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**THE BATTLE TO BE MAYOR: A CASE STUDY  
OF INTERETHNIC CONFLICT IN THE  
LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY**

**A Thesis**

**by**

**ADRIAN CRUZ**

**Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Texas—Pan American  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF SCIENCE**

**December 2001**

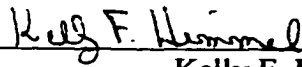
**Major Subject: Sociology**

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**2001**

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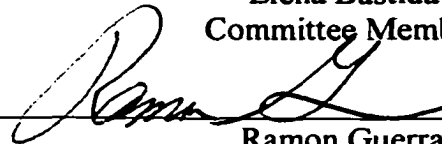
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December 2001

## **ABSTRACT**

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**Mexican Americans and Anglos have lived in Texas for generations now. Historical data has shown that Anglos have dominated the political and economic structures in the state. A case study was conducted of the 1998 mayoral election that took place in a city located in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The study investigated if there was evidence of Anglos supporting one candidate and Mexican Americans supporting the other.**

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem

Edward Dougherty spoke to the Lone Star Literary Association in Brownsville, Texas on May 29, 1867. Below is an excerpt from Dougherty's speech:

The day will come, friends and neighbors, when the Rio Grande valley will supply, not only hides and wool, but breadstuffs, silver, gold, copper, and lead to the markets of the world; as well as cattle and sheep for food, and horses, and mules for labor. And there is nothing, perforce, I say, to prevent us.....(Dougherty, 1867)

Who is "us" in Dougherty's speech? Throughout his address that evening, Dougherty often made references to not only "us", but to "our valley." Dougherty's interesting choice of phrases forces many historical questions to be asked. Who is this "us" that the valley belonged to? Does it still belong to them? There is little doubt that Dougherty was referring to the Valley's Anglo population. He presents the Valley as a place of economic opportunity and a place where progress is about to occur (Montejano, 1987). History has shown us that only Anglos have been allowed access to this opportunity and progress.

What has occurred in the Valley that has kept Mexican Americans in a subordinate position? One important reason is that institutionalized forms of discrimination in the U.S. Southwest have persistently victimized Mexican Americans.

Many scholars describe the American Southwest as an internal colony in which Mexican Americans have been forced to occupy a subordinate position (Barrera, 1988).

This intellectual journey will begin by examining the history of relations between Mexican Americans and Anglos in the Rio Grande Valley. By exploring the past, this study will provide a much-needed correction to the existing Anglo-oriented histories of Valley. However, the 1998 political election in Border Town, Texas, evaluated in terms of its place in Valley history, and the internal colonialism model, will be the focus of this thesis.<sup>1</sup>

### **Statement of Purpose**

This study will center on the community of Border Town, Texas. Located twenty-five miles north of the U.S.-Mexican border in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Border Town is a community with a numerical majority Mexican American population and a numerical minority Anglo population. In May of 1998, the city of Border Town witnessed a contentious and heated mayoral contest. The contest pitted two Mexican American candidates against each other, Alfredo Huerta and Smiley Gomez. The latter eventually won the election. This mayoral election is the event to be investigated in this study.

Though Anglos are the numerical minority in the community, they remain the dominant group in terms of political and economic power. Conversely, Mexican Americans remain politically and economically subordinate to Border Town's Anglo

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<sup>1</sup> Border Town is a fictional name. Every individual, city, street, and business that is mentioned in the Research Findings section of the thesis also have fictional names.

population. I argue in this thesis that even in an election between two Mexican American candidates there remains evidence of Anglo domination in Border Town.

The domination by the Anglo elite and their confrontation with a quickly growing Mexican American elite is not the only component of the hypothesis. Both of these sets of elites, the more powerful Anglo group and the subordinate Mexican American group, had their interests represented in one of the two candidates. Smiley Gomez represented the interests of the Anglo elite. Alfredo Huerta represented the interests of the Mexican American elite. This kind of situation, where the Anglo elite selects a member of a subordinate group to rule over other members of the subordinate group, is not new to political structures in the Valley (Acuna, 1988). It is also not a new phenomenon to colonized people in many parts of the world (Murguia, 1975).

### **Research Question**

The question to be answered in this study is as follows: Who were the supporters of Smiley Gomez and Alfredo Huerta and why? One must consider several factors in answering this question. When asking the question “who?”, then one must consider groups as well as individuals. More specifically, one must examine the ethnic background and social class allegiances of those groups and individuals. Border Town is a community with a history of racial segregation and as such the historical experience of Anglo domination of Mexican Americans must be taken into account (Montejano, 1987). The why part of the question will be answered by utilizing the internal colonial model.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Historical Perspective on Anglo-Mexican American Relations in Texas**

After the advent of Texas independence in 1836, Anglos began to invade much of the state. This quickly made much of the Mexican American population in Texas a numerical minority. Initially, the small Mexican American elite (referred to as “Tejanos” by Meier and Ribera) did socialize, conduct business with, and even intermarry with the Anglo elite. However, this convenient sociopolitical, economic arrangement was palatable partly because of the light skinned appearance of this Mexican American elite. And as for the palatability of the arrangement, it was short-lived (Mirande, 1985, Mirande, 1987, Acuna, 1988, Meier & Ribera, 1993).

In the 1840s Mexican Americans began to lose property rights to Anglos in Texas. In 1848, the Rio Grande Valley officially became a part of the United States as a result of the signing Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo after the Mexican American War. Finally, Anglos had political control of the part of Texas between the Rio Grande and the Nueces river (Mirande, 1985, Mirande, 1987, Montejano, 1987, Meier & Ribera, 1993).

The rise of the Know-Nothing Party in the decade of the 1850s further worsened race relations between Mexican Americans and Anglos in Texas. This party was responsible for creating a nationalist, anti-Catholic fervor in the United States.

This proved unfortunate for the Mexican American population in Texas as the Know-Nothings also proved to be not only anti Catholic and nationalistic, but also racist. This created an increasingly difficult situation for Texas' Mexican Americans, particularly those who were dark skinned (Meier & Ribera, 1993).

Mexican Americans certainly resisted Anglo domination. The six-month long "Cortina Wars" are evidence of this. In 1859, Juan Cortina insisted that he was defending himself when he shot and wounded an Anglo lawman in Brownsville. Anglo law enforcement could have cared less and brought criminal charges against Cortina. Cortina and several supporters were able to seize control of Brownsville for six months. The "Cortina Wars" destroyed much property in the Valley and forced many people to protect themselves by leaving the area (Montejano, 1987).

The actual population size of Mexican Americans and Anglos meant little in terms of which group was in control. Wirth (1964) defines a minority group as

a group of people who, because of physical and cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination (p. 245).

If a minority group exists then so too does a dominant group. This dominant group considers itself superior to the minority group. As a result of this treatment, the minority group perceives itself as a separate entity from the dominant group even as both share the same society (Wirth, 1964). Therefore, in Texas, Mexican Americans were a minority group and Anglos formed the dominant group.

Increasingly, Anglos did come to dominate the political, economic, and cultural landscape of Texas. Anglos soon became the majority group in terms of economic and political power. Mexican Americans certainly had become subordinate to Anglos in

Texas. This certainly became more prevalent throughout the rest of the Nineteenth Century and into the present one (Montejano, 1987, Meier & Ribera, 1993).

### Historical Perspective on Anglo-Mexican American Relations in the Valley

By the 1880s Mexican Americans in the Valley and much of South Texas had become accustomed to working for Anglos. For many people of Mexican descent, Anglos had become powerful and paternalistic *patrones*. Soon, this relationship, especially in the Rio Grande Valley, was about to take a drastic turn.

