the endearment *La Reina del Accordeón* (The Queen of the Accordion), and what follows is her story.

Ybarra was one of eight children born to Pedro and María Luisa Ybarra, both migrant workers. Her father was born in Graytown, and her mother in Leesville, near San Antonio. As a three-year-old field worker, she soon learned what she did not want to do for the rest of her life. She once told her father that she did not want to hoe the fields and, instead, wanted to be “somebody.” Confident that she would, he replied, “one of these days.”
Coincidentally, Ybarra discovered what she did want to do: become a musician. From a very young age, she had seen her father and brother play the accordion and wanted to do the same. Although self-taught, Ybarra recognizes their role in introducing her to the music. One day, when she was only four, she asked her mother to turn on the radio. She recalls, “It was English. I remember I heard ’Don’t Let the Stars Get in Your Eyes’ [Perry Como’s 1952 recording]. I got the melody . . . just by listening to the radio. I got the notes.” Her mother provided a small stool and chair for her to practice. Within a year, practice led to performing, and, at five, the child prodigy began to play outside of Texas. In Arizona, a rancher name Caesar Vicar heard her play and told her father, “this little girl, when she grows up, don’t let her be in the fields . . .” to which her father replied, “no, I want her to play for me.” She remembers, “We made money. They didn’t have to work because I was making money. He took us to baseball fields, to restaurants, and . . . the tienditas (small stores).” At one of these venues, some Native Americans in attendance were brought to tears by her performance. When Ybarra asked why, her mother answered that they appreciated someone so young with so much talent.

Both her parents were very supportive. However, they sometimes disagreed on what instrument their daughter should play. At nine, her mother enrolled her for piano lessons, purchased a piano, and told her that the accordion was too heavy and might damage her lungs. Ybarra believed that her mother might have thought it was a “man’s instrument.” Her father, on the other hand, privately told his young musician that there were many talented piano players, but few accomplished acordeonistas. Thus, she continued with her instrument of choice. When promoters contacted Ybarra to perform outside of Texas, her mother was uncomfortable with her daughter’s touring, so her father accompanied her everywhere until her late twenties. Nevertheless, it was a source of friction between the parents. Once, Mrs. Ybarra told an agent from Michigan that her
daughter would not go there. Ybarra responded by saying, “I’m your daughter, but I belong to the audience.”

Sometimes Eva Ybarra’s talent has been underestimated and underappreciated. As a child, she was occasionally told by male musicians that she could not perform with them because only they knew the arrangements. Ybarra commented about being a female accordionist, “It’s very complicated to be a lady leading a group . . . they [men] don’t accept a lady to . . . make arrangements and direct them.” Women, too, have doubted her abilities and left Ybarra with some of her worst memories. Once, at a club, two women told Ybarra that she should leave because they only wanted to hear the two guitarists accompanying her. On another occasion, one woman said that Ybarra didn’t even know how to hold the accordion, much less perform. These incidents brought her to tears, but also increased her resiliency. Some men have even questioned whether she deserves the label “Accordion Queen.” Conversely, Ybarra has received praise from both audiences and fellow musicians. She was given a standing ovation in Chicago at a venue with the Super Tejanas, four highly acclaimed Texas musicians. In New York, where she performed with the Ethel Quartet, the audience stood in the middle of her performance. Many male fellow musicians like and respect her. Mingo Saldivar, an elder statesman and virtuoso of the accordion, once joked that he hoped Ybarra would not perform at the concert before him, implying that she was a tough act to follow, and she is. Ybarra responds by saying, “They make me feel good; they’re good guys.”

In the 1960s, while playing at a dance hall with her brothers in San Marcos, Texas, the fourteen-year old was approached by Ruben Ruiz, record producer and owner of Rosina Records. Ruiz was so impressed with her sound and musical persona that he offered Ybarra a one-year contract, which he extended to two years because of her initial sales. Later, she recorded for Reloj, Hacienda and Dina Records. In the mid-1990s, Rounder Records released A Mi San Antonio and Romance Inolvidable, her most popular albums.
Over the years, Eva Ybarra has been a multi-instrument instructor at several institutions and organizations. In San Antonio, Texas, these include Palo Alto College’s conjunto program and the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center’s music education program where she has taught since the 1980s. In 2016, she was a participant in the Texas Folklife’s Master Teaching Artist Program. In 1997, Ybarra was the artist-in-residence at the University of Washington in Seattle, where she taught all the conjunto instruments. Ybarra recalls the diversity of the students and their eagerness to learn. While there, she organized a student conjunto called the Space Needle that recorded an album.¹³

Some have called Ybarra the hard-luck queen because, over the years, Ybarra’s resolve has been severely challenged. Several times, dance promoters have not honored their contractual word and refused to pay her. In 2010, thieves broke into her San Antonio home, stealing all her instruments, valued at nearly $15,000. A fundraiser was held at Mission Trails Conjunto Express to help the accordionist recoup her losses.¹⁴ In 2015, her home was foreclosed, and on one occasion, during a tour in Puerto Rico, she was nearly raped by a promoter whom she trusted. When there are no concerts or dances, she supplements her income by heading a mariachi trio that performs in San Antonio restaurants for ten dollars a song. She calls it “kitty cattjing” or “taloneando” (working hard) for sometimes little money. Despite periodic economic hardships, Ybarra refuses to work at anything but her music.

Ybarra is not without critics. She has been labeled a “diva” and “headstrong,” primarily because she does not get along well with her fellow musicians and is constantly replacing members of her conjunto, or they just leave. In 1991, for example, her conjunto performed to rave reviews at the Tejano Conjunto Festival in San Antonio. The next day, her all-male conjunto quit.¹⁵ Some musicians accuse her of constantly stealing the scene. Pedro, her brother, worries that this bickering and jealousy can possibly result in danger to his sister. Ethnomusicologist Cathy Ragland
says that Eva Ybarra is brilliant, but somewhat egotistical and high maintenance.\textsuperscript{16}

“La música en la sangre” is a Spanish phrase which translates to “music in the blood.” Eva Ybarra was born into a family of musicians that included her parents and brothers. From a young age, she has been a paid performer and has worked virtually all her life among professional musicians. It is obvious that Ybarra, now seventy-two, continues to enjoy it, whether at a San Antonio restaurant or a sold-out conjunto festival. Emotionally, she says, “I feel like a reina (queen); I feel very honored; I feel . . . that I’m somebody . . . I think I feel angels surround me and give me energy, strength . . . I feel them and, once I’m on stage, I throw myself.\textsuperscript{17} Ybarra particularly likes her visits to the Rio Grande Valley. On several occasions, she has appeared in San Benito at the annual Narciso Martinez Cultural Arts Center and its annual Conjunto Festival. For her, every time has been memorable. She says, “I love the people from here because . . . they love the music, they feel the music, and they make you feel the music, too; . . . One time, I came here and the people gave me a lot of, you know, aplausos.”\textsuperscript{18}

Ybarra is a Tejana and proud of it. This accordionista was born in San Antonio and has called it home all her life. Furthermore, she embraces the culture and music. Ybarra comments, “I’m a real Tejana musician . . . it’s all in my blood . . . I love being Tejana; I’m not ashamed of being Tejana . . . because there’s a lot of good Tejanos.”\textsuperscript{19}

Despite her personal hardships, Ybarra’s musical career has been marked by longevity and acclaim. Few musicians can say that they have performed professionally for nearly 70 years and remain among the elite in their craft. She has been inducted in Texas Conjunto Halls of Fame in San Antonio, Alice, and San Benito. In 2015, Ybarra received the South Texas Conjunto Association Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2017, the National Endowment for the Arts named her as a National Heritage Fellow, one of the most prestigious designations given any musician.\textsuperscript{20}
Conjunto experts and aficionados agree that Ybarra’s legacy is noteworthy. Rogelio Núñez and Ramón de León are co-founders of San Benito’s Narciso Martinez Cultural Arts Center. Núñez says that she is unique, because of the repertoire of musical influences in her style, and a “frontrunner,” because she still commands respect. De León questions the amount of that respect when he says, “Eva Ybarra has not gotten her dues . . . I think her currency will be very high when she’s gone. People are going to realize that [she] was a jewel we didn’t pay attention to.” Juan Tejeda, long-time Director of San Antonio’s Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center and member of the acclaimed Conjunto Aztlán, comments that throughout Ybarra’s three-decade tenure as conjunto instructor, the center has attracted more girls and women to carry on her legacy. She is well-liked, teaches a variety of instruments, and outperforms many men. About Ybarra’s ranking among female accordionists, Tejeda simply states, “She’s the best in the history of conjunto music.”

After nearly seven decades of performing professionally, Ybarra continues to overcome the odds. She still makes a living pressing the buttons on the accordion and challenges herself to become better and more innovative. Cognizant of her age, Ybarra says, “I’m still almost the same, but not the same . . . Before, I [would] hear a melody and I [would] get it right away . . . right now the computer is going down [she laughs]. I love music; I’m married with the music.” Occasionally, on a Friday or Saturday night, conjunto’s main squeeze is still seen “kitty cattying” at restaurants and bars, while, during the day, she is busy writing and arranging songs at her San Antonio home. On stage, “la reina” still holds court. Her presence is unmistakable; her persona is indomitable; her legacy is irrefutable. She is singular; she is “somebody,” and conjunto music is better because of it.

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
Endnotes


4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.


15. Ybarra interview.


18. Ybarra interview.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.


24. Ybarra interview.
VALLEY HISTORY
PRESERVATION
The Recent History and Unification of Historical Societies in Brownsville

by

Alma Ortiz Knopp and Anthony Knopp

The first sixty years of the Brownsville Historical Association (BHA) were documented in a journal article by Anthony Knopp published in 2008.¹ In it, the BHA is identified as “the oldest active historical organization in the Rio Grande Valley.” The quest by the BHA to maintain this distinction requires a review of the activities of the organization during the last 10 years. The BHA has progressed to a new era of substantial growth which has resulted in an increase in membership, facilities, programs and educational opportunities for the Brownsville community.

The genesis for many of the recent activities was the arrival of Priscilla Rodriguez as executive director in the fall of 2005.² Early in her term as executive director, the BHA saw an increase in programs showcasing art, culture and heritage with art exhibits, musical presentations, cooking classes and folk art demonstrations.³ These activities eventually resulted in the revision of the BHA mission statement and the adoption of a vision statement by the BHA Board that reflected the new direction of the BHA in June of 2006. The revised mission statement reads: “. . . to preserve, educate, and promote the history, heritage, and cultural arts of Brownsville, Texas and its environs . . . .”⁴ It was this revision of the BHA mission statement that Dr. Juliet V. Garcia, University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College president and a member of the Board of Directors of Humanities Texas, referred to in her remarks during the BHA’s “Night of Culture” where Dr. Garcia congratulated the BHA
for receiving the Humanities Texas Award for “imaginative leadership in the humanities.” Dr. Garcia praised the BHA’s “multidisciplinary approach,” its use of bilingual programming, and its outreach efforts to “underserved audiences.”

In an effort to reach out to the working-class neighborhood of Southmost, the BHA, the city of Brownsville and other local organizations collaborated to create the Urban Center at Gonzalez Park in June of 2008. The BHA was responsible for the establishment of the Brownsville Heritage Center within the Urban Center, which included an outer gallery for permanent exhibits and an inner gallery for temporary exhibits. The programming and scheduling of events was the responsibility of the BHA, providing this low-income area of Brownsville with what many considered the neighborhood’s first museum. The museum opened in September of 2009 with an art exhibit titled “Dichos” by Harlingen artist Jennifer Rodriguez. It also displayed a photography exhibit titled “Taquerías in Southmost” by Chuy Benitez of El Paso. The collection of photographs was part of “A Place at the Table: A Foodways Survey of the State of Texas” project commissioned by Texas Folklife, in its effort to record the “food cultures” found in the state. The Texas Recreation and Park Society awarded the Urban Center an Arts and Humanities Award for 2008.

The BHA greatly benefited from the good relations between Executive Director Priscilla Rodriguez and Brownsville City Manager Charlie Cabler. The BHA entered an agreement to lease the Market Square building, formerly city hall, several years before, and by 2009 the first renovation phase was completed, providing a place to house archives and a gallery space. The project was part of an effort to help revitalize downtown, and the new space was named the Market Square Research Center. The gallery space was used to exhibit a collection of western art including many Fredrick Remington reproductions and Charles M. Russel pieces donated by Ben Edelstein in 2010. The facility has undergone several renovations of the in-
terior and exterior of the building. The Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation (BCIC) provided major funding at $180,000 dollars for the 2009 renovation. The cost was kept low thanks to the volunteer efforts of many BHA Board members, particularly Larry Lof, Professor Emeritus from UT Brownsville and a historical restoration expert.\textsuperscript{10}

The vaults in Market Square later provided an important storage depository to house the BHA’s collections during natural disasters. Hurricane Katrina in 2005 prompted the BHA leadership to draft an “Emergency Preparedness and Response Manual” approved by the Board of Directors in June of 2006. The response plan was activated by the threat of tropical storm Erin in 2007, prompting the BHA staff and Board members to relocate the organization’s artifacts and collections in the document vaults in the Market Square facility for safe keeping.\textsuperscript{11}

By 2014, the vaults at Market Square had reached maximum capacity due to donations of artifacts from the community. The Brownsville Chamber of Commerce archives were donated, as well as new family collections.\textsuperscript{12} Earlier, in 2012, the Backal family from Mexico City loaned part of the Mexican-cinema-themed Agrasanchez collection, Spanish silver artifacts from colonial Mexico, retablos and some sketches from Mexican artist Miguel Covarrubias.\textsuperscript{13} The Hunter Room collection that had been housed at Texas Southmost College and later the University of Texas at Brownsville and TSC was transferred to the BHA as custodian in 2016 after the dissolution of the partnership between the two schools.\textsuperscript{14}

Increasing foot traffic and tourism along with the revitalization of downtown have been important goals the BHA shares with the City of Brownsville; in the past they have worked together for that aim. One program made use of the Brownsville Urban System’s trolleys for trolley tours of downtown Brownsville. The tour visited historical sites like the Stillman House, the Old City Cemetery, and Fort Brown. The tours were conducted by Peter Goodman and Joe Gavito from the city’s Heritage Office.\textsuperscript{15}
The BHA partnership with the City of Brownsville and the BCIC aided in the BHA’s efforts to obtain a $130,000 Preserve America grant in 2007, to be used towards a technology-based tourism program titled “Brownsville-21.” The program involved the installation of nine kiosks in historical sites that would give information about the location along with MP3’s, CD tours and bilingual DVDs to enhance self-guided walking and driving tours of downtown. Ten photomurals depicting life in downtown Brownsville were also included in 2008. The “Explore Historic Downtown Brownsville Photomurals” project was also funded by the city of Brownsville, BCIC, and the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce. By 2011, “Brownsville-21” goals were a good fit for the city’s Imagine Brownsville comprehensive plan that promoted the idea of “heritage tourism.” Mayor Tony Martinez was enthusiastic about the project since it would contribute to a future walking-tour map making downtown Brownsville a healthy historic district. “Brownsville-21” facilitated heritage tourism with bilingual signs installed as part of the program funded by monies from the Preserve America grant, the BCIC and other federal sources.

The development of the Old City Cemetery Center was also a collaboration with the City of Brownsville, with funding from BCIC. What began as an effort to stop vandalism in the cemetery evolved into a project that included security cameras, cemetery clean ups, beautification efforts, restoration of damaged headstones, and the creation of a “visitor center” which served as the meeting place for walking tours of the cemetery and the local neighborhood. The Old City Cemetery Center opening ceremony was held in October of 2007 and greatly enhanced the offerings of the Mitte Cultural District in Linear Park. The exhibits include information on the architecture of the tombs, the Hebrew Cemetery, burial practices, and important people and families buried there.

The City Cemetery Project also provided an opportunity for collaboration with the Brownsville Independent School District.
The BHA received a $10,000 “Save Our History” Grant from the History Channel. The money was used to restore the Old City Cemetery, create the Old City Cemetery Center and fund a project in partnership with Hudson Elementary school. The project involved working with 4th grade teacher Noel Kendall’s class to create a bilingual cemetery brochure with primary sources provided by the BHA. The project was titled “Keepers of the Crypt” and the finished product was displayed on the BHA website. BHA has had a long relationship with BISD which has provided annual funding in exchange for free admission for students and teachers. BHA developed several “Traveling Trunk” education exhibits (“Exploring Meso-American Cultures” and “Exploring Brownsville Roots”) to share local history and culture with BISD students. In its “hay day” the program had reached 525 students by May of 2006. BHA members have also assisted with walking tours of downtown Brownsville and Fort Brown for history faculty professional development and several student history clubs throughout the years.

In 2007, Gregory Free & Associates were hired to develop a reinterpretation of the Stillman House Museum. Some of the recommendations were adopted, and the Museum was reopened in December of 2007. Some of the changes made included reversing the master bedroom and parlor to more closely resemble the original layout of the home. The role of the Treviño family, who owned the home after Charles Stillman, was acknowledged, bringing attention to the multicultural history of the home. The Treviño family made several renovations and added additional bedrooms to the home. Bilingual information was provided to “broaden the audience” and make it more accessible to Mexican visitors since the museum is two blocks away from an international bridge. A Humanities Texas Community project grant was used to help fund the reinterpretation. The Paul Gilmore Memorial Garden was the result of a contribution of Board Member Joann Gilmore in memory of her husband, a local farmer and member of the BHA Board. The Garden, located
outside the kitchen of the Stillman House, is reminiscent of the kitchen gardens common in the 1800’s.

The Heritage Museum, located next door to the Stillman House, closed in May of 2009 for a major $150,000 renovation and reinterpretation. The museum went from a room with historic photographs to various hands-on exhibits with different themes and a more kid-friendly atmosphere. The renovated museum opened its doors in January of 2010. Kate Moore, the project director, discussed the interactive features of the renovation and explained that “[A]t least 80 percent of the museum’s exhibits now have something you can touch or play with.” Dress-up areas and word-search puzzles, as well as models of storefronts from downtown Brownsville, are now part of museum, including a gift shop. Additions to the Heritage Museum which have added to the ambiance were the bar exhibit known as Crixell’s Saloon and the Blacksmith shop. Both were built and donated by Henry Newman.

The BHA has long benefitted from the generosity of its members and the Stillman family. The Stillman family Trust has been an important source of funding for many projects throughout the years. The yearly Stillman Family Trust Dinner, usually held in January, is an opportunity for members of the Stillman family and community members to keep abreast of the on-going progress of the BHA. The Stillman family reunion took place in February of 2013 and many members of the family attended the Stillman Trust Dinner where the Stillmans donated clothes that belonged to James Stillman for display at the Stillman House. The Stillman Trust Dinner is also the time BHA recognizes outstanding service through the awarding of the Cemetery Preservation Award, the Preservation Award, and the Kino Camarillo Service Award.

A historic German automobile built around 1908 and thought to have belonged to Mexican President Porfirio Diaz was purchased for the BHA by an unknown donor in 2008. The vehicle was housed at the Alonso Building and then moved,
in 2010, to the newly remodeled Aiken Education Center, where it became the focal point of the Mexican Revolution exhibit to mark the 100th year anniversary of the Mexican Revolution.29 The historic Alonso building, renovated and owned by the Gorgas Science Foundation, was sold to Alexander (Sandy) Stillman, who then donated it to the BHA in 2010. The building, which received its Texas Historical Marker in 1999, is currently used for ceremonial functions and is available as a rental venue for events.30 The Los Laureles ranch house is the latest BHA acquisition that was donated by Sandy Stillman. Built around 1850 and originally located in what is today the King Ranch (twenty-two miles South of Corpus Christi), Charles Stillman’s ranch house was relocated in 2013 by Sandy Stillman and his family to Brownsville, Texas.31 Originally parked next to the Cueto Building, the ranch house was eventually moved to Linear Park, where it underwent extensive restoration and became part of the Mitte Cultural District. The move and the renovation were paid by the Stillman family. The restored structure is now used for social functions and as a venue for fundraising like the “Taste of Texas” wine-tasting fundraiser and the Paella Festival. It is also opened for the public on Saturdays during the Farmer’s Market, and the BHA is in the process of building programs around the Los Laureles ranch house. The most recent addition is Yoga Day.32

Prior to the 2009 economic recession, the BHA had been tremendously successful in obtaining grants to fund programs and renovations. After the recession, grant money became scarce and belt tightening in the City of Brownsville and BISD began to impact the BHA. In 2012 the BHA received a 25% cut in funding from the City of Brownsville and a 30% cut in funding from BISD, while the BHA now needed more funds to properly care for the new acquisitions, the Alonso building, the expanded Market Square Facility and the Old City Cemetery Center.33 The BHA turned to partnering and cooperating with other civic organizations in order to share resources for mutual benefit. In
2010, the BHA participated in several meetings sponsored by the Brownsville Convention and Visitors Bureau that included several local business and other local organizations that rely on tourism dollars to discuss ways to spur tourism to Brownsville. Joint marketing was one of the solutions since “Everyone’s working with less money . . . [you have to] prioritize and think about where to put the limited amount of resources.” Working with less led to increased communication between these entities and the BHA tried to capitalize on the Convention and Visitors Bureau’s new slogan, “With a History as Big as Texas.”

