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Supplementary studies in Rio Grande Valley history

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**RIO GRANDE VALLEY
HISTORY**

Edited by
**Milo Kearney
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Illustrated by
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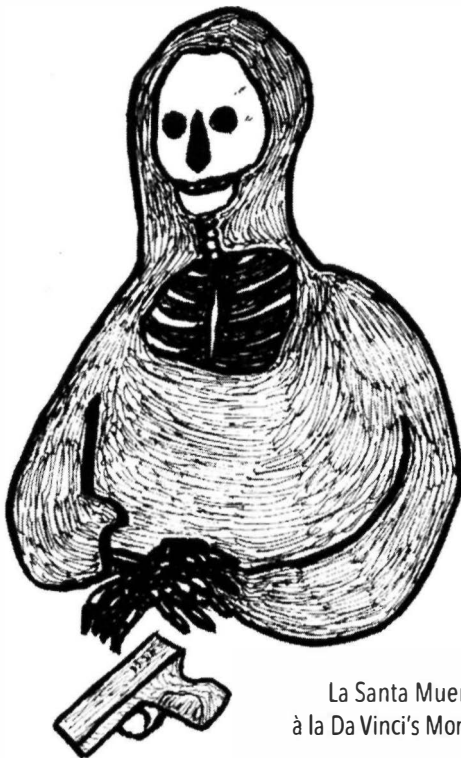


Volume Fifteen
**The UT Rio Grande Valley Regional History Series
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley**

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La Santa Muerte
à la Da Vinci's Mona Lisa

Volume Fifteen

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The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

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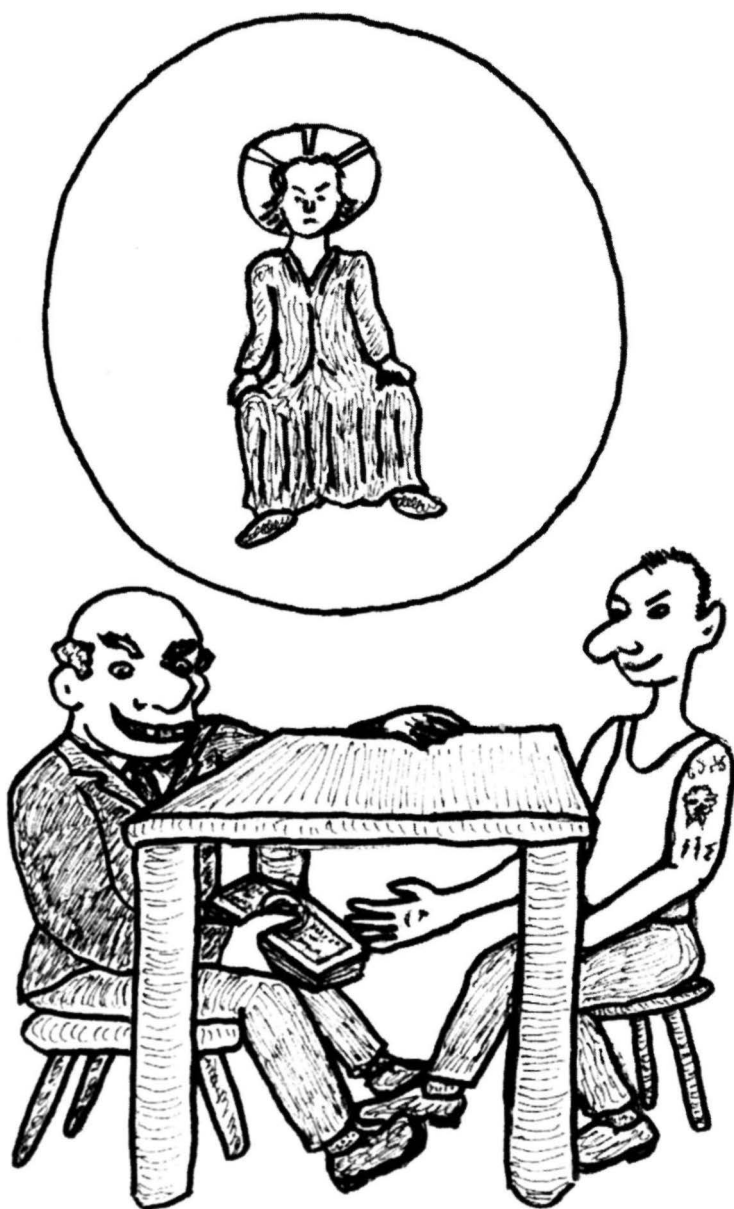
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by Milo Kearney

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God Is Watching
à la Hieronymus Bosch

Corrupted

by

Tom Emrick

It is said that money corrupts
Just how bad could it possibly be?
Now that they've relaxed regulations
absolute wealth corrupts absolutely

If money is considered to be free speech
we might as well all stay at home
for we still just have our normal voice
but the rich got a megaphone

There are lots of national polls
that reveal what's on most of our minds
But politicians on both sides of the border
can only see those dollar signs

Now because of Citizens United
our representation is going to fail
So if corporations are really people
then some of them should go to jail

EARLY MATAMOROS



Open Carry Nativity
à la Goya

**Primal Matamoros:
Deeper Meanings of Name and Place
on the (Once Wild) Río Bravo**

by

Craig H. Roell

This river, without doubt, is one of the most interesting objects which should be attended to, not only in the colony but in all the internal provinces ... the aforesaid, it seems to me, is sufficient so that it be seen without equivocation that, in these lands, one could do with the Río Bravo or Grande del Norte what those of Louisiana and Boston do with the Mississippi.

—Fray Vicente de Santa María,

Relación histórica de la colonia del Nuevo Santander

"Yes, the floods, Don Santiago." Tomás also shook his head. "It is not called the Río Bravo for nothing. You and I have seen it so wide that it seemed a sea, and wild as a thousand charging bulls."

—Jovita González and Eve Raleigh,

*Caballero: A Historical Novel*¹

In the primal history of Matamoros, the river that Spanish adventurers would call "*Grande*" and "*Bravo*" is the city's genesis story, both great and wild. It has nourished this historic locale in northeastern Tamaulipas, Mexico, with opportunities and dreams, protection and utility, livelihood and sustenance, commerce and trade, tradition and folklore—indeed life itself. As Rod Davis, writing for *Texas Parks and Wildlife Magazine*, insightfully put it, "Always the river has been used for commerce, for transportation, for irrigation, for washing, for drinking and as a sewer.... Its waters carry the genes of conquest, defeat, valor, and treachery."²

The *Río Bravo del Norte* (as the Rio Grande is called in Mexico) begins inauspiciously as a snow-fed stream in what is today the Rio Grande National Forest in southwestern Colorado (United States), some twelve-thousand feet above sea level in the remote San Juan Mountains. Perhaps it is merely poetic happenstance that Saint John the Apostle (*San Juan*) would also inspire the original naming of the settlement that would be established amid the estuaries near the mouth of the river, *San Juan de los Esteros Hermosos*—later renamed Matamoros. From the knife-edge ridges and steep slopes that characterize the San Juan Mountains, the Rio Grande flows forth just east of the Continental Divide and travels some 1,900 miles before finally emptying into the Gulf of Mexico, making it the fifth longest river in North America and among the top twenty in the world. The river's dramatic length ensured that, historically, Indians and foreign explorers would encounter it only in segments.³

Indian peoples identified the vital watercourse in their own Native languages, commonly translated roughly as “big river.” Spaniards, who discovered the river's mouth perhaps as early as 1519, called it variously *Río de Nuestra Señora* (River of Our Lady), *Río del Norte* (River of the North), *Río Turbio* (muddy or turbulent river), and *Río Grande del Norte* (the Great River of the North), among other names. The lower course of the river, which forms the setting for our story, was dubbed *Río Bravo* by the Spaniards as early as 1598.⁴ The Spanish name *bravo* reveals the once volatile nature of the river, denoting “wild, bold, agitated, stormy, fierce, angry”—terms prophetically suitable for the turbulent history that would be later realized between Texas and Mexico, and symbolized in the city of Matamoros itself. Moreover, the sharp hairpin turns of the lower Bravo contributed both the river's historic wildness as well as the area's characteristic oxbow lakes, which Spaniards dubbed *resacas*. But these twists, turns and loops made the river (in a phrase common among boatmen) “exceedingly tortuous” to navigate, even though the river measured about eighty yards wide and,

varying according to the seasons, from seven to nine feet in depth for about one hundred miles from its mouth. While Matamoros was only about thirty-one miles from the Gulf, to follow the anfractuous windings of the river nearly doubled that distance. Plus, a sand bar at the entrance of the harbor added to navigational hazards, which only smaller vessels usually could negotiate. Nearby Brazos de Santiago on Brazos Island offered a deeper water port for larger vessels; cargo was unloaded and then hauled overland 29 miles to Matamoros by mule packs or ox carts, then ferried across the river. Even so, the historical celebration of Matamoros as a regional center of trade and commerce lay in its *potential*.⁵ As one writer reflected in 1838, "its locality will, in spite of the sand bar at the entrance of the harbor, render it, in times to come, the principal sea port of the Mexican republic, and secure for it an extensive trade.... Even, at this day, the commerce of Matamoros is considerable; coming next to that of Tampico and Vera Cruz. It will certainly, before long, surpass that of either of those two cities...."⁶ As Sam Spade or Prospero might have said, such potential is the stuff that dreams are made of.

Regrettably, the exciting promise of this once grand river has rather become a mournful elegy. Today, less than a fifth of the Rio Grande's historical flow now reaches the Gulf. Over the last thirty years the population in the Lower Rio Grande Valley has exploded in both the United States and Mexico, driven in large part by NAFTA-inspired factories (*maquiladoras*), as well as agricultural and livestock productivity, and tourism. As Colin Woodward reported for *Emagazine* in his 2003 article bearing the sadly ironic title of "Rio Poco": "The total population of the valley has doubled from 1.1 million to more than 2.2 million since 1970. It's expected to double again by 2030." A current ongoing study by the Lower Rio Grande Valley Developmental Council pulls no punches: "The magnitude and frequency of water supply shortages within the study area are severe. The Region M Water Plan states that the population in the eight-county region

is expected to grow from 1.7 million in 2010 to 4 million in 2060. The water supply shortage is expected to reach a staggering 592,084 af/yr [acre-feet per year] by 2060, which would result in 35 percent of water demands being unmet.”⁸ Moreover, to tame the river’s historic wildness, dikes, levees, and dams have been built to control the water flow in order to prevent flooding and to supply water for massive irrigation projects between the Amistad Reservoir and Matamoros/ Brownsville. With the corresponding population and irrigation demands on the river, exacerbated by drought, Woodward observed that, “by the time [the Rio Grande] reaches Matamoros, the river’s level is so low that it often falls below the Mexican city’s intake pipes.” Sadly, as the *Austin Chronicle* reported in 2001, “for the first time in recorded history,” the once mighty river “no longer had enough flow to push away a sandbar built up by ocean waves at its mouth, near the coastal beach at Boca Chica.”⁹

Rod Davis similarly lamented in 2002 for *Texas Parks and Wildlife* magazine, “Today the river is so depleted from irrigation, salt cedar [Tamarisk shrubs], and municipal and industrial draws [that] the river has earned another name: endangered. Over the last decade, it has placed six times on lists of severely troubled waterways compiled by the environmental watchdog group American Rivers.” River water is “being leached away,” not only by invasive salt cedar, but also by bottom-growing hydrilla and free-floating water hyacinths, which clog the flow and periodically must be removed. “These invaders have gotten so thick in the lower valley riverbed that giant machines to cut them down have on occasion become trapped overnight as the masses of vegetation shift around in the slow current. The machines themselves then must be cut free.”¹⁰

As if this were not problematic enough, water resources activist Basia Irland (Professor Emerita, University of New Mexico), warned in 2007, “Because of less stringent pollution regulations on the south side of the border, most of the maquiladora factories dump toxic wastes into the river by the ton,

making this lower stretch of the Rio Grande one of the most polluted bodies of water in the world.”¹¹ Rod Davis similarly observed, “It’s not just what is being taken out, but what is being put in. Recent studies show very high amounts of arsenic, mercury, copper, selenium and antimony sediment from current or long-closed mines,” resulting in warning signs posted against fishing—“yet it continues to be fished.” For fish species, this ecological disaster is exacerbated at the coast where “the loss of adequate fresh water from the Rio Grande means the once-rich estuaries have lost their balance with the sea water and are lethally saline.” Davis continued, “Compounding those impediments is silt runoff from agriculture. Compounding that is a drought going strong into its second decade.”¹² Davis’s sobering conclusion was that the Rio Grande is no longer a “whole” river, but managed in fragments, and segmented by dams. “It is not the wild and untamed river it used to be.”¹³

According to Larry McKinney, senior director of aquatic resources for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, “It’s hardly even a river anymore. It’s more a managed irrigation ditch.... Slowly but steadily, it is losing most of the criteria that define a river—that it has to have water in it, and that it reaches its end at its mouth.” As Rod Davis opined, “Certainly there are worse tragedies to see in this life, but one that you could do without is seeing the most famous river in the Southwest dead at your feet.”¹⁴ Fortunately, efforts, especially in Texas, have been underway to remedy this.¹⁵ But sadly, even in 2015, Michael Vines writing for the *New York Times* calls the once-mighty river, which continues to be shriveled by overuse and drought, merely a “trickle under siege” that “has become a moist breath.”¹⁶ Moreover, the extensive and dense thorny shrub lands of the Lower Rio Grande Valley have been converted to agriculture and urban development over the past sixty years, with land cleared for production of vegetables, citrus, sugarcane, cotton, and other crops. Less than five percent of the original vegetation remains in the Rio Grande Valley. Such drastic change has endangered

wildlife, such as the legendary aplomado falcon, jaguarundi, and ocelot. Indeed, the southern tip of Texas is the only remaining area in the entire United States where once-common ocelots can still be found.¹⁷ What is the deeper meaning of a river named both *Grande* and *Bravo* when it ceases to be either? How does such change impact a city like Matamoros, whose identity has long been associated with such a river?

Historically, however, it was a *much* different picture, as the headliner quotations for this article suggest. Some sense of the wildness and expanse that was so characteristic of the unhindered Río Bravo is evident from official Spanish reports about the settlements of the Rio Grande Valley. For six months in 1757, José Tienda de Cuervo, acting as royal *juez inspector* (official inspector) of José de Escandón's colony of Nuevo Santander, compiled first-hand detailed reports on the colony's progress. At that time, Reynosa was the town farthest south on the river; Matamoros would be established later. Capt. Don Carlos Cantú was the civic and military official of Reynosa. Quoting his testimony, "the river called Río Grande del Norte that others call el Bravo ... passes through the settlements of Laredo, Dolores, near Camargo, and from this town of Reynosa traveling along to the sea and, at a distance of about fifteen leagues from this settlement, it divides into three different branches or streams, all three go to the sea, each one on its own, at about a distance of twenty-five leagues from this town such that *their currents are distinguishable through the sea for some leagues*, and when there are floods, before reaching the sea they form some very large inundations such that, in that region, another lake is formed with the abundance of its waters in such a way that in many leagues of its land *nothing is left without being covered by water*."¹⁸ It is worth noting that both Reynosa and Matamoros had to be relocated from their original sites due to disastrous floods from the wild Río Bravo—the same recurring and often ferocious floods that historically nurtured native plant and animal life in the rich Rio Grande Delta.¹⁹

The bountiful Matamoros frontier extended outward from both the south and north banks of the wild and majestic Rio Grande and stretched north to the Río Nueces, which was the historic border of the Spanish and Mexican province of Texas. This territory was once part of Spain's Nuevo Santander, afterward Mexico's Tamaulipas, and later claimed by Texas and the United States. The region's vibrant historical and cultural complexity can be readily recognized in a sampling of colorful book titles dealing with Matamoros and borderlands studies. This "wild and vivid land" along "the Great River," once "the Comanche empire," was also "the Spanish frontier," the place of "*el mesquite*," "*los mesteños*," and the "Wild Horse Desert." In time, this "raw frontier" became a "Tejano empire," a "Mexican American cultural province," subject to "changing national identities"—which included "Anglos and Mexicans in the making of Texas" as well as "Irish pioneers in Mexican and revolutionary Texas." It was perhaps inevitable that the transnational result was "myths, misdeeds, and misunderstandings"—such things entwined "Matamoros and the Texas Revolution"—followed by cycles of "boom and bust" in local and even international economies. Through it all, the Rio Grande remained a "river of hope" in forging identity and nation in these borderlands, which have bound both the rich and the poor "on the rim of Mexico." Not surprisingly, given this colorful if turbulent history, the result has been "conflict and cooperation" and "border contraband" on the "edge of the law" on the U.S.-Mexican border. Americans, and especially Texans, should be more aware that today's cross-border rivalries, resentments, and diplomatic pitfalls are among the "enduring legacies" of America's "forgotten war—which Mexico, understandably, has *not* forgotten."²⁰

Matamoros—“What’s in a Name?”²¹

In all this, the experience and identity of Matamoros—from its primal history as a strategic camping place on the venerable

Río Bravo to becoming a strategic Mexican city and port—has been, like its river, one of turmoil, even in its name. Certainly when the growing village of *Congregación de Refugio* (the “Refuge”) was elevated in status to a town (*villa*) and renamed *Villa de Matamoros* in 1826, this indeed honored the warrior-priest and martyred hero of Mexican independence, Mariano Matamoros. This Roman Catholic priest turned rebel soldier was rapidly promoted to lieutenant general for his leadership skills, effectively second in command of José María Morelos’ revolutionary army. Indeed, Mariano earned the nicknames “*el brazo derecho de Morelos*” (“the right hand of Morelos”) and “*sin terror de los llamados gachupines*” (“without fear of so-called gachupines”).²² But in 1814, Gen. Matamoros suffered capture after the failed rebel attempt to take the royalist town of Valladolid, was publicly humiliated, tried by Spanish authorities, and executed for treason. Following Mexican Independence in 1821, Mariano Matamoros would be honored as a “deserving figure of the nation” (“*Benemérito de la Patria*”) in 1823, and in three years the thriving town on the Río Bravo carried his name.²³ Such renaming of towns was symbolic of Mexican expectations of a bright new future after its severance from Spain. *Fronterizo*s similarly rechristened other municipalities in Tamaulipas and Nuevo León to honor the heroes of Mexican independence, towns that, like Matamoros, had previously honored Catholic saints.²⁴ Simple enough.

But there is lurking in the turbulent background of the Matamoros name a more complicated allusion to *Santiago*, the Apostle James the Greater, patron saint of the Spanish *Reconquista*. According to tradition (and notably recorded by the thirteenth-century archbishop of Toledo, Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada), Santiago’s miraculous military intervention, descending from heaven, charging on a brilliant white horse and wielding a deadly sword, allowed Ramiro of Castile’s victory over the Muslims at the Battle of Clavijo (ca. 844 AD).²⁵ Christian participants in the battle said they saw Saint James riding with them, slaying

the enemy on every side. With Santiago's continued intervention — and the resulting battle prayer, "God and Santiago, help us!" — Spaniards successfully drove the Muslim invaders from the Iberian Peninsula, giving the saint the honorific title of "Mata Moros," meaning "Killer of Moors" (or possibly "Death to Moors"), meaning the Muslims. It was no small thing that Miguel de Cervantes had his celebrated protagonist Don Quixote of La Mancha proclaim, "Santiago Mata Moros [Saint James the Moor Slayer], one of the most valiant saints and knights which earth ever produced, or heaven now contains.... You must know that God has given this great knight with a red cross as a patron and protector to Spain."²⁶

Images of Santiago as a warrior and conquistador, as compared to the gentle apostle, arose in the twelfth century in the context of the First Crusade. Sir Edward Gibbon termed the transformation of "a peaceful fisherman of the lake of Gennesareth ... into a valorous knight, who charged at the head of the Spanish chivalry in battles against the Moors" a "stupendous metamorphosis." Moreover, wrote Gibbon, "The gravest historians have celebrated his exploits; the miraculous shrine of Compostela displayed his power; and the sword of a military order, assisting the terrors of the Inquisition, was sufficient to remove objection of profane criticism."²⁷ This image was promoted especially by the majestic Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, which not only enshrined the saint's remains but portrayed in statue the apostle on horseback wielding a sword — the oldest known image of the saint as a warrior. That Santiago emerged dominant over other saints demonstrates the influence and power of this cathedral in both devotional and political factors — especially in the associated cult of Santiago, which the royal family of Castile-León adopted as a source of economic and political power and territorial expansion.²⁸

By the sixteenth century, Santiago, patron warrior-saint of the Castilian Reconquista, was further transformed and called upon against numerous enemies of Catholic Spain, especially in conquering the Americas and the malignity of their indigenous gods.²⁹

Geographic sites, towns, and settlements named “Santiago” became numerous (over 80 settlements in Mexico alone), and festivals and pageants honoring Santiago Matamoros were celebrated throughout Latin America, particularly on the dangerous frontier. As historians Milo Kearney and Manuel Medrano have shrewdly shown, “The culture of the Mexican-American Borderlands,” rife with Anglo-Hispanic tensions, misunderstandings and hostilities, “cannot be fully understood without knowledge of its medieval underpinnings in both Castile and in England” — underpinnings, which these scholars assert, *predated* Bartolomé de las Casas and the origin of the “Black Legend.” Medieval culture influenced language, law, politics, economics and social class, literature, art, music, architecture, and especially religion. Indeed, as Kearny and Medrano make clear, “the religious flavor of Borderlands society is its strongest tie to the Middle Ages.”³⁰

Accordingly, Saint James, in the guise of Santiago Matamoros, became the champion for the common people and especially for the soldiers in the Spanish colonial era. His iconography astride his horse raising his sword amid the fray became ubiquitous in Mexico’s northeastern region and, conspicuously, in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (the *Bajo Bravo*). Countless parishes paid homage to Santiago, with figurines of the warrior saint appearing in churches throughout the region. As Johanna Hecht of the Metropolitan Museum of Art writes, “Although official standards of taste may have changed with the end of the colonial era, processional figures of Santiago continued to play a prominent role in Mexican pueblos long after the last viceroy left Mexico. St. James was believed to have come to the aid of Mexicans in the wars of independence and in their battles against foreign invaders well into the nineteenth century. His cult remains strong to this day.”³¹

In the mid-eighteenth century, when the Royal Commission to the Colonies of Nuevo Santander began the work of allotting land grants to José de Escandón’s colonists who settled the Rio Grande Valley, Juan Armando de Palacio headed the commission

to lay out the Río Bravo towns of Reynosa, Camargo, Mier, and Laredo. Fittingly, he was a “Vowed Knight of the Order of Santiago,” or more properly, the Military Order of Saint James of the Sword. So was the founder of the settlements, Escandón himself, as was José Tienda de Cuervo, the royal *juez inspector* of Escandón’s colony of Nuevo Santander. Significantly, these frontier river settlements—the Villas del Norte—drew upon a venerable *fronterizo* tradition of political autonomy organized for warfare against enemy Indians and outsiders to keep their communities vibrant. This tradition honored the gallant figure of the mounted *ranchero*, who emerged by necessity as the vital citizen militia to become heroic defenders in the spirit of Saint James. Significantly, Catholic churches throughout the Lower Rio Grande Valley encouraged this association between Santiago and area *rancheros*. “The *ranchero* inspired fear and motivated harsh retaliation,” writes historian Manuel Callahan. Not only this, but ironically, even the “small population of Anglos in outlying areas already populated by *Mexicanos* could not have defended their homes, protected their communities and occasionally brought offenders to justice, without the aid of *rancheros*.” These heroic *rancheros* “fought Indians, confronted revolutionaries on both sides of the river, and struggled to keep their communities vibrant, populating the frontier as fierce fighting forces.” They were, according to one contemporary, “the ‘Guerrilla’ system of old Spain as commenced in the new world.”³² Thus, the spirit of Santiago Matamoros was alive and well, from the Rio Grande Valley to the settlements on the Nueces, San Antonio, and Guadalupe rivers in the guise of mounted *rancheros* defending home and hearth against the “Moors” of the times.

Fittingly, during the Texas Revolution, it would be Tejano *rancheros*—“people of paradox” (as historian James E. Crisp aptly calls them),³³ caught in trying to be loyal Texans as well as proud Mexicans—who at first allied with Anglo Texians against the perceived tyranny of Santa Anna in support of the Constitution

of 1824. Then, finding themselves faced with an Anglo-American independence movement (and likely annexation of Texas to the United States), most Tejano *rancheros*, having family, political, and economic connections with Matamoros and the other towns of the Rio Grande Valley, “switched sides.” Perhaps as many as 200 Tejano *rancheros* even directly aided Mexican Gen. José de Urrea’s army in defeating the predominately American invaders—the latest enemies of Saint James—in the battles of Agua Dulce, San Patricio, Refugio, and Coletto (Goliad) for the sake of preserving Texas for Mexico during the Texas Revolution.³⁴

In a fascinating article, historian Denise A. Spellberg writes, “The conflation of the Spanish conquest of Indigenous peoples with Muslims, although symbolic, forged a cultural tie that would resonate through the centuries on both sides of the Rio Grande ... even allowing the peoples conquered by the Spanish to participate in imperial founding myths of dominance and expansion.”³⁵ During the Mexican war for independence from Spain, revolutionary hero and warrior priest Mariano Matamoros had both ecclesiastical and political reasons for naming his San Pedro regiment after Peter, the saint of Apostolic Succession. But there is no doubt that Mariano—himself bearing Saint James’ honorific battle name—recruited people to the cause of the insurgency under a huge black banner bearing a red cross, a well-known symbol with intended associations with Santiago Matamoros. Devotion to Saint James continued after Mexico won independence from Spain, thriving in Mexican borderlands culture even today. As Spanish historian Nicolás Cabrillana Ciézar wrote, “the image [of St. James, the Moor-slayer] could be used without reserve, which represented religion as a means of domination, as a means of controlling the mass of converts.”³⁶ In Spain’s conquest of the New World, “Indians were imagined as extension of either the defeated Moors or the still-troublesome Moriscos,” echoes Anouar Majid, founding director of the Center for Global Humanities. “So interchangeable were Muslims and Indians in the conquistadors’ minds that they called

Indians 'Muslims' and Indian temples 'mosques.'" Renowned Mexican historian Ramón Eduardo Ruiz called the Spanish conquest of America the "last crusade"—a holy mission both to save souls and conquer enemies. This military and religious enterprise would likewise inspire Mexicans to conquer the new "Muslims," with the aid of Saint James, as Mexico dealt with its multitude of internal foes, be they Indians, other Mexicans, rebels in Texas, or American invaders.³⁷

It is also worth noting that the *Villas del Norte* from Laredo to Matamoros had a large Basque contingent. Recounting the considerable contributions of the Zavaleta family to the Rio Grande Valley, historian Antonio Zavaleta writes, "Basque marriages continued to be arranged between Spain on the one hand and Camargo and Matamoros on the other, well into the nineteenth century." In discussing the intensely proud and privileged Basque heritage, which had enormous impact throughout Spanish and Mexican history, Zavaleta reminds us that "the primary road to the second holiest pilgrimage site in Europe, *Santiago de Compostela*, the burial site of Saint James the Apostle, passed directly through the Basque countryside." As it happens, Gen. José Cosme de Urrea was himself Basque. His independent division of the Mexican army was headquartered, appropriately, at Matamoros before venturing forth and defeating rebel forces in Texas during the revolution. Urrea certainly understood his role as a defender of the nation against *norteamericano* aggressors, the latest enemies of Saint James.³⁸

Moreover, historian Frank de la Teja has pointed out that the major annual Santiago festival at Saltillo, Coahuila, honoring this city's patron warrior-saint of Saint James, was not merely a religious celebration, but was awash in civic boosterism. The festival was a huge commercial opportunity, not just for Saltillo alone, but for the entire region of Nuevo León, Coahuila, Texas, and Nuevo Santander.³⁹ After Mexican independence from Spain, Saltillo's Santiago festival attracted even foreign merchants, such as Reuben Marmaduke Potter, who was

then an American agent for a commercial house in Matamoros from 1827 to 1833. (Potter later achieved renown in obtaining amnesty for the prisoners of the Texan Matamoros expedition, and as a man of letters.) In a letter to his brother living in New York, Potter recounted his 1828 visit to the Monterrey and the Saltillo festivals of Saint James. Potter wrote that he and about a dozen other foreign merchants (American and mostly French) had earned “2 to 300 dollars a day, nearly all at retail.” They returned to Matamoros with “mule loads of money” amounting to a most impressive “sixty or seventy thousand dollars” in specie. The government apparently extracted its due, for Potter ends his letter with the wry comment that his “squabbles with the Customs House, *et cetera*, like those of Judas Macabeus, are too many to be written.”⁴⁰ Significantly, the commercial importance of the Saltillo festival declined in the wake of increasing trade with the United States and Texas, in which the burgeoning city of Matamoros would play a major role—and thereby eclipsing Saltillo in trade importance.

By the 1830s and into the 1840s, as *matamorenses* faced war with the Comanche, insurgents in Texas, and increasing threats from Americans, they did not lose sight of the patron warrior-saint of Saint James in the official renaming of their community from Refugio to Matamoros to honor the renowned warrior-priest in the war for Mexican independence. As much as the village had once been called a “refuge,” it was now time for the city, growing ever vital to the national economy and security, to take on the trappings of the warrior. In their very name, *matamorenses* did not just honor the warrior-priest, Mariano Matamoros, projecting patriotism and courage, but subtly (perhaps only to outsiders) invoked the power of the warrior-saint, Santiago Matamoros, Saint James himself, against the “Moors”—the current enemies at hand. Indeed, U.S. troops occupying Matamoros after the initial battles of the U.S.-Mexico War were quickly made aware of this association. When Thomas Bangs Thorpe published his memoir, *Our Army on the Rio Grande*, in

1846, he would write that the renaming of Refugio to Matamoros “would have been considered most honorable indeed by the Spaniards who conquered the Alhambra, as the name of the city signified that its inhabitants had distinguished themselves in the wars with the Moors.” Almost fifty years later when U.S. Army officer William H. Chatfield, stationed at Brownsville, published *The Twin Cities of the Border: Brownsville, Texas and Matamoros, Mexico*, in 1893, he noted “an entirely different version of the derivation of the name of Matamoros” than that commonly attributing it to the hero of independence Mariano Matamoros. With curiosity, he recorded that “Death of the Moors” was a “local phrase,” and conjectured that “etymology and national bias had equal weight in originating the epigram, which is evidently formed from the Spanish *matar*, to kill, and the Greek *mauros*, moorish or black.”⁴¹

If the “local phrase” and tradition were circulating enough that foreign American soldiers picked up on it in 1846 and as late as 1893, can there be any doubt that as Matamoros faced the tumultuousness of the early nineteenth century, it was even more so? What better place to headquarter the commandant general of the Internal Provinces to govern the affairs of the region? What better place from which to launch the Mexican army under Gen. Urrea to squelch to the rebels in Texas, or after San Jacinto, to reconquer Texas? What better place to defend the homeland from American invasion in 1846? “God and Santiago, help us!” indeed.

These turbulent feelings were underscored in Jovita González and Eve Raleigh’s well-researched but controversial historical novel, *Caballero*, written in the 1930s and 1940s. “May Saint James destroy the enemy so that when we come again to Matamoros no hateful *gringo* face will offend our eyes.” So said one of the novel’s main characters, Don Santiago de Mendoza y Soría, patriarch of the fictional Rancho La Palma de Cristo, located on the north side of the Río Bravo near Matamoros. The manuscript was rejected by three major publishers for its contro-

versial subject matter; then it languished among private papers until finally published in 1996. Jovita (1904-1983), a protégé of folklorist J. Frank Dobie and a respected educator, folklorist, and historian in her own right, set her immensely readable novel in the time period of the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846-1848. From a South Texas border perspective, the book grapples with how lives were irrevocably changed by the American take-over of Mexican lands and heritage, particularly the historical experience of Tejano women. As the book's editors José E. Limón and María Cotera assess this unsettling, insightful work, "The production of culture in a mid-nineteenth century South Texas Mexican world, historically fraught with issues of racism and countervailing masculinized nationalism, is at the heart of *Caballero*, especially as a culture is deeply embedded in questions of class, patriarchy, and gender." When the novel's appropriately named patriarch, Don Santiago, invokes his namesake and patron saint, Saint James—Santiago Matamoros—to "destroy the enemy," he draws upon the Reconquista tradition and Spanish Mexican religious faith, culture, and imagery in dealing with enemies, in this case, the "gringos"—who Mexicans have longed called the contemptible "*invasión Yanqui*." As *Caballero* vividly captures it, "*Americanos*, a dread word, which held nothing of good. One crossed one's self, name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, when one heard it."⁴² As another example, in his appropriately titled novel *Reconquista* (1908), Mexican writer and diplomat Federico Gamboa (1864-1939) used the contemptible term "*invasión Yankee*" this way: "The Yankee invasion; slow, heartless, corrupting; today one zone, tomorrow another, and another, and finally, everywhere!...[N]obody, I mean nobody—this is the sad part—dares to resist it."⁴³

Yet, this rich if controversial tradition of Santiago Matamoros the "Moor slayer" has rarely received comment in English-language histories of the Texas Revolution, the U.S.-Mexican War, and the Rio Grande Valley. This should not be surprising. As historian Armando Alonzo has revealed, the traditional Anglo interpretation of Texas history is not only "selective

in its interpretation of facts and of history,” but its theme of unrelenting success is built in Anglo notions of superiority “grounded in their ideas of settlement, progress, and race.” Thus, this interpretation not only “disregards the contributions of Tejanos and Mexican immigrants,” but necessarily reinterpreted how Tejano *rancheros* were forced from their lands in the subsequent Anglo occupation.⁴⁴ Of course, as Alonzo shows, it’s more complex than this summary, but the point here is that the Mexican and Tejano conceptualization of the “*invasión Yanqui*” —invading Anglo “Yankees” from the United States—as being the most recent enemies of Santiago, while lost on most Anglos, has been hidden in plain sight. To put it simply, traditional racist Anglo notions about the inferiority of Mexicans cannot comprehend that, to Mexicans and Tejanos, it was *Anglos* who were the enemy, the “Moors,” who deserve the wrath of God and Saint James. Such is the primal history of the Matamoros arena, a rich history and identity rooted in medieval challenges and revealed (and concealed) in names.⁴⁵

A (Wild) River Runs Through It

What drew settlement historically to the Lower Rio Grande Valley and particularly to the area along the wild river destined to host the future city of Matamoros? As history occurs in both space as well as time, geography offers a vital clue to understanding these events. “Before we present you the matters of fact it is fit to offer to your view the Stage whereon they were acted,” as the famous Englishman Captain John Smith appropriately expressed this necessity in 1624; “History without Geography wandreth as a Vagrant without a certaine habitation.”⁴⁶ The luxuriant geography through which Río Bravo flows—called technically the Matamoran Biotic District of the Tamaulipan mezquital⁴⁷—is a unique ecosystem found only in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of south Texas and northeastern Tamaulipas. Once teeming with wildlife, it is hard to imagine

how astonished early travelers and settlers to the area must have been when they first encountered this rich and exotic land. The characteristically flat alluvial plain is (as geographers describe it) weakly dissected and dendritically drained. The bulge caused by the Río Grande Delta—the predominant feature of the South Texas and northeastern Mexico shoreline—covers 600 square miles over what were once the shallow waters of the Laguna Madre. Today, the Laguna Madre is one of the most important and unspoiled lagoon ecosystems in Texas and one of the most protected in the United States; 75% of its shores are protected by the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge and the Padre Island National Seashore.⁴⁸ Here one finds a unique system of oxbow lakes (resacas), meandering streams, wetlands, mudflats, lomas, and clay dunes. Summers have historically been long and hot, droughts frequent, hurricanes threatening, and otherwise mild winters disrupted with biting legendary “northers.” Taken together, the Laguna Madre of Texas and its companion Laguna Madre de Tamaulipas, form the largest hypersaline lagoon in the world. The wild and often flooding Rio Bravo once contributed to the Laguna Madre, but because of dams and irrigation, the river and its large Rio Grande Basin no longer directly do.⁴⁹

The (now threatened) dense and thorny Tamaulipan brushland characterizing the Lower Rio Grande Valley is aptly named “thornscrub”; everything seems to have thorns, briars, stickers, or prickles. Cabeza de Vaca, the first Spanish explorer in the area, said of it: “The land is so rugged and impassable that many times when we gathered firewood in the dense thickets, when we finished taking it out we were bleeding in many places from the thorns and brambles that we encountered, for wherever they ensnarled us they broke our skin.”⁵⁰ Later travelers recorded similar accounts in their native Spanish, French, or English. The unforgiving thorny geography was characteristically likened to the hellish habitat of the Devil himself. American soldiers who encountered this chaparral in their trek to Matamoros

in the U.S.-Mexico War (1846-1848) typically recorded the thorny obstacles, understandably likening them to daggers and bayonets. As one put it, "The chaparral ... is composed of bushes and briars, thorns and prickly-pear—and these of all sorts and varieties, sometimes forming an even hedge impenetrable and insurmountable, and at other times varying in height and density so as to admit of ingress and egress, but at all times and in all places rugged, hirsute, and bristling."⁵¹ Or another, describing the prickly pear as "that unmatched bane to prairie life and physical comfort" because it "held almost unaccompanied possession of the soil ... possessed a thorn where there was room, and the process of laceration lost nothing in its vicinity." Approaching the river the cactus "becomes a monster, and rears its hideous arms to the height of six or eight feet."⁵² Kentuckian William A. McClintock put it vividly in his colorful account: "40 miles from the river we entered the so called Rio Grand timber which is one continued and increasing chaparel of musquit *Lignum vitae*, long gigantic cactus (or prickly pear), with thousands of shrubs, and grasses, all bearing, pricks, thorns, or burs. There is nothing of the vegetable world on the rio grand, but what is armed with weapons of defence, and offence."⁵³

Yet a multitude of animals and birds thrived in this harsh environment, even using it to advantage to hide from predators. Moreover, it yielded a certain beauty and even utility. Cenizo ("purple sage"), like the ebony tree, could predict rain if blooming, according to folklore.⁵⁴ The ebony yielded seeds, which, like mesquite beans, provided a food source. The maguey (agave) plant, which grew wild but also was cultivated, produced a sap harvested by *tachiqueros*, which furnished distilled alcoholic beverages of pulque and mescal. The strong fibers in the plant's leaves were made into rope, sackcloth (*guangoche*), shoe thread, and sewing thread. The plant's upright shoot, when roasted and cut into pieces, was sweet like sugar cane and prized for chewing. The ubiquitous prickly pear cactus provided a celebrated food and medicine source for centuries. In his 1828 inspection

of Texas, General Manuel Mier y Terán noted that the prickly pear was “Among the most abundant vegetation covering the land from Matamoros on the entire way we have traveled.” He drew special attention to the *cochinilla*, a little red insect “found in abundance” on the cactus leaves; when dried, it “provides the best scarlet [dye] known.” Another traveler, William B. Dewees, writing in 1827, commented on the difficulty and danger the cactus presented: “The road is oftentimes completely hedged in for miles by long rows of prickly pear, which are almost impassable. Beneath the huge leaves of the pear are vast quantities of snakes and poisonous reptiles, which have crawled under them to shelter themselves from the scorching rays of the sun.” But Dewees also captured the beauty and especially the largeness of the cactus, “lest you should think it the same as the ladies of the north so often cultivate.... Here the prickly pear grows from one to fifteen feet in height, and frequently with a round body like a tree, eighteen inches in diameter, and the leaves measuring a foot in breadth. The flowers are red, yellow, and white; these are exceedingly beautiful and large. The fruit is sometimes blue, and sometimes red, and of a very pleasant flavor.... When these various cactuses are in full bloom with all their rich and varied hues, they render the prairies beautiful beyond the power of language to describe.”⁵⁵

Indeed, the beautiful purple juicy-sweet fruit (which in Spanish are called “*tunas*”) and fleshy leaves or pads (“*nopales*”; the more tender young pads are called “*nopalitos*”) are rich in Vitamins C and A, riboflavin and B6, magnesium, potassium, and iron, calcium, fiber, and carbohydrates. Native peoples used the seasonal treat for trading with more distant tribes; Mexicans harvested them for market. The pads could be consumed year-round when other resources were scarce, and were even used as containers and canteens. For centuries, thick concentrations of prickly pear sustained migratory hunter-gatherers, adventurers, and settlers, as well as a variety of wildlife and cattle from the Río Bravo to the Nueces and beyond. Indeed, the seasonal tuna

harvest historically has been the most important food in the region, ranking in importance with pecans and buffalo. But it was not without risk, the *tuna* and *nopales* being laden with spines that had to be removed, from the pads, usually by roasting. French explorer Henri Joutel, a survivor of La Salle's expedition to coastal Texas in the late 17th century, recorded that "One must strip the fruit before eating it because, although the quills are quite small and almost imperceptible, without fail they make one sick once they lodge in the throat and on the roof of the mouth. One of our soldiers even died from having eaten the fig greedily without wiping it. All these quills caused tremendous inflammation of the throat and eventually suffocated him."⁵⁶

In addition to the characteristic dense growths of prickly pear cactus, Native peoples and Spanish adventurers in the area—and eventually Mexicans, Tejanos, and Texians—would have walked among some live oaks and post oaks, even anaqua trees, but mostly Texas catsclaw, Texas ebony (ebano), huisache and mesquite (all members of the bean family), whose beans were another food source in summer and late fall. Though now rare, even Montezuma bald cypress trees were once common along the Rio Grande for 100 miles. Willow, water plants, reed and canebreak were also characteristic, the latter lending itself to the Spanish naming of local native peoples as the "Carrizo." Nevertheless, the signature tree along the lower Rio Grande was and remains the *palma de Michbaros* (*Sabal mexicana*), popularly called the Mexican palm, Texas sabal palm or Rio Grande palmetto. This stout tree grows to 50 feet tall, bearing fragrant flowers, fruit, and large, blue-green fan-shaped leaves much utilized in making thatched roofs and seating. They so dominated the landscape—an estimated 40,000 acres—that in Texas folklore, Spanish explorers dubbed this river "Río de las Palmas." Although scholarship disputes whether this name designated the Soto la Marina River of Tamaulipas instead, the name still finds its way into romanticized tales of the lower Rio Grande (and especially found on the Internet). In a sense the point is moot; the palms indeed characterize

the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Today, the Valley's remaining old-growth palm grove (only 40 acres) is Brownsville's Sabal Palm Sanctuary, a lush 527-acre refuge housing abundant animal and bird life, notably rare green jays, colorful parakeets, and hummingbirds. It is a sad irony of history that this Tamaulipan brushland of the lower Rio Grande delta is not only the most biodiverse region in the United States, but it is also the most threatened.⁵⁷

This ancient geography has historically sustained a rich wildlife. Migratory hunters, travelers, and settlers found whitetail deer, antelope, peccary (which Spaniards called *javelina* because of their razor-sharp tusks, the name derived from Spanish for javelin or spear), and even bison, bobcats, ocelots, and jaguarundi, which thrived in the Valley's characteristic dense thorny shrublands. Coyote and smaller animals also flourished, including armadillos, cottontail rabbits, and jackrabbits—which one traveler, never seeing the critter before, described as “a rat, in everything but ears, which resembled those of a rabbit.”⁵⁸ There were also Mexican prairie dogs and ground squirrels, hog-nosed skunks, gophers, and a diverse assortment of bats, rats, and mice (such as Mexican spiny pocket mice) found often among thickets of prickly pear. Perhaps most significant among the wildlife were the wild mustangs (*los mestizos*), having descended and multiplied from the first horses the Spanish brought. These legendary horses became so plentiful in time that the area south of the Nueces River to the Río Bravo was nicknamed “Wild Horse Desert.” Coming upon a herd a few days journey south of the Nueces River, one witness described the amazing scene: “As far as the eye could reach to our right, the herd extended. To the left, it extended equally. There was no estimating the number of animals in it.”⁵⁹ It would be the crucial need for such horses that drove elements of the ill-fated Texan Matamoros expedition in the Texas Revolution.⁶⁰

Tribes, travelers, settlers, and soldiers would also have historically encountered a rich variety of other creatures, some quite dangerous like the American alligator and such poisonous snakes as the western diamondback, which was greatly feared.

Nineteenth-century French botanist Jean Louis Berlandier commented that Mexican, Comanche, and Lipan sojourners carried hopeful remedies variously called *la yerba del Indio* or *yerba de las víbora* (Indian herb or snake/viper herb), and that folklore persisted of placing a black rope around one's bedroll to mimic the rattler's enemy, the blacksnake — alas, a discredited precaution.⁶¹ There were scorpions as well as tarantulas, whose arch-nemesis, the tarantula hawk, is a large wasp with rust colored wings and sturdy exoskeleton, whose stings are considered to be the most painful of any North American insect. Amphibious life included Berlandier's tortoise among about a dozen species of turtles, and assorted geckos and lizards, toads, and frogs, including the fierce-looking yet amiable Texas Horned lizard — the folkloric "horny toad" (now threatened).

Among birds historically characteristic of the area, the distinctive voice of the noisy chachalaca ("Mexican tree pheasant"), named for its raucous, ear-splitting "cha-cha-lac-a" group call, still abound among the uplifting lilt of bobwhite quail, the melancholy coo of white-winged doves, and the gobble of Rio Grande turkeys. Other distinctive birds include melodious black-headed orioles, loud and piercing kiskadee flycatchers, brightly colored kingbirds, yellow-green vireos and green jays, ferruginous pygmy-owls dwelling in patches of mesquite, ebony, and cane along the river, thicket-loving long-billed thrashers, and tiny beardless flycatchers and buff-bellied hummingbirds. Although birds feed on the fruit and berries of the thornscrub, a main food supply is the delta's insect populations — one of the most diverse of North America. The Sabal Palm Sanctuary boasts 900 species of beetles alone and 40 percent of all butterflies recorded north of Mexico, with more species than the entire eastern United States!

Sadly, modern development has nearly annihilated this rich and diverse historic geography; 95 percent of the Lower Rio Grande Valley habitat has been lost. Fortunately, Brownsville's Sabal Palm Sanctuary provides visitors with some sense of this

lost world, as does nearby Weslaco's Estero Llano Grande State Park and World Birding Center.⁶² "Estero Llano Grande" essentially means "wet place on the big plain"; the park seeks to simulate the way the wetlands habitat might have looked in times past when the Rio Grande regularly flooded its banks, sending its waters into the region's abandoned riverbends or oxbows (*resaca*), thus creating the "beautiful estuaries" for which Matamoros would originally be named. These are but glimpses of Río Bravo's ancient Eden, the deeper meanings of name and place.

"Those Who Eat Raw Food"

For centuries this diverse and rich environment was home to native peoples about which little is known. They are collectively called Coahuiltecan, a name not coined until the 19th century and based on Coahuila, the Spanish name for the vast northeastern province of New Spain first called Nueva Extremadura. Ironically, the derivation of the name "Coahuila" itself is unclear.⁶³ The term Coahuiltecan is only valid in a geographic sense and "masks considerable ethnic and behavioral diversity"; it is really a "geographic catch-all that could also be described as 'the native peoples of south Texas and northeastern Mexico'," according to the *Texas Beyond History*, the superb Internet resource of the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory at the University of Texas at Austin. Despite much research, our knowledge about these indigenous peoples "remains a complex puzzle with most of its pieces missing." These peoples were ethnically distinct, speaking several diverse languages: Coahuilteco, Comecrudo, Cotoname, Sanan, and others. There were literally hundreds of highly mobile distinct tribes or bands in the region, each with different names; John R. Swanton's magisterial *The Indian Tribes of North America* lists 225 subdivisions. For most, there is only minimal information. As *Texas Beyond History* puts it, "Some groups got along with one another and shared partially overlapping territories, particularly in the prickly pear

season. Other groups were sworn enemies of one another or simply had such widely separated territories and language differences that they rarely came in contact."⁶⁴

As for the names of the tribes, the Spaniards created such names, transliterating to Spanish the understood aboriginal word, generating a toponym based on locality, or even imaginatively nicknaming the Indians on assumed characteristics such as tattoos, diet, or type of dwellings. These were hunter-gatherers, movingly seasonally to take advantage of the abundant wildlife, the fruits of wild plants like mesquite and ebony beans, prickly pear fruit and pads, chilies, tomatillos, wild onions, various wild greens, but also pecans, acorns, and roots. They established seasonal camps in which they scattered corn, squash, pumpkin, and melon seeds, but they did not tend or live from the harvest. Rather, when they returned, if a crop was available it was simply enjoyed as supplemental, such as corn-derived tortillas, atoles (gruel), tamales, and pinole flour (corn or mesquite), which was enjoyed with wild honey. Those living closer to the coast or rivers also fished and collected shellfish; the Rio Grande delta's extensive tidal zones and marshes, together with the periodic river floods, created productive and numerous *resaca*s (oxbow lakes) and estuaries. Shells provided these Indians with a variety of tools, ornaments, and projectile points, which, as scholars note with great interest, also formed a sort of currency traded for more exotic items like pottery, chert (flint), jade, and obsidian with tribes to the south in northern Mexico. They also used mountain laurel and peyote for its narcotic effects.⁶⁵

Mexican historian Arturo Zárate Ruiz notes that the groups of Indians who once lived near the location of present Matamoros fished for "huge bull corbina" (*enormes corvina*s *toro*) and hunted for ducks migrating from Canada to the Río Bravo's estuaries and Laguna Madre, as well as deer, wild boar and other beasts. They particularly gathered the wild greens of *flor de pita*, seeds of the ebony tree (*maguacata*s) and the fruit of Mexican olive tree (*anacabuita*). Zárate Ruiz also observes that some of

these groups have been charged with “the most cruel custom” of cannibalism (*las más crueles costumbres antropófagas*). Being nomads, as the sweltering heat season approached, they would wisely seek better and more agreeable hunting grounds to avoid drought, hurricanes, river flooding, mosquitoes, and diseases generated by stagnant water, thereby also evading ill temper and a “very bad mood” (*mismísimo mal humor*).⁶⁶

From prehistoric times to the Spanish era, the main weapon of these ancient Native peoples—even after the introduction of the bow and arrow—was the “dart,” which resembled a long, thick arrow. The sharp end was a stone or obsidian point that archeologists call the “Matamoros point,” so named because of the multitude found in the Matamoros area and distinctive because it was small, triangular, and unstemmed, fastened to a separate, short piece of wood, from which, when hurled with a throwing stick at a target prey, the longer shaft fell off, leaving the point imbedded in the animal (or human), causing death sooner. In his comprehensive synthesis, *Indians of the Rio Grande Delta*, Martín Salinas shows an even greater complexity of this Indian population by distinguishing between tribes native to the area and those who migrated there, who were displaced by the Spanish colonization of Nuevo León and seeking slave labor for work in the mines. Nevertheless, Salinas notes, “For any particular Indian group, little can be said about its culture at any time during the 367-year period covered by documents.”⁶⁷ The earliest non-Indian observance about these peoples came from the first Spaniard who traversed this area and lived among the coastal peoples, the remarkable if legendary Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, who was shipwrecked off the coast of Texas in 1528, spending 1534-35 in the Coahuiltecan plain. Historians are not in agreement about de Vaca’s path—it is certain that he did not wander the vastness of Texas as today some county histories nostalgically give him credit—but he generally followed the inner coast and crossed the Rio Grande into Mexico somewhere between present Laredo and Brownsville, likely near the site

of today's International Falcon Reservoir. De Vaca's account, *Relación*, offers the first geography, history, and ethnology of the area, his trek serving as a harbinger of the foreign invasion yet to come.⁶⁸

When José de Escandón y Helguera, colonizer of Nuevo Santander and "father" of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, explored the region, he recorded, in 1747, that at least thirty named Indian groups were living in the lower Rio Grande delta—sixteen bands south of the river (some 2,500 families) and fourteen north of it. Of these, the group living near the Gulf coast of the river was the most numerous. They spoke a Pakawa dialect—Pakawa itself being a Coahuiltecan word meaning "tattooed"—and were called the "*Comecrudo*," Spanish for "those who eat raw," an observation of their food being half raw from cooking in animal paunches. (Spaniards used the term "*Comecrudo*" freely, applying the name to at least three other unrelated groups.) These coastal *Comecrudo* fished and hunted deer, javelina, rabbits, rats, mice, turkey, and smaller birds, even snakes, and, in time, captured wild horses and the livestock of Spanish colonists.⁶⁹ Escandón noted that the males wore no clothes; the women wore skirts of grass or skins.