In 1904 the Missouri-Pacific railroad system opened up the Rio Grande Valley to Anglo settlers from the North. Wealthy Anglo ranch owners cut up their properties into tracts of farming land. Some ranchers would sell their land directly to immigrant Anglos. Others sold their property to developers and allowed them to deal with the hassles and details of selling off the profitable land. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the Valley was publicized and advertised as "The Magic Valley." The region became a place of economic opportunity, ready to be chiseled by Anglo colonization (Montejano, 1987). However, the sale of this land left Mexican Americans without the traditional kinds of work they had been forced to rely upon.

Eventually, this transition from a ranching economy to a farming economy produced violent conflict (Montejano, 1987). The following passage from Montejano (1987) details the state of race relations between Anglos and Mexican Americans from 1915 to 1917,

The dire and pressing situation of the Texas Mexican was clear. The sense of urgency appears in various pieces of evidence: in the call to not sell the land; in the bitterness of the old elite; in the displacement of *rancheros*, *vaqueros*, tenants, and artisans; in the racism of the newcomers; and in vigilante lynchings and police executions. (p. 118)

The insurrection carried on by many Mexican Americans was a reaction to the end of the traditional ranching society, racism, and a police state that Texas Rangers were enforcing upon them (Mirande, 1987, Montejano, 1987, Acuna, 1988).

Anglo newcomers and old timers in the Valley were reaping the dividends. The new Anglo immigrants were finding purchasable tracts of land to farm. The old ranching, Anglo elite owned the land. This enabled them to profit handsomely from the sale of their property. Mexican Americans were pushed out. They were given little opportunity in this new economy. Dominant Anglo society saw to it that Mexican Americans remain subdued. Anglos controlled not only the political and economic structures, but law enforcement as well. Texas Rangers formed the muscle to keep Mexican Americans subdued and locked out of this new agrarian economy that was taking shape in the Magic Valley (Barrera, 1979, Mirande, 1987, Montejano, 1987).

As the Twentieth Century progressed, Border Town, Texas was founded and built up by Anglos who were able to seize property and power. The population in the city swelled in the century's first three decades. In 1900, the population of Border Town was 1,784. However, by 1932, the population had grown to 13,000 (Hill, 1973).

Lon C. Hill had founded the city in January 1905. He was able to set up the city's first school, cemetery, and park. Hill was able to do this because of his considerable land holdings. The Border Town newspaper reported, in a July 29, 1932 edition, that Hill owned 25,000 acres of property in the Border Town. Eventually, this property would become the city that Border Town is today (Hill, 1973).

In the one historical account I reviewed of Border Town's beginnings (the only one I could locate), I saw hardly any mention of Mexican Americans. Occasionally, there were a few Spanish surnames mentioned, but not much else.

### Internal Colonialism

Frantz Fanon (1963) and Albert Memmi (1965) provide the foundation for the internal colonial model. They provide analysis of European colonization through a Marxist framework and from a Third World perspective.

Memmi (1965) asserts that racism is an integral part of the colonization process. The colonizer labels the colonized as inferior, lazy, and weak. This is crucial, because the colonizer wishes to access the land, resources, and economic opportunities that exist in the land that the colonized occupy. Therefore, the colonized must be negatively labeled and stereotyped in order to justify the process of colonization (Memmi, 1965).

Fanon (1963) deals with colonization as a process that has economic, political, and military components. However, Fanon also points out how the colonization process includes the colonization of the mind. Natives become so well colonized that they identify themselves with the colonizer. A few of these colonized natives are allowed by the colonizer to maintain control over the natives. In order to free themselves from the chains of colonization, the colonized must free their minds from the influences of the dominant colonizer (Fanon, 1963).

Robert Blauner (1972) further developed the concept of the internal colony. In these essays, he criticized the use of the assimilation model to evaluate the place of ethnic minorities, such as Black Americans, Mexican Americans, or Native Americans in the



United States. The assimilation model may have been applicable to European immigrants, but for groups such as Black Americans or Mexican Americans, internal colonialism presented a more appropriate analysis of interaction patterns between racial and ethnic groups.

Barrera (1979) provides a definition of internal colonialism that is appropriate for the purposes of this paper. The definition is as follows:

Internal colonialism is a form of colonialism in which the dominant and subordinate populations are intermingled, so there is no geographically distinct "metropolis" separate from the "colony" (Barrera, p. 194).

By using the term, metropolis, Barrera is referring the actual central state, which holds dominance and power over the colony. Obviously, in an internal colonial model, there is no physically or geographically separated power structure, which exercises its power over the subordinate region.

Barrera (1979) asserts that internal colonialism is the most appropriate model to evaluate racial and ethnic inequality because of its broad scope. The internal colonial model combines history along with culture, economic, and political factors to make sense of racial inequality.

In addition, Barrera refers to the "comparative scope" (p. 203) which internal colonialism provides. Other cases can be paralleled and examined along side the current case being evaluated in the framework. Barrera does make note of a glaring weakness. Because of its Marxist roots, the internal colonial model makes it difficult to evaluate racial divisions. Marxist oriented theories place great emphasis on economic systems and economic factors, thereby dismissing other possible reasons for social stratification.

The most important idea that Barrera creates out of the internal colonial model is the division he makes between race and class. To Barrera, race is of overwhelming

importance when compared to class. He asserts that even as Mexican Americans build up a middle class and an affluent class, they remain subordinate to the dominant Anglo population in the U.S. Southwest. In essence, a Mexican American may own a business, their own home, and send their children to university, but in many respects their status remains below that of a working class Anglo. This theory will be put to the test in this study.

### Mexican American Attempts at Political Organization

Anglo domination continued throughout the Twentieth Century. However, Mexican American political resistance chipped away at Anglo domination. In order to explicate the evolution of Mexican American political power and participation, different organizations will be examined. These groups are reflective of current situation in which Mexican Americans find themselves. The organizations to be presented in this section illustrate how Mexican Americans increasingly accessed political power and representation, but the job never was complete.

### LULAC

The League United of Latin American Citizens (LULAC) was an important formal organization of Mexican American political interests. LULAC was founded in Corpus Christi, Texas in 1929. The Mexican American middle class was largely responsible for the creation and development of LULAC. This middle class consisted of mostly professionals and small time entrepreneurs (Acuna, 1988, Marquez, 1993).

Marquez (1993) makes three important observations about LULAC. First, LULAC sought to combat discrimination. This was an issue in which LULAC had to tread carefully when dealing with the problem. Second, LULAC was creating a political organization for a racial/ethnic group that was in a subordinate position. The fact that much of its membership came from a middle class background did not prevent the organization from being viewed by the Anglo majority as a potential threat. Finally, LULAC, though willing to deal with discrimination and racism, was essentially a conservative organization. Marquez (1993) writes:

But in the final analysis, Mexican culture was part of their [LULAC members] glorious *past*, an aspect of their lives that they should be prepared to compromise on in the interest of social mobility.....The LULAC code called upon members to study their cultural heritage and be proud of it but to also adopt the culture and mores of the United States, "the country to which you owe your allegiance." (pp. 22-23)

The class cocoon, in which LULAC existed, limited the contributions the group could make to bringing down barriers of structural discrimination in places like South Texas. In essence, LULAC was only willing to improve the lives of other middle class Mexican Americans or those that aspired to reach the middle class. While LULAC was clearly aware of discrimination in society, they sought to end that discrimination primarily by becoming more assimilated and encouraging assimilation among other Mexican Americans. In addition, LULAC was unwilling to critique the economic inequity that many fellow Mexican Americans suffered from (Marquez, 1993 Gomez-Quinones, 1994, Griswold de Castillo and De Leon, 1997)

### The American GI Forum

The American GI Forum found its galvanizing moment in the fight to properly bury a war hero. Felix Longoria, a soldier killed during WWII in the Philippines, was

denied services in the funeral home of his hometown, Three Rivers, Texas. In addition, Longoria's body would need to be buried in the segregated Mexican cemetery. This denial of respectful treatment for a war veteran forced the GI forum into action. The organization was able to attain the help of Texas politicians in Washington, DC (particularly Congressman Lyndon B. Johnson). Eventually, Longoria's body was buried in Arlington National Cemetery (Ramos, 1998).