The BHA over the years has learned to do more with less thanks to a hardworking and more professional staff according to the new Executive Director, Tara Putegnat. Serving as President of the BHA from 2010-2012 helped Tara Putegnat successfully steer the organization after the departure of Priscilla Rodriguez as Executive Director in 2014. Putegnat had previously received the 2012 Kino Camarillo Service Award and had served on the board for several years. The BHA maintained itself financially healthy and has found creative ways to stretch its resources. Such was the case in October of 2014, when the BHA partnered with Humanities Texas, the Brownville Public Library, Texas Southmost College, the Texas Archive of the Moving Image and BISD to host the second History Harvest in Texas. Scanning stations were set up in the Brownville Public Library and volunteers helped community members digitize the family photographs and documents to create a community collection which would serve as a repository that would be “made available for research, teaching, and educational exhibitions.”

Some of the more memorable BHA programs include the “Coffee and Culture Series” involving the BHA staff sharing coffee with museum patrons and discussing the exhibits to the “Gallery Talks” which were mostly arts and crafts demonstrations. Both programs go as far back as 2005. The historical walking tours are another favorite, especially for the Winter Texans. They began as downtown and Fort Brown walking
tours and have expanded to include the Old City Cemetery, usually with Gene Fernandez of the Old City Cemetery Center, the Brownsville Raid, with UTRGV Lecturer James Mills, the St. Charles District, and the Old Charro Days Route, developed by UTRGV Professor Emeritus Anthony Knopp. In October, the “Shades of Haunted History,” a local favorite and easily becoming a Brownville tradition, is usually led by Anthony Knopp and Michael Rodriguez. Board Members also worked to design and decorate a replica of the Stillman House for display at the Holiday Village at Dean Porter Parker, a new holiday tradition in Brownsville. The BHA also hosted the semi-annual meeting of the South Texas Historical Association, in November of 2015, at Market Square.

The Crixell Saloon in the Heritage Center Museum provided the inspiration and location for the Historical Happy Hour program. Originally held only in October, the program was expanded by Tara Putegnat and has become a very popular monthly program that provides beer, wine and liquor tastings, as well as food and an opportunity to tour the museum and exhibits. The Historical Happy Hours have been held at the various locations of the BHA and were originally free to the public, though now a small fee is collected. BHA members can still attend free of charge. The program increased membership and helps draw a younger crowd to the BHA. The Historical Happy Hour program resulted in collaborations with Feldman’s Liquor, L & F Distributors, Brownville Craft Beer Enthusiasts, and various local eateries. A spin-off with the Brownsville Craft Beer Enthusiasts is the “Crafts for a Cause” fundraiser which began in 2016 and is usually held in April in the Alonso building. The proceeds go to the BHA and to fund various causes like Alzheimer’s research or scholarships for special needs students.

The BHA is also a member of the Blue Star Museum program which is a partnership between museums, Blue Star families, the Department of Defense and the National Endowment for the Arts to provide free admission to active duty personnel,
the National Guard and Reserve from Memorial Day Weekend to Labor Day. The BHA has participated in this problem since at least 2012.45

In January of 2009, the BHA began a project with Acadia Publishing involving a collection of historical photographs to document Charro Days, Brownsville’s pre-eminent cultural celebration that developed in the 1930’s. Priscilla Rodriguez and board members Dr. Manuel Medrano and Dr. Anthony Knopp co-authored the project. The BHA posted several advertisements asking the public’s assistance in gathering photographs documenting the parades, Sombrero Festival, Mr. Amigo, and Fiestas Mexicanas.44 The BHA archives were also searched to uncover photographs and advertisements. The book was published under the title Images of America: Charro Days in Brownsville 1940-1970. The proceeds of the book were used to fund a BHA scholarship for UTB/TSC History students. The BHA hosted a meet and greet with the authors in December of 2009 to present the book to the public.45

The BHA has also collaborated with the Mexican Consulate in Brownsville. The Consul’s office has used BHA locations for various events. They have partnered to provide the “Mexican Independence Day Celebration,” held in September. Consul Rudolfo Quilantan organized the screening at the Alonso Building of a Mexican silent film accompanied by a live pianist. Tara Putegnat described several meetings between the BHA and the Consul’s office to utilize more BHA properties for Mexican Consul activities.46

Amidst the many other accomplishments of the BHA in recent years, the merger with the Historic Brownsville Museum Association was clearly the apogee. For years, confusion existed in the city over the names and management of the historical museums and even a sense of competition. In a community sometimes accused of fostering a spirit of self-interest at the expense of progress, the merger must be considered an outstanding achievement.
Although the BHA temporarily occupied the old Fort Brown chapel as a museum after World War II, the lease expired. The next home for the BHA and its artifacts was the Stillman House, acquired by Chauncey Stillman and donated to the city in 1958, but it served primarily as a house museum. By the mid-1970s there was a growing interest in historic preservation, resulting from the loss of landmark buildings that had played important roles in the development of the city. Mayor Ruben Edelstein and his slate of city commissioners, elected in 1975, reflected this concern, especially as it applied to the old Southern Pacific Railroad Depot. The SP Depot, constructed in the late 1920s in Spanish Colonial Revival style, served as such until the 1950s, when passenger service terminated. The building then provided storage for cotton until the late 1970’s.47

In his autobiography, Mayor Edelstein listed “among major accomplishments” of his administration that he “negotiated purchase by the city from the Southern Pacific Railroad of property where the Police Department is now located and also where the Historical [sic] Brownsville Museum Association converted the old passenger depot into a museum for the community.”48

In late 1982 the Brownsville Herald announced that the “city has acquired” the Southern Pacific Depot, “often described as the most beautiful building in the city,” accompanied by a photo of Mary Yturria showing off the building.49

With the purchase of the Southern Pacific property committed, Mayor Edelstein appointed a citizens committee “to study the potential uses of the [depot] building.”50 The committee, consisting of Mary Yturria, Ruby Wooldridge, Tom Fleming, and Robert Vezzetti, promptly secured the services of Richard Mycue of San Antonio for an architectural study. The study was funded by grants from the U.S, Department of the Interior, the Texas State Historical Commission, and the City of Brownsville through HUD Community Development funds.51

The report from the Mycue firm recommended the use of the former depot as a museum. After study by the committee and
public officials, as well as public hearings, a formal committee “to promote and organize the museum” was established. Otis Parchman was chosen as chairman of the new committee, but Mary Yturria assumed that position in 1983, and Gene McNair replaced her in January, 1984. The Historic Brownsville Museum Association received its State Charter early that year. Six years previously, the museum structure had already been listed on the National Register of Historic Places, largely through the efforts of Mary Yturria.

The new HBMA was not created to compete with the Brownsville Historical Association, but to develop new resources in terms of financial support and skills. According to Bob Vezzetti, the original organizers reached out to “new elements” of the community not previously engaged in supporting historical research and preservation but financially able to participate. Vezzetti himself served as president of the BHA in this era. He noted the complementary aspects of both organizations and asserted the expectations of eventual merger.

As the new Chairman of Historic Brownsville Museum Association (HBMA), Gene McNair informed members that “the exterior of the old depot has been completely restored to as good or better than its original condition.” The building was leased to the HBMA from the City of Brownsville for 99 years. Noting that it would “take an additional $150,000 to $200,000 to open the doors of the Museum,” plus furnishings, staff, and operating costs, McNair announced that “Our membership and financial drive is underway. . . .”

Chairman McNair and the new Board of Directors of the HBMA had ambitious plans for the projected museum. McNair estimated the cost to refinish the interior of the building at $150,000. The “services of a professional curator, a secretary and a maintenance man” would initially require another $70,000. The museum would develop rotating displays of “different items, objects and exhibits” to be exhibited throughout the year.
Development of the Museum proceeded rapidly. On March 2, 1986, the Historic Brownsville Museum had its formal opening of the new museum for a crowd of over 750 people, including visitors from all parts of the Rio Grande Valley, as well as Matamoros. The inaugural event featured guest speaker T.R. Fehrenbach, a Valley native and prominent historian. In his later report to the HBMA, Chairman McNair described the geographic focus of the museum as “restricted to a limited and defined . . . area directly relating to Brownsville,” including South Texas and northeastern Mexico. Historical focus was to be divided into four periods: Pre-historic Indians, Spanish-Mexican, American Frontier, and Modern. McNair also announced the results of the search for a director for the new museum – Larry Bowles, an experienced museum curator. McNair closed by soliciting the donation of historical artifacts and photos from community members.57

Many prominent citizens gave support and participated in the HBMA at its origination. The newly-selected Board of Directors consisted of Gene McNair (Chairman), Bobby Lackner (city commissioner/Jeweler), Bruce Aiken (historian), Bob Vezzetti (BISD music administrator), Irv Downing (banker), Randy McLelland (banker), Mary Yturria (philanthropist), Carlos Barreda (accountant), Henry Krause (retired diplomat), Dr. Homer Peña (university administrator), Gracie de Peña (BISD board member), Don Breeden (commercial artist), and David Garza (lawyer).58

Two major developments occurred during the early years of the HBMA. The first was the construction of the Mary Yturria Education Center in 1990. Built behind the Historic Brownsville Museum in the same Spanish Colonial style, the structure provided a high-ceiling auditorium with space for a large audience, plus some office space. The new building was heavily-utilized by the Brownsville Independent School District for teachers meetings, and workshops, as well as meetings by other public, non-profit, and private entities. The HBMA held
its social functions, programs, and fundraisers here, and the walls often displayed important exhibitions of art.\textsuperscript{59}

The second major development began in 1995, when Gene Balch, owner of a machine shop, began work on restoring an 1870’s Baldwin locomotive that had operated on the Rio Grande Railroad from Port Isabel to Brownsville. The restored engine was housed in a separate Spanish Colonial structure designed by architect Calvin Walker and named for Simon Celaya, first president of the railroad. The engine became an important attraction for the museum.\textsuperscript{60}

The museum building itself underwent substantial interior changes in 2004, “. . . renovating its displays and exhibits with an $80,000 donation from Charles Isbell. Executive Director Marisela Cortez asserted that the result “would be a lot more child-friendly.”\textsuperscript{61}

Marisela Cortez was the longest-serving executive director of the HBMA, becoming acting director in September 1997, and departing in January 2013, to take a position on new Congressman Filemon Vela’s staff.\textsuperscript{62} The first executive director, Larry Bowles, was replaced by Brian Robertson, author of \textit{Wild Horse Desert}, an historical perspective on South Texas. When Robertson departed in 1992, noted local historian Bruce Aiken accepted the position, resigning for health reasons in 1997.\textsuperscript{63} When Marisela Cortez stepped down in 2013, she was succeeded by Maribel Guerrero, previously an employee and briefly board president. Guerrero resigned to take another position in 2016.\textsuperscript{64}

Over the years, the HBMA staff organized many displays, exhibits, and programs. Some notable examples include the trolley tours in the 1980s, Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament School display, historic toys, women in history, Indian artifacts, a replica of the Matamoros Battalion flag, and a collaborative display of vintage wedding dresses with other museums. Three of the most popular exhibitions were Bishop Raymundo Peña’s nativity scenes “from around the world,” the \textit{Día de los Muertos} altars assembled by Patricia Quilantan and the Mexican Consulate,\textsuperscript{65} and artist Mark

A major challenge for almost any museum is fundraising. The HBMA, of course, charged for memberships and obtained support from the City of Brownsville as well, and also obtained contributions from a private bingo operation, plus “fines” paid to “Brush Court” during Charro Days. The HBMA Board of Directors and the Executive Directors employed a variety of social events as fundraisers. Over the years, these included Valentine’s Day Dinners, wine-tastings, “Pint Night,” and ultimately, Paella Fest, involving team competition.67

The essential focus on fund-raising, especially after some reductions in City funding, may have prompted over-reliance on social activities at the expense of the historical mission, though that was never abandoned. Although membership numbered in the high hundreds during the 1990’s, failure to follow-up on renewals and solicit new members took its toll on finances. The last president, Harry McNair, persuaded the Board of Directors to support a potential merger with the Brownsville Historical Association to enhance the mutual interests and goals of both organizations.68 In a brief retrospective McNair named some of the people who had made enduring contributions to the HBMA, such as Frank and Mary Yturria, Calvin Walker, and Bruce Aiken, in addition to the members of the final board of directors, including Walter Plitt, Norma Valle, Maria Hinojosa, and Scott Pajeski.69

Impetus for a merger between the BHA and the HBMA built slowly over several years. Members of both boards of directors expressed interest in such a development, and there was an informal meeting of some directors from both boards a few years before serious negotiations began. Priscilla Rodriguez, executive director of the BHA, with the encouragement of Brownsville City Manager
Charlie Cabler, expressed support for negotiations. Ultimately, though, it was the leadership of HBM President Harry McNair that enabled actual negotiations. The BHA was represented primarily by President Eric Valle, Calvin Walker, and Larry Lof.  

Among the issues to be resolved were the choice of an executive director and the combining of assets. Since some of the assets had been donated to both organizations by the distinguished Yturria and Stillman families, this was a sensitive topic. Ultimately members of both families proved to be very supportive. The executive director issue was resolved by a vacancy in that position at the HBM and the part-time employment of BHA Executive Director Tara Putegnat to supervise HBM operations. When the merger was completed, Putegnat continued as the head of the combined operation. Clearly Putegnat’s tactful management in both components had facilitated the merger.  

Other issues of the merger included legal ramifications, of particular concern to the three lawyers on the BHA Board, but the board ultimately voted against delay. The finances of both organizations were carefully considered since neither could have been considered prosperous nor profligate. It was determined that neither component would be an undue burden on the other. 

Before consummation of the merger, both organizations agreed to a year of “partnership” with shared governance by both boards acting jointly. At the end of 2017, the merger was formalized, and HBMA board members were welcomed to the BHA Board. The combined organization took the name of the elder, the Brownsville Historical Association.  

The new combined BHA continues to serve the community by continuing with old programs and activities, like the historical happy hours, walking tours, and the Paella Festival, but has also developed new programs and has been awarded new grants. In 2018, the BHA received a Historical Foundation grant to repair the Stillman House’s windows and shutters. The BHA along with the Brownsville Preservation Society and the Brownsville Convention and Visitors Bureau, helped plan and host several
activities in the 2018 *Preservation Texas Summit in Brownsville*. The “Father’s Day Classic Car Rally” has been held since 2016 in the parking lot of the Historic Brownsville Museum. A new event sponsored by the BHA, “Brownsville Vintage Day,” was held, in April of 2018, in Market Square. A rehabilitation of the second floor of Market Square also began, in April of 2018, and is currently underway. Long time BHA employee Esther Ramirez now resides in the apartment behind the Stillman House, which was formerly the residence of the long-time caretaker of the Stillman House, Kino Camarillo.

In recent years, the BHA has made strategic planning efforts and has looked towards self-improvement. In 2006, a five-year strategic plan was proposed under the leadership of then Chairman of the Board Larry Lof. The BHA has fulfilled many of their goals, including improving infrastructure, digitization of the collections, seeking more funding from grants, hiring professional staff, and membership growth, but still needs improvement in other areas. Since the BHA is a member of the Alliance of Museums, in 2017 they applied for a Museum Assessment Program peer review through the American Alliance of Museums. The review found the BHA a healthy organization and made several recommendations, three of which were for them to engage in a re-branding with a marketing plan, to develop a five-year strategic plan with a new mission statement, and to diversify and develop new income sources.

New achievements, new challenges (and old), new opportunities. The recent history of the Brownsville Historical Association encompasses all of these. At the root, most of the frustrating issues can be attributed to finances, a problem shared with the broader community. Fortunately, the BHA has the will, under the leadership of President Harry McNair and Executive Director Tara Putegnat, to cope with the challenges, issues, and opportunities of the present and future.
Endnotes


12 “BHA Annual Member’s Meeting,” January 16, 2014.


14 “Texas Southmost College District Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Board of Trustees,” January 21, 2016.


26 “BHA Annual Member’s Meeting,” January 16, 2014.


48 Edelstein, A Life and History, 39.


50 McNair, “Historic Brownsville Museum Association.”

51 Ibid.


53 Ibid.

54 Robert Vezzetti, interview by Anthony Knopp, Brownsville, June 20, 2018.

55 McNair, “Historic Brownsville Museum Association.”
56 Ibid.


63 Ibid.


67 Reagan, “For a Good Cause.”

68 Harry McNair, interview by Anthony Knopp, Brownsville, July 23, 2018.

69 Ibid.

70 Calvin Walker, interview by Anthony Knopp, Brownsville, August 6, 2018.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.
Ibid. Walker, BHA board chairman in 2016, “tried to be a unifier,” but noted that the executive director “runs the operation.”


Brownsville Historical Association. 2018. “We are excited to announce the Brownsville Historical Association has begun the rehabilitation of the second floor at our beautiful Market Square.” Facebook April 14, 2018. https://www.facebook.com/brownsvillehistoricalassociation/posts/10156272355578620?__xts__=%5B%5D=68.ARAAd5tGzQwo2qk0wbEzMLJzf-HSfx7Z94mITX4ngtGtqpw0kS22JCyfPNAZztpH0ETov9wd8XmLsmXkbK2L-jXB1wcu7_vmFu9DhiT9muGq1V-XUK50tJuWHGy2ri0lmUtlRPPKJKme3__tn__=-R.


The publication of this sixteenth book in the UT-B/UT-RGV Regional History Series seems an appropriate time to look back at the story of the project itself. At the time of the establishment of the Pan American University Upper-level and Graduate Center in Brownsville in 1973, there was an urgent need for more research and publication in the history of Brownsville. The first steps to address this need were taken in the 1980s by members of the Brownsville Historical Society (including Robert Vezetti) and some of the faculty at Texas Southmost College (including Ruby Wooldridge). Wooldridge and Vezetti collaborated to produce Brownsville: An Illustrated History in 1982.

The need for an outlet for articles about local history was first addressed by Antonio Zavaleta, a Ph.D. in Anthropology trained at the University of Texas at Austin and an Instructor at Texas Southmost College in Brownsville, who founded The Borderlands Journal. Zavaleta’s expertise in local history was rooted in his belonging to one of the oldest and most distinguished ranching families of the Rio Grande Valley, hailing back to the Basque area of Spain. He was the recipient of an American G.I. Forum Award of Merit and was an Andrew W. Mellon Fellow.

Pan American University at Brownsville, newly founded as an upper division and graduate center in 1973, joined the effort in 1986. At that time, PAU-B’s President, Homer Peña, held a meeting to ask his faculty members to suggest projects to help celebrate the Texas Sesquicentennial (the one hundred
fifty-year anniversary of Texas independence). Milo Kearney volunteered to edit a book of articles about local history.

Kearney, a Woodrow Wilson Fellow, a Minnie Stevens Piper Professor, a Fulbright scholar, and a recipient of the UT Chancellor’s Award for Outstanding Teaching, who had spent a year as an Assistant Professor of history at the Goethe Universität in Frankfurt/Main, Germany, had joined the history faculty at Pan American University in 1970 as a result of an interest in U.S.-Mexican border culture sparked in 1958, when he had first visited Brownsville and Matamoros. The interplay of Spanish and English and of Mexican and American launched a hobby of visiting U.S.-Mexican twin cities. While his Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley was in European medieval history, with eventually several published books in ancient, medieval, world, American, and San Antonio history, as well as of poetry, Kearney’s concurrent interest in Border culture led him to take employment as a Professor in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

The series on local history began with *Studies in Brownsville History* in 1986. This initial book presented articles by scholars from Pan American University at Brownsville, Pan American University at Edinburg, Texas, Texas Southmost College in Brownsville, and the Brownsville Historical Society, as well as by a PAU-B graduate student. Local folktales, collected by Peter Gawenda, were included. The book was illustrated by nine Brownsville artists: Charlie Becker, Cynthia Dufour, Ben Garza, Peter Gawenda, John Haller, Vivian Kearney, Cornelio Nouel, Cynthia Pierce, and Eli Rodríguez.