Escandón's source was a *Comecrudo* leader, "Capitán Santiago," who, with smoke signals, summoned some two hundred families to Escandón's base camp near present Matamoros. Other Pakawa in this same vicinity were the *Anda el Camino*, the *Como se Llaman*, and the *Cotonames*.⁷⁰ Spaniards also called the *Cotonames* and *Comecrudos* (and others) the "*Carrizo*," referring to the canes or reeds with which they built dwellings. As the name Pakawa implied, the various groups along the Lower Rio Grande Valley were distinguished by tattooing; males restricted to the face, women on both face and body. As hunters and gatherers, these peoples practiced seasonal migration, traveling to different areas depending on the harvest.

So what became of these Indian predecessors of the Matamoros area and what difference does it make in our story? In

addition to invasion by Spanish colonists moving north from Mexico and the spread of deadly European diseases like smallpox and measles, Coahuiltecan peoples endured incursion from the violent Karankawa Indians roving south from the Guadalupe and Nueces river bottoms in Texas. Additional Indian invaders into traditional Coahuiltecan territories were marauding and fierce Comanche, Kiowa, and Tonkawa, as well as Mescalero and Lipan Apache—after whom the Spaniards would later name Fort Lipantitlán near San Patricio, Texas, on the Nueces River.⁷¹ These invading tribes drove remnant Coahuiltecan peoples into conflict with the Spanish over limited resources, into Spanish missions for sustenance and protection, and some out of the area altogether. In time, disease, warfare, capture or enslavement for work in mines, migration, dispersion, religious conversion, and intermarriage erased the identities of these peoples. Nevertheless, as late as 1829, Jean Louis Berlandier recorded the language of *Comecrudo*, the most well known, in a list of 148 words (Berlandier called the language “Mulato”).⁷²

As to the second question, it is important to remember that Spanish settlement did not occur in a vacuum. Spanish adventurers and colonists undoubtedly learned from these Indian peoples of the Lower Rio Grande Valley how to gather edible seeds, berries, and, especially, mesquite beans, prickly pear fruit, ebony seeds, wild cucumber and chili pepper, which became a staple of the Spanish diet. By similar contact, the Spaniards learned about herbal medicines, such as juice extracted from mesquite leaves to treat pink eye, a cough medicine derived from the seeds of the wild olive plant, a purgative from ebony seeds, and leaf teas to treat fever. Ultimately, Indian survivors were absorbed into colonial society—and significantly—with many working on Spanish ranches that increasingly characterized the area on both banks of the Río Bravo from Laredo to Matamoros. Though often called “extinct,” there is evidence that today a remnant have merely “hidden well” and continue to thrive, such as the Tap Pilam-Coahuiltecan Nation, who trace

their heritage to Coahuiltecan peoples and are in the process of revitalizing their ancestral language and culture.⁷³

Exploradores and Intruders

History is a slippery thing. The initial Spanish intrusion into this area, the distant Spanish “forefathers” of Matamoros, is usually *misattributed*—yet claimed all over the Internet—to explorers Alonso Álvarez de Pineda in 1519, Diego de Camargo in 1520, and Francisco de Garay in 1523. From the legendary escapades of these explorers come the stories that the Spaniards camped or even attempted to establish a colony at the particularly Edenic mouth of a river that they called “*Río de las Palmas*.” This indeterminate watercourse was described as “a very large and very swift river,” which many Mexican and American scholars have identified as the Río Bravo, including Matamoros historian and cartographer Manuel Humberto González Ramos.⁷⁴ Were it so simple! Certainly, the so-called “River of Palms” was important. Between 1518 and 1528, Spanish authorities dispatched some eight *exploradores* to investigate and lay claim to the area by attempting to colonize at its mouth; but none did so successfully. Nevertheless, the descriptive river name appears in a multitude of documents, its mouth considered an important reference for navigating the Gulf of Mexico. As Mexican historian Eugenio del Hoyo observed in his now classic *Historia del nuevo reino del león* (1972), “The Río de las Palmas is one of the most outstanding geographical accidents in the ancient American cartography, figuring in almost all the old maps of our continent.”⁷⁵ Yet, befitting the mythical origins of the area, the river’s location has been disputed by old and new chroniclers, both Mexican and American alike.

As illustration, Spanish explorer and cartographer Álvarez de Pineda recorded that his ships “entered a river of very great volume at the mouth of which was a large town” where they stayed more than forty days repairing the ships. Moreover, “six

leagues up the river [they] found forty towns on the shores.”⁷⁶ Reputable scholarship, notably by historians Robert S. Weddle and Donald E. Chipman, asserts that Álvarez de Pineda’s coastal references are too unclear, but his river colony was “unequivocally” on the Pánuco River in Mexico. Weddle contends, “Nothing but supposition connects either Álvarez de Pineda or the Río de las Palmas to the Rio Grande.” Further, Camargo and Garay “never” set foot in Texas, and contrary to much erroneous historical writing, Garay named the Río Soto la Marina, 150 miles further south in Mexico, the “River of Palms”—and *not* the Rio Grande.⁷⁷ In a creative compromise, Eugenio del Hoyo, using historic maps and chronicled evidence, has asserted convincingly that “the name of las Palmas was used from time immemorial” as a reference to *both* the Río Soto la Marina *and* the Río Bravo, “a fact that well explains the great disorientation of the historians.”⁷⁸ As already noted, in a sense, the point is moot; as del Hoyo emphasizes, ancient palm groves still grace the lower Rio Grande, notably in the old-growth forest protected in Brownsville’s Sabal Palm Sanctuary. Moreover, despite extensive Spanish exploration, colonization did not yet occur.

The later trek of Cabeza de Vaca undoubtedly crossed the Rio Grande, but Cabeza de Vaca’s was not a colonizing effort. The palms notwithstanding, intensive Spanish settlement efforts ignored the land across the Río Bravo and into modern coastal and eastern Texas, concentrating instead on northeastern Mexico and territory even farther north—Saltillo and Monterrey were established in the 1570s, San Gregorio (Cerralvo) and Monclova in the 1580s, and even distant Santa Fe about 1608. The Portuguese-born controversial slave trader, adventurer, and self-promoter Luis de Carvajal y de la Cueva was likely the first Spanish subject to cross the Río Bravo, sent by authorities to the mouth of the river to chastise Indians suspected of massacring Spanish shipwreck castaways. Later, the king of Spain rewarded him with the title of governor and captain-general with orders to subdue and settle a vast new province to be called

the Nuevo Reyno de León (extending to the Hill Country of Texas), but nothing came of it, largely due to his ongoing legal and political troubles, which resulted in part from his continued lucrative Indian slave raiding ventures on both the Río Soto la Marina and the Río Bravo. What ultimately spurred Spaniards to venture into the land they would name (rather ironically) for the ancient Hasinai Indian greeting of “techas” or “tejas,” meaning “friends,” was international rivalry and old enemies—the Dutch and, especially, the French.⁷⁹

Already dealing with the loss of Portugal and the Netherlands, Spanish imperial hegemony was further tested by the ascent of France. The shores of the Gulf of Mexico were of increasing interest to these competing European powers. The year 1638 brought the first panic concerning Texas. Governor of Nuevo León Don Martín de Zavala was greatly distressed by reports regarding the Texas coast to the effect that only “more or less 30 leagues (to the north of Cerralvo) there were some men very different from us, with beards and blond hair, with red hose, with doublets and hats of iron, and who carried harquebuses longer than ours,” who “killed Indians in bunches, very far, within the forests.” Moreover, these were said to be Dutch pirates under command of the notorious and dreaded buccaneer “Dieguillo” or “Diego el Mulato” (Jacob Hendrikszoon Lucifer) who “was fortifying himself in some region of the coast from where they could go out to steal.” De Zavala sent a well-armed 40-man expedition under Sergeant-Major Jacinto García de Sepúlveda (first mayor of Cerralvo, the oldest municipality in Nuevo León) to explore the area in search of these contemptible Dutch intruders. The expedition crossed the Rio Grande near present Mier and marched down the river as far as present Brownsville, but proved unsuccessful. Nevertheless, the Spaniards increasingly recognized the strategic worth of this vast Gulf Coast area bounded by the Pánuco River at Tampico, Mexico, to the San Antonio River at Matagorda Bay, Texas, and would refer to it as *Seno Mexicano*—metaphorically translated as “the bosom of Mexico”—to be defended at all costs.⁸⁰

The next panic was over the French, with whom the Spanish were at war, and proved much more of a threat. In 1682, the controversial Diego de Peñalosa, the discredited and exiled Spanish governor of the province of New Mexico in New Spain, traveled to France to offer King Louis XIV plans for the overthrow of Spain from the northern area of Mexico and Texas. He proposed the construction of a fort—significantly for our story—at the mouth of the Rio Grande. Even the 1681 mural map attributed to French cartographer Abbé Claude Bernou—*Carte de l'Amérique du Nord*—which depicts French explorations in North America and the Gulf of Mexico, clearly shows the Río Bravo. Meanwhile that same year, the renowned French explorer René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, had probed the Mississippi River from Illinois country to its mouth and claimed for his king all the vast territory drained by the river and its tributaries, calling it *Louisiane*. Returning to France the following year, La Salle proposed his own plan for settling a colony near the mouth of the Mississippi via the Gulf as a base for the Mississippi valley fur trade, but also for striking Mexico, harassing Spanish shipping, and possibly even gaining control of the silver mines of Nueva Vizcaya, the northern frontier province of New Spain. La Salle strategically argued that numerous Indian tribes, infuriated over their treatment by Spaniards, would serve as his allies.

La Salle's four-ship expedition, initially carrying 280 colonists, including craftsmen, merchants, women and children, missionary priests, and soldiers, left France for the Mississippi, in August 1684. Plagued by navigational errors—longitude could only be guessed at, maps were inaccurate, and the French were unfamiliar with the Gulf, which has been accurately described as having “the bewildering sameness of the coastline”—La Salle instead sailed into Matagorda Bay, Texas, in 1685. He established Fort St. Louis on Garcitas Creek in present Victoria County, and claimed the area as part of New France (Louisiana)—a claim that U.S. President Thomas Jefferson would later try to utilize,

though unsuccessfully, to include Texas as part of his purchase of Louisiana Territory in 1803. In exploring the region by canoe and on foot, there is evidence according to La Salle's ablest historian, Robert S. Weddle, that La Salle reached the Rio Grande and ascended it as far present-day Langtry. Nevertheless, the ill-fated settlement on Garcitas Creek was short-lived, succumbing to misfortune, wrecked ships, disease, dissent, desertion and murder (including the slaying of La Salle himself), and ultimately attack from area Karankawa Indians. Survivors assimilated into local tribes or made their way to French Canada.⁸¹

Spanish authorities learned of the intrusive settlement from captured French pirates who were actually defectors from Fort St. Louis. Such an audacious foray into the *Seno Mexicano* could not be tolerated! "Urgency dictated that the viceroy of New Spain not wait for crown authorization," wrote historians Donald E. Chipman and Harriett Denise Joseph; "instead, plans were immediately formulated to extirpate the foreign colony."⁸² So great was Spanish determination to hold claim to Texas—and so lacking in information about the French location and strength—that authorities ordered five sea voyages and six land expeditions to find the intrusion to secure the bosom of Mexico.⁸³ The result of these expeditions was exploration of the area that the future city of Matamoros came to dominate. Using *piraguas*—sizable custom-built, shallow-draft boats specially constructed at Veracruz, each with a large sail, twenty oars on a side, six bronze swivel guns, carrying sixty-five men on board, and towing canoes—Captains Martín de Rivas and Pedro de Iriarte circumnavigated, explored, and mapped the entire Gulf Coast.⁸⁴ Thanks to chief pilots Juan Enríquez Barroto and Antonio Romero, who had designed the *piraguas*, the expedition's reports, maps, and records of coordinates along the Texas coast were the most thorough and advanced to that date.

Significantly for our story about primal Matamoros, they affixed a reasonably precise latitudinal fix of 25°55' west latitude for the mouth of the Río Bravo. They sounded the sand bar

with an audience of armed Indians on the shore, presumably from the three Indian villages they recorded nearby. Thereafter they sailed up the coast, encountering Indians all along the shore, and ultimately discovered evidential wreckage of two of La Salle's ships, *Belle* and *Aimable*, in Matagorda Bay in April 1687—but alas, not the French fort.⁸⁵ In late 1688, Captains Rivas and Andrés de Pez y Malzárraga, in the fifth and final maritime attempt to find La Salle's fort, focused on searching the Río Bravo. With canoes and the same two *piraguas* used in the Rivas-Iriarte expedition, Rivas and Pez explored a reported 36 leagues upriver (perhaps as far as present Roma and Ciudad Miguel Alemán), the first known instance of Europeans sailing on the Rio Grande. Attacked by Indians, the vessels then further explored Matagorda Bay, but again, without finding the fort.⁸⁶

Meanwhile, in the summer of 1686, the seasoned entrepreneur, soldier, and adventurer, Alonso De León, the younger ("*El Mozo*"), in the first of four overland treks to find the French intruders, reached the Rio Grande, following it south. On July 6, he camped in the hills near present Reynosa, later stopping near what today are the Matamoros suburbs of La Gloria, El Moquete, and El Ebanito. On July 12, 1686, he established a strategic military camp on the banks of a bend of the Río Bravo, about where Lucio Blanco, in eastern Matamoros, is located today. Although historically significant, here it is wise to recall Mexican historian Arturo Zárate Ruiz's caution that we must be careful not to read too much in to these precursor events: "In Matamoros, sometimes we see this as a singular event, as if it had been uniquely dedicated only to the settlements that would subsequently be in the region. But this camp merely served to defend for a short time coastal Tamaulipas and Texas from enemies."⁸⁷ Failing to find a French outpost during this or two subsequent expeditions, Don Alonso led a fourth one in 1689. This time, with the invaluable guidance of La Salle deserter Jean Jarry, an aged Frenchman whom de León had captured during his third trek (Jarry was found living among

Coahuiltecan Indians near present Brackettville, Texas), the Spaniard and his force of over 100 men finally discovered the ruins of Fort St. Louis on Garcitas Creek on April 22, 1689.⁸⁸

How does this matter to our story? De León's accomplishment had momentous impact, notably for the future history of the Matamoros arena. He helped map the frontier, charting not only the Spanish settlements of Coahuila (Monclova), Monterrey, and San Gregorio (Cerralvo), but also the isolated territory of Texas. His map finally identified with certainty the "Río Bravo or del Norte," listing forty-four Indian "nations" living along this river and several Indian "*rancherías*," beyond "Paso del Río." The map also depicted a salt lake corresponding with what would be called *la Sal del Rey* or *Sal Vieja* in the Lower Río Grande Valley, which the Spaniards would soon make commercially significant—and much later would feed the economy of Matamoros. Moreover, on a river (later named Garcitas) shown entering the Gulf through the Bay of Espíritu Santo, his map showed the elusive "*Castillo*" of La Salle. Appropriately, the ford of the Río Bravo that de León used (near present Guerrero, Coahuila), which he mapped as "Paso del Río," would be dubbed "Paso de Francia" (France Passageway). Significantly, in his treks to find the French, de León blazed what would be called the *Camino Real* (the King's Highway), later called the Old San Antonio Road and La Bahía Road, the most important routes in Texas—which would also serve Matamoros.

Ultimately, regardless that La Salle's tragic venture failed, it nonetheless drove the Spaniards to redouble their effort to colonize what de León himself identified as the "great kingdom of the Texas" (referring to the Hasinai Indian tribes as Father Damian Massanet, who accompanied de León, mistakenly called them), which he wrote "is so large and so fertile and has so fine a climate."⁸⁹ Thus, it is de León, and ironically La Salle indirectly, who may fittingly be called the "forefathers" of colonization and settlement that would one day include Matamoros. In the deeper meanings of name and place, Matamoros, with the help of Saint James, would come to similarly guard the *Seno Mexicano*.

Colonizing *El Bajo Bravo*—The Lower Rio Grande Valley

The French threat in Texas did not stop with La Salle. Having successfully established colonies at Biloxi in 1699 and Mobile in 1702, the French presence in the Gulf grew ever larger. In 1706, rumors of another French shipwreck, this time at Brazos de Santiago Pass separating Brazos Island and Padre Island, only eight miles north of the mouth of the Río Bravo, brought an expedition under Cpt. Juan José de Hinojosa to investigate. Advancing into the area of present Matamoros, Hinojosa was so taken with the beauty of the many estuaries dotting the landscape, formed by the periodic flooding of the wild Río Bravo, that he dubbed the area *El Paraje de los Esteros Hermosos* (Place of Beautiful Estuaries)—fittingly Matamoros's maiden name. Moreover, he advocated Spanish settlement in the area to thwart French designs. Although it took some time for his vision to become reality, Captain Hinojosa would continue to play a pivotal role in the area's development. He would become captain and chief justice of Reynosa and a wealthy cattle baron who begat the Lower Bravo Valley's most powerful ranching dynasty (the Hinojosa and Ballí families) and would be a founding father of Matamoros.⁹⁰ For the time being, however, as Mexican historian Zarate Ruiz aptly puts it, the Place of the Beautiful Estuaries was only an occasional passing place, and "from the perspective of empires, could merit the nickname 'no man's land'."⁹¹

Captain Hinojosa's enthusiastic recommendation to settle the lower Río Bravo did eventually bear fruit through José de Escandón and Blas María de la Garza Falcón. Settlements established on the south bank of the wild river include Camargo (1749), Reynosa (1749), Revilla (1750, later renamed Guerrero, which much later in 1840 would serve as capital of the short-lived Republic of the Rio Grande; the site became submerged in Lake Falcon, though drought and water shortages have allowed ruins to become visible), and Mier (1753); and on the north bank, Nuestra Señora de los Dolores Hacienda (1750,

now ruins) and Laredo (1755). Eventually, *rancheros* from Camargo and Reynosa established a modest ranching settlement farthest south on the river near its mouth and named it *San Juan de los Esteros Hermosos* in 1774. This thriving settlement grew into a village and was renamed *Congregación de Refugio* in 1793. Elevated to a *villa* in 1826, the town was renamed Matamoros. Economically and strategically, Matamoros rapidly eclipsed her sister settlements.⁹²

Nothing New in Matamoros?

“Nothing new in Matamoros,” wrote González and Raleigh of the river port city in their historical novel *Caballero*; “... a flash of a thrown knife; a pistol shot, running feet, a street suddenly deserted—except for a groaning form lying prone, another bending over it and cursing in a mixture of Spanish and English. Perhaps both were to blame, perhaps neither. Only the pot boiling over and spilling the fat of idleness and arrogance onto the coals of war. No, nothing new.”⁹³ The historical context for this assessment was racism and violence during the U.S.-Mexico War, but the passage also reflected the challenges of the U.S.-Mexico border in the wake of the Mexican Revolution at the time the novel was written in the early twentieth century. Sadly, it still reflects recent history and current events involving immigration issues and the violence of illegal borderlands drug trade. But as I have emphasized here and elsewhere, Matamoros has always been about potential, the promise of something better. The city inspired extravagant, yet conflicting expectations involving a throng of seemingly unconnected issues, especially during the Texas Revolution. Matamoros should be appreciated as a type of master key, unlocking local, regional, and international connections and a hodgepodge of murky, even clandestine ones. To study Matamoros unties a Gordian Knot, or perhaps more appropriately, provides the path through the dense and thorny chaparral of borderlands history.

By the second and third decades of the 19th century, Matamoros' considerable potential, through increasing trade revenue and commerce, inspired strategies to salvage Mexico's national economy and credit structure that had been devastated by Mexico's war for independence from Spain. The city's magnetism as an international commercial center but also as a cultural hub drew together and diffused Mexican, European, and American values, yet ironically caused division. The city embodied the portentous conflicts between traditional Mexican loyalties to church, government, and culture on the one hand, and, on the other, the economic pull and foreign attraction of the United States, New Orleans in particular. Yet in all this, Matamoros characterized a confluence of conflicting cultures: a frontier culture, a more "civilized" urban culture, and, eventually, a "borderlands" culture. Not surprisingly, this resulted in a conflicting identity construction among *matamorenses* regarding their being loyal Mexicans and proud Federalists, while also being *fronterizos* and *norteños*—people of the frontier, and *not* the interior. Matamoros quickly became crucial in the complex history of Mexico, Texas, and United States, playing roles in the Mexican War of Independence, the Texas Revolution, the U.S.-Mexico War, the American Civil War, the French Intervention, the Mexican Revolution, and the twice-failed attempts to establish an independent Republic of the Rio Grande—for which the city earned honorable designations from the state and federal congresses as "Undefeated," "Loyal," and "Heroic." Officially, the city was therefore renamed *Heróica Matamoros*. Through boom-and-bust periods of the late 19th century and into the 20th century, the city rapidly blossomed into becoming one of the fastest growing cities and economies in Mexico.⁹⁴

Today, reflecting its long history as a trading center and port, Matamoros is the only city on the U.S.-Mexico border that boasts four international bridges. Taken together with Brownsville, the Matamoros-Brownsville Metropolitan Area (or Borderplex) is the fourth largest metropolitan area in the U.S.-Mexico border, among the top ten fastest growing urban

areas in the U.S., and home to agriculture, oil, and industry, especially international automobile and accessories manufacturing.⁹⁵ Significantly, the two cities celebrate the historical interaction of Mexico and the United States with an annual international fiesta: Charro Days (since 1937) and its offspring, the Sombrero Festival (since 1986). Associated with these festivals is the Mr. Amigo Association, which, each year since 1964, has honored a Mexican citizen as “Mr. Amigo” to promote international friendship and goodwill between the U.S. and Mexico. As Mr. Amigo Association president Robert Avitia put it in 2014, “We are a Hispanic culture. Our heritage runs through us, and a border doesn’t divide us.”⁹⁶ So in this historic and cultural sense, González and Raleigh were right: there is “nothing, new” in Matamoros. From its primal history to today, Matamoros, in its deepest meanings of name and place, has conveyed exchange and above all, potential. Hence, the city is rightly called by its latest moniker, “*La Gran Puerta de México*” —the Great Gateway of Mexico.⁹⁷ It has been a gate that opens both ways.

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Endnotes

1 Fray Vicente de Santa María, *Relación histórica de la colonia del Nuevo Santander y Costa el Seno Mexicano* [c. 1790], translated by Edna G[arza] Brown in *General State of the Foundation of the Colony of Nuevo Santander*, Vol. 2 (Corpus Christi, TX: Edna Brown/Corpus Christi Public Libraries, 1994), II: p. 239. Corpus Christi Public Libraries Digital Archives <<http://archives.celibraries.com/cdm/compoundobject/collection/odf/id/1296>> [Accessed September 1, 2016]; Jovita González and Eve Raleigh, *Caballero: A Historical Novel*. Edited by José E. Limón and María Cotera; foreword by Thomas H. Kreneck (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996), p. 305. The quotation was said by Don Santiago de Mendoza y Soría, patriarch of the fictional Rancho La Palma de Cristo, located on the north side of the Río Bravo near Matamoros, and is the main character in this well-researched novel, written in the 1930s and 1940s.

- 2 Rod Davis, "Rio Grande *No Mas?* When Does the Rio Grande Become the Rio Gone? Maybe Already," *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine, July 2002 <http://www.tpwmagazine.com/archive/2002/jul/ed_8/> [Accessed September 1, 2016].
- 3 The International Boundary and Water Commission designates the Rio Grande to be the fifth largest river in North America and gives its total length to be 1,901 miles. International Boundary and Water Commission, "About the Rio Grande" <<http://www.ibwc.gov/crp/riogrande.htm>> [Accessed September 1, 2016].
- 4 The river's various names and rich history are documented in Paul Horgan, *Great River: The Rio Grande in North American History* (2 vols., 1954; 4th edition revised, Hanover, NH : Wesleyan University Press, 1991); Jan Reid, ed., *Rio Grande* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004); and Carroll L. Riley, *Rio Del Norte: People of the Upper Rio Grande from Earliest Times to the Pueblo Revolt* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2007).
- 5 I expand on this theme in Craig H. Roell, *Matamoros and the Texas Revolution* (Denton: Texas State Historical Association, 2013).
- 6 "A. T. Myrthe" [Anthony Ganilh], *Ambrosio de Letinez Or The First Texian Novel Embracing a Description of the Countries Bordering on the Rio Bravo, with Incidents of the War of Independence* (New York: Charles Francis & Co., 1842), pp. 81 and 187. First published as *Mexico Versus Texas, A Descriptive Novel, Most of the Characters of which consist of living persons*. "By a Texian." (Philadelphia: N. Siegried, 1838). This was the first novel to incorporate the seminal events of the Texas Revolution; Ganilh, the author, insisted in the preface that the historical context of his novel was accurate and resulted from his "protracted travels through Mexico."
- 7 Just one acre-foot per year (af/yr) is approximately 325,635 U.S. gallons per year, or 892 U.S. gallons per day; so the predicted amount of 592,084 af/yr would indeed be "staggering" — 192,803,321,877 (192.8 billion) U.S. gallons per year, or 52,8228,279 (52.8 million) U.S. gallons per day!
- 8 Colin Woodward, "Rio POCO: The Once-Mighty Rio Grande Has Slowed to a Trickle" *Emagazine*, June 30, 2003 <<http://www.emagazine.com/magazine-archive/rio-poco>>; Lower Rio Grande Valley Developmental Council, Water Resources: "Fact Sheet: Lower Rio Grande Basin Study," <<http://www.lrgvdc.org/water.html>> [Accessed September 1, 2016].
- 9 Woodward, "Rio POCO"; Dan Oko, "Rio Grande No Longer?" *Austin Chronicle*, October 26, 2001 <<http://www.austinchronicle.com/news/2001-10-26/83444/>> [Accessed September 1, 2016].
- 10 Davis, "Rio Grande *No Mas?*"

11 Basia Irland, *Water Library* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), p. 76

12 Davis, "Rio Grande *No Mas?*" In a recent ironic twist of fate, the National Weather Service (NOAA) reports that "The year 2015 in the Rio Grande Valley will be at once fondly remembered as the year without a severe or greater drought (Level 2 on the U.S. Drought Monitor Classification) for the first time since 2007. For many, 2015 will also be remembered for the more than \$100 million in property and crop damage from spring and fall floods. In all areas where a full set of data was available, annual rainfall ranked in the top 20 highest on record; for the highly populated areas between McAllen and Brownsville, rain totals ranked in the top ten." Moreover, "widespread neighborhood flooding in Weslaco, not seen in decades, impacts were sufficient to warrant Federal Disaster Assistance to Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy County." See NOAA National Weather Service Weather Forecast Office, Brownsville, Texas, "Drought, Out! 2015 Brings Green and Flooding to Valley. Year in Review: Wet Was the Word; Cool Start, Warm Finish" <http://www.srh.noaa.gov/bro/?n=2015event_annualsummary> [Accessed September 1, 2016].

13 Davis, "Rio Grande *No Mas?*"

14 Ibid.

15 Although water shortages seem to be inevitable in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, new irrigation and water monitoring technologies, plus innovative water allocation management, promise water savings of over fifty percent. This is crucial savings for agriculture, the Valley's biggest economic driver—a \$396 million industry heavily reliant on water. See Tom McLemore, et al, Harlingen Irrigation District and the Texas Water Development Board, *Final Report for Agricultural Water Conservation Demonstration Initiative in the Lower Rio Grande Valley*, August 2015 <http://www.twdb.texas.gov/publications/reports/contracted_reports/doc/0503580013_harlingen.pdf>. [Accessed September 1, 2016].

16 Michael Wines, "Mighty Rio Grande Now a Trickle under Siege," *New York Times*, April 12, 2015 <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/13/us/mighty-rio-grande-now-a-trickle-under-siege.html?_r=0> [Accessed September 1, 2016].

17 Texas Parks and Wildlife, "Endangered and Threatened Animals of Texas" <https://tpwd.texas.gov/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd_bk_w7000_0013.pdf> [Accessed September 1, 2016].

18 Emphasis added. Statement of Capt. Don Carlos Cantu, Reynosa, July 1757, in *Expedientes relativos á Inspección y estadística de la Colonia de Santander*,

by José Tienda de Cuervo, translated by Edna G[arza] Brown as *General State of the Settlements Made by D. José de Escandón in the Colony of Nuevo Santander: Coast of the Gulf of Mexico* (Corpus Christi, TX: Edna Brown/Corpus Christi Public Libraries, 1994), I: 246. Corpus Christi Public Libraries Digital Archives <<http://archives.cclibraries.com/cdm/ref/collection/odf/id/1296>> ; alternative online version: <http://www.stexboat.com/books/Nuevo_Santander/SANTANIC.HTM> [Accessed September 1, 2016].

19 See for example John J. Leffler, *Refuge on the Rio Grande: A Regional History of Bentzen-Rio Grande Valley State Park* (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 2013) <http://tpwd.texas.gov/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd_bk_p4502_0058n.pdf> [Accessed September 1, 2016].

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of *Smuggling across the Rio Grande* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015); Michael Van Wagenen, *Remembering the Forgotten War: The Enduring Legacies of the U.S.-Mexican War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012).

21 William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene II.

22 There are no in-depth English-language biographies of Mariano Matamoros. For his life, see José Herrera Peña, *Mariano Matamoros* (1965; 2d edition, Gobierno del Estado de Michoacán de Ocampo, 2015); Gabriel Agraz García de Alba, *Mariano Matamoros Guridi, héroe nacional* (México, D.F.: Edición del Autor, 2002); Willebaldo Herrera, *Tres clérigos liberales por la segunda vuelta: Mariano Matamoros, José Miguel Guridi y Alcocer, José Manuel de Herrera* (Tlaxcala: Universidad del Valle de Tlaxcala, 2004); Rogelio Javier Escamilla Torres, *Mariano Matamoros, segundo de Morelos y "terror de los llamados gachupines"* ([Morelia, Michoacán de Ocampo, Mexico]: Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Departamento de Historia Latinoamericana, [1994]; Perla Chinchilla, *Mariano Matamoros* (Juárez [Mexico City]: Comisión Nacional para las Celebraciones del 175 Aniversario de la Independencia Nacional y 75 Aniversario de la Revolución Mexicana, 1985); Armando de María y Campos, *Matamoros: teniente general insurgente*. Colección México heroico, no. 28 (México: Editorial Jus, 1964); José Jesús de la Rosa Pérez, *Don Mariano Matamoros, el brazo derecho de Morelos*. Héroes de México (México [Impr. M. León Sánchez] 1964); Jesús Arroyo Cruz, *Proceso instruido en contra de don Mariano Matamoros: estudio preliminar y memoria del homenaje tributado al héroe en Morelia en el sesquicentenario de su sacrificio* (Morelia: Gobierno del Estado de Michoacán, 1964), and Modesto V Ríos, *El cura de Janteteleo. Don Mariano Matamoros y sus patriotas feligreses en la guerra de independencia* (México: Tip. Económica, 1912).

23 The remains of Mariano Matamoros are interred today with other heroes of independence, including Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, José María Morelos y Pavón, Vicente Guerrero, José Mariano Jiménez, Nicolás Bravo, and Guadalupe Victoria at Mexico City's iconic *El Ángel Monumento a la Independencia* victory column on the *Paseo de la Reforma*. See "Matamoros, vicario," *El Sol de Hidalgo*, 19 de abril de 2009, <<http://www.oem.com.mx/elsoldehidalgo/notas/n1129007.htm>>; Jorge Legorreta, "Tres figuras aladas erigidas a la libertad." *La Jornada*, 18 de septiembre de 2002, <<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2002/09/18/02an1cul.php?origen=cultura.html>> [Accessed September 1, 2016].

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- 25 Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, *Roderici Ximenii de Rada Historia de rebus Hispanie, sive, Historia Gothica*, edited by Juan Fernández Valverde (Turnhout: Brepols, 1987), pp. 132-33.
- 26 Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote: History and Adventure*. Trans. Tobias George Smollett (Ware, Hertfordshire, UK: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1998), pp. 831-32 and 833.
- 27 Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, abridged and with an Introduction by Antony Lentin and Brian Norman (Ware, Hertfordshire, UK: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1998), pp. 285 and 303 note 176.
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- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 33-34.
- 30 Milo Kearney and Manuel Medrano, *Medieval Culture and the Mexican American Borderlands* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), pp. 1 and 103.
- 31 Johanna Hecht, "The Liberation of Viceregal Architecture and Design." in *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries*. Introduction by Octavio Paz (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Boston: Little, Brown, 1990), p. 346.
- 32 *Nile's National Register* (September 12, 1846), p. 22. <https://books.google.com/books?id=bv8PAQAAMAAJ&source=gbs_navlinks_s> [Accessed September 1, 2016]; Manuel Callahan, *Mexican Border Troubles: Social War, Settler Colonialism and the Production of Frontier Discourses, 1848-1880*. Ph.D. diss. (Austin: University of Texas, 2003), pp. 80-87.
- 33 James E. Crisp, "Anglo Texan Attitudes toward the Mexican, 1821-1845" (Ph.D. diss., New Haven: Yale University, 1976), quoted in David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1856-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), p. 26.
- 34 See Roell, *Matamoros and the Texas Revolution*.
- 35 D[enise] A. Spellberg, "Inventing Matamoros: Gender and the Forgotten Islamic Past in the United States of America," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 25 (Number 1, 2004), pp. 148-64. In addition to exploring connections between St. James the Moor Slayer, Mariano Matamoros, and the city of Matamoros, Spellberg also examines the curious naming of three cities in the United States bearing the name "Matamoros," which she asserts, is more than simply a misspelling.

36 Here Cíezar is writing about what historian Grace Magnier calls “Santiago and Spain’s Perceived Pre-eminence,” and provides excellent details on the proliferation of Saint James in Spanish thinking. Nicolás Cabrilla Cíezar, *Santiago Matamoros: historia e imagen* (Málaga: Servicio de Publicaciones, Diputación de Málaga, 1999), p. 109; Grace Magnier, “Santiago and Spain’s Perceived Pre-eminence among Christian Nations,” in *Pedro de Valencia and the Catholic Apologists of the Expulsion of the Moriscos: Visions of Christianity and Kingship* (Leiden, NL, and Boston: Brill, 2010), pp. 85-118. See also Marc Simmons, Donna Pierce, and John Myers, eds., *Santiago: Saint of Two Worlds* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991).

37 Anouar Majid, *Freedom and Orthodoxy: Islam and Difference in the Post-Andalusian Age* (Stanford, CA Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 49; Ramón Eduardo Ruiz, *Triumphs and Tragedy: A History of the Mexican People* (New York: Norton, 1992), p. 39.

38 Antonio N. Zavaleta and James E. Zavaleta with Theresa Zavaleta, “The Zavaleta Family: A Legacy of Public Service,” in *Further Studies in Rio Grande Valley History*, edited by Milo Kearney, Anthony Knopp, and Antonio Zavaleta, UTB/TSC Regional History Series Volume 7 (Brownsville: The University of Texas at Brownsville, 2006), online version <<https://www.hitpages.com/doc/5484124689137664/1#pageTop>>; Stephen T. Bass, “Basques in the Americas from 1492 to 1850: A Chronology” (Bakersfield, CA: September 2008), <http://www.nabasque.org/old_nabo/pdf/Basque%20Chronology.pdf> [Accessed September 1, 2016].

39 Jesús F. de la Teja, “St. James at the Fair: Religious Ceremony, Civic Boosterism, and Commercial Development on the Colonial Mexican Frontier,” *The Americas* 57 (January 2001), pp. 395-416.

40 Bill Karras, ed., “First Impressions of Mexico, 1828, by Reuben M. Potter,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 79 (July 1975), pp. 60, 67, and 68.

41 Thomas Bangs Thorpe, *Our Army on the Rio Grande: Being a Short Account of the Important Events Transpiring from the Time of the Removal of the “Army of Occupation” from Corpus Christi, to the Surrender of Matamoros ...* (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1846), p. 129; Lieut. W[illiam] H. Chatfield, *Twin Cities of the Border: Brownsville, Texas, and Matamoros, Mexico, and the Country of the Lower Rio Grande* (New Orleans: E.P. Brandao, 1893), p. 31.

42 González and Raleigh, *Caballero*, xxii, 12 and 161. Few books have captured so poignantly the heartrending difficulty and complexity of proud Mexicans living in South Texas and dealing with having to become “Americans” in the aftermath of San Jacinto and the U.S.-Mexico War.

- 43 The Spanish reads: “*Era la invasión yanqui, lenta, sin entrañas, corruptora; hoy una zona, otra mañana, después otra, y otra, ¡al cabo, todas! ... lo que se llame nadie — ¡be ahí lo triste, lo trístísimo! — oponiáale ni asomos de resistencia.*” Federico Gamboa, *Reconquista* (Mexico City: Eusebio Gómez de la Puente, 1908), p. 277.
- 44 Armando C. Alonzo, *Tejano Legacy: Rancheros and Settlers in South Texas, 1754-1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), pp. 5-13.
- 45 Ironically, in the wake of the continued American fight against Islamic terrorism, a new (if short-lived) graphic comic book superhero emerged in 2007, who bore the sobriquet “Santiago Matamoros.” Written by Sleet and Darius LaMonica, illustrated by John Cox, and published by Mastyx Comics, *Matamoros* was the first comic book focusing on the U.S. military’s fight against radical Islamists. The cover of *Matamoros #1* even bears the famed red Cross associated with Saint James the Greater during the Reconquista. See Kevin Ferris, “New Comic Hero Takes on Terrorism: Two Area Authors Expand on the Tradition of Captain America,” <http://articles.philly.com/2008-03-07/news/25258877_1_captain-america-muslim-men-comic-book> For the cover art, see John Cox, “Matamoros Comic Book Cover,” <http://www.johncoxart.com/2007/12/matamoros_comic_book_cover.html> [Accessed September 1, 2016].
- 46 Cpt. John Smith, *Travels and Works of Captain John Smith, 1580-1651*, ed. Edward Arber, Part II (Edinburgh, 1910), p. 625.
- 47 John Wesley Tunnell, Jr. and Frank W. Judd, eds., *The Laguna Madre of Texas and Tamaulipas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), esp. pp. 31 and 41-43; Taylor H. Ricketts, Eric Dinerstein, David M. Olson, Colby J. Loucks, and William Eichbaum, *Terrestrial Ecoregions of North America: A Conservation Assessment* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1999), pp. 344-47.
- 48 Joe Nick Patoski, “The Big Laguna: The Long, Shallow and Pristine Laguna Madre Serves as the Lifeblood of the Gulf,” *Texas Parks and Wildlife Magazine*, July 2008, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, <http://www.tpwmagazine.com/archive/2008/jul/ed_2/> [Accessed September 1, 2016].
- 49 The best work on the Laguna Madre Texas and the Laguna Madre de Tamaulipas, which synthesizes over seventy years of literature, is Tunnel and Judd, eds., *Laguna Madre of Texas and Tamaulipas*.
- 50 Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *The Narrative of Cabeza de Vaca*, edited and translated by Rolena Adorno and Patrick Charles Pautz (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), p. 123.

- 51 [John A. Scott], *Encarnacion Prisoners: Comprising an Account of the March of the Kentucky Cavalry from Louisville to the Rio Grande, together with an Authentic History of the Captivity of the American Prisoners, including Incidents and Sketches of Men and Things on the Route and in Mexico. By a Prisoner* (Louisville, KY: Prentice and Weissinger, 1848), p. 23.
- 52 [Charles P. Kingsbury], "Notes from My Knapsack," *Putnam's Monthly* 3 (January to June, 1854), pp. 370 and 371.
- 53 William A. McClintock, "Journal of a Trip through Texas and Northern Mexico in 1846-1847," Part III, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly Online* 34 (January 1931), pp. 231+, <<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph101091/m1/247/>> [Accessed September 1, 2016].
- 54 Thomas Meade Harwell, *Studies in Texan Folklore — Rio Grande Valley: Twelve Folklore Studies with Introductions, Commentaries, and a Bounty of Notes* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), p. 145.
- 55 Manuel Mier y Terán, *Texas by Terán: The Diary Kept by General Manuel de Mier y Terán on His 1828 Inspection of Texas*, edited by Jack Jackson; translated by John Wheat (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), p. 165; William B. Dewees, 6 Jan. 1827, in William B. Dewees, *Letters from an Early Settler of Texas*, compiled by Cara Cardelle [pseud], 2d ed. (Louisville, KY: New Albany Tribune, 1858), pp. 63-64. *The Handbook of Texas Online* notes that Emmaretta Cara Kimball Crawford [pseud. Cara Cardelle] and Dewees collaborated to produce the book; she may have authored it from Dewees' reminiscences.
- 56 William C. Foster, ed., *La Salle Expedition to Texas: The Journal of Henri Joutel, 1684-1687* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1998), quoted in "Prickly Pear," *Texas Beyond History*, Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, University of Texas at Austin, <<http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/st-plains/nature/images/prickly.html>> [Accessed September 1, 2016].
- 57 The Sabal Palm Sanctuary near Brownsville, Texas, operated by the Gorgas Science Foundation in collaboration with the National Audubon Society, is one of the last locations in the Rio Grande Valley for a copious forest of historic sabal palms. The Sanctuary is prized for bird and butterfly watching, and is a critical source of shelter and food for migrating and wintering species. It is associated with the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge, one of the most biologically diverse regions in North America. See <<http://sabalpalmsanctuary.org>> and <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Lower_Rio_Grande_Valley/> [Accessed September 1, 2016].
- 58 George C. Furber, *The Twelve Months Volunteer: Or, Journal of a Private, in the Tennessee Regiment of Cavalry, in the Campaign, in Mexico, 1846-7* (Cincinnati: J.A. & U.P. James, 1848), p. 185.

- 59 Ulysses Simpson Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, 2d Edition (New York: The Century Co., 1895), I: p. 61.
- 60 See Roell, *Matamoros and the Texas Revolution*; Craig H. Roell, "Matamoros Expedition of 1835-36," *Handbook of Texas Online* <<https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/qdm01>> [Accessed September 1, 2016]. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.
- 61 Jean Louis Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico during the Years 1826-to 1854, Volume 2*. Translated by Sheila M. Ohlendorf, et al. Introduction by C. H. Muller. Botanical notes by C. H. and Katherine Muller. 2 Vols. (Austin: Texas State Historical Association and the Center for Studies in Texas History, University of Texas at Austin, 1980), II: p. 459.
- 62 The World Bird Center offers nine unique locations in the Rio Grande Valley featuring over 500 species of birds. See <<http://sabalpalmsanctuary.org>> and <<http://www.theworldbirdingcenter.com>> [Accessed September 1, 2016].
- 63 There are various creative attempts to explain the meaning and origin of the term "Coahuila," ranging from crawling snakes to flying vipers. But Alfonso González Contreras of the *Asociación de Investigadores de Historia y Paleontología de la Comarca Lagunera* (Association of Researchers of History and Paleontology of the Laguna Region), building on the classic work of Tomás Cepeda (Zepeda) Rincón's *La República Mexicana: geografía y atlas*, asserts that the name is "derived from the Nahuatl since coahuiltecos were Chichimecas who spoke Nahuatl." The word "Coahuila" is the conjunction of two words: "Quahui" meaning trees, and the preposition "tla" meaning abundance. See "Origen de la palabra Coahuila" in *El Siglo de Torreón* (Coahuila), 03 de noviembre 2002 <<https://www.elsiglodetorreon.com.mx/noticia/7867.origen-de-la-palabra-coahuila.html>> [Accessed September 1, 2016].
- 64 *Texas Beyond History*, Nancy Kenmotsu, Susan Dial, and Steve Black, "Native Peoples of the South Texas Plains During Early Historic Times," Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, University of Texas at Austin <<http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/st-plains/peoples/>> ; John R. Swanton, *The Indian Tribes of North America*. Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 145 (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1953) <<https://www.accessgenealogy.com/native/coahuiltecan-indians.htm>> ; *Handbook of Texas Online*, "Coahuiltecan Indians," <<https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/bmcah>> [Accessed September 1, 2016]; Nancy L. Hilbun and Amy E. Koltermann, "Ranching Heritage" in *The Laguna Madre of Texas and Tamaulipas*, edited by John Wesley Tunnel, Jr. and Frank W. Judd (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 59. See also Thomas N. Campbell, "Coahuiltecas and Their Neighbors," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 10 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1983); Thomas N. Campbell, *The Indians of Southern Texas and Northeastern Mexico: Selected Writings of Thomas Nolan Campbell* (Austin: Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, 1988).

65 *Texas Beyond History*, Kenmotsu, Dial, and Black "Native Peoples of the South Texas Plains During Early Historic Times," <<http://www.texasbeyond-history.net/st-plains/peoples/>> [Accessed September 1, 2016].

66 Arturo Zárate Ruiz, *Matamoros: textos y pretextos de identidad. Su historia, territorio, cultura y comida* (Ciudad Victoria, Mexico: El Colegio de Tamaulipas, 2005), 14. Pdf book downloaded July 21, 2008 from <<http://matamoros.com.mx/descargas/libro-pdf-matamoros-textos-y-pretextos-de-identidad/>> [Accessed September 1, 2016].

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68 For the best scholarly treatment of Cabeza de Vaca's epic trek, see Donald E. Chipman, *Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca: The Great Pedestrian of North and South America* (Denton: Texas State Historical Association, 2012); and Andrés Reséndez, *A Land So Strange: The Epic Journey of Cabeza de Vaca* (New York: Basic Books, 2007). The best English translation of Cabeza de Vaca's narrative *Relación* is Adorno and Pautz, *Narrative of Cabeza de Vaca*, cited above, Note 50.

69 See Russell K. Skowronek and Bobbie L. Lovett, "Coahuiltecan of the Rio Grand Region," *Native American Peoples of South Texas*, ed. Bobbie L. Lovett, Juan L. González, Roseann Bacha-Garza, and Russell K. Skowronek (Edinburg, TX: CHAPS — Community Historical Archaeology Project with Schools at the University of Texas-Pan American, 2014), pp. 13-22, <https://portal.utpa.edu/utpa_main/claa_home/csbs_home/chaps_home/imagesfiles/native-american-peoples-of-south-texas-book-publisher-format.pdf> [Accessed September 1, 2016]; and Enrique [Gilbert-Michael] Maestas, "Culture and History of Native American Peoples of South Texas" (PhD diss. University of Texas at Austin, 2003).

70 See Mary Jo Galindo, "Con Un Pie En Cada Lado: Ethnicities and the Archaeology of Spanish Colonial Ranching Communities Along the Lower Rio Grande Valley" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2003). Moreover, Manuel Orozco y Berra, in his historic *Geografía de las lenguas y carta etnográfica de México* (Mexico City: J. M. Andrade y F. Escalante, 1864), mapped the following names near the mouth of the Rio Grande: Pintos, Tanaquiapemes, Ayapaguemes, Comesacapemes, Catanamepaques, Saulapaguemes, Auyapemes, Uscapemes, and Gummesacapemes.

71 Ironically, while both Apaches and Comanches called themselves "the people" in their own languages, Spaniards knew the former as *apachú* and the latter as *komántcia* — both names meaning "the enemy," the former in Zuni, the latter in Ute. David J. Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 71 and 72.

- 72 Jean L. Berlandier, *The Indians of Texas in 1850*. Edited by John C. Ewers; trans. by Patricia R. Leclercq (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1969).
- 73 See American Indians in Texas at the Spanish Colonial Missions, a non-profit organization established by the Tap Pilam Coahuiltecan Nation <<http://aitscm.org>> [Accessed September 1, 2016].
- 74 Manuel Humberto González Ramos, "Conquistas Fracasadas" *El Bravo* (Matamoros: 8 de marzo de 1998) Suplemento Dominical, p. 12; Zárata Ruiz, *Matamoros*, p. 15.
- 75 Eugenio del Hoyo, *Historia del nuevo reino de león, 1577-1725* (Monterrey: Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores/Fondo Editorial, 1972; reimpresión 2005), p. 14. See especially Hoyo's chapter "Identificación del río de las Palmas," pp. 14-23. For an excellent English translation, see "Identification of the Las Palmas River," trans. by Edna G[arza] Brown (Corpus Christi, Texas: 2003), pp. 7-12 [chapter 2, section b], Corpus Christi Public Library Digital Archives <<http://archives.cclibraries.com/cdm/compoundobject/collection/odf/id/1683/rec/3>> [Accessed September 1, 2016].
- 76 D. Martin Fernando de Navarrete, *Colección de los viajes y descubrimientos*, III:65, translated and quoted in Walter Bell Scaife, *America, Its Geographical History 1492-1892: Six Lectures Delivered to Graduate Students of the Johns Hopkins University; with a Supplement Entitled Was the Rio Del Espiritu Santo of the Spanish Geographers the Mississippi?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1892), p. 143.
- 77 See Robert S. Weddle, "Álvarez de Pineda, Alonso," *Handbook of Texas Online* <<https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fal72>> ; Robert S. Weddle, "Garay, Francisco de," *Handbook of Texas Online* <<https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fga18>> Robert S. Weddle, "Camargo, Diego de," *Handbook of Texas Online* <<https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fca24>> [Accessed September 1, 2016]. See also Donald E. Chipman, *Spanish Texas, 1519-1821* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992); and Robert S. Weddle, *Spanish Sea: The Gulf of Mexico in North American Discovery, 1500-1685* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1985).
- 78 del Hoyo, *Historia del nuevo reino de león*, p. 17. Adding another complication to the Pineda story, in his bicentennial history of the Matamoros cathedral, Clemente Rendón de la Garza includes a photograph of a broken stone found at the mouth of the Rio Grande in 1974 (photo caption: "*Piedra encontrada muy cerca de la desembocadura del Río Bravo en 1974*"), carved with the inscription (in part): "Álvarez de Piñeda 1519". Historian David J. Weber notes, however, that "most scholars doubt its authenticity." Rendón de la Garza is a past president of El Colegio de Cronistas e Historiadores de la Frontera Norte de Tamaulipas y Sur de Texas. Clemente Rendón de

la Garza, *Bicentenario de Nuestra Señora del Refugio de las Esteras catedral, H. Matamoros, Tamaulipas México* (H. Matamoros, Tamaulipas, México: s.n., 1994), 11. Available at <http://matamoros.com.mx/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/01/cap_01_catedral_ci.pdf> [Accessed September 1, 2016]; David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 34.

79 Robert S. Weddle, "Carvajal y de la Cueva, Luis De," *Handbook of Texas Online* <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fcadn>>; Phillip L. Fry, "Texas, Origin of Name," *Handbook of Texas Online* <<https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/pft04>> [Accessed September 1, 2016].

80 del Hoyo, *Historia del nuevo reino de león*, 415; Brown translation, 245. *Seno Mexicano* reference identified in Mary Margaret McAllen Amberson, James A. McAllen and Margaret H. McAllen, *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas: A History of the Lower Rio Grande Valley and the People of the Santa Anita Land Grant* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2003), p. 17. See also Alonzo, *Tejano Legacy*, pp. 15-29; and Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*, pp. 18-19.