The GI forum, like LULAC, consisted (and today still consists) of a mostly middle class Mexican American membership. Like LULAC, the GI forum is founded on patriotic and pro-assimilationist values. The forum did fight discrimination and racism leveled against Mexican Americans, but because of its strong patriotic stance the group was unwilling to critique the actual institutions and structures of American life that were inherently unfair to much of the Mexican American population. The organization desires that Mexican Americans will assimilate and become "American" (Meier and Ribera, 1993).

### La Raza Unida

La Raza Unida was a radical political party. Founded in Crystal City, Texas by Jose Angel Gutierrez, La Raza Unida took Mexican American political organization to another level. Raza Unida based much of its movement on the concept of cultural nationalism. The group stressed the cultural and ethnic roots of what it meant to be Mexican American. Cultural nationalism is a political movement that includes the

language, practices, and foods of a group in carrying out its goals. Garcia (1989) quotes a young Raza Unida activist who spoke about the aims of the group:

We set out to come up with a lexicon of.....terms.....terms like 'La Raza,' 'Chicano Liberation,' ....and the word 'Chicano.' We began personifying the system through the Use of the word 'gringo.' (p. 18).

Mexican American cultural practices and Mexican American identity were incorporated into the political rhetoric of La Raza Unida. The new terminology introduced by the group was loaded with controversial terms (Garcia, 1989).

The short-lived movement that Raza Unida led was a militant one. Raza Unida was no doubt different from its predecessors such as LULAC and The American GI Forum. The new militant approach to gaining political power frightened the Anglo establishment. While Raza Unida did include part of the middle class, the group was not as timid or unafraid to challenge the Anglo establishment (Garcia, 1989).

La Raza Unida had a difficult time surviving and eventually, their political movement subsided. According to Montejano (1987), there were three important reasons that the life span of the group came to an end. First, much of what Mexican American political organizations fought for, from LULAC to Raza Unida, had been achieved. Second, Raza Unida, in particular, had angered Texas' Anglo establishment, who directed much hostility against such militant activity.

Finally, there was a practical reason that Raza Unida and militant activism could not survive. Raza Unida had made a dent in Texas politics. The group, at the very least, had shown that the Mexican American vote counted a great deal. The 1972 Raza Unida gubernatorial candidate, Ramsey Muniz, had been able to secure 6% of the statewide vote. This indicated to the Anglo dominated political establishment how much power the Mexican American vote held. Eventually, one of the indelible changes that Raza Unida

made to the political landscape was making the power of the Mexican American vote known to the Democratic Party. (Montejano, 1987).

### Voters Rights Act Extension of 1975

The extension of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 provided the right to vote, but the right was not necessarily guaranteed to Mexican Americans. In 1975, this act was extended to include Mexican Americans. Much of the activism and organization (such as LULAC, GI Forum, Raza Unida) throughout the Twentieth century deserves much of the credit for creating full voting rights for the Mexican American population (Ramos, 1998).

The extension of voting rights instigated tremendous changes in political representation for Mexican Americans. In California, voting registration among Mexican Americans increased from 715,600 in 1976 to 988,130 in 1980. Four years later in 1984, the registration list had grown to 1,136,497. In Texas, voter registration among Mexican Americans rose from 32% to 51% between the years of 1976 and 1984 (F. C. Garcia, 1988).

### Summary

Research is warranted on the current state of the political structure in South Texas using the internal colonial model. In particular, after more than forty years of Mexican American political activism and federal legislation aimed at producing political equality in South Texas, a case study account of Border Town's 1998 mayoral election would help clarify our understanding of the internal colonial experience of Mexican Americans.

**In addition, because of the ethnic background of this researcher, a study on the 1998 mayoral election would provide a different historical perspective of Border Town, Texas. In reviewing the history of the city, it is evident that no Spanish surnamed author has contributed to the understanding of Border Town history.**

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

#### **A Word on Methodology**

Many would argue that Sociology finds its roots in quantitative, logical, and empirical forms of scientific investigation. In today's sociological world, logical empiricists and logical positivists perpetuate the belief that the social sciences should approach their study of the social world through the usage of the traditional natural science model. (Sjoberg & Nett, 1968). The long held traditional view asserts that this model, based in empirical evidence and logic (however positivists define logic), is the only acceptable way in which to conduct social research.

This long held assertion will be challenged in this proposal. While quantitative methods certainly have their place in the world of social research, the goal of this section is to state the necessity for a qualitative and case study approach to researching Border Town, Texas and its 1998 mayoral election

#### **Criticisms of the Case Study**

The case study has been subjected to several critiques. First, the case study has been perceived as a non-rigorous and biased piece of investigative work (Yin, 1984).



However, Olesen (1994) argues that the bias of a researcher can indeed be a valid resource in and of itself. Bias is a resource that can provide a guide to the research process and interpretations to the data that the researcher assembles. This is of special relevance for this study on Border Town as the researcher has been a lifelong resident of the area. Therefore, my own biases are an important asset in interpreting assembled information.

I am a resident of the Border Town area. While I am not eligible to vote in municipal elections, I do have my own interest in discovering the inner workings of this election. I consider Border Town my hometown. My father grew up on the city's West Side and Border Town is where my parents had their first home as a married couple. My own perspective and feelings on the Border Town community and this election are an essential part of the thesis.

Second, the qualitative study does not lend itself to generalizations about the social world (Yin, 1984). In essence, this critique maintains that a case study approach is not in adherence with the natural science model and the final conclusions do not provide a "representativeness" about the topic being studied.

However, the solution to this problem is found in the circular nature of social research. Replication is the answer. Several researchers agree with Yin's assertion that, like quantitative experiments, qualitative case studies can be repeated in order to verify the findings and conclusions of the researcher (Orum, Feagin, & Sjoberg, 1991, Huberman & Miles, 1994).

Third, Yin (1984) remarks on how qualitative studies are stereotyped as taking "too long" and resulting "in massive, unreadable documents" (p. 21). Essentially, this

critique asserts that case studies include too much information. However, Stake (1994) maintains that it is the responsibility of the researcher to edit their final product. Every part of the case cannot be told. Therefore, the researcher must make “subjective choices” of what is pertinent to the final piece of research and what is not. Important and relevant information may be left out, but the researcher must have some modicum of discipline in preparing the final product. The final product should be succinct and relevant to the topic.

### Advantages of the Case Study

Orum, Feagin, and Sjoberg (1991) state four main advantages of qualitative research and the case study. First of all, the qualitative approach allows the researcher to study people in their natural setting. Subjects in this study of Border Town will not be asked to come to a special research setting, a laboratory, or a university. This will allow the researcher to observe research subjects and converse with them and interview them in an environment that is less formal and less intimidating.