This project led on to the publishing, in 1989, with the continuing support of President Homer Peña (whose institution’s name had now been changed to the University of Texas-Pan American-Brownsville) of the second book in the series: *More Studies in Brownsville History*. By this time, Kearney had increased his involvement in local history by collaborating with Alfonso Gómez Arguelles and Yolanda Z. Gonzalez to publish *A Brief History of Education in Brownsville and Matamoros*
Articles included in the *More Studies in Brownsville History*, beside coming from members of the institutions mentioned for the first book, were contributed by faculty members of the University of Texas-Pan American-Edinburg and by a member of the *Sociedad Tamaulipeco de la Historia de Matamoros*. Again, folktales were included, this time collected by the Matamoros folklorist Manuel Rodríguez Brayda and by Peter Gawenda. Illustrations were provided by Bob Angel, Charlie Becker, Jaime Garza Salinas (Garsal), Peter Gawenda, Gary Hatcher, Milo Kearney, Vivian Kearney, and Cynthia Pierce.

The third book in the series, *Still More Studies in Brownsville History*, was published in 1991. This was the last book to be prepared under the auspices of President Peña, whose institution by this time had been transformed into the University of Texas at Brownsville. This third volume introduced the practice of featuring local poets, with one poem about Brownsville at the beginning of the book and another at the end. This volume presented poems by James Cowen and by Bob Rose. Beside contributions from the institutions mentioned above, articles were written by the curator of the Brownsville Historical Museum. Folktales collected by Peter Gawenda were included once more, with sketches by Bob Angell, Mike Clark, Maria Garza, Peter Gawenda, Gary Hatcher, Milo Kearney, Vivian Kearney, Cynthia Pierce, Letty Rendón Jamar, and Bernardo Reyes.

After the merger of the University of Texas at Brownsville with Texas Southmost College in 1993, Anthony (Tony) Knopp and Antonio Zavaleta, both already faculty members of Texas Southmost College and two of the greatest authorities on local history, joined as co-editors of the series. The addition of their expertise and energy added a major new boost to the series. Antonio Zavaleta—who became Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, of the new University of Texas at Brownsville—took over the financial sponsorship of the series. Zavaleta also received the Mort Rosenfeld Award in 1995, the Best National
Documentary Film Award in 1996, and the Gold Apple Award in both 1996 and 1997 for his documentary film series *Al Alma del Pueblo: The Mexican Americans*.

For his part, Tony Knopp brought keen editorial skills, specialized training in Latin American history, and a major commitment to local history to the project. He had majored in history at all three levels of a B.A. from the University of St. Thomas, an M.A. from the University of Minnesota, and a Ph.D. from Texas Tech University, with a helpful undergraduate minor in Spanish at the University of St. Thomas. In 1991, Kearney and Knopp published *Boom and Bust: The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville* (Eakin Press) and, in 1995, *Border Cuates: A History of the U.S.-Mexican Twin Cities*. Knopp’s role as a member of the Board of Directors and then President of the Brownsville Historical Association (1988-1991) and as a member of the Brownsville City Heritage Council and the Palo Alto National Park Committee allowed him to solicit new contributors for the series. The merger of the two schools expanded UT-B’s history faculty from one to many, allowing teaching in specializations. While Kearney restricted himself increasingly to teaching courses in early European history, Knopp taught the history of Modern Latin American, of the U.S.-Mexican Border, and of Brownsville and Matamoros. Knopp also led frequent historical tours of Brownsville.

In this period, two more books were added to the series, whose scope was expanded to include, first, Matamoros, and, then, the rest of Cameron County as well. *Studies in Brownsville and Matamoros History* appeared in 1995. It was illustrated with sketches of historic Brownsville buildings by Brownsville artist Don Breeden, with folktales contributed by Peter Gawenda. New sources of contribution included a faculty member of Rice University, the Director of the Brownsville City Planning Office, and the Director of the Palo Alto National Battlefield. Milo Kearney taught courses in U.S.-Mexican Border history, on a Fulbright Scholarship, in 1992-1993, at Matamoros’ *Instituto*
Tecnológico, facilitating more participation in the 1995 book from scholars in Brownsville’s sister city across the Río Grande. These included faculty members of the Instituto Tecnológico of Matamoros, the Director of the Hogar Para Mujeres of Matamoros, and members of the Sociedad Tamaulipecas de la Historia de Matamoros. The poems were also about Matamoros—one by Manuel Rodríguez Brayda and another by Alfonso Gómez Arguelles.

In 1997, the scope of the series was further expanded with the publication of Studies in Matamoros and Cameron County History. Carlos Gómez, of the University of Texas at Brownsville Art Department, illustrated the work with Surrealist evocations of Valley culture. Miguel Gallegos, Marty Lewis, and Manuel Rodríguez Brayda contributed poems. Articles were now additionally submitted by scholars from western Cameron County, faculty members at the Colegio de la Frontera Norte of Matamoros and San Antonio College, a member of the Anchorage Foundation of Texas, and the Cronista Municipal of Ciudad Río Bravo, Tamaulipas.

Another lapse of the series occurred with the promotion of Antonio Zavaleta from the position of Dean of the School of Liberal Arts at UT-B to that of Vice-President for External Affairs. However, in 2005, Zavaleta rescued the series by supporting it from his new office. By this time, Tony Knopp had co-authored Brownsville: Portrait of a Border City (Eakin) with William Adams in 1997, and, in 2001, Kearney and Manuel Medrano had published Medieval Culture and the Mexican American Borderlands (Texas A & M University Press). The same year, Kearney also published Stories Brownsville Told Its Children: A Child’s History of Brownsville / Historias Que Brownsville Contó a sus Hijos: Una Historia de Brownsville para Niños (Eakin Press). He had also written “Redbeard of the Río Grande,” a two-act musical play about Brownsville’s and Matamoros’ bandit hero Juan Cortina, performed by the Bravo Opera Company of the music department of the University of Texas at Brownsville, in 2004, at the Kenedy Ranch Museum in Sarita, Texas, in 2005; at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio, Texas, in 2005; and
by the University of Texas at Brownsville Math and Science
Academy, at the SET-B Auditorium, in 2008.

The resuscitated book series broadened its scope still again
to include all of the Lower Rio Grande Valley on both sides
of the river. In 2005, Volume Six appeared under the title of
Studies in Rio Grande Valley History. The book was illustrated by
Brownsville artists Jessica Cisneros and Salomón Colmenero
with sketches of historical scenes from the Lower Rio Grande
Valley ranging from the 1760s down to the present. Scholars
from Hidalgo County now began to make a greater contribu-
tion, and new contributing institutions included the Curator of
Archives and Collections at the Museum of South Texas His-
tory in Edinburg, a faculty member at Cy-Fair College in Cy-
press, Texas, the Brownsville Public Information Officer, the
Archivista of Matamoros, a member of the Brownsville Histor-
ical Association, members of the Sociedad Tamaulipecan de la His-
toria de Matamoros, and the past Master of East Dallas Masonic
Lodge # 1200 and of Keystone Masonic Lodge # 1143.

In 2006, Further Studies in Rio Grande Valley History was il-
ustrated by Eduardo Ybarra with sketches evoking the spirit
of different Valley towns. Newly-contributing sources included
the Director of Historical Preservation for the City of Port Isa-
bel and the Curator of Archives and Collections at the Museum
of South Texas History in Edinburg. At this point, Milo Kear-
ney and Tony Knopp both retired, but continued their work on
the series as Professors Emeriti, later joined in this status by
Tony Zavaleta.

In 2008, Additional Studies in Rio Grande Valley History was
illustrated by Noel Palménez with Valley birds and animals.
Folktales collected and illustrated by Peter Gawenda were in-
cluded, and Chip Dameron wrote poems. New sources of arti-
cles were a faculty member at Our Lady of the Lake University
in San Antonio, the Regional Coordinator of the Texas Tropical
Trail Tourism Program in the Rio Grande Valley, and the Archi-
vista of Reynosa.
In 2009, Antonio Zavaleta received the Premio Ohtli award from the Republic of Mexico for bettering Mexicans outside the country. Also in 2009, Zavaleta and Alberto Salinas, Jr. published *Curandero Conversations: El Niño Fidencio, Shamanism and Healing Traditions of the Borderlands*. In the same year, Tony Knopp directed a project called Brownsville-21 (as in 21st Century technology) at the Brownsville Heritage Complex, working with Preservation America. It established a walking tour complete with map, I-PODs, CD recordings, DVDs, large signage, kiosks placed at several sites around the city, among other features. He also published *Charro Days in Brownsville* together with Manuel Medrano and Priscilla Rodríguez by Arcadia Press (2009). Also, Kearney’s play, expanded and transformed into *Border Walls: A Musical About Redbeard of the Rio Grande*, was published at the end of 2008 (by the Arnulfo Oliveira Literary Society).

In 2010, Dr. Zavaleta’s new position as Director of the Texas Center for Border and Transnational Studies at the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College allowed him to continue his sponsorship of the series from that office. That year of 2010, *Continuing Studies in Rio Grande Valley History* was illustrated by Rick Zamorano and Milo Kearney, with poems by Vivian Kearney. One new source of articles was the Executive Director of the Brownsville Historic City Cemetery.

In 2011, *Ongoing Studies in Rio Grande Valley History* was illustrated by Carlos Gómez, with poems by Milo Kearney. New sources of articles were a Senior Texas Ranger Captain and a University of California at Berkeley graduate student.


In 2013, *More Studies in Rio Grande Valley History* was illustrated by Peter Gawenda and Milo Kearney, with poems by Milo Kearney. New sources of articles were a faculty member at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, the Curator of the *Archivos Cinematográficos Mexicanos* in Harlingen, the Principal Investigator at SWCA
Environmental Consultants in Austin, and the President of the Bexareños Genealogical and Historical Society in San Antonio.

The separation of the University of Texas at Brownsville from Texas Southmost College in 2014 ended Dr. Zavaleta’s support for the series from the Texas Center for Border and Transnational Studies. At this point, financial support was assumed by the UT-B Provost Dr. Alan Artibise.

In 2014, *Still More Studies in Rio Grande Valley History* was illustrated by Milo Kearney, with poems by Josie Mixon and Lyon Rathbun. New sources of articles were faculty members at Georgia Southern University, the University of Texas at San Antonio, and East Stroudsburg University, Pennsylvania, and a doctoral student at Stanford University.

At this point, Dr. Thomas Daniel Knight of the history faculty at the University of Texas-Pan American, with a Ph.D. in early American history from Oxford University, agreed to add his major editing and research skills to the editorial team, beginning with the thirteenth book in the series. Knight’s interest in local history dated to the 1980s, when he worked at a local archives and historical center in Georgia. He edited one local history periodical for several years and served as co-editor of another, compiled two volumes on local history published by the Troup County Archives and Historical Society and authoring several family histories. He continued his interest in local history at Washington and Lee University, the University of Michigan, and Oxford University while completing his academic training in early American, southern U. S., and Atlantic World history. Knight’s arrival in the Rio Grande Valley in 2004 kindled a similar interest in the region’s history that led to his involvement with the book series. Knight’s joining the project added his additional expertise and widened the Valley base for soliciting research in the period leading to the merger of the University of Texas-Pan American with the University of Texas at Brownsville into the new University of Texas—Rio Grande Valley.
In 2015, *Yet More Studies in Rio Grande Valley History* was illustrated by Lydia Blanchard and Delfino Martínez, with poems by Elvia Ardalani, James Brandenburg, and Janie Alonso.

In 2016, *Extra Studies in Rio Grande Valley History* was the first book in the series put out by the newly-combined University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, thanks to financial support left by the out-going UTB, co-ordinated by Dr. Javier Martínez, Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at the new university. It featured illustrations by Eduardo Ybarra and poems by Manuel Medrano. New sources of articles were a faculty member at Pace University, New York City and the secretary of the Cameron County Historical Commission.

The fifteenth book in the series, *Supplementary Studies in Rio Grande Valley History*, was the result of still another change, as the series received financial support from UTRGV’s College of Liberal Arts, Graduate College, and Provost’s Office, as well as support from external gifts made to the university. Dr. Knight generously took on the formidable task of setting up this new arrangement, and Dr. Zavaleta gained the financial support of the Brownsville Historical Association under the direction of Tara Putegnat. The volume featured poems by Tom Emrick and illustrations by Milo Kearney based on world-famous paintings transformed into comments on Valley life. New sources of articles included those by faculty members at Trinity University in San Antonio and California State University at Northridge, as well as by Walter Wilson, author of the biographies *James D. Bulloch* and *The Bulloch Belles*.

The present sixteenth book, *New Studies in Rio Grande Valley History*, was once again saved by Dr. Zavaleta, who, from his position as a board member of Texas Southmost College, played a decisive role in obtaining the bulk of the funding from that institution, with the support of TSC President Dr. Jesús Roberto Rodríguez, in addition to contributions from UTRGV and the Brownsville Historical Association. It was agreed to embark on a new path for the continued publication of the series with a
partnership between UTRGV and TSC. New Studies contains poems by Mario Barrera, Manuel Fernández Guzmán Jiménez, and Ralph Martin, and is illustrated by sketches of typical Valley plants by Myrna Ellison.

Thus, the series has grown from a one-time experiment into a series extending over two decades down to the present 2018 publication, and from a strictly Brownsville product into more of a Valley-wide effort. It would be gratifying if it were to provide the foundation for more publications covering the rich historical heritage of the Rio Grande Valley for years to come.

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Dreamers

Manuel Fernando Guzmán Jiménez

Deportación masiva, orden superior
los *dreamers* en suspenso, me quedo o me voy.

Todos vinieron de lejos, buscando una oportunidad,
caminaron el desierto o en el vientre de mamá.

No me expulsen, no me lancen,
quiero seguir estudiando, no me manden para atrás.

Entre el Bravo y el desierto
cuánta gente no resistió,
los *dreamers* damos la cara,
¡No a la deportación!
RECENT BORDER PROBLEMS
Viajes peligrosos: 
El tránsito de menores migrantes mexicanos por la frontera

por

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Cuando le pregunté a Luis cómo había cruzado la frontera México-Estados Unidos, por algunos segundos guardó silencio, como si tratara de recordar o dudara en compartirme o no su experiencia. Enseguida narró que él, junto con dos amigos, había llegado a una ciudad fronteriza de Tamaulipas, al noreste de México, y ahí habían contactado a un hombre, quien los llevó a una casa donde había otras personas, jóvenes y adultas. “El señor cuidaba la casa y traía una pistola,” continuó narrando, “y nos dijo que cruzaríamos en la madrugada, pero que mientras, no hiciéramos pedo, porque si no íbamos a valer madre con la mañana.”

Luis, sus amigos y el resto de personas en la casa, cruzaron la frontera, guiados por una persona más a quien, según se enteró, le pagaban por viaje. Sin embargo, a las pocas horas fueron descubiertos por la migra, como coloquialmente se conocen los agentes de la Patrulla Fronteriza. El guía huyó, pero Luis y el resto se asustaron y agacharon mientras los agentes los esposaron y subían a las camionetas. Enseguida los llevaron a una estación migratoria que Luis definió como “un congelador donde sólo les dieron un sándwich y un jugo.” Después les hicieron preguntas y les dijeron que firmaran un documento, hasta que al otro día llegó gente del Consulado Mexicano y fueron repatriados al país.

La historia de Luis remite al tema de la migración de menores mexicanos, e incluso de adultos, nacionales y extranjeros, que de forma irregular cruzan la frontera México-Estados Unidos por diferentes rutas geográficas. Específicamente remite a
un problema antropológico: las experiencias de violencia que viven los menores al interactuar con coyotes insertos en el crimen organizado (el Cártel o la maña) y agentes de la Patrulla Fronteriza (la migra).

Este trabajo tiene como objetivo analizar este problema, sintetizado en la siguiente pregunta de investigación: a pesar de todo, ¿cómo los menores migrantes sobreviven a diferentes expresiones de violencia al llegar y cruzar la frontera? Para responder a esta pregunta, aquí se echará mano de la propuesta de Slack y Whiteford en torno a la “violencia postestructural,” la cual es útil para comprender las formas de violencia estructural que vulneran a los menores migrantes, así como las acciones y reacciones que éstos despliegan para mitigar dicha violencia.

A manera de supuesto planteo que, desde hace una década, con el incremento de la violencia criminal en México y el reforzamiento de la seguridad fronteriza en Estados Unidos, no sólo la migración irregular se ha redefinido en fronteras como la que comparten Tamaulipas y Texas, tal como plantea Correa Cabrera, sino también las experiencias y estrategias de los migrantes. Desde esta perspectiva, se trata de viajes peligrosos que los menores migrantes emprenden al llegar a la frontera e interactuar con coyotes del Cártel del Golfo, y al cruzar la frontera e interactuar con agentes de la Patrulla Fronteriza de Estados Unidos.

Este artículo deriva de una investigación realizada a fines del años 2016 y principios del 2017, en el marco del proyecto Deporting youth: The emotional and physical effects of trauma and violence among Mexican migrant minors, el cual fue realizado en un Centro de Atención a Menores Fronterizos (CAMEF por sus siglas) situado en una ciudad fronteriza de Tamaulipas, a donde llegan menores mexicanos no acompañados, que fueron detenidos y repatriados por la Patrulla Fronteriza. Aquí se utiliza información preliminar de una encuesta piloto aplicada a veinticuatro menores repatriados, de ambos sexos, quienes oscilaban entre los trece y diecisiete años de edad, y procedían de diferentes regiones de México.
Aunque el proyecto se basó en un cuestionario, también se hicieron notas de campo en las que se registraron conversaciones *off-side*, en las cuales los menores narraban a detalle experiencias no compartidas en la encuesta, tal como lo hizo Luis. Además, se hicieron entrevistas formales e informales con la coordinadora y el personal del CAMEF, así como con autoridades migratorias y representantes de asociaciones de apoyo a migrantes en la ciudad. También se hicieron recorridos en la ribera del río Bravo, así como en la central de autobuses, donde constantemente llegan migrantes deportados de Estados Unidos.

**Migrantes y violencia postestructural**

El tema de la violencia se ha prestado a una serie de clasificaciones y debates, las cuales no siempre remiten a contextos fronterizos. No obstante, gran parte de los analistas sociales han apropiado tales clasificaciones y debates para abordar y explicar fenómenos migratorios, en especial la migración irregular de personas que se consideran vulnerables, tales como las mujeres, los ancianos y los menores de edad, planteando que, derivado de condiciones estructurales, físicas e incluso psicológicas en los países de origen, de tránsito o de destino, los migrantes son vulnerables.

Lo anterior remite a una relación causal entre violencia y vulnerabilidad de los migrantes que no sólo ha sido formulada en términos teóricos, sino también demostrada sociológica o etnográficamente; muestra de ello son estudios como los ya citados e incluso informes y análisis sobre la vulnerabilidad de menores migrantes de México o Centroamérica al vivir una serie de riesgos en su trayecto y sus derechos humanos ser violentados por parte de autoridades y delincuentes.

No obstante, tal relación causal posiciona a los migrantes irregulares, ya sean adultos o menores de edad, como simples “marionetas sociales” que son víctimas de mecanismos normativos y estructurales, tal como enfatizó Giddens en su teoría de la
acción y la estructuración social. En otras palabras, se considera a los migrantes como actores sociales desprovistos de procesos de reflexividad y mucho menos que echan mano de su agencia ante situaciones de adversidad estructural. Esta reflexión invita a repensar cómo es que, a pesar de la violencia y la vulnerabilidad, los migrantes logran sobrevivir a situaciones de adversidad.

Al respecto, la propuesta formulada por Slack y Whiteford sobre lo que llaman “violencia postestructural” es por demás relevante. Ellos la definen como “las maneras en que la gente reacciona con las limitaciones resultantes de la violencia estructural,” es decir, “qué acciones lleva a cabo el individuo para mitigar su situación vulnerable y precaria.” Obviamente, se trata de una propuesta incipiente, que no niega la existencia de violencia estructural, sino más bien que invita a repensar qué hacen las personas para evadirla, atenuarla e incluso redefinirla en el marco de los constreñimientos y oportunidades que se les presentan.

En suma, se trata de una propuesta que intenta comprender y articular el nivel estructural de la violencia con el nivel micro de la agencia de los migrantes. En el caso de México, dicha violencia estructural se ha hecho visible desde el año 2006 a través de la llamada “guerra contra el narcotráfico” que puso en entredicho la soberanía, la gubernamentalidad y la seguridad ciudadana; con el asesinato de migrantes en San Fernando en el 2010; o bien con la implementación del Plan Frontera Sur en el 2014 y el aumento de demandas por violación de derechos humanos de los migrantes.