81 Robert S. Weddle is the reigning historian of La Salle's sojourn in Texas, beginning with his classic *Wilderness Manhunt: The Spanish Search for La Salle* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), followed by *The French Thorn: Rival Explorers in the Spanish Sea, 1682-1762* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991); *The Wreck of the Belle, the Ruin of La Salle* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001); and *The Wrecking of La Salle's Ship Aimable and the Trial of Claude Aignon*, Charles N. Prothro Texana Series (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010). Recent supplemental literature includes William C. Foster, *The La Salle Expedition to Texas: The Journal of Henri Joutel, 1684-1687* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2015); James E. Bruseth and Toni S. Turner, *From a Watery Grave: The Discovery and Excavation of La Salle's Shipwreck, La Belle* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005); and *Texas Beyond History*, "Fort St. Louis," Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, University of Texas at Austin <<http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/stlouis/index.html>> [Accessed September 1, 2016].

82 Donald E. Chipman and Harriet Denise Joseph, *Spanish Texas, 1519-1821*. Revised edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), p. 72.

83 See Chipman and Joseph, *Spanish Texas*; William C. Foster, *Spanish Expeditions into Texas, 1689-1768* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995); David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); and John L. Kessell, *Spain in the Southwest: A Narrative History of Colonial New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, and California* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002).

84 Robert S. Weddle, "Rivas-Iriarte Expedition," *Handbook of Texas Online* <<https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/upr05>> [Accessed September 1, 2016]; Weddle, *French Thorn*, pp. 52-70.

85 In 1995, Texas Historical Commission archeologists discovered *La Belle's* resting place and have excavated the shipwreck and salvaged more than a million artifacts, most on display at the Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History, the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin, Texas, and the Museum of the Coastal Bend in Victoria, Texas (though ownership of both the wreck and its artifacts are retained by the Musée national de la Marine in Paris). See James E. Bruseth and Toni S. Turner, *From a Watery Grave: The Discovery and Excavation of La Salle's Shipwreck, La Belle* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005); *Texas Beyond History*, "La Belle Shipwreck," Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, University of Texas at Austin <<http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/belle/>>; and Texas Historical Commission, "La Salle Archeology Projects *La Belle* and Fort St. Louis Excavations" <<http://www.thc.state.tx.us/preserve/archeology/la-salle-archeology-projects>> [Accessed September 1, 2016]. See also Weddle, *The Wrecking of La Salle's Ship Aimable*.

86 Robert S. Weddle, "Pez y Malzarraga, Andres de," *Handbook of Texas Online* <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fpe55>>; and Robert S. Weddle, "Rivas-Pez Expedition," *Handbook of Texas Online* <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/upr06>> [Accessed September 1, 2016].

87 Zárate Ruiz, *Matamoras*, p. 22. As example of this caution, Zárate Ruiz cites Eliseo Paredes Manzano, *Homenaje a los Fundadores de la Heroica, Leal e Invicta Matamoras en el Sesquicentenario de su Nuevo Nombre* (Edición del Ayuntamiento de Matamoras, 28 de enero de 1976), who wrote "All historians agree that it was Captain Don Alonso de León, "El Mozo," as the first Spaniard to set foot on matamorenses land" ["*Coinciden todos los historiadores en que fue el Capitán Don Alonso de León 'El Mozo', el español que por primera vez pisara tierras matamorenses.*"] (3). Arturo Zárate Ruiz, a professor at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Matamoras, Tamaulipas (Mexico), specializes in rhetoric, culture, and politics in the Mexican-U.S. borderlands.

88 In addition to sources in Note 80, see Robert S. Weddle, "Jarry, Jean," *Handbook of Texas Online* <<https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fja47>>; and Robert S. Weddle, "La Salle's Texas Settlement," *Handbook of Texas Online* <<https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/uel07>> [Accessed September 1, 2016].

89 *Ibid.*; also Herbert E. Bolton, *The Hasinai, Southern Caddoans as Seen by the Earliest Europeans*, edited and introduction by Russell M. Magnaghi. The Civilization of the American Indian Series (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987; Red River Books edition, 2002), p. 56.

90 *Ibid.*, 25; Jack Jackson, *Los Mesteños: Spanish Ranching in Texas, 1721-1821* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1986; 2006), p. 446.

- 91 Zárate Ruiz, *Matamoros*, p. 25; and Milo Kearney and Anthony K. Knopp, *Boom and Bust, The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville* (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1991), p. 12.
- 92 See Roell, *Matamoros and the Texas Revolution*.
- 93 González and Raleigh, *Caballero*, p. 107.
- 94 The best English-language work on the history of Matamoros and Brownsville remains Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp, *Boom and Bust: The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville*. Recent supplemental literature includes Craig H. Roell, *Matamoros and the Texas Revolution*; Craig H. Roell, "Matamoros Before the Texas Revolution: Becoming Mexico's Pivotal Port City on the Northern Frontier," in *Still More Studies in Rio Grande Valley History*, edited by Milo Kearney, Anthony Knopp, and Antonio Zavaleta, pp. 3-36 (Brownsville: The Texas Center for Border and Transnational Studies and the University of Texas at Brownsville, 2014); and Craig H. Roell, "Matamoros and the *Tejanos* of Goliad and Victoria in the Texas Revolution: Conflicting Loyalties and 'Assiduous Collaborators'," in *Extra Studies in Rio Grande Valley History*, edited by Milo Kearney, Anthony Knopp, Antonio Zavaleta, and Thomas Daniel Knight, Volume 14 in the UT Rio Grande Valley Regional History Series (Brownsville: The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, 2016), pp. 5-46.
- 95 For current statistics on the automobile industry in Matamoros, see "The Brownsville Borderplex, a Key Link in the Realigned North American 'Auto Alley,'" *Business South Texas*, June 11, 2015 <<http://businessouthtexas.com.yellow.mysitehosted.com/?p=1621>> [Accessed September 1, 2016].
- 96 The first Mr. Amigo in 1964 was former Mexican President Miguel Aleman. Mr. Amigo can be female; the 2015 designee was Mexican actress and singer Itatí Cantoral. Robert Avita quoted in "Officials name producer as upcoming Mr. Amigo," *Brownsville Herald*, Dec. 2, 2014 <http://www.brownsvilleherald.com/news/local/article_0dc9b996-7aa0-11e4-b266-0fce9199ffeb.html> [Accessed September 1, 2016].
- 97 Ivonne Ma Martínez Cadena, *Matamoros: la gran puerta de México*, 2d ed. (Matamoros, Tamps.: Ink Servicios Gráficos, 2006); Gobierno Municipal de Matamoros, *Matamoros: La Gran Puerta de México* <<http://mimatamorosquerido.enteratenorte.com/inicio.htm>>. A wealth of historical and current information in Spanish is accessible on the city's official website: <<http://www.matamoros.com.mx>> [Accessed September 1, 2016].

U.S.-Mexico Relations during the Establishment of the American Consulate in Matamoros: 1826-1842

by

Melisa C. Galván

"During my residence at this port, as Consul of the United States, it has been my constant endeavor to facilitate and guard the interest of my countrymen and at the same time to husband the good opinion and friendship of the natives...."

— Daniel Willard Smith, American Consul in Matamoros, 1829¹

The words of Northern Mexico's first consul emphasize the extent to which United States diplomats were utilized by their government as front-line guardians of American interests abroad.² While a newly-independent Mexico was struggling to impose control over its vast territories, the Matamoros consular office played a complex role that involved, on the one hand, mediating differences between U.S. and Mexican governmental systems and, on the other, maintaining control over a diverse set of constituents, each seeking to protect a personal or political interest. In this Mexican outpost, in the early part of the nineteenth century, on any given day, the tasks of the consulate might entail protecting the rights of the small but ambitious group of entrepreneurial American businessmen who had settled there, documenting the steady stream of transient maritime merchants eager to exploit the relatively lax governmental controls in the port of Matamoros, and holding at bay the settlers in Texas intent on laying claim to as much land as possible. The Matamoros consular office mediated disputes involving Americans and acted as the official U.S. representative in cases that involved their competing legal systems. As Daniel Willard

Smith's words above attest, throughout his tenure as the port's first consular official, he also saw his assignment as one of promoting good will and friendly relations between Mexico and the United States, a task that was complicated by the instability of, and political rumblings stirring in, Mexico's Texas territories.

It was expected that U.S. consuls stationed abroad report to Washington periodically with accounts of their actions, including contacts with Mexican officials, as well as updates on the local political climate. But at this time Smith's duty was also as a "commercial agent," which entailed documenting the local business activities of Americans and maintaining records of American vessels that entered and exited the port. The Matamoros consul was a member of a founding generation of diplomats who were charged with establishing consular posts throughout Latin America's newly independent nations, and his dispatches reveal a sense of the distinctively regional diplomacy practiced in this period during which Matamoros was emerging as one of Mexico's more active commercial ports.³

Through an examination of the Matamoros consul's regional diplomatic interactions during Mexico's first twenty years of independence, this article will argue that the multi-dimensional relationships that Smith established were an integral part of the region's first relations with the United States. The consul was responsible for negotiating between a complex set of parties that included Mexican nationals, Anglo-Texas settlers, his American superiors in Washington, and local Matamoros residents who originated from around the globe. These early consular records contribute to our understanding of the vulnerability of Mexico's northern territories during the period leading up to and during the significant social experiment that encouraged Anglo Americans to settle in Texas.⁴ The place of the consulate fits well within the body of literature that explores the development of regional economies largely independent of Mexican authority in the years following independence.⁵ Within that context, the opportunism of American entrepreneurial interests, including

that of Smith himself as a businessman, also appears to have contributed to the region's growth. As will be demonstrated, although the Matamoros consul may not have fit the mold of American imperialists looking to expand the United States frontier, this case does illustrate that the ineffective reach of a central Mexican authority is what made the relative autonomy practiced by many Northern figures, including American diplomats, possible.⁶

The port city of Matamoros, located today at the mouth of the Rio Grande River, just across the border from Brownsville, Texas, has been an important commercial center since its earliest beginnings. During the colonial period, the port—commonly referred to at the time as *Refugio* and only later renamed Matamoros—was not legally recognized by the Spanish crown.⁷ This did not prevent an informal network of merchants from establishing a major commercial center there prior to independence, dealing mostly in contraband trade goods going into New Spain (Mexico).⁸ This illicit commerce developed for two main reasons: first, the port was relatively close to the flourishing trans-Atlantic hub of New Orleans and, second, the shallow waters along the Gulf Coast allowed merchants using light-draft ships with smaller crews to move quickly and stealthily in eluding the reach of the small cadre of Mexican officials charged with regulating maritime trade.⁹ As a result, strong ties between Matamoros and New Orleans crystallized, and, by the early 1820s, Matamoros not only served as the main port for all of northeastern Mexico, but had also become an important center of trans-national commerce, although on a much smaller scale than New Orleans.¹⁰

The loose control of the central Mexican authority in distant Mexico City made it necessary, in Daniel Willard Smith's view, for the United States to step in to protect its interests locally. Because the Mexican national government was in disarray on multiple fronts immediately following independence, Tamaulipas authorities imposed their own version of order, although with

uneven results that led to instances of corruption, abuse of power, and a form of frontier law that sometimes resulted in rebellion.¹¹ With a keen eye towards foreign trade, as soon as the political context became favorable in 1824, President James Monroe issued the order that established the United States consulate in Matamoros and named Smith, who was already an established local merchant there, as its first official.¹²

Smith had moved to Matamoros in 1821 as part of a wave of American settlers who were drawn by Mexico's legalization of foreign trade. Although he was a native of Connecticut, it is clear that he was attracted to the region for its business potential. Little is known about his personal business holdings there, except that he was a partner of Francis Stillman, a Hartford, Connecticut, merchant who operated a regular line of trade ships that shuttled between Matamoros, New Orleans, and New York City.¹³ Thus, the United States' first consular representative already enjoyed strong ties to the local business community by the time he was assigned to the post.

While almost all foreign consular posts are charged with facilitating interactions between two nations, Matamoros' geographic location and the diversity of political interests that the consulate had to balance made it especially challenging. A handful of American merchants had already settled in the Mexican territories by 1824, but during the period leading up to 1835, the Matamoros consulate was responsible for protecting, not only established American residents, the entrepreneurial transient businessmen who passed through the port, but also Anglo settlers in Texas with vastly divergent interests. Smith's adversary, Richard Pearse, who will be described later as playing a high-profile role in a campaign to replace Smith as consul, wrote numerous letters to Washington claiming that he failed in his responsibility to protect the interests of American citizens. This episode sheds light on Smith's own opinions of U.S. expansionism—which were very different than those of many of his fellow Americans as he acted on his fervent belief that Matam-

oros should *not* become part of the U.S. territories. Clearly, his counterparts in Texas, including Sam Houston, Stephen Austin, and even Pearse, did not concur. It is clear that mediating between, and sometimes for both sides of the settlers' complex interests was a challenge for American diplomats during this volatile period.

The Matamoros consulate was also responsible for representing the United States in dealings with local Mexican officials. The official documents that survive today in archives and other holdings document Smith's actions to ensure that American citizens were treated fairly and granted their legal rights.¹⁴ His most common interventions came when American citizens were unlawfully detained or had their property seized. Matamoros may have been a thriving port during the 1820s, but local Mexican law enforcement (as described in the dispatches) was haphazard. Furthermore, the shaky national political struggle between Mexican Centralist and Federalist forces played itself out in a very real way on the streets of Matamoros. The conduct of Mexican politics was a constant topic in messages Smith sent to Washington, which often included newspaper clippings describing new laws enacted by the state or national government that could potentially impact American business interests. Despite these inherent struggles, for the most part, it appears that the consul's interactions with officials such as the local *alcalde* were positive, in keeping with his interest in ensuring friendly U.S.-Mexico relations.

By far the most important official function of the consulate was to maintain the flow of information about the region to Washington. Because Matamoros is thousands of miles removed from Washington, the semi-annual dispatches and the numerous other letters written by U.S. representatives in Matamoros, served as the primary means of communication with the American government. It is unclear how influential such opinions were with high ranking U.S. officials, but the position required that details of local life be relayed. In fact, the level of detail about the

local goings-on contained in these letters varied according to the expectations of the then-current Secretary of State.¹⁵

The story of the establishment of the diplomatic outpost in Matamoros illustrates that even a remote site is able to exert a level of economic influence that can result in broad regional consequences. The port had a reputation for being friendly to contraband trade well before independence, and, for that reason, strong trans-national ties had developed between Mexican businessmen from the interior and American maritime merchants from the exterior. Symbolic national laws were not strongly felt by the Mexican populace in the nation's periphery, and that made it possible for Matamoros to follow its own unique course of development. In other words, what was taking place in the center of the Mexican national state, while ultimately relevant, was relatively inconsequential for Matamoros at this time because it was beyond Mexico's bureaucratic reach. Thus, the traditional economic model that ascribes a post-independence pattern of economic decline for all of Mexico's outlying territories ignores the nuances that the local records and correspondences reveal.¹⁶ Previous historical accounts of the northeast Mexican territories describe the regional economy during this period as struggling, but it is clear from the correspondences of Smith, the customs records of local officials, and the volume of wealth described in these documents that Matamoros does not fit such descriptions.

Consular Records as Primary Sources

Since this article is based on consular records as primary sources, it is necessary to acknowledge the debate among historians about the usefulness of such documents to explore the history of a specific locale. This debate is centered on competing interpretations of the motivations of foreigners who either resided in Mexico or had significant commercial interests there. Foreign consuls like Smith were responsible for championing the

interests of their compatriots and working to obtain swift justice for Americans. Although it is hard to tell how fervently Smith pursued this role, other consular delegates have been described as looking for the slightest offenses in order to justify broader imperialist actions on behalf of their governments. It has been argued that, because consular records are partisan by nature, they present the potential for distorting the historical record.

Three competing interpretations of the usefulness of consular records as primary historical sources have considered this issue, beginning with a 1979 article by Barbara Tenenbaum that describes a partisan slant in the British consular records used in her research.¹⁷ Tenenbaum argues that the British and other foreign governments with a presence in Mexico during the period after independence relied heavily on exploiting the weaker Mexican nation in order to fuel their own economic prosperity.¹⁸ She was one of the first to analyze the actions of foreign consular officials and to show how their multifaceted diplomatic relationships were formed. While Tenenbaum's case study is extreme in its claims about the extent to which commercial imperialist interests served as the motivation for the underlying interactions, it is her contention that consular dispatches can only be used to reflect the ways that diplomatic officials served their own interests. Her interpretation acknowledges the complex nature of consular diplomacy, but sets aside the agency of individual consular actors in negotiating their own roles on a local level.

She was challenged, in 1986, by David Walker, who attempted to debunk her framework by taking issue with the assumption that foreign merchants were purposely looking for any reason to justify foreign intervention in Mexico, and entirely motivated by personal profit.¹⁹ John French summarizes Walker's critique: "[He] has vigorously rejected a 'Black legend' that ... condemns foreign merchants as 'perfidious outside forces.'"²⁰ In Walker's view, the foreign merchants often were the *victims*—barely protected by their own governments and discriminated

against because of their “foreignness.” Regional variations, for Walker at least, can shed light on the ways that particular local politics and situations influence these relationships. It is clear that Walker’s approach takes the imperialist framework spectrum to the opposite end from that of Tenenbaum, leaving room for a more tempered view of the nuances of consular diplomacy.

John D. French’s 1990 work avoids either extreme, instead adopting a nuanced version of Tenenbaum’s original interpretation.²¹ In his study of the port city of Tampico, located roughly halfway between Matamoros and Veracruz, French acknowledges the “heated debate” between Tenenbaum and Walker, but rejects both extremes and instead argues “that merchants’ economic and diplomatic links to the exterior were a positive factor of ‘primordial importance’ in Mexico before 1870.” He notes that Tampico’s “foreign capitalists” were “the commercial foot soldiers of the European and North American drive for overseas expansion and colonial empire.”²² This nuanced framework is particularly compelling because it acknowledges the imperialist motivations of some foreign diplomats of that era in Mexico while noting their individual efforts at the local level. Thus, French concludes that a complete and balanced historical account should address the nationalist motivations of consular officials, while, at the same time, taking into account the local realities that these officers were charged with navigating.

The case of Matamoros during the period between the establishment of the United States consulate and Smith’s resignation in 1842 appears to most closely build upon the view set forth by French. D.W. Smith clearly sought to position the local American business community, including his own business interests, to benefit from Mexico’s weak situation. Yet, at the same time, he preserved the local status quo by not calling for the intervention by U.S. forces except in extreme instances.²³ Smith was alert to the corruption and misconduct by Mexican officials in Matamoros during his term, and he kept the American government informed of these in his dispatches. He chose to focus his

attention mainly on the accounts of national and local politics that could affect local American interests. His official letters reflect a deep-seated commitment to upholding the United States' interests, one that is measured and relatively tame compared with the consular records described by French and others. In fact, the consular dispatches examined for this study give us a unique view of how national weakness plays out on a regional level, with the Americans emerging as neither strictly greedy opportunists nor victims.

The Case of the Matamoros Consul

The Matamoros consular records shed light on the crucial role that this consular office played in mediating divergent interests in the Mexican Northeast. This section will explore three significant periods in the diplomatic history of the region—the first six years of the consulate during which Smith emphasized the development of friendly relations, a contentious period during which competing interests threatened to undermine Smith's service as consul, and, finally, the period during which Texan settlers began their push for unofficial autonomy from Mexican oversight.

Development of Consular Roles and Responsibilities

Smith sent his first report to Washington on July 24, 1826. In that report, which took about two-and-a-half months to arrive, he formally accepts his appointment as consul. He informs his superiors that he will “forward [his] report[s] at the expiration of six months with any occurrences that may be of importance to government.”²⁴ The post had never before been occupied, nor had the businessman ever served as a government employee. He expresses his frustrations in dealing with local Mexican officials in his first letter back to Washington:

*Much difficulty and trouble is always the consequence when officers are not acquainted with their duty or Laws of their Country, this is the case with the Authority of this place, and they act from prejudice more than justice with all foreigners, but as this place is daily growing to importance the government no doubt will take more notice of it ... I hope the evil will be soon remedied.*²⁵

It is clear that his concerns stem from his perceived inability to establish friendly relations with the “natives.”²⁶ His duties were not well defined and were further exacerbated by the fact that, as he notes, the Mexican authorities were uninformed. It did not take long for Smith’s opinions to change.

The American consulate in Matamoros was established to protect the interests of United States citizens either residing in or visiting the port. If Americans were either detained or mistreated by Mexican authorities, the consul’s job was to intervene on their behalf and ensure they received fair treatment. Logistically, it made the most sense for the consul to account for Americans in these territories by having them register at the consulate office upon their arrival, and this information was eventually reported to Washington for review by State Department officials.

The information that the consul was responsible for transmitting was fairly comprehensive. The forms for these reports were produced in the United States and included the following information concerning every ship that arrived in the port: the date of arrival, classification of vessels, name of ship, length, captain, number of Americans and other foreigners working as crew members, where it originated, where it was registered, the contents of its inward cargo, if known, the value of the inward cargo, the outward cargo and its value, the number of Americans and other foreigners on the outward crew, and their date of departure.²⁷ The records indicate that there was a lively export trade centered in Matamoros. By collecting each ship’s vital statistics, the consulate was able to track patterns and ensure that the “American crew in” closely resembled that of the “American crew out.” This was crucial given the lucrative commodities that

Smith describes, "The imports consist of cotton and linen goods of British and German manufacture shipped from the United States ... and of American brown and bleached shirtings, and sheetings, lumber, furniture, etc. The articles of export are silver from the mines in the interior, wool, hides, and mules."²⁸ More important to understanding the allure of the area to American merchants is Smith's noting that only the silver "is subject to an export duty of 3.5 percent, [while] the remaining articles are exported free of duty."²⁹ Besides painting a picture for the government in Washington, this information was also useful when dealing with the numerous contraband accusations made against American citizens.³⁰

One of the office's other duties was the collection of fees for services rendered, which supported the consul's salary. Another form was developed to keep track of fees for reporting purposes. The information that the office kept track of was similar to that of the returns, the major difference being the type of fee that was collected. It is unclear how the money received was handled exactly, and whether money was couriered back to the United States or maintained in Mexico.

These fees were not the only means for the consular office to fund its operations. They were also responsible for the handling of deceased Americans' estates. According to Smith himself, an act of Congress from 1792 gave him such a right.³¹ In most instances, no surviving relatives were present at the port (except in the case of some permanent residents), so it was the consul's duty to liquidate the remaining assets and attempt to locate the immediate family. The consul was not expected to do this alone; a team of assessors was hired to inventory goods.³² The quality and quantity of goods varied, ranging anywhere from "small tables" and "box[es] of teeth cleaning instruments" to "pantalons" and "bundles of letters and receipts."³³ Smith was particularly meticulous with his reporting on these matters, in many cases writing updates about the settlement of estates until he had finished locating next of kin.

Lastly, it was the consul's responsibility to intervene if an American citizen was arrested and to ensure that U.S. laws were respected. The *ayuntamiento* archives shed the most light on these cases, containing a number of handwritten correspondences penned by the consul. For example, when Johnathan Walker was murdered aboard his ship in 1836, Smith wrote a scathing letter to the mayor of Matamoros: "I communicate [this letter] to you, with the hope, that you will relay, take prompt and efficient measures to apprehend the perpetrators of the outrage and cause them to be punished according to the atrocity of the crime of which they are guilty."³⁴ While this correspondence is stern in its tone, it is clear that the consul made sure that he would be able to mediate all sides in these situations. Mediating between opposing sides was extremely difficult, and his actions and decisions were not always favorably received, as the following section illustrates.

A Politically Motivated Challenge to the Consul's Authority

Smith had served as consul in Matamoros for six years when a heated controversy arose over his ability to perform his duties. A fellow merchant named Richard Pearse went to extraordinary means in his attempts to recall him from office. Pearse was a Freemason and a native of Massachusetts who arrived in Matamoros in 1822.³⁵ When he "solicited a recall" of Smith and "appointed himself to the office," the main issue cited was the imposition of a Mexican tax of one percent on the property of all foreign merchants (that began in 1830), a law that Smith himself opposed, but which he felt duty-bound to impose.³⁶

While the issue at first appears to be the one-percent tax, it quickly unfolds into something much deeper. Almost immediately after the first word of the Pearse challenge made its way into the consular dispatches, the future president of the Texas Republic Sam Houston weighed in on the matter. Houston's involvement underscores the importance of Matamoros, not just

for the Mexican and American governments, but also for Texan interests. Houston summarizes the charges against Smith as, "intemperance of habit and as totally regardless of the rights of American citizens." He goes on to note that Smith had neglected "the atrocious murder of Colonel R. Rop, [which] remains unavenged, ... [and] the murderer [was] in favor with our consul."³⁷ While Pearse insisted on numerous occasions that it was never his intention to become consul, the intensity of his efforts to see Smith removed from office suggests otherwise.

Pearse pursued the matter relentlessly, eventually flooding the Secretary of State's office with letters that detailed the incompetence of Smith and that touted his own ability to serve as consul. At its core, though, was the consul's ability to mediate between many sets of contending interests. Pearse, a businessman, was angered by the export and import tax, something that neither Smith nor the consulate more generally was directly responsible for putting in place. The consul's ability to weather these types of storms and his diplomatic skills were put into question. Pearse accuses him of ignoring the opposition to the law: "General Terán and the Administrator, with many of the most respectable citizens here, offered their support of the consul, and recommended him to oppose the law, as unjust and unconstitutional." Yet, as Pearse contends, "his countrymen were astonished to hear that he had deserted them."³⁸ Hence, Smith's ability to mediate the interests of businessmen, natives, and Texan residents was being tested.

Prior to this explosive debate, it is clear that Smith exercised what he believed to be the most suitable diplomatic strategy, which was to remain as neutral as possible. One example came in 1832, when a series of civil wars (led by competing political factions) was spreading through the Mexican north, with Antonio López de Santa Anna as one of its leaders. Santa Anna had most recently led Mexico to victory against the Spanish forces that had attempted to invade Tampico in 1829, and he served as a military figure up until his election as president of

Mexico in 1833. Smith's correspondence from 1832 demonstrates his own personal strategy in dealing with political instability: "The citizens of the state are encouraged to remain neutral in the context."³⁹ Such neutrality earned him the praise of many local residents, as the following excerpt from a supporting letter attests, "We firmly believe that his long experience and good natural abilities, together with the high estimation in which he is held both by natives and foreigners, enable him to discharge the duties of his office in a manner more beneficial to our interests than could be done by most others."⁴⁰ In other words, Smith believed that the role of a United States consul in this region was to remain below the radar of contentious debates so as to ensure friendly relations among all sides.

Pearse challenges Smith's policy of neutrality in one of his more vitriolic letters, a 12-page document addressed to the State Department in which he argues in favor of the acquisition of Matamoros by the United States. This issue had been long on the minds of U.S. politicians because of Matamoros' strategic location and proximity to the Texas territories that had become a settlement zone and also because the port could function as a hub, not only for international exchange, but also for intra-American commerce. In other words, goods purchased at the port could be transported upriver and into Texas, by mule to Monterrey or Chihuahua, and from there to a wealth of other areas. Furthermore, maritime trade originating in Matamoros could conceivably reach any international port. If such trade opportunities were realized, a lot was at stake financially.

The internal debate between Pearse and Smith over the acquisition of Matamoros illustrates the consul's diplomatic reasoning in important ways. Pearse did not possess the experience necessary to recognize the consequences of such an action. Pearse gives five reasons in support of the acquisition of Matamoros. He begins by invoking the need to secure American citizens, writing that: "It is necessary for their physical security."⁴¹ Next, he argues that it would offer "commercial advantages."⁴²

In fact, it is likely that he believed that the duties he so vigorously opposed would no longer be an issue, thus increasing potential profits for merchants there. Incredibly, his third reason is that the acquisition was “necessary in order to prevent our country from being drained of its population.”⁴³ Although the city’s population was growing steadily, the more than 300 foreign residents (according to Smith) would hardly be considered a drain on the U.S. population.⁴⁴ Next, in an apparent appeal to the U.S. government, he argues that the potential revenue from trade fees would be beneficial to the American government.⁴⁵ Finally, he asserts that “it is for the mutual interest of both governments, that the change should take place”.⁴⁶ He goes on to refer to Matamoros as a “beautiful territory” and “one of [the country’s] fairest jewels.”⁴⁷ He concludes his letter with the most desperate of pleas and accusations: “When you succeed in bringing back to this fold of the good old U. States, this fair portion of country, if you will not have reclaimed a sinner, you will, at least, have hidden a multitude of sins, for many did he commit, who caused it to be lost.”⁴⁸ It is unclear how Pearse could lay blame on Smith for the “loss of territory” since it had always belonged to either Spain or Mexico. Regardless, the U.S. government chose to ignore his arguments.

Although Pearse was persistent in his submission of appeals to the government through numerous letters of support and personal references, the U.S. government kept Smith in office. The exact reasons remain absent from the record, but Pearse’s persistence is well documented—he sent over 200 letters, some more than 12 pages in length, to the department during 1832. One notable letter in support of Smith came from Francis Stillman, father of Charles Stillman, the founder, later, of the city of Brownsville, Texas. Francis states that, “He may have asserted ... that Mr. Smith is unfriendly to the present administration, if so, it is a direct violation of truth, as we all know, that our consul has been as uniformly its friend as Pearse has been its enemy and traducer.”⁴⁹ The ability to mediate between competing interests

was seen by merchants like Stillman as the key to maintaining friendly relations with Mexican officials in the region.

At one point, Sam Houston tried to warn Pearse that his reputation among State Department officials was not favorable. He notes, "I find that charges have been made against you at the State Department and of such character as I apprehend will remove you from your present situation and replace you by some other person."⁵⁰ Pearse did not give up that easily, but for a six-month period the dispatches returned to being penned by Smith. In the meantime, the political climate in Texas, which was moving steadily towards becoming an independent Republic, remained volatile, which made for a period of uncertainty and instability that was also felt in Matamoros.

The power-play issue disappears from the consular records with Smith's only letter of defense, in which he responds to the allegations brought against him and attaches letters of support written by local Mexican officials, with Joaquín Barragán being the most outspoken in his defense of Smith's abilities to foster friendly relations.⁵¹ In Smith's words, "In order to exculpate myself from the imputation contained in the charges it has become necessary to expose to the world the infamy of the man who falsely pressured them ... and show that he was activated by no other motive than that of gratifying his private malice with a view of promoting his own appointment."⁵² Pearse, of course, responded in his own defense, "my object in introducing them was not ... a way for my own appointment to the office"⁵³ Smith was then officially reappointed by the State Department on November 23, 1832, only one month after Texan settlers had unofficially declared their own independence from the Mexican government.

The Texas Republic—A Test of Smith's Consular Diplomacy

The foreign consular service may have weathered the Pearse-Smith storm, but the political climate that emerged was anything

but calm. While their ordeal was hanging in the balance, a series of events in Mexico's Texas territories threatened to drastically change geographic and political markers.

Most American settlers who had made their way to Texas in the early 1820s were motivated by a hunger for land, stimulated in large part by the Panic of 1819 in the United States.⁵⁴ The depression that followed resulted in large increases in the number of settlers who wished to escape their creditors and purchase cheap land in Texas.⁵⁵ The Mexican Constitution of 1824 insured that immigrants would be protected under Mexican national laws. But as Siegel notes, "Difficulties over land matters also plagued the settlers in their relations with the Mexican government."⁵⁶ A large-scale rebellion occurred in 1825, but Mexican authorities were quick to suppress what historians now call the Fredonian rebellion.⁵⁷ From that point on, however, the Mexican government became extremely apprehensive about further immigration from the United States into their Texas territories. By October of 1832, Texan independence had been declared (but not yet recognized by the Mexican government), with Austin named to serve as the republic's first president.

Although the steps towards independence that had been taken were swift and relatively peaceful, the job that Smith had fought so hard to keep was challenged at its core by these events. The social climate of Matamoros was drastically altered; the city that, on a daily basis, saw a variety of different nationalities now became entirely unfriendly to foreigners. Thus, the efforts that were undertaken to establish friendly diplomatic ties between Mexicans, Texans, and American immigrants in Matamoros were severely challenged.

The tensions between 1832 and the official concession of independence to the Texas Republic in 1836 were intensely felt in Matamoros. Smith, in a rare display of opinion, wrote to his superiors in Washington in 1833 about the prospects for Texas:

The people of Texas in a few years will be enabled to carry on a very lucrative trade, not only with the Southern ports in the gulf, but with

*foreign countries which will yield an important revenue to the Mexican nation; and it is to be hoped that such obvious advantages will not be sacrificed by jealousy or misguided ambition.*⁵⁸

It is clear that Smith, whose policy was always to remain neutral and friendly with all sides, did not wish to get involved. United States officials, while remaining open to the settlement that was taking place in Texas, were concerned with the issue of slavery, which was itself causing internal divisions from within the new Texas government. One wonders what Smith and the United States State Department would have done had the instability caused by the challenge of power in 1832 not occurred, especially since the Matamoros consul was, and still remains, the closest outpost to the happenings there.

Religious tolerance was another issue that divided Texans in terms of how their own American views on the issue would fit with those of the Mexican government.⁵⁹ The Mexican government, itself experiencing a shift of power in 1834, had affirmed that Roman Catholicism was its official religion. Smith reported back to his superiors about the local sentiment: "I have the honor to inform you that on the 22nd the civil and military authorities of this place declared their intention to support the Catholic Religion and President Santa Anna."⁶⁰ Despite these larger issues at play, American commerce continued to thrive at the port into the following year (1835). Yet, it was not long before Smith made his first suggestion to send military reinforcements to the city because of the climate in Texas.

The activities taking place to the north of Matamoros in 1835 were of enough concern to cause the consul to request that American military reinforcements be sent to the port to protect citizens' interests. Smith notes,

*I have frequently suggested to the Department the propriety of an occasional visit of one of our small armed vessels off this port. The prospect of an open rupture with Texas and the present unsettled state of affairs throughout this country have excited apprehensions, which, it is confidently expected, will not escape the observation of our government.*⁶¹

To make matters worse, it became clear to Smith, when the Department of State sent him an up-to date list of consular posts, that his own Government was somewhat unclear about where he was stationed. He clarified the error to his superiors immediately, stating, "the place of my residence is designated as being in Texas. This is a mistake ... The town of Matamoros is situated within the state of Tamaulipas...."⁶² Although his communications to Washington had been consistent in noting his location, it is clear that his distance played an important role in the misunderstanding.

The records take a downward turn immediately after this point—Smith's role as diplomatic intermediary was challenged, and it appears that it became increasingly difficult for him to follow his strategy following the eruptions in Texas. Smith writes candidly about the situation in 1836:

*Most of the American merchants engaged in this trade are minding their affairs with the intention of leaving the country. The recent occurrences in Texas have rendered the foreigners generally unpopular throughout the interior, especially our countrymen, who are in some instances, unjustly identified with the Texas cause, and subjected to repeated insult and oppression.*⁶³

The hostilities escalated to the point that Smith's own home was stormed by soldiers the following month.⁶⁴ In an event serious enough for Smith to warn his superiors in Washington, President Santa Anna ordered the execution by firing squad of 412 Texan prisoners.⁶⁵ Smith was shocked to report that "even women have been butchered in the street in the most shocking manner."⁶⁶ By the end of June, 1836, he notes, "[American] merchants, being unwilling to risk their persons or properties in the country, have disposed of their effects at a considerable sacrifice with a determination to abandon the trade altogether."⁶⁷ The hostilities did not stop there, and Smith appears to have almost given up in an 1838 letter:

It would seem that the civil and military authorities of Mexico seize every opportunity with avidity to create an invidious destruction to the prejudice of citizens of the United States, who are generally looked upon as enemies in disguise This feeling towards our countrymen, as unmerited as it is unjust, commenced with the hostilities in Texas.⁶⁸

Without a doubt, Smith's diplomatic efforts could not quell the harsh treatment and resentment being displayed by Mexican citizens in Matamoros following the establishment of the Texas Republic.

Matters came to an even more dramatic head in 1836 when the Mexican government attempted to implement a forced loan from all foreign merchants in Matamoros, presumably to fuel their own war expenses. Smith had staunchly opposed the measure, noting that: "Should an attempt of the kind be enforced on any American citizen, I will fearlessly protest against the measure...."⁶⁹ The end result years later was the sudden departure of U.S. citizens from the city and port, with Smith himself warning New Orleans customs houses in 1839 about the hostile climate.⁷⁰

When Smith's home was invaded and ransacked by soldiers, he chose not to pursue the cause with retaliation, but, instead, worked to ensure that the same would not happen to other U.S. citizens. He sought to ensure that the Mexican officials understood that he and other Americans living in Matamoros were not with Texas, although apparently with minimal success. U.S. diplomatic strategy was genuinely challenged between 1832 and 1838, and the way that Smith and his superiors chose to mediate the difficulties assured their success in the handling of the complex set of political actors. The Texans to the north had forced the consulate to reassess its own strategy, but the fact that the office withstood these challenges and that Smith was allowed to remain in office until 1842, suggests that the U.S. government's tactics were successful at appeasing all sides at a time when even the smallest skirmish might have led to full-scale war.

Conclusions

D.W. Smith's tenure as consul came to a rather anticlimactic end on May 30, 1842.⁷¹ The office of consul had taken nearly twenty years to develop, and the ability of its first officer to establish and maintain friendly relations in the face of such divergent regional interests at this transnational port city remains its greatest legacy.

The years following the official establishment of the Texas Republic in 1836 intensified the tensions in the region, but the more immediate concern for the consular service in Matamoros was the threat of foreign invasion. The Mexican government had begun to question its legal commitment to protecting American citizens as outlined in the "Treaty of 1831 which placed American citizens upon an equal footing, in regard to navigation and commerce."⁷² The French government in 1838 was beginning to look for just cause for intervening in Mexico and, at one point, even sent naval vessels to blockade the Gulf ports. Needless to say, Smith's remarks that "The commercial transactions at this place [were] trifling in comparison with former times" attest to the effects of such events on the once thriving maritime commerce there.⁷³ In other words, it is apparent that threats of invasion began to outbalance the risks that foreign businessmen were willing to take, and thus, the amount of trade taking place there.

Although it has gone largely unrecognized in Mexican historiography, Matamoros was an important site of transnational exchange both before and during the early decades of Mexican independence. The development of the consular outpost was a key factor in maintaining a receptive climate for international trade. The themes described in the consular dispatches of that period point to the ways in which Matamoros' location complicated the ways that diplomacy was practiced on the ground. Smith's own strategy for dealing with such factors may account for some of his trials and tribulations,

but, despite the controversies, his administration was successful at mediating between a set of very complicated interests.

It is clear that the port of Matamoros was important because of its location at the mouth of a major river system. But it also served as a point of convergence for a variety of different political interests, all of which were forced to negotiate with one another. It is for this reason that the diplomacy explored in this article became significant, spurred on by the efforts of an activist consul. Foreign businessmen as well as Mexican merchants worked together in the hopes of capitalizing on the potential of what many saw as the next Veracruz. The porosity of Mexico's borders throughout the early 1820s down into the 1840s facilitated the entrepreneurial possibilities made available to all parties willing to acknowledge and deal with the risks inherent in a fluid border.

The unplanned intersection of interests due to the geography of this crossroads port had an important role in the way local and national politics played out during this period. This paper has described the ways in which one consular office served as a city's (and perhaps even a region's) most stabilizing force. The analysis of the diplomacy practiced there brings into question the work of scholars who have argued in favor of an "imperialist framework" approach to consular relations as it applies to Matamoros. By examining the trajectory of the first occupant of this consular post, this article has shown that Smith's reliance on goodwill impacted the way that Mexicans viewed the outside world and, in turn, the ways outside forces ended up interacting with Mexico.

Finally, despite its regional uniqueness, Matamoros owes its own development to a broader set of factors. The U.S. consular service's assertive local authority in general was possible because of the vulnerability of the local and national governments. United States opportunists were able to benefit from the distinctive regional economies that developed there, partly as a result of the region's remoteness from Mexico City.⁷⁴ Thus,

the full appreciation and analysis of the early national period of Mexican history depends on the inclusion in the Mexican historiography of a “de-centered” focus on local actors and regional variations. Despite their limitations, consular dispatches like those used for this article, illustrate the potential value of such examinations, and the study of later periods will undoubtedly benefit from these inquiries.

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Endnotes

1 “D.W. Smith to Secretary of State Van Buren, 1829.” Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906 (Microfilm, 12 reels, National Archives Microfilm Publications), roll 1. The term ‘dispatch’ was used throughout the nineteenth century by the United States government to describe semi-annual correspondence from consular officials to the Secretary of State located in Washington, D.C.

2 The term diplomat is used in this context to refer to U.S. representatives stationed in foreign countries, such as Mexico.

3 For more on Matamoros’ economic history see Melisa C. Galván, “From Contraband Capital to Border City: Matamoros, 1746-1848,” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2013).

4 The works of Mario Cerutti are the most comprehensive on this subject: Mario Cerutti and Miguel A. González Quiroga, *El norte de México y Texas: 1848-1880* (San Juan: Instituto Mora, 1999), Mario Cerutti, *Burguesía, capitales e industria en el norte de México: Monterrey y su ámbito regional: 1850-1910* (Monterrey: Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, 1989), Mario Cerutti and Oscar Flores, *Españoles en el norte de México: Proprietarios, empresarios y diplomacia: 1850-1920* (Monterrey: Universidad de Monterrey, 1997), Mario Cerutti, *Proprietarios, empresarios y empresas en el norte de México* (México: Siglo Veintiuno, 2000).

5 See Margaret Chowning’s article, “The Contours of the Post-1810 Depression in Mexico: A Reappraisal from a Regional Perspective,” *Latin American Research Review* 27.2 (1992): pp. 119-150.

6 It is widely believed that by the end of the American Civil War (1865), Matamoros was Mexico’s third largest port, behind Veracruz and Tampico.

See David Montejano, "Mexican Merchants and Teamsters on the Texas Cotton Road, 1862-1865," in *Mexico and Mexicans in the Making of the United States*, edited by John Tutino (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), pp. 141-170.

7 The port was renamed after the wars for independence after the Independence War hero, Mariano Matamoros.

8 The Spanish crown legalized trade in late 1820, but the official correspondence did not make its way to Matamoros until after Mexico obtained its independence. See Melisa C. Galván, "Contraband Trade in Matamoros, Mexico and its Impact on the Northern Mexican Economy during the 1820s," in *Continuing Studies in Rio Grande Valley History*, Ed. Milo Kearney, Antonio Zavaleta, and Anthony K. Knopp (Brownsville: University of Texas at Brownsville and The Texas Center for Border and Transnational Studies, 2011); Galván, "From Contraband Capital to Border City."

9 Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp, *Boom and Bust: The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1991), p. 31; Melisa C. Galván, "Contraband Trade in Matamoros, Mexico and its Impact on the Northern Mexican Economy during the 1820s," in *Continuing Studies in Rio Grande Valley History*, Ed. Milo Kearney, Antonio Zavaleta, and Anthony K. Knopp (Brownsville: University of Texas at Brownsville and The Texas Center for Border and Transnational Studies, 2011); Melisa C. Galván, "From Contraband Capital to Border City: Matamoros, 1746-1848," (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2013).

10 The term transnational is used throughout this paper to refer to the international business exchanges and people who visited, lived, or partook in commerce in Matamoros.

11 Local skirmishes and power struggles were quite common throughout the early nineteenth century. Although the U.S. consulate remained fairly stable, local government offices appear to have been more transient positions.

12 LeRoy P. Graf, "The Economic History of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1820-1875," (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1942), p. 76.

13 Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, p. 33. Stillman was also the founder of the city of Brownsville, Texas, which after 1848 officially became U.S. territory.

14 The records that do survive are located within the *ayuntamiento* archives, a copy of which is housed at UC Berkeley's Bancroft Library.

15 It appears from the records that the office of Secretary of State was not particularly stable, with no one official holding office for more than two years.

16 Margaret Chowning, "The Contours of the Post-1810 Depression in Mexico: A Reappraisal from a Regional Perspective," *Latin American Research Review* 27.2 (1992): pp. 119-150.

17 Barbara A. Tenenbaum, "Merchants, Money and Mischief, The British in Mexico: 1821-1862," *The Americas* 25.3 (1979), pp. 317-339.

18 Tenenbaum, p. 318.

19 As cited in John D. French's article, "Commercial Foot Soldiers of Empire: Foreign Merchant Politics in Tampico, Mexico, 1861-1866" *The Americas* 46.3 (Jan. 1990), p. 292; David W. Walker, *Kinship, Business, and Politics: The Martinez del Rio Family in Mexico, 1828-48* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), pp. 13-14.

20 John D. French, "Commercial Foot Soldiers," p. 293.

21 John D. French, "Commercial Foot Soldiers of the Empire: Foreign Merchant Politics in Tampico, Mexico, 1861-1866" *The Americas* 46.3 (Jan. 1990), pp. 291-314.

22 John D. French, "Commercial Foot Soldiers," p. 293.

23 Later in his tenure, Smith called for the United States to send Navy vessels to protect American interests in the port. He was mostly unsuccessful in his pleas (only one vessel was ever sent).

24 "D.W. Smith to H. Clay, July 24, 1826." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

25 "D.W. Smith to H. Clay, July 24, 1826." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

26 Smith's frustrations were not limited to a professional level. Barely three weeks into his new assignment, Mexican officials filed a legal case against him that claimed that his marriage earlier that year had not followed Mexican law. Documents obtained at the national archives in Mexico City include a letter written on August 18, 1826, by José León Lobo, the Minister of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs in Monterrey, to the *Presidente de la Republica*, in which he describes the conduct of United States Consul Daniel "Smit." The case against Smith, as summarized by Lobo, was based "por la publicidad con que celebró Matrimonio al estilo de su país, causando el mayor escándalo a los vecinos de dicha Villa [Matamoros]." Other documents describe details of the investigation into his marriage that resulted in the probable annulment of his marriage because Smith, a Catholic, had married the sister of Richardo Piers (probably Richard Pearse), a Presbyterian and a foreigner, and the wedding had taken place in his house and had been performed by a Catholic priest. The central issue was that they had not received the proper civil

approvals and the Mexican authorities were intent on “separar a Esmit de su falso y nulo matrimonio.” It is unclear whether Smith’s marriage was actually annulled or whether he was permitted to obtain the necessary civil approvals, but by the limited paper trail that followed it is obvious that the case against Smith was dropped.

27 The sample used for this example was taken from: “D.W. Smith to John Forsyth, January 1, 1838.” Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

28 “D.W. Smith to Louis M. Sean, January 1, 1834.” Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

29 “D.W. Smith to Louis M. Sean, January 1, 1834.” Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

30 The records recounting contraband violations are endless—housed within the Mexican *ayuntamiento* records for the city.

31 “D.W. Smith to Martin Van Buren, April 18, 1831.” Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

32 In most cases it appears by the surnames that the people hired were Mexican citizens. Where property was stored or how it was exactly handled is unclear.

33 The articles used for this example come from: “Inventory of the Effects belonging to the estate of Phineas Ranney, April 9, 1836.” Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

34 Archivo del Ayuntamiento. Photostats, various dates. M-A 11 Pt. I. Special Collections and Archives, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, Volume 4, pp. 82-83.

35 “John Blair et al to Edward Livingston, April 7, 1832.” Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

36 “Local Businessmen to Edward Livingston, June 4, 1832.” Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1. (1.10). According to Graf, by 1832 “there were about 300 foreign residents in Matamoros, the majority of them Americans.” Graf, *The Economic History of the Lower Rio Grande Valley*, 23; “Local Businessmen to Edward Livingston, June 4, 1832.” Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

37 “Sam Houston to Edward Livingston, April 10, 1832.” Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

38 “Richard Pearse to Col. A Longworthy, April 10, 1831.” Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

- 39 "D.W. Smith to Edward Livingston, March 27, 1832." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.
- 40 "E. Gregory et al to Edward Livingston, June 4, 1832." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.
- 41 "Richard Pearse to Col. A Longworthy, April 10, 1831." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1. The numbers within the quotes are his.
- 42 "Richard Pearse to Col. A Longworthy, April 10, 1831." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.
- 43 "Richard Pearse to Col. A Longworthy, April 10, 1831." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.
- 44 "D.W. Smith to Edward Livingston, August 21, 1832." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.
- 45 "Because it would be a most fruitful source of revenue." "Richard Pearse to Col. A Longworthy, April 10, 1831." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.
- 46 "Richard Pearse to Col. A Longworthy, April 10, 1831." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.
- 47 "Richard Pearse to Col. A Longworthy, April 10, 1831." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.
- 48 "Richard Pearse to Col. A Longworthy, April 10, 1831." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.
- 49 "E. Gregory et al to Edward Livingston, June 4, 1832." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.
- 50 "Mr. Arnold to Washington, June 10, 1832." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.
- 51 "Richard Pearse to Edward Livingston, June 4, 1832." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.
- 52 "D.W. Smith to Edward Livingston, October 10, 1832." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.
- 53 "Richard Pearse to Daniel Brent, September 17, 1832." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.
- 54 This panic or depression had devastating effects on the United States economy, with many people losing their lands to bankruptcy and foreclosure.

It is for this reason that American settlers would find the cheap land and opportunity available to them in Texas so alluring.

55 Stanley Siegel, *A Political History of the Texas Republic: 1856-1845* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1956), p. 6.

56 Siegel, *A Political History of the Texas Republic*, p. 10.

57 Siegel, *A Political History of the Texas Republic*, p. 11.

58 "D.W. Smith to Edward Livingston, May 28, 1833." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

59 Siegel, *A Political History of the Texas Republic*, p. 8.

60 "D.W. Smith to John Forsyth, July 23, 1834." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

61 "D.W. Smith to John Forsyth, June 13, 1835." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

62 "D.W. Smith to John Forsyth, July 18, 1835." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

63 "D.W. Smith to Francisco Vital Fernandez, February 17, 1836." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

64 "D.W. Smith to Francisco Vital Fernandez, February 17, 1836." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

65 "D.W. Smith to John Forsyth, April 11, 1836." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

66 "D.W. Smith to John Forsyth, July 1, 1836." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

67 "D.W. Smith to John Forsyth, July 1, 1836." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

68 "D.W. Smith to John Forsyth, November 30, 1837." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

69 "D.W. Smith to John Forsyth, July 1, 1836." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

70 "D.W. Smith to John Forsyth, November 10, 1839." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

71 "D.W. Smith to Daniel Webster, May 30, 1842." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 2.

72 "D.W. Smith to John Forsyth, November 30, 1837." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

73 "D.W. Smith to John Forsyth, July 1, 1837." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

74 Smith confirms this sentiment, "The remote situation of this port from the capital, the frequent alteration of the laws, and the peculiar manner in which they are promulgated — would render my best exertions unavailing, without the constant aid and cooperation of our Agent in the city of Mexico." "D.W. Smith to John Forsyth, March 1, 1837." Dispatches from United States Consuls in Matamoros, 1826-1906, roll 1.

CIVIL WAR SHIP CAPTAINS



*Scream on a Bridge from Mexico
à la Edvard Munch's *The Scream**

Captain King's Cotton

The Civil War Blockade-Running Adventures of Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy

by

Walter E. Wilson

During the American Civil War, Captain Richard King was uniquely positioned to profit from the primary cash crop of the South: "King Cotton."¹ King's strategically located Santa Gertrudis Ranch, his government contracts, extensive personal friendships, and his Rio Grande riverboat business with Mifflin Kenedy and Charles Stillman brought cotton and the war to his doorstep.² This linkage eventually led the partners, and Richard King in particular, to risk running their cotton through the Union blockade and investing in blockade runners as ship owners.

Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy had been "captains" long before the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861. They were steamboat captains, but above all else they were astute businessmen. They made their money through trustworthy partnerships, profitable government contracts, and clever investments. By 1861, King and Kenedy had one primary tripartite partnership: M. Kenedy & Company. The company owned and operated a profitable fleet of river steam boats plying the waters of the Lower Rio Grande and into nearby Laguna Madre.

M. Kenedy & Co. included the visionary, but slippery, Charles Stillman as its third member. Charles Stillman's important contributions to the partnership included investment cash as well as intelligence and business contacts from New York, Europe, and both sides of the Rio Grande. King, Kenedy, and Stillman also formed other independent partnerships and contractual agreements. One of these was King & Company, that included Mifflin Kenedy plus James Walworth as the third, and

mostly silent, partner. A trusted friend and former steamboat captain himself, James Walworth was a delegate to the Texas Secession Convention and spent most of his time in Austin.³

The success of these partnerships grew out of Mifflin Kenedy's government contracts for hauling personnel and supplies for the U.S. Army during the 1846-1848 War with Mexico. When the Lincoln Government declared a blockade of the southern states, in April of 1861, King and Kenedy had a new opportunity to advance their shipping interests, albeit with a newly formed Confederate States Government. Over the next four years, they astutely leveraged their government contracts and personal relationships to gain privileged access to cotton and transportation assets, including blockade runners.

In addition to opportunities for profit, the chaos of war and the threat of a Union blockade presented great risks to their shipping business. Fortunately for all Texas businessmen, the U.S. Navy found that declaring a blockade and enforcing it were two entirely different realities. The mouth of the Rio Grande River (Boca del Rio) was at the far end of the Confederacy's 3,549 miles of coastline, and the Navy was woefully short of ships. King, Kenedy, and their partners knew that the Union Navy would eventually appear on the Texas coast, but they did not know when or how it would affect them.⁴

It was not until the summer of 1861 that the Union blockade began to take effect in Texas. Although the U.S. Navy's presence was minimal and concentrated on Galveston, the blockade paralyzed normal commercial traffic along the Texas coast. Entrepreneurs like King and Kenedy understood that an alternative to running the blockade was to ship goods across the Confederacy's only international border: the Rio Grande. But it took several months before Texas merchants and shippers recognized the Union blockade's ineffectiveness against small schooners and fast steamers.⁵

From the start of the blockade, distance and international law worked in favor of the ports on the Rio Grande (Bagdad,

Matamoros, and Brownsville) and within the lower Laguna Madre (Brazos Santiago and Point Isabel). These ports experienced a surge of activity, remaining unchallenged and open to trade until February 1, 1862. On that day, the Union warship *Portsmouth* arrived offshore and began boarding vessels that were anchored near the Boca del Rio. Although a proper blockade required 30 days' notice before it could take effect, the *Portsmouth* immediately seized the merchant sailing vessels *Wave* and *Labuan*. The Union captain of the *Portsmouth* argued that both ships had anchored north of the extended boundary of the Rio Grande and were subject to capture.⁶

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo had established the Rio Grande as the international boundary between Texas and Mexico in 1848. That boundary extended three nautical miles (marine leagues) from the center of the river and into the Gulf. The Treaty also affirmed that the river was an international water-way open to joint use of Mexico and its neighbor to the north. The vessels of that neighbor now hoisted the flag of the Confederate States at their mast heads.⁷

The *Wave* was a Confederate-flagged schooner carrying tobacco and provisions consigned to Mifflin Kenedy. The *Labuan* was a British steamer that was in the process of loading Texas cotton from King and Kenedy's river steamers *Matamoros* and *Mustang*. Although these small steamers sailed under Confederate flags, they managed to escape by quickly retreating across the bar guarding the Rio Grande at the Boca del Rio.⁸ The Union Navy's prize crew sailed the British-flagged *Labuan* to New York where an Admiralty Court eventually released the ship and cargo, but refused to pay for damages and time lost. The *Wave* was not so lucky. In addition to listing Mifflin Kenedy, a well known Confederate, as the consignee of its cargo, the *Wave* flew the Confederate flag and was well north of the Rio Grande. The court condemned the vessel and cargo for a net total of \$4,291.31, half of which went to the U.S. Treasury and the other half to the officers and men of the USS *Portsmouth* and their commodore.⁹

The *Portsmouth's* disruptive stay was brief as she cruised between Corpus Christi and the Rio Grande. Her replacement, the USS *Montgomery*, arrived in late April. By this time, the capture of the *Labuan* had set off a firestorm of diplomatic protests from British, French, and Mexican authorities. Admiral Farragut, who was in overall command, instructed Captain Charles Hunter of the *Montgomery* to be more careful.¹⁰ Upon his arrival, Captain Hunter's first order of business was to demand the evacuation of Confederate forces near the Boca del Rio or they would suffer a devastating bombardment. Rather than just refusing this request, the officer in charge of Confederate forces, Colonel John "Rip" Ford, politely but firmly replied, "If you will come ashore you shall be met as brave men ever meet the invaders of their soil, who come to execute the edicts of a despotic government."¹¹

Despite his bravado, Col. Ford realized that there were more prudent approaches in dealing with the big guns of the Union warships. Even though the Rio Grande was a neutral waterway and could not legally be blockaded, the menacing presence of the U.S. Navy created "... a panic in this market and no price for the article [cotton]."¹² Clearly, something had to be done.

Colonel Ford called a meeting of the leading merchants of Brownsville. Attendees included Mifflin Kenedy, Charles Stillman, and their former partner and competitor José San Román. Ford's purpose was to devise a strategy on how to continue the Texas-Matamoros cotton trade in the presence of the Federal blockade. At Ford's suggestion, they all agreed to re-flag the lighters and river steamboats on the Rio Grande under Mexican Registry. Although frequently referred to as a "sham" sale, this procedure was no less legal than the Northern practice of reflagging its commercial vessels to avoid capture by Confederate cruisers. King and Kenedy's fleet would now sail under the Mexican, instead of the Confederate flag. There was, however, no change in the true, beneficial ownership. M. Kenedy & Company remained in control of their steamers.¹³

With their river steamers safely under the protection of a neutral flag and the Union Navy unable to completely blockade a neutral port, King and Kenedy were well positioned to prosper. The company's future was assured when the commander of the District of Texas decided to put an end to the Army's reliance on undependable foreign suppliers in June of 1863. As Major General John B. Magruder reported, "King, Kennedy & Stillman, a house in Brownsville, having agreed to furnish supplies at lower rates than any house in Matamoros [*viz*], I advised Major Hart to enter into a contract with them." As a result, M. Kenedy and Company secured a government contract that propelled them into a favored position for receiving and shipping cotton on land, sea, and across the international border.¹⁴

There were several overland routes available for shipping cotton to Brownsville and Matamoros. Cotton from the central portion of the state usually passed through San Antonio where oxen and mule teams continued on the arduous trek to Roma, Laredo, or Eagle Pass. The most direct and popular overland route originated as far north as Alleyton, the railhead just west of Houston. From there it passed through Victoria and Richard King's hospitable ranch at Santa Gertrudis, near present-day Kingsville. King and Kenedy's wagon masters, who were exempt from military service, headed their ox or mule teams south for 120 miles to Brownsville. This was the most difficult leg of the trip. Practically every living thing in the sandy Wild Horse desert threatened to bite, sting, stab, or shoot those teamsters and their animals that did not first die of thirst or starvation. Those who made it across the Rio Grande shifted their cargoes to a foreign owner who then shipped the cotton (and sometimes wool or hides) to a market.¹⁵

There was one other important and often overlooked path to Brownsville. When possible, cotton from Matagorda Bay usually traveled by the seaborne route through the inland waterway. This faster, less expensive, and relatively safe voyage landed at Corpus Christi or at Flour Bluff (at the southern end of Corpus Christi Bay). The farthest navigable point along the Laguna Madre was

at Penascal, a point at the southern entrance to Baffin Bay. Major General Magruder described the importance of this waterway, "which makes us independent of the blockade as long as we can hold these passes [Cavallo and Aransas]."¹⁶

When the cotton reached Brownsville, M. Kenedy & Co. ferries were ready to transfer the cargo across the river. King and Kenedy's partnership with Charles Stillman also controlled most of the steamboats on the lower Rio Grande. These small steamers hauled the bales of Texas-grown cotton some thirty miles down to Bagdad. The company's outside steamers, like the *Matamoras* and *Mustang*, then delivered the cotton to the waiting holds and decks of ocean-going merchant ships anchored offshore.¹⁷

Philomena

During the Civil War, Charles Stillman owned or operated a number of these large sailing vessels that included the bark *Alice Tainter*, brigs *John Jewett* (later renamed the *Emma Dean*), *Icarian*, *William R. Kibby* and the ship *Banshee*. Each of them carried quasi-legal Texas cotton and hides from the Rio Grande to New York City. Fortunately for Stillman, the Union had a difficult time proving the true ownership of his vessels and their cargoes.¹⁸ Following Stillman's lead, Mifflin Kenedy and Richard King made a modest investment in a vessel of their own that carried cotton from the Rio Grande. In December of 1862, Richard King loaded 120 bales of cotton onto the British-flagged schooner *Philomena* that was bound for Havana. By early January, the schooner had safely arrived and his agent in Havana sold the cotton.¹⁹ After expenses for insurance and commissions, M. Kenedy & Co. netted a nice profit of \$21,606.16.²⁰

Cuca

King and Kenedy's next vessel, the schooner *Cuca*, began operations much like the *Philomena*. From the spring of 1863

through the late spring of 1864, the Mexican-flagged schooner *Cuca* conducted routine commercial voyages under Captain Pedro (Peter) Rault, traveling to Tampico, Matamoros, and New Orleans. Capt. Rault traded his cargoes of wool and fresh fruit from Mexico for flour, candles, cheese, soap, potatoes, apples, and onions in the U.S. on behalf of M. Kenedy & Co.²¹

In April of 1864, merchants from Tampico decided to charter the *Cuca* when the high demand for corn along the Rio Grande promised a nice profit. They were confident that the shipping agent José San Román could overcome any of the ongoing political difficulties associated with the various French, Mexican, U.S. and Confederate authorities who were contending for control of the Rio Grande. Their trust in San Román was well-placed, for he managed to skirt a customs issue, and the *Cuca* successfully discharged 316 sacks of corn at Matamoros.²²

The run from the Rio Grande to ports like Havana, Tampico, New Orleans, or New York was not, technically speaking, a "violation" of the Union blockade. As long as the true ownership of the vessel and cargo remained hidden, the Union Navy might seize and detain a ship and its cargo, but the U.S. admiralty courts would most likely set them free. King and Kenedy's early success in these quasi-legal shipments and their need to move their cotton to a market bolstered their confidence in taking greater risks.²³

For the *Cuca's* next trip, the partners decided to gamble on even better profits. On the morning of June 8, 1864, Confederate Colonel Joseph Bates reported to headquarters at Houston that Captain Pedro Rault had arrived during the night from Tampico with the Schooner *Cuca*. The *Cuca* had safely run past the Union blockaders and the hazardous shallow bar at the mouth of the Brazos River. After a brief stop at Velasco, the *Cuca* slowly made her way up river to Columbia. She was carrying much needed flour, coffee, salt, nails, thread, and assorted dry goods. The cargo was consigned to the Brazoria County Commissioner John Adriance who lived in Columbia.²⁴

After offloading its cargo, the *Cuca* languished on the Brazos River for almost three months. Capt Rault had collected a cargo of cotton but he needed a dark night with favorable breezes before attempting to run the blockade. That opportunity finally arrived in the early morning hours of August 29th. Col. Bates reported that, the "Schooner *Cuca* which has been lying in the Brazos River for some time past, went to sea from the mouth of that river this morning, having a cargo of cotton on board."²⁵

Mifflin Kenedy and Richard King worked safely behind the scenes as the owners of the *Cuca*. They had purchased an anchor for Captain Rault and paid watchmen while the *Cuca* waited at anchor. As half-owners of the cargo, King and Kenedy collected their share of the profits from this blockade running venture that totaled \$2,058.88. Capt Rault received the other half and used this infusion of cash to purchase the *Cuca* back from M. Kenedy & Co. for \$1500 later that year. Pedro Rault then sold the schooner after he safely returned to Tampico. On her next trip, the *Cuca* sailed with a different crew and a new name, the *Lone*. This time, the U.S. blockading fleet captured the schooner as it attempted another run into the Brazos River.²⁶

Cora

Shortly after M. Kenedy & Co. first acquired the *Cuca*, Richard King decided to expand his operations to another vessel that operated beyond the familiar waters of the Rio Grande. He invested in the steamship *Cora*. The *Cora* was a Pennsylvania-built stern-wheel steamer that arrived in Galveston from New Orleans via Bayou Teche in the fall of 1859. It was originally intended for service on the Trinity River and Galveston Bay. By April of 1863, however, the *Cora* was on the Brazos River working under a Confederate government contract. Its owner, Thomas Gripon, then sold one-third shares in his steamer to both Richard King and Charles Gearing.²⁷

Charles Gearing and his son Franklin were new-comers to Texas. They had arrived in late 1860 with two steamers of their own and grand visions of adventure and profit. While they certainly led adventurous lives, profits proved to be more elusive. Charles had financed two river steamers and sailed them down the Mississippi and on to Galveston. Gearing named the vessels after prominent Trinity River businessmen, *Colonel Stell* and *John F. Carr*. He had hoped these gentlemen would buy their namesake steamers upon Gearing's arrival in Texas. However, the onset of the Civil war, lack of cash, and resulting economic uncertainty placed the Gearings in a difficult position. Charles eventually leased his two steamers to the Confederate Army, leaving his 22-year-old son Franklin in command of the *John F. Carr*. Gearing's son and his steamers proved to be efficient in ferrying troops and supplies around Galveston Bay, the Brazos River, and Matagorda Bay.²⁸

In early 1863, Charles Gearing sold the two steamers and used those funds to purchase his one-third ownership interest in the *Cora*. As part of the partnership arrangement with Gripon and King, young Franklin Gearing became the captain of the 127 foot long *Cora*.²⁹

Richard King, however, did not invest in the *Cora* with the intention of leasing it back to the Confederate government as a supply ship. With its fully-loaded draft of only four feet, the *Cora* had potential as a blockade runner and inland transport. His plan was to load the steamer with cotton, run the blockade out of the Brazos River, hug the coast and then duck into Matagorda Bay. From there, he hoped the *Cora* could steam south within the safety of the shallow inland waters and into Corpus Christi Bay and Northern Laguna Madre. With luck, they could reach Penascal and offload their cotton there.³⁰

John Ingalls and Company had built a pier at Penascal Point and established a thriving trans-shipment depot there. From Penascal, shippers could hire oxen and mule carts to transport the cotton the final 100 miles down to Brownsville for sale and

export to international markets.³¹ The *Cora's* intended operation had to be a "very secret arrangement," but not because of Union gunboats. Richard King was concerned that, if his planned voyage "came to the ears of Capt. Kennedy [sic], [it] might create strife among them." Even though they were trusted partners, the more conservative Mifflin Kenedy strongly opposed King's lavish spending on such risky endeavors, particularly when they failed to make a profit.³²

Despite King's efforts at secrecy, Mifflin Kenedy did get wind of his partner's daring adventure. Undeterred by Kenedy's concerns, the *Cora* successfully ran the blockade out of the Brazos and into Matagorda Bay in early May 1863. She carried a load of at least 100 bales of cotton, about half of which belonged to Richard King.³³ It was a profitable journey, but the *Cora* probably had to off-load its cargo below Corpus Christi at Flour Bluff. Only very small, shallow draft sloops and schooners with retractable centerboards could venture as far south as Penascal.³⁴

The Confederate and Union military forces soon stymied King's plan for the *Cora* to move cotton on behalf of his business interests. Appreciating the value of the *Cora* as a transport, the Confederate Army impressed the steamer for Government use in Corpus Christi Bay from late May through Mid-November of 1863. That month, Union Army and Naval forces captured Brazos Santiago and Brownsville and began to move up the coast from the Rio Grande. On November 16, 1863, after a brief battle, they captured the small Confederate garrison at Aransas Pass on the northern end of Mustang Island. The *Cora* attempted to reinforce the small fort at Aransas Pass with 150 embarked troops, but arrived too late. "The steamer *Cora* passed through safe" before the Union forces could block her passage as she steamed back to the port of Saluria on Matagorda Bay.³⁵

The *Cora* remained in Matagorda Bay during the Union attack at Fort Esperanza on northern Matagorda Island. Commodore Leon Smith of the Confederate Marine Department soon

arrived on the scene to take charge of all the vessels in the area. His fleet consisted of the lightly armed *John F. Carr*, the *Cora*, and 11 other small vessels. The *Cora's* first job was to prevent U.S. Navy forays into the northern part of the Bay by obstructing the channel. With her light-loaded draft of 25 inches, the *Cora* also moved 2,000 bales of cotton to safety through the shallow channel leading to Caney Creek. Despite Smith's countermeasures, the Union occupation of the South Texas coast had thoroughly disrupted the inland waterway as a route to move cotton across the Mexican border.³⁶

Back on the Rio Grande, Union forces seized King and Kenedy's river steamers and used them to support their operations from Brazos Santiago and along the Rio Grande. Fortunately for King and Kenedy, those steamers carried the Mexican flag and were under nominal Mexican ownership. Like their Confederate counterparts, the U.S. Government paid charter fees whenever they seized or impressed a vessel from a legitimate owner. These charter arrangements meant that King and Kenedy had vessels in the service of both the Union and the Confederacy. Of their steamers in Union hands, the *Matamoros* was the most seaworthy and saw the most action. In an ironic twist, she was with the flotilla that operated in support of the Union attacks at Aransas Pass, Fort Esperanza, and into Matagorda Bay.³⁷

While the *Matamoros* was in Union service, King and Kenedy also received compensation from the Confederate Army for the use of the *Cora*, albeit in severely devalued Confederate dollars. Richard King had gained a two-thirds ownership share of the *Cora* after Charles Gearing sold his interest, in August 1863. For the next year, the Confederate charter for the *Cora* continued to pay Richard King and his partners \$4,500 per month. They also received payments for hauling non-government freight, even while the *Cora* was in government service. Commercial freight added at least \$1,600 to the M. Kenedy & Co. partnership accounts that totaled over \$340,000 for the quarter ending March 31, 1864.³⁸

Fears of Union occupation of Texas began to lessen in the spring of 1864 as the U.S. Army began to withdraw its troops from outposts along the coast. For months, the Union army had been clinging to tiny toe-holds in a hostile territory that offered little in the way of food, fodder, shelter, or fresh water. Union strategists realized that their troops could be put to better use elsewhere. By July of 1864, they had abandoned all of their positions in Texas except for Boca Chica, a seven mile stretch of barren sand between Brazos Santiago and the Boca del Rio.³⁹

The Union withdrawal put extra pressure on its blockading fleet and presented opportunities for adventurous souls willing to risk a run into open waters. It was time for the *Cora* to test the blockade. In August 1863, Commodore Leon Smith of the Marine Department decided to place one of his own men on board. He ordered John Curley to report as the chief engineer to the Captain of the *Cora*, Joseph Sargent. Curley, however, was delayed and did not execute those orders until early December. By this late date, Leon Smith had turned over his own position in the Marine Department to Henry S. Lubbock. Smith would later reappear in Brownsville as he prepared for a special mission financed in large part by King and Kenedy.⁴⁰

As the *Cora* prepared to run the blockade again, Richard King pressed Theodore Gripon to pay his one-third share of the vessel's expenses (totaling \$2,455.56 in specie) before she sailed. It was not until March 1865 that the *Cora* was finally ready to make an attempt to run out of Matagorda Bay. Captain Joseph Sargent, however, would not be at the helm. In his place was William Evans, a British citizen who had sent his family ahead to Matamoros. This change of command came about as Richard King asserted his majority ownership of the steamer and appointed Captain Evans and the rest of the twelve-member crew to their positions. Four of those twelve sailors were "negroes," who were most likely slaves on hire from their masters.⁴¹

By mid-March of 1865, Captain Evans successfully navigated the *Cora* down the inland waterway to Corpus Christi,

where he stopped to take on provisions. Due to the lack of coal in Texas, wood was the best fuel available. The *Cora* sailed in ballast with no cargo except for 5,000 feet of lumber consigned to Richard King and intended for use onboard the vessel. With a fresh supply of wood onboard, Evans slipped past the blockading fleet and headed for the Rio Grande. He almost made it. Within sight of Brazos Santiago, the Union gunboat *Quaker City* recognized the stern wheel steamer as a blockade runner and promptly boarded and seized her as a prize.⁴²

In a bit of "I told you so," Mifflin Kenedy informed Richard King of the *Cora's* fate a few days after its capture.⁴³ It is unclear why Richard King or the Confederate authorities chose to risk running the blockade with a river steamer that carried no cargo. Perhaps King hoped that the *Cora* could serve as a replacement for one of his seized and worn-out river steamers. It was obvious to all that the war was winding down and that the Confederacy had no hope of success. If the *Cora* had reached Confederate-occupied Brownsville, perhaps King could have kept her safe on the neutral Rio Grande. If successful, he might have prevented the *Cora's* inevitable seizure if it had remained in Confederate Matagorda or Corpus Christi Bays.

As it happened, the Union Navy decided to avoid the risk of sending the fragile river steamer across the Gulf to the Admiralty Court in New Orleans. The court tried the case remotely, leaving the *Cora* at Brazos Santiago, where she was condemned as a valid prize. Valued at \$6,000, the court sold the *Cora* to the U.S. Army for service as a military transport on the Rio Grande. Although the vessel probably had already paid for itself, it appears that Richard King never recovered control of the *Cora*.⁴⁴

Derby

In late September of 1864, while the *Cora* was still operating in Matagorda Bay, Richard King had another opportunity to obtain a vessel on advantageous terms. A British-flagged

schooner named the *Derby* had fallen into Confederate hands. That month, the *Derby*, under Captain Henry Sheppard, had departed from Matamoros and made a successful run past the blockaders through Pass Cavallo. However, when Sheppard arrived at Port Lavaca on Matagorda Bay, he found a nasty surprise awaiting him. Confederate marshals seized his vessel and placed Sheppard and his crew under arrest.⁴⁵

At the beginning of the Civil War, Captain Sheppard was the commander of the Texas Marine Department's fleet in Matagorda Bay. He lost his command when he and three others had the misfortune of being captured by the U.S. Navy in October of 1862. The Union finally released Sheppard from jail in 1863 and a year later he was returning to Matagorda Bay. Upon his arrival at Port Lavaca, he may have expected a welcome befitting a returning hero. Instead, the Confederate authorities accused Henry Sheppard of treason, alleging that he had signed a Union loyalty oath. If the charge proved to be true, that oath made him and his crew enemies of Texas and the Confederacy.⁴⁶

Captain Richard King entered into the picture even before the courts settled the fate of Sheppard and his schooner. Captain S.K. Brown, Sheppard's replacement as the Marine Department's commander in Matagorda Bay, promptly placed a crew onboard the *Derby*. The Confederates off-loaded her cargo at Matagorda and gave control of the schooner and its crewmen to Richard King. According to Brown's directive, all Captain King had to do was sign a receipt for the vessel, its crew, and an inventory of onboard property. King briefly relinquished control of the *Derby* when Major General Magruder ordered a board of inquiry to determine the facts in the case.⁴⁷

Despite this legal delay, Colonel John Bates, who was in overall command of the Matagorda District, stated that, "Evidence in regard to the loyalty and disloyalty of Capt S. [Sheppard] is abundant." Accordingly, Bates once again turned the *Derby* over to Richard King. The colonel was certain the verdict against Captain Sheppard and his vessel would be "guilty as

charged." It was not until late November of 1864 that the vessel went before the Confederate admiralty court in Gonzales, Texas. The details of the hearing and subsequent auction sale of the *Derby* have been lost to history, but, in early January of 1865, the schooner was ready to run the blockade once again.⁴⁸

The *Derby* loaded 91 bales of cotton and paid customs duties at the port of LaSalle on Matagorda Bay. Half of the bales (45) were on government account and the others were consigned to George Burkhart. Although Richard King may have been the true owner of the cotton, there is no evidence of his ownership interest in the *Derby* as a blockade runner. The *Derby* cleared from Matagorda Bay *en route* to Matamoros, on January 28, 1865, and made a successful run through the blockade. By March, the *Derby* was in New Orleans, where Federal authorities briefly seized her before releasing the schooner to resume its trading at the Rio Grande port of Bagdad.⁴⁹

Richard King's need for the schooner may have been temporary. In late August of 1864, he had requested the use of any excess vessels the Marine Department had at its disposal in Matagorda Bay. King needed additional vessels to help him fulfill a contract with the government to furnish salt. Captain S.K. Brown had initially offered up the schooner *Susan Smith*, and he probably volunteered the *Derby's* services as well.⁵⁰ Richard King may have decided to bypass the opportunity to purchase the *Derby* at auction, since he was heavily invested in larger steamers that were also about to test the blockade.

Ike Davis (Montgomery, Robert E. Lee), Rosa, and Amoret

Within days of the *Derby's* arrival at Port Lavaca, another vessel sailed into Matagorda and into the possession of Richard King. The steamship *Ike Davis* was previously a British-flagged blockade runner named the *Montgomery*, that operated out of Havana. In September of 1863, the USS *De Soto* captured the 421 ton *Montgomery* as it attempted to deliver a cargo of pork,

beef, and medicine to Mobile.⁵¹ The New Orleans Admiralty Court quickly condemned and sold the vessel at auction. By the summer of 1864, the new owners had renamed their steamer the *Ike Davis*. She sailed under the U.S. flag and began carrying cargoes between New Orleans and Matamoros.⁵²

On August 19, 1864 the *Ike Davis* cleared New Orleans for Matamoros. Her manifest listed corn, lard, potatoes, oil, soap, and quasi-legal ropes and bagging used for baling Texas cotton. She also carried letters for Matamoros merchants, including several for King and Kenedy's former partner José San Román.⁵³

On her return trip to New Orleans, the *Ike Davis* got "underweigh" (the nautical spelling) late on Wednesday afternoon, September 21, 1864. Since there was no market for cotton in New Orleans, the captain had a very light return load and was only too happy to book passage for fifteen passengers. Ten of those passengers were healthy young Anglo males.⁵⁴ There was little reason for suspicion since among the crew were many able-bodied men who left Texas via Matamoros to either sign up for service in the Union Army with Edmund Davis' First Texas Calvary Regiment or simply to avoid service in the Confederate Army.⁵⁵

For this trip, the 32 crewmen of the *Ike Davis* should have been more vigilant. Ten of their passengers were Confederate sailors and soldiers intent on capturing the steamer on behalf of their Government. Their leaders were Captain W.F. Brown of the Texas Marine Department and Lieutenant Marcus Beebe of the Confederate Navy. With the advice of Leon Smith, former Commodore of the Texas Marine Department, they had planned the expedition at Bagdad. Commodore Smith was at the Rio Grande awaiting passage for a special mission to Havana. Lt. Beebe was particularly motivated to capture a Union vessel. He had just escaped from New Orleans after being captured during the Battle of Mobile Bay upon the surrender of his ironclad, the CSS *Tennessee*.⁵⁶

Just after sunset, the *Ike Davis* had traveled about 12 miles from the Rio Grande, and was well beyond the sight and

sound of Bagdad and the Union Navy blockaders. The armed Confederate men quickly overpowered the crewmen on deck and drove them below. By 7:00 p.m., Brown and Beebe had control of the steamer and were on their way to Matagorda Bay. Although it only required 17½ hours to arrive at Pass Cavallo, the Confederates delayed another two days before docking at Port Lavaca.⁵⁷

There, the captors off-loaded their prisoners, with the exception of one chambermaid and seven “negro” crewmen. These prisoners were considered part of the captured property and remained with the vessel. Brown and Beebe then turned their prize over to the Confederate Marshal. The Admiralty Court at Gonzales soon condemned the vessel and put the *Ike Davis* up for sale. On October 24th, the Confederate Marshal sold the steamer at auction for \$32,260. The official court record left the space for the name of the buyer blank. The name in that blank space should have read “M. Kenedy & Co.” Richard King had decided to invest in another blockade-running enterprise.⁵⁸

While the court decided the fate of the *Ike Davis*, Texas officials widely lauded the ten captors for their daring success. In addition to those ten men, others worked in the background and played important roles in the success of the mission. Among them was a “Mr. Phelps,” the “purser of the vessel ... [who] was also concerned in her capture and running into a C.S. [Confederate States] port.” This shadowy character was most likely James H. Phelps, a long-time friend and business associate of King, Kenedy, and Stillman. Phelps was also a Brazos River plantation family member and wartime cotton agent and merchant. Early in the war, he transferred his operations from New Orleans to Havana. By 1864, he was back in Texas doing business along the Rio Grande. Phelps also entered into a partnership with Jeremiah Galvan of Matamoros. Not coincidentally, Galvan was the trusted shipping agent and surrogate for Mifflin Kenedy, Richard King, and Charles Stillman.⁵⁹

Between 1863 and 1865, Mifflin Kenedy and Company paid over \$98,000 to J.H. Phelps for operations described merely as an "adventure." The account for the adventure with J.H. Phelps involved cargo transfers from the British Bark *Herbert* and the *Pasha*. It also included the purchase and outfitting of the Sloop *Rosa* and the *Amoret*, a schooner named for Phelps' daughter. Although Kenedy and Co. nominally transferred the *Rosa* to Santiago Yturria at Matamoros in late 1863, both the *Rosa* and the *Amoret* remained on the company's books as a part of their adventure with J.H. Phelps through February of 1865.⁶⁰

The mention of Mr. Phelps as the pursuer for the *Ike Davis* long before the vessel had been offered for public auction suggests that Phelps, King, and Kenedy were intimately involved in the plan to capture the *Ike Davis* from the beginning. Although he was in Laredo at the time, James H. Phelps may have been the agent who bankrolled the operation on behalf of Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy. In return, King and Kenedy would have expected that, if successful, the captors would deliver the vessel to a Confederate port. Confederate authorities could then silently and legally transfer control of the vessel to M. Kenedy and Company. Mifflin Kenedy subsequently issued payments to and corresponded with Captain John "Jack" Wilson, who eventually commanded the *Ike Davis*.⁶¹

The leadership of Major Leon Smith in planning the capture of the *Ike Davis* also supports the notion of Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy's early financial support. Leon Smith had gotten his unofficial appointment in the Confederate Army through his long standing friendship with Major General John B. Magruder. Smith was a veteran steamboat captain and proudly posed for a photograph wearing the uniform of a Confederate Navy Lieutenant. He also had the honorific title of "Commodore" of the Texas Marine Department, even though he never held any official navy or army commission. What Leon Smith did have, however, was the complete confidence of General Magruder. That confidence extended to the partners of M. Kenedy and Company.⁶²

In the spring of 1863, Charles Stillman, Richard King, José San Román, and four others had all signed on as supporters of Leon Smith's secret "scheme" to acquire a privateering warship that could prey on Union commerce. Mifflin Kenedy was Smith's "authorized agent" in Brownsville, responsible for procuring subscriptions for the privateer steamer.⁶³ By late summer of 1864, Leon Smith was back in Matamoros. He was on his way to Havana, and perhaps to Liverpool, in hopes of acquiring a privateer. While awaiting suitable transportation, he probably made arrangements with King and Kenedy to reallocate some of their subscription funds via J.H. Phelps. This relatively small amount would have covered the fares and subsistence for the ten Confederates who captured the *Ike Davis*.

The exact total of King & Co.'s investment in the purchase of the *Ike Davis* is uncertain, but he and Kenedy ended up with at least half of the shares in the captured vessel. In addition to its new owners, and a Confederate flag, the steamer soon had a new name, the *Robert E. Lee*. With its ownership settled and a new name painted on the stern, the steamer was ready to embark on a profitable run through the blockade out of Matagorda Bay. By early December of 1864, Captain Jack Wilson had a light load of cotton on board the steamer. He wanted to ensure his vessel could clear the shallow bar at Pass Cavallo. Since there was no coal available, the crew had to depend upon charcoal for fuel.⁶⁴

Unfortunately, the *Robert E. Lee* needed more than a light load, a fresh coat of paint, and a new name to survive a run into the Gulf of Mexico. She leaked. While on her voyage down to Matamoros, the steamer had to be unloaded four times before it could get safely to sea. After her capture, the vessel still required two hours out of twenty-four at the pumps to keep her afloat. The shipyard facilities in Matagorda were not sufficient to repair a 421-ton vessel that measured 173 feet in length. So it was left to the seven captured "negro" crewmen to man the pumps and keep the former *Ike Davis* afloat. Confederate cynics

observed that “her capture did not occasion her [Yankee] owners much regret.”⁶⁵

The steamer’s run through the blockade began auspiciously enough. At sunset on December 10, 1864, she successfully crossed the bar at Pass Cavallo and eluded the Union fleet off Matagorda Bay. All was smooth sailing until the early morning hours of the next day. They were just past the bar at Corpus Christi Bay when a severe “norther” struck. They had expected the *Ike Davis/Robert E. Lee* to leak, but the water gained on the pumps as the gale grew in strength. The crew threw the deck-load of cotton overboard, but to no avail. At about noon, the water reached the furnace and extinguished the steam engine’s fires. The ship now “lay at the mercy of the waves.” God may be merciful but the waves were not. The heavy seas had already dashed their lifeboat to pieces. The 25 crewmen and three passengers had to lash together bales of cotton and other bits of jetsam in hopes of staying afloat.⁶⁶

By the time the French barque *Charleton* found the shipwrecked sailors, six of the crewmen were lost at sea. They had gone 48 hours without food or water. Their timely rescue on the evening of December 12th saved the others from dying of exposure and exhaustion. “On arrival at Bagdad, they were also treated with the greatest kindness.” The captain of the *Charleton* and the Mexican Captain of the Post in Bagdad at the Boca del Rio generously supplied all their needs. King and Company, however, suffered a total loss.⁶⁷

Granite City (City of Dundee, Three Marys, Antonio) and Wave

Even before his acquisition of the *Ike Davis*, Richard King had set another plan in motion. He wanted to acquire additional captured Union steamers and convert them into blockade runners. In mid-May 1864, Texas infantry forces had captured two U.S. Navy warships at Calcasieu Bay in Louisiana. The side-wheel steamers *Granite City* and *Wave* were damaged during the

battle, but they were still afloat and their futures undetermined. Less than a week later, Captain King wasted no time in expressing his interest in acquiring both vessels.⁶⁸

The *Granite City* had begun its life in late 1862 as the River Clyde-built, *City of Dundee* of Scotland. The 160-foot steamer, like other swift Clyde-built steamers, was an ideal blockade runner. However, after one successful run into Wilmington, North Carolina, from Nassau, the U.S. blockading fleet captured the *Granite City*. The Admiralty court awarded the vessel to the U.S. Navy in New York, where it was converted from a blockade runner into an armed blockader. The *Wave* was a slightly smaller Pennsylvania-built steamer that the U.S. Navy had purchased just six months earlier.⁶⁹

When the Confederates moved these two prizes up river from Calcasieu Bay for repairs and future operations, Richard King set his plan in motion. Within a few weeks, he inserted a clause into his contract with Colonel William Broadwell, Chief of the Cotton Bureau that stated, "Capt King shall have the control of the Steamers *Granite City* and *Wave*."⁷⁰ However, "control" of two ships would have little practical value if the vessels remained bottled up in Calcasieu Bay.

It would take over eight months before King's idea became reality. On a foggy night in late January, 1865, the *Granite City* and *Wave* ran past the Union Navy's blockader off Louisiana's coast. The *Granite City* had suddenly appeared through the mist and nearly collided with the USS *Chocura's* picket boat situated at the mouth of the Calcasieu. The Union sailors desperately signaled the nearby *Chocura* in vain as the Confederate ships disappeared into the dark.⁷¹

At mid-afternoon, the next day, the gunboat USS *Penguin* sighted the tell-tale black smoke plumes of the *Granite City's* coal-burning steam engines approaching the western end of Galveston Island. The warship immediately gave chase, firing its forward pivot gun in hopes of forcing the racing blockade-runner into deeper water. With shot and shell falling around

him, Captain Green Hall managed to run the *Granite City* ashore about half a mile below the entrance to the Brazos River and its protecting fort at Velasco. Finding that the fort's guns outranged his own, the frustrated Captain of the *Penguin* fired a few broadsides and prudently retired. At last sight, the Union captain reported that the *Granite City* resembled a beached whale, with "heavy sea rolling in and continually breaking over her." Everyone assumed she was another casualty of the war.⁷²

The Union picket boats never detected the steamer *Wave* during its escape from Louisiana. The U.S. Navy surmised that she was *en route* to the Rio Grande with a load of lumber, based on prisoner reports.⁷³ The *Granite City* had no cargo, and it appeared to U.S. Navy officials that the escape of the two steamers would be but a minor episode in the continuing series of embarrassments they had suffered in the Western Gulf of Mexico. Even the official U.S. Navy records reflected the convenient assumption that the *Granite City* had broken up on the beach and never went to sea again. It also appeared that Richard King had lost another opportunity to run the blockade with a profitable load of cotton.

It served Captain King's purposes for the Union Navy to believe that the *Granite City* had met its doom. In reality, the Confederates re-floated and repaired the former warship. On February 18th, 1865, the Confederate Marshal offered the "Prize steamer *Granite City*, her tackle, apparel, boats, engines, furniture, boilers, etc" for sale at public auction. Although the auction was held in Houston, the *Granite City* was safely afloat on the Brazos River.⁷⁴

By all appearances, the prize sold for a total of \$36,000 in hard currency. The buyer of record was Thomas W. House, a wealthy businessman, owner of multiple blockade runners, and a former mayor of Houston. Once again, all was not as it appeared. The auction was rigged. Mr. House bought the *Granite City* as an agent of the Confederate States Government, which meant that he only had to pay \$621.20 to defray expenses for the maintenance and sale of the vessel.⁷⁵

While this auction was underway, the *Wave* remained near its fellow prize, probably on the Brazos River. It, too, was in custody of the Confederate Prize Commissioner's Office. Two weeks later, the Confederate Admiralty Court sold the *Wave* in another sham auction. Thomas W. House was again the purchaser. This time, the total auction sale was \$5,000. As with the *Granite City*, House was only responsible for expenses, which came to \$381.10.⁷⁶

The deception, however, went even deeper. Not only were the sales a sham, Thomas W. House was not the actual buyer. Major General J.G. Walker, who then commanded the District of Texas, received puzzled queries from the Confederate States Attorney George Manson and Marshal William T. Austin about the purchases. Walker responded that it was Richard King who was the actual "agent of the Confederate States Government." Even though Captain King was the true purchaser of both the *Granite City* and the *Wave*, General Walker ordered that, "arrangements be made out in the name of T.W. House."⁷⁷

Richard King clearly wanted to avoid public exposure of his controlling interest in these blockade runners. Perhaps more importantly, he was trying to avoid another confrontation with his partner, Mifflin Kenedy. Even though King's investment totaled just over \$1,000, it appeared to the public that the ships had brought \$41,000 into the public coffers. If paid in specie, that amount was roughly equivalent to \$639,000 in 2016 dollars.⁷⁸

After its sale, the *Wave* disappeared from the public record. The disparity in purchase price suggests that the *Wave* was no longer sea worthy as a blockade runner or transport. During the Battle of Calcasieu, the *Wave* had been the more seriously damaged of the two prizes. It is unlikely that the vessel ever got "underweigh" again. It did not appear in any foreign port or the listings of confiscated Confederate property at the end of the war. Captain King most likely decided to cannibalize the wounded vessel to refit the *Granite City* and sold off the remaining materials of value.⁷⁹

King's purpose in purchasing "control" of the *Granite City* became clear a few days later. He did not need to own the vessel if he could ship a load of his cotton to a port of his choosing. To add to the official confusion, King changed the name of his vessel to the *Three Marys*. "R. King" then placed 450 bales of cotton aboard. After clearing Confederate Customs on March 3rd and paying the requisite \$278.79 in duties, Richard King's new steamer was ready to risk the Union blockade once again.⁸⁰

On April 1, 1865, a surprised U.S. Consul at Tampico, Mexico, dutifully reported the arrival of a steamer flying Confederate colors named the *Three Marys*. She had entered the harbor on March 31st from the Brazos River and carried 450 bales of cotton, 30 crewmen, and two passengers. Consul Chase soon realized that the mysterious Confederate steamer was the former USS *Granite City*.⁸¹

Captain Green Hall remained in command of the *Three Marys* when she arrived in Tampico. Before the war, he had been the first mate on Thomas Gripon's *Cora*. He was well known to King as an experienced mariner who had commanded two other Texas Marine Department gunboat steamers. The first was the *Uncle Ben* out of Sabine Pass and the other was the *John F. Carr*. Formerly under the ownership and command of Charles and Franklin Gearing, the *J.F. Carr* had successfully run from Galveston Bay to the Brazos River before ending up as the most active gunboat on Matagorda Bay. Richard King was in Matamoros in late April 1865, where he wrote to Hall in Tampico. His letter updated Captain Hall about the impending demise of the Confederacy. King no doubt gave the captain instructions on what to do with the *Three Marys* and its cargo.⁸²

Green Hall's business acumen would now be put to the test. If he could not find a buyer for the *Three Marys* and its cargo, King's entire investment would be lost. As the war drew to an end, there was a surplus of heavily mortgaged blockade runners for sale. The universally vilified "speculators" also anticipated a

glut of cotton to enter the market. As a result, prices for both collapsed. Still, a depressed sale of 450 bales of cotton weighing 223,000 pounds at 50¢ per pound would yield over \$100,000 in hard currency for Captain King.⁸³

Although the details about the final destiny of the *Granite City/Three Marys* remain a mystery, she tarried in Tampico through late July, long after the war had officially ended. The vessel had obtained a new black paint job, a Spanish registry, and “a crew composed of rebel offenders.” She was preparing for sea “under the command of the notorious rebel and Blockade Runner Captain Wilson.”⁸⁴ This was the same Captain Jack Wilson who had unsuccessfully commanded King’s shipwrecked steamer *Ike Davis/Robert E. Lee* out of Matagorda Bay.

U.S. Consul Franklin Chase speculated that the *Three Marys* had been renamed once again and would soon depart for Havana via Vera Cruz. His suspicions were confirmed when the black-hulled ship appeared in Havana on August 27th, over two months after the end of the war. She was flying a Spanish flag and had the name *Antonio* freshly painted on her stern. Uncharacteristically, the U.S. Government did not pursue the repatriation of its former gunboat. As the successor to the Confederate Government, the United States had legitimate claim on Confederate vessels and perhaps the cargo as well. It seems that Richard King’s attempt to elude and outwit the governments of four countries was entirely successful, as the *Granite City/Three Marys/Antonio* faded from official and public view.⁸⁵

The last phase of King and Kenedy’s blockade running exploits followed the more conventional approach of other shippers, agents, and speculators. Rather than directly investing in vessels, they simply placed their bales of cotton on ships owned by others. For Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy, these vessels included the steamers *Banahoe II*, *Fox*, *Badger II*, *Pelican*, and *Lark*, and the schooners *Mary Lee* and *Eliza Catharine*.

Banshee II

The *Banshee II* was a fast, Clyde-built steamer, specially designed to run the Union blockade. She first arrived at Nassau in the Bahamas in late autumn of 1864. The *Banshee II* made a total of three successful round trips between Nassau and Cape Fear's port of Wilmington, NC. However, a combined U.S. Army and Navy force successfully attacked Fort Fisher in late December, effectively closing Cape Fear as a haven for blockade runners. The loss of Fort Fisher forced the *Banshee II's* British captain, Jonathan Steele, to shift his operations to Havana, in January of 1865.⁸⁶

At this late date in the war, Galveston was one of the Confederacy's very few ports not in enemy hands. For the majority of the Southern states, Texas was the least desirable port of entry. It was far from European suppliers and the rest of the Confederacy. Plus, the state's lack of rail or river connections into the other states exacerbated this handicap. Despite these shortfalls, with the fall of Fort Fisher, there simply was no other good choice.

The *Banshee II* arrived in Galveston on the evening of February 24, 1865, but only after passing through a hailstorm of cannon-fire from the Union fleet. A month later, she had 1,126 bales of Texas cotton on board and was ready to test the blockade once again. Of those bales, about half were on government account, but the others belonged to well-known Texas businessmen such as R & D.G. Mills and Thomas W. House. Another 26 bales belonged to the ship's captain, J.W. Steele. Fifty of the cotton bales, weighing 25,091 pounds, belonged to M. Kenedy & Co. The *Banshee II* ran the blockade without incident and, after a brief stop in Havana, on March 26th, she arrived in Nassau four days later before continuing on to Liverpool.⁸⁷

Eliza Catharine

At the same time that M. Kenedy & Co. was loading cotton on the *Banshee II* in Galveston, Richard King managed to gain

control of the schooner *Eliza Catharine* on the Brazos River. The *Eliza Catharine* had a long history as a blockade runner. A Mr. A. Turbert purchased the schooner, originally registered out of Key West, Florida, in Havana in November of 1862. By early 1863, she was a familiar visitor on the Brazos River and, in March of 1865, she was ready to make one last dash to sea and on to Vera Cruz.⁸⁸

Once again, taking advantage of his privileged position with the Government, Richard King owned 135 of the 180 bales of cotton on the vessel. By law, the Government was supposed to own half of all outgoing cargoes on blockade runners. As the holder of thousands of dollars in unpaid Government invoices, King had considerable leverage in bypassing such government regulations. On the evening of April 6th, Captain R. Boyle and his crew of 5 men were ready to make their run. On their way out, however, they became stuck on the bar, where the schooner capsized. Tragically, three of the men quickly drowned, while three others managed to cling to the vessel for several hours. The wind and wave, however, thwarted all rescue attempts. All six seamen eventually succumbed to the elements before being washed ashore a few days later. King's investment was a total loss. Only the Union fleet profited from the *Eliza Catharine's* misfortune. Their Yankee sailors managed to rescue a few of the bales that floated into the Gulf.⁸⁹

Fox and Badger II

Perhaps encouraged by the successful voyage of the steamship *Banshee II*, Richard King hastily decided to place some of his cotton onboard two other fast steamers. The *Fox* and the *Badger II* had recently made their first runs into Galveston. The *Fox* was another Clyde-built steamer that had made eight successful round trips between Charleston, SC and Nassau from May 1864 through February 1865. Like the *Banshee II*, the *Badger II* had to transfer its operations to Galveston after narrowly

escaping from Cape Fear in December. By late March of 1865, both the *Fox* and the *Badger II* were in Havana, loaded, and ready to try their luck at Galveston.⁹⁰

The *Badger II* arrived in Galveston undetected a few days later. She was short of coal, but managed to purchase some of the excess carried on the *Wren*, a fellow blockade runner.⁹¹ The *Fox* was not as fortunate. Her captain, Simpson A. Adkins, mis-timed his arrival off the coast of Texas. At 10:00 a.m. on April Fool's Day, Captain Adkins found himself northeast of the entrance to Galveston Bay and in the midst of the blockading fleet. Rather than turning around and making his escape at sea, he pressed on. The *Fox* raced ahead through the shallow channel paralleling Bolivar Peninsula. The Union fleet quickly responded with shot and shell, "every missile which the ingenuity of Satan and his children, the Yankees, have invented, was thrown at, around, over, and in the waters beneath the [*Fox*] ... Strange to say, although hundreds of shots were fired, but four took effect.."⁹²

Those four hits proved to be minor. Less than two weeks later, the *Fox* had loaded 602 bales and the *Badger* another 500 bales of cotton. The Confederate Government owned half of each load, but the rest belonged to six different individual shippers. One of those six was King & Company. King owned a total of 95 bales (58 on the *Fox* and 37 on the *Badger*). Perhaps learning from the example of the *Eliza Catherine*, Richard King and the other five shippers realized that it was less risky if they could split their cargoes on multiple vessels. If one of the blockade runners was lost or captured, they could still make a profit with the surviving load.⁹³

On April 16th, Colonel Ashbel Smith gave both the *Fox* and the *Badger* permission to pass the Galveston forts and "proceed to sea tonight or first favorable opportunity." Both vessels ran past the blockading fleet without incident and soon arrived in Havana. On May 5th, the *Badger* sailed for England and the *Fox* left eight days later, touching at Nassau, before continuing on

to Liverpool. The excitement of the war was over for these two blockade runners. This time, Richard King's cotton shipments turned a nice profit.⁹⁴

Mary Lee, Pelican, and Lark

Richard King was not the only partner trying to get his cotton out of Galveston before the Union Navy put an end to the entire enterprise. Mifflin Kenedy with the aid of an associate in Houston, William G. Hale, placed 37 of the 75 bales cotton aboard the schooner *Mary Lee*. He had more on the fast steamers *Pelican* and *Lark*. Little is known about the *Mary Lee's* history, but it apparently ran the blockade in mid-May 1865 without incident.⁹⁵

Despite briefly running aground, the British-flagged screw steamer *Pelican* arrived undetected in Galveston from Havana in late March. Thomas W. House and the Confederate Government were equal owners of the vessel. After loading 900 bales of cotton, the *Pelican* cleared from Galveston on April 23rd, it appears that William Hale was able to place about 94 bales of Mifflin Kenedy's cotton aboard.⁹⁶

When the *Pelican* arrived in Havana on May 1, 1865, it was her last run through the blockade. She sold off her cotton without problem, but, at the end of the war, U.S. officials forced the *Pelican* to remain in Havana until its true ownership could be determined. It was finally decided that the *Pelican* had been a Confederate Government asset and therefore belonged to the United States.⁹⁷

The *Lark* was another fast, British-built vessel specifically designed for running the blockade into relatively shallow ports like Galveston. She arrived in Havana from Liverpool in December of 1864 and first ran the blockade into Galveston on January 20th of 1865. Of the *Lark's* four trips into and out of Galveston, Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy had an interest in the second voyage. They owned 150 of the 793 bales loaded on the side-wheel steamer. They paid \$157.50 to compress

the cotton for baling and for freight expenses. Even though the Confederate customs report listed R & D.G. Mills as the exporters of all cotton not on the *Lark's* Government account, it appears that they were acting on behalf of Mifflin Kenedy and Company. The *Lark* safely delivered their cotton to Havana in late March 1865.⁹⁸

Shortly after the *Lark's* departure from Galveston in late May, all blockade-running in Texas came to an end. In June of 1865, Confederate General Kirby Smith officially surrendered his army of the Trans-Mississippi and Union forces occupied Galveston.⁹⁹

Back to Business

At the end of the war, King and Kenedy quickly resumed their steamboat business on the Rio Grande. Some historians have speculated that M. Kenedy & Co. lost their river steamers without compensation when the Union forces captured Brazos Santiago and Brownsville in November of 1863.¹⁰⁰ However, the company's financial journals show that such was not the case. Long-time partner José San Román managed the financial accounts for the firm's Rio Grande steamboats while they were in U.S. custody. An entry dated January 31, 1865, states that King and Kenedy, "Rec'd as a compensation for the seizure of the Steamboats *Matamoros*, *Mustang*, and *James Hale* ... \$159,140.09." Similarly, Kenedy's ledgers and journals show repeated entries for the steamers *Alamo* and *Grampus No. 2* during the period between the Union occupation and the end of the war.¹⁰¹

While King and Kenedy were a bit more open about their overland and seaborne cotton shipments, they were very secretive about their ownership stakes in blockade runners. There were many reasons for secrecy. Exposure might have jeopardized their steamboats in Union service. Texans also had a visceral loathing of "speculators," which especially included those

who obtained government favors in the cotton trade. Most importantly for Richard King, he wanted to avoid Mifflin Kenedy's criticism over his risky ventures that failed.

Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy were skilled at developing deep personal friendships and lasting business relationships. During the Civil War they leveraged those relationships and business skills in preserving their steamboats and negotiating favorable government contracts. These talents also extended to the blockade running business. Most of King and Kenedy's investments in blockade running vessels were a direct outgrowth of their privileged connections within the Confederate States Government.

Despite occasional setbacks, Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy were well positioned financially at the end of the war. They even bought four expensive new river steamboats and had them on the Rio Grande by the summer of 1865. Just as they had done before and during the war, they then negotiated profitable contracts with the military and sold off surplus vessels. They and their heirs continued to prosper. King and Kenedy used their wartime cotton profits to expand and sustain their cattle and land ventures throughout South Texas.¹⁰²

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

Endnotes

1 Abbreviations used are:

Briscoe CAH: Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, Texas

GPO: Government Printing Office

NARA: National Archives and Records Administration

ORA: United States, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 70 vols. (Washington, DC: GPO, 1880-1901).

ORN: United States, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, 30 vols. (Washington, DC: GPO, 1894-1921).

TAMU-Kingsville: Texas A&M University Kingsville, Kingsville, Texas.

- 2 Tom Lea, *The King Ranch* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1957), pp. 183-184.
- 3 Mifflin Kenedy & Co. Journal (Oct 15, 1857 to December 31, 1866), pp. 6 and 137, King Ranch Archives, Kingsville, TX; Lea, *The King Ranch*, pp. 173-174 and 179.
- 4 Stephen R. Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy: Blockade Running During the Civil War* (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1988), pp. 12-13; Lea, *The King Ranch*, pp. 171-172 and 185-186.
- 5 Walter E. Wilson, "The Civil War Blockade Running Adventures of the Louisiana Schooner William R. King," *Louisiana History*, 56, (Summer 2015), pp. 294-314; Frank Lawrence Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of the Confederate States of America* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1931), p. 88.
- 6 Swartwout to Wm. W. McKean, Feb 3, 1862, *ORN I*: pp. 17 and 101; Thos. B. Gammon to S. Swartwout, Feb 2, 1862, *ORN I*: pp. 17 and 104; L. Tuffy Ellis, "Maritime Commerce on the Far Western Gulf, 1861-1865," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 57, (Oct 1973), pp. 205-206.
- 7 George Minot (ed.), *The Statutes at Large and Treaties of the United States of America*, Vol. IX (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1862), pp. 928-943 (Articles V & VII).
- 8 Samuel Blatchford, *Reports of cases in prize, argued and determined in the circuit and district courts of the United States, for the southern district of New York, 1861-1865* (Washington: GPO, 1866), pp. 148-149; Charles Stillman to Capt R. King, Feb 25, 1862, King Ranch Archives, Kingsville, TX.
- 9 United States. *Compilation of Laws and Decisions of the Courts Relating to War Claims* (Washington: GPO, 1908), pp. 212, 225, and 253. Note: By Sep 1862, the *Labuan* was back at the Rio Grande and continued to trade at Matamoros, New Orleans, New York, and Liverpool through 1864.
- 10 *New York Times*, Apr 6, 1862; Farragut to Hunter, Apr 11 & 16, 1862, *ORN I*: 18, pp. 22 and 130.
- 11 Ford to Hunter, Apr 30, 1863, *ORN I*: 18, p. 458.
- 12 José San Román to S. Seeligton, Feb 5, 1862, San Román Papers Box 2G120, Letter Press, Sep 10, 1861 — May 29, 1862, Briscoe CAH (quoted material); Swartwout, to Wm. W. McKean, Feb 3, 1862, *ORN I*: 17, 101; Thos. B. Gammon to S. Swartwout, Feb 2, 1862, *ORN I*: 17, 104.
- 13 James A. Irby, *Backdoor at Bagdad: The Civil War on the Rio Grande* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1977), pp. 8-9; John Salmon Ford and Stephen

B. Oates (ed.), *Rip Ford's Texas* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1963), p. 329; Charles Stillman to Capt R. King, Mar 11, 1862 and M Kenedy & Co. Ledger (Oct 15th 1857 to December 31, 1866), King Ranch Archives, Kingsville, TX. Note: the partners had already sold the SS *Mexico* to the Bagdad shipping agent Benito Vinas in June of 1862.

14 J.B. Magruder to S. Cooper, June 8, 1863, *ORA I*: 26/2, 63; Kenedy, King, & Stillman to Maj. S. Hart, Jun 1, 1863, Charles Stillman business papers, 1847-1884; MS Am 800.27 (pp. 4-20), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass; Lea, *The King Ranch*, pp. 197-199.

15 James W. Daddysman. *The Matamoros Trade, Confederate Commerce, Diplomacy, and Intrigue* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1984), pp. 107-110; Ronnie C. Tyler, "Cotton on the Border, 1861-1865," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 73, (Jul 1970), pp. 461-463; Jerry Thompson and Lawrence T. Jones III, *Civil War and Revolution on the Rio Grande Frontier; A Narrative and Photographic History* (Austin: State Historical Association, 2004), p. 43.

16 *Tri-Weekly Telegraph* (Houston), Friday, May 30, 1862; J.B. Magruder to S. Cooper, Jun 8, 1863, *ORA I*: 26/2, 61-62 (quoted material).

17 Rio Grande Ferry service application, May 22, 1861 & May 21, 1862, Cameron County Commissioner's Court Minutes, Book A, Aug 29, 1848 to May 24, 1862, pp. 33-37 and 41-42; Lea, *The King Ranch*, pp. 171-172 and 177.

18 W.M. McKean to Gideon Welles, Mar 19, 1862, *ORV I*: 17, p. 190; Charles Stillman to Elizabeth Pamela Goodrich, Oct 7, 1861, King Ranch Archives, Kingsville, TX; Marilyn McAdams Sibley, "Charles Stillman; A Case Study of Entrepreneurship on the Rio Grande, 1861-1865," and L. Tuffy Ellis, "Maritime Commerce on the Far Western Gulf, 1861-1865," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 57, (Oct 1973), pp. 175, 206-208, and 227-228, 236-239; United States, 38th Cong. 2d Sess. House Ex. Doc. No. 25 "New York Custom-House," (Washington: GPO, Mar 1, 1865), pp. 1-217.

19 José San Román to M. Echeverria & Co., Dec 4, 1862, José San Román Papers, Box 2G120 and M. Echeverria & Co. to José San Román, Jan 10, 1863, José San Román Papers, Box 2G63, Briscoe CAH.

20 Donahue to Yturria, Sep 3, 1862, Charles Stillman business papers, 1847-1884, MS Am 800.27, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; Mifflin Kenedy & Co. Journal, (Oct 15, 1857 to December 31, 1866), 106, King Ranch Archives, Kingsville, TX; Statements and accounts, Jose Morel Account with J.&N. Smith & Co., 12/16/63. Charles Stillman business papers, 1847-1884, Am 800.27, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Mifflin Kenedy also had a 2/16th ownership share in the *Emma Dean*.

- 21 *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), Dec 22, 1863 and Jan 14, Feb 9, & Mar 16, 1864.
- 22 José San Román to Preciat & Gual, Apr 21, 1864, José San Román Papers, Box 2G121, Briscoe CAH.
- 23 Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, pp. 282-283.
- 24 J. Bates to L.G. Aldrich, Jun 8, 1864, NARA RG:109, M323 Conf. Soldiers TX, 13th Vol., Joseph Bates.
- 25 Bates to Jones, Aug 29, 1864, NARA RG:109, Conf. Vessel Papers, Seq. C-220, *Cuca*.
- 26 Mifflin Kenedy Journal (January 1st 1861- March 31st, 1864), p. 97 and (Oct 15, 1857 to Dec 31, 1866), p. 126, King Ranch Archives, Kingsville, TX; Declaration of Ownership, Oct 4, 1864, NARA, RG:21, Admiralty Case No. 7930, U.S. vs Schr *Lone*; Eaton to Welles, Nov 10, 1864, ORN I: 27, pp. 635-636.
- 27 *Galveston Weekly Civilian and Gazette*, Jan 24, 1860; Register of the Steamboat *Cora*, Apr 13, 1863, NARA RG:21, Admiralty Case No. 7961, U.S. vs Schooner *Cora* [misfiled NARA record].
- 28 Richard B. McCaslin, "'A Curious War' Franklin A.G. Gearing in the Civil War," *East Texas Historical Journal*, 53, (Fall 2015), pp. 7-28.
- 29 Samuel Simpson to José San Román, Apr 21, 1863, José San Román Papers, Box 2G64, Briscoe; Richard B. McCaslin, "'A Curious War' Franklin A.G. Gearing in the Civil War," *East Texas Historical Journal*, 53, (Fall 2015), p. 14.
- 30 Samuel Simpson to José San Román, Apr 6, 1863, José San Román Papers, Box 2G64, Briscoe CAH.
- 31 John Ingalls & Co. to Messrs Droege, Oetling & Co., Ballinger (William Pitt) Papers Box 2A 187a and Manifest of *Blue Bird*, Oct 9, 1863, José San Román papers, Box 2G66, Briscoe CAH.
- 32 Samuel Simpson to José San Román, Apr 6, 1863, José San Román Papers, Box 2G64, Briscoe CAH; Jane Clements Monday and Frances Brannen Vick. *Petra's Legacy: The South Texas Ranching Empire of Petra Vela and Mifflin Kenedy* (College Station: Texas A&M Univ. Press, 2007), p. 89.
- 33 Receipt to R. King, Oct. 31, 1863, Dorothy Sloan-Books, Auction 22, lot 126, [dealor.com/Auction/A22/item-kopke-gripon-inventory.html](https://www.dealor.com/Auction/A22/item-kopke-gripon-inventory.html), accessed Mar 12, 2016.
- 34 Samuel Thompson to José San Román, May 5, 1863, José San Román papers, Box 2G64, Briscoe CAH.

- 35 *Galveston Tri-Weekly News*, Nov 27, 1863; Bee to Dickinson, Nov 21, 1863, *ORN* I: 20, 682 (quoted material).
- 36 Leon Smith to J.B. Magruder, Nov 30, 1863, *ORN* I: 20, 853; *Galveston Tri-Weekly News*, Jan. 18, 1864.
- 37 Banks to Bell, Nov 17, 1863 and Mann to H. P. Bee, Nov 26, 1863, *ORN* I: 20, 680 and 684.
- 38 J. C. Stafford to H. E. Loebnitz, Aug 23, 1864, *ORA* I: 41/2, 1078; *Mifflin Kenedy Journal*, (January 1st 1861- March 31st, 1864), King Ranch Archives, Kingsville, TX.
- 39 Stephen A. Townsend, *The Yankee Invasion of Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M Univ. Press, 2006), pp. 77-81.
- 40 Leon Smith to John Curley, Aug 1, 1864, and Wm. A. Smith to John Curley, Mar 6, 1865, NARA RG:21, Admiralty Case No. 8032, U.S. vs. SS *Cora*. Note: Smith's successor as commodore was Henry S. Lubbock, the brother of the former Texas Governor.
- 41 Richard King to Theodore Gripon, Oct 7, 1864, Dorothy Sloan-Books, Auction 22, lot 126, [doloban.com/Auction/A22/item-koopke-gripon-inventory.html](https://www.doloban.com/Auction/A22/item-koopke-gripon-inventory.html), accessed Mar 12, 2016; Depositions of William Evans and John Curley, Apr 28, 1865, NARA RG:21, Admiralty Case No. 8032, U.S. vs. SS *Cora*.
- 42 Depositions of William Evans and John Curley, Apr 28, 1865, NARA RG:21, Admiralty Case No. 8032, U.S. vs. SS *Cora*; Wm. F. Spicer to H. K. Thatcher, Mar 25, 1865. *ORN* I: 22, 110.
- 43 Monday and Vick, *Petra's Legacy*, 127.
- 44 Appraiser's Report, Jul 19, 1865, NARA RG:21, Admiralty Case No. 8032, U.S. vs. SS *Cora*.
- 45 Irwin to Brown, Sep 24, 1863 and Bates to Yancey, Oct 10, 1863, NARA RG:109, Conf. Vessel Papers, Seq. D-75, *Derby*.
- 46 H.B. Cleveland to Shea, Oct 26, 1862, *ORN* I: 19, 794-795; Bates to Yancey, Oct 6, 1863, NARA RG:109, Conf. Vessel Papers, Seq. D-75, *Derby*.
- 47 Irwin to Brown, Sep 24, 1863, and Bates to Yancey, Oct 10, 1863, NARA RG:109, Conf. Vessel Papers, Seq. D-75, *Derby*.
- 48 Bates to Yancey, Oct 10, 1863, NARA RG:109, Conf. Vessel Papers, Seq. D-75, *Derby* (quoted material).
- 49 Weekly Abstract of Export Duties, Jan 9-14, 1865, NARA RG:109, M346. Conf. Citizens File, Darwin M. Stapp; José San Román to J. Carrol

- Smith, Apr 10, 1865, José San Román Papers, Box 2G121, Briscoe CAH; *The Daily Ranchero* (Matamoros), Jun 14, 1865.
- 50 R. King to J.E. Slaughter, Aug 30, 1864, and Wm. K. Foster (for J.E. Slaughter) to H.S. Lubbock (with enclosures), Sep 5, 1864, NARA RG:109, M346 Conf. Citizens File, King Ranch.
- 51 W.M. Walker to Theodorus Bailey, Sep 13, 1863, *ORN* I: 17, 552.
- 52 *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), Aug 26, 1864; Dennison to Fessenden, Aug 22, 1864, United States, 39th Cong. 1st Sess., House Ex. Doc. No. 24, "Trade between New Orleans and Matamoros" [*sic*] (Washington: GPO, 1866), 177-178.
- 53 O. Steele to A.C. Jones, Sep 26, 1864, NARA RG:109, Conf. Vessel Papers, Seq. I-10 ½, *Ike Davis*; Avendano & Co, to José San Román, Sep 17, 1864, San Román Papers, Box 2G73, Briscoe CAH.
- 54 J.G. Walker to W.R. Boggs, Oct 1, 1864, *ORN* I: 21, 913; Steele to Jones, Sep 26, 1864, NARA RG:109, Conf. Vessel Papers, Seq. I-10 ½, *Ike Davis*.
- 55 *Handbook of Texas Online*, Eugene M. Ott, Jr. and Glen E. Lich, "First Texas Cavalry, USA," accessed Apr 9, 2016, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/qlf03>.
- 56 J.G. Walker to W.R. Boggs, Oct 1, 1864, *ORN* I: 21, 913; J.B. Magruder to W.R. Boggs, Apr 9, 1865, *ORA* I: 48/2, 1273-1274; Steele to Jones, Sep 26, 1864, NARA RG:109, Conf. Vessel Papers, Seq. I-10 ½, *Ike Davis*.
- 57 O. Steele to A.C. Jones, Sep 26, 1864, NARA RG:109, Conf. Vessel Papers, Seq. I-10 ½, *Ike Davis*.
- 58 O. Steele to A.C. Jones, Sep 26, 1864, W. Hyllesbed to J.M. Hawes, Oct 10, 1864, and Marshal's Notice, October 24, 1864, NARA RG:109, Conf. Vessel Papers, Seq. I-10 ½, *Ike Davis*. Note: The prisoners from the *Ike Davis* were released, but left to make their own way back to Union lines via the Rio Grande.
- 59 James L. Smith, "Orozimbo Plantation," Brazosport Archaeological Society, 2008, www.lifeonthebrazosriver.com/Orozimbo-Plantation.pdf; Jos. P. Couthouy to Wm. W. McKean, Mar 19, 1862, *ORN* I: 17, 191-192.
- 60 Mifflin Kenedy & Co. Journal, (Oct 15, 1857 to December 31, 1866), 53, 113, 136, 137, King Ranch Archives, Kingsville, TX; Receipts to S. Yturria, Sep 1, 2, & 3, 1863 and Receipt from S. Yturria to M. Castano, Jul 20, 1863, Box 2A, Kenedy Family Collection A1995-045, South Texas Archives, James C. Jernigan Library, TAMU-Kingsville; James H. Phelps to Charles Stillman, May 1, 1864, Charles Stillman business papers, 1847-1884, Am 800.27, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

- 61 Mifflin Kenedy & Co. Journal, (Oct 15, 1857 to December 31, 1866, Nov 30, 1862), 2, 16, 95, 136, 137, 176-177 and Mifflin Kenedy to John Wilson, June 30, 1865, Mifflin Kenedy letter press book, 1865, King Ranch Archives, Kingsville, TX; William J. Phillips to Charles Stillman, Sep 7, 1864 and J.H. Phelps to Charles Stillman, Sep 20, 1864, Charles Stillman business papers, 1847-1884. Am 800.27. Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
- 62 James M. Day, "Leon Smith, Confederate Mariner," *East Texas Historical Journal*, 3 (March 1865), pp. 34-49.
- 63 Leon Smith to Mifflin Kenedy, April 25 and Jul 15, 1863 (1st quote) and Leon Smith letter designating Mifflin Kenedy as his agent, Apr 28, 1863, (2nd quote) Box 2A, , Kenedy Family Collection A1995-045, South Texas Archives, James C. Jernigan Library, TAMU-Kingsville.
- 64 *Galveston Weekly News*, Dec 7, 1864; A. G. Clary to Geo. F. Emmons, Nov 25, 1864, *ORN* I: 21, 736.
- 65 *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, Dec 14, 1864; O. Steele to A.C. Jones, Sep 26, 1864 (1st quote), NARA RG:109, Conf. Vessel Papers, Seq.: 1-10 ½, *Ike Davis'* Memorandum of Commander Le Roy, Nov 1, 1864 (2nd quote), *ORN* I: 21, 713.
- 66 *The Ranchero* (Brownsville, TX), Dec 17, 1864; *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, Dec 26, 1864 (quoted material); *Galveston Weekly News*, Dec 28, 1864.
- 67 *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, Dec 26, 1864 (quoted material); *Galveston Weekly News*, Dec 28, 1864.
- 68 Alwyn Barr, "The Battle of Calcasieu Pass," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 66, (Apr 1963), pp. 59-67; Richard King to Gen. Slaughter, May 12, 1864, NARA RG:109, M346 Conf. Citizens File, King Ranch.
- 69 Statistical Data of U.S. Ships, *ORN* II: 1, 238; Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, pp. 303 and 326.
- 70 Richard King to Gen. Slaughter, May 12, 1864 and Slaughter to Hebert, Sep 7, 1864 (quoted material), NARA RG:109, M346, Conf. Citizens File, King Ranch; D.G. Farragut to Gideon Welles, May 18, 1864, *ORN* I: 21, 247.
- 71 Richard W. Meade, Jr. to G. F. Emmons, Jan 24, 1865, *ORN* I: 22, 17-18.
- 72 James R. Beers to Geo. F. Emmons, Jan 21, 1865, *ORN* I: 22, 18 (quoted material). Note: Official Navy records and many modern historians have accepted this inaccurate version of the *Granite City's* demise.
- 73 Richard W. Meade, Jr. to G. F. Emmons Jan 24, 1865, *ORN* I: 22, 17-8.

- 74 *Galveston Tri-Weekly News*, Feb 13, 1865; Tucker to Austin, Feb 9, 1865, NARA RG:109, Conf. Vessel Papers, Seq. G-30 ½, *Granite City*.
- 75 Bill of Costs and Stone to House, Feb 21, 1865 and Mason to Austin, Feb 18, 1865, NARA RG:109, Conf. Vessel Papers, Seq. G-30 ½, *Granite City*.
- 76 Tucker to Austin, Feb 9, 1865 and Walker to Wm T. Austin, Mar 2, 1865, NARA RG:109, Conf. Vessel Papers, Seq. W-3, *Wave; Galveston Tri-Weekly News*, Feb 22, 1865.
- 77 Walker to Wm T. Austin, Mar 2, 1865, NARA RG:109, M346; Conf. Citizens File, T.W. House and Co.
- 78 Stone to House, Feb 21 and Mar 2, 1865, NARA RG109, Conf. Vessel Papers, Seq. G-30 ½, *Granite City*.
- 79 Alwyn Barr, "The Battle of Calcasieu Pass," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 66, (Apr 1963), pp. 59-67.
- 80 Register of Export Duty on Cotton, Mar 31, 1865, NARA RG:109, M346 Conf. Citizens File, James Sorley.
- 81 Franklin Chase to F.W. Seward, Apr 1, 1865, Tampico Consular Despatches, Ramsdel Collection, Briscoe CAH.
- 82 SS *Cora* crew list, Feb 11, 1860, Dorothy Sloan—Books, Auction 22, lot 126, doloan.com/Auctions/A22/item-kopke-gripon-inventory.html, accessed Mar 12, 2016; *Uncle Ben* Crew List Aug 31, 1863, NARA RG109, Conf. Vessel Papers, Seq.: U-3, *Uncle Ben*; A. P. Cooke to J.B. Marchand, Apr 7, 1864, *ORN* 1: 21, 169.
- 83 Monday and Vick, p. 129; Register of Export Duty on Cotton, Mar 31, 1865, NARA RG:109, M346 Conf. Citizens File, James Sorley.
- 84 Chase to W.H. Seward, Aug 15, 1865, Tampico Consular Despatches, and Savage to W.H. Seward, Havana Consular Despatches, Ramsdel Collection, Briscoe CAH.
- 85 *Ibid.*
- 86 Eric J. Graham, *Clydebuilt: The Blockade Runners of the American Civil War* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2005), 185; Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, 240-241, 249-250, 290. Note: the steamer *Banabee II* is sometimes confused with the sailing ship *Banabee* that carried cotton for Charles Stillman between New York and Matamoros.

- 87 *Galveston Daily News*, Feb 26 & 28, 1865; *Galveston Tri-Weekly News*, Feb 27, 1865; Cotton Export Duty Report for Week Ending Mar 25, 1865, NARA RG:109, M346 Conf. Citizens File, R:0963, James Sorley; *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, Apr 6, 1865; *Washington Evening Star*, Apr 14, 1865; *New York Times*, Apr 15, 1865; Graham. *Clydebuilt*, p. 185.
- 88 R.W. Shufeldt to Wm. H. Seward, Dec 1, 1862, Havana Consular Despatches, Ramsdel Collection, Briscoe CAH; Gerald R. Powell, Matthew C. Cordon, and J. Barto Arnold III, *Civil War Blockade-Runners: Prize Claims and the Historical Record, Including the Denbigh's Court Documents* (College Station: Institute of Nautical Archaeology, 2012), p. 173; George Thebo to Miss Lou, May 11, 1864, NARA RG:21, Admiralty Case No. 7899, U.S. vs. SS *Isabel*.
- 89 Cayce to Turner, Apr 14, 1865, NARA RG:109, M323 Conf. Soldiers TX, 13th Vol., Henry P Cayce; *Galveston Daily News*, Apr 13 & 27, 1865.
- 90 Graham, *Clydebuilt*, 189; Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, 253-254, 257-258, 273, 275, 289; Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, pp. 206, 240-241, 273, 275, and 289; *New York Times*, Mar 30, 1865; *New York Herald*, Apr 6, 1865.
- 91 Shipping Account No. 39, Henry Sampson Papers, Box 2 FF 10, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, TX.
- 92 *Galveston Daily News*, Aug 8, 1886 (quoted material); John F. Mackie. "Running the Blockade: Escape of the *Fox*," *Blue and Gray: The Patriotic American Magazine*, 2, (Jul-Dec, 1893), pp. 339-342.
- 93 Weekly Customs Register, Apr 15, 1865, NARA RG:109, M346 Conf. Citizens File, James Sorley.
- 94 Galveston Special Order No. 77, Apr 16, 1865, Ashbel Smith Papers, Box 4L262, and Minor to Wm. Hunter, May 16, 1865, Havana Consular Despatches, Ramsdel Collection, Briscoe CAH.
- 95 Shipping Account sheets, Henry Sampson Papers, Box 2 FF 10, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, TX; Galveston Special Orders No. 100, May 9, 1865, Ashbel Smith Papers, Box 4L262, Briscoe CAH.
- 96 William Watson, *Adventures of a Blockade Runner* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1892), pp. 300-302; Sorely to Magruder, Apr 6, 1865, NARA RG:109, Conf. Vessel Papers, Seq.: L-120, *Lavinta*; W.G. Hale Ledger for M. Kenedy, 1865, William G. Hale Papers, Box 2D258 and Galveston Special Orders No. 84, Apr 23, 1865, Ashbel Smith Papers, Box 4L262, Briscoe CAH.
- 97 Minor to W.H. Seward, May 1, 1865, Havana Consular Despatches, Ramsdel Collection, Briscoe CAH; *Galveston Weekly News*, May 31, 1865; *New York Times*, Feb 5, 1867.

98 Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, pp. 149, 213-214, 219, 221, 273, 275, and 308; Account sheets, Henry Sampson Papers, Box 2 FF 10, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, TX; Mifflin Kenedy & Co. Journal (Oct 15, 1857 to December 31, 1866), p. 142, King Ranch Archives, Kingsville, TX; Register of Export Duty on Cotton, March 25, 1865, NARA RG:109, M346 Conf. Citizens File, James Sorely; *Daily Courier and Union* (Syracuse, NY), Apr 6, 1865.

99 Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, pp. 219-220.

100 Lea, *The King Ranch*, pp. 210 and 242-243; Monday and Vick. *Petra's Legacy*, p. 212.

101 Mifflin Kenedy & Co., Ledger and Journals (Oct 15, 1857 to December 31, 1866), (1859-1864), and (January 1st, 1861- March 31st, 1864), King Ranch Archives, Kingsville, TX. Note: \$159,140 is equivalent to about \$2.5 million in 2016.

102 Lea, *The King Ranch*, pp. 242-244.

The Sad Saga of John V. Singer

by

Norman Rozeff

South Texas has known many “characters”, and many have fascinating histories, but that of John Valentine Singer can easily match any that I have come across. Our story begins in the last decade of the 18th Century when John was born to millwright Adam Singer and his wife Ruth Benson Singer in Troy, Rensselaer County, New York, on September 4, 1791.¹ Adam and Ruth were both born in Canada. His younger brother was to be Isaac Singer, the eventual perfecter of the Singer sewing machine, who ran away from home, at age 11, to become an entertainer.² Their parents, who seemed to have set the stage for their sons’ later disaffections, divorced in 1821.³

By around 1823, John married Canada-born Ann Collins. At least seven children were to be born to the couple. The first were Electra M., born ca. 1820; Horace Meach, born 1 October 1823 in New York; Edgar Collins, born 21 October 1825 in Ohio; and Clara A. (also sometimes noted as Clarissa), born 13 July 1829 in Ohio. In 1830, John Valentine Singer was living in Salem Township, Ashtabula County, Ohio. He owned two horses and a cow. A younger sister, Harriet, was to be born in New York. After a gap of 16 years, Frances L. and then Dora E., 18 months later, were born in Illinois.⁴ The diverse birth places of the children may indicate that John was somewhat unstable in securing a living.

It would appear that the family was residing in Lockport, Illinois, when John again came down with *Wanderlust* fever and precipitously abandoned his young family. He took flight, according to family history, bought a steamboat, and traveled south on the Mississippi River to New Orleans.⁵ The next firm

record available shows that, in 1841, John V. was on the tax rolls of Galveston County, Texas.⁶

John married Johanna Shaw, of Irish birth and from a wealthy family settled in New Orleans. Whether either John or Ann Collins Singer ever officially filed and received divorce papers is unrecorded. Regarding the second union, we can only speculate on whether John was a very smooth talker or Johanna was headstrong, or both. If their first child was legitimate and conceived in wedlock, John V. had married Johanna at least by 1845, for the U.S. Census for Cameron County taken on June 30, 1860, revealed that John and Johanna had parented the following children, all Texas-born: daughter M. A., 14; Alex, 12; John, 10; Johannah, 8, Elijah, 6; Ann, 4, and J. B., 1. Son John, who was to become a seaman, died accidentally by drowning at age 18.⁷

In 1847, as the Mexican War was in progress, John and his wife sailed for Point Isabel, Texas, where he wanted to establish a shipping business. Their initial plan, according to Helen Chapman, was to go to California, but reports of a cholera epidemic there changed their minds. It was Mrs. Singer who then suggested a move to Texas.⁸ The three-masted schooner in which they sailed, the *Alice Sadell*, was caught in a severe storm and wrecked off the coast of Padre Island. The schooner was washed ashore, and apparently the two oldest sons were saved from drowning together with their parents. (No mention is to be found concerning the craft's crew.) Fortunately the Singers then were able to salvage material, food, and furniture from the beached vessel. Initially using the boat's sails, they were able to fashion a canvas shelter.⁹ Later, they would construct a more substantial shelter out of wood.

Something must have clicked in John's mind about the prospects of shipwreck salvaging for there is a handwritten document of February 11, 1850, evidencing that John V. had been commissioned "wreckmaster" of the Port of Cameron County, Texas.¹⁰ At that time, the wreckmaster's business was

to determine who owned a wreck and return it, if possible, to its owners. A percentage of its later worth upon disposal went to the state and some to the wreckmaster.

Here the story takes on an odd twist. John is said to have lent his brother Isaac \$500 (another source puts it at \$150) in the period when Isaac, short on funds, was developing his sewing machine. Steve Hathcock writes that this occurred in 1851 when, by chance, Isaac encountered his brother in New York City.¹¹ Upon its success and rapid acceptance by the world, Isaac became wealthy. Isaac was later to reward his brother's generosity with a loan of \$150,000 (approximately \$45 million in today's money). This loan appears to be attested to in the June 30, 1860, U.S. Census of Cameron County in which John listed his occupation as farmer, the value of his real estate at \$100,000, and his personal estate at \$18,000. The fact was that, in 1851, John had purchased the *Rancho Santa Cruz* from the heirs of Padre José Nicolás Ballí. While Padre Ballí served his parishioners in Matamoros, he left the running of the ranch to his brother's son, Juan José Ballí II. "The Ballís had 1,000 cattle on the island by 1811; the island began to be called Padre Ballí's island. The padre died in 1829. His nephew ran the ranch for another 15 years, leaving after a hurricane hit on August 4, 1844."¹²

Pauline Reese, in her 1938 Master of Arts thesis at Texas College of Arts and Industries, tells us of Singer's acquisition. She states: "In about 1855, John V. Singer, with his wife Johanna Shaw and an associate named James Walworth, engaged in a rather lively speculation in Padre Island, specializing in lands situated in the southern portion of the island. (This might have been the same steamboat captain James Walworth who assisted Richard King in obtaining the entire de la Garza grant.) The deeds on which they predicated their sales were for the most part irregular, and they did not pretend to connect with the Ballí grant. On May 10, 1855, John V. Singer did obtain a deed from Juan Nepomucino Solís y Ballí and Dolores Solís y Ballí, who were two of the four children of Carmen Ballí to whom

one-seventh of Padre Ballí's undivided one-half of Padre Island was devised. The purchase price was \$150. This deed passed in 1890 to Jay Cooke who in turn conveyed one-half interest in his claim to John S. McCampbell (a lawyer and later judge), E. A. McCampbell, and Stanley Welch."¹³

General Deed records kept in Cameron County reveal a number of land purchases by the Singers. One dated July 21, 1851, has Johanna purchasing a half interest in 2,000 acres of Padre Island for \$200 from Maria Antonia Cantu. This was land at the Santa Cruz Rancho and included a cabin. John purchased land for \$150 on May 10, 1855 from Pedro Paras Villarreal. He paid \$1370 to Augustín García for a warranty deed for a tract of land on Padre Island on April 4, 1857 and again another \$200 to García for another warranty deed on December 25, 1850 for Block No. 63 in the City of Brownsville. On November 4, 1852, John paid Thomas B. Chubb \$3000 for 1200 acres on the island. (Chubb, originally from Massachusetts, had a checkered past. He was a gun runner, an admiral in the Texas Navy, once accused of stealing slaves, and, later, a commander of a Confederate warship.¹⁴) From Charles W. Rainey, Singer bought ½ of 160 acres on Padre Island for \$100 on March 31, 1860. Daughter Johannah would have Patent No. 177, 160 acres of Brazos Island land purchased in 1873 from the state of Texas in her name.¹⁵

It was on the foundations of the old ranch house, about 27 miles from the southern tip of the island, that Singer built his new home and renamed the ranch *Rancho Las Cruces*. The family was quite self-sufficient in that it raised vegetables, ran livestock, and salvaged usable flotsam and jetsam from the beaches of the island. In her book *Letters from Brownsville*, Helen Chapman, the wife of Major William Chapman, who was serving at Fort Brown, wrote about a visit that she and her husband made to visit the Singers. She wrote that they went in a boat and "carried a table, dishes, meat, sugar and tea. . . . We found Mr. Singer waiting with a little kind of handcart to which

was harnessed a little old donkey. . . . Their house had been built by joint labor of their hands and all their furniture consisted of wood thrown upon the shore. The children are beautiful and perfectly healthy. The wife is a great, strong, muscular looking, good humored woman; she helps him regularly with his outdoor work." Mrs. Chapman also prominently notes that Johanna Singer came from a family holding and trading slaves. She had grown up in a section of Louisiana where it was common to have slaves, as the surrounding sugar plantations required their labor. Mrs. Singer was not opposed to slavery.¹⁶

Unknown to most is the fact that, at a shallow depth, there exists on Padre Island a fresh-water aquifer. This is because lighter density fresh water floats above denser sea salt water, a phenomenon known as the Gryben-Herzberg lens. This situation provided the Singers a source of drinking water and allowed them to raise two types of melons for commercial sale. Their produce was boated across the Laguna Madre and brought by ox-cart to Brownsville for sale. They did well with their cattle too. At one point that were raising 1,500 calves per year.¹⁷ Each parent had a registered brand by 1847 and all six children, too, by 1852.¹⁸

The year 1853 was to see an unusual cargo sent to general delivery, Port of Brazos Santiago. Brother Isaac had dispatched one of his new Singer Sewing Machines for the Singer family. It was, in fact, the first modern sewing machine to be found in Texas. The family treasured it for many a year, and it served the large family well in creating and mending the clothes that they wore.¹⁹

The year 1861, by which time John Singer had experienced enough adventures for two lifetimes, saw the start of adventures for his son Edgar by his first marriage. We know from the U.S. Census of 1850 that Edgar was still living with his mother in Lockport, Illinois, employed as a clerk.²⁰ At some point, he left the north and came to reside in the seaport town of La Vaca [later to become Port Lavaca], Texas, and, when the Civil War began, in 1861, gave his allegiance to the Confederacy. His New-

York-born wife Harriet Newell and their seven-year-old Texas-born son, Richard, were with him. Five years later, Richard's sister Annie was born in Texas and, nine years later, his brother, George F. Curiously enough, Edgar's sister Clara also joined her brother in Texas. Her future Canadian-born husband, C. E. (Charles Edward) Frary, was employed as a carpenter in La Vaca. He and his two brothers were living in La Vaca by 1860.²¹

The six-foot-three-inches-tall gunsmith Edgar had a bent for mechanics. He had already been recognized as offering improvements to his Uncle Isaac's first commercially successful sewing machine. By 1862, Edgar had become a private in the home guard unit of the Texas Light Artillery. When, in 1862, a small contingent of the Union navy sailed into the bay and launched 250 rounds into the town, the guard could do little to reciprocate. Edgar's ire was raised, and he vowed to counter the enemy. He knew about gunpowder and its properties and conceived of using it in underwater mines.

Working with fellow fraternal Masons, and especially with Dr. John Fretwell, Edgar constructed a mine and tested it on a beached hulk on the shoreline of La Vaca. Its destructive power amazed those who viewed it. Edgar's commander, Captain Daniel Shea, recognizing the potential possibilities, ordered Singer and Fretwell to go to Houston to meet with CSA General John Magruder, who was planning action against Union forces in Galveston. Magruder, however, was skeptical of the proposed weapon. He was given a demonstration of its power in the Buffalo Bayou as it was placed below an old scow and ignited. The subsequent blast thoroughly demolished the vessel. Magruder soon ordered Singer to report to Major General Dabney H. Maury, commanding the District of the Gulf, with headquarters at Mobile, Alabama. "Engineers who subsequently evaluated the merits of Singer's device for the War Department in Richmond urged its adoption 'as a powerful accessory to our limited means'."²²

Singer returned to La Vaca and, with the help of fellow Masons and his brother-in-law, worked to perfect his torpedo.

The town, in fact, became the prime site for manufacturing torpedoes west of the Mississippi.²³ After Singer and his companions went to Richmond to demonstrate the device to the War Department, they were provided with the ammunition and *matériel* to commence manufacturing more of the weapons. Singer, now raised to the rank of captain, was also authorized to form a special torpedo service of not more than 25 men. He called the unit "Singer's Submarine Corps." It would evolve into what was named the "Singer Secret Service Corps."²⁴ Next to be perfected was a submarine to deliver the torpedoes, but, before that, mines were distributed in the Yazoo River of Mississippi. One that was laid soon sank the Union ironclad ship *Baron DeKalb*. "It jarred loose a detonating rod, igniting a mine, and quickly sank to the bottom of the muddy river. A few days later, Union Admiral David Dixon Porter described the device that had sunk the ironclad, in a report to his superiors in Washington, as 'some new invention of the enemy.'"²⁵

Soon the world would learn of the Confederate submarines. The *H.L. Hunley* was constructed and deployed, but not before 16 of its crew died during several test runs. Singer designed several new torpedoes for the submarine to use. On the night of February 17, 1864, for the first time, a submarine sank an enemy ship. It was the Federal steam sloop of war *Houatonic*, sunk in Charleston Harbor. Unfortunately, just after the event the submarine itself was to sink with the loss of all of its five hands.²⁶

As Singer's torpedoes continued to inflict damages on the enemy, the aggressive Singer later proposed the construction of low-profile iron-clad torpedo boats. The object was to use them to remove blockade ships from southern harbors. After his proposal, the names of members of his "secret service" inadvertently fell into the hands of Union military personnel. This misfortune led to the promulgation of General Orders No. 184 which, in addition to listing those names, contained a proviso that all captured and identified Singer members would be "shot on the spot." Regardless, drift and other mining continued to

extract heavy indemnities upon Union vessels in both rivers and harbors until the end of the war. Two of Singer's torpedo boats were being constructed in Texas as the war ended.²⁷

After the war, Edgar returned to live in La Vaca, where he listed his occupation as "inventor" in the 1870 U.S. Census. He was also a foundry consultant. His wife Harriet, born May 2, 1830, died on March 17, 1893. Edgar, born October 21, 1825, in Ohio, died on April 30, 1919. Both he and his wife are buried in the Calvary Cemetery, Marble Falls County, Texas.²⁸

With the onset of the Civil War, Texas authorities considered John Singer to be a possible threat as he was a Yankee who might provide important information on the Brazos Santiago Pass to the Union. The family moved to Flour Bluff, where Union sympathizers were said to be housed. At this point, we enter the realm of legend. Before leaving their island home, the Singers have been said to have buried a cache of jewelry, gold, and silver, worth \$60,000 to \$100,000, in two ceramic stone jars sealed by beeswax, between two scrubby live oaks, on the ranch. It is possible that some of this treasure may have been recovered by family members, over the years, from the Spanish galleons shipwrecked nearby in 1553.²⁹ Despite the ongoing war, John and his eldest son, Alexander, were said to have returned several times to the cache to remove valuables. During their absence, scavenging Federal military removed much of their home for firewood and consumed their cattle for provisions. Following the war's end, the Singers allegedly returned to dig up their treasure, only to find that storms had altered the terrain and landmarks to such a degree that the trove could not be located.³⁰ This legend has provided treasure hunters reason to continue to search for the missing cache. Even with the application of modern metal detectors, no valuables have been unearthed.

If Singer was living at Flour Bluff, it was not for long. Donald C. Simmons, in his book *Confederate Settlements in British Honduras*, writes about Singer and his involvement in British Honduras, today known as Belize. Around 1862, a Mrs. Singer (likely Jo-

hanna), age 38, was aboard a passenger ship bound for British Honduras from New Orleans. Her husband, Captain John Singer, was charged with piracy. Helping provide his defense was Confederate sympathizer and ardent secessionist Christopher D. Hempstead of Belize City. Hempstead, who had been US Consul under the Polk administration in British Honduras in 1840, remained there to become a businessman and, later, a legislator.³¹

Simmons writes this about the matter: "Hempstead ... also drew a great deal of public attention when he assisted the notorious Captain John V. Singer, formerly of Brownsville, Texas, and brother of I. M. Singer, founder of Singer Sewing Machine, in his defense against the charge of piracy. John Singer was said to be one of the Confederacy heroes of the Civil War as a result of having invented a destructive torpedo." (Simmons is erroneous in this statement, as he confuses John with his son Edgar.) Hempstead accompanied Singer to the hearings and served as his counsel.

With the help of Hempstead, Singer was exonerated and a settlement was reached. The trial created quite a stir in Belize City and became quite the topic of conversation when Singer's wife arrived in town, during the hearing, to lay claim to her ship reportedly stolen by Singer and another woman, who also claimed to be his wife. Once released, he fled to Livingston, Guatemala, with the 'other woman.'"³²

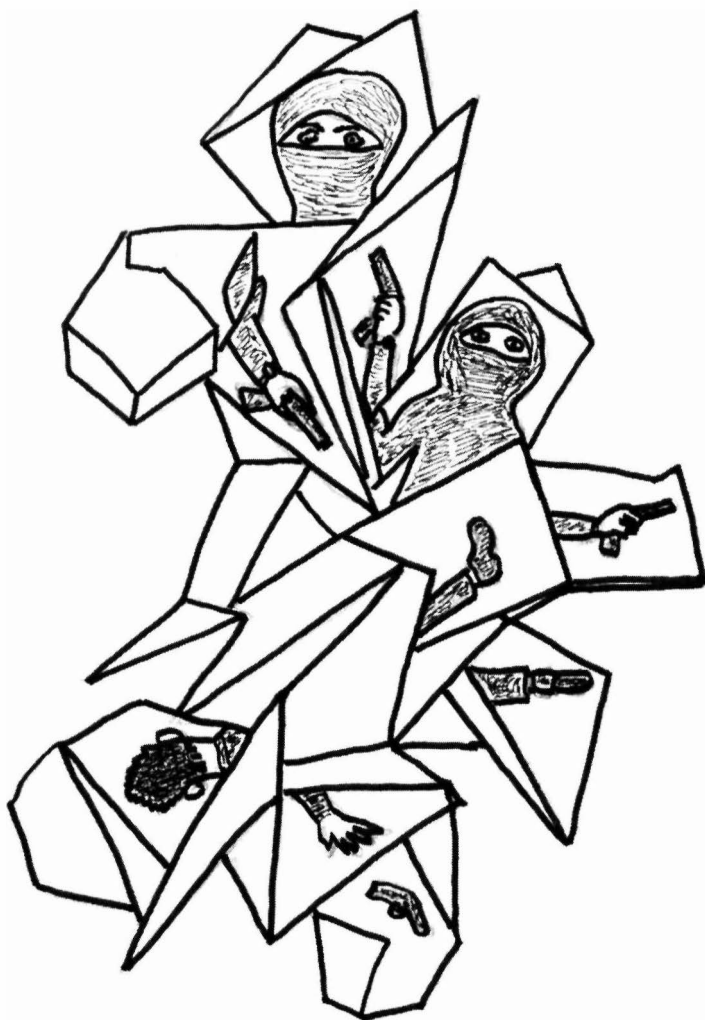
It appears that the ship, most likely a sailing schooner, was owned by Johanna or her family and was registered in their name before Singer absconded with it. Even at the age of 71, Singer continued to act in the most outrageous manner. Johanna, by one account, died in 1866.³³ She would have been only 40 years old or so. On the other hand, John Valentine, according to family research, lived to the ripe old age of 86 and is reported to have died in Appalachicola, Franklin County, Florida, around 1877. Family sources have the first name of John's last paramour as Briget, but her surname is not recorded.³⁴ Surely this reprobate's unusual life story is one for the books.

Endnotes

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OTHER CIVIL WAR BIOGRAPHIES



Cartel Rumble
à la Picasso

Ulster and the Texas-Mexico Border: John McAllen and His Family

by

Thomas Daniel Knight

The University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley, where I teach, is located in south Texas, near the United States-Mexico border.¹ My campus is in Hidalgo County, named for Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla (1753-1811), a leader of the Mexican Independence movement, and until 1844 the entire region was part of Mexico. The university is classified as a Hispanic Serving Institution,² and in 2014 the U.S. census bureau estimated that 91.2% of the county's 831,073 inhabitants could be classified as Hispanic or Latino.³

Looking on the surface, the area would seem to have little relevance for researchers interested in Ulster, in Northern Ireland, and its influence on the United States, but surface appearances can be misleading. The largest town in Hidalgo County is called McAllen, named for John McAllen (1826-1913), an Ulster immigrant to the United States who spent the majority of his life in South Texas. And while McAllen's accomplishments may be singular, the connection between Northern Ireland and South Texas was not unique.⁴

Historians focusing on the region's complicated past situate it within a more general borderlands history that examines the interactions of peoples and cultures in regions of contestation, change, and, often, exploitation.⁵ Throughout its history, the area has experienced several major population booms which have often been accompanied by these phenomena. International attention first focused on Texas in a serious way during the Texas Revolution, at which time individuals from throughout

western Europe left their homelands to participate in the conflict. It has been estimated that at least fifteen percent and as many as thirty-three percent of the 190 men who died at the Alamo in 1836 had come from the United Kingdom, including several men born in Northern Ireland.⁶ During the conflict, expeditions to the Rio Grande began to reveal latent interest in the area, but the region between the Nueces and Rio Grande Rivers was not formally claimed by Texas until the United States annexed the entire region when Texas entered the Union as a state in 1844.⁷ This action prompted the Mexican-American War, lasting from 1846 to 1848, and focused international attention specifically on the area where John McAllen would settle. At the end of the nineteenth-century, a major agricultural boom brought new attention to the region. At the end of the twentieth century, the creation of the McAllen Foreign Trade Zone in the late 1980s, followed by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) of 1994, were responsible for tremendous economic growth and development in the region.⁸

Of these events, the Mexican-American War from 1846 to 1848 and its immediate consequences were, arguably, responsible for the greatest degree of ethnic and cultural diversity the region would ever see. In 1850 and 1860, census figures indicated that between 11.92% and 12.61% of the region's population was born outside the state of Texas and/or Mexico—either elsewhere in the United States or abroad. By 1870, the number had fallen to 10.4% and by 1880 to 6.47%. The 1900 census showed that just 2.15% of the local population was born outside the region. And of those who were born abroad, the single largest source of origin outside the United States in every year prior to and including 1880 was Ireland.⁹

The 1850 United States census had grouped the three southernmost counties of Texas—Starr, Hidalgo, and Cameron, which together then spanned about 150 miles of the US—Mexico border from just south of Laredo to Brownsville, Texas—as a single entity. Later census reports enumerated the three counties

individually, and so for my research I included both composite and individual figures. Throughout the tri-county region in 1850, there were 92 individuals reporting births in Ireland. By 1860, the number had climbed to 286. It reached 315 in 1870 then fell to 195 in 1880 and to only 31 by 1900. Among other countries, the numbers from Ireland were approximated most closely by Germany (with 75, 159, 207, 160, and 43 respectively) and by England (83, 48, 68, 58, 11), France (47, 69, 112, 86, 37), and Spain (38, 28, 78, 73, 48). A small number of Scots (11, 14, 19, 12, 1) was also present, along with a smattering, at one point or another, from most of the European and Asian nations.¹⁰

Several conclusions and caveats are necessary. First, the 1850s and 1860s were clearly the most dynamic in terms of the region's diverse population history. While immigrants from throughout the world were scattered on farms and ranches throughout the region, the greatest single concentration was in the region's largest town—the international port of Brownsville, Texas, where on a single street in the 1850s it would have been possible to hear accents from all of the leading nations of western Europe. Second, a significant number of those present were employed as merchants, urban laborers, and agricultural workers, but an important component were soldiers—stationed at Fort Brown in Brownsville and at Fort Ringgold one-hundred miles to the west—who were using military service as a path to citizenship and full participation in American life. Third, since the region's population remained overwhelmingly Mexican-American in nature, those immigrants who did not come as families often chose to marry into the local Tejano population.

¹¹ This created a local population in which many families were half-Mexican, half-European, often sharing family ties through a common Mexican-American heritage as well as a culture that, while predominantly Mexican-American, retained many dynamic cultural elements from homelands outside the region, including aspects of language, dress, religion, onomastics, and even gastronomy.¹² In terms of interest in Northern Ireland,

however, one limitation is that the census records fail to distinguish between those born in Ulster and those born in other parts of Ireland, but it is clear from other sources that many of them were, like John McAllen, Ulstermen.

Although the city (with a present population of 130,000) was not created until 1911, the name of McAllen, Texas, reflects this period of nineteenth-century ethno-cultural diversity. But it also reflects the preeminent importance that one individual—John McAllen—came to assume throughout the region in the later nineteenth-century. But, although born in Northern Ireland, McAllen's life does not conform to the typical pattern of Ulster immigration to the United States in several ways. First, his family did not belong to any of the large migrations of the eighteenth-century, but instead McAllen came alone—although as part of the extended migration of several relatives—during the famine-era of the nineteenth-century. This is particularly important since—unlike many of the Irish who chose to remain in the urban northeastern United States—McAllen lived the majority of his adult life in the American South, where the overwhelming majority of those with Ulster roots belonged to families that had come during the colonial period. Yet McAllen identified himself as Scotch-Irish in origin. He was a native of Londonderry, and he indicated on U. S. census reports (although it is probably wrong) that his parents had been born in Scotland. Second, McAllen was Roman Catholic, not Presbyterian, a factor that distinguished him from the majority of the Scotch-Irish in the southern United States, although not from the majority of the population in the region in which he chose to settle. Third, and perhaps most interestingly, as previously mentioned, McAllen did not remain in New York or the northeastern United States. Instead, he chose to venture about as far from New York as one could go and still remain in the United States—to deep south Texas, on the border between the United States and Mexico.¹³

McAllen was born in Londonderry—which he often referred to as “Derry,” perhaps because of his Catholic heritage—in 1826.