The second strength is a holistic approach to social research. From a holistic perspective, the researcher is allowed to see the subject in relation to their social world. Human beings, when studied and observed in their social context, will be more inclined to play the role that operates in conjunction with their environmental surroundings. By focusing on one political event, in this situation a mayoral election, the research will be able to document what occurred and what the effects were on the social world of Border Town.

The third important point in support of the qualitative case study approach is that it allows for a sense of time and history. This point is particularly pertinent to the case study of Border Town's mayoral election. Time is a continuum. Social life does not remain the same. Constantly, social forces change our world and things that have been one way or in one state at one point history change their forms. Social life and history are fluid. They do not exist in a vacuum.

Orum, Feagin, and Sjoberg's (1991) final point is what their essay refers to as theory generation and expansion. They assert that the qualitative case study roots itself in what many of sociology's founding scholars practiced: the development, examination, and re-examination of new social theories.

### **Selecting Participants**

Rubin and Rubin (1995) provide three criteria that should be used to select interviewees. First, the interviewee should be well acquainted with the situation and topic that is being studied. Second, the participant should be a willing volunteer to be interviewed by the researcher. Third, all the participants interviewed should be representative of various points of view and perspectives concerning the subject matter being investigated. Finally, Rubin and Rubin (1995) advise the researcher to allow interviewees to lead them to other potential interviewees. The social network they are connected to can be of great help to the researcher.

Conducting research on the Border Town political arena requires the researcher to use his own judgment and interpretation of the political scene in Border Town. Still, considering the mayoral election is the centerpiece of the study, three key actors that

should be interviewed are the former mayor, Frank Williamson, the present mayor and winner of the 1998 election, Smiley Gomez, and the loser of the 1998 election, Alfredo Huerta.

As to the question of how many individuals should be interviewed, Kvale (1996) asserts that the researcher need only abide by the following rule: Interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know.

### Advantages of the Interview

There are several advantages Bailey (1994) lists as part of the interview method. First of all, interviews allow for tremendous flexibility in asking questions. A researcher can probe into the deeper meaning of different answers. Looking for detailed responses is an important goal of a case study.

Another advantage listed by Bailey (1994) is the opportunity the researcher has to visually observe nonverbal behavior. Different cues, facial gestures, and hand gestures can only be observed by utilizing interviews or participation observation tactics.

The last and perhaps most important strength of the interview method is opening up the opportunity for spontaneity. The fact that the unstructured interview and qualitative research as a whole is open ended can allow for all types of information and facts to be discovered by an aggressive and keen interviewer (Bailey, 1994).

### The Qualitative Interview

Much care must be taken in the researcher's approach of conducting social research with qualitative interviews. Prospective interviewees will be contacted via fax or through posted mail. Bailey (1994) asserts that most interviews use standard questions

contained in a pre written questionnaire. This will not be the case in this study of Border Town.

The interview process will be unstructured for this research. There will be a general outline the researcher will use and several questions will be planned ahead of time to be asked, but each set of questions will be custom fit for each interviewee. Several open-ended questions will form much of the interview.

The unstructured interview can often cross over into a conversation. The conversation/interview is a valid and useful research method. While the unstructured interview may *sound* like a conversation, Kvale (1996) maintains that the unstructured interview is a different creature. The interviewer must control the flow of the conversation by gently keeping it on track. The interview may indeed transform into a conversation, but this is where the interviewee is most relaxed and allows the research to recover pieces of valuable information.

### Secondary Analysis

A distinction should be made between documents and records (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, Hodder, 1994). Records are pieces of text that are used for official purposes. Therefore, records to be analyzed for the purposes of this study include voting precinct results, campaign contribution lists, and newspapers. Documents are pieces of text that are for personal use. Therefore, documents would be items such as personal letters, diaries, or memos. For this study, there is no indication that these documents will be analyzed. However, this situation may change if the opportunity to examine documents does present itself.

Having made a distinction between records and documents, these two kinds of text are helpful in assembling a study. Silverman (1993) lists two key advantages in the analysis of documents and records. First, they are directly relevant to the issue being studied. Records such as voting precinct records will provide proof of what sections of Border Town voted for each candidate. The second advantage is that records and documents are often accessible. This is especially true in the case of accessing voting records or campaign contribution lists.

### Analyzing Qualitative Data

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) asserts that in conducting social research “objective reality cannot be captured” (p. 2). The qualitative researcher is conducting an exploratory search for knowledge about a person, an event, or an issue (Kvale, 1996). Therefore, in analyzing and interpreting qualitative data, specifically interviews in this case, the researcher must interpret the meanings that participants attach to their words. This is a “naturalistic” and “interpretive” approach to understanding the ethnographic data (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

Denzin (1997) refers to this ethnographic approach as “The New Journalism” (p. 126). While news journalists present their articles as objective, factual accounts of events, “The New Journalism” grants license to the social scientist to interpret the words, text, and narrative of the research participant. Indeed, Denzin (1997) argues that the words of the research participants require interpretation by the ethnographer.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### Border Town's First Mexican American Mayor<sup>1</sup>

Border Town voters had elected a Mexican American to the office of mayor before Smiley Gomez and Alfredo Huerta fought each other for the mayoral office in 1998. Beto Longoria won the office in 1970 when he defeated Harold Brock, but lost it two years later in a close election to Mack Larsen. Today, Longoria claims that he failed to win his 1972 re-election bid because rainy weather discouraged voters from coming to the polls on Election Day. Nevertheless, Longoria had accomplished an important feat in becoming Border Town's first Mexican American mayor. In his opinion, his 1970 victory was an important event that paved the way for other Mexican American politicians to run for mayor in neighboring Valley cities.

In 1983 Longoria ran for the office of mayor again. He handily defeated two Anglo candidates, Lester Graff and Johnny Lindale, by well over 1,000 votes. In 1985, Longoria ran for re-election and narrowly defeated Larry Stafford by sixteen votes. However, Longoria's return to mayoral office, his defeat of Anglo candidates, and his willingness to question city policies and practices did not cause the kind of controversy or

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of simplicity, the research findings will utilize the term, Mexican American rather than Mexicano, Latino, or Hispanic.

racial animosity that the Gomez/Huerta contest did. It should also be noted that Longoria was not the only Mexican American making inroads to Border Town politics.

In addition to the Longoria victories, several Mexican Americans have held political office in Border Town on its five-seat city commission. Mexican American candidates have frequently won elections to the seats on the commission since 1970. Although these are designated as Place 1 through Place 5, elections for the city commission are at large elections. The mayor presides over commission meetings that are held in city hall on the first and third Monday and Wednesday of every month. The mayor votes on an issue only when there is a tied vote. One interviewee revealed that Frank Williamson, mayor of the city from 1987 to 1995, had voted only a handful of times during his tenure as mayor. If this were the case, why would someone want to be mayor of Border Town? The office seems to have little political power.

#### Who Wants To Be Mayor Of Border Town?

In terms of voting power, the mayor of Border Town has little power on the city commission. However, one interviewee made an important note on this issue. He made the distinction between the voting power the mayor possesses and the amount of influence that the mayor possesses. According to this interviewee, a journalist who had often covered Border Town politics, Frank Williamson had often been successful in swinging commissioner votes in the direction he would like them. One reason that Williamson was successful at this was because of his prominence in and strong connections to the Border Town business and political community. Another reason was



his military background. Williamson was a retired military colonel and as another interviewee stated, “He [Frank Williamson] was used to getting his way.”