Pero, por otro lado, la agencia de los migrantes también se ha hecho visible al sortear y sobrevivir a dicha violencia; de otra forma los antropólogos y otros analistas sociales no contaríamos con testigos (o informantes, si se prefiere) que dieran testimonio de la misma. Sin embargo, como aclaran Slack y Whiteford, el término “violencia postestructural” no sólo propone comprender la relación horizontal entre violencia estructural y agencia de los migrantes, sino también captar “las variadas formas de violencia que coinciden simultáneamente creando un escenario de violencia”, lo cual
invita a explorar la complejidad y matices de la violencia, así como a ir más allá del binomio víctima-victimario.

La migración por la frontera Tamaulipas-Texas

Con aproximadamente 350 kilómetros de longitud, la frontera entre Tamaulipas y Texas representa alrededor de un 10% de la frontera México-Estados Unidos. Es una región con una larga historia de vínculos económicos y culturales, principalmente entre las denominadas ciudades hermanas o gemelas (twin cities) como Matamoros-Brownsville, Reynosa-McAllen y Nuevo Laredo-Laredo. Sin embargo, también cuenta con una amplia tradición de migración de mexicanos, tanto documentada como irregular, a Estados Unidos.

Durante y después de la Revolución Mexicana, esta frontera se caracterizó por el flujo de migrantes mexicanos que huían a Estados Unidos ante el movimiento armado, así como por la situación económica que existía en el país. Tales flujos se acrecentaron a mediados del siglo XX con la creación de los programas Bracero, pero al término de estos también emergió la migración clandestina, la que llegó a constituir un negocio particular aliado con la corrupción de algunas autoridades migratorias, tanto mexicanas como texanas.

Al respecto, Duran y Massey han confirmado lo anterior al señalar que la migración irregular en México, así como el nacimiento de “coyotes,” tomaron auge cuando el gobierno de Estados Unidos optó porcluir los programas en cuestión, institucionalizar la frontera para dificultar el paso, hacer deportaciones masivas de trabajadores e impulsar la Immigration Reform and Control Act, en 1986, lo que suscitó el “coyotaje” como sistema alternativo para los migrantes sin documentos que deseaban traspasar la frontera México-Estados Unidos.

Estas y otras situaciones propiciaron que a la migración irregular de mexicanos se sumara la de centroamericanos. Sánchez Munguía afirma que desde la década de los ochenta
se hizo visible este fenómeno en la ruta migratoria Tamaulipas-Texas. Ello se debió, principalmente, a la distancia geográfica más corta por esta ruta con ciudades de la costa este americana, asimismo, porque en esta región había un número considerable de organizaciones civiles de apoyo a migrantes, y finalmente, porque existía una amplia red de “pateros” o “coyotes”.

En las últimas dos décadas, por la frontera Tamaulipas-Texas el flujo de migrantes mexicanos y centroamericanos ha tenido altibajos que responden a procesos socioeconómicos, a la violencia social y vigilancia en la región, así como a las redes de los migrantes en diferentes ciudades fronterizas, tal como sucede a lo largo de la frontera México-Estados Unidos. Lo anterior no ha menguado las actividades de los “coyotes” (también conocidos como “pateros” o “polleros”), por el contrario, son más visibles.

Sin embargo, al menos en la última década, como resultado de la llamada “guerra contra el narcotráfico” implementada en México desde el año 2006, no sólo se desató una ola de violencia entre grupos del crimen organizado y las fuerzas militares del país, sino también entre los propios grupos criminales disputando territorios y buscando negocios alternativos al tráfico de drogas. La frontera entre Tamaulipas y Texas no fue la excepción, pues dicha “guerra” tuvo efectos en las políticas de seguridad fronteriza, en la economía regional y, especialmente, en la migración irregular.

Al menos en la región, con la ruptura entre el Cartel del Golfo (CDG) y Los Zetas, dos grupos del crimen organizado que hasta antes del 2010 trabajaban de manera conjunta, gran parte de los migrantes en tránsito fueron víctimas de asaltos, extorsiones, secuestros e incluso asesinatos por estos últimos. Sin embargo, el CDG vio en la migración irregular un negocio rentable, al igual que el tráfico de armas y de drogas, por lo que empezó a monopolizar la actividad del “coyotaje” ante el alto flujo de migrantes mexicanos y centroamericanos por esta ruta migratoria.
Lo anterior se puede afirmar con base en el trabajo de campo etnográfico realizado. Por un lado, algunos de los menores entrevistados en la frontera de Tamaulipas, como Luis, narraron que quienes los “ayudaron” a cruzar la frontera pertenecían o pagaban a la maña: coloquialismo utilizado para etiquetar a quienes trabajan en alguna célula del Cartel del Golfo en la frontera de Tamaulipas.27

Por otro lado, las conversaciones con los jóvenes coyotes de una ciudad fronteriza tamaulipeca también confirman lo anterior. Según ellos, al menos en esta ruta, el “coyotaje” ya no se puede practicar como antaño de forma independiente: o se paga una “cuota” a la maña para poder cruzar a migrantes, o se pertenece a la misma siendo parte de la nómina. Esta situación evidencia que al menos en la región fronteriza entre Tamaulipas y Texas, la migración clandestina se ha vuelto un negocio del crimen organizado.28

Como antes se dijo, ello se debe a lo rentable del negocio de la migración irregular, pues los cobros a los migrantes son elevados y en dólares, mismos que varían dependiendo del lugar de origen en México (o Centroamérica) y de destino en Estados Unidos. Por ejemplo, el cobro a menores mexicanos que van al Valle de Texas o alguna ciudad de la costa este americana, oscila entre los 1,500 y 3,000 dólares, mientras que el cobro a menores centroamericanos cuesta en promedio 5,000 dólares. Además, según los testimonios de algunos menores, por algunas ciudades fronterizas de Tamaulipas semanalmente pasan entre dos y tres grupos de alrededor de veinte migrantes, ya sean del país o del extranjero.

Es decir, en esta región fronteriza los “coyotes” han dejado de ser traficantes autónomos. Aunque se han diversificado y tienen una división, especialización y profesionalización de “su trabajo” antes, durante y después de cruzar la frontera Tamaulipas-Texas, están subordinados al control del Cártel del Golfo, ya sea de algunos de sus grupos o líderes. Para los menores—o adultos—esta situación es un peligro, en particular al llegar a la frontera y ser llevados a las denominadas “casas de seguridad.” Sin embargo,
no es la única situación: al cruzar la frontera y ser detenidos por agentes de la Border Patrol, viven nuevos peligros.

Aunque algunos reportes periodísticos han señalado que los agentes de la Patrulla Fronteriza en Texas se distinguen por detener o rescatar a migrantes, o bien por señalar la injerencia de cártels en la migración clandestina, también incurren en prácticas que violentan los derechos humanos de los menores migrantes, tal como mostró un estudio realizado recientemente, en el que un número considerable de menores que durante su estancia en estaciones de detención, sufrieron frío intenso en “la congeladora,” fueron amenazados o bien obligados a firmar documentos que no entendían.

Si bien durante el último semestre de la administración de Barack Obama, 7,595 menores mexicanos fueron repatriados de Estados Unidos, mientras que en el primer semestre de la era de Donald Trump, se reportaron un total de 3,807 menores, en el 2017 tanto los menores como los adultos migrantes son más vulnerables en Estados Unidos, en especial con la aprobación y puesta en marcha de leyes como la SB4 en Texas, la cual prohíbe ciudades santuario y autoriza a la policía para cuestionar el estatus migratorio.

Además, la autorización de nuevas plazas para agentes de la Patrulla Fronteriza, así como la adquisición y uso de tecnología de punta a orillas del Río Grande, muestran el reforzamiento de la seguridad fronteriza; aunque es evidente que las denuncias contra agentes de la Patrulla Fronteriza, por violación de derechos de los migrantes, continúan, así como la impunidad de las mismas.

Lo anterior significa que para los menores –y adultos—migrantes, cruzar la frontera México-Estados Unidos, en la administración de Donald Trump, también se ha vuelto un viaje peligroso.

Viaje peligroso 1: menores y coyotes del Cártel

Desde hace varias décadas, la migración irregular de menores y adultos migrantes por la frontera México-Estados
Unidos es facilitada por los llamados coyotes, polleros o guías.\textsuperscript{37} La frontera compartida por Tamaulipas y Texas no ha sido la excepción: ya desde los años noventa algunos estudios identificaron la presencia de estos actores sociales,\textsuperscript{38} los cuales emergieron al finalizar el Programa Bracero, aprovechando su experiencia previa como migrantes y las necesidades de los migrantes en tránsito, tanto mexicanos como centroamericanos.

Sin embargo, el reforzamiento de la frontera estadounidense a partir del llamado 9/11 en el año 2001, así como el inicio, en el 2006, de la denominada “guerra contra el narcotráfico” en México, cambiaron el escenario de la migración clandestina a lo largo de la frontera. En el caso de Tamaulipas las pugnas entre grupos del crimen organizado como el Cártel del Golfo y Los Zetas, afectó el tránsito de migrantes, lo que resultó en el 2010 en el asesinato de 72 de ellos, de origen Centro y Sudamericano, en San Fernando.\textsuperscript{39} La hipótesis judicial fue que, este último grupo criminal, los asesinó porque no quisieron ser reclutados, o bien, porque sus familias no reunieron el suficiente dinero para pagar su secuestro.

Este hecho dio pie para pensar cómo algunos grupos criminales comenzaron a incursionar en “el negocio” de la migración clandestina, así como en otros. Un reportaje periodístico, por ejemplo, afirmó que al menos en ciudades fronterizas de Tamaulipas, el Cártel del Golfo había monopolizado no sólo el tránsiego de drogas, sino también la prostitución, la migración, la venta de gasolina, etc.\textsuperscript{40} Sin embargo, a diferencia de Los Zetas, el Cártel del Golfo no incursionó en la migración clandestina haciendo uso del secuestro, la extorsión y el asesinato, sino cobrando “cuotas” a los coyotes existentes, o bien poniendo sus propios coyotes.

Durante una entrevista, Joaquín, un menor migrante procedente de Oaxaca, expresaba: “Es que esos que lo cruzan a uno trabajan para la maña, porque si no, no trabajan y uno pues no pasa.” Como se observa, Joaquín, al igual que Luis, aluden a la maña como un ente poderoso que controla tanto a los coyotes
como a los migrantes; en este caso, *la maña* es el mote con el que se ha adjetivado a los grupos del Cártel del Golfo y el epítome de las actividades ilegales de sus miembros, a decir de *los mañosos*, la gente cuyo trabajo opera de forma clandestina pero visible.

A finales de la primera década del siglo XXI, un estudio identificó que el Cártel del Golfo estaba participando en el cruce clandestino de migrantes, aunque se supuso que era a través del cobro a los coyotes por protección. Sin embargo, como se ha mostrado recientemente en un estudio antropológico realizado a lo largo de la frontera de Tamaulipas, el sistema de coyotaje en esta región es controlado por el Cártel del Golfo y ha devenido en una división, especialización y profesionalización del mismo.

Hoy en día, este es el escenario con el que se “topan” tanto los menores como los adultos migrantes al llegar a la frontera de Tamaulipas. Los datos preliminares de la encuesta que usamos revelaron que, de los veinticuatro menores, un 33.4% viajaron y cruzaron la frontera en compañía de un “guía”, es decir, de un coyote. Esto significa que al menos tres de cada diez menores migrantes que viajan solos, hicieron uso de los servicios de un coyote, lo que se traduce en vivir riesgos al llegar y cruzar la frontera, que pueden derivar en algunas formas de violencia. Pero, ¿cuáles son éstas y cómo los menores la mitigan, evitan o redefinen?

Roberto, un menor migrante oriundo de Puebla, narraba que si bien su padre fue quien contactó al coyote, cuando él llegó a la frontera sentía miedo, el cual se acrecentó cuando el coyote lo llevó a una casa: “Era así como una casa, ahí había otro señor y más gente que hablaba raro, entonces nos dijeron: no hagan ruido y nada de asomarse por las ventanas, quien no quiera, aquí lo tableamos”. El caso de Roberto evidencia al menos tres formas de violencia que viven los menores al llegar a la frontera: 1) estar en el encierro en “casas de seguridad”, 2) estar sujetos a reglas y, 3) ser amenazados en caso de no cumplir las reglas.

Al menos los menores migrantes, cuyos padres o familiares contratan el servicio de un coyote, al llegar a la frontera son reciíbidos por éstos y llevados a “casas de seguridad”, las cuales
pueden ser casas semi-abandonadas, bodegas abandonadas o cuartos de hoteles de paso, según lo reveló un estudio previo en la región. En dichas casas de seguridad, los coyotes aglomeran a los migrantes, mexicanos y centroamericanos, adultos y menores, mujeres y hombres, en grupos que van desde las diez hasta las veinte personas, incluso más. Su estancia en las casas de seguridad varía: puede ser desde uno hasta tres días, dependiendo del número de migrantes que los coyotes reúnen, o de la “seguridad” para cruzar la frontera.

Durante su estancia en las casas de seguridad, los migrantes viven el encierro, el cual, como lo mostró un estudio, constituye una forma de violencia hacia los migrantes, que no sólo los trauma al temer por su seguridad, sino que también pone de relieve una violencia estructural que oscila entre la inercia del Estado para proteger a los migrantes y el poder de grupos criminales para violentarlos. Cabe destacar que, a pesar del encierro, ninguno de los menores entrevistados señaló haber sido víctima de alguna forma de violencia física o sexual, aunque sí verbal. Algunos como Juan, un menor de Veracruz, expresó: “Nomás me gritó porque le dije que yo quería salir, y que se enoja el que cuidaba”.

Además del encierro, la violencia en las casas de seguridad utilizadas por los coyotes adquiere mayor visibilidad con las reglas impuestas a los migrantes, tales como no asomarse a la ventana, no hablar entre sí y, mucho menos, hacer uso de teléfonos celulares. Un estudio afirmó que tales reglas en las casas de seguridad, constituyen indicios de una violencia directa utilizada contra los migrantes y, al mismo tiempo, son reglas utilizadas por los coyotes para proteger “su negocio” de los vecinos, la policía o el ejército.

Finalmente, la amenaza de los coyotes hacia los migrantes, referente a “ser tableados” si no cumplen con las reglas, evidentemente forma parte de una violencia que se traduce en el ejercicio del poder. Cabe destacar que esta forma de amenaza y sanción es la misma que utilizan los grupos del crimen organizado.
cuando detienen a miembros de otros grupos, o bien cuando alguno de sus miembros no acata las reglas: ser “tableado” literalmente significa ser golpeado con una tabla en las nalgas, y representa una forma de castigo. En el caso de los menores ninguno de ellos expresó haber sido tableado, aunque la amenaza estuvo latente.

Ahora bien, la pregunta obligada es: ¿cómo es que los menores migrantes sobreviven a estas formas de violencia al llegar a la frontera y estar en casas de seguridad controladas por los coyotes? Lo expresado por el representante de una asociación religiosa de apoyo a migrantes, es una pista inicial: “Los migrantes pagan antes un 50% a los coyotes, y el otro 50% cuando los dejan en Estados Unidos, entonces es un trato que tienen, si son menores es un trato con su familia.” En parte esta es una explicación económica del por qué los coyotes “no dañan el negocio,” además del hecho de que tienen que pagar a la maña por ejercer su trabajo.

Pero hay otra explicación, la cual se orienta a la propia seguridad de los coyotes y, por default, del crimen organizado en la región. Una autoridad migratoria comentaba que a veces las rutas usadas para el cruce de migrantes, son las mismas para cruzar drogas: “A ellos no les conviene dañar a los migrantes, porque saben que se calienta la plaza, o sea la policía o el ejército van a andar checando y friegan todos sus negocios.” “Calentar la plaza” significa que, en determinado territorio controlado por algún grupo criminal, se han presentado situaciones violentas que hacen inestable su control y es vigilado por autoridades del Estado, como la policía o el ejército.

Los menores migrantes entrevistados son conscientes tanto de su vulnerabilidad al estar en las casas de seguridad, como del hecho de que ellos representan un negocio para los coyotes. Ellos aprovechan esto último para poder mitigar su vulnerabilidad y las expresiones de violencia durante su estadía, haciendo uso de diferentes estrategias. Por ejemplo, Juana, una menor procedente de Chiapas, narraba que ella, aunque tenía miedo,
constantemente le recordaba al coyote que su familia le pagaría al llegar a Estados Unidos; de esta forma ella matizaba que, de no ser llevada o de llegar agredida, los coyotes perderían parte del negocio y se verían perjudicados.

Otros menores como Joaquín expresaron que, a pesar de las reglas impuestas al interior de las casas de seguridad, muchos migrantes las trasgredían valiéndose de dos estrategias: primero, entablando “amistad” con el coyote para poder hacer alguna llamada, segundo, encubriéndose con otros migrantes aprovechando el descuido de los coyotes, aun cuando podían ser sorprendidos. Aunque para todos los menores migrantes, la mejor forma de evitar amenazas o sanciones, era soportando el encierro y acatando las reglas durante su estadía. Después de todo, sobrevivieron para cruzar la frontera y contar su experiencia.

Viaje peligroso 2: menores y agentes de la Patrulla

El reforzamiento de la seguridad fronteriza en el sur de Estados Unidos no es nuevo, sin embargo, en la actual administración de Donald Trump ha adquirido otro matiz. Recientemente, el fiscal general, Jeff Sessions, durante un recorrido al cruce fronterizo cercano a Nogales, Arizona, expresó: “Para aquellos que siguen intentando ingresar de manera ilegal en este país, están advertidos: esta es una nueva era, esta es la era de Trump.” Además, agregó que su objetivo era: “frenar las actividades del crimen organizado, como el tráfico de personas, el narcotráfico y la violencia” y “que los casos migratorios se vuelvan prioritarios, que aumenten las penalidades y contraten más jueces de inmigración.”

El mensaje fue claro y directo. En la frontera de Texas con Tamaulipas, desde fines del año 2016, la Agencia de Aduanas y Protección Fronteriza (CBP) anticipó que se contratarían más agentes de la Patrulla Fronteriza, quienes apoyarían en el procesamiento de casos de inmigrantes. En el 2017 fue evidente el incremento de agentes que patrullaban la ribera
del río Bravo/Grande, así como la adquisición de tecnología para vigilatar la frontera, en particular por las ciudades de Nuevo Laredo-Laredo y Reynosa-McAllen. Ni los coyotes ni los migrantes desconocen esta situación, pero a pesar de los riesgos de ser detenidos, cruzan la frontera, aunque muchos sin éxito.

De los menores migrantes encuestados, el 95.8% dijeron haber sido detenidos por agentes de la Patrulla Fronteriza, o la migra. La mitad de ellos justo al cruzar la valla fronteriza, mientras que el resto mientras caminaban y se escondían entre el monte o predios de cultivo, al transitar por algún camino o carretera, o bien en algún pueblo o ciudad del Valle de Texas. Por otro lado, un 62.5% de los menores señalaron que no intentaron huir, esconderse o resistirse cuando los agentes los sorprendieron y detuvieron, aunque un 37.5% reconoció que sí lo hizo. Más allá de estos datos, lo relevante es conocer los peligros del viaje que emprenden los menores al ser detenidos y permanecer en custodia de los agentes de la Patrulla Fronteriza.

Obviamente se trata de un viaje en el que pueden estar expuestos a diversas formas de violencia. En la encuesta se les preguntó a los menores si durante su detención alguno de los agentes les había pegado, empujado o agarrado a la fuerza, es decir. Solamente un 12.5% de los menores respondieron que sí, es decir, tres de los veinticuatro casos. Uno de los menores expresó: “Me abrieron las piernas, muy fuerte y me tiraron al suelo para revisarme”, otro señaló que: “uno de los de la migra me metió el pie y me caí”, y finalmente uno más dijo: “Me pegaron con la pistola en la espalda muy fuerte”. También se les preguntó si habían atestiguado que algún agente abusara físicamente de algún migrante. Sólo un menor respondió que sí, diciendo que observó cuando un agente golpeó con su rodilla la costilla de un hombre.

Por otro lado, se les preguntó a los menores si en algún momento los agentes les habían gritado o amenazado. Un 29.2% respondieron que sí, es decir, siete de los veinticuatro casos. Sus narrativas dicen más que los números: “Me amenazaron que dijera con quién había cruzado, sino me iban a meter en la cárcel,”
“Maldiciones en inglés y en español: pinche perro y mojado,” “Que a la otra que volviera a cruzar me iban a matar,” “Que si no me detenía me iban a disparar,” “Maldiciones porque ya eran muchas veces que cruzaba.” Por otra parte, un 16.7% señalaron que los agentes los habían amenazado con un arma de fuego, mientras un 25% denunciaron que les habían quitado sus pertenencias y no se las regresaron.