Not a great deal is known of his background. He repeatedly identified himself as Scotch-Irish, and tradition holds that earlier generations of the family hailed from Argyll in western Scotland.¹⁴ His father was named James McCallion and his mother Elizabeth. The family had lived at “lands glen” in the “upper portion of Glandermott” at the time of John’s birth. His parents died when John was quite young, and John was taken in by his uncle Hugh McCallion, who lived at Logue’s Hill. It was there that McAllen spent his formative years, working as “a slave” on a local farm before training as a tailor.¹⁵

McAllen is said to have initially crossed the ocean as a young teenager. He had a sister who settled in Philadelphia and reared her family there, and he may have come to America to live with or to visit other relatives there. For whatever reason, however, he returned to Ireland, and it was not until 1845 that he made the trip that would lead him on to his destiny. As he recorded many years later, he arrived in New York City in the summer of 1845, just in time to witness the funeral procession of former president Andrew Jackson, the child of Ulster immigrants, through New York City. The event clearly had significance for McAllen, for he chose, decades later, to preserve it among his scant recollections from the period. Perhaps it would not be too much to imagine that, for nineteen-year-old John McAllen, it reminded him of what a lad from Ulster might accomplish in this vast new land.¹⁶

McAllen did not remain in New York long, despite sizeable Irish community there. He had close relatives in the area, and he had connections there that would last a lifetime. Twenty years later, amid the conflict of the American Civil War, he and his wife would purchase a home in Brooklyn and reside there briefly, and McAllen would continue to correspond with family and business acquaintances in the city for the rest of his life. But he chose to move on almost immediately upon arrival. Again, viewing his life with hindsight, it could seem that ambition pushed McAllen forward in search of the chance of a lifetime during this early period in America.¹⁷

We next find McAllen travelling to Texas and Mexico, where he worked for several years. He engaged in a variety of occupations, most of them involving physical labor, that took him to port cities from Galveston to Matamoros to Veracruz. On one occasion McAllen “went to work for an Irish man by the name of Clegg” at Clegg’s Hotel, a stagecoach stop and post office along the Texas Coast in Port Lavaca; at others he worked as a cook, cabin-boy, deck hand, surveyor, and clerk. Experiences like these would serve him well in coming years as he engaged in business with merchants throughout the area.¹⁸

The Mexican–American War began soon after McAllen reached America and lasted from 1846 to 1848. The conclusion of the war—which ended militarily with General Winfield Scott’s invasion of Mexico City and diplomatically with the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo—confirmed U. S. possession of the disputed region between the Nueces and Rio Grande Rivers, including the future site of McAllen, Texas, and conveyed a tremendous portion of what is now the southwestern United States to the nation. The end of open conflict in 1848 meant the beginning of a period of active expansion throughout the region.¹⁹ A new town—Brownsville—was springing up near Fort Brown, north of Matamoros, where the Rio Grande River flows into the Gulf of Mexico. Sixty miles inland, but still on the river, a smaller town, Edinburgh, was developed as an important crossing, named in honor of town founder John Young’s birthplace in Edinburgh, Scotland. And sixty miles further up the river, Rio Grande City, where Fort Ringgold would be located, became another important location. All three became important crossings between the United States and Mexico, a factor that ensure their survival and growth.²⁰

Unlike many of his countrymen, John McAllen had not taken an active part in the conflict between the United States and Mexico, an indication of a path of action that would serve him well in the future. McAllen arrived in South Texas amid the hustle and bustle of an expanding economy. Many former soldiers

had remained in the Valley, and—with statehood secure—many others began to arrive from outside the region. McAllen settled in Brownsville, where he quickly found work with Scotch immigrant John J. Young. Young, the founder of Edinburgh in Hidalgo County, had been born in Scotland in 1802.²¹ He had come to northern Mexico in the 1830s and become a prosperous businessman. By the late 1840s, he owned a business operating in Brownsville and Matamoros along with ranching enterprises in Cameron and Hidalgo Counties. McAllen began work for Young as a clerk. A common Scottish connection may have helped foster some sort of friendship between the two men. McAllen soon became Young's trusted advisor, taking an active part not only in the mercantile enterprise but also in the ranching enterprises as well.²²

Young died in 1859. Like many settlers, he had married—comparatively late in life, however—into a prominent local family. Young had chosen as his wife Salome Ballí, whose Ballí, Dominguez, and Perez ancestors had come from central Mexico among the first settlers to colonize the Rio Grande Valley in 1740s. The Ballís were one of the region's most prominent ranching families, and their social and political connections as well as their economic prestige may have aided Young considerably. Following Young's death, as Young's trusted advisor, John McAllen worked closely with Young's widow Salome. It is perhaps not surprising that they soon married. McAllen became, not only guardian of John and Salome's son John J. Young, but also administrator of the senior Young's estate and guardian of the boy's substantial inheritance.²³

It would be tempting to conclude that money was the primary motivation for McAllen's marriage, for the union certainly benefitted him economically. McAllen gained control of Young's far-flung business enterprises. But two factors suggest that there was a truly affectionate basis to the union. The marriage lasted for nearly forty years and ended only with Salome's death in 1898; tradition holds that Salome was an affectionate

wife and mother and that the union was a close one. But Salome was a formidable character in her own right. She had been born in Matamoros, Mexico, in 1826, and came from a culture in which women were afforded considerably more autonomy than in the prevailing Anglo-American culture of the eastern United States at the time.²⁴ Rio Grande Valley history contains several examples of women who amassed vast landholdings and operated large ranches on their own. Salome seems to have partnered with her first husband, John Young, and with her second, John McAllen, to acquire property that she managed herself, and she also took an active interest in the Young and McAllen business endeavors. Local history holds that she was a competent businesswoman in her own right and that her marriage with John McAllen was a partnership of equals.²⁵

The 1860s proved to be an important decade in McAllen's life. A Civil War raged within the United States, and war also existed in Mexico for much of the decade. McAllen was not yet a United States citizen and avoided being drawn directly into the conflict. He continued to trade legally in the region and to ship through the international port of Brownsville. While many business owners struggled, McAllen prospered. McAllen sent Salome, his son, and his stepson to New York for part of the war to live among his friends and family there. In peacetime, Salome returned to the Rio Grande Valley and resumed her economic activities connected with the Santa Anita Ranch and her other business enterprises in Cameron and Hidalgo Counties.²⁶

The 1870s and 1880s were a time of turmoil throughout the Valley. As in much of the southern United States, the region—which had been a part of the Confederate States of America from 1861 to 1865—struggled with the difficulties of reconstruction. There had never been a large African-American population in the area; in 1850, only a few dozen slaves inhabited the thousands of square miles that ranged between Laredo, Texas, and the Gulf of Mexico.²⁷ But the region was not immune to the political and economic difficulties associated with the process of

reunification, and a prolonged series of bandit raids worsened the situation. McAllen finally became a United States citizen in 1866 and entered the region's political life soon afterwards. In the ensuing years, McAllen would serve four terms as the presiding judge for Hidalgo County. He would also serve a stint in the state legislature between 1883 and 1884.²⁸

Political power aided both McAllen's ranching enterprises as well as his business ones. He was able to protect his and his wife's land titles from would-be fraudsters who were attempting dishonestly to consolidate invalidated land titles into holdings of their own. Although McAllen's ranching and political activity kept him inland at his ranch in Hidalgo County for much of the time, he continued to have his primary urban residence in Brownsville, near the coast, and to oversee his mercantile enterprises there into the 1890s.²⁹

Salome Ballí Young McAllen had only two children, one by each marriage. Both were natives of Texas and American citizens, but John J. Young was half-Scotch, half-Mexican while his younger half-brother James Ballí McAllen was half-Irish, half-Mexican. Like their fathers, the young men were astute businessmen. From their mother, they seem to have acquired an almost instinctive understanding of the ranching business. In 1894, Salome negotiated the division of the bulk of her own property to her two sons, including a considerable amount of stock and the vast Santa Anita land grant. The division took three years to accomplish and was finalized shortly before Salome's death in 1898. The half of the property that went to James Ballí McAllen came to be known as the McAllen Ranch. It is still operational today. Since some of the original title of the grant had been awarded to José Manuel Gómez, a Ballí relative, in 1790, it is one of the oldest continually operated ranches owned by the same family line in Texas history.³⁰

By 1900, John McAllen was seventy-four years old. He had largely retired from business and ranching and, like his wife Salome, had turned much of his financial empire over to his

son James Ballí McAllen, who had been born in 1862, during the American Civil War. Retirement afforded the senior McAllen the time to pursue other interests, among them gardening, writing, and the renewal of old acquaintances. McAllen—primarily forward-looking in his personal and business life—had never severed his ties with the land of his youth or with family members in Ireland or elsewhere in America. He continued to correspond with his sister Sara McAllen Gill’s family in Philadelphia, and remained in contact with McCallion cousins in Derry. Finally, in 1903, McAllen decided to return to his homeland. Nearly sixty years had elapsed since his arrival in the New York, and he was, by the standards of the time, an old man.³¹

McAllen spent two months in Ireland. He visited family members and renewed old acquaintances. He noted that he “found four cusins and any amount of second cusens” in Londonderry.³² He returned to his birthplace and the community in which his uncle Hugh McCallion had reared him. In Logue’s Hill he visited his uncle’s grave and planned a memorial to be erected for his family there. While the reunion with his relations brought McAllen some joy, the trip was not without complaints. McAllen—who had largely abandoned formal religious practice in America—criticized his Irish relatives, one of whom had recently been ordained as a priest, for their blind allegiance to the Catholic faith.³³ Ill health—exacerbated by the cold, wet weather that McAllen found hard to bear after more than half a century in the scorching Texas sun—plagued him throughout his visit and necessitated long periods when he was confined to his room. But perhaps most troubling to him was the transformation in his boyhood haunts:

Yesterday went to see the place where I was raised. Found it all in ruins and not one of the names alive. Nothing but old walls and desolation looking. What was...youthfull...mirth all turned to sorrow, it was hard for me. I am now ready to bid farewell forever.³⁴

Later, McAllen would comment that the transformations he witnessed “made my hart sore.”³⁵ Perhaps McAllen’s reaction embodied something of the natural disappointment at the inevitable passage of time—one’s expectations seldom live up to reality.³⁶ But there is a deeper theme here also. When the monument to Hugh and Rose McCallion (there spelled McCallin) was erected the year after his visit, it bore the inscription:

Requiescat In Pace—May they rest in peace
Erected by His Nephew
The Hon. John McAllen
Texas U.S. America AD 1904.³⁷

McAllen was an American now, and, during the cold, damp summer spent in his homeland, the dry plains of Texas beckoned him. He yearned particularly for his home in Brownsville, his garden, and his grandchildren, who were a comfort to him. McAllen returned to Brownsville, never to visit Ireland again, in September 1903. But he corresponded regularly with friends and family there for the rest of his life, and he was frequently seen wearing his shamrock robe at his home in South Texas.³⁸

McAllen lived until 1913, dying at the age of 87 after a short illness. By then the agricultural boom of the early twentieth-century was well under way, and the era of vast South Texas cattle ranches was waning. The Valley was embarking upon another period of transformation, but John McAllen would not witness it.³⁹

McAllen had done well in his adoptive homeland. He lived to see the creation of McAllen, Texas, in 1911, although the town had a population of only about 1,000 inhabitants when McAllen died in 1913. To borrow McAllen’s own words, the coincidence of the town’s name and its location may at first seem a “strange mixture.”⁴⁰ Today, McAllen, Texas—with a population of 130,000 inhabitants within a booming metropolitan area of more than 1.5 million—is a major gateway from northern Mexico into the United

States. It is a hub of commerce, industry, and cultural exchange in what is recognized as one of the fastest growing regions of the United States.⁴¹ And so it is particularly significant for Ulster-American heritage that the town and its name are reminders of the complex events that brought a man like John McAllen from Logue's Hill in Londonderry, Ireland, to South Texas—and of Ulster's enduring connection with the tropical Rio Grande Valley region of southern Texas and northern Mexico.

University of Texas—Rio Grande Valley

Endnotes

- 1 This paper was written as part of the XXI Ulster American Heritage Symposium, held in Omagh, Ireland, in 2016. I would like to thank my colleagues at The University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley for sharing their expertise in Texas, Mexican, Mexican-American, and Borderlands history: Linda English; Harriett Denise Joseph; Anthony Knopp; Irving Levinson; Christopher L. Miller; James Mills; Russell Skowronek; Jamie Starling; Charles Waite.
- 2 There are several criteria to be listed as a HSI, one of which being that the full-time undergraduate student population be at least 25% Hispanic. At UTRGV that number exceeds 90%. The university is currently the second-largest Hispanic-serving institution in the United States.
- 3 <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/48215.html>.
- 4 There was a significant Irish presence in antebellum Texas drawing both from the future Republic of Ireland and the future Northern Ireland. For a very early account, see: John C. Linehan, "The Irish Pioneers of Texas," *American-Irish Historical Society Journal*, 1899. For a general discussion of the Irish presence in antebellum Texas, see: *Handbook of Texas Online*, Phillip L. Fry, "Irish," accessed May 05, 2016, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/pii01>. The best published accounts are John Brendan Flannery, *The Irish Texans* (San Antonio: University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures, 1980) and Graham Davis, *Land! Irish Pioneers in Mexican and Revolutionary Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002). One of the most notable Irishmen in early Texas was John ("Juan") McMullen, who is believed to have been born in northeastern Ulster in 1785. He was an

"Irish Empresario" and, along with James ("Santiago") McGloin, co-founder of the McMullen and McGloin colony. Another was James Power, born about 1788 at Ballygarrett in County Wexford. Power lived first in New Orleans, Louisiana, and later in Matamoros, Mexico, before establishing his colony north of the Rio Grande. See Rachel Bluntzer, *From San Patricio de Hibernia* (Eaken Press, 1981); "The McMullen and McGloin Colony, Municipality: San Patricio de Hibernia" (<http://www.tamu.edu/faculty/ccbn/dewitt/irishcolframe.htm>); "The Power and Hewetson Colony, Head Municipality: Refugio" (<http://www.tamu.edu/faculty/ccbn/dewitt/irishcolframe.htm>); *Handbook of Texas Online*, Mrs. Patrick H. Welder, "Power, James," accessed May 05, 2016, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fpo36>; *Handbook of Texas Online*, Rachel Bluntzer Hébert and William H. Oberste, "McMullen, John," accessed May 05, 2016, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fmc94>. William Oberste (1899-1973), a Catholic priest and historian based in Refugio, Texas, from 1933 to 1968, was the author of *Texas Irish Empresarios and Their Colonies* (1953). Hobart Huson, Jr. (1893-1983), a Refugio attorney and well-known regional historian, wrote *Refugio: A Comprehensive History of Refugio County from Aboriginal Times to 1955* (2 vols., 1953-1955). See: *Handbook of Texas Online*, Cathy Syverson, "Oberste, William H.," accessed May 05, 2016, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fob03>; *Handbook of Texas Online*, Robert W. Shook, "Huson, Hobart, Jr.," accessed May 05, 2016, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/thu62>. Irishmen continued to play an important role in Civil War Texas as well. Edward T. Cotham, Jr., *Sabine Pass: The Confederacy's Thermopylae* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004) discusses this important battle, including the role of Richard "Dick" Dowling of Houston, who led an Irish artillery unit called the Davis Guards at the 1863 battle.

5 There are many historical parallels between the history of Northern Ireland and South Texas. In this sense, Fischer's controversial "borderlands" approach to the history of the Scotch-Irish offers an interesting and relevant methodological comparison for historians of the Spanish borderlands.

6 See: "Origins of the Alamo Defenders," http://www.tamu.edu/faculty/ccbn/dewitt/adp/history/1836/the_battle/the_texians/origins.html. The precise origin of several Alamo defenders is not known, leading to some uncertainty about the figures. Alamo scholars estimate that a substantial number of the defenders whose origins are unknown were British subjects and many of them Irish. Those known to have been born in Ireland include Samuel E. Burns, Andrew Duval, Robert Evans, Joseph M. Hawkins, William Daniel Jackson, James McGee, James Nowlan, Jackson J. Rusk, Burke Trammel, and William B. Ward. Several of these men are believed to have originated in Ulster. This is a surprisingly contentious subject. See: Scotch-Irish-L Archives, 1999-09, at www.rootsweb.com. See also: <http://www.scotland.org/features/the-alamo-and-the-scots/>; <http://www.ulsterancestry.com/news-letter-content.php?id=195>; <http://www.txscot.com/history/early-texas-scots/>.

Philip Fry (*Handbook of Texas Online*, Phillip L. Fry, "Irish," accessed May 05, 2016, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/pii01>) notes that there were twenty-five Irish signers of the Goliad Declaration of Independence and four Irish signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence.

7 Alicia A. Garza and Christopher Long, "BROWNSVILLE, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hdb04>), accessed January 12, 2016. Uploaded on June 12, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

8 Alicia A. Garza, "MCALLEN, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hdm01>), accessed January 12, 2016. Uploaded on June 15, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association. In 2013, the McAllen-Hidalgo-Reynosa International Bridge was estimated as the 7th busiest port of entry to the United States (247wallst.com). For a discussion of the Irish participation in the Mexican-American War, see: Dennis J. Wynn, *The San Patricios and the United States-Mexican War of 1846-1848* (Ph.D. Diss., Loyola University of Chicago, 1982, 219 pp.) Wynn tells the story of these Irish immigrants serving in the U.S. Army who became so angry with the anti-Catholic bigotry they experienced that they switched sides and became the San Patricio battalion of the Mexican Army. Those captured by General Winfield Scott were hanged; those not captured became heroes in Mexico. A recent published account, with details of the Irishmen who remained in Mexico following the war, is Peter Stevens, *The Rogue's March: John Riley and the St. Patrick's Battalion, 1846-1848* (Potomac Books, 2005). See also Michael Hogan, *The Irish Soldiers of Mexico*, first published in 1997. Hogan's book, since reprinted several times, became the basis for a popular motion picture dealing with the subject.

9 These figures were previously published in Thomas Daniel Knight, "Immigration to South Texas, 1850-1900", in Milo Kearney, Anthony Knopp, and Antonio Zavaleta, eds., *Still More Studies in Rio Grande Valley History* (Brownsville: The University of Texas at Brownsville, 2014), pp. 49-97. See also Gerhard Grytz, "German Immigrants in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1850-1920: A Demographic Overview," in Milo Kearney, Anthony Knopp, and Antonio Zavaleta, eds., *Studies in Rio Grande Valley History* (University of Texas—Brownsville, 2005), pp. 145-167. Although Grytz focuses on German immigration, he also examined other groups.

10 Knight, "Immigration to South Texas;" See also Grytz, "German Immigration."

11 Adán Benavides, Jr., "TEJANO," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/pft07>), accessed January 12, 2016. Uploaded on June 15, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

12 For an analysis of this sort, one might refer to the folkways model employed by David Hackett Fischer in *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

13 In addition to Fischer's account, see also Patrick Griffin, *The People With No Name: Ireland's Ulster Scots, America's Scots Irish, and the Creation of the British Atlantic World, 1689-1764* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) as well as James Leyburn's classic *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962). See also William V. Shannon, *The American Irish: A Political and Social Portrait* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989); David T. Gleeson, *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); and David T. Gleeson, *The Green and the Grey: The Irish in the Confederate States of America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

14 M. M. Amberson, James A. McAllen, and Margaret H. McAllen, *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas: A History of the Lower Rio Grande Valley and the People of the Santa Anita Land Grant* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2003), pp. 456, 565, FN 28. Amberson and McAllen's study offers the definitive history of the McAllen Ranch as well as of the family of John and Salome Ballí McAllen. I am grateful to the Texas State Historical Association for permission to quote from this volume.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 131-146, esp. p. 142. The McAllens were living in Glendermott Parish as late as 1834. John McAllen later recorded that his mother Elizabeth died in 1831 or 1834. He identified his grandmother as Sarah Logue, who was from a village near Ardmore known as Logue. See Amberson et al., p. 564, FN 2. For more on McAllen's background, see *Ibid.*, p. 565, FN 28. John McAllen claimed that his grandfather had "drifted" to Logue's Hill, where he married one of two sisters who were daughters and co-heirs of the owner of "the hill." See: John McAllen to Haugherty relatives, undated fragment, but c. 1906, John McAllen Papers, McAllen Ranch Archives, cited in Amberson et al., *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas*, p. 566, FN 29. McAllen also wrote that an earlier ancestor, surnamed Daugharty, had taken part in the Siege of Londonderry. The Daughartys married into the Logue family, and "those of the hill were Daugherty logues." One tradition McAllen recorded was that "Prince Chas. Stewart after his defeat in 1745, he came by Lough Fayel and up through glendermot with Flora McDonall and stopped at doharty to rest..." The prince was nursed by "our grate, grate grandmother and from there made his escape through the maintains where he escaped to France. Only tradition...but some may be true." See: John McAllen to Walter Haugherty, undated fragment, John McAllen Papers, McAllen Ranch Archives, cited in Amberson et al., *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas*, p. 566, FN 35. Hugh McCallion (1800-c.1847) married Rose Dougherty (1809-1884), which provided a second McCallion-Dougherty connection. While they were likely unrelated, it is notable that John McAllen had a close relationship with Irishmen Edward and William Dougherty in South Texas.

16 For Jackson's background, see Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, and Robert Remini, *Andrew Jackson: The Course of American Empire (1767-1821)* (1977). This was the first of Remini's three-volume biography of Jackson, which was later distilled into *The Life of Andrew Jackson* (1988). See Amberson et al., *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas*, p. 131.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 131-145, 224, 255-256.

18 John McAllen Memoir, c. 1900, McAllen Store Ledger, McAllen Ranch Archives, quoted in Amberson et al., *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas*, p. 142. See also pp. 131-145. The hotel's owner was one Edward Clegg. McAllen later worked as a "clerk with an old Irish man by name of M. McMahan." *Ibid.*, p. 149.

19 Daniel Walker Howe, *What God Hath Wrought: A History of the United States, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

20 *Handbook of Texas Online*, Alicia A. Garza and Christopher Long, "Brownsville, TX," accessed May 03, 2016, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hdb04>; *Handbook of Texas Online*, Garna L. Christian, "Rio Grande City, TX," accessed May 03, 2016, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/HFR05>.

21 The original town Edinburgh was renamed Hidalgo later in the nineteenth-century. In the early twentieth-century, a new town was created about twenty-miles northeast of the original site and given the original name. The final "h" was omitted from the new spelling, however, and the town's name came to be pronounced with a hard "g" — Edinburg. See Amberson et al., p. 66, for a discussion of Young's background. Young had arrived in America in 1828 and had reached the Rio Grande Valley in 1845 after having been involved in the McMullen-McGloin colony.

22 Amberson et al., *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas*, pp. 174-184.

23 *Ibid.*, esp. pp. 174-176. See also Thomas Daniel Knight, "Dona Rosa Maria Hinojosa de Ballí and Her Family: A Lower Rio Grande Valley Family in an Atlantic Perspective," in Milo Kearney, Anthony Knopp, Antonio Zavaleta, and Thomas Daniel Knight, eds., *Yet More Studies in Rio Grande Valley History* (Brownsville: The University of Texas at Brownsville, 2015), pp. 109-138, and Thomas Daniel Knight, "The Origins of Salome Ballí McAllen," in Milo Kearney, Anthony Knopp, Antonio Zavaleta, and Thomas Daniel Knight, eds., *Extra Studies in Rio Grande Valley History* (Brownsville and Edinburg: The University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley, 2016). Interestingly, the McAllen-Ballí marriage was one of several unions between Irishmen and Mexican, Tejano, or Mexican-American women. Edward married Marcela Garcia, and his brother William Daughtery married Eloisa Vela. Daniel Louis McGraw married (or had an extra-marital relationship with) a woman named Dolores Serna, from Old Guerrero, a town along the Rio Grande that

was later covered by Falcon Lake. The McGraw-Serna union produced two sons, Santiago and Daniel. The boys were adopted by the family of Francisco and Felicitas Trevino Yturria, a wealthy but childless couple. Santiago died as a child, but Daniel Yturria, who married Ysabel Garica, became heir to the vast Yturria fortune and head of this prominent family. See: Frank Daniel Yturria, *The Patriarch* (Brownsville: UTB-TSC, 2006), p. 57. Additional proof of the adoption is found in *Texas Reports: Texas Supreme Court, Cases Argued and Decided in the Supreme Court of Texas*, Vol. 109 (Austin: State of Texas, 1920), Vol. 109, pp. 223-224. Men who served in the San Patricio Battalion also left many descendants in Texas and Mexico.

24 Salome's tombstone, in Brownsville's Old Cemetery, gives her birthdate as 1830, but baptismal records from Matamoros, Mexico, show that she was actually born earlier than that. See Amberson et al., *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas* and Knight, "The Origins of Salome Ballí McAllen."

25 Amberson et al., *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas*, esp. pp. 176-177. See also Knight, "Dona Rosa Maria Hinojosa Ballí," and Knight, "The Origins of Salome Ballí McAllen."

26 Amberson et al., *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas*, pp. 224, 255-256, 270, 279-280. McAllens's sister Sara McAllen Gill (1828-1878) lived in Philadelphia. Sara is buried in Cathedral Cemetery in West Philadelphia. Her daughter Janet married David Franklin Engle but remained in Philadelphia. Her son James came to South Texas and died in Matamoros, Mexico, near Brownsville, in 1901. The 1860 Philadelphia Co., PA, Census, Philadelphia Ward 24, Precinct 7, HH 519/619 showed the family. James Gill, 38, Ireland, was a gardener with no property. Sarah Gill, 35, Ireland, was a Dairy Woman. The couple had a six months old daughter, Mary, born in Pennsylvania. The 1870 Philadelphia Co., PA, Census, Philadelphia, Ward 8, District 22, Census, HH 4, showed the family. James Gill was shown as age 50; Sara was shown as age 40. Four children were shown: Mary, 11; Jane, 9; James, 8; and John, 6. Jane ("Jennie") Engle's 1913 Philadelphia Death Certificate identifies her parents as James Gill and Sarah McAllen, both natives of Ireland.

27 1850 U. S. Census, Slave Schedule, Cameron, Webb, and Starr Counties; Amberson et al., *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas*, pp. 255-289.

28 Amberson et al., *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas*, pp. 279-280, 297, 310. See also: Legislative Reference Library: Texas Legislators: Past & Present (<http://www.lrl.state.tx.us/mobile/memberDisplay.cfm?memberID=4119>). The 1870 census recorded the McAllen family twice, once in Hidalgo County (where the Santa Anita Ranch was located) and once in Cameron County (where the McAllens maintained an urban residence in Brownsville). The census enumeration provides an evaluation of McAllen's wealth. The Hidalgo County enumeration showed that he was a Stock Raiser with personal property and real estate together valued at \$41,900. The Cameron County

enumeration showed that McAllen was a farmer with personal property and real estate together valued at \$30,000. The Hidalgo County enumeration showed McAllen born in Ireland; the Cameron County enumeration showed him born in Scotland. See 1870 Hidalgo Co., TX, Census, Population Schedule, HH 19/18; 1870 Cameron Co., TX, Census, Brownsville, Ward 2, HH 392/376.

29 Amberson et al., *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas*, pp. 336-340, 424-429. Much local power was in the hands of the Irish-American community during the 1880s. Edward Dougherty, born in Ireland in 1819, served in the Texas legislature from 1859 to 1861. He also held several local offices prior to his death about 1877. Dougherty immigrated to New York from County Caven in 1820 with his parents; he came to Texas in 1846 as a soldier in the Second United States Dragoons. He married Marcela Garcia in 1847 and reared a large family. See: *Handbook of Texas Online*, J. L. Bryan, "Dougherty, Edward," accessed May 05, 2016, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fdopy>. Edward's brother William also came to the Rio Grande Valley, where he married Eloisa Vela and became a prominent citizen. The family is discussed extensively in John J. Leffler, *Refuge on the Rio Grande: A Regional History of Bentzen-Rio Grande Valley State Park* (Texas Parks and Wildlife Division, 2013). The Doughertys and their Leo descendants continued to be prominent in South Texas politics well into the twentieth-century. The 1880 populations schedule did not provide a summary of McAllen's wealth to compare with his political standing at the time. He was enumerated in Hidalgo County at the Santa Anita Ranch and was shown as a Stock Raiser; the census indicated that McAllen was born in Ireland with both parents born in Scotland. See 1880 Hidalgo Co., Census, Conception Rancho-Santa Anita Rancho, HH 374/374.

30 Amberson et al., *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas*, pp. 391. Although superseded by *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas*, Florence Johnson Scott's *Historical Heritage of the Rio Grande Valley* (San Antonio: Naylor Company, 1937) and *Royal Land Grants North of the Rio Grande, 1771-1821* (Waco: Texian Press, 1969) provide older and still useful accounts of the development of the important ranches along the Rio Grande, among them the McAllen holdings.

31 Amberson et al., pp. 413-420. McAllen's correspondent's included his cousin Tom McCallion (1840-), who married Rose Kilgore (1841-1910). Tom and Rose remained in Ireland, but Tom's son Hugh (b. 1869) and daughter Flora both settled in New York.

32 John McAllen to Margaret Rhode, 3 July 1903, Ireland, John McAllen Papers, McAllen Ranch Archives, as cited in Amberson et al., *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas*, p. 605, FN 71. Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Special Sorrows: The Diasporic Imagination of Irish, Polish, and Jewish Immigrants in the United States* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 24, 25, 59, 128, focuses on the theme of "Irish suffering" and "the Irish exile." See also

Leonore Loeb Adler, Uwe Peter Gielen, eds., *Migration: Immigration and Emigration in International Perspective* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003), p. 106-107, which references the “collective longing for the rural lifestyle of the Ireland they had left.” McAllen’s letters from his Irish visit and his subsequent correspondence with Irish relatives exhibits these same themes, as well as the idea of exploitation and loss. McAllen—who had prospered greatly in America—seems to have romanticized his memory of Ireland although not of his own youth as a “slave” there.

33 Amberson et al., *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas*, p. 418.

34 John McAllen to Margaret Rhode, 13 July 1903, Ireland, John McAllen Papers, McAllen Ranch Archives, cited in Amberson et al., *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas*, p. 605, FN 72.

35 John McAllen to Tom McCallin, July 1908, Brownsville, John McAllen Papers, McAllen Ranch Archives, cited in *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas*, p. 611, FN 76.

36 Jacobson, *Special Sorrows*, pp. 219, 240, argues that the “diasporic imagination” created a “spirit which lays claim to America as home while remaining engaged in the struggles and the ideals of a distant homeland.” McAllen’s Irish visit seems to have marked a turning point in his thinking. The reality of Ireland in 1903 had fallen short of his expectations. While McAllen’s subsequent correspondence reflects an interest in Ireland and his kin there, it lacks the strong sense of personal connection that McAllen’s letters from June 1903—prior to his visit to his old home at Glendermott—exhibited.

37 Thomas McCallin to John McAllen, undated, John McAllen Papers, McAllen Ranch Archives, cited in Amberson et al., *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas*, p. 605, FN 73, 74.

38 Amberson et al., *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas*, pp. 413-420, 455-457. Writing to a cousin in Ireland, McAllen described his grandchildren as “half duch, half Scotch Irish and Mexican, a strange mixture” Ibid., p. 456, FN 72, citing John McAllen to Tom McCallin, 30 January 1905, Brownsville, John McAllen Papers, McAllen Ranch Archives.

39 Amberson et al., *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas*, p. 461. See McAllen’s Death Certificate at Texas Deaths, 1890-1976 (<http://familysearch.org/ark:/61905/5:1:55SQ-GY1Z-5LR>). McAllen’s obituary in the Brownsville Herald (Brownsville Herald, 18 February 1913) describes immigration from Ireland but focuses primarily on his accomplishments in South Texas.

40 Amberson et al., *I Would Rather Sleep in Texas*, p. 456.

41 Haisten Willis, “Dynamic, Fast Growth Comes to the Four-County Area of ‘Rio South Texas’”, Posted 7 August 2015 (See: rebusline.com/dynamic-fast-growth-comes-to-the-four-county-area).

Joseph Kleiber and His Letter Press Book

by

**Anthony K. Knopp
and Alma Ortiz Knopp**

In 1860, Joseph Kleiber purchased the Webb Drug Store, the only drugstore in the frontier town of Brownsville.¹ Little did he anticipate the cataclysmic upheaval that the Civil War would visit upon Brownsville and his own life and business. Nor could he anticipate the opportunity that he would have after the war to play the crucial role in the creation of the first railroad to service the city.

Joseph Kleiber was born in 1833 in Strasbourg, Alsace-Lorraine. He was a nephew of Napoleon's Marshall Jean-Baptiste Kléber, an illustrious figure in French military history. At the age of thirteen, together with three brothers, Kleiber immigrated to the United States. After living for a time in New Orleans, he relocated to Point Isabel (today Port Isabel), where he married Emma Henrietta Butler, daughter of sea captain and merchant John R. Butler, in 1856. The Kleibers eventually had five children; daughter Pauline would marry James B. Wells, future political "Boss" of Brownsville and South Texas.²

Despite the initial impression of the likelihood of minimal competition, Kleiber opened his doors at an unpropitious hour—the eve of the Civil War. A Confederate sympathizer, Kleiber saw his prospects prosper at the beginning of the war. In June of 1861, the U.S. postmaster, Gilbert Kingsbury (often better known by his pen name, F. F. Fenn) was besieged by Confederates and fled to Matamoros, and his position was assumed by Kleiber. From his store, Kleiber procured and sold war material critical to the Confederate cause and participated in the blockade-running cotton trade through Matamoros. When Union forces captured Brownsville, in 1863, Kleiber

moved with his family to Matamoros, where he continued to live for a few years after the end of the war.³

Upon his return to Brownsville, Joseph Kleiber resumed his mercantile activities. The pre-war confluence of economic interests and political factionalism re-emerged, and Kleiber found himself a member of the faction opposing the Stillman, Kennedy, and King steamboat transportation monopoly. Kleiber has been described as the “driving force” in organizing and directing the successful campaign to build a railroad from the Gulf Coast to Brownsville.⁴

Kleiber resigned from the railroad in 1874, relocated to Austin, and dealt in real estate in Central Texas. He died in 1877 and was buried in the Brownsville City Cemetery. His descendants intermarried with the Wells, Woodhouse, Vivier, Browne, Landrum, Combes, Hicks, and Powers families, “the clan that would dominate Brownsville’s politics” throughout that era.⁵

The story of Joseph Kleiber is even more significant for an understanding and appreciation of the Civil War period and its aftermath than his biography would indicate, due to the preservation of his correspondence. Kleiber’s letters, and some by his brother, Emile, are available to researchers in the form of the *Joseph Kleiber Letter Press*, covering the period from 1860 to 1876.⁶ The “Joseph Kleiber Papers” are archived at the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin in the form of the letter press book and four typescript copies.⁷ Additional copies are in the possession of the University of Texas - Rio Grande Valley Library and the Brownsville Historical Association.

Of course, the original documents were hand-written in the pre-typewriter era. Apparently family members decided to reproduce the content of the original letters in print form using letterpress. Prior to the 1950s, letterpress had been the predominant form of printing for almost 500 years, beginning with Gutenberg. Essentially this method involves inking a surface with raised letters and pressing the surface to paper or other substrate.⁸

The "original in possession of J. K. Wells" was the source of the various copies of the letterpress book, although it is not clear whether Wells provided the original letterpress book or the hand-written letters themselves. John H. Hunter, a noted Brownsville historian, claimed that the original letters were in the archives of the University of Texas (Austin). In 1939, Hunter obtained the letters from the archives with the permission of the Kleiber family and read a number of them to a meeting of the Brownsville Rotary Club. The archives at present do not report possession of the original letters. In any case, the University of Texas obtained the letterpress book in 1932 through the efforts of J. Evetts Haley, an accomplished West Texas author and historian with a long relationship with the university.⁹

The Kleiber letters are highly important for piecing together an accurate portrayal of Civil War-Era Brownsville. John H. Hunter was fascinated by the letters and well-aware of their historical significance. In his introduction, appended to his copy of the letterpress book in 1961, Hunter wrote that he had "read and re-read [the letters] many times, and each time I find new facets of Brownsville's past reflected by them."¹⁰ A businessman himself, Hunter concluded that Kleiber was "first, last, and always a businessman." Hunter clearly admired Kleiber for his business acumen as well as his business ethics. "He was considerate but firm with his debtors, while, at the same time, scrupulously honest and straight-forward with his creditors." Hunter also considered Kleiber admirable for his personal relationships: "His relationship with his family is touching. He always seemed to have time to help a friend who needed him. He held his friends through good years and bad."¹¹

Joseph Kleiber's letters begin in October of 1860, the early days of his new drugstore enterprise. In the diverse society of the Rio Grande Valley, Kleiber found it beneficial to be able to communicate in Spanish and French as well as English. Many of the early letters consisted of orders for merchandise to be sent from New Orleans. Many items ordered were patent medicines

or other items with exotic or bizarre labels. On October 24, for example, Kleiber's order to "Messrs. E. B. Wheelock & Co" of New Orleans involved five gallons of "Balsam Capaiba," "6 Iodid Potash," and "1 doz. Henry's Genuine Magnesia."¹² On November 7, an order to "Messrs. J. Wright & Co" of New Orleans called for shipment of "3 doz. Osgoods India Chologogne for fever," "3 doz. T. Marmays Sanitary gruel," and "3 doz. Norwoods Tinct of Veratium Verdi," among others.¹⁵ Such was the state of pharmacology in that era that there was no independent process of verifying the efficacy of the products sold by drugstores.

Many of the letters involve correspondence with doctors and store owners in the smaller communities farther inland along the Rio Grande. Usually these consisted of invoices for orders for drugs and sundries or requests for payment. Several of the letters were signed by Kleiber's brother, Emile; another brother was a partner in the firm of Butler and Kleiber in Point Isabel (Port Isabel), while the senior partner, Captain John R. Butler, had been Joseph's father in-law (Butler had died in 1858). Apparently Butler and Kleiber handled the shipping operation for Joseph Kleiber and others, as Kleiber's letters usually involved large remittances to the Point Isabel firm.¹⁴

Kleiber's prospering drug trade soon fell under the shadow of an impending Civil War. In the early months of 1861, Brownsville sent three pro-secession delegates to the Texas state convention that approved secession, and Union forces peacefully withdrew from Fort Brown.¹⁵ The unsettled conditions accompanying the beginning of the war soon took a toll on Rio Grande Valley commerce. By mid-April, Kleiber was informing his up-river clients of the complete stagnation of business.¹⁶ A prescient Kleiber had foreseen the rise in prices causing the stagnation. In a late March letter, Kleiber noted that the Confederate Congress had imposed a 24% tariff on medicines, but Kleiber claimed to have anticipated the government's need to raise revenue by laying in large supplies. Thus Kleiber would be able to "sell cheap," but "for cash."¹⁷

Businessman Kleiber, frustrated by declining income from the drug trade, probably saw income potential in patriotic government service. In a July 1, 1861, letter to J. H. Reagan, Postmaster General of the Confederate States of America, Kleiber reported that the local postmaster, pro-Union F. F. Fenn (Gilbert Kingsbury) had been replaced by Kleiber with the support of "principal citizens," including Col. John S. "Rip" Ford, Confederate military commander.¹⁸ The challenges of the position soon became apparent, however. Kleiber wrote Reagan, on July 14, that Cristobal Benavidez, the mail contractor for the Laredo route, had ceased carrying mail due to lack of pay for seven months. Kleiber had been unable to find a replacement.¹⁹

Both challenge and financial opportunity for Joseph Kleiber appeared with the establishment of the Union blockade of the lower Texas Gulf Coast, including Point Isabel, in July of 1861. As early as September 2, Kleiber had engaged to acquire gunpowder and shot for Gonzalez County. He had found both in Matamoros, but "the supply [was] low and prices high." He claimed that he would "not make much" on the gunpowder, but that he was "as anxious to furnish the powder as I am to make money."²⁰

By November of 1861, Kleiber was directly billing the Confederacy for arms and ammunition in the amount of \$3,842. Shortly thereafter, he was engaged in the trading and transportation of coffee and had come to recognize the potential of cotton trading.²¹ Kleiber sought profit from high prices, but also recognized the danger for his drug business. On January 26, 1862, he requested that an order for "Drugs, chemicals, perfumery & surgical instruments" be filled in England, where they would "cost about 50% less," in that "many of these articles are not to be had at any price" in the Confederate States.²²

Kleiber had an additional reason to seek lower-cost goods from abroad—competition. As soon as Kleiber had set up business in Webb's former location, "our steamboat friends immediately set up an opposition."²³ The "steamboat friends" were Charles Stillman, Mifflin Kennedy, Richard King, and their

political faction allies, who supported opening a rival drugstore.²⁴ Ironically, Kleiber and the “steamboat friends” found themselves on the same side during the Civil War.

As the war continued, and the price of and demand for cotton rose, Kleiber increased his speculation in that commodity, as well as coffee, wool, and anything else for which there was demand. Kleiber would arrange for clearance with Confederate authorities as well as transportation in crossing the cotton to Matamoros.²⁵

When Union forces occupied Brownsville, in November of 1863, Joseph Kleiber found it expedient to join his compatriots in exile in Matamoros. He would remain there for several years. From Matamoros, Kleiber continued to arrange cotton shipments for the Confederate government and his own account. He even posted his brother, Emile, in Laredo to cross cotton away from the Union-controlled crossings. But Kleiber was out of money. On May 18, 1864, Kleiber wrote that if he did not receive government reimbursements he would be “far worse off than I ever was in my life.” To a doctor in Houston, Kleiber wrote imploring him to provide promised cotton: “if I do not get it, I will be ruined and left without one cent after all my hard work.”²⁶

Reflecting on the results of the Civil War, in October 1865, Kleiber wrote, “Although the war ended in a manner contrary to my expectations, still I am glad it is over.” He claimed that his cotton losses amounted to \$50,000, although many people believed that he had acquired a fortune. Kleiber acknowledged that he had the opportunity to do so “provided I took advantage of the trust confided to me, but I have the consciousness as well as the happy consolation to know that I did not enrich myself at the expense of the sufferings of the people — I prefer my present situation to having a million and remorse.”²⁷

For Kleiber, the move to Matamoros was a case of “out of the frying pan, into the fire.” In a letter written after the end of the Civil War, Kleiber reported that “the business prospects of Matamoros are bad indeed for years to come.” This was the era

of civil war in Mexico between forces loyal to President Benito Juárez and those supporting the Emperor Maximilian and his French-occupation allies. The economic conditions were due to the civil war and banditry: “no goods or silver can be trusted on the highways The road [from Monterrey] is infested with bands of armed men under the command of several chiefs who claim to be in the service of [President Benito] Juárez.” A particularly intimidating presence was that of Juan N. Cortina, a cross-border rancher, charismatic militant, and independent military figure. Kleiber reported that Cortina was “within one mile of town nearly every night, and not a day passed without some shots being exchanged between the scouts within sight of the city”²⁸

By the end of 1866, Joseph Kleiber and his family were “getting heartily sick of this frontier and its continuous troubles.” Kleiber had been reduced to importuning friends and those who owed him money for the funds to pay his own creditors, feeling “much mortified and almost disgraced” by his situation.²⁹

Kleiber’s economic woes were magnified by “acts of God.” A severe winter involving a significant snow fall during 1866-67 was followed by a yellow fever epidemic that took the lives of a third of the Brownsville population. The catastrophe of a gigantic hurricane on October 7, 1867,³⁰ proved to be the most devastating episode for Kleiber. On November 5, Kleiber wrote two letters claiming that his Matamoros warehouse had been destroyed, along with goods amounting to \$15,000, as well as his farm “up the river.”³¹

Kleiber survived his economic challenges and returned to live in Brownsville in 1868. He still had not prospered, but his situation had stabilized to the extent that he was able to undertake the great accomplishment of his business career—the creation of the railroad line to Point Isabel. The dream of building a railroad between Point Isabel and Brownsville originated with Kleiber’s father-in-law, John R. Butler, who resided in Point Isabel and had participated in one of the earliest efforts to

build a railroad. Butler organized meetings and created a business plan to attract investors. His name appears on a charter granted by the state legislature on February 7, 1853, to build a railroad from the Laguna Madre to the Rio Grande. This early effort failed, but Captain Butler's work served as inspiration to Joseph Kleiber.³²

In 1865, General Philip Sheridan was more successful. He built a military railroad from Brazos de Santiago to White's Ranch. When its military value declined, the railroad was sold to the firm of West & Chenery for \$108,000 dollars in 1866. The new owners failed to make a commercial success of this venture, in part due to the involvement of Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy. Both men were partners in a successful steamboat business which was in direct competition with the railroad. King and Kenedy had submitted a bid of \$60,000 dollars for the railroad, but had lost to West & Chenery. King and Kenedy took advantage of their ownership of the land that housed the terminal facilities at Brazos de Santiago and the terminal facilities at White's Ranch to undermine the new owners. West & Chenery ultimately returned the railroad contract to the government, and the 1867 hurricane destroyed much of the railroad.³³

A state charter to build a railroad from Brazos de Santiago or Point Isabel to Brownsville was issued to Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy, on October 1, 1866.³⁴ They hoped the purchase would help strengthen their transportation monopoly in the area. Brownsville merchants were looking forward to the new railroad, but disappointment set in when King and Kenedy did little to develop the project. They basically bought land for the right of way and did nothing else.³⁵ For many, including Joseph Kleiber, it was apparent that King and Kenedy never meant to build the road.³⁶ By obtaining the charter they were merely trying to prevent others from building one.³⁷

Brownsville faced many economic challenges during Reconstruction. The high cost of transportation resulting from the King and Kenedy shipping monopoly resulted in a renewed

effort by several merchants to build a railroad. The principle organizer of this effort was Joseph Kleiber,³⁸ and the Kleiber letters present a window into the various financial alliances and political wrangling required to make the railroad dream a reality. In his letters, two people emerge as the main participants in his correspondence with regard to planning and strategizing the creation of the railroad, Simon Mussina and H.E. Woodhouse. Mussina was a merchant, newspaper man, and lawyer of Dutch Jewish ancestry who had been living in Galveston at the time of his involvement in the Rio Grande Valley. He had acquired property in Point Isabel during the Mexican War, had been active in the founding of Brownsville as a surveyor, and was a business partner of Charles Stillman and Samuel Belden in the Brownsville Town Company.³⁹ A conflict arose, however, with Stillman and Belden both accusing Mussina of breach of contract. Mussina would later become a member of the Blue political party along with Kleiber. Stillman and Belden were politically and economically aligned with King and Kenedy and were members of the Red political party. The Reds had substantial political and economic control in Brownsville.⁴⁰ Possibly, Mussina's past conflict with Stillman and Belden and his interests in Point Isabel led to his participation in the railroad project. Eventually, the Red Party emerged as the party of the steamboat interests, and the Blue party represented the railroad interests.⁴¹

As early as April 10, 1868, Joseph Kleiber wrote to Simon Mussina about Mussina's intention to build in Point Isabel. He explained, "If you intend building at Pt. Isabel, you will have to get all the material from abroad as there is [no] more to be had here." The military pulled out of Point Isabel under the orders of General Hartsuff, who was "determined to have the Boca Chica route via White Ranch adopted at all hazards—no matter at what cost of life or property." Although the railroad is never mentioned in this letter it is significant that Kleiber mentioned H.M. Field, who would later become the principle engineer of the project. Kleiber wrote about the possibility of Field visiting

Mussina in Galveston and that Field would conduct a survey of "the Point" on his return. This exchange between Kleiber and Mussina took place during the time that King and Kenedy held their railroad charter.⁴²

Humphrey E. Woodhouse, a Connecticut merchant, was another early partner of Charles Stillman at the time of the founding of Brownsville. Originally an employee of Samuel A. Belden in Matamoros, by August of 1848 he had opened his own store in Brownsville. During his association with Stillman they expanded their trade operations into the Mexican interior, but by 1859 he left Stillman's firm and began a successful line of packet ships which carried goods from New York to Point Isabel and Brazos de Santiago. He also owned property in Point Isabel, including a wharf and a warehouse.⁴³ Woodhouse is mentioned in a letter to Messina, on May 13, 1870. Kleiber informed Messina that the King and Kenedy railroad charter had been revoked since they had gone a year without doing "any real work." At the time, Texas was under Republican control and the Republican newspapers were highly critical of King and Kenedy's failure to move forward with the railroad project, often referring to them as part of the "'Sesesh Clique.'" Those opposed to King and Kenedy could depend on the state government's support, so the Texas Legislature revoked the King and Kenedy railroad charter in 1870.⁴⁴ In an effort to persuade Messina to solicit a railroad charter from the legislature, Kleiber also advised Mussina that Woodhouse would be an ally who would "act in concert with you, or act on his own hook and have the road built at once." Such a move against King and Kenedy would not be easy, so Kleiber attempted to convince Mussina that he would not be alone in the effort. Woodhouse would also be very helpful since, as Kleiber explained, he could "easily obtain all the stock subscriptions wanted in New York and New Orleans." Kleiber understood that the railroad project would be in direct opposition to the King and Kenedy steamboat operations and thus advised Mussina that the commissioners listed on the railroad charter should "not belong to the steamboat company."⁴⁵

Discretion was also advised since Woodhouse's role was to be kept secret. He explained to Mussina that it was imperative to keep Woodhouse's name out of anything involving the railroad, especially the charter. Woodhouse feared retaliation from King and Kenedy against his shipping interests if his involvement with the railroad project was discovered. He told Mussina that if King and Kenedy knew he had "connived" with Mussina they could "injure him seriously in many ways." He further mentioned the need for selecting commissioners for the railroad and that the only criteria should be that they "not belong to the Steamboat Co. & to Stillman & Belden." Kleiber had already provided some names to Woodhouse for consideration and he was quite sure that none of them would "'play into the hands of the enemy.'" In this letter, Kleiber attempted to convince Mussina to support the project by touting its economic viability, predicting that the amount of business would be "at least double of what it would have been before the war" and that it "would pay better than any other in the country."⁴⁶

King and Kenedy did not go quietly and fought to retain their charter. They filed two "obstructive lawsuits" in an attempt to stop the future Rio Grande Railroad Co. Before the lawsuits, King and Kenedy tried to get an extension of their charter through the legislature on the grounds that they had started work within the twelve months. Kleiber was informed of this by a Mr. Downey, an associate of King and Kenedy. In a letter to Mussina, Kleiber recounted how Kenedy, Belden and Downey with some Mexican workers had gone to where the railroad would have ended in Brownsville and "threw up an embankment of some 40 or 50 yards of the proposed road . . . the parties performing such an operation must either be fools or knaves . . . it proves their bad faith." He urged Mussina to continue working to procure the charter and concluded with the following: "if you want to see the iron horse travel over Palo Alto prairie in your lifetime, now is the time to strike."⁴⁷

On August 13, 1870, Kleiber's efforts proved successful. A new charter was issued with the help of State Representative

F. Schlickum, to whom Kleiber wrote for support, in June 24, 1870. In a letter to Mussina, dated September 3, 1870, Kleiber enclosed a thank-you letter for Schlickum and communicated the "commotion" created by the publishing their new railroad charter in the *Ranchero* newspaper. The publisher of the *Ranchero*, Henry Maltby, agreed to publish the charter only after Kleiber threatened to go to the competition, the *Sentinel*, owned by Rip Ford, for publication. Kleiber wrote Mussina, "Maltby belongs to the steamboats -- so does Ford." Kleiber perceived this as a continuation of the competition with the steamboat interests when he added, "I have given [Maltby] to understand that no one-horse newspaper of a one-horse town could either write down or write up any enterprise . . . he had better let us alone." When Maltby refused to invest in the railroad, Kleiber told Mussina, "I told him I did not care whether he or anyone else in all [Brownsville] did."⁴⁸

Kleiber was named secretary of the railroad and took his position seriously, devoting his time and energy to undertaking of the project.⁴⁹ He asked Rep. Schlickum to request an extension from the legislature, since a "quarantine" order had been placed preventing several of the "incorporated from getting to Brownsville." He also wrote people outside of Brownsville asking for copies of by-laws to use as models for the incorporation of the railroad. In one of those letters, Kleiber listed some of his duties as secretary and the difficulties he faced in the position when he explained, "As I am the secretary the work devolves upon me to prepare By-laws—obtain the necessary books, blank forms of certificates, & c—As nothing of the kind exists in this part of the world I must obtain them abroad." In that same letter, Kleiber proclaimed himself to be the "projector of this movement" and added that the railroad would "be built & [would] break up the steamboat monopoly."⁵⁰

One of the major decisions for the Rio Grande Valley Railroad Company was whether to build a standard-gauge or a narrow-gauge railroad. Kleiber played a principal role in this

decision. In a letter to a Galveston businessman, Kleiber wrote, "We have heard some little, sometime ago and lately a great deal about narrow guage [*sic*] railroads—the difference in cost of building and the reduced expense of running, . . . I have heard that a narrow guage [*sic*] road company has been organized in Houston . . . please see if they are willing to give any information they have on the subject." ⁵¹ So Kleiber began his research into the subject and solicited information from various sources which led to the decision by the Rio Grande Railroad Company to opt for a narrow-gauge railroad.⁵²