Every individual that was interviewed during the fieldwork process of this study recognized the importance of the 1998 mayoral election in Border Town. One respondent referred to it as “the biggest thing that has ever happened in this city.” Another respondent stated that “it isn’t the biggest thing that has ever happened in Border Town, but it’s definitely the biggest thing that’s ever happened in Border Town politics.”

### Why Are We Talking About This?

One individual, a former city commissioner, did not see the relevance of writing a thesis on the subject of this mayoral race. I called her one afternoon to request an interview. I informed her that I was conducting a case study and it was concentrating on the 1998 mayoral race, she started to laugh as she responded, “And they [the Department of Sociology at UTPA] let you pick this as a topic.” As she continued to laugh I asked her, “Ma’am, could you tell me why you find this so funny?” She stumbled over her words for a moment and then asked, “What is it you want from me?” I again requested an interview. She answered, “I wouldn’t be interested.” and hung up the phone.

I mentioned this incident to former Mayor Longoria and he commented on her behavior by saying, “Oh, she didn’t want to talk to you because she knew you would bring up the racial thing. She doesn’t believe in any of that kind of stuff.”

In fact, I had been motivated to call her because of the editorial piece she had written in the April 25, 1998 edition of the local Border Town newspaper a week before the election took place. In her editorial column, she brings up two important questions

that are relevant to this research. First, her column asks, “Why has race become an issue in this campaign when both candidates share the same heritage?” Second, her column asks, “Why is it so difficult for some to accept that a Hispanic can deserve the respect of both Anglo and Hispanic supporters?” The candidate she referred to, who has the respect of Anglos and Hispanics, was Smiley Gomez. The interviews presented here provide some answers to her questions.

### **The Battle To Be Mayor**

The three individuals that were targeted for interviews were former Mayor (1987-1995), Frank Williamson, present mayor and winner of the 1998 election, Smiley Gomez, and election loser, Alfredo Huerta. Within a week of my request for an interview, I was able to spend some time with each man. I was never able to speak to any of them directly until the appointed time of the interview.<sup>1</sup>

By happenstance, the interviews with Alfredo Huerta and Mayor Gomez took place on the same day. However, the following is compiled from the time I spent with several interviewees. Adding some important understanding to their words and opinions are additional interviews with two journalists, a city commissioner, and another former mayor who was previously mentioned, Beto Longoria.

Alfredo Huerta was painted by himself, during the campaign and during our interview, as the anti-thesis of Frank Williamson. Inspection of campaign contribution records demonstrates that this may not have always been the case. 1995 campaign contribution lists reveal that Huerta made a \$100 contribution to Williamson’s campaign

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<sup>1</sup> I am unable to use the information garnered from my interview with Frank Williamson. The reason for this is covered in detail in the appendix section of the thesis.

fund. However, Huerta strongly testified of his strong feelings against former Mayor Williamson, both professionally and personally. Huerta did not agree with the way the West Side had long been ignored by what he felt was an Anglo dominated power structure in Border Town.

When someone in Border Town mentions the West Side, they refer to the Mexican American section of the city. Indeed, 80% of the Border Town population (like most Valley cities) consists of Mexican Americans. The West Side has an even larger percentage Mexican Americans than the rest of Border Town. Driving south on Fernando Street, I notice that nearly all the businesses have names such as “Hermosa Tire Shop” or “Lopez Tortilleria.” In the residential areas, I see hardly any white faces.

To my own perception, the West Side is a distinct and mostly Mexican American neighborhood. According to several interviewees, the fact that the West Side is a Mexican American neighborhood is connected to the lack of services and resources that they believed the neighborhood suffers from. However, this did not stop many of these interviewees from being complimentary of Frank Williamson. Many regarded him as a strong mayor.

According to poll results from 1987 to 1995, Frank Williamson was a popular mayor in Border Town. He easily won election to the mayoral post. In fact, he ran uncontested in 1987 and 1992. In 1989 and 1995, when he did face opposition, Williamson easily won the elections. In 1989 he won the election by over 2,700 votes and in 1995, he won the election by well over 1,500 votes.

Alfredo Huerta believed that Frank Williamson was doing a good job of being unfair. In particular, Huerta accused Williamson and his political allies of ignoring the

West Side. Huerta was seemingly a newcomer to Border Town politics. Though he had numerous business dealings in the area, he was an unfamiliar face with much of the Border Town community. While he may have been a new face in Border Town politics, former mayor Longoria pointed out that Huerta had long been quietly involved in the city's political workings.

I met with Mr. Huerta in the late afternoon of a typically hot and humid summer day in Border Town. We spoke in his office, which is housed in a two-story office building on a major commercial street in Border Town. Mr. Huerta is one of Border Town's wealthiest citizens.

I wanted to open the interview by questioning Mr. Huerta about some rumors I had heard about him during the campaign. I relayed to him that there were a few tough questions I would like to ask, but I did not want to sound disrespectful. He stopped me in mid-sentence and said, "Let me tell you something. It is very hard to offend me. You can ask me any question you want."

He gave me the green light so I asked, "Are you a drug dealer"? He replied by telling me that all of the money he had earned in his life had been through legitimate business dealings. The second question I asked him was, "Did you buy votes in this election and did you pay people to snoop through the trash bins outside Mr. Gomez' house?" He also vehemently denied such allegations and found them preposterous. He was not offended by the questions.

In later interviews with two local journalists, they both found it unlikely that Huerta had bought votes or paid people to search through the trash bins outside Mr. Gomez' house. They had never heard the rumors I was curious about. Huerta claimed

that a prominent Border Town attorney had been responsible for spreading rumors about him.

Both journalists confirmed that the same attorney named by Huerta had called one of them with information about a run in with the law that Huerta had in the early 1970s. For several days, the attorney called one of the journalists, pressuring him to publish the story. The story did end up being true and was published, but the journalists were surprised by how strongly the attorney pushed to have the story made public.

In our interview, Huerta went on to list the two main reasons that he ran for mayor. First, he wanted to gain name recognition. Ultimately, he would like his two sons to be U.S. congressmen and he realized that he did not have enough name recognition in Border Town. Second, and most important, he believes that Border Town needs a new direction. The city needs new blood to run its political and business affairs. He believed that an old Anglo elite continued to run the city. Huerta characterized Frank Williamson as the embodiment of the Border Town Anglo elite.

Assertions such as this one did not please Frank Williamson. He made his disdain for such allegations evident in the Border Town newspaper. During the campaign, Huerta also questioned the financial integrity of the Williamson administration. Huerta accused Williamson of mismanaging city funds. In a Border Town newspaper article, Gomez defended the Williamson administration by saying that a reputable Texas CPA firm had conducted an audit of municipal finances. Border Town had been given a clean bill of fiscal health.

One of the significant aspects of Border Town's 1998 mayoral election was the amount of money spent on the campaign. In particular, Mr. Huerta spent a great deal of

his own money on his campaign. Campaign contribution records dated April 24, 1998 show that the Huerta campaign had \$64,070.51 in loan debt. These were loans that Huerta had lent to his own campaign.

The amount of money that Huerta spent on the campaign was an issue I raised with Mayor Smiley Gomez. Mayor Gomez spoke to me in the office that is provided for the mayor of Border Town in city hall. Mayor Gomez stated that it seemed as if Huerta attempted to “buy the election” by spending \$84,000 on his mayoral campaign. Gomez seemed to feel that spending so much money to win a political election was insulting. In addition to this, Gomez, like Williamson, believed that Huerta attempted to create a racial division in the city in order to be elected.