Lo anterior muestra expresiones de violencia física, verbal y psicológica que viven algunos menores por parte de agentes de la Patrulla Fronteriza. No en balde, un 33.4% de ellos señalaron que, en general, los agentes los trataron “más o menos” con respeto, o bien no los respetaron. Otras formas de violencia, más institucionales, que los agentes ejercieron hacia los menores migrantes, fueron obligarlos a tomar sus huellas dactilares y firmar un documento, en un 95.8% de los casos; no explicarles que es lo que firmaban, en un 70.8% de los casos; permanecer por horas e incluso días en los Centros de Detención, los cuales, según los menores, son “congeladoras” porque la temperatura es fría o muy fría; ser interrogados por los agentes, en un 87.5% de los casos, sin la presencia de familiares o agentes consulares mexicanos; un 79.2% fueron esposados durante su traslado; entre otras.

Al respecto, la coordinadora del CAMEF decía: “Muchos de los menores me dicen que los de la Patrulla Fronteriza los tratan mal, entonces, es un problema porque corren riesgos cuando llegan y luego cuando los agarran, pero siguen cruzando la frontera.” El comentario de la coordinadora da pie para pensar cómo es que los menores migrantes mitigan formas de violencia como las que ejercen algunos agentes de la Patrulla Fronteriza hacia ellos, pero, por otro lado, por qué es que continúan cruzando a pesar de los riesgos y la violencia en ambos lados de la frontera. Las narrativas de algunos de ellos son un buen comienzo.

Joaquín, el menor de Oaxaca, comentaba que, si bien algunos agentes de la Patrulla Fronteriza los agredían, física, verbal o psicológicamente al momento de la detención, era porque
algunos de los menores intentaban huir, esconderse o resistirse; recordemos que sólo un 62.5% no optó por esto último, pero el restante 37.5% de los menores sí lo hicieron. Para Joaquín, la respuesta para evitar tales agresiones era todo lo contrario: “Cuando te cachan, pues ni modo, hay que quedarse quieto y hacer lo que dicen, sino te va mal.” Sin duda se trata de una elección, pero también de una estrategia, que los menores toman a sabiendas de posibles represalias.

Por supuesto, eso no justifica que los agentes de la Patrulla Fronteriza ejerzan violencia contra los menores migrantes, ya sea pegándoles, empujándolos, tomándolos a la fuerza, amenazándolos o insultándolos. Para otros menores, como Pedro de Tamaulipas, ante estas situaciones no hay más que “aguantar vara,” es decir, soportar y resignarse ante el hecho de que su estatus migratorio y su edad los hacen vulnerables con las autoridades migratorias. Sin embargo, en la expresión “aguantar vara” también hay una dimensión simbólica que explica por qué los menores soportan la violencia ejercida por agentes de la Patrulla Fronteriza.

En un estudio previo, Hernández-Hernández mostró que, entre los menores migrantes, “el aguante” constituye una expresión relacionada con el valor masculino para soportar las penurias al cruzar la frontera, pero, por otro lado, también es un elemento crucial que incita a la competencia entre los propios menores. Es decir, se tiene que “aguantar” para demostrar que se tiene valor ante la autoridad migratoria, pero también ante otros migrantes. Por supuesto, las menores migrantes también demuestran valor, aunque no como competencia, sino como solidaridad. Miriam, una menor de Zacatecas, comentaba: “Vimos que venía la migra, entonces todos corrieron, pero yo me quedé con una prima porque ella no podía correr, entonces me dijo: ¡vete!, pero le dije: no, aquí me quedo contigo, aunque nos agarren”.

Respecto a otras formas de violencia en los Centros de Detención en Texas, por ejemplo, cuando los agentes de la Patrulla Fronteriza interrogan y amedrentan a los menores migrantes
con llevarlos a la cárcel si no dicen sus datos personales, en algunos casos éstos dan información falsa; o bien cuando son obligados a firmar documentos que no les son explicados o permanecen en las “congeladoras,” insinúan a los agentes que se quejarán con el Consulado Mexicano. Por supuesto, se trata de sólo algunas estrategias que los menores despliegan para mitigar, evadir o redefinir la violencia que viven durante su detención y estancia en Estados Unidos.

Quizás una de las razones por las que agentes de la Patrulla Fronteriza ejercen hacia los menores migrantes formas de violencia como las descritas, es porque tienen un doble objetivo: el primero es amedrentarlos para que ya no vuelvan a cruzar la frontera, lo cual es poco probable en virtud de las crisis económicas y familiares en México, así como por el hecho de que al menos un 12.5% de los menores encuestados estaban decididos a volver a emigrar y un 25% estaban indecisos; el segundo es porque los agentes sospechan que entre ellos viaja el coyote o guía, lo cual en muchos casos es cierto, pero los menores se niegan a decirlo a pesar de las amenazas.

Esta última situación revela un vínculo entre la violencia ejercida por los coyotes de la maña y la ejercida por los agentes de la migra: los primeros los amenazan con no decir quién es el que los guía al cruzar la frontera, y los segundos con sancionarlos si no lo dicen. La estrategia seguida por los menores es negar que conocen quién es el guía, argumentando viajar solos, y de esta forma no ser objeto de represalias al regresar a México, ya sea perdiendo la oportunidad (y el dinero invertido por sus padres) de cruzar nuevamente con el mismo guía, ser tableados por delatores o estigmatizados por los mismos migrantes con los que cruzaron la frontera.

**Conclusiones**

Durante la última década, la frontera México-Estados Unidos ha sido protagonista de fenómenos relacionados con la
violencia: desde el 2006 la “guerra contra el narcotráfico” en México y sus secuelas entre la ciudadanía, hasta en 2010 la inversión del gobierno de Estados Unidos en el aseguramiento de la frontera. Estos fenómenos, como he mostrado, están relacionados entre sí y al menos para los menores migrantes mexicanos, significa que viajar a esta región fronteriza, sea un viaje peligroso, aunque también para los antropólogos que realizan trabajo de campo en la región.

Al menos en la región fronteriza conformada por Tamaulipas y Texas, el monopolio de la migración clandestina, como se ha mostrado, es resultado de las pugnas entre grupos del crimen organizado que empezaron a buscar otros negocios que les eran rentables, además del tráfico de drogas y de armas. Aunque el *modus operandi* es diferente, en esta región se ha caracterizado por el control de los coyotes, quienes trabajan para algún grupo criminal, o bien le pagan a éste por desempeñar su trabajo a expensas del pago de los migrantes.

Esto ha significado que, para los menores y adultos migrantes, llegar a la frontera sea un viaje peligroso en tanto pueden ser víctimas de extorsión, secuestro e incluso asesinato, o bien sujetos de una violencia que se matiza en agresiones verbales, psicológicas y simbólicas al permanecer en casas de seguridad mientras cruzan la frontera. Más allá de lo anterior, lo relevante es cómo a pesar de dichos peligros, los menores migrantes continúan llegando a la frontera y mitigan la violencia a través de diferentes estrategias tanto individuales como colectivas.

Por otro lado, es evidente que los menores son víctimas potenciales de violencia no sólo al transitar por la frontera de lado mexicano e interactuar con los coyotes del Cártel, sino también al cruzar la frontera hacia Estados Unidos. Los diferentes mecanismos utilizados por los agentes de la Patrulla Fronteriza para detener y procesar a los menores migrantes mexicanos, es una muestra de otras formas de violencia, institucionales, simbólicas e incluso físicas, que los agentes ejercen hacia los menores migrantes mexicanos. Sin embargo, también es evidente que
los menores han sabido sortear la violencia de la Patrulla Fronteriza a través de diferentes estrategias, aun cuando saben que serán deportados.

En síntesis, este trabajo muestra no sólo las diferentes formas de violencia social que viven menores migrantes mexicanos antes y después de cruzar la frontera México-Estados Unidos, sino también cómo en la actualidad se ha construido un tipo de violencia postestructural en la que víctimas de riesgos y agresiones, como son los menores migrantes, participan al igual que los victimarios, aunque usando otras formas para mitigar, cuestionar o reorientar la violencia social en la frontera.

El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, Matamoros, Tamaulipas

Fuentes

1  Por razones de confidencialidad para los entrevistados, todos los nombres utilizados a lo largo del documento, son seudónimos.

2  Aquí se apropia el término “menores” en el entendido de personas que en México aún no cumplen los 18 años de edad. Por ello, también se alude y prefiere la noción “migración de menores” por encima de adjetivaciones psicosociales e institucionales, como “migración infantil” o “migración de niñas, niños y adolescentes.”


5  Por razones de seguridad se omite el nombre del CAMEF y la ciudad donde se ubica.

6  A lo largo de este documento se utilizará el término “repatriados,” aludiendo a personas migrantes detenidas al cruzar la frontera y devueltas de forma inmediata por las autoridades migratorias de Estados Unidos (returns), más no a aquellos migrantes que ya tenían tiempo residiendo de forma irregular y que fueron deportados (removals).


12 Galtung, 1969.


22 Pereyra, 2012.


26 Correa Cabrera, 2012.


28 Izcara Palacios, 2012.


31 Rebecca Torres et al, 2015, “Immigration Policy & Children’s Rights:
Impacts of Repatriation of Unaccompanied Migrant Children from Mexico”, Proyecto financiado por Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies, University of Texas at Austin.


40 Martínez, 2011.

41 Spener, 2009, pp. 159-160.

43 Ibidem.


48 Univisión, 2016.

49 Garvin, 2017.


Immigrant Caging on the Texas-Mexico Border

by

Antonio Noé Zavaleta and Mitchell A. Kaplan

Introduction

From 2010 to 2014, the United States experienced an unprecedented rise in undocumented immigration along the Texas-Mexico border.¹ The Lower Rio Grande Valley Border Patrol sector saw the highest-ever influx of illegal immigration. The entire border region has become a primary entry point into the United States for a burgeoning refugee population of thousands of undocumented immigrants fleeing Central America and making the perilous journey across Mexico in a desperate attempt to enter the United States.²

The largest cohort of undocumented arrivals originates in the Central American countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, the region known as the Northern Triangle.³ The remainder of new arrivals is emanating from Mexico, despite the fact that Mexican immigration is now greatly reduced from what it was in previous years.

Since 2011, there has been a significant rise in illegal immigration to the United States from Central America. Of the three million Northern Triangle immigrants who were already living and working in the U.S. in 2015, more than half were illegal.

Approximately 250,000 of those are DREAMERS, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and Temporary Protection Status (TPS) recipients. Dreamers are children and young adults brought to the United States illegally by their illegal immigrant parents or guardians, who were younger than 31 years of age on June 15, 2012, and who entered the
United States before the age of 16, living in the United States continuously since 2007. Immigrants from the three nations of the Northern Triangle of Central America living in the United States play a major role as contributors to the national economies of their homelands. Immigrants from the Northern Triangle countries of Central America are currently responsible for the remission of an estimated $16 billion in income earned in the United States and sent to their home countries each year. The breakdown of the income distribution by country is as follows:

- Guatemalan immigrants contribute an estimated $8 billion of their income earned in the U.S. to the sustainability of the local economy of their native country annually, accounting for 11 percent of the total economic output of Guatemala.
- Salvadoran immigrants contribute an estimated $5 billion of their U.S. income to the sustainability of the local economy of their native country, which accounts for 17 percent of the total economic output of El Salvador.
- Hondurans contribute an estimated $4 billion of their income to the sustainability of the local economy of their native country, which translates to 18 percent of the total economic output of Honduras.

These tremendous numbers make it abundantly clear that illegal immigrants living and working in the United States play, not only a significant role in the U.S. economy, but also a critical role in the economies of their home countries.

In 2014, 115,000 new immigrants arrived in the United States from these three countries alone, doubling the 60,000 who arrived in 2011 and every year since then. In fact, demographic statistics from studies conducted by the Pew Research Center indicate that the total number of immigrant arrivals to the United States from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador
rose by 25 percent between 2007-2015, while the number of Mexican immigrant arrivals fell by 6 percent during the same period.\textsuperscript{6}

\textit{For decades, millions of Mexicans crossed into the U.S. in one of the largest mass migrations in modern history. But stricter immigration enforcement and greater opportunities in Mexico have reversed the trend.}\textsuperscript{7}

U.S. government immigration statistics indicate a downturn in the number of undocumented Mexicans living illegally in the United States. Additionally, more than one million Mexicans returned to Mexico from the United States between 2009 and 2014. Failing economic opportunity in the U.S. combined with the crackdown on illegal immigration has caused undocumented Mexicans to return to their homes and to stay home. These factors are responsible for the substantial decline in the number of new Mexican arrivals and have created a workforce void in the United States, increasing opportunity for arriving Central Americans in recent years.\textsuperscript{8}

Despite the trend in declining Mexican immigration, Central American immigrants and, especially, unaccompanied children from Central America are arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border and, especially, in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas in record numbers.

The conditions in El Salvador are particularly disturbing. Gang wars between the \textit{Mara Salvatrucha} and \textit{Barrio 18} have led to the world’s highest murder rate for people under the age of 19, about 1.5 per day. Crime and extreme poverty in Central America have engendered a steady stream of immigrants out of Central America heading for the U.S.-Mexico border. As a result, the U.S. Border Patrol apprehended 17,512 unaccompanied Salvadoran minors in 2016, continuing the humanitarian crisis of 2014. Additionally, one-third of the unaccompanied children traveling to the border are girls, who have been targeted by gangs for abduction, rape, and murder.\textsuperscript{9}
The record number of illegal immigrants arriving in 2014, the peak year, was spurred by the fact that U.S. Immigration Officials failed to deport approximately 550,000 illegal immigrants by granting them temporary amnesty during the Obama administration.\textsuperscript{10}

Recently released U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) statistics indicate that, in 2017, the first year of the Trump administration, 226,000 illegal immigrants were deported from the United States, a 6 percent decrease from 2016. By all accounts, 2017 was starkly different. During the period of January 20 to September 20 of 2017, ICE reported 111,000 illegal immigrant arrests in the United States, representing a 42 percent increase over 2016. Ninety-eight percent of these were apprehended at the southern border of Texas. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials indicate that, in 2017, federal authorities arrested at least 1,000 persons per day coming across the Texas-Mexico border.\textsuperscript{11}

The number of daily apprehensions on the southern border is so massive that Border Patrol agents have reinitiated a catch-and-release policy, since shelter does not exist to support the growing numbers of illegal aliens, especially children apprehended daily.

The Rio Grande Valley Sector leads the other eight southwest Border Patrol sectors in apprehensions. The three Texas border sectors, the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Laredo, and El Paso, account for approximately half of all southwest border apprehensions.\textsuperscript{12}

The Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) reports that the majority of apprehensions occur in the Rio Grande Valley Sector of Texas. This is . . .

\textit{especially a problem for Texas, which is bearing the brunt of this influx. It is stressing the schools and health care systems, it's costly for taxpayers, and it has created a major public safety problem.}\textsuperscript{13}

Many thousands of illegal immigrants remain in Texas and along the border, taking up residence in border colonias and barrios.
Immigration analysts are aware of the fact that the substantial growth of unaccompanied children attempting U.S.-Mexico border crossings in recent years is linked to an expanding host of complex problems in their home countries.\textsuperscript{14} The current unparalleled uptick in illegal immigration of unaccompanied children is fueled by:

- The strong desire to reunite children with their families in the United States;
- The extreme criminal violence and poverty in their respective homelands; and
- The growing fear of adverse immigration laws and an attempt to be grandfathered beforehand.

The summer of 2014 witnessed a historic peak in the growing immigrant population along the border, especially the subpopulations of unaccompanied children and single-parent families with small children. The continued in-migration of mothers and children is so great that the U.S. Federal government has recently approved a new deterrent to immigration by separating families at the border. That is holding children separate from their mothers. This scare tactic would send parents to detention facilities while their children remained in a separate protective facility.\textsuperscript{15}

During this period, the United States Immigration Service reported an exponential increase of more than 20,000 illegal immigrant apprehensions per month over previous years.\textsuperscript{16} Note that the majority of illegal refugees taken into custody by Border Patrol agents should not be enumerated as actual apprehensions since most unaccompanied children turn themselves into authorities at the border, requesting asylum. The continued entry of unaccompanied children has posed a complex legal and moral dilemma for federal immigration and homeland security authorities.\textsuperscript{17}

In 2014, detention facilities and immigration courts were quickly overwhelmed by the expanding crisis, resulting in
pro-refugee organizations, the U.S. Congress, and President Obama declaring a humanitarian emergency.\textsuperscript{18}

In 2015, two leading experts on the social effects of the current border crisis and the co-authors of this article, Dr. Antonio Zavaleta, a retired professor of anthropology at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, and Dr. Mitchell Kaplan, a clinical sociologist and independent research consultant in New York City, published a seminal analysis. Their study, entitled \textit{The Human Tragedy of Unaccompanied Child Immigration to the U.S.-Mexico Border, 2014}, examined the effect of continued illegal immigration on the social and economic conditions along the border and in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.\textsuperscript{19}

Since 2014, the expansion of immigrant populations crossing the U.S.-Mexico border into South Texas has entered an endless cycle of in-migration and out-migration, making the immigrant population truly transmigrant.

Leading border researchers have studied the result of packing immigrants into limited spaces due to heavy law-enforcement. They described this condition as so common on the border that it is actually “caging” immigrants in \textit{barrios} and \textit{colonias} located along the border:

\textit{Immigration enforcement has led to a “caging effect” over the past two decades which has disrupted seasonal migration flows, increased familial and social ties to the United States, and decreased the probability of returning to Mexico once in the United States. The development of strong family and other ties to the United States contributes to a greater resolve to return post-deportation.}\textsuperscript{20}

The migrant’s decision to stay in the United States or in their country of origin is based on the social and political conditions of the immigrant’s home countries and the intensity of U.S. federal immigration pressure on immigrants in the United States.\textsuperscript{21}

By 2017, with the presidential election of 2016 in the history books, an anticipated comprehensive immigration reform law had failed to be enacted by Congress.
Additionally, soon after his inauguration, President Trump terminated former President Obama’s Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. DREAMERS or the children of illegal immigrants brought to the United States as minors were given until March 5, 2018, to re-apply for DACA protection or face imminent deportation. Immigrant children and young adults who qualified for DACA are known as DREAMERS, which resulted from President Obama’s failed attempt to pass the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, known as the Dream Act.

The combination of a lack of legislative action needed to pass comprehensive immigration reform granting protective status to more than 800,000 qualifying undocumented immigrant youth in the United States has left those most vulnerable with a pervasive fear of imminent deportation. Meanwhile, most of the original Dreamers are no longer children.

The Pew Research Center reports that:

about 690,000 unauthorized immigrants were enrolled in DACA as of September 2017, although roughly 800,000 unauthorized immigrants have ever received benefits through DACA, about 110,000 of this group are no longer enrolled in the program. About 70,000 former DACA participants did not renew their benefits or had their renewal application denied. Another 40,000 have adjusted their legal status and obtained green cards, which grant lawful permanent residence. As 2017 ended, Congress failed to act as promised on immigration reform, choosing instead to kick the DACA can down the road into 2018. Many observers believed that Congress had developed a bipartisan plan to save DACA recipients from deportation by embedding the immigration issue into the Omnibus spending legislation, but that attempt was not successful before the end of 2017. In 2017 DACA advocates saw mounting efforts by bi-partisan supporters to pass DACA legislation and promised action early in 2018. Meanwhile, the President’s March 5, 2018, deadline for DACA has come and gone.
South Texas

Most who take an interest in illegal immigration, including lawmakers and the media, have failed to acknowledge that the actual crisis created by illegal immigration in South Texas is the creation of internal colonies of destitute immigrant poor in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and elsewhere along the border with Mexico.\textsuperscript{28}

Hapless immigrants are packed into deplorable living conditions and are residentially segregated in border colonias, living lives of quiet desperation while illegal immigrant families live in fear of deportation.\textsuperscript{29} It is the separation of families that sadly motivates thousands of children to attempt illegal entry into the United States resulting from physical and emotional isolation from their parents in the United States.

These facts bring into sharp focus the reality of South Texas colonias, rural unincorporated and unimproved makeshift settlements surrounding cities and towns strewn along the winding Texas-Mexico border.

This pent-up aggregation of poverty-stricken immigrant populations living under wretched and deplorable social conditions in marginalized neighborhoods represents a legitimate humanitarian crisis. The increasing pressure of illegal immigrants is placing mounting social pressure on an already overburdened and woefully underfunded system of social services in the region. The lack of economic funding for vital services provided by community-based social institutions such as social-service agencies, criminal justice agencies, healthcare, and educational facilities, places the implementation of support services for illegal immigrants out of reach for most.