Kleiber believed that the weather conditions at the time were optimal for railroad construction. The drought had lowered the river level and had hurt farmers and ranchers, so "labor was cheap and easily obtained" and it "would make it an easy job for leveling, draining, hauling ties."⁵³ Kleiber also tried to recruit Mexican investors, held organizational meetings, and continued his lobbying efforts with the legislature through Mussina. He wrote Mussina, "I am doing all I can—You must do your share." He warned him, "Do not tell anything I say or write about Railroad to any Brownsvillians in Austin." King and Kenedy interests were still trying to get an extension on their charter through the legislature.⁵⁴

The battle between the steamboat interests and the railroad developed into a proxy war in Austin. In an effort to stop the King and Kenedy team from obtaining an extension of their charter and to obtain the necessary additional legislation required for the railroad, Kleiber decided to align himself with the Republicans in Austin and solicited help from Governor E. J. Davis himself. Governor Davis would prove a very helpful ally to the railroad interests in Brownsville.⁵⁵ In a private memorandum to Frank Cummings, Kleiber directed him to tell Governor Davis to push through the legislation needed, and in regards to the charter extension for King and Kenedy, "such application should be refused - they have had ample time and land subsidies to do the work if they were honest in holding a

charter." Kleiber added, "whatever power or influence we may possess will be thrown in favor of Gov. Davis all along the R. Grande Valley."⁵⁶ The Rio Grande Railroad Company charter was obtained, and the company was permanently organized, on May 22, 1871. The officers were Simon Celaya, President, F. Armendariz, Treasurer, Joseph Kleiber, Secretary, and H.M. Field, Engineer. Some of the stockholders listed were Woodhouse, Cummings, Antonio Longoria, Nestor Maxan (their attorney) and newspaper editors John S. Ford and H.A. Maltby. Apparently Ford and Maltby had "seen the light."⁵⁷

Yet, King and Kenedy continued their pursuit of an extension of their charter through the legislature, and Kleiber, who assumed that the legislation was stuck in committee, was instead apprised that it was indeed moving forward. Kleiber responded to the news from Mussina, writing that, "If the extension of time to the old charter is not defeated we will not build the road . . . [w]hat has happened in Austin is outrageous."⁵⁸ Although Davis had previously been employed as an attorney who had worked to defend the interests of Richard King from litigation for several years as a law partner of Stephen Powers,⁵⁹ Davis vetoed the King and Kenedy charter extension. Kleiber wrote a letter to Governor Davis sharing information about the officers of the company, their compliance with the charter, the seriousness of their intentions to construct the railroad, and the economic standing of the company, and also thanked Governor Davis for his veto. Kleiber wrote to Governor Davis that the members of the company, "[had] read your Veto message with great pleasure. " He also shared with Davis that they had fifty-five stockholders and planned to recruit more from the border communities and the city of Monterrey, Mexico. The company wanted to ensure the success of the railroad by getting as many small investors as possible and achieve buy-in from the surrounding communities.⁶⁰

Indeed, once word of the Davis veto reached Kleiber, the Rio Grande Railroad Company marched full steam ahead. A set of by-laws for the company was written, stockholders

were documented, and H.E. Woodhouse and Simon Celaya were named commissioners entailed to travel to New York to buy materials for the construction of the railroad, including the engines. Even a company seal was ordered in New York. Twelve men were hired to clear the route all the way to Brownsville with the intention of hiring up to two-hundred workers to "grade the road." Kleiber in his letter to Woodhouse and Celaya explained that the drought had left many "*ranchero*," desperate to take whatever work was offered. Kleiber figured they could easily get all the workers they needed at 62½ cents per day. It was decided that mesquite trees would be used to make the railroad ties.⁶¹ This material had never been used for this purpose before. It was later written that the owner of the Morgan Steamship Line, Charles Morgan, had visited Point Isabel, in 1875, and had been impressed by their use in railroad construction.⁶² Kleiber himself offered to donate the mesquite trees off his land free of charge to the company. "I have thousands of trees . . . that will make the best mudsills for the trestle work that can be had anywhere," he wrote. It was also decided that the railroad route would be "as straight a line as possible between the two towns."⁶³ That decision later jeopardized the success of the railroad since the route ran across several areas of marsh land which necessitated the building of several sections of trestles and wooden bridges. At the time of construction a severe drought, mentioned earlier, facilitated the construction, but three hurricanes struck the area several years later and washed away several miles of trestles and bridges and placed the company in financial difficulties.⁶⁴

The King and Kenedy forces made another attempt to stop the railroad. The news was shared with Mussina that "there is a movement on foot to obtain exclusive control of the Govt. wharf at Brazos either by King, Kenedy & Co. or Chas. Morgan." Kleiber believed that the purpose was to deny the Rio Grande Railroad the ability to use the wharf, which at the time was under military control and was essential to the

railroad operation. Kleiber immediately moved into action and asked Mussina to investigate the veracity of the claim and to begin a lobbying effort with Mussina's military contracts to stop the King and Kenedy forces from obtaining the wharf.⁶⁵ Mussina's contacts proved effective. In a letter to Mussina three months later Kleiber thanked Mussina for his "attention to the wharf matter." He also shared that they had "assurances from Washington that nothing will be done." A dynamic emerged with Kleiber alerting Mussina or Woodhouse of new plots by the King and Kenedy interests and Mussina and Woodhouse mobilizing their contacts in Austin or Washington, D.C., to foil their efforts.⁶⁶

Kleiber and the railroad interests decided to go on the offensive. In a letter to Woodhouse, Kleiber discussed going after the government transportation contract in direct competition with King and Kenedy. Their bid was for the route from Brazos de Santiago to Brownsville.⁶⁷ In order to get the contract, Kleiber got the military to accept bids "by land," not just by water, enlisted J.B. Lacoste (an acquaintance of George Brulay, a local plantation owner) as an agent to help lobby the military for the contract, and encouraged the use of code and secrecy when telegraphing each other to protect against King and Kenedy spying. Their efforts did not pay off, as King and Kenedy were given the contract since they submitted the lowest bid. In a letter to Woodhouse, Kleiber explained that if their bid was not successful they would still be responsible for forcing King and Kenedy to offer a very low bid. Kleiber also shared some Matamoros gossip telling Woodhouse, "Doña Petra (Kenedy's wife) is going to lend El Capitan her money she has in Europe so as to enable him to build an opposition railroad from Brazos to Br'ville. The Mexicans believe this yarn."⁶⁸ In another letter to Woodhouse, he reported that the winning King and Kenedy bid was in reality a "looseing [*sic*] business," and he shared that "Kenedy looks terribly blue lately. It makes me feel sorry to see him."⁶⁹

Kleiber, in a letter to Woodhouse, also described a confrontation that took place between Kenedy and José San Román, a principal

supporter of the railroad. Kleiber wrote, "Kenedy butten-holed San Román last Sunday evening for several hours . . . [and] he meant to make war to the knife, Steamboat vs. R.R." San Román responded that he was not interested in "war" and that he wanted "to sell his steamboat share and not go into any ruinuous [*sic*] opposition." Kenedy calmed down and told San Román that the railroad folks should not have "steamboated against him." This is a reference to the Rio Grande Valley Railroad Company's purchase and operation of the *S. T. Lee*, a steamboat to be used to ferry materials for the railroad but which was also competing for freight with the King and Kenedy steamboats. The *S. T. Lee* was expensive to operate, and its purchase and operation was a source of disagreement between the business partners.⁷⁰ Another Kenedy attempt to undermine the railroad was his purchasing of railroad shares from a previous owner and suing to get his shares recognized. At issue was the railroad's insistence that the shares were not transferable, which resulted in a further lawsuit by Kenedy to get his shares recognized.⁷¹

As the action continued in the courts, the railroad was nearing completion. Kleiber wrote Mussina, "[We] have two locomotives & 25 cars now being set up at Point Isabel."⁷² The Rio Grande Railroad Company started operations, in the summer of 1872, with some sources claiming that the first passengers rode the rails on July 4, 1872. A *Poor's Manual* from 1890 listed the completion of eight miles of track by 1872 and the rest completed in 1873. A legal battle involving the Brownsville City Council concerning a city ordinance to give the railroad the right of way prevented the railroad from entering the city of Brownsville. This issue was decided by the Supreme Court in 1881.⁷³

Joseph Kleiber worked tirelessly for over five years to make the Rio Grande Railroad a reality. On August 8, 1874, Kleiber severed his ties with the company in a letter written to José San Román with the only the following: "Owing to action of some Directors, I cannot with proper self-respect remain in employ of Railroad."⁷⁴ There is evidence that the break was not amicable.

In May of 1875, Kleiber wrote the Treasurer of the Railroad Company requesting that the payment of \$50 dollars to a Mr. J.F. Enking be taken out of his salary. Kleiber had hired Enking to take care of some of the bookkeeping during his exit from the company. The railroad company refused to pay unless the money was to be taken from Kleiber's salary.⁷⁵ Kleiber described his life while in the midst of the railroad business to Woodhouse and Simon Celaya in the following way: "In conclusion I can assure you that the road will be built if money and energy can do it. I work hard every day, running on both sides of the river, and I have plenty of writing and thinking to do."⁷⁶

The Rio Grande Railroad served the port and Brownsville for decades, although hurricanes, bandits, and economic stagnation limited its impact on the development of the region. It would remain for the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railroad to open the Rio Grande Valley to its full economic potential, beginning in 1904. Nevertheless, the pioneering struggle of Joseph Kleiber and his allies for transportation diversity opened the door for Brownsville to the railroad era and its benefits.

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Endnotes

1 John Webb had become a partner of Henry Miller in the hotel business shortly after the conclusion of the U.S.-Mexico War in 1848. A citizens meeting was held "at the hotel of Messrs. Webb and Miller, on 2nd December, 1848 . . . for the purpose of devising means to obtain and enclose a suitable place for a cemetery." *American Flag, Cameron County and Matamoros Advertiser*, vol. III, No. 237, Brownsville, Texas, December 6, 1848, p. 3. Webb and Miller also built the Webb Drug Store on 13th Street below Elizabeth Street in the early 1850s. Webb operated the store until his death in 1855. J. Lee Stambaugh and Lillian J. Stambaugh, *The Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas*.

(Austin: Jenkins Publishing Co., 1964), p. 91; Robert B. Vezzetti (Ed.), *Tidbits* ([Brownsville]:[The Brownsville Historical Association], n.d.), p. 63. A competitor for Kleiber appeared later that same year in the person of Joseph Putegnat, who opened the Botica del Leon at the corner of Elizabeth and 12th. Lt. W.H. Chatfield, *The Twin Cities of the Border* (New Orleans: E.P. Brandao, 1893), p. 23. The Webb (Kleiber) building still exists as the 409 Gallery, belonging to Mark Clark, who restored it.

2 Minnie Gilbert, "Joseph Kleiber of Alsace-Lorraine," in *Rio Grande Round-Up: Story of Texas Tropical Borderland* (Mission, Texas: Border Kingdom Press, 1980), pp. 129-137; Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp, *Boom and Bust: The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1991), pp. 74, 177; *Handbook of Texas Online*, John H. Hunter, "Kleiber, Joseph," accessed July 16, 2016, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fk108>. See also: Evan Anders, *Boo Rule in South Texas* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1982).

3 Gilbert, "Joseph Kleiber," pp. 131-32; Hunter, "Kleiber, Joseph"; Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, pp. 118-21. See also: James A. Irby, *Backdoor at Bagdad: The Civil War on the Rio Grande* (El Paso: Texas Western Press of the University of Texas at El Paso, Southwestern Studies, Monograph No. 53, 1977).

4 Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, pp. 158-59; Gilbert, "Joseph Kleiber," pp. 129, 133-34.

5 Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, pp. 177; Gilbert, "Joseph Kleiber," pp. 135-36; Hunter, "Kleiber, Joseph."

6 Joseph Kleiber, *Joseph Kleiber Letter Press* (Brownsville: n.p., n.d.), "From original in possession of J.K. Wells."

7 Joseph Kleiber Papers, 1860-1877, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin. <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utcah/02893/cah-02893.html>.

8 "LetterPress," What Is.com.

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José Agustín Quintero y Woodville: Confederate Special Agent

by

Jim Mills

José Agustín Quintero was the Confederacy's most capable agent in Mexico and responsible for keeping shifting powers — from border *caudillo* Santiago Vidaurri, to Mexican president Benito Juárez, to the Imperial French — non-threatening and supportive of the Confederate States of America interests along the south Texas/northern Mexico border region. As a result, he also played a key role in huge amounts of Mexican resources being channeled to the Confederate cause, as well as in exports in Southern cotton. The contributions to the Confederacy along the lower Rio Grande by this educated, bilingual, multi-talented Hispanic should not be under-appreciated.

José Agustín Quintero y Woodville was born in Havana, Cuba, on May 6, 1829, to Antonio Quintero, a wealthy tobacco grower of Cuba, and his British mother, Ana Woodville. A young José, born of privilege, quickly learned both English and Spanish. At the age of 12, reported the New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, José Quintero attended Harvard University and may have studied under Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Quintero tutored Spanish while enrolled at Harvard and also took classes in law, as well as studying the German language. An essay of Quintero's work still survives today in the Boston library entitled *Lyric Poetry in Cuba*. Strangely, however, no official records of Quintero's attendance at Harvard survive.¹

Quintero finished his education back home in Cuba, graduating in law at the age of 19. As a young man, Quintero favored "Cuba Libre," Cuban independence from Spain, and joined an elite secret society known as the Havana Club. However,

Spanish authorities learned of the insurrection and imprisoned several conspirators, including Quintero, who received a four-year sentence but managed to escape to New Orleans.²

During the 1850s, Quintero ventured into Texas and befriended Mirabeau B. Lamar, the former second president of the Republic of Texas. While in Texas, Quintero edited the San Antonio newspaper *El Rancharo* and also served as an assistant clerk to the Texas House of Representatives in Austin. It was while living in Austin, in 1859, that Quintero first met Santiago Vidaurri, who had been temporarily exiled from Mexico. This chance meeting would have important consequences for both men in the years to come.³

With the start of the American Civil War (1861–1864), Quintero readily sided with Texas and, for a short time, served as a Texas infantryman. He opposed northern tyranny as being symbolic of Spanish control over Cuba, and he remembered southern support of an independent Cuba years earlier. Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, understood the potential importance of Mexico to the Confederate cause and soon linked Santiago Vidaurri, who was now back in northern Mexico as a powerful border *caudillo*, and the “multilingual Harvard-educated journalist-attorney of Hispanic descent,” José Quintero. Referred to as an “agent and special messenger” to Davis, Quintero received a salary of \$200/month and was charged with securing Vidaurri’s alliance to the Confederacy, thus establishing a passive border region which would stimulate international trade along the Rio Grande. Vidaurri himself would realize an economic opportunity when he saw one.⁴

Quintero departed from Galveston aboard the *Sam Houston* in early June, sailed to Brazos Santiago, and crossed into Mexico at Matamoros. There he traveled by stagecoach to Monterrey, the capital city of Vidaurri-controlled Nuevo Leon; a control that stretched all the way to the Gulf coast. Quintero was armed with letters of introduction from Texas Governor Edward Clark and Confederate Secretary of State (February 25–July 25, 1861)

Robert Toombs. In the letter, Toombs extended friendship and asked for support in promoting a peaceful border between the Confederate States of America and Vidaurri-controlled northern Mexico. Quintero soon met with Vidaurri, who reassured the Confederate agent of his allegiance and cooperation. Important to Vidaurri was the fact that an alliance with the Confederacy would help to promote and strengthen his autonomy against President Benito Juárez, who wanted to centralize his control of Mexico.⁵

Quintero, who was described as a “clever and resourceful diplomat who handled many delicate and involved situations with skill and success,” also assured Vidaurri that the Confederacy would not invade Mexico and gave further reassurance that a passive border region between Confederate south Texas and northeastern Mexico would reap the border boss huge profits by selling needed commodities at inflated prices, as well as receiving tariffs on imports. The two also discussed concerns of threats from both American and Mexican highwaymen, bushwhackers, and other unsavory characters, who were poised to descend upon the area for any possible personal gain. Quintero stated that Confederate leadership would strive to alleviate these threats, and Vidaurri likewise reciprocated, pledging his “determination to preserve the peace of the Rio Grande frontier.”⁶ Vidaurri assured Quintero that he would call for the arrest of any border ruffians who sought to disrupt the peace between his areas of northern Mexico and the south Texas frontier. Vidaurri also made important concessions that Abraham Lincoln’s Union forces would not be allowed to cross into his territory, by land or sea, with the intent of invading the Confederacy. He insured Quintero of his support, even if it meant opposition to Juárez. Quintero also received Vidaurri’s assurance that trade between northern Mexico and the Confederacy would be supported. After meeting with Vidaurri, Quintero was confident that his mission had been a success. He also realized that the Vidaurri-controlled areas were rich in natural resourc-

es, including such important commodities as cloth, copper, lead, saltpeter, and gunpowder.⁷

After leaving Monterrey, Quintero traveled to Tamaulipas to examine the port "city" of Bagdad, located at the mouth of the Rio Grande, and then crossed to Brownsville. Upon his inspection of Bagdad, Quintero felt that Matamoros was in an excellent geographic location to serve the Confederacy in the "importation of arms and other materials from both Mexico and Europe," especially compared to ports farther south like Tampico. Furthermore, with Bagdad and Matamoros on the south bank of the Rio Grande, the area was free from the Union naval blockade off the coastlines which jeopardized trade for much of the Confederate States of America.⁸

Although his meeting with Vidaurri had been fruitful, the details would be unknown to Confederate leadership until delivered personally by Quintero, who realized correctly that important, secret communications could not be trusted through the postal mail service, due, in part, to Union agents working there. He arrived in Richmond, Virginia, the seat of the Confederate States of America, on August 17, 1861, and there corresponded with newly appointed Confederate Secretary of State, Robert Hunter (July 25, 1861-February 18, 1862), who had recently replaced Robert Toombs, assuring Mexican trade items, including such necessities as, "lead, copper, saltpeter and gunpowder," as well as the use of the neutral port of Bagdad, and Vidaurri's cooperation.⁹

The Richmond leaders were highly impressed with Quintero's diplomatic talents and formally acknowledged him as the most important Confederate agent to Mexico. He had the "shrewdness, insight, and tenacity necessary to achieve diplomatic success for his government." He was fluent in both English and Spanish, and, as the "confidential agent of the Confederacy to northeastern Mexico," he would be based in Monterrey, which would serve as the communication center with the Confederacy, rather than Juárez-held Mexico City. Quintero's mission was to cultivate continued "friendly relations with the border states."¹⁰

Richmond leadership also politely rejected Quintero's hand-delivered, incredible offer from Vidaurri, who had requested the annexation of his border kingdom to the Confederacy — an area which included Nuevo Leon and Coahuila, as well as Tamaulipas, and perhaps even Chihuahua and Sonora. Vidaurri envisioned joining his areas of control in northern Mexico with the Confederate States of America and requested military support of at least one thousand men and some artillery, which he felt would be adequate to defeat any Juárez opposition. Vidaurri also concluded that his region of Mexico was more naturally and geographically suited to being part of Texas and the American Southwest than southern Mexico. These areas would strengthen the southern states and bring in vast natural resources, as well as northern Mexico textiles. Jefferson Davis, however, felt that such a move would put the South formally at war with the Juárez government of Mexico, and could also cause retaliation from certain Western European powers, especially France, which was poised to intervene in Mexico in lieu of payment of monetary debts. Although it may have been tempting to authorities in Richmond, the idea of the annexation of northern Mexico was not seriously considered.¹¹

By October, 1861, Quintero was back in Brownsville, where he met with Fort Brown military commander John S. Ford. Although he initially found Ford to be "of fine intellect," his full trust and confidence in him later soured, and he was instrumental in having Ford temporarily removed to Austin and replaced by Brigadier General Hamilton P. Bee, who quickly worked to secure the area for favorable Confederate trade. With Bee's support, Quintero was able to establish the aid of the Mexican suppliers, Oliver and Brothers from Monterrey, who could produce lead, sulfur, and saltpeter, as well as shoes and blankets.¹²

By February 1862, Quintero was additionally able to negotiate a deal with Captain R. J. Lawler and Company to secure and transport 40,000 rifles from New York, originally destined to Mexico (which could not pay for them) and skillfully channel

them to the Confederacy by way of Matamoros. Quintero had been notified by customs agents in Matamoros that the shipment was en route. He notified Richmond, who in turn convinced the French fleet off the coast not to seize the shipment. These important munitions were paid for with the "white gold" of southern cotton, which was being transported to the Brownsville and Matamoros areas, and then on to the coast by riverboat or oxcart. Here, Quintero was instrumental in working with Vidaurri, referred to by some as the "Lion of the North," to keep order along the border region and keep tariffs low. Thus, the Brownsville/Matamoros area continued to be an important region for imports and exports, in part due to the abilities of José Agustín Quintero.¹³

Quintero also informed Richmond authorities that Mexico could provide all of the flour needed. Evaristo Madero, a partner of Patricio Milmo, son-in-law of Vidaurri, shipped flour, and Matamoros businessman L. Werlman contracted for over 300 wagon loads to be hauled across the border into Texas. Additionally, a San Antonio merchant by the name of A. Urbahan pledged one million pounds of flour to the firm of Milmo and Company in return for some 850,000 pounds of cotton. Quintero was further able to negotiate saltpeter at 16 cents per pound, and sulfur at 9 cents per pound. He also quickly purchased an additional 370 "old, but serviceable rifles" for \$2,000 before they could be bought and resold to the Confederacy at inflated prices.¹⁴

Quintero brokered five hundred wagons from Vidaurri-controlled Mexico to haul cotton to the coast and worked to ensure that import taxes at the customhouse in Matamoros remained low. Hundreds of ships anchored off Bagdad to enjoy trade that in large degree had been made possible as a result of Quintero's efforts. These vessels brought in needed commodities to the Confederacy in exchange for cotton. Quintero was also involved in making cotton a medium of exchange for goods in lieu of Confederate notes. In fact, Quintero reported that the cotton trade coming in to the area was "immense," in large degree

because of his efforts to keep a passive border region between South Texas and Northern Mexico open with as few problems as possible.¹⁵

Firms in the Brownsville and Matamoros area were ready to supply the Confederacy with goods, while businesses in Monterrey and Matamoros were also eager to act as brokers in receiving cotton. Examples included: Droege-Oetling and Company, with offices in Matamoros, England, and Germany, whose head also served as consul to Prussia. Lloyd's of London, Mariano Trevino and Brothers, and H.E. Woodhouse and Company brokered goods in raw materials that were sold to the military. By March, 1862, large amounts of sulfur and saltpeter were being carried by oxcart from northern Mexico to the Texas Confederate border. The Oliver Brothers supplied these goods, much of which was originally mined in Zacatecas. Quintero also worked with the Commander of the Western District of Texas, Colonel Henry McCulloch, to ensure that large amounts of "wheat, corn, flour, sugar, and coffee" were purchased from Mexico to further supply the Confederate cause. Through 1862, Quintero succeeded in securing Vidaurri's allegiance to the South, had accomplished multiple trade agreements, and had secured Matamoros/Bagdad as an entry point and exit for Confederate goods.¹⁶

Quintero wrote newly-appointed Secretary of State Judah P. Benjamin (March 18, 1862 - May 10, 1865) that "the road to Matamoros was one vast and almost unbroken line of wagons and carts carrying cotton to the gulf shore." Quintero reported, in December of 1862, that the Union was seemingly helpless to stop the trade, which was flowing unchallenged. Goods in minerals and materials were being carried into Texas and cotton was taken to the gulf coast at Bagdad, where literally hundreds of ships awaited. Manuel G. Rejón, Vidaurri's Secretary of State, also notified Quintero that he could supply large amounts of lumber to build Confederate ships.¹⁷

By September, 1862, Quintero was influential in brokering additional needed resources from Mexico including "powder

... lead, copper, tin, blankets, coffee, sugar, shoes, hides, and cloth." Cloth was produced in the Mexican textile mills of Nuevo Leon and Coahuila, areas alone that purchased three to four thousand bales of Confederate cotton annually. On the other end, he helped channel southern cotton to foreign buyers by working closely with their consuls, who pledged that their governments were willing to pay top dollar in specie for "king cotton." However, although the border trade was healthy, it also came with problems.¹⁸

Unfortunately for the Confederate cause, Quintero reported to Richmond that there was much waste and inefficiency, especially in the cotton trade from unscrupulous middlemen, many of whom were only concerned with personal profit. Quintero stayed ever loyal to the Confederacy and kept abuse by profiteers to a minimum whenever possible. When the Mexican firm of Droege, Oetling, and Company sought to create a monopoly, for example, Quintero stepped in and vetoed the action.¹⁹

Another problem that arose stemmed from the actions of José María Carvajal, a friend of John Ford, who was based in Brownsville and led raids against Tamaulipas. Carvajal wanted to create a separate border region to be called the "Republic of the Sierra Madres." It was Ford's alliance to Carvajal, who threatened border tranquility, which caused concern for both Quintero and Vidaurri. In fact, Ford had allowed Carvajal to train troops in the area and looked the other way as local merchants, including Mifflin Kenedy and Mariano Treviño, sold the opportunistic Carvajal cannon. Quintero, who appealed to Ford's superior Colonel Henry Eustace McCulloch, as well as to Texas governor Francis Richard Lubbock, threatened to resign his position if his recommendation that Ford be removed not be upheld. Quintero also informed that Vidaurri's loyalty would be jeopardized if Carvajal was supported. In fact, Vidaurri did retaliate by closing trade at Mier and raising tariffs on cotton by 2 cents per pound. Quintero responded by filing a protest which caused the border boss to acquiesce.²⁰

It was also feared that Unionists in Mexico would combine with Carvajal, perhaps to invade Texas. United States vice-consul M. M. Kimmey in Monterrey was suspected of recruiting and organizing Union raids against Confederate interests along the border. In response, Quintero called upon Tamaulipas Governor Albino López for assistance, who assured him that even U.S. consul Leonard Pierce in Matamoros would be arrested if need be. The local trade was too profitable to challenge.²¹

When Jesús de la Serna won a controversial election for Governor of Tamaulipas, an area over which Vidaurri wielded great influence, opposition party candidate Cipriano Guerrero refused defeat and sought to challenge the election by force. Carvajal championed de la Serna with his band of followers, while the equally capable General Guadalupe García fought for Guerrero. The entire episode threatened the Confederate commerce in the Brownsville/Matamoros area. Vidaurri moved in to calm the situation with Quintero's support. Upon Quintero's suggestion, Carvajal was charged with "violation of the international boundary" by Mexican colonel Macedonio Capistrán, who was then serving as military *Comandante* in Matamoros. This official declaration was brought to the attention of Brownsville Commissioner John Tabor and ensuing actions forced Carvajal away from the border.²²

Other disruptions periodically occurred along the border. Union supporters called *enganchados* (the "addicted" or "hooked" men) sought to recruit Hispanics to their cause and offered to pay "one hundred pesos in gold" and a minimum of fifty acres of Texas land. One taker was a man by the name of Octaviano Zapata. Carrying the Yankee flag, Zapata subsequently led border raids against Confederate commerce at Roma, as well as Las Cuevas, south of present-day Rio Grande City — actions that would ultimately attract the attention of Vidaurri and Quintero.²³

When Zapatistas crossed the border into Texas and killed Isidro Vela, the chief justice of Zapata County, Santos Benavides, a loyal Confederate from Laredo, pursued, killing several and

confiscating papers explicitly implicating Union Consul Pierce as supporting these guerrilla tactics. Although questioned by Governor López, Pierce was nevertheless exonerated of any involvement. However, Quintero was not satisfied and wrote to Secretary of State Benjamin, in February of 1863, that he suspected that the local Mexican authorities feared retaliation from Abraham Lincoln and were willing to look the other way. Soon thereafter, however, Quintero received a message from López requesting that the two meet. In their meeting, López informed Quintero that he would allow Confederates to pursue and prosecute marauding outlaws and others who attacked Confederate commerce. López also met with Fort Brown commander Hamilton Bee to work towards maintaining a peaceful border. Quintero further received support from Governor López in the returning of escaped slaves in northern Mexico back to Texas.²⁴

In March, 1863, a Unionist attorney and district judge of the Twelfth Judicial District of South Texas by the name of E. J. Davis, and William W. Montgomery, a Texas rancher, landed at the coastal port city of Bagdad with the goal of raising at least one Union regiment to lead attacks against the Confederate controlled area, presumably with the permission of United States consul Leonard Pierce from his office in Matamoros. Quintero objected once again to Mexican governor Albino López who intervened, but only halfheartedly. However, retaliation came swiftly when Confederates under Major George Chilton, with six companies, crossed the river at Clarksville, opposite Bagdad, and under the cover of darkness surprised a Union camp of three hundred, capturing Davis and Montgomery. Davis put up no resistance, but Montgomery “fought like a wild cat” and wounded two men with his bowie-knife before being incarcerated. The two ringleaders were ferried back across the Rio Grande, where, early in the morning of March 15, with the approval of Chilton, Montgomery was hanged from a mesquite tree for committing treason against Texas and the Confederacy.

Soon afterwards, on March 21, Quintero wrote to Judah Benjamin proclaiming that Montgomery would not "commit treason again in this world" and was "permanently located in the soil." However, bowing to the delicate balance of peace along the lower Rio Grande border region, and fearing retaliation from Union sympathizers in Matamoros, Quintero encouraged Hamilton Bee to release Davis and three others with a formal apology for crossing into Mexico. Davis and the others were received in Matamoros by American Consul Leonard Pierce, complete with a band playing patriotic songs. Thus, the lucrative trade continued.²⁵

When sixteen million dollars in Confederate notes were seized in Matamoros and found their way into Vidaurri's coffers through his son-in-law Patricio Milmo, Quintero contacted Richmond, who threatened, on Quintero's recommendation, to close all border trade with Vidaurri-controlled northern Mexico in both imports and exports. On January 12, 1864, General E. Kirby Smith, commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department, issued Special Order Number 8, "closing the border to any further shipment of cotton to Mexico." Kirby also ordered all Mexican assets in Texas seized until the matter was settled and even threatened to send a large military force to the region. The cotton embargo brought Vidaurri and Milmo to heel. Thanks once again to Quintero's skillful diplomatic abilities, the sixteen million dollars were released and the threatened commerce resumed.²⁶

Quintero's personal life was equally prosperous during this time as he and his wife, Eliza Bournos of New Orleans, had a son born in Matamoros on September 7, 1863, and named him Lamar, in honor of his old friend Mirabeau B. Lamar. Quintero, a noted poet and writer, also found time to pursue intellectual interests. He became friends with Don Manuel G. Rejón, Vidaurri's Secretary of State of Coahuila and Nuevo Leon, who himself was an accomplished historian, politician, and lawyer. Through Rejón, Quintero read numerous historic Mexican archives, which included important aspects of Texas history from

Philip Nolan to Jim Bowie. Rejón would later be executed by orders of then Governor of Tamaulipas, Juan Cortina. Ever true to the Confederacy, Quintero even reported to Richmond knowledge of a Spaniard named Narciso Monturiol of Barcelona, Spain, who had built a submarine. Quintero argued of its potential importance in aiding the Confederate cause, but the suggestion fell on deaf ears.²⁷

By November of 1863, Abraham Lincoln had ordered an invasion of the Brownsville/Matamoros Rio Grande River area by 7,000 troops to stop the lucrative cotton trade. However, Quintero and Confederate leaders were ready. Quintero wrote Confederate Secretary of State, Judah P. Benjamin, that Charles Russell, Quartermaster at Fort Brown under Hamilton Bee (who had fewer than 200 men at Fort Brown), had requested that as much Confederate supplies as possible be moved upriver to Eagle Pass. Local merchants pledged that they were willing to cover freight charges. The cotton trains were diverted farther inland, and Quintero worked once again with border *cuadillo* Santiago Vidaurri, who sent troops to protect the trade south of the river. Although Vidaurri was a difficult man to deal with at times, Quintero was nevertheless able to keep him in line. Although a large Union force now occupied Brownsville, they could not cross the border into Mexico. Matamoros, within eye-sight, was another world away. The cotton trains moved west to Eagle Pass, crossed the river at Piedras Negras, and were then carted along the south bank to the gulf, all the while protected by Vidaurri, who was making some \$40,000 per month in profits for himself at this time.²⁸

When the French occupied Mexico City, Benito Juárez moved to Monterrey. Quintero quickly opened diplomatic channels with General Manuel Negrete, who assured Quintero that he would not be harmed and that previous regional trade agreements would be honored. However, in March of 1864, Vidaurri's secretary of state, Manuel Rejón fled across the river to Brownsville, where he was arrested by Union General Francis

J. Herron, who accused him of aiding the Confederacy with raw materials and weapons. He was turned over to *Juaristas* in Matamoros, where he died in a hail of bullets, compliments of a firing squad.²⁹

Rejón's execution worried Quintero that he might receive the same fate. However, he was invited to dine with the Mexican president, who personally assured Quintero that the Confederate trade would remain unmolested (while Juárez reaped profits) as well as assuring him of his personal safety. Vidaurri, in the meantime, taking with him "state archives and treasury," fled to the safety of Santos Benavides in Laredo and then on to Houston, where he stayed in the finest hotel, compliments of General John Magruder. Although Quintero worried, Juárez needed the cut of Confederate revenue generated along the border and he could not risk creating a Confederate enemy. Furthermore, Juárez realized that the Confederacy had no desire to annex northern Mexican territory. Quintero also had important Cuban connections within the Juárez government, including Pedro Santacilia, son-in-law of Juárez, and as a result, Juárez continued to maintain neutrality. Also interesting is the fact that Juárez received no money from the United States, but profited from over one million dollars from the Confederacy in just the five months he was in Monterrey.³⁰

When French forces subsequently expelled Juárez from Monterrey to Chihuahua in August, Quintero cleverly, and rapidly, promoted the Confederacy and the French allegiances. Thanks in part to Quintero's diplomatic talents, including working with French General Armand Castagny, the cotton trade along the lower Rio Grande region continued, despite the changes in Mexico. It was in France's favor to see a Confederate victory over the Union. The French also benefited from income generated from duties on the trade—a benefit Juárez had enjoyed, and lost.³¹

On September 26, 1864, General Thomas Mejía led two thousand French and Austrian troops into Matamoros and es-

established friendly relations with the Confederacy. Meanwhile, combined forces under John S. Ford, who had returned to the area, and Santos Benavides successfully ousted the Union army, which was evacuated to Brazos Island on the coast leaving some 950 troops there. The lucrative cotton trade in the Brownsville/Matamoros region resumed as strong as ever and flowed unabated to the gulf, while large amounts of munitions and goods crossed the river into Texas. Quintero survived unscathed and continued his diplomatic magic. Quintero wrote to Richmond, in late 1864, that “we have never before been in such a favorable condition as we are at present.”³²

At the end of the war, a month after Lee’s surrender to Grant, Unionist Colonel Theodore Barrett marched on Fort Brown from his camp at Brazos Island on the coast. In quick response, José Quintero contacted French Imperial General Tomás Mejía. Mejía assured the Confederate agent that his troops remained ready to assist if needed. However, Ford was able to check the Union advance at the second battle of Palmito Ranch. Quintero, who spent the night at Fort Brown, had been at the ready to ride to Matamoros and call upon Mejía’s assistance if needed. After this last battle of the Civil War, Quintero was soon back in Monterrey, knowing that the Confederate dream had died. He had been ever loyal to the Confederacy throughout the war, and had done all that could have been asked of him.³³

By 1866, Quintero had secured a presidential pardon and moved to New Orleans, where he practiced law and lived out much of the remainder of his life. While there, he also worked for the *Daily Picayune* newspaper. He also served Belgium and Costa Rica in their “legal and commercial interests” in the Crescent City. Additionally, Quintero wrote on Philip Nolan in an 1868 entry in *The Texas Almanac* from original letters and documents he had acquired from Rejón.³⁴

In March, 1871, Quintero and his wife Eliza had a second son named John Marshall, who also practiced law, served as consul to Costa Rica, and as chairman of the Sons of

Confederate Veterans. He died in 1960 at age 89. Quintero's eldest son Lamar also practiced law, having graduated from Loyola University and received appointments from President Taft. He died in 1921 at the age of 58. José Agustín Quintero himself passed away in New Orleans in 1885 at the age of 56. It had been a full and exciting life for the former Confederate agent, who should be remembered today for his extraordinary work along the south Texas border region during the American Civil War.³⁵

The University of Texas - Rio Grande Valley

Endnotes

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FAMILY HISTORY



*Drug Gangs like Cats and Dogs
à la Da Vinci's Battle of Anghiari*

The Putegnat Family and J. P. Putegnat's Escape from a Yankee Prison

by

Tara Putegnat

For many U.S. towns and communities in the mid-nineteenth century, growth and change was inevitable. Settlers and immigrants in search of better opportunities immigrated to America and started their lives anew. These newly-established Americans raised families, started businesses, contributed to their local communities, dutifully joined the military service to fight wars, and endured hardship as well as success. A history of one family in South Texas reflects these aspects of American life in Brownsville, Texas. What follows is a brief overview of this family's most famous story.

John Pierre Putegnat was born in Lyon, France in 1812. The town of Lyon is located in the Auvergne-Rhone-Alps Region of France and is the third-largest city in France today. John Pierre's father was a pharmacist and perfume manufacturer in Lyon. At the age of 23, John Pierre left France for America and arrived in Princess Anne County, Virginia (today Virginia Beach County). In 1837, after two years in Virginia, he married Elizabeth (Eliza) Ann Butt.

Once married, the couple moved to Mobile, Alabama, and had six sons and two daughters. Three of the boys died in infancy, and the only children surviving through adulthood were: Joseph Luke, William Henry, John Peter Jr., Susan Catherine, and Mary Louise. Sometime in the 1840s, the Putegnat family moved to Matamoros, Mexico, and later settled in the small U.S. border town of Brownsville, Texas, in the 1850s. While in Matamoros, John Pierre Putegnat opened a mercantile store

and traveled throughout northern Mexico for trading trips via horse-drawn wagon. In 1853, his wife Elizabeth died of yellow fever. John Pierre died three years later, in 1856. Both John Pierre and Elizabeth are buried in the Magnolia Cemetery in Mobile, Alabama.

John Pierre's sons, Joseph Luke and John Peter ("J. P."), became successful pharmacists in the Rio Grande Valley. After the Civil War, J. P. operated a pharmacy in Brownsville as well as in Rio Grande City, Texas. In 1860, Joseph Luke founded and operated one of the first pharmacies in Brownsville, the "Botica de Leon," located on the corner of 12th and Elizabeth Street in downtown Brownsville.¹ Besides offering medical remedies for ailments, the store sold hardware supplies, perfumes, stationery, gardening seeds, equipment, candy, and soda water. Over the years, Joseph Luke was recognized for his research on native drugs and herbs as medicines. "*Chaparré amargosa*" was one of the drugs sold at the store as a treatment for dysentery and various tropical fevers that were common in South Texas.² This drug was often used by sick soldiers stationed at Fort Brown.

The Putegnat men would soon participate in the conflict beginning to unfold between the northern and southern states in America. J. P. and William H. Putegnat joined the Civil War effort in 1861, when they returned to Alabama to join the Confederate Army. Like all families in Brownsville, the Putegnat family made a decision about the looming war beginning to affect South Texas.

In 1862, Joseph Luke married Rosa Vidal Kenedy and had 12 children. Only nine of their children lived to adulthood. Joseph Luke's wife, Rosa, was the daughter of Petra Vidal Kenedy, who was married to Mifflin Kenedy, entrepreneur and proprietor of a South Texas ranching empire.

At this time, Brownsville played an important role for Texas during the Civil War. In 1862, the port of Galveston fell to Union troops, and it soon became apparent that the only seaport available to the Texas Confederates was the Port of Bagdad on the Mexican

side of the mouth of the Rio Grande River. Many local merchants in Brownsville decided to move to Matamoros as rumors of a Union invasion threatened their safety. It was President Abraham Lincoln's plan to stop all trade between the Confederates and Europe through southern ports. The only problem was that half of the mouth of the Rio Grande River belonged to Mexico and, as Mexico was neutral, it could not be blockaded.⁵ Regardless, in 1863, the Union troops would eventually make their way south and occupy Fort Brown and Brownsville.

Joseph Luke Putegnat's father-in-law, Mifflin Kenedy, had to protect his business interests during these tumultuous times. Kenedy's business partners, Richard King and Charles Stillman, strategized about how to get cotton to the ports of the north-eastern United States as well as of Europe. They did not want to lose lucrative business opportunities in Brownsville and Matamoros because of a war. In accordance, the Putegnat brothers embraced the Confederate cause, not only to honor their Alabama roots, but also to protect Brownsville's economic interests.

In May of 1861, the Jefferson Davis Light Artillery regiment was organized in Selma, Alabama. The men for this regiment were recruited from several counties by Captain Joseph T. Montgomery of Selma, Alabama. The regiment's first assignment was in Virginia under General Jubal Early's brigade at Manassas and then under General Garland at Seven Pines. Later, the company was assigned to T.H. Carter's and R.M.C. Page's Battalion of Artillery, Army of Northern Virginia. It fought in many conflicts from the Seven Days' Battles to Cold Harbor, moved through the Shenandoah Valley with Early, and eventually saw action in the Appomattox Campaign. Its captains were J.W. Bondurant, J.T. Montgomery, and William J. Reese. Today a historical marker commemorates this regiment on the Gettysburg battlefield in Pennsylvania.⁴ Shortly after the regiment was formed, J. P. and William Henry Putegnat joined. Both men were enrolled in military school in Victoria, Texas, and returned to Mobile, Alabama, to serve in the Confederate Army. Confederate military muster

rolls show that William Henry Putegnat enlisted on September 1, 1861, at Fort Morgan.⁵

The Jefferson Davis Light Artillery regiment saw many battles throughout the Civil War. In April of 1862, the regiment attached to Hill's division and, on May 31st, engaged at the battle of Seven Pines. It went on to fight at Mechanicsville, the first battle of Gaines Mills, the Battle of Boonsboro, the Battle of Sharpsburg, and the Battle of Fredericksburg. In May of 1863, it engaged at the Battle of Chancellorsville and, in July, at the Battle of Gettysburg. In early May of 1864, they fought in the Battle of Wilderness, the Battles of Spotsylvania, and, in the fall, at the Battle of Cedar Creek.⁶

It was at the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House, in Virginia, that J. P. was captured by the Union Army, in May of 1864. He was sent to Elmira Prison, a prisoner-of-war camp constructed by the Union Army in New York. Many prison camps built during the Civil War were constructed in haste and therefore suffered poor living conditions and struggled with a lack of resources. The site where the camp was built was chosen because of its proximity to the Erie Railway and the Northern Central Railway. Originally, the camp's site was used for the training of Union troops, but it was converted into a military prison in the summer of 1864.⁷

The Elmira prison camp was used as a prisoner-of-war camp for the last 15 months of the war and housed more than 12,100 Confederate soldiers over that span of time. Almost 25% of those incarcerated died from a combination of malnutrition, exposure to the cold winter, disease, and poor medical care. The prison was named "Hellmira" by its inmates. The camp's dead were buried at what is now Woodlawn National Cemetery. At the end of the war, each prisoner was required to take an oath of loyalty to the Union and given a train ticket home. The last prisoner left the camp on September 27, 1865, and, shortly thereafter, the camp was closed. Later, the infamous prisoner-of-war camp was demolished and converted to farm land.⁸

On August 24, 1864 (nine days after his arrival), J. P. and nine other men began digging a tunnel in an effort to escape the deplorable living conditions they encountered in the prison. J. P. was able to measure the distance needed for the tunnel by tying a string to a stone and throwing it from his tent to the fence post bordering the camp. He measured 68 feet. Because the tent next to Putegnat and his fellow prisoners was empty at the time, they began digging with their hands.⁹ This was the north side of the prison, second row, close to the city streets. By October 6, 1864, the tunnel was complete. As a precautionary measure, in case the tunnel was discovered, they had also begun work on a second tunnel, which was a shorter distance for escape. Later inspections by Union commanders would find a total of 28 tunnels dug by several groups of Confederate soldiers at the prison.¹⁰

The first Commandant of the Camp was Major Henry V. Colt of the 104th New York Volunteers. He was given charge of the camp due to his inability to serve in combat. On July 6, 1864, he received his first 400 prisoners. Shortly after receiving command of the prisoners, he learned of the challenges that came with the work. It was 16-year-old Washington "Wash" Brown Traweek, Confederate prisoner, whom he first had to discipline in the camp. Traweek had planned to escape and failed at the attempt, along with several other members of the Jefferson Davis Artillery Company. The escape plan meant digging a tunnel from his neighboring tent, underneath a fence and into town. Major Colt asked Traweek about where the second tunnel was located. Traweek refused to reveal the secret passage and so was ordered to a "sweatbox" as punishment.¹¹ Colt was eventually forced to release Traweek, and, within a few weeks, on October 7, 1864, Traweek escaped the camp along with others.

It is understandable that J. P. and others would have been so inclined to escape Elmira Prison. The prison camp had two observation towers that were constructed by onlookers in the nearby town. Citizens paid 15 cents each to climb the towers and view the Confederate inmates below. By some accounts,

concession stands were built near the towers and sold peanuts, cakes and lemonade. This was torturous for the inmates to see as they slowly starved inside the prison from a lack of rations. The chief surgeon of Elmira Prison was overheard to boast (before resigning to avoid court martial) that he had killed more rebel soldiers than any other Union soldier. The prison was notoriously famous for high mortality rates. Throughout the war, 3,866 more Confederate soldiers died in Union prisons than Union soldiers died in Southern prisons.¹²

It was J. P. who had the extra shirt in the prison needed for the tunnel digging. The shirt was cut up in sections and used to make pint-size pockets to carry the dirt out while digging the tunnel. Then the dirt was dumped into standing water privies inside the camp. The group of Confederate prisoners dug down six feet and then horizontally in a direct line towards a stairway by the prison wall. In case of random test inspections by prison guards, they took pieces of plank from sidewalks and placed them over the hole. They then filled the vacancy above the plank with dirt and sod. To avoid further detection during inspection, they turned their clothes inside out so as to cover up the dirty side.

The escapees also involved a sick inmate by promising him "in" on the tunnel escape. Confederate Sergeant "Parson" J. P. Scruggs of South Carolina, of the Holcomb Legion, was brought in, even though he was too ill to dig, because of his special access to the cook's room in the kitchen. The tunnel diggers needed sufficient food in order to continue the very physical work of digging. Scruggs was able to supply them with extra food.

The Elmira Prisoner Camp was in the process of constructing seventeen small hospital rooms on the prison grounds. It was decided by Traweek and J. P. that, in order to dig a shorter distance, they would dig towards hospital room #2. They were also able to secure a spade, which allowed them to finish the digging much more quickly. Both crawled through the tunnel after reaching the area outside the prison. They had successfully

completed the mission. Both quickly returned to the camp through the tunnel to inform the others, who escaped as well. In total, eight prisoners escaped through the tunnel and quickly separated once outside the prison gates.

The escapees split into small groups in an effort to avoid suspicion while traveling. Cecrops Malone, of the 9th Alabama infantry, and J. P. walked to Ithaca, about thirty miles northeast of the Elmira prison camp. Malone had extra clothing, so they were able to change clothes to avoid discovery by Union troops. They eventually traveled to Auburn, N.Y., where Malone acquired work as a machinist. J. P. soon became his co-worker at the factory. They put away money for train fare to New York City and then to Baltimore, Maryland, from where they eventually made their way south. Another pair, J.W. Crawford, of the 6th Virginia Cavalry, and "Wash" Traweek, traveled to Mt. Zoar Road (the main road outside the prison). It took them twenty-three days to arrive home. John Fox Maull, known for firing the first shot at Seven Pines, "Hickory" George Gilmore Jackson, and William Templin (all from the Jefferson Davis Artillery) also made their way to Mt. Zoar Road and immediately began traveling south. Another escapee, Glen Shelton, of Mississippi, made it out of the prison through the tunnel but separated on his own and was never heard from again.¹³

On February 26, 1863 and, again, in February 1865, William Henry Putegnat was admitted to the General Hospital, Howard's Grove, Richmond, Virginia.¹⁴ Records do not indicate why he was admitted to the hospital. By the war's end, William Henry would return to Brownsville at the age of 22. Soon after, he married Annie Granier of New Orleans, Louisiana, and started a family.

The couple had a son named William Henry II ("William"). William owned and operated the W.H. Putegnat Hardware Store on Elizabeth Street and later purchased Model Laundry, in 1913. Model Laundry had existed in Brownsville since 1906. William married Jennie Burton of San Antonio and they had

three children: William Henry III, Barry and Jennie. William was socially active in the Brownsville community. He was a founding member of the Brownsville Rotary Club. William and his wife were devoutly Catholic and were founding parishioners of Sacred Heart Catholic Church on Elizabeth Street in Brownsville. Additionally, William was a proud member of the Knights of Columbus. His heirs still reside in Brownsville today and his great-grand children now own and operate Model Laundry, which services the entire Rio Grande Valley.

William's uncle, J. P. Putegnat, came home a war hero, and his famous prison escape was chronicled through several generations of the Putegnat family. Like his brother, Joseph Luke, J. P. married one of Petra Vidal Kenedy's daughters. In 1870, J. P. married Anita Vidal and lived in Brownsville after the war.¹⁶ This meant that both Putegnat brothers, J. P. and Joseph Luke, married sisters. J. P. and Anita's son, John Peter III, married Annie Scanlan. The Scanlan family was well-known in the Brownsville community. Annie Scanlan Putegnat was a well-known teacher in Brownsville for thirty years. The first grammar school in Brownsville still bears her name. Annie Putegnat's heirs live in Brownsville today, and her grand-daughter lives in downtown Brownsville in the beautifully restored Canales house located on East Saint Charles Street.

Executive Director, The Brownsville Historical Association

Endnotes

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Putting the Pieces Together: The Rhetoric of Oral Tradition in the Twentieth-Century Rio Grande Valley

by

Monica Reyes and Andy Najera

In 1929, my grandfather, your great-grandfather, Desiderio Najera — you know, I'm his namesake — gambled at a bar in Matamoros with a man named William Crafts. Crafts was from Brownsville, and my grandfather (Desiderio) was from Matamoros. The story goes that Grandpa caught Crafts cheating and an argument erupted. Grandpa fired his pistol and chased Crafts out of the bar. Crafts hid in a nearby alley, and Grandpa ran after him, determined, most likely, to kill him. But Grandpa ran past Crafts, and that's when Crafts took the shot, you know, killing Grandpa with a shot in the back. When my uncles — Grandpa's brothers — heard about this, they wanted revenge. Severino, one of my uncles, who was younger than Grandpa, got his pistol and went looking for Crafts. He found him and unloaded his gun into Crafts point blank. At the burial of Grandpa, Severino tells his mother, my great grandmother, that Crafts is dead — you know, he got the job done, like [my] grandma wanted — but his mother tells him that Crafts is still alive and challenges her sons to finish the job. When Severino heard this, the story goes that he was filled with so much anger that he spit up blood and fell dead at his own brother's burial, right there ... alongside the grave of his brother.