Nevertheless, Gomez felt he was victorious because he was able to stick to his own record of civic service. Gomez believes that his pledge to continue the “controlled growth” that had been fostered under Mayor Williamson was important to Border Town voters. It was this pledge to keep Border Town on the path to steady growth that allowed him to win the election.

City commissioner, Mark Martinez, also felt that Huerta overspent on the mayoral contest. In his opinion, the Huerta campaign “scared off people and brought the vote in for Smiley Gomez.” Martinez felt that the flamboyant manner in which Huerta ran his campaign eventually turned many voters off. Martinez also pointed out that much of the Border Town community was unfamiliar with Huerta, although his name had been known for some time in the area. Therefore, Border Town voters, both Mexican American and Anglo, would have felt very uncomfortable electing a man like Huerta into office. He was too flamboyant and seemingly arrogant.

However, Huerta did respond to the criticism that he was attempting to buy his way into the mayor's office. Huerta believed that the only way he could become mayor of Border Town was to spend an enormous amount of money. He told me, "Money is the only way to beat a closed system." In order to demonstrate for me exactly what he meant by "closed system," Huerta used an example: South Africa.

He stated the way Blacks had been subjected to racism and discrimination in South Africa was the same situation that Mexican Americans experienced in Border Town. In particular, Huerta emphasized the treatment that the West Side had received from the Anglo elite in Border Town.

Another issue that Huerta raised from his South Africa analogy was the low voter turnout in the election. He believed the only reason he lost the race was because Mexican Americans did not vote in high enough numbers. He believed the reason for voter apathy, especially on the West Side, was that voters had little hope that Border Town would change. According to Huerta, voters on the West Side cannot escape the feeling that the status quo would remain. West Side voters were mired in the feeling that Anglos would remain in charge, regardless of which way they voted.

How to characterize the voter turnout is something that Huerta disagrees on with Mayor Gomez. Official voting records indicate that Gomez garnered 4,304 total votes to Huerta's 3,444. The local newspaper in a May 3, 1998 edition reported that indeed this was the highest voter turnout in Border Town history for a municipal election. But how do the election results look if only West Side voting precincts are evaluated?

There are nine voting precincts that cast votes for municipal elections in Border Town. For the purpose of evaluation, I determined that five of these precincts were West

Side precincts and the remaining four were in other parts of the city. As a resident of the area, I relied on my understanding of Border Town to decide whether or not a precinct was on the West Side. According to my own analysis, Huerta garnered 1,990 votes from West Side voters as opposed to the 1,012 votes that Gomez received.

Gomez won the election by overwhelming Huerta in Precinct 6, Border Town's most affluent neighborhood. Gomez claimed 1,164 votes in Precinct 6 as opposed to the 362 votes that Huerta claimed. At the onset of our interview, Gomez disagreed with my claim that he did not do well in West Side precincts. He claimed that he had done quite well on the West Side.

I raised the point that his strongest showing had been in Precinct 6, not only Border Town's wealthiest neighborhood, but also considered the city's most Anglo neighborhood. I was a bit taken aback when Gomez told me "Precinct 6 is basically a Hispanic neighborhood now." I was able to repeat this quote to every respondent I interviewed. Every respondent disagreed with Gomez' characterization of Precinct 6 as a Hispanic neighborhood.

To Gomez, the overall voter turnout for the mayoral election was terrific. After all, it had been the highest turnout the city had ever seen for a municipal election. To Huerta, history meant very little in this case. In his opinion, the Mexican American vote in the city had not even come close to its potential. Huerta described the lack of Mexican American votes as "a sleeping giant that I want to awaken." He again maintained that Mexican Americans stayed away from the polls because of a belief that their vote would not change Border Town's political power structure.



However, several respondents disagreed with Huerta on why the Mexican American voter turnout was so low. Few of them agreed with the Huerta argument that Mexican Americans did not vote because they lacked hope. One respondent (a Mexican American) claimed that Mexican Americans are not as concerned with public affairs as Anglos are. She noted: "I never see Hispanics at city commission meetings. Usually, it's mostly Anglos that attend those things. If Hispanics want things to change, they have to get involved."

Former Mayor Longoria agreed with Huerta. He concurred that many Mexican Americans did not vote because they believed it would not make any difference in Border Town. Longoria also stated that certain prominent families are able to control important business and political affairs in the city. Longoria said that, to some extent, the people in Border Town who believe their vote does not make a difference are correct.

Longoria disagreed with the opinion of Mayor Gomez that there was no racial division in Border Town. He laughed and exclaimed, "Hell yes, it exists!" Longoria was an avid and public supporter of Huerta during his candidacy for mayor. He talked of how much he disliked "the status quo in Border Town." He also spoke of how he believed that Frank Williamson and "others" represented the old status quo. Another respondent agreed that Williamson and Gomez represented the status quo. This same respondent was of the opinion that the reason that Gomez believed that the voter turnout was excellent is "because they won."

That phrase, "they won", is an important piece of information in this study. The respondent had referred to Williamson and Gomez as people that were on the same team. Williamson, actually, did not endorse a candidate in this political election. However,

campaign contribution records do show that after the election, on June 30, 1998, Frank Williamson made a contribution to the Gomez war chest in the amount of \$1,000.

Although the Williamson contribution was after the election, it certainly is some indication of which candidate Williamson favored. Local journalists that were interviewed agree. They advised me to assemble the campaign contribution records of Williamson and Gomez. These records would demonstrate that Gomez and Williamson share many of the same political supporters. In addition, the journalists claimed that the campaign contribution records would indicate Gomez was backed by mostly Anglo supporters. To this point, the journalists both stated that racial tension was present in the mayoral contest. According to them, many prominent Anglos were not pleased with Mr. Huerta's candidacy. As one respondent told me "Rich White people in Border Town were pissed off that Huerta was running for mayor."

In comparing the Williamson and Gomez contributors, the journalists are correct in their two main assertions. First, many of the same people financially supported Williamson and Gomez. Second, the majority of these financial supporters have English surnames and it can be safely assumed that they are Anglo. Therefore, Huerta was correct in saying that Gomez had tremendous Anglo support. Huerta even alleged that a "special meeting" of prominent Anglos had taken place as the filing deadline to run for mayor of Border Town approached. Huerta alleged that at the "special meeting" Gomez was hand-picked to succeed Frank Williamson as mayor of Border Town. Who were these prominent Anglos that Huerta accused of hand-picking Gomez to run for mayor?

When discussing what he considered to be the Anglo elite, Huerta was not afraid to name names. These were families and people at whom he was quite angry. He told

me that three important people or families ran political and business affairs in Border Town. First, the family who owned Border Town National Bank, according to Huerta, was an “old power” family that controlled much of the “money supply” in the city. Second, Huerta alleged that another family, who owned a large car dealership in Border Town, controlled city elections. Finally, Huerta alleged that Frank Williamson had tremendous power in controlling Border Town politics.

Huerta also stated that these prominent families in Border Town were wary of him. He had stated often that Border Town should “be ruled by the majority.” Huerta explained that the city is 84% Mexican American and that its power structure should reflect that. The election of Smiley Gomez maintained the old Anglo power structure in Border Town.

Concerning Smiley Gomez’ place in the Border Town power structure, Huerta claimed that Gomez had always been of little importance in the Border Town business and political community. He told me, “Smiley Gomez has little or no influence in Border Town. He is *their* Hispanic.” As the interview progressed, Huerta pointed out that when he used the term, “their,” he was referring to an Anglo elite in Harlingen. The resentment that Huerta felt toward Williamson and other prominent Anglos was deep and intense.