Inadequate government funding of social services places substantial limitations on an already disenfranchised poverty-ravaged immigrant population, struggling to survive in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas and elsewhere along the border.
The communities in which most *colonía* immigrants reside are characterized by extreme poverty, uncertainty, and a general feeling of hopelessness and despair, referred to in the social science literature as the Neighborhood Effect. Undocumented residents in these communities live in constant fear of arrest and deportation by U.S. Immigration authorities. The majority of poor immigrant children are malnourished and sickly because their illegal immigration status prevents their parents from working or receiving government benefits such as healthcare, food-stamps, and subsidized housing.

This contention is confirmed by the work of Carla Argueta of the Congressional Research Service, in her article, *Border Security: Immigration Enforcement Between Ports of Entry*. Argueta’s report to Congress confirms two salient facts that underscore the research of Zavaleta and Kaplan. First, an increasing number of immigrants are forced to stay in the Lower Rio Grande Valley region of the United States once they cross the border. They do not have the means to return to Central America, have no desire to settle in Mexico, and cannot move northward out of the Valley.

Secondly, the increased presence of U.S. Border Patrol and other federal, state, and local law-enforcement agencies patrolling the streets and roads of the Lower Rio Grande Valley has placed mounting pressure on undocumented immigrants to hide in their *colonía*-based homes where they have a sense of security. Illegal immigrants settle primarily in the urban *barrios* and rural *colonias* of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The mounting illegal immigrant presence along the border had spurred a major increase in law enforcement along the lower border. In 2000, there were fewer than 9,000 Customs and Border Patrol agents patrolling the border; by 2010, the number had increased to close to 23,000.

At least half of all children in the Rio Grande Valley are children of immigrants, and the Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP), and the Texas Kids Count Project indicates that more than half of
the children living in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (215,000) live with one or more illegal immigrant parents in poverty.\textsuperscript{35}

Importantly, the Kids Count Project recognizes that it has no proven method to accurately enumerate the number of illegal immigrant children living in the shadows, so both the total number of children as well as the number of children living in poverty is much greater than reported.

These are the critical factors producing a “caging” effect, which is the primary thesis of this article.\textsuperscript{36} Illegal immigrants are said to be “caged” when they are neither able to move north of the frontier zone (approximately 100 miles) into the United States nor south to return to their countries of origin after entering the United States illegally. Simply stated, illegal immigrants find that they have no choice but to remain hidden in South Texas border communities.

**Illegal Immigration and “Militarization”**

The continuing research of Zavaleta and Kaplan highlights how the “caging” effect has influenced an unintended border crisis connected to illegal immigration, while the United States continues to experience one of the greatest surges in immigration in our nation’s history.\textsuperscript{37}

In recent years the number of undocumented immigrant refugees entering this country illegally via the Texas-Mexico border has grown substantially. This growth is much to the dismay of government lawmakers and homeland security officials determined to defend our borders against encroachment by those they consider a danger to our national security.

In Texas, the recently passed Senate Bill 4, known as the “Show me your Papers” law, encourages law-enforcement officers to act as quasi-immigration officials.\textsuperscript{38} Meanwhile, illegal immigrants arrive in great numbers, having no choice but to flee their countries or face the continuous fear of poverty, violence, and death.\textsuperscript{39}
According to various research reports, seventy-five percent of new immigrant arrivals between 2014 and 2017 were children from Central America, where poverty, unemployment, gang violence, murder, and political unrest are high. The remainder was from Mexico, where drug cartels force impoverished children to serve as lookouts, human traffickers, and “mules,” used to smuggle drugs and people into the United States.\(^{40}\)

Research conducted by The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reveals that safety concerns associated with fear of harsh social conditions in their native countries are one of the primary social determinants that motivate unaccompanied child minors to cross the border illegally, seeking asylum.\(^ {41}\)

For many others, the promise of economic opportunity and reunification with family members are deciding factors motivating their efforts to make the treacherous journey across Mexico to the Texas border.\(^ {42}\)

Whatever the reasons for the increase in this unaccompanied child crisis, one thing is clear: U.S. government officials must work in close collaboration with their counterparts in the countries of immigrants to develop appropriate strategies for stemming the massive tide of people fleeing Central America. Unknown to them, illegal immigrants face uncertain outcomes and the potential of a lifetime of poverty as the reward for their perilous journey and illegal entry into the United States.\(^ {43}\)

Mexico has substantially increased its southern border patrol program intended to curb encroachment of Central Americans on its borders with Guatemala and the United States.\(^ {44}\) However, it is unclear that the American Alliance for Prosperity Program (AAPP) in Mexico is succeeding, and conditions may worsen in Central America with the forced deportation of hundreds of Central American Salvatrucha (MS-13) gang members back to their homes.\(^ {45}\)

The Trump administration’s forced return policy directed at Central American gang members is proving to have a reverse ef-
fected on the surge of the undocumented immigrant population along the south Texas border.\textsuperscript{46} That is, it seems to be motivating greater immigration out of Central America instead of subduing it.

\textit{The New York Times}, reports that:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Washington has operated under the assumption that fewer undocumented Central Americans will lead to less gang violence on the streets of the United States. Deporting gang members, however, seems to have actually helped stimulate MS-13’s growth in the United States. There are now around 10,000 members in 40 states.}\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

The return of violent gang members to their communities in Central America is resulting in more and more unaccompanied child minors and families journeying out of their countries to the United States. Illegal immigrants seek political asylum that allows them to escape the onslaught of violence and death accompanying the return of gang members.\textsuperscript{48}

In a desperate effort to escape the horrific conditions in their homeland, many illegal migrants chose the only transportation available to them: riding the “death train” known as \textit{La Bestia}, the beast. Immigrants and children ride the rails across Mexico in the hope of a safe arrival and river crossing at the Texas border.\textsuperscript{49} However, many die along the way, either at the hands of gangs or by falling off the train or by arriving at the Rio Grande River and drowning in the crossing. Many others die of exposure to the relentless South Texas sun in the attempt to cross approximately 100 miles of brushland on foot, without water, a buffer zone once called “The Wild Horse Desert.”\textsuperscript{50}

Researchers studying the border crisis firsthand suggest that a combination of factors, in confluence with other unforeseen events, account for the continued ingress of illegal Central Americans into the United States.\textsuperscript{51} A persistent danger festers for immigrants, both in their home countries and in their perilous attempt to traverse Mexico and enter the United States.

In September and October 2017, the federal government arrested 267 individuals identified as members of multinational
gangs, primarily MS-13. Sadly, ICE officials admit that their gang operations often apprehend innocent non-gang immigrants along with actual gang members, further disrupting peaceful immigrant families.\textsuperscript{52}

In 2017, immigrants settling just across the border in the Lower Rio Grande Valley increased. Whatever the causes, the effects are clear in the South Texas border region. Tangible evidence of the negative impact of socio-economic changes in the Lower Rio Grande Valley region of South Texas can be seen in increased levels of extreme poverty among the undocumented-immigrant population residing in rural \textit{colonias} and urban \textit{barrios}. Increases in illegal immigration have also resulted in a heightened presence of law-enforcement authorities at all levels along the border.\textsuperscript{53}

\textit{In Texas, state troopers have become frontline enforcers of federal immigration laws. In recent years, and especially since Donald Trump was elected president, the Texas Highway Patrol, part of the state’s deportation machine is scooping-up drivers who’ve committed minor traffic infractions. They then funnel them to the Border Patrol and sometimes Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Passengers and pedestrians who were not driving are also taken into custody. Caught in the Texas deportation pipeline, immigrants’ lives are damaged, along with those of their children. Many were born and raised in the U.S.}\textsuperscript{54}

In 2017, government figures reported that illegal immigration rose more than 20 percent above that reported in 2016. A comparison of immigration statistics from the period between June 2016 and July 2017 indicates a 23 percent spike in the number of newly arrived single undocumented adults at border crossings. Additionally, there was a 27 percent rise in the number of unaccompanied children and a 46 percent increase in the number of undocumented immigrant families seeking asylum, although a simple request for asylum no longer grants asylum for illegal immigrants.\textsuperscript{55}

Within the period of October 1, 2016 (the start of the U.S. fiscal year) to June 30, 2017, the U.S. Border Patrol
apprehended 33,036 unaccompanied children and 63,411 families. An additional 87,591 individuals and families were deemed inadmissible and turned back at the international bridges.\textsuperscript{56} It is not clear what fate they encounter at the hands of Mexican immigration officials as they are turned back to Mexico at the border.

United States immigration officials initiated sweeping arrests of undocumented illegal aliens across the country beginning in January 2017. The first three months of the Trump administration saw arrests of undocumented immigrants jump by almost 40 percent.\textsuperscript{57}

From January through May 1, 2017, ICE officers arrested 41,318 people at a rate of more than 400 per day, compared to 30,028 during the same period in 2016.\textsuperscript{58} On January 25, 2017, President Donald J. Trump issued executive order EO13768, \textit{Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States}, setting forth the administration’s immigration enforcement and illegal immigrant deportation priorities.\textsuperscript{59}

Nevertheless, so far, 2017 arrests pale in comparison to President Obama’s 2011 arrests of 351,029 immigrants or about 29,000 per month. The Obama “sweep” had an unintended-effect accounting in large part for the massive arrests in 2011 and serving as a powerful counter intuitive incentive to Central Americans to migrate to the United States instead of deciding not to come.\textsuperscript{60}

Meanwhile, immigration courts are operating at full capacity, and the number of deportations is spiking. Between February and July 2017, immigration court officials ordered 50,000 deportations of illegal aliens, a figure representing a 28 percent increase over the same period in the last year of the Obama administration. However, these illegal immigrant deportation numbers are still lower than the peak year of 2014.\textsuperscript{61}

Detained illegal immigrants are spending an exorbitant amount of time in deportation centers while waiting for immigration hearings. At the beginning of 2017, 384 federal-
immigration judges heard cases with an average wait time of 665 days (almost two years) for non-detained immigrants and 71 days for incarcerated immigrants. Unaccompanied minors and families comprise the non-detained category. In the Lower Rio Grande Valley, it is not uncommon for immigration-court judges to preside over an average of 75 to 90 cases daily, nowhere near the number necessary to defray the pent-up load of detainees.\textsuperscript{62}

In 2016, candidate Trump campaigned for the deportation of illegal immigrants living in the United States as well as for the termination of President Obama’s DACA program, which gave provisional protective immigration status and legal rights to a subpopulation of more than half a million children and young adults of undocumented immigrant parents currently living in this country. Immigration-rights groups petitioned the courts in states across the country, including Texas, pleading with the administration to preserve the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, DACA, to no avail.

They argue that the elimination of DACA will result in a severe disruption to the social and economic progress of many undocumented immigrant families with foreign-born children who have never known any country other than the United States. DACA students attending American high schools and colleges and participating in the workforce enjoy provisional rights and protections through this innovative program.\textsuperscript{63}

Research on DACA indicates that Dreamers complete high school at the same rate of the general population, around 44 percent, but attend college at a lower rate than American citizens choosing to work. Dreamers also hold jobs while in high school and college. In fact, approximately half of Dreamers are working, while the remainder attends school. Research has shown that Dreamers are a working-class population employed in mid-level skilled occupations. They work in service industries and construction, and many hold managerial jobs, and, in general, the jobs they hold are much better than the low-skill jobs held by the undocumented immigrant population.\textsuperscript{64}
Fear is the administration’s most effective weapon of persuasion as a deterrent to immigration, which is used in American cities and along the border as justification for enhancing federal efforts to control border crossings by undocumented immigrants.

Between January and March 2017 federal border patrol agents arrested 21,362 undocumented immigrants with criminal histories, an increase of 5,258 arrests over 2016, when 16,104 illegals with criminal backgrounds were taken into custody. In December, 2017, the Department of Justice and Homeland Security (DOJ) issued a report indicating that more than one in five persons currently in federal prisons are foreign nationals and that 92 percent of foreign nationals in federal prisons are illegal immigrants. These statistics provide impetus to the Trump administration’s deportation plan and support Attorney General Sessions claim that:

Americans are being victimized by illegal aliens who commit crimes. The simple fact is that any offense committed by a criminal alien is ultimately preventable. One victim is too many.

The Trump administration’s crackdown on undocumented immigrants with criminal backgrounds has served to reduce criminal activity by organized gangs significantly. For example, the deadly Central-American MS-13/Mara Salvatrucha members are being apprehended and deported as quickly as possible, while they continue to terrorize East-coast communities. Many lawmakers support the administration’s motivation for using this strategic approach to crime reduction.

Additionally, many criminal immigrants have gone underground, the government’s fear tactics resulting in a major downturn in the number of criminal immigrants apprehended in the first six months of 2017. However, the backlash from this approach has had devastating consequences for the non-criminal undocumented population and their children.

The National Immigration Law Center believes that the government’s goal is to make life so unbearable for illegal
immigrants that they will voluntarily choose to self-deport. Others say that this is not the case and that people are hiding, waiting, digging-in, and hiding in plain-sight in Valley colonias, which is one of the theses of this article. Many believe that the government’s strategy is to instill fear, creating a lasting effect on immigrants and especially their children.\textsuperscript{69}

Early in 2017, immigration officers increased arrests by 33 percent, including the arrest of thousands of peaceful non-criminal immigrants. Additionally, the government vowed to deport the approximately 11 million undocumented immigrants living established lives in the United States.

As a result, illegal immigrants living in the colonias of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas fear to venture out of their homes, go to the store, or send their children to school.\textsuperscript{70}

One prosecutor remarked,

\begin{quote}
\textit{The federal government, in reality in just a couple of months, has undone decades of work that we have done to build this trust.}\textsuperscript{71}
\end{quote}

The National Academies Press book, \textit{Budgeting for Immigration Enforcement: A Path to Better Performances, in Recent Patterns of Unauthorized Immigration}, sums up the effect as follows:

\begin{quote}
Among unauthorized Mexicans who have made it into the United States, increased border and interior enforcement have a strong negative effect on the likelihood of their returning to Mexico. Unauthorized migrants who are working are reluctant to return to Mexico, even for a short visit, because they risk losing their foothold in the U.S. economy. Moreover, they would have to pay heavily to be smuggled back into the United States. This “Caging effect” of tougher enforcement on return migration is one of the most notable consequences of the immigration enforcement build-up since 1995, accounting for a significant portion of the growth of undocumented Mexicans (in the Lower Rio Grande Valley) during this period.\textsuperscript{72}
\end{quote}

Heightened immigration enforcement has resulted in illegal immigrants living in the Lower Rio Grande Valley abandoning any hope of returning to their homes abroad or any notion of
moving north and into the United States. Because the immigrant presence on the border has come under increased scrutiny, they have no choice but to live in obscurity and isolation in rural colonias and urban barrios.

One researcher states that:

*The probability of return to Mexico calculates return within 12 months of the migrant’s arrival to the United States.*\(^{73}\) Since the establishment of the Texas-Mexico border in 1848, Mexican citizens have routinely crossed the border, back and forth, unfettered by immigration law or any other restriction. Immigration law in the United States changed with the creation of Operation Wetback during the Bracero Era in the 1950s.\(^ {74}\)

In their initial article, *The Human Tragedy of Unaccompanied Child Immigration to the U.S.-Mexico Border, 2014*, Zavaleta and Kaplan examined the exploding immigration of unaccompanied children and families to the border from 2010-2014 and proposed causes and results for continuing high levels of illegal immigration through 2017. Also examined is the long-term negative impact of an increasing Lower Rio Grande Valley poverty rate.

When combined with the socioeconomic marginality of “caged” immigrants in Valley colonias it becomes obvious that the consequence of “caging” immigrants in the Valley intended or not, is a major environmental nightmare.\(^ {75}\)

Critical in the equation of illegal immigration on the Texas border was fear of the outcome of the 2016 presidential election. In fact, immigrants’ worst fears were realized with the election of Donald J. Trump as President of the United States in 2016 and the enactment of his campaign promise to deport all of the 11 million illegal immigrants from the United States.\(^ {76}\)

President Trump promised unprecedented enforcement of immigration laws, immigration reform, and mass deportation of millions of illegal immigrants and their children from the United States. As predicted, the proposal and implementation of sweeping changes in immigration policies were immediately evident after the inauguration in January 2017.
The administration has also widened its crackdown on undocumented parents living in the United States and attempting to claim their unaccompanied children detained on the border. Thus, the illegal immigrant crackdown has significantly driven immigrants living in the Lower Rio Grande Valley deeper into the shadows of Valley colonias.

As an additional blow, President Trump reversed President Obama’s executive order, which created the DACA program threatening to deport approximately 800,000 undocumented children and young adults along with all other DREAMERS in 2018. Between 115,000 and 200,000 DREAMERS live in Texas.\textsuperscript{77} Studies have confirmed that the majority of DREAMERS and DACA recipients are productive workers and college students working in the American labor force. The Trump administration gave Congress until March, 2018, to enact immigration reform to save DREAMERS and DACA or the government would commence deportation.

Even more frightening is the fact that immigration authorities are now coercing detained children into providing information on the location of their undocumented parents. This latest strategy has fueled great fear for both intimidated children and their parents, all of whom now face the real possibility of imminent deportation. Immigration advocates warn that this tactic is tearing families apart as children are forced to identify the location of their illegal immigrant parents, a tactic common in fascist countries.\textsuperscript{78}

The Trump Immigration Plan includes the following:

- The promise to triple the number of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents;
- The mandatory deportation of all criminal undocumented immigrants;
- The detention of undocumented immigrants while awaiting immigration hearings;
- The defunding of sanctuary cities;
• The enforcement of stronger penalties for overstaying visas;
• The deportation of known gang members;
• The deportation of children of illegal immigrants born in the United States;
• The enforcement of e-verify for employment; and,
• The end of welfare programs supporting undocumented immigrants.\textsuperscript{79}

These combined efforts have greatly increased the crackdown on undocumented immigrant parents who have come to the Lower Rio Grande Valley from the north seeking to claim their unaccompanied children held in detention. These children have arrived at the border by the thousands and are assigned to Valley shelters and detention centers for undetermined lengths of time.\textsuperscript{80}

As an additional measure, beginning in the fall of 2017, immigration officials began disallowing immigrants, once arrived in south Texas, from returning northward from the Lower Rio Grande Valley, further enforcing the creation of an internal colony of poor immigrants “caged” in the Valley.

The Trump administration also greatly restricted the asylum program for mothers and children, claiming that it serves as an incentive for invalid asylum claims in the United States. Thus, the Family Case Management Program was eliminated in the summer of 2017.\textsuperscript{81}

Even more egregious is the administration’s plan to press felony charges against parents suspected of hiring coyotes/smugglers to cross their children into the United States. These fears lead parents to delay reclaiming their children caged in detention centers for fear of deportation. This results in traumatized children remaining in immigrant detention centers for longer durations. Many hundreds of unaccompanied children are detained in detention facilities along the South Texas border with plans for additional facilities to be built.\textsuperscript{82}

ICE spends more than $2 billion on privately-owned-and-operated immigrant-detention centers per year and approximately
$32 million annually to feed and provide medical care to illegal immigrant children. However, human-rights groups report the program’s abject failure when it comes to providing detained immigrants with critical and timely medical attention or legal representation.83

The apprehension of unaccompanied children increased by 38 percent in the first three months of 2017, and thousands more are currently in jeopardy of arrest. It is important to note that less than half of the persons entering the United States are apprehended at the border. Many thousands are successfully smuggled across the border and into networks of temporary stash houses throughout the Lower Rio Grande Valley and beyond.84 Smugglers charge upward of $4,000 to transport a single child out of the Valley and into the interior of the United States.85

Most safe houses are deeply hidden in impoverished pockets of Valley colonias and barrios.86 These clandestine locations serve as staging areas before attempts are made to transport illegal immigrants north of the Border Patrol checkpoints.87 The Border Patrol maintains 34 interior checkpoints up to 100 miles north of the border. At the Laredo, Texas, checkpoint, agents have approximately 10 seconds to evaluate the approximately 9,000 vehicles traveling northward daily.88

Additionally, legal immigrants are also in danger. In August 2017, the Trump administration announced the development of plans to curb legal immigration including the admission of limited numbers of educated and trained workers, ending “chain migration,” where one family member brings another family member and then the next into the United States.89 Recent government reports indicate that federal immigration officials counted the number of green cards issued between 2005 and 2015, finding that the majority were awarded to immigrants admitted through the family-preference program. That is, they were issued to family members of legal immigrants living in the United States. Federal statistics indicate that approximately 9.3 million new immigrants were admitted to the United States by
chain-migration over the ten-year period. Approximately 1.7 million of these immigrants are Mexicans, and a healthy percentage of those live in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Additionally, new immigration enforcement will establish a “grading system” for green-card eligibility, which will cut the number of immigrants entering the country each year by half.

Currently, the deportation of up to 11 million illegal immigrants who are currently in the U.S. is on hold. Deportation efforts are ostensibly intended to enforce border security and to put Americans back to work.

Approximately one million legal immigrants enter the country each year on work and student visas. Immigration reform would reduce legal immigration to the United States to approximately 500,000 annually and eliminate chain immigration. In previous years, the United States accepted approximately one million immigrants per year, amounting to approximately 33 million legal immigrants admitted over the last 35 years, of which approximately 61 percent were chain immigrants. Statistics show that the average immigrant to the United States sponsored 3.5 additional immigrants.

The Department of Homeland Security indicates that 76 percent of DACA recipients are from Mexico and that Mexican immigrants sponsor an average of 6.4 additional legal immigrants, the highest rate for any nationality for chain migration.

One of several proposed Immigration Reform Bills known as the RAISE Act will require full self-sufficiency of legal immigrants. Immigrants will be required to possess a marketable skill, be employable and live without receiving welfare to remain in the United States and subsequently claim a path to citizenship.

**Dreamers-DACA**

DREAMERS are children and adolescents who were brought to the United States illegally by their parents under the
age of 16, who are under 31 years of age as of June 15, 2012, and who have continuously resided in the U.S. from June 15, 2007, to the present. DACA recipients are those DREAMERS who applied for and received deferred action that allows them to work or go to school and delay deportation for up to two years.

In 2012, President Obama issued an executive action, creating an opportunity for DREAMERS to receive protective status through a federal program called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Under the Trump administration, DACA protection will be terminated, and all DREAMERS will be deported.\textsuperscript{95}

Two federal laws regulate the treatment and processing of children: the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 and the Homeland Security Act of 2002, legally known as the Flores Settlement Agreement of 1997. The Trump administration also plans to terminate these important pieces of legislation.\textsuperscript{96}

Many of the children of undocumented immigrants or DREAMERS were brought to the United States as children. While DACA was never intended to be a permanent program; recipients have been waiting for Congress to enact immigration reform to protect them. However, Congress has not acted, as of March, 2018.\textsuperscript{97} DACA does not offer legal immigration status nor a path to citizenship or any other permanent protection. Nor does it give immigrants legal U.S. residence.\textsuperscript{98}

However, those who qualify for DACA may avoid deportation for up to two years and are granted permission to work and go to school in the United States. However, government data reveal that only half of DACA recipients have attained a high-school diploma. It has been suggested that a major percentage of DACA recipients have serious limitations in their education and English fluency that affect their ability to function in American society, making them vulnerable to deportation.\textsuperscript{99}

The Obama administration created the DACA program to shield up to five million immigrants from deportation, providing
them with work and education permits. The DACA program is, likely, one of the primary reasons that Central-American immigration dramatically increased after the establishment of DACA.\textsuperscript{100} Beginning in 2014, immigrants sensed that the DACA program was most likely heading for termination in 2017. Therefore, unaccompanied child immigrants and their parents rushed to enter the United States, believing that they would be “grandfathered” or otherwise authorized to remain in the country. This, however, is not the case.

The Trump administration’s Immigration Plan will have the following effects:

- It eliminates a safe path for children and forces them into hiding;
- It turns away asylum seekers at the border;
- It separates mothers from children and detains asylum seekers awaiting a court date; and,
- It is more stringent on unaccompanied children and may criminalize parents.\textsuperscript{101}

Although the DACA program is not a viable pathway to legal residency or citizenship, it does provide undocumented youth with temporary protection from deportation, giving them a two-year renewable work-authorization visa. DACA visas allow participants to become legally employed in the U.S. labor force, open bank accounts, qualify for drivers’ licenses and credit cards, and have an opportunity to attend an American college or university for a two-year period.

Research by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) reveals that, as of 2016, more than 1.9 million unauthorized immigrants were potentially eligible to participate in the DACA program. Researchers at the Migration Policy Institute divided the potential applicants into three identifiable groups:
• 1.3 million unauthorized immigrants who met all the DACA eligibility criteria and were therefore immediately eligible to apply for deferred action;
• 398,000 unauthorized immigrants who met all DACA eligibility criteria except for the education requirement of having attained a high school diploma or the equivalent; and
• 228,000 unauthorized immigrant children who were previously ineligible for DACA because they were below the program’s minimum age of 15 at the time of implementation would now be eligible to apply to the program, providing they stay in school.

As of 2017, only about 800,000 DREAMERS eligible for DACA have applied for and received certification as such. Approximately 200,000 DREAMERS and DACA recipients live in Texas, many along the South Texas border.\textsuperscript{102}

Research findings provide clear indications that DACA has transformed the lives of thousands of undocumented immigrants in many positive ways that are of significant benefit to the economy of the nation, especially the Lower Rio Grande Valley. DACA is one of a very limited number of avenues immigrants have to climb out of a life of poverty.\textsuperscript{103}

Participation in DACA has played a major role in shaping the life-chances for a broad spectrum of the young-adult-immigrant population across the nation, including in the Lower Rio Grande Valley region of Texas. The program has been instrumental in creating new pathways to higher education, scholarship opportunities, and professional training leading to permanent employment, greater stability, higher pay, and the opportunity to achieve economic and social mobility in American society.\textsuperscript{104} Overall, DACA has resulted in raising the socio-economic status of all immigrants, legal and illegal. Additionally, economists find that DACA recipients have higher incomes and greater financial stability, increasing household economic power in local economies.\textsuperscript{105}
In total, the repeal of DACA will result in the loss of 800,000 productive employees from the American workforce over the next two years and will cost employers $3.4 billion in unnecessary job-retraining expenses. It will also significantly reduce taxpayer contributions to Social Security by approximately $24.6 billion over the next decade.

As a result, there will be a negative economic impact in the employment sector of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, along the border, and elsewhere in the state and nation.

It is evident from the research reviewed here that DACA recipients represent a vital source of economic strength and social stability for immigrants in the Texas and the U.S. economy as a whole. The program has been a particularly positive immigration pull-factor in certain areas of the country, such as the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, where poverty and unemployment in mixed-immigrant families are high.

Mixed immigrant families are those that contain some legal members able to work while living in the same household with illegal members who cannot legally work.

Recent reports from the Texas Workforce Commission’s periodic labor market data indicate that the unemployment rates in the Lower Rio Grande Valley are the lowest they have been in 30 years. However, these figures do not reflect the vast numbers of illegal immigrants living in the Valley who are not counted or eligible to participate in the Valley workforce. Therefore the low unemployment rate is an underestimate of actual unemployment.

In the Lower Rio Grande Valley, the service sector, including all levels of government employment, increased by 3,200 jobs, the majority of those in healthcare and social services. The total number of non-farm sector jobs increased in the Valley by 7,600. Meanwhile, the total available unemployed job-seeker pool has shrunk, since most illegal immigrants are not eligible for legal employment.\textsuperscript{106}

DACA recipients work hard to overcome social and economic barriers, hopeful for an opportunity to become
productive citizens and attain a chance to reap the benefits of the American dream.

Despite the well-documented positive effects of DACA, the program was scheduled to end. United States Attorney General Jeff Sessions revealed plans to rescind the DACA program, leaving it up to Congress to develop a legislative alternative to deportation by March 5, 2018. If Congress did not act by March 5, 2018, it is estimated that as many as 983 undocumented DACA recipients would lose their protected status daily, resulting in approximately 30,000 deportations per month on the average for the period 2018 to 2020. In early 2018, a Federal court placed a temporary hold on the commencement of deportation proceedings of Dreamers and DACA recipients. Their ultimate fate is not known.

Given the backlog of other more pressing legislative concerns facing lawmakers during the waning days of 2017, it was not possible for Congress to act on immigration reform in the period allotted by the president. Congress’ inability to act left hundreds of thousands of DACA recipients and their families immediately vulnerable to deportation.

However, a lawsuit was brought by DACA advocates in a California Federal Court which ruled against the administration’s attempt to terminate the DACA program. The Trump administration appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court to hear the case that was denied in February 2018. Therefore, March 5, 2018, deadline is no longer legally valid, and the Federal Government must continue the program for the foreseeable future. However, on February 27, 2018, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that immigrants in long-term detention and awaiting the outcome of deportation proceedings do not have the right to a bond hearing after six months.

The U.S.-Mexico border region in general and the Lower Rio Grande Valley in particular is arguably the most underdeveloped and poorest region of the United States. Contributing to this is the fact that it has the highest percentage of undocumented
families, many of which are mixed-families comprised of both legal and illegal immigrants.

The mass deportation of gainfully employed family members will result in a significant blow to the economy of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas and a disruption in the lives of thousands of marginalized families who currently reside in south Texas.

Advocates of immigration reform in the United States have called upon the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service to establish clear and efficient guidelines for the process of implementing deportation prosecution against immigrants. However, so far, this has not happened, and the promised-deportation campaign of Central American and Mexican immigrants has begun.\textsuperscript{110}

Parents and children are being targeted in a new crackdown, and in some cases, parents are being charged with felonies for the illegal trafficking of their children. It may be claimed with certainty that it is a frightening day to be an undocumented immigrant in America.\textsuperscript{111}

While Congress debates the various alternatives proposed for DACA reform and as the administration creates arbitrary immigration policy by executive order, the number of unaccompanied children and families crossing the Texas border continues unabated. The result is a growing “caged” population of isolated illegals, most of whom disappear into the \textit{colonias} and low-income neighborhoods of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

The administration’s tough talk on immigration has not slowed illegal immigration. It has, however, lowered the number of immigrants walking across the bridges in request of asylum, which is an increasingly difficult and complicated legal matter. It is no longer a simple avenue available to them for legal entry to the United States.

The apprehension rate of an illegal immigrant attempting to cross one of the international bridges is 64 percent compared to a 27 percent chance of apprehension of those immigrants attempting to cross the river.\textsuperscript{112} Therefore, the apprehension of
undocumented immigrants attempting a bridge crossing is twice as successful compared to the capture of illegals attempting a river crossing. Knowing this intuitively, immigrants continue to choose a river crossing.

Thus, the rate of undocumented immigrants illegally crossing the river has not slowed, as evidenced by the mounting number of returned refugees stockpiled in Mexican border communities like Matamoros, Reynosa, Nuevo Laredo, and Ciudad Juárez.

In 2017, Mexico reported the detention of 10,000 immigrants awaiting deportation to Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. This figure represents only a small percentage of the total population of illegal Central Americans placed in a holding pattern at the Mexican border.

In fact, border porosity continues unabated, and an entirely new strategy must be adopted before there is any hope for a secure border. Proof of the expansion of the undocumented immigrant population in this region is evidenced by the exponential growth of border school districts and the request for a myriad of social services that have realized significant increases by illegal immigrants in 2017-2018.

Additionally, Texas now reports the existence of 2,300 colonias along the border; mostly located in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. And most new colonia residents are undocumented immigrants.

A critical factor of importance to the evolving undocumented immigration dynamic along the U.S.-Mexico border is the deteriorating social and economic conditions immigrant families face in the United States, particularly those who reside in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas.

Research reveals that the average number of families living in poverty in Texas border counties exceeds that of all the other counties in the state if not the nation. The debilitating effects of institutionalized poverty upon the lives of immigrants in the Valley are self-evident and exacerbated by a plethora of less-than-desirable conditions influencing the socioeconomic status of the area.
That is, as an underclass in the Valley, the non-working poor are increasingly socially and economically distanced from the working lower class constituting a permanent caste of indigent immigrants. Key among the characteristics of abject poverty are:

- A low level of literacy and dropping rate of school attendance;
- A significant increase in the number of single-parent households;
- A high birth rate;
- Poor health status;
- Hunger resulting from lack of access to government benefits; and
- A significant amount of underemployment and unemployment.

The Caging and Neighborhood Effects

In their original 2015 analysis, Zavaleta and Kaplan suggest that the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas continues to experience a downward socio-economic spiral toward the creation of an internal colony or permanent holding area for immigrants and the poor. Illegal immigrants who have crossed the Texas-Mexico border or *Frontera* are unable to move out of the Valley and are hesitant or unable to return to their countries of origin. In the study of immigration and settlement, this phenomenon is known as the “caging effect.”

It is important to understand that the “caging effect” is a metaphor that implies that, once in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, undocumented immigrants are forced to live in the shadows and are in a “cage” that blocks them from moving northward. At the same time, they are unwilling or unable to return to Mexico or Central America. Furthermore, the reality of the “caging effect” serves as an incentive in the development of a smuggling industry.
moving immigrants across the river and then northward out of the Valley and into the rest of the country.\textsuperscript{114}

Combined with the “Caging Effect” is the “Neighborhood Effect,” found in large cities that include dilapidated housing structures, abandoned cars, and lots filled with trash and other debris, unsupervised children, prostitution, and the pervasive use of drugs, all common features of Valley \textit{colonias} and urban \textit{barrios}.\textsuperscript{115}

Social conditions such as these have made significant contributions to the development of a social climate of hopelessness or \textit{anomie} among immigrants living in border communities. \textit{Anomie} is a concept developed by French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), referring to a condition of normlessness or hopelessness.\textsuperscript{116}

The result is the formation of a continuous string of “caged” \textit{colonias} along the Texas-Mexico border from Brownsville to El Paso.\textsuperscript{117}

\textit{Colonias} are defined as rural unincorporated and unimproved clusters of shanty settlements. Recently created \textit{colonias} by unscrupulous landowners are not equipped with electricity, running water, sanitary sewer, or drainage; they do not have paved streets or sidewalks and do not appear on the traditional school bus routes.\textsuperscript{118}

Hundreds of these \textit{colonias} contain undocumented immigrant populations referred to as \textit{paracaidistas} or parachutists because of the way the immigrants arrive in the border communities by simply “dropping-in,” mimicking the infamous slums in Latin America.

Federal checkpoints which retain immigrants in the border zone are located on the two major routes northward of the Valley at Falfurrias, Texas, (US Highway 281) and Sarita, Texas, (US Highway 77). There is no Border Patrol checkpoint on US Highway 83 leading west to Laredo, Texas, since it does not exceed the frontier. Interstate highway 35 north from Laredo toward San Antonio does have a check station at a similar distance north of the border.

Interestingly, the creation of poor, informal settlements is a border phenomenon on the Mexican side of the border as
well as in Texas. In-migration from the interior of Mexico and Central American countries has created enclosed-pressurized populations contained in Mexican border communities from Matamoros, Tamaulipas, to Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. In Mexican municipios or counties, poor immigrant enclaves often cluster in or around communal farm settlements called ejidos encircling metropolitan areas and along the river.

The growth of poverty among the immigrant population without the possibility of advancement in this cross-border region has made the daily struggle for survival nearly impossible and hence has often forced desperate people into lives of criminal activity to survive.

Additionally, U.S. Border Patrol agents are faced with multiple-apprehension processing and deportation of repeat offenders week after week.\textsuperscript{119} It has been said that: “Something to eat and a bed at a U.S. detention center is often better than starvation or sleeping on the streets in Mexico and Central America.”

These dire conditions have also taken a heavy toll upon the mental-health status of immigrants, producing a high incidence of behavioral problems, substance abuse, alcoholism, and all forms of stress-related emotional conditions brought on by heightened feelings of social isolation, worthlessness, and despair.\textsuperscript{120}

The behavioral health of unaccompanied and abandoned children is negatively impacted by loneliness as they are isolated from loved ones, compounded by the inability to understand the cause of their incarceration.

The years 2014-2017 saw a dramatic increase in violence along the border promulgated by warring factions of drug cartels combined with spillover-violence on the Texas side of the border.\textsuperscript{121} For many immigrants, the only way to counteract their condition of despair is to seek social acceptance through membership in narcotic-and-alien-smuggling gangs or by joining the cartel counterculture of violence and criminal activity that has proliferated in so many impoverished communities on both sides of the border.\textsuperscript{122}
In addition to organized corporate drug cartels, gangs of loosely affiliated street criminals called *la maña* operate in every Mexican border town. *La maña* is principally responsible for border auto thefts, assaults, abductions, and ATM kidnapping.\textsuperscript{123}

In 2017, unaccompanied children continued to arrive at the border in surging numbers. Unaccompanied children crossing the border increased by 78 percent in the period between 2015 and 2016. During the first six months of 2017, approximately 27,000 unaccompanied children were apprehended at the border. November 2017 apprehensions were up by 12 percent compared to October with double the numbers for March and April 2017. Even more disturbing is the fact that families traveling together increased by 45 percent while unaccompanied minors increased by 26 percent.\textsuperscript{124} Furthermore, 66 percent of all apprehensions in 2017 took place among the undocumented poor immigrant population living in the internally “caged” urban *barrios* and rural *colonias* within the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Reports suggest that the Obama administration worsened the overall condition of young refugees in 2016 by committing $86 million to address efforts to intercept Central American and Mexican refugees in Mexico before they arrived at the border.\textsuperscript{125} There is no accounting for how that money was spent. The condition of detainees in Mexico is exponentially worse than in the United States. Mexico claims to have deported approximately 10,000 immigrants to Central America in 2016, a paltry number in that, in 2016, Mexico encountered five times more unaccompanied children than in the past. Mexico under-reports the immigrants apprehended, while most immigrants are never caught, simply disappearing into Mexican slums.

For immigrants living in impoverished social conditions in border communities, the pathway into involvement in criminal behavior is extremely alluring. Poor immigrants represent easy marks for organized gangs like *la maña* and for transnational criminal groups, who recruit them into criminal organizations for cross-border criminal activity and violence.\textsuperscript{126}
Social disenfranchisement is the etiology of criminal participation and the medium of choice for the transportation of drugs, people, weapons, and cash across the border. Gang and cartel membership replaces alienation from family and school cohorts and establishes a feeling of belonging for desperate immigrant children and adolescents, resulting in the coercive persuasion of undocumented immigrants, sometimes called the Stockholm syndrome.  

While it is difficult to predict the flow of illegal immigration to the United States in the future, the Lower Rio Grande Valley has reached a “tipping point” regarding the number of the undocumented population the Valley can support.  

In Valley colonias, a major focus of immigrant poverty is the inability of social-service agencies to sustain the delivery of assistance to illegal immigrants. Also, the increase in the number of educational facilities represents a mixed blessing for colonia residents whose children attend schools built in or near colonias, making it easier to identify where illegal immigrant families live. This growth is far more problematic for school-district administrators and taxpayers attempting to balance budgets without increasing property taxes.

Educational and social service outposts built within or near colonias encourage residents to remain within the limited boundaries of their communities, serving to increase social isolation by segregating illegals in caged colonias. Illegal immigrant colonia residents are set apart from the mainstream of society and offered very limited opportunity for escape from unavoidable institutionalized poverty.

This is called the “neighborhood effect” of immigrants living in high poverty areas. Impoverished colonias isolate residents from access to both resources and opportunities. Nearly 70 percent of all children living in the Lower Rio Grande Valley live in high-poverty barrios and colonias.  

Discriminatory practices represent an infringement upon basic human rights, compromising the overall well-being
of society at both the individual and collective level. On the individual level, society’s well-being is assessed by the social needs of immigrants, and on the collective level, by the way the social needs of families and communities are met. “Poor immigrant children growing up in colonias face barriers in housing, education, and health, which can lead to slowed growth and low educational development rates.”

Critical measures implemented to assess the health status and overall development of immigrants in the United States include physical and emotional health, lifespan, morbidity, nutritional status, cognitive development, and human-growth factors, in addition to illiteracy and the overall lack of educational attainment. Public-health studies reveal that immigrant communities in the Lower Rio Grande Valley fall far behind the rest of the state and nation on all-important indicators of human health and development. Another indicator of inequity in the border region stems from the fact that, even though the U.S.-Mexico border shares many social characteristics with other border regions of the world, it is unique in its demographic nature. Demographic data reveal that the area’s large immigrant population falls far below that of every other ethnic group in the region by all significant social and political indicators of economic, educational, and health disparity.

The lack of economic resources places most of the immigrant and native Latino population in border communities at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale and leaves them with little opportunity for social and economic mobility in comparison to the region’s overall population. The difference between the two populations is demonstrable. The Texas border’s dire social and economic dynamics have led many demographers to predict that the majority of the border population will live in semi-urban slums by the year 2030. This is already exemplified in many highly urbanized trans-border communities where large populations of urban poor maintain the economic prosperity of the community at an all-time low.
Poverty and Population Growth

The U.S. Census Bureau’s Small Area report indicates that, among the 23 U.S. counties that border Mexico, the poverty rate averages 28 percent of the population, while in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, the poverty rate increases to between 35 and 40 percent of the population.