I had taken note of an article in the April 15, 1999 edition of the local newspaper. The article revealed that Williamson and Huerta were next door neighbors. This intrigued me and I asked Huerta if it was a coincidence that he and Williamson were next door neighbors. He said that he lived next door to Williamson on purpose. He stated, “I wanted to get in his [Williamson’s] face and let him see me every day. I wanted him to know that I knew what he was up to.”

Beto Longoria believed that Alfredo Huerta had a right to be angry. Longoria had attended St. Mary's University in the 1950s. He returned to Border Town and built a career in educational administration. He was successful in building his career. However, he maintained that a career as a state employee is easier for a Mexican American to have in Border Town as opposed to a career in business. Longoria said:

I don't blame Alfredo for being angry. He is involved in the business community and someone's race affects them more in the Border Town business community. Alfredo had to be more aggressive in order to make it in business here.

However, Huerta pointed out to me that he was initially unable to make his way in the Border Town business community.

He claimed that he was forced to make much of his initial fortune outside of Border Town. He spoke of business dealings he had in several states such as Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Colorado. This fact ended up working to his advantage when he began his campaign for mayor. As he began his campaign, he pointed out that much of the Anglo elite did not realize how wealthy he was.

Huerta claimed that soon after filing to run in the mayoral contest, two sizable loans he had taken out with local banks were ordered to be paid immediately. Huerta proudly pointed out that he had plenty of money with which to pay off the loans and promptly did so. He said that these locally run banks were stunned that he was able to come up with so much money so quickly. Huerta credited the fact that so many of his business dealings being outside of Border Town provided him with an upper hand on the city's Anglo elite. He believed the loans had been called in to dissuade him from running for mayor.

Some respondents relayed to me that City Commissioner Martinez had desired to run for mayor. They alleged that Williamson and other prominent individuals had pressured Martinez to forego plans to stage a mayoral campaign. However, when Martinez was questioned about this, he responded that he had thought about running for mayor, but had made a personal decision not to do so. He emphasized that no one but himself was responsible for his decision.

However, Martinez did assert that there is a powerful Anglo establishment in Border Town. He stated that "Border Town may not be ready for a Hispanic mayor." What I understood Martinez to mean was that much of the Mexican American community in the city still does not have the political or economic resources to truly have power in Border Town. Like Longoria and Huerta, Martinez pleads the case of the West Side. He feels that for a long time now the West Side has been ignored. In his opinion, many of its residents have not had equal access to resources.

However, Martinez believes that Huerta sometimes takes his sentiments too far. He worries that both Gomez and Huerta are too exclusive rather than being inclusive. Martinez feels that an exclusive approach to Border Town politics will not bode well for most people in the city. In his opinion, both candidates were too rigid in defining who it was they represented. Martinez also made a point of saying that although Huerta advocated for the West Side, he found Huerta "hard to read" politically.

Huerta was quickly becoming a political man. He asserted that his political platform revolved around ending Border Town's Anglo political machine. He claimed that he was fighting the fight that poor and working class people on the West Side could

not afford to fight. According to Huerta, it is the very fact that he is a wealthy man that allows him to fight for the West Side.

Even though Huerta stood up for the West Side, many respondents agreed with the Martinez that it was difficult to tell which groups or people were Huerta supporters. As for Gomez, many interviewees did perceive him as a candidate who represented Anglo interests in Border Town. Some pointed out that Gomez could not afford to advocate the interests of the West Side, because it may have jeopardized his relationship with prominent Anglos in Border Town.

Some interviewees even depicted Gomez as someone who was not really Mexican American. Huerta would always reiterate this when he would refer to Gomez as “their Hispanic.” One interviewee agreed, “Huerta is a Mexicano. Smiley sounds like he’s from West Texas when he talks. He’s basically White.”

This made Gomez quite angry. He could not understand why people perceived him as anything else but Mexican American. He told me, “I’m Mexicano. I couldn’t even speak English when I started school.” He also informed me that the reason people knew him as Smiley was because his first school teacher could not pronounce his proper name, Ismael.

According to many respondents, days of ethnic tension, imagined or real, are not finished in Border Town. Alfredo Huerta is convinced there is an Anglo elite that needs to be put out of power. He is also convinced he is the man who can do it. Huerta told me, “I’m smarter than them. I’m younger than them and I have more education.” Huerta said that it was a “near certainty” he would run for mayor again in 2001. He has made

**this fight a personal one. If Huerta does run in 2001 then he can count on a rematch.**

**Smiley Gomez informed me that his bid for re-election in 2001 is already planned.**

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

**There were other institutions in Border Town that could have been the focus of a case study. There is much controversy concerning the Border Town Police Department and the Border Town Chamber of Commerce. Many of the respondents brought up both organizations when discussing interethnic conflict between Mexican Americans and Anglos in the city.**

**There is one important rule that a social researcher must know if they want to investigate Border Town politics. The rule is that business and politics are the same worlds in Border Town. They are inseparable. The five politicians that were interviewed for this study had numerous business dealings in the community. Business affairs were always discussed when interviewees began to talk about Border Town politics. It is money and property that much of the political fighting is about.**

**This research found that Smiley Gomez was the candidate of choice for Anglo residents in Border Town. Every interviewee, with the exception of Gomez and Williamson, agreed with this assertion. Evaluating campaign contribution records makes this clear. The very people who supported his predecessor, Frank Williamson, contributed to the Gomez campaign. Finally, the election results in Precinct 6, Border Town's most affluent and Anglo dominated neighborhood, indicate that Gomez garnered**



most of his support from Anglos. Why did the Anglo elite support Gomez?

Gomez answers this question himself. In our interview, he continually pointed out that he believed Border Town was in good hands when Frank Williamson was mayor. As far as he was concerned, Gomez wanted to continue the “controlled growth” and economic prosperity that Border Town was experiencing. He delivered the party line. There was every reason for an Anglo elite in Border Town to support Smiley Gomez.

Therefore, evidence remains of Anglo domination in Border Town. Prominent Anglos have owned businesses, banks, and commercial real estate for generations now. This kind of situation leads to the institutionalized and personal discrimination that continues in Border Town. The West Side is the most obvious victim of this discrimination.

As for Alfredo Huerta, the questions are difficult to answer, but an educated guess can be made. Did a Mexican American elite support him? As far as the research could learn, the answer to this is no. In fact, this question forces a second question to be asked. Who is the Mexican American elite in Border Town?

When respondents talked about prominent Anglos, they were able to name four or five prominent families in the community. No one ever brought up the names of any powerful Mexican American families. Huerta may be in the process of forcing some kind of Mexican American elite into action, but the fact remains that he financed his campaign. As long as this is the case, it will remain difficult to draw connections between Huerta and who his supporters might be.

As for the harshness of the internal colonialism in South Texas, and particularly Border Town, its effects have eased. However, the evidence presented here argues for its

persistence in Border Town political institutions. Mirande (1985) is in accordance with this conclusion when he argues:

The dominant group permits a certain amount of upward mobility for individual Members of internally colonized who are either more Caucasian in appearance And/or willing to adopt the values and culture of the dominant group. Ironically, Such individuals are accepted largely to the extent that they are perceived as not Identifying with or representing the interests of the colonized group (p. 189).