Additionally, children suffer the most. The child-poverty rate in this region has skyrocketed to approximately 50 percent, and children living in colonias are almost all poor. Two main social forces drive poverty rates among children in the Valley upward:

- Mass immigration from Central America and Mexico, and;
- The invisible transnational migration settlement of immigrants into the poorest urban neighborhoods on the U.S. side of the border to escape detection.\(^{156}\)

In fact, demographic experts believe that most of the population growth in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in future decades will be generated by the clustering of immigrant groups into large metropolitan semi-rural-semi-urban centers, intensifying the social problems associated with border urbanization and the continued insulation of the urban poor.

For example, it is projected that the continued expansion of the Texas-Mexico cross-border region, including the Lower Rio Grande Valley population, is expected to explode into a cross-border, mega-metropolitan area or “borderplex” of more than five million inhabitants by 2030. Most of this growth will be the direct result of the migration of poor immigrants “caged” on both the Mexican and the Texas sides of the border.\(^{137}\)

In the Lower Rio Grande Valley, 49,959 unaccompanied children were apprehended in 2014, the peak year. Subsequently, that number declined in 2015 to 23,864 due to intense border enforcement and then began to rise again in 2016, reaching 36,714, a 54 percent increase within a one-year period.
The number of unaccompanied children apprehended by border patrol officials in 2017 was higher than it was during the same period in 2015-2016, when adult apprehensions increased by 90 percent.\textsuperscript{138}

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement reports for 2016, indicate total apprehensions nationwide to be 550,250, with increases in deportation reaching 450,954, individuals removed from the country. Statistics from the U.S. Department of Immigration and Naturalization Service indicate that the number of undocumented immigrants apprehended in South Texas in 2015 and 2016 exceeded 100,000 each year.\textsuperscript{139} The clear majority of immigrants apprehended by the U.S. Border Patrol were in the Rio Grande sector, and, if not deported, most are fated to remain “caged” in that sector.

The data indicate that the massive influx of impoverished immigrant children into Valley border communities is disproportionately driving up the percentage of children living in extreme poverty and social isolation to unprecedented and unacceptable heights.\textsuperscript{140}

Between 2015 to 2017, thousands of mostly Central-American parents attempted to identify their children in detention centers on the border. The fact that these immigrant parents are journeying across the United States to the border in search of their children only serves to exacerbate an already dangerous problem that has U.S. government officials searching for effective resolutions.\textsuperscript{141}

Once parents reunite with their children, they are often not allowed to leave the area pending an immigration hearing and most probably will be deported or be forced to remain in the Valley indefinitely since they are not permitted to travel northward. More than half of the 450,000 children living in the Valley live with a single illegal immigrant parent in poverty. Living in a Valley \textit{colonia} is tantamount to a life sentence of detention. During the wait, they become semi-permanent residents in border \textit{colonias} and poor urban \textit{barrios}, contributing to the huge number of undocumented workers making a far below minimum wage in the Valley’s cash-economy.
The number of families attempting to cross the river illegally into the Lower Rio Grande Valley is also on the rise. Many children are simply abandoned on the U.S. side of the river by smugglers and are taken into custody to be claimed by family members who reunite with them only after great difficulty. Claiming detained, unaccompanied children have become more and more dangerous for parents as well as it is difficult.142

In the early days of the Trump administration, the United States lacked a clear policy to govern immigration. In other words, the holding, removal, and repatriation of unaccompanied children and the lack of due process may be seriously challenged if immigrant human rights are not honored.143

In sending their children northward from Central America, parents mistakenly believe if they pay smugglers extra money for their children’s passage into the United States, they will receive special treatment and suffer less. Actually, it is the exact opposite. Child abuse at the hands of smugglers is extremely commonplace. However, there is little evidence of child abuse in U.S. detention facilities or by federal officials, although allegations are commonplace.144

Recent human-rights abuse reports indicate that the number of complaints of mistreating immigrant children is growing steadily. Children report abuses at every stage in their journey, including in their countries of origin and during their odyssey through Mexico.145

The most recent and comprehensive report documenting abuse states that ICE is generally incapable of properly examining privately owned and operated detention centers. NPR reports that outside advocacy groups claim extensive human rights abuses at ICE detention centers. In addition to unsanitary conditions, hygiene supplies are inadequate, medical care is not forthcoming, and the food is unsafe to eat.146

Even more disturbing is the fact that these findings by a federal investigative team are not new since similar findings have been documented since 2014. They conclude that substandard detention facilities place detainees’ lives at risk.147
One report on U.S.-Mexico Border Immigration policy indicates that immigration strategy focusing solely on security through increased “militarization” has not been successful in accomplishing its intended outcome. However, one unintended outcome is that increased militarization does represent a major economic windfall for the border region. That is, most federal immigration and state law-enforcement officials live and invest their incomes in supporting their families in the Valley. They purchase homes, buy cars, and maintain all aspects of economic life by investing their incomes in the Valley economy.

On the other hand, the huge and increasing number of federal, state, and local law-enforcement agents may weaken the rights of border communities in that expanded law-enforcement negatively influences the psyche of the entire border community and not just illegal immigrants.

Furthermore, U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions promised to incentivize the apprehension of illegal immigrants by awarding more than $98 million in community policing grants to local police departments who cooperate with federal immigration authorities. This is attractive to underfunded border law-enforcement agencies as well as to the State of Texas.

Texas and its border communities seek reimbursement for local funds expended to provide for immigrant families while housed in border communities. When immigrant children and families are detained on the border, it is often for an unreasonable length of time resulting in suffering and overall degradation of emotional health and human rights.

Given the situation described in this analysis, it is evident that policy changes must be implemented within the U.S. immigration system to safeguard the basic human rights of unaccompanied immigrant children and their parents who are seeking a new beginning in our country. The Trump administration has promised needed change, but to date, no concrete strategic plan to implement these changes has been put forward.

The U.S. judicial system must install practices and procedures
that will protect the rights of immigrants by giving them access to legal counsel and by allowing refugee authorities to expedite the review of all court cases involving the proposed decision to deport immigrant families from the United States.

Most importantly, laws must be enacted which allow immigrants to leave the border region and enter the United States beyond the frontier while awaiting immigration hearings. Currently, the wait for an immigration hearing can be up to two years or longer.

Poverty and violence in their home countries represent the primary causes of why most people migrate to the Texas-Mexico border.¹⁵¹ Most unaccompanied child immigrants are sent northward to reunite with family members already in the United States with the urgency of entering the United States before immigration reform law are passed in Congress. Illegal immigrants are fearful that a new immigration reform law will prohibit their entry and automatically trigger the deportation of their families.¹⁵²

The urgency they once perceived to emigrate is now of lesser importance since executive orders regarding immigration policy and procedures may be made at any time with a stroke of the President’s pen and without the need for Congressional approval or oversight.

Finally, in the last three years, there has been a well-documented “word of mouth” propaganda campaign operating in Central-American countries and among immigrant-advocacy groups, urging immigrants to send their children to the United States. These same groups urged immigrant communities living in colonias to resist census enumeration during the 2010 census process, thus continually undercounting the Valley population.¹⁵³ This anti-government behavior is expected to continue during the upcoming 2020 census.

One immigrant mother said, “I decided to leave Central America with my child so that maybe, this way, they’ll give me a chance to help my children advance, and we were told not to
participate in the census process.\textsuperscript{154} The population undercount in the Rio Grande Valley hurts all agencies in that fewer funds are available.

It is estimated that the cost to the U.S. government to house, feed, and transport immigrant families to shelters and or reunite them with relatives living in the United States will continue to increase each year if an appropriate and acceptable alternative is not found. The increase in the immigrant population reduces the already limited funding available and exacerbates a continued and adverse increase of the poor living in the \textit{colonias} of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.\textsuperscript{155}

Today more than 500,000 immigrants live in Valley \textit{colonias}, and the number of \textit{colonias} has grown to over 2,300 along the Texas-Mexico border. Currently, there is no enforced regulation in the creation of \textit{colonias} along the Texas-Mexico border. The hundreds of millions of dollars invested by the state of Texas in the 1970s and 1980s are no longer available to regulate or develop newer \textit{colonias}. Human-rights advocates, as well as county officials, feel that we are returning to the social conditions that were present in this region more than 40 years ago.

Population density in the \textit{colonias} continues to rise with dire living conditions visibly evident. Multiple families live in make-shift huts constructed of pallets, and other discarded building materials, cardboard, and abandoned house trailers without the benefit of indoor sanitary facilities, electricity, running water, wastewater, drainage, or paved streets. The rapid growth of these poor multiple family undocumented immigrant borderland communities provides yet another illustrative example of what social scientists refer to as the \textit{neighborhood effect}.

Outdoor privies, thought to have been eliminated in the United States long ago are commonplace in Valley \textit{colonias} and urban \textit{barrios} today. Today illegal electrical and water connections are made from house-to-house using extension cords and garden hoses producing a great risk of fire and disease which are commonplace.
In 2017, the Texas program, which regulated *colonias* and provided running water, electricity, and other improvements to *colonias*, was discontinued, and the state office, which oversaw *colonia* development since 1999, was closed.\(^{156}\)

For those unaccompanied children not lucky enough to have a Valley address, relative, or safehouse to go to or who are without a parent or relative to claim them, the situation is far more difficult. When they are apprehended crossing the border illegally, they are taken to a holding facility and then to a detention center, where they commiserate with other children often traumatized by fear and anxiety. Children in detention shelters are processed through immigration courts which function painfully slow.\(^{157}\)

In 2014, an immigrant family’s odds of remaining in the United States after illegally entering were better than average. Homeland Security data indicate that approximately 80 percent of the child-visa petitions were approved between 1992 and 2014. Central-American parents aware of this success rate felt justified in sending their children to the United States unaccompanied.\(^{158}\) However, the success rate changed for the worse in 2017 with the Trump administration’s added border immigration enforcement and most likely will never return to the previous level of success.

While children may petition for Special Immigrant Juvenile Visas (SIJV), agencies’ policies and procedures are highly regionalized. Rules are interpreted arbitrarily by immigration courts based on local interpretation and not on a unified national standard.\(^{159}\)

Additionally, the charge of Entry Without Inspection (EWI) is on the rise.\(^{160}\) The EWI charge is used when an immigrant is detained while having established residence in the Valley. Since these immigrants were not apprehended at the time of entry into the United States, they are charged with Entry Without Inspection when apprehended at a later date.\(^{161}\)

For example, at the Port Isabel area detention center in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1,000 of the 1,200 available beds
are constantly occupied. Data from the Transactional Access Records Clearinghouse at Syracuse University indicate that, in 2017, 52 percent of available beds were occupied by detainees who entered without inspection (EWI). The remaining 48 percent of detainees were charged with other immigration violations such as illegal entry and illegal reentry.\textsuperscript{162}

Immigration attorneys in the Valley say that EWI cases have been on the rise since January 2017. Both the number of people placed in detention in the Lower Rio Grande Valley as well as the length of time detained is increasing because the system is vastly overwhelmed.

To date, at least two generations of undocumented immigrant families have grown up in border colonias and urban barrios unable to leave. They dreamt of one day being allowed to enter the United States beyond the “caged” area. However, most never achieve the opportunity to enter the United States beyond the constitutional limit of approximately 100 miles or have the economic ability to return to their native country.

Since they have no papers, these immigrants are forced to live out their lives in a kind of quasi-suspended animation along the border; unable to return home or have the freedom to move about the United States. They are simply “caged.”\textsuperscript{163}

\section*{Conclusions}

The essential theme of this paper is to point out the negative impact of the “caging effect” on illegal immigrants living in colonias and urban barrios and the negative consequences of the “Neighborhood Effect,” as described by William Julius Wilson in his seminal work on urban poverty and race. The Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas demonstrates all of the salient characteristics of the neighborhood effect but has not been documented in the research literature until now.

Five factors support the central thesis that less than desirable socio-economic conditions in combination with political instability
in Central America and Mexico are the primary catalyst driving the substantial increase in the extreme numbers of illegal immigrants crossing the Texas border into the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The key social factors contributing to the present border crisis include:

- Illegal immigration exacerbates rapid population growth and far outstrips a border countys’ abilities to support the growing number of undocumented immigrants;
- Rapid and unnatural population growth places increased stress on an already overburdened and underfunded social-service system;
- Unchecked increase in poverty associated with the “caging” effect and the creation of a neighborhood effect; and
- Reinforcement of extreme levels of law enforcement describes as “militarization” on the border.

These factors have produced an untenable situation along the border and ultimately have created a caste-system configured in the form of rings of poverty around Valley towns, counties, and municipios on both sides of the border. This growing disenfranchised underclass is maintained by a law-enforcement or military class consisting of federal, state, and local law-enforcement officials supported by the system.

The “caged” population, on the other hand, is neither able to return to their countries of origin nor to move northward and away from the border region. With no viable options available to them, illegal immigrants take up residence in the poorest areas of the Valley, exacerbating existing dire conditions.

The Texas-Mexico border consists of four Mexican border states which adjoin Texas and are matched by seven pairs of border towns and cities. The seven Texas border cities account for approximately 2.3 million people while the seven Mexican sister cities represent 3.1 million people for a total Texas-Mexico cross-border population of more than 5.4 million persons. It is es-
estimated that the population in general, and the illegal immigrant population in particular, is undercounted by at least 50 percent.

The largest cross-border populations are growing at rates which far outstrip similarly sized Texas populations not located on the border. For example, between 2010 and 2017, Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, across the border from Hidalgo, County, Texas, experienced a population increase of approximately 45 percent while McAllen, Texas, in Hidalgo County just north of Reynosa, grew by 36 percent.

Texas border cities are expected to grow from 50 to 100 percent between 2010 and 2050. El Paso will grow by 50 percent while McAllen is expected to double its size, and Brownsville will be right behind with an 80 percent increase in population. Hidalgo County currently has a population of 775,000, which is expected to increase to 1.5 million.

Many demographers believe that this growth will be mostly due to illegal immigration. McAllen’s population could triple in that timespan, depending upon social, economic and political conditions in Central America and the Valley.

Additionally, the Texas side of the border is home to more than one million illegal immigrants. Hidalgo County, Texas, is estimated to be home to at least 100,000 illegal immigrants; El Paso has 66,000, Laredo 30,000, and Brownsville 40,000.

Simply stated, illegal immigration is the single most important factor in the population growth of border and Valley communities. This is a trend that began with the 1940s Bracero Program and has never abated.\textsuperscript{164}

Between 2010 and 2017, the Lower Rio Grande Valley registered more than two million apprehensions of illegal immigrants, and border security estimates that an equal number were not apprehended. With each illegal-crossing attempt, immigrants become more and more astute in successfully crossing into the United States, either by the river or by a bridge. This fact has maintained Hidalgo and Cameron counties as the two poorest in Texas. Therefore, the two most impoverished counties in Texas
have become “cages” for poor immigrants, worsening their already dire economic condition.

Poverty is the most distinguishing characteristic of people living in Valley colonias, and there are more than 2,300 colonias in Hidalgo County alone, representing a shadow population of at least 500,000 uncounted people.\textsuperscript{165}

Additionally, the Texas-Mexico border must be characterized as an irredenta colony, where the minority non-Latino population controls most societal aspects for the majority Latino population. This well-developed irredenta colony along the Texas border is a region that is historically dominated by a non-Latino population. Meanwhile, the Latino population is subordinate to it economically and politically.

That is, the Latino population is controlled by the dominant non-Latino population, which is much smaller in numbers. The result is a burgeoning illegal population with mounting social problems characterized by the following:

\begin{itemize}
  \item A developed country bordering an underdeveloped country;
  \item A high incidence of irredentism and discrimination;
  \item A high rate of continual illegal immigration;
  \item A high population growth rate;
  \item A high rate of poverty;
  \item A high rate of spillover violence and crime;
  \item A high rate of personal, social and political corruption;
  \item A high unemployment rate;
  \item A low level of educational attainment and a high illiteracy rate;
  \item A high number of foreign-born residents; and
  \item A high rate of residential segregation in colonias and barrios creating internal colonies.
\end{itemize}

Finally, these factors combine to create a “caging effect” or caste-system resulting in a permanent underclass living in continually deteriorating neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{166}
The post-World War II era has witnessed a tremendous change in the irridenta conditions in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. The “Latino baby-boom” children of WWII veterans have prospered, joining the ranks of the Valley’s professional class and transforming the irridenta to an economically-dominated rather than an ethnically-dominated society.

Our conclusions are supported by the classic description of Black ghettos of the 1980s by Harvard sociologist William Julius Wilson. In his book, the *Truly Disadvantaged*, Wilson examined the negative impact of poverty and ghetto life on social isolation and generational poverty. We believe that similar effects are seen in the colonias and urban barrios of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas.

Similarly, University of Chicago sociologist Robert Sampson coined the concept of the “Neighborhood Effect.” Deteriorating conditions in border colonias and urban barrios are very similar to the “Neighborhood Effect,” found in large cities, that include dilapidated housing structures, abandoned cars and lots filled with trash and other debris, unsupervised children, prostitution, and the pervasive use of drugs, all common features of Valley colonias and urban barrios.

That is, South Texas neighborhoods matter in poor people’s lives. Sampson reflects that “Exposure to severely disadvantaged areas hampers children’s verbal skills roughly equivalent to missing years of education,” not to mention the delay in their overall cognitive and physical development.

Other important concepts supported in this article include the fact that poverty is passed-on from generation to generation in the Rio Grande Valley and that an under-class has supplanted ethnicity as the defining characteristic of Latino neighborhoods.

Poverty is associated with a myriad of social problems, all of which are common in Valley colonias and urban barrios. These conditions include, but are not limited to, violence, alcohol and drug abuse, homelessness, joblessness, unwanted pregnancies, broken families, and dependence on welfare programs.
Sampson explains that the “Latino population is headed straight to the underclass in a very real and powerful way.” This “neighborhood effect” is clearly evident in the characteristics of the Rio Grande Valley.

Additionally, inner-city sociological research has shown that, in regards to Latino neighborhoods, large numbers of immigrants promote decreases in crime. However, the proximity to the border and drug cartels provide an enticement to participate in criminal activities in the Valley.

The United States has experienced a 50 percent increase in immigration from 1990 to 2000, as Central Americans and Mexicans flood into American cities and the border. This is especially true of border colonias. Therefore, neighborhoods matter because of the negative effects colonias and barrios have on children’s lives and the fact that these negative effects are passed on from generation to generation. Any reasonable examination of poverty in the Valley reveals at least four consecutive generations of poverty in families and in some cases, even more.

Cities, counties, the Texas Legislature, and the United States Congress, must take notice of these characteristics and assume corrective action. The border is at the tipping-point and will not be able to maintain current conditions in the coming decades of the 21st century. A new form of urban poverty is emerging in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, similar to large cities of America in which illegal immigrants import a permanent culture of poverty from Central America and Mexico into the Valley.

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
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My South Texas hometown is doing great, they say, what with the population growth and the cross-border trade, those eighteen-wheelers coming through from Mexico, headed north. All the new hotels.

But still...

I don’t get out there much these days, air travel being what it is, a royal pain in the butt. And Mission is not an easy place to get to, unless you’re already in Texas, which, last time I checked, I’m not.

When I do visit, I make it a point to swing by the approximate location of my father’s old drugstore, La Botica Barrera, the only one in what used to be the Mexican side of town, before the whole town turned Mexican....

Years ago the old drugstore building became a dreary second-hand clothing store, a real sacrilege. Nowadays it’s even hard to figure exactly where it used to be.
The house I grew up in is still there, seems bigger now. All relative, right?
Angelica, my mother’s cook and then caregiver, still lives there, keeps it like a museum, frozen in time. A memorial to my mother, her friend. My mom’s clothes still hang in her closet.

My father’s huge steel safe is now in the storeroom out back, the safe where he kept that old-time appetite stimulant, cannabis powder. And I drive by the old high school, with all the ghost students out in the front yard between classes, not knowing they’re ghosts. B. J., my high school crush. Fausto, my best friend—my only real friend. He sees me drive by, I think. He was always perceptive.

Out on the football field our high school band still marches to “Them Basses” and “The Stars and Stripes Forever.” The ghost twirlers sexy as ever in their white boots and short silver skirts.

Yeah, I visit the cemetery, read my folks’ headstone inscription, but I don’t leave flowers. What’s the point, they’re not there. My mother’s home, talking to Angelica, laughing, or in her classroom teaching Spanish literature; my father is greeting customers in his drugstore, why wouldn’t he be? He was there every day, including half days Sundays, probably to avoid going to El Mesias Methodist Church, where my mother taught the Sunday School class for adult women.

Homer, my tennis team doubles partner, died last month, still in Mission. Perhaps his ghost is out on the tennis court, has to be somewhere. If I ever get back to Mission, I’ll go check. Maybe my ghost will be there too.