The data show that many Huerta supporters perceived Smiley Gomez as "White". Huerta refused to see that the West Side had interests that were in conflict with the Anglo elite and, most importantly, he received the financial backing of Border Town's Anglo elite and the votes of Border Town's Anglos.

Border Town is an exceptional place to study. I am biased, because it is my hometown. However, the conflict between Mexican Americans and Anglos in the community has not been settled. Many respondents believed the Anglo elite was literally dying off. Its days were numbered. This may not be the case though. Some kind of conflict will continue to exist in Border Town, especially if the predominantly working class, Mexican American West Side continues to be ignored.

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**Note:** Campaign contribution records and election results are in possession of the author. All newspaper articles that are referred to in this study are in the possession of the author with the exception of the July 29, 1932 article. This article can be accessed in Hill's book, which is referenced above.

## **APPENDIX A**

## **Anglo Oppression of Ethnic Minority Researchers**

In the fall semester of 1998 while completing my graduate work for my Master's degree in Sociology, I was enrolled in a Research Methods seminar. Throughout the course of the seminar I had spoken often about my thesis topic of Border Town and its 1998 mayoral election. Many times students had made numerous comments on my work, particularly an Anglo graduate student. She had been a colleague of mine in previous graduate seminars. Like myself, this graduate student lived in the Border Town area. On this evening she would attack me personally and my research on Border Town. Although in previous class meetings she had been quite supportive of my work, this night was to be different.

In the first hour of our seminar that night I told my colleagues that I had come to the realization that I had prejudiced feelings toward Anglos. This realization came to me in moments of self-examination while reading on Rio Grande Valley history and Mexican American history. I did not think my comments would be earth shattering, but in retrospect it may have been the flame that started the fire.

As we progressed through the second hour of discussion in our seminar, the aforementioned Anglo graduate student began to raise her voice and speak angrily to me. For several minutes she attacked my perspective on Border Town and the anti-Anglo sentiments I had confessed to. I found this ironic, because in a previous class meeting she had declared to the class that "all Whites must realize that they are racist." She allowed herself to confess her own racist tendencies, but apparently she was unwilling to allow me to confess my own prejudices. She angrily shook her glasses at me and said, "You have sat there all semester and pontificated and pontificated about Border Town."

I began to sense what was making her so angry was that a young Mexican American man was beginning to make some bold statements about the Border Town community. What also might have angered her was that I was making many of those critical statements about her ethnic group. I was as much an expert on the Border Town area as she was and I had the right to make comments about the area. And as for pontificating, my good friend, Omar Rivera, summed it up when he told me, "Why not harp about Border Town? That's what your research is about."

I can understand the offense that she took at my comments. I certainly meant no harm by them, but at the same time I was being honest about my personal feelings and how they were connected to my research. However, that is not the main point of this section.

The more crucial point is that this woman, who in the past had told me of her family and social links to Border Town's Anglo community, was oppressing my research. Her angry opposition to the statements I made is indicative of Anglo oppression. Apparently, liberal Anglos, such as this lady, can make harsh statements about the Anglo establishment, but in her mind there should be a limit on someone like me. I refuse to accept those limits and other minority social researchers should refuse too.

The other main point of this section is to warn other ethnic minority social researchers. You will face opposition when you want to correct and add to history. An important reminder is that some of this oppression will come from liberal Whites. Many of these individuals may be willing to criticize Anglo domination, but only if it is they who are doing the criticizing. The moment that a social researcher of color chooses to

construct indictments against the Anglo establishment then for some the situation becomes unacceptable.

This incident was unfortunate. I would be lying if I said that I was unshaken by what occurred that night. I felt hurt and humiliated. Did it stop me from pursuing my research? Absolutely not. Other minority social researchers should not be discouraged by adversity. These attacks will come. If anything, the anger that this colleague displayed toward me only proved that I was truly on the trail of something important in Border Town.



## **APPENDIX B**

**“Use of material from our interview is not authorized and ill advised.”**

On July 12, 1999 I did interview former mayor of Border Town, Frank Williamson. We spoke in his office, which is housed in the investment firm that he runs in Border Town. We spoke for well over an hour. He was articulate and enthused throughout our interview. Before I left, Mayor Williamson made sure to give me a lengthy resume showing his long career of military and public service. He also provided me with his business card. I was happy to have spoken with him and he seemed pleased to have been interviewed. I knew that his comments and opinions would be a valuable addition to my thesis.

On August 3, 1999 I faxed a permission slip to Mayor Williamson. This was a request to receive official permission to use the words and opinions from our interview in my thesis. He asked to see a draft of my thesis. I sent him what I had completed on August 6. He faxed a letter the next day stating that he had been misquoted (in his opinion) once. Other than this, he was satisfied with the draft. However, until he saw a final draft, he could not sign the permission slip.

I faxed the final draft of my thesis to Mayor Williamson on August 10. The next day he faxed me the following letter:

Adrian:

I agreed to your request for an interview in my sincere belief that you would prepare a completely factual, objective and fair thesis. The draft you have provided me does not meet that high standard, in my opinion.

Your thesis is slanted, biased and less than factual in many instances.

Accordingly, I cannot in good conscience sign your form of official permission to use information from our interview. Use of material from our interview is not authorized and ill advised.

I am disappointed you failed to measure up to my high expectation of you.

Frank Williamson

Needless to say I was angered with the response from former Mayor Williamson. I had hoped he understood the story I was trying to communicate about Border Town. He apparently did not.

I was especially angry that he talked “down to me” with his comment about how I was unable to meet his high expectations and high standard. I interpreted this as an inference that I had low standards. I was offended. A few minutes after receiving this letter, I replied to Mayor Williamson:

Dear Mayor Williamson,

I am disappointed that you will not authorize your participation in my thesis. Of course, I respect your right to withdraw your participation. **My thesis will not, in any way, use your comments or opinions that I obtained during our interview.** I indeed do have high standards, Mayor

Williamson. That is why I asked permission to use your words and opinions in the first place. This will be my last correspondence with you.

Respectfully,

Adrian Cruz

Is my anger apparent in the letter? I believe so. I suppose that it was unrealistic to expect Frank Williamson to understand my perspective in the thesis, but I hoped that he would accept my research as a valid perspective on the mayoral election in Border Town. Obviously, I was wrong. I made some mistakes here and they should be addressed.

In my opinion, I was wrong to send a permission slip nearly a month after I had conducted the interview. I believe that presenting the slip *immediately after* the interview would have increased the possibility of having it signed. I can also argue that a permission slip was not necessary at all. Williamson (and every respondent that was interviewed) agreed to be interviewed, knew that it was about the mayoral election, and knew that I was collecting information for a thesis. Did I need to present them with a permission slip? In retrospect, no, I do not believe so. I know some social scientists would disagree with me.

What was another mistake I made? I forgot that I was interviewing politicians. Politicians have public personas to protect. I can think of two quotes from Mayor Williamson that must have made him kick himself when he read them. In his final letter to me, he accused my thesis of being slanted and biased. I do not disagree with those assertions. The thesis is biased. However, I think that ultimately, Mayor Williamson refused to allow his participation because he said a few things that could reflect upon him negatively.

There are lessons here. I have learned from them. Already, they have made me a better sociologist. What is the most important lesson I have learned? Ethnographers should tread carefully.

## VITA

**Adrian Cruz received his BA in English from the University of Texas—Pan American in 1997. He expects to receive his MS degree in Sociology in 2001, also from the University of Texas—Pan American. Since the 1999-2000 academic year, he has been a doctoral student in Sociology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.**