— Desiderio G. Najera¹

This story of our great-grandfather's death was told to my sister Monica and me, Andy Najera, throughout our childhoods.²

These types of stories are what historians and literature scholars term *oral traditions*. Not to be confused with *oral histories*, *oral traditions* are “not contemporary; [they have] a historical genealogy and may be used as historical sources, particularly in non-literature cultures, but often it is hard to say when the

story originated because of its instability over time owing to the chain of transmission.”³

Of course, this kind of story is problematic, although as children, Monica and I were unaware of (or uninterested) in such concerns. “Oral tradition possesses a dynamic nature; it is continually passed on and in that process is transmuted. Each rendering of the oral performance will be influenced by the circumstances in which the telling occurs.”⁴ In other words, I heard this story with different flair and emphasis from various uncles and aunts, sometimes with laughter and sometimes with regret. A popular alternate version is that because of Desiderio’s philandering in both cities, he and Crafts were at odds. Like many natives of the Rio Grande Valley, I never tired of replaying my oral tradition. After all, it had all the elements of good fiction: short, tragic, and shocking. But what was most captivating about this family story is that it was not fiction — it was true. Despite its scandalous plot line, Monica and I had no reason to doubt the story’s authenticity. Soon, it became part of my family’s reception histories, as they explained my grandfather’s grit growing up without a father. It also provided my aunts and uncles a necessary origin story to rationalize certain family traits, like fierce loyalty. Little did Monica and I realize that placing our tradition into historical context would provide insightful revelations about our ancestors and their ability to pass on a legacy that would point to larger socio-political truths of their time.

Life in the Rio Grande During the Turn of the Twentieth Century

Contextualizing my great-grandfather’s life along the Rio Grande is vital in beginning my exploration of this oral tradition. The period of my great grandfather’s short history was marked with frustration and socio-political violence, largely affected by the destabilization of Revolutionary Mexico. In 1910, thousands

of indigenous field workers revolted against the dictator Porfirio Diaz, resulting in the armies of Emiliano Zapata in the south and Pancho Villa in the north finally ousting Diaz, in 1911. The Mexican government shifted hands numerous times during the next decade, causing social and economic disorder throughout all of Mexico. This led to thousands of Mexican immigrants entering the United States, at a time when Brownsville and Matamoros established a significant means of crossing with the B&M Bridge.

Border violence led to an influx of regiments of Texas Rangers to secure the frontier. In their work, *Boom and Bust: The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville*, Kearney and Knopp remind us that in 1915:

*The (Texas) Rangers, finding a situation already out of control, tried extreme solutions, often outside of both law and human decency. Killing of innocent Mexican Americans in reprisal for the shooting an Anglo American became common practice. This created among the Mexican Americans a great fear and hatred of the Rangers and of all law enforcement officers, as these brutal methods spread. This hatred spilled over to antagonism against the Anglo-American community....*⁵

In other words, the Mexican Revolution brought not only a rise of ethnic and national violence along the border, but also a rise of suspicion in regard to border policy and policing tactics.

Adding even more frustration between ethnic and social classes, the economy along the Mexican-American border was competitive and tumultuous. Kearney and Knopp argue that immigration from Mexico caused tension, "as newcomers challenged natives for jobs and also greatly reduced the percentage of Anglo Americans in the population. The bulk of landholding in the delta shifted from Mexican-American ranchers to Anglo-American farmers, creating a great residual resentment in the Mexican-American community..."⁶ This meant that there was a deepening of the rupture in the relationship between Anglos and Hispanics as they both fought for economic prosperity. But the

tension was not simply concerning economic and agricultural issues; the violence was also an unwelcomed ingredient to the mix: "The spillover of lawlessness from Mexico in the 1910s added to the difficulties of establishing markets for the local crops and retarded the takeoff of agriculture for a decade."⁷

Of course, the effects of the Great Depression also led to the rise of distrust and anger between the Anglo and Mexican-American communities along the border. Kearney and Knopp mention how:

[o]ne immediate result of the Great Depression, with its collapse of available work in the United States as a whole, was the onset of a policy of ruthless deportation of Mexicans, along with their American born children. This policy was first applied in Brownsville... Beginning in 1950, whole Mexican neighborhoods were expelled (amounting to over 450 people from Brownsville in a one month period in the spring of 1951) Fear gripped the Mexican population, and indignation swept all of the residents of Brownsville and its environs.⁸

While some may have argued that the need for such deportation methods were justifiable, the fear, bitterness, and broken dreams of many Mexican immigrants perpetuated during this already unstable time.

Also significant is the political frameworks of the Rio Grande Valley in the early 1900s, when two parties battled, often corruptly, for political supremacy of Brownsville. The Democratic Blue Party was controlled by boss Jim Wells, while Wells' nemesis were the Republican/Independent Red Party bosses Rentfro Creager, Vicente Crixell, and Benjamin Kowalski.⁹ As these groups sought mastery over the Brownsville political scene, they were not above using violence and intimidation to secure election victory. The Democratic Party oversaw the county law enforcement, while the Republican Red Party headed the city law enforcement. Regardless of viewpoint or jurisdiction, both parties pandered to the Hispanic vote: "Jim Wells obviously engaged in

the same kind of paternalistic activity that characterized ... his own informal welfare system.”¹⁰ Ultimately, many in the already desperate and poverty stricken Mexican-American community gave their votes under compulsion to Jim Wells because their employers threatened them if they refused. The Republicans/Independents were supported by the “new Anglo electorate” in hopes of breaking Well’s stronghold.¹¹

The socio-political, agricultural, and national climate(s) in which my great-grandfather lived created an atmosphere of radical change, fear, and fierce family and national and ethnic loyalties; and this contextualization is immeasurably meaningful to understanding our family’s (and I believe countless other Rio Grande Valley families’) stories.

Questioning the Past

Years later, Andy and I would confront this story, our story, again, but this time with years of education demanding clarification, evidence, and relevance. Andy is a celebrated history teacher with BISD and is pursuing his M.A. degree at UT-RGV; I teach Writing Studies at UT-RGV and am completing coursework for my PhD in English Studies. In the spring of 2016, Andy decided to take his wife and young sons to the Brownsville Old City Cemetery to research a project for his 8th graders. Along the red brick path, Andy observed the names on tombs that were broken and beaten down; weeds and stones littered the sight among the headstones and crosses that sprang up out of the ground. After completing his research, Andy was shocked to see a white sunbaked tomb with the faded name of “William Crafts.” The family story flooded his mind, and he quickly shared it with his wife, who had heard it many times before. Andy, to the best of our knowledge, was standing before the grave of the man who killed our great grandfather and great uncle. Our oral tradition suddenly had context. Of course, we had never met our great-grandfather; moreover, the man was

absent from our own grandfather's life, so his existence was wrapped up in the one faded portrait we had of him in our home and in this man, his murderer, William Crafts.

Andy continued thinking about Crafts. Days turned to weeks and weeks into months, but William Crafts truly haunted him. Who was he? How did he survive being shot at least 6 times point blank? What was his life like after the duel that supposedly killed him? Did he go to prison? The historian in Andy grew more and more restless, so he began to investigate Crafts, looking for information about him. Andy finally located Craft's death certificate through Brownsville's Old City Cemetery web site, and under the cause of death was scribbled "Gunshot Wound."¹² Andy's immediate thought was that Severino did avenge the death of his brother, our great-grandfather. Perhaps Severino just didn't realize it, and more importantly, perhaps, most of all, the story is true. Still, there was a problem: Crafts died on June 3, 1917, and our grandfather, Israel Najera Sr. (who had recently passed in 2013) had always affirmed that his father, Desiderio, was killed in 1929, when Israel was 5 years old. There was a 12-year difference between William Crafts' death and Desiderio's death. After conferring with our father and looking at my grandfather's baptismal record, the time discrepancy became the first flaw in the oral tradition. This meant that Desidero was not killed by Crafts, because Crafts had already died years before Desiderio was killed.

As Andy dug deeper into Crafts history, he discovered that Crafts was also a Mexican-American (his mother, née Leal, was from Mexico) police officer who was part of a political machine in post-reconstruction Brownsville. Crafts was in at least one documented gun battle in a downtown Brownsville bar. Andy began considering the possibilities: Maybe the oral tradition had been reversed? Had Desiderio killed Crafts in 1917 in Brownsville and some relative or friend of Crafts took revenge on Desiderio in 1929 in Matamoros? Which then led to a feud between the Najeras and the Crafts? Had there been some sort of

Border War between residents of Matamoros and Brownsville? Was our family part of a “Hatfield and McCoy” story that had been forgotten? Andy admitted that his ideas were just speculation and conjecture, and he needed more evidence to untangle the history. But the question that nagged Andy the most was, if Willie Crafts didn’t kill Desidero, then who did?

Andy’s summer nights were spent searching the internet for any information that he could glean from the web. Andy began by aiming to authenticate the date of death of our great-grandfather to rule out the possibility of Crafts’ involvement and confirm if Desiderio was killed by a gunshot. The integrity of the oral tradition depended on these facts. Andy finally found a civil registration website from 1800-2002 from Mexico,¹⁵ and he spent hours scouring pages and pages of handwritten entries of long-forgotten Mexican residents who had passed away in the year of 1929. At last, on page 332, entry #97, written in Spanish cursive, Andy read: “Mr. Desidero Najera age 33 death by the result of injuries sustained from a firearm.” The date of the document was March 11, 1929. Andy was relieved that at least a portion of the oral tradition was true, that our great-grandfather was killed by a gunshot wound. Now, with the date of death, Andy could search the archives of the local newspaper, *The Brownsville Herald*, to piece together the rest of the story.

From Oral Tradition to Archive: The Search for Authenticity

The oral tradition began to fade and a new story was emerging, based on documents like death certificates. I confirmed that Desiderio Najera was killed on a Saturday night around 11:30 pm from a gunshot wound in 1929. William Crafts had been dead for at least 12 years from a gunshot wound also and seemed to have nothing to do with our great grandfather’s death.

Further archival newspaper searches of March 11, 1929, (the day after the incident on the death certificate) were fruitful as well; hidden away inside *The Brownsville Herald* was the headline:

“Two die as result of Matamoros Scrape.” The report claimed that Desidero Najera and Trinidad Garcia were instantly killed. Both were said to be Matamoros residents. Jesus Lopez Abrego, a policeman in the middle of the fusillade, escaped uninjured. One shot struck Najera in the kidney.¹⁴ Thus, Desiderio was not killed by William Crafts but by a policeman who had arrested Najera earlier on a charge of disturbing the peace. The archives conflicted with the oral tradition, and I began wondering how much of the original tale would survive.

The oral tradition was unraveling before my eyes; yet, small elements of the unwritten story remained. The gambling and the chase of the oral tradition were missing, along with William Crafts’ involvement, but we did know of a gunfight, very possibly outside of a bar. Also, the tradition holds that Desiderio was shot in the back, and the primary source confirms that he was shot in the kidney, which would lead me to believe that he was hit in the lower back. These shared details that seem inconsequential kept me interested in discovering if the version I knew well had more elements of “truth.”

The next part of the oral story was the act of vengeance committed by Severino Najera, who supposedly found Crafts after Desiderio’s death and gunned him down. We certainly know that Severino killing Crafts is inaccurate, but was there a vendetta on Jesus Lopez Abrego, the policeman who killed Desidero? I began to search *The Brownsville Herald* archives from March 12th and 13th, seeking any mention of Severino Najera or Jesus Lopez Abrego. After looking through newspapers and the 1929 Mexican civil registry of the deceased, I discovered that Severino killing Abrego immediately after his brother’s death, and the death of Severino could not be validated by reports, and yet again, the oral tradition lost more credibility. I began searching “Najera” on *Newspapers.com*, but results were nil. Finally, a search for “Jesus Lopez Abrego,” provided two articles revealing the second part of the oral tradition.

The revenge of Severino did not happen the following day,

as in the oral account, but it apparently happened three-and-a-half years later, on a cool and rainy December day in 1932. According to *The Brownsville Herald* and death certificate records, Severino “Najar [sic]” and his older brother Alejo “Najar [sic]” tried to assassinate Abrego in the late afternoon in Matamoros, Mexico. A vicious gunfight erupted: a young deportee was killed, and a bus driver was shot trying to protect a child in the gunfire. Alejo was shot 4 times and killed, and Severino was captured.¹⁵ This event was nothing like the oral account. The story I knew had Seferino shoot his brother’s killer until his gun was empty, without a struggle and without being captured. The second newspaper article, dated March 3, 1935, two years after the first failed assassination attempt and six years from the death of Desiderio Najera, is a two-paragraph blurb in *The Brownsville Herald* and lists an unknown assailant in the dead of night shooting into a room where Jesus Lopez Abrego slept. The article mentions seven rounds being fired at Abrego, one hitting him in the knee and two others hitting a woman in her legs. *The Herald* attributes the shooting to “[r]evenge.” The elements of truth in the oral story began to show itself once more. Severino had not quenched his thirst for vengeance, even though he had unloaded his pistol into the room of Abrego:

Salinas Padilla, 19 stood on a street corner in Matamoros late yesterday and pondered his fate. He had just been deported from Brownsville by U.S. Immigration officials on order of the federal court here. As he meditated, guns suddenly blazed in a battle between Policeman Jesus Lopez Abrego and the brothers Alejo and Severino Najar. A stray bullet struck young Padilla, killing him instantly. Killed also was Alejo Najar. . . . Alejo Najar died from four bullets from the gun of the policeman. Severino is in jail. The officer said the men apprehended him on the street and started firing without warning, because of the slaying three years ago of a third brother, Desidero. An investigation into the affair is being made today.¹⁶

The closing of the oral tradition was most captivating— Severino falls to his own *coraje*, spitting up blood out of the heartache of not fulfilling *la venganza de sangre* or blood vendetta. The last piece of the puzzle was to find the death account of Severino. According to the original story, he died, possibly within days of my great-grandfather, so I went back to the civil registration website from 1800-2002 from Mexico and searched March 4, 1935, but found nothing. Again, the oral story was misleading, so I continued to search entry after entry, and finally May 13, 1936 brought surprising answers.

I admit that I judged my great uncle and how he possibly died—a person who lost both brothers to violence, lived through the Mexican Revolution, spent time in prison, survived firefights where innocents were wounded and killed—what kind of violent death awaited this man? As my blood-shot eyes scrolled down the worn photocopied page, I saw in faded words “*tuberculosis de los pulmones, falleció,*” indicating that the cause of death was “tuberculosis of the lungs”. One of the symptoms of tuberculosis is the coughing up or spitting up of blood, so Severino coughing up blood was accurate, but from a sickness, not out of regret or disappointment for a failed “hit” and lost revenge.

The puzzle was complete except for one piece- the mystery of who killed William Crafts in 1917. *Newspapers.com* was of no help because *The Brownsville Herald* editions of 1917 were missing. Visiting the Texas Southmost College Library, I inquired about archives from the June 3, 1917 newspaper referencing William Crafts. According to *The Brownsville Herald*, “Crafts and Friend” were walking home that night when a famous local gambler known as Juan “the Pig” Sanchez pulled out his .38 revolver and shot Crafts and Crafts’ companion through the heart and in the neck, respectively. As “the Pig” continued to fire at Crafts’ friend, Crafts somehow managed to pull out his pistol and shoot Sanchez four times in the midsection, killing Sanchez. All players died that day.¹⁷

I finally had another version of the “truth,” not from the oral story, but from primary sources, and though I should have

been satisfied, I was not. Questions still lingered in my mind, namely: What influenced the obvious discrepancies between the oral tradition and the archived versions? Why and how was William Crafts inserted in our oral tradition? Was there any significance to the addition of figure of an authority with an Anglo surname as a violent figure, when in fact, the person involved in our great-grandfather's death was Mexican?

The Rhetoric of Oral Tradition: Understanding Our Tradition

As Andy and I came to understand that our oral tradition had obvious discrepancies, I shared with Andy that the rhetoric of oral traditions, oral histories, and even first-person narrative accounts are unique. My work with archival material, like diaries from the 19th century, helped us understand that perhaps the story, as we heard it as children, contained marks of social influences and purposes, producing a type of rhetorical tool that was passed down in our family to help explain our multi-faceted history, players, and major events in a way that the speakers were allowed to tell it at the time.

Paul Thompson, author of *Voices of the Past: Oral Histories*, describes how “[a]ll history depends ultimately upon its social purpose. This is why in the past it has been handed down by oral tradition and written chronicle.”¹⁸ Andy and I were challenged to put together these pieces and ask: What were the motivations for our great-great-grandmother, Francisca Najera, to (reportedly) tell this story this way? Were there historical, social, economic, cultural influences prompting her to create this oral tradition? Abrams reminds us that oral histories are very much an overlap of “personal memory and the social world,” and the stories that are produced are significant to the culture in which they derived.¹⁹ In other words, when mining oral histories, there is a profound rhetorical element in historical research that cannot be ignored.

When studying voices from our past, these are questions that offer a rhetorical and historical mix of consideration: What were the prejudices, biases, frustrations, beliefs and values of the storyteller which shaped their experience and perspective and memory of this event? Abrams contends: "To get grips with all the different elements that surfaced in an oral history encounter, oral historians came to other people's theories. These included subjectivity, memory, use of language, structures of narrative, and modes of communication, as well as issues concerning power and ethics."²⁰ The layers of complexity in the practical gathering, reading and sharing of oral histories is challenging and should not be ignored; even Abrams admits that oral histories can be "restructured by people in the present," and the slippery nature of memory and interpretation continues.²¹

Additionally, we, like Abrams, are "aware that all personal narratives are embedded within something much bigger- what we might call culture, or wider social forces or the public-political world or the discursive field."²² Abrams reminds us that "oral history is permeable and borderless," often requiring scholars to cross "disciplinary boundaries, in order to make the most of this rich and complex source."²³ Andy (history) and I (rhetoric and literature) exemplify this cross-disciplinary approach to obtain a historical narrative that provides varying yet contextual perspectives of family, community and heritage. We realized that the perpetuation of *our* oral tradition had a larger rhetorical purpose, and we began to consider those socio-political, cultural and economic aspects of life on the border during the early 1900s.

As noted earlier, oral traditions are not told by those within the story, the original players— these tales have been passed down by at least one generation, so the idiosyncrasies of such objects of study are obvious (authenticity, lack of archival materials, forgotten details, etc.) Where there is no history readily at hand, it will be created,²⁴ and, in the early twentieth century Rio Grande Valley, this was certainly a possibility.

For families who were disconnected, like my great grandfather, who was estranged from his children (living on separate sides of the border), it was likely useful for spouses, lovers, sons and daughters to add details to remember or honor other family members. The tradition also enables family members to “give an individual a strong sense of a much longer personal lifespan, which will even survive their own death.”²⁵ an important necessity in the violent Rio Grande Valley. Our oral tradition, despite its flaws, also offers later generations insight into family structures and roles.²⁶ Perhaps our great-great-grandmother, Francisca, desired Severino to die with dignity, showcasing his loyalty and love for his brother, rather than dying from a debilitating disease.

Perhaps the most illuminating consideration about the rhetoric of our oral tradition is that this story perhaps is/was used to explain or rationalize painful events our family endured in ways which were allowed and accepted: “Through history ordinary people seek to understand the upheavals and changes which they experience in their own lives: wars, social transformations ... or personal migration into a new community.”²⁷ Along similar lines, Thompson also considers how “Sometimes the social purpose of history is obscure” and “can be quite blatant: used to provide justification for war and conquest.”²⁸ For example, it is unclear why our great-grandfather was in a shootout with Abrego, a police officer, but I wonder why Abrego, a Mexican officer with Spanish surname, was purposely replaced by a Brownsville officer with an Anglo surname in our oral tradition; perhaps Crafts was more fitting for the role of the story at the time it was created, and violence across ethnic lines was more expected and accepted. If that is the case, our ancestors were engaging in a social rhetoric of the milieu, using their story as a means to make history.

This type of imaginative history is not uncommon when working with oral traditions and oral stories; Abrams cites noted historian Luisa Passerini: “We should not ignore that the raw material of oral history consists not just of factual statements, but

is preeminently an expression and representation of culture, and therefore includes not only literal narrations but also the dimensions of memory, ideology and subconscious desires."²⁹

We had to face the reality of our great-great-grandmother's rhetorical choices in shaping her and her family's history—by choosing to avoid certain narratives and add particular fabrications, she was, essentially, in control of her and her family's story.³⁰ She shaped history with her words, and words, during the early twentieth century, were the trusted means of communication. As scholars in the field acknowledge "memory stories are ... often fluid, and in short, [argue] that oral sources must be judged differently from conventional documentary materials, but this in no way detracts from their veracity and utility."³¹

Additionally, our great-grandmother, Elisa Najera (Desiderio's widow and a Brownsville resident), participated heavily in politics in her lifetime. We wonder if her political loyalties to the Democratic "Blue" Party had an impact on how she chose to remember and pass on her family's story. After all, Crafts answered to Crixell, a member of the "Red" Party that controlled the city's police force. While some may argue that our conclusions are mere conjecture, Passerini's work with oral history draws profound conclusions regarding studying oral tradition:

Oral sources derive from subjectivity- they are not static recollections of the past but are memories reworked in the context of the respondent's own experience and politics. If one accepts this point then the oral historian is obliged to think hard about how and why those memory stories are produced- about the cultural environments of memory (when things happened) and of remembering (as they are recalled).³²

Conclusion

Cyrus R.K. Pattell, associate professor of American Literature at New York University, states that oral traditions are sometimes "damaged," but that it is worth calling attention to

the ways in which they are damaged. While we would not label our oral tradition as “damaged,” we certainly would agree it is rhetorically transformed— a (possibly) fabricated story was used to tell another truth of the time. We consider this observation to be relevant, perhaps even more relevant than finding the difference between “truth” and “lies.” Similarly, Thompson’s work affirms that “In some fields, oral history can result not merely in shift in focus, but also in the opening up of important new areas of inquiry.”³³

This was our area of focus— the mesh among history, rhetoric, language, and storytelling is relevant to scholars, especially in the Rio Grande Valley, where many native people did not/could not read or write and relied on oral traditions to make sense of their lives. Thompson also asserts that oral history “provides a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past, a challenge to the established account. In doing so, oral history has radical implication for the social message of history as a whole.”³⁴ Maybe, through this cross-disciplinary perspective, our family can understand our heritage in a new way and appreciate that our ancestors were makers of history through their own version of remembering it and passing it on.

The University of Texas—Rio Grande Valley

Endnotes

- 1 Personal interview of the authors with Desiderio G. Najera.
- 2 For purposes of clarity and due to numerous people referenced in this paper who share surnames, the authors of this paper, Andy Najera and Monica Reyes, will be referenced by their first names.
- 3 Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London and New York: Routledge UP, 2010), p. 26.
- 4 *Ibid.*

- 5 Milo Kearney and Anthony K. Knopp, *Boom and Bust: The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownville*, 1st ed. (Austin: Eakin Press, 1995), p. 195.
- 6 Kearney and Knopp, *Op. Cit.*, p. 194.
- 7 Kearney and Knopp, *Op. Cit.* p. 213.
- 8 Kearney and Knopp, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 230-231.
- 9 Kearney and Knopp, *Op. Cit.*, p. 202.
- 10 *Op. Cit.*, p. 201.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 "William A. Crafts Jr." *Findagrave.com*, 5 Jun. 2016,
<http://www.findagrave.com/cgibin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GSln=Crafts&GSi-man=1&GScid=5742&GRid=62804552&>
- 13 *Familysearch.org* is a database which catalogues public records. The authors used this site to discover death certificates, but any information was cross-referenced with other publications, such as *The Brownville Herald's* archive material.
- 14 *The Brownville Herald*, "Two die as a result of Matamoros Scrap," 11 March 1929. *Newspapers.com*.
- 15 *The Brownville Herald*, "Man carries girl from line of fire in Matamoros, is wounded," 6 December 1932. *Newspapers.com*.
- 16 *The Brownville Herald*, "Former Matamoros officer is wounded," 3 March 1935. *Newspapers.com*.
- 17 *The Brownville Herald*, "3 men dead after a day of quarrels between the principles." 3 June. 1917. *Newspapers.com*.
- 18 Paul Thompson, *The Voices of the Past: Oral History*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: UP, 1988), p. 1.
- 19 Abrams, *Op. Cit.*, p. 7.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 Abrams, *Op. Cit.*, p. 8.
- 22 Abrams, *Op. Cit.*, p. 16.
- 23 Abrams, *Op. Cit.*, p. 3.

24 Thompson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 1.

25 Thompson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.

26 Thompson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 7.

27 Thompson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.

28 Thompson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 1.

29 Abrams, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 6-7).

30 Part of our oral tradition affirms that the authors' great-great-grandmother, Francisca Najera, began the story and that it was retold to her daughter-in-law, Desiderio's wife- Elisa Najera.

31 Abrams, *Op. Cit.*, p. 6.

32 Abrams, *Op. Cit.*, p. 7.

33 Thompson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 6.

34 Thompson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 5.

TWENTIETH CENTURY BIOGRAPHY



The Angel of Death
à la Bernini

President Emeritus Miguel A. Nevárez and the Transformation of South Texas

by

Rolando Avila

In 2013, the Texas Legislature approved the creation of a new school in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV), which was primarily based in Edinburg, Harlingen, and Brownsville. In the Fall of 2015, the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA) and the University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) entities were dissolved, and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) opened its doors on the campuses of the two “legacy institutions.” One major benefit of this change was that the new school had access to the Permanent University Fund (PUF).¹ Another benefit of the new school was that, beginning in 2016, it included a school of medicine. Besides increasing access for RGV residents to medical training, the school of medicine also held the promise of promoting research in illnesses that plagued the area, including diabetes.

In 2016, the provisional mission statement of UTRGV was: “The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley provides a high quality, innovative, and affordable education to the students of South Texas, Texas, the United States, and the world. The University will transform Texas and the nation through student success, research, healthcare, and commercialization of university discoveries.”² Of course, no one knew the future, but in 2016 the future of UTRGV, did, in fact, look bright. Building on the 1989 merger with the University of Texas System (UT System), UTRGV held the promise of exciting innovation. However, one could never understand how the school got to that point without understanding crucial events that came before it.

A Brief History of the School and Presidents

Named for the city in which it was located, Edinburg College, a two-year junior college, was founded in 1927 in Edinburg, Texas. In these early years, the college temporarily formed part of the Edinburg Independent School District, and H. C. Baker (1927–1930), the Superintendent of Schools, concurrently functioned as the college's first president. After Edinburg students completed their K-12 education, they were encouraged to transition to the two-year junior college. Under the leadership of President Baker, the school served about 200 students.³

In 1930, H. U. Miles (1930–1931), the second president, served exclusively as president of the junior college, which was then operating independently of the school district, and began serving students from the entire South Texas region. In 1933, under the leadership of R. P. Ward (1931–1943; 1946–1960), the third president, the name of the school was changed to Edinburg Junior College to better describe its mission. In recognition that the institution served a much wider area than just the city of Edinburg, in 1948 the local college board renamed it Edinburg Regional College.⁴

Due in large part to the G.I. Bill, the fall semester enrollment grew dramatically by 1947 to 650 students.⁵ Under the leadership of President Ward, the growth in enrollment prompted a move of Edinburg Regional College from its original four-acre campus at the corner of McIntyre Street and 8th Avenue to a 186-acre campus at the corner of West University Drive and Sugar Road, which was just a few blocks to the west from the original campus. In 1951, the school became a four-year institution and was renamed Pan American College in 1952. The choice to use “Pan American” as the name of the college was based on the administration’s “desire to bridge the cultures of North and South America and to reflect the cultural and ethnic diversities of the university.”⁶ By the fall 1952 semester, the locally funded and newly upgraded public 4-year institution saw a tremendous increase in enrollment to 1,537 students.⁷

H. A. Hodges (1943–1946) served as interim president while Ward served in the military during World War II. After Ward retired, Ralph Franklin Schilling (1960-1981) served as the fifth president of the college.⁸ The school continued to grow under Schilling's leadership. For example, in 1965, when the college joined the state system, the fall semester enrollment increased to 2,861 students.⁹ The move of the college to the state system shifted the school's funding source from local to state. The continued growth of the school led to a transition from college to university status, and, in 1971, the name, Pan American University (PAU), reflected the new character of the school.¹⁰ By 1972 fall semester, the school's enrollment was 6,896, which "brought increasing state revenue appropriations."¹¹ Consequently, Schilling planned and began "a long range building program."¹²

In 1973, Schilling appointed Miguel A. Nevárez to the position of Vice President for Student Affairs. That same year, Schilling formed a partnership with Texas Southmost College (TSC) in Brownsville, Texas. Under the partnership, TSC continued to offer the Freshman and Sophomore level courses, and PAU offered the Junior and Senior levels. By offering the upper level courses, PAU was "filling a gap" in the higher educational needs of local residents.¹³ Schilling appointed "Dr. Fred Cunningham, who had been dean of the PAU College of Education, to set up the upper level courses there."¹⁴ Nevárez recalled, "the vision of the partnership originated with Arnulfo Oliveira, the president of TSC, who wanted students who went to TSC to have the opportunity to earn a 4-year degree."¹⁵

After Schilling retired as president in 1981, Nevárez became the sixth president of the university.¹⁶ The partnership between TSC and PAU continued for about a decade. After Oliveira passed away, Juliet V. García became president of TSC. Nevárez recalled, "We had a series of different directors running the PAU branch on the TSC campus, but I felt like I was not doing enough for Brownsville. I was concentrating more on Edinburg. Our upper level Brownsville program was only a line

item on our budget. But, if they separated from us, they would get their own appropriations.”¹⁷

In 1989, both Nevárez and UT System Chancellor Hans Mark were instrumental in bringing PAU into the UT System. The merger led to a name change to the University of Texas–Pan American (UTPA). Nevárez recalled, “in 1991... we introduced a bill to make the Brownsville UTPA branch independent, separate from us. It passed. At that time, Juliet García was still president of TSC and Homer Peña, who had been serving as the Brownsville UTPA branch director, became the first president of the University of Texas at Brownsville.”¹⁸ After Peña retired in the early 1990s, García became president of UTB. Nevárez recalled:

García had to give up the TSC presidency, but she developed a partnership with the TSC Board. She oversaw TSC while she was president of UTB. The UT System did not do a search. They just gave the job to her, and she convinced the TSC Board to give her all of the administrative duties for TSC without paying her a salary. She did both jobs at the same time, but she only had one title, president of UTB. She transferred a lot of administrative positions to UTB, and she did away with some positions. As part of the partnership, she combined the administration of both schools.... The big problem that UTB had was that they did not own the land, and they constructed their buildings on someone else's land. If you own the land, and someone else builds a house on your land, guess who owns the house? You can't move it. That was part of the partnership arrangement that they had. I really believed that what was going to happen in Brownsville was that UTB and TSC were going to make a complete merger. With the disappearance of TSC, that tax burden would have disappeared, which would have made taxpayers in Cameron County happy. After the merger, only UTB would have remained and functioned as both a community college and a university, like PAU had done for many years before South Texas Community College was established. I really thought that that was going to happen. But, TSC did not want to be absorbed or dissolved. In their partnership, UTB took on all of the responsibilities even though the TSC Board still existed. Under this arrangement, the TSC Board asked, "What do we do?" "We don't hire a president." "We don't hire the faculty." "We don't approve programs." "What do we do?" The response was, "Well, you collect taxes,

and you use the money to construct new buildings.” They didn’t like it. The TSC Board sent the UT System a bill for about \$10 million. They said, “This is what you owe us in rent.” The UT System responded by saying, “We are taking all our marbles and getting out of here.” I think that this contributed greatly to the TSC-UTB “divorce.”¹⁹

In late 2010, the UT System Board voted to terminate the TSC-UTB educational partnership. The TSC Board did the same in early 2011. The next year, the UT System Board approved a proposal to merge UTB and UTPA. Nevárez asserted, “Some people have asked, ‘Would the recent merger between UTB and UTPA have been possible without the TSC-UTB divorce?’ I think it would have been a lot more difficult to do. In fact, it may have been impossible. But, I don’t call the creation of UTRGV a merger. I say that UTB came back home. That is certainly one way of looking at it.”²⁰ While the TSC-UTB “divorce” may have facilitated the establishment of UTRGV, a series of past events had brought the school to that juncture. Nevárez explained:

In 1989, Hans Mark, the UT System Chancellor, and I were able to successfully negotiate a merger that brought Pan American University (PAU) into the UT System. Today, not many people realize how difficult that process was.... I am fully aware that the 1989 merger would not have been possible without the work of previous leaders. If the founding leaders had not separated the original school from the Edinburg School District in the early 1950s, the community college would not have been able to grow to a regional college and later to a university. In like manner, we could not have gone into the UT System if former President Ralph Schilling had not brought the school into the state system in 1965. In the same way, the 2015 reorganization of the university into the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley was possible because of the 1989 merger.²¹

Early Merger Attempts

By far the most notable change during Nevárez’s tenure was the merger of PAU with the UT System in 1989. It was a long

and arduous journey that had, in fact, begun during Dr. Schilling's presidency. In the early 1960s, Schilling began an effort to bring the school, which was locally funded and controlled, into the state system. However, Schilling 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, this would open the school doors to more Hispanics in the area. Nevárez 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 newspaper [with the headline]: "Why Does Pan American College Want to Educate Cotton Pickers...?" There's no place for that.... So, in order to get something like that done, you are not going to do it by being nice.... It was a very different environment. I think he was the right person for that time. That's the kind of administrative style that was needed.²²

In spite of opposition from both inside and outside the college, in 1965 Schilling was successful in bringing the school into the state system. State funding led to building projects on the campus. In fact, construction continued through the rest of Schilling's tenure and into Nevárez's tenure. Having secured entrance into the state system, in the late 1960s Schilling sought a merger with Texas A & I University to form a South Texas System. However, the plan was defeated in the Texas legislature. Half a decade later, Schilling made another attempt at a merger. In 1975, with support from some community members and some of the members of the Board of Regents, including Board Chairman Morris Atlas and Board member Ruben Cardenas, Schilling planned to go before the Texas legislature to appeal for a merger with the University of Texas System.

Faculty member Dr. Jerry Polinard described his “all-time favorite faculty meeting,” which had been called by Schilling a couple of weeks before the legislative session.²⁵ Polinard recalled:

Schilling was very upset. He had heard that a few faculty members had contacted some state legislators to tell them that they opposed the merger. Schilling said, “O.K., I want the legislators to know we support this. We’re going to take a vote.” Then Schilling proceeded to explain the benefits of the merger. Following the explanation, he announced, “O.K., I guess that’s all.” At that point, a faculty member said, “Well, Dr. Schilling, I thought you said we were going to take a vote.” Schilling was clearly upset by this challenge and responded, “Alright, those of you voting ‘no’ stand up and give your names to my secretary!” No one stood up.²⁴

Polinard assessed, “I always thought, ‘Wow! That was a very effective way.’ I don’t want to seem critical of him. That was his nature. He was a take-charge person, and it was an interesting period.”²⁵ However, in spite of Schilling’s efforts, the legislature rejected his appeal for a merger. As Schilling’s vice president, Nevárez witnessed the defeat of the 1975 merger attempt. Nevárez explained, “We wanted to get graduate and professional programs. The merger was the means. The merger was never the goal.”²⁶

Promoting Awareness

During Nevárez’s presidency, he continually promoted awareness of PAU’s plight before the Texas Legislature. On one occasion, he placed a bottle of ketchup on the desk and announced that his testimony had to do with the bottle set in front of him. He recalled, “That got everybody’s attention.”²⁷ He then stated to the legislators, “My testimony has to do with catching up... ketch-up.”²⁸ Once he had their attention, he reminded them of the disparity in funding that existed in state-supported universities and then requested more funding for PAU. While he felt it was a silly thing to do, it accomplished the desired result of calling

attention to the problem and the request. From that point on, every time Nevárez went to the legislature, several legislators would comment, “Here comes the guy with the ketchup!”²⁹

In 1986, Nevárez spoke about Mexican-American higher education challenges before a special Committee on Higher Education in Harlingen, Texas:

The [U.S. Commerce] Department...tells us we will continue to hold the distinction of being the poorest region in the entire United States, poorer than Appalachia, poorer than the poorest regions of Alabama and Mississippi.... The bottom line, I propose, is this: The need for higher education in this region is increasing. The question is: Will we provide the opportunities to answer that need? That raises the question of access and academic support for the marginal student. Many people argue that the best way to improve overall student performance in higher education is to exclude the ill-prepared student. No question about it. That's a quick, cheap, and convenient way to do it. You simply raise the floor. But you haven't raised the ceiling. Exclusion does not educate. It only leaves a larger problem.... The causal factors [of disparity] are related to economics and a history of unequal participation in higher education.... The key is this: We seek to raise performance—not to lower standards. Quality and access are compatible goals.... We don't often associate excellence with open admission schools, but excellence is certainly possible in all institutions. And we have evidence of it at Pan American.... In the last 10 years, for example, we have produced more than 10,000 graduates, many of whom have gone on to become doctors, lawyers, teachers, bankers, and business men and women. Many of those 10,000 graduates came to us unprepared to do college-level work; they came from first-generation college families, and they were poor. They worked at full-time jobs; they lived with their families and they helped take care of their younger brothers and sisters. And when they graduated, many of them doubled their earning power and tripled their level of education, compared to that of their parents. This is value added. Pan American was the only door open to them; they took advantage of that opportunity, and now they, their families, their children, and the State of Texas are better off for it.³⁰

Nevárez elaborated on the “value added” concept that he often used to promote awareness:

When I went to Austin, either to the Coordinating Board or to the Texas Legislature, the question that often came up had to do with retention and graduation rates. At that time, we were an open-admissions school, and most of our students were under-prepared to come to college. Many of them came from low-income backgrounds. They were first-generation college-attending students. In other words, they did not have the same support system as students that came from middle-income families that were the second, third, or fourth generation from their families to attend college. So, by comparing all students in Texas merely on retention and graduation rates, they were really comparing apples to oranges. It was not fair. That was the situation, and I presented my argument in the framework of value added. Universities, for the most part are funded by taxpayers. There are a lot of business people that work on the philosophy of what they call a return on investment: "If I make this investment, what am I going to get out of it?" When we looked at PAU graduates who gained triple the formal education and triple the earning power of their parents that was value added. What does that mean? When we looked at those two things, we could convert that into economic development. PAU graduates paid more taxes, purchased better cars, and bought better homes than their parents. PAU was creating a better educated workforce. This was what the taxpayer was getting for their investment. Now, who contributed more to economic development, a student from PAU or a student from UT Austin? When many UT Austin students graduated, they had not attained the same level of education or the same level of earning power as their parents. Considering these things, if you are going to make an investment, where would you put the money? I thought that it was a very useful argument to make to the Texas Legislature and to foundations when we were raising money. UTRGV can still make the same argument today, but it is not as strong an argument as it was when I was president.³¹

In 1988, as part of a report on Hispanic-serving colleges and universities across the country, a *New York Times* reporter interviewed Nevárez. In the interview, Nevárez explained that since the Hispanic population was growing very quickly, it was in society's best interest to educate this segment of the population. He explained, "It doesn't take too much imagination to realize that this is the future work force. Someone will have to keep the Social Security checks alive."³²

New Failed Merger Attempt with Significant Results

In the 1980s, the failed attempt by Schilling to merge PAU with the UT System was still fresh in the minds of legislators and community leaders. Nevárez was aware that the past failure might make it difficult to secure support for a new attempt at a merger with existing university systems. The problem was that the South Texas region did not have “enough political clout to get some things done.”³³ So, Nevárez and the college presidents from Corpus Christi, Kingsville, and Laredo came up with a new plan. If they could not join the existing systems, perhaps they could come together to create a new one: The South Texas University System. However, the bill was defeated in the legislature. Nevárez recalled, “Even our own legislators said, ‘Why do the poor want to join the poor?’”³⁴ After the failed attempt to form the South Texas University System, Nevárez decided to regroup with the other three presidents. Although the South Texas University System did not officially exist, they continued to work together as an unofficial system. Nevárez recalled:

The four universities worked together anyway. We were united. We all spoke in agreement. We were not a university system, but we were all on the same page. Because we were working together, we got a lot more attention at the legislature. And, our team work had the same effect as if we were a system. We were able to get representatives involved. In fact, the whole South Texas Delegation started to work together, because they saw us working together.³⁵

Nevárez asked Frederick von Ende, a PAU faculty member, to accompany him to a meeting with the presidents. At the end of the meeting, the presidents agreed to have von Ende do some research, write a report, and develop a presentation about the inequalities of higher education program offerings in South Texas compared to rest of the state. Von Ende worked on the report during the summer of 1987. A few years earlier, with the goal of reorganizing all public institutions of higher learning into

designated tiers, the Higher Education Coordinating Board had compiled a tremendous amount of data on all public colleges and public universities. Even though the Board had not been able to accomplish its goal, it left behind a gold mine of data, which von Ende discovered during the course of his research. The report von Ende wrote was titled, "Higher Education in South Texas: A Comparative Examination with an Emphasis on the Availability of Advanced Degree Programs" and was composed of three sections. Von Ende recalled:

The first section was an analysis of the demographics of the South Texas area compared to the rest of the state. Of course, that showed that the Hispanic population was a very important element of that population. Then the second part of it was an analysis of higher education opportunities in South Texas as compared to the rest of the state. And, what it showed was that South Texas wasn't...having as many higher education opportunities as the rest of the state. Just an example, in the area of doctoral degrees, there was one in our area of South Texas. And, I pointed out that there were 400 in North Texas. And, I thought that...emphasized the disparity between the various areas of the state. The third section of it was going to be what we needed to...make the situation better.⁵⁶

Von Ende never finished the third section of the report. While he had written an introduction to the third section, which stated, "In order to make things better, we need to....," the sentence just stopped. Von Ende was waiting for the presidents to tell him what action they deemed best. However, the presidents had the unfinished report printed and sent to the legislature, because they felt that the "statistical analysis...was really the key point."⁵⁷

Shortly after, news of the report spread and von Ende received calls from colleges in Arizona and California asking for copies. A couple of months later, the Mexican American Legal Defense Council (MALDEF) in San Antonio called von Ende asking for permission to use the report in a South Texas discrimination case. Before von Ende took any action on the request, he went to see the president. Von Ende recalled his conversation with Nevárez:

"They want to use...the study that you had me do, but we're going to be defendants in the case....and they want me to possibly testify in a trial." He said, "Go ahead." I said, again, "We're going to be defendants. I'll be testifying against ourselves." And he said to me...he said, "In this case, if we lose, we win."³⁸

In effect, Nevárez provided MALDEF with data to use as part of a discrimination lawsuit. MALDEF sued the Texas governor, the colleges in South Texas, the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A & M University for not providing an equitable access to higher education programs in Texas. MALDEF won its case at the lower court, presided over by Judge Gilberto Hinojosa in Brownsville, Texas; however, the ruling was overturned by a Court of Appeals, because the upper court felt that there were many areas in Texas that were under-served—not just South Texas.

In spite of the loss, the case garnered a lot of public awareness about the higher education inequalities in the state and the lack of educational programs in South Texas. In short, Texas Legislators began paying serious attention to the plight of the South. Von Ende assessed, "By that time the evidence that what Dr. Nevárez had said that 'if we lose, we win' began to show up, because the legislature began to pay a little more attention to South Texas. Eventually, I think all of that attention led to the South Texas Border Initiative."³⁹ Nevárez assessed:

That created an awareness in Austin: "Hey, we need to do something for those guys in South Texas." That all happened in 1987. They said, "We have to do something." And, what they did is say, "You know A & M System [and] UT System...you go down there and see what you can do for those guys over there. In the meantime, here's some money..." They gave us some money...some startup funds...to develop new programs."⁴⁰

The South Texas Border Initiative funds did not really solve the problem, because PAU needed more than money to start new programs. The university also needed other kinds of help. Nevárez explained:

*We needed the money. There was no question about that. But we also needed the know-how. When you go to the Coordinating Board and say, "I want a doctoral program." They will ask, "Does your faculty have the research credentials to qualify to teach in a doctoral program?" Well, we didn't have enough of that. So, we needed that. As a matter of fact, the doctorate in education started out as a cooperative doctorate, because we lacked the needed expertise. The South Texas Border Initiative provided us with money, but we said, "That is not enough. We need help in development." So, the legislature told the UT System to send people to help us. They didn't tell them to merge with us. They just asked them to help us. UT System Chancellor Hans Mark was the one who proposed a new merger attempt to me.*⁴¹

1989 Merger with UT System

On July 23, 1987, during a coffee break at a Higher Education Coordinating Board meeting, Nevárez struck up a conversation with UT System Chancellor Hans Mark. Nevárez said to Mark, "You know this lawsuit isn't going to go anywhere, because of the argument that there are other un-served [areas]."⁴² Nevárez then proceeded to explain to Mark about Schilling's failed attempt to merge with the UT System one decade earlier. Mark responded, "You know, that sounds to me like a hell of a good idea. That is, why don't we try it again?"⁴³ Nevárez recalled his conversation with Mark:

*And, the conversation started out, "We need help in developing more programs." And...he said, "The only way that we can really help you is...if we bring you into the system. Then we can really work together, because if we do things any other way, it would be a one shot deal. And then you leave as president, and I leave as chancellor and things go back to the way they used to be."*⁴⁴

Nevárez was encouraged by Mark's support. Nevárez answered Mark by stating, "O.K., I was in on the first one. The second one might succeed. You know, we're farther along the way."⁴⁵ Both men sat down together and began to plan a strategy. The merger would need to be initiated by the two Boards

of Regents. So, Nevárez went to work primarily with the PAU Board and Mark went to work primarily with the UT Board. Mark recalled, "We both had to be pretty careful not to look like we were trying to upset the world."⁴⁶

Besides working with the board, Nevárez drummed up support for the merger with the Rio Grande Valley community. Mark was impressed with Nevárez's political connections in South Texas. Mark assessed that Nevárez's judgment when dealing with the local community was "absolutely superb."⁴⁷ Mark observed, "He made it possible for me to go to our Regents here and say, 'Look, there are some very serious people in that neighborhood who really want to do this....'"⁴⁸

Mark recalled that there was "a fair amount of...unpleasant opposition" in Austin.⁴⁹ The main argument against a merger was that the quality and rating of PAU were not very good. However, it was obvious to the supporters of the merger that this fact was the best reason to merge, because the merger would lead to more programs and an improvement in rating. Mark speculated that racism also played a role in the minds of those that opposed the merger, because he was aware of strong opposition to having "Hispanics on the board."⁵⁰ After some time, Mark and Nevárez came to a conclusion: "We kind of figured that in the case of the Pan American Board, all we needed was the majority of the 9 members. But, if the UT Board did not approve of this move unanimously, we both judged that it would fail. And, so the big problem was how do we get the unanimous agreement?"⁵¹ In this regard, Mark assessed that "the person that really made that happen was Jack Blanton... who was the Chairman of the Board.... He performed a miracle."⁵² Nevárez had a different view. He stated:

I think Hans Mark undersells himself. He gives a lot of credit to the Chairman of the Board. The Chairman did a lot. I don't want to minimize Mr. Blanton's contributions. But, it was Hans Mark who got Blanton to that point. Mark was the motivator with that board. He set the tone with Blanton and the board. Then, Blanton worked on convincing his fellow board members with Mark's support.⁵³

The UT Board approved the merger unanimously on January 11, 1988. Mark “was both surprised and pleased by this development.”⁵⁴ Most of the rest of the year was spent in negotiations with the PAU Board. On December 6, 1988, the PAU Board, by voting for the merger, in effect, voted itself out of existence by a majority vote of five to four. Although only one vote made the difference, the merger resolution was approved. With approval from both boards, the next step was to get a merger bill passed in the Texas Legislature. Mark recalled, that the “key person,” during the merger negotiations, “was a representative by the name of Renato Cuellar.”⁵⁵ In fact, “The deal was struck in Cuellar’s office.”⁵⁶ Besides Cuellar, in Mark’s opinion, other key players during the merger negotiations included Mario Yzaguirre from Brownsville, Dr. Mario Ramirez from Roma, Morris Atlas from McAllen, State Senator Eddie Lucio, Jack Blanton, and Nevárez. Mark praised Nevárez in the following way: “His faith and persistence when problems arose was a most important factor in the success of the merger effort.”⁵⁷

Legacy

Looking back on a long career, Mark offered this assessment, “I’ve done a few good things in my life and this...probably...had the most important impact.”⁵⁸ Von Ende assessed: “Many may consider the merger of Pan American University into the University of Texas System as the most significant change that occurred during [Nevárez’s] presidency. He helped to engineer that and to make it become a reality when it became clear that that was going to be one of the best ways to promote higher education in South Texas.”⁵⁹ Nevárez recalled:

Hans Mark was enthusiastic about helping us. He set the tone with the UT System deans to help us. At that time, Bill Cunningham was the dean of UT Austin’s School of Business. I remember Cunningham bringing a team to see if we could create a doctoral program in Business Administration here. After their review, they concluded that we could

*create that one on our own. They said, "You don't need a cooperative with this one. That help would not have occurred had we not been part of the UT System. Cunningham became the UT Chancellor when Hans Mark left. Chancellor Cunningham was also very supportive."*⁶⁰

In a 1994 President's Report, Nevárez stated: "The approval of our first doctoral degree program elevated us to a new level of degree-granting authority.... More and more our institutional growth will be measured in the variety and quality of our programs."⁶¹ By the 1990s, the "region's long-disadvantaged Mexican American majority" was noticeably reaping the benefits of higher education at UTPA.⁶² For example, Lawyer Ramon García told a *Wall Street Journal* reporter, "We went from picking cotton to what we're doing now, and I can tell you it is a lot better."⁶³ García explained, "It would not have happened without Pan Am. Most everybody I grew up with went to Pan Am. It was a way out."⁶⁴ Dr. Jerry Polinard, a UTPA Political Science professor, assessed in 1997, "We're just now seeing the positive effects of the university system.... There's a much larger Mexican American middle class and educated class here now than ever before."⁶⁵ Throughout the years, Nevárez received many awards and honors. However, he is most proud of one recognition:

*If you go back when I was growing up here in the Valley... you were either very poor or you were very well off. There was not a middle class here.... I think what I'm most proud of... is this university getting recognized of creating a middle class of people here in the Valley. It's the university.... What I'm proud of is it happened while I was here."*⁶⁶

In 2004, the U.S. Congress named the Edinburg Post Office the "Dr. Miguel A. Nevárez Post Office Building." Praises were heard in Congress during discussions of the bill. For example, in the House, Representative Ruben Hinojosa stated:

*Dr. Miguel A. Nevárez has presided over a sea of change in South Texas. His leadership of the University of Texas-Pan American has transformed the region.... Today...UTPA is a full-fledged research institution, offering 56 undergraduate programs, 42 master's programs, and 5 doctoral programs.... The growth and development of South Texas are inextricably linked to growth and development of UTPA.*⁶⁷

Besides setting the tone with the UT System deans, Mark also “set the tone with the UT Health Science Centers at San Antonio and Houston.”⁶⁸ Nevárez explained to an interviewer in 2010, “A medical school was promised to us by the UT System during the merger negotiations.”⁶⁹ In 2016, Nevárez explained:

*Some people may think that the creation of UTGV was driven by a new desire to build a medical school in the Valley. Hey! The medical school was promised to us through Hans Mark back in 1989. And they started doing the best they could by offering third and fourth year programs in Harlingen. They developed a building out of the UT Health Science Center in San Antonio with Francisco Cigarroa. In other words, Cigarroa was very much aware of the commitment that UT had made to develop a medical school down here. In fact, Cigarroa was the UT Chancellor when UTRGV (with a plan for a medical school) was created.*⁷⁰

Conclusion

In a recent interview, Nevárez reflected on the history of higher education in the RGV and the future of UTRGV:

*Well, what has come out in this reunification of UTB and UTPA along with a plan for a medical school is great. It is the greatest thing! There is no question that a lot of good will come from it. But, to understand how we got to this point, we need to see that everything builds on something else. If there had not been a 1989 merger with the UT System, we could not do any kind of reunification within the UT System. Everything builds on something else. If you take one of the links off, the next thing cannot happen.*⁷¹

In 2013, UT System Chancellor Francisco G. Cigarroa announced, "It's because of [Nevárez's] contributions and his leadership that we are positioned to create a new university that will transform South Texas."⁷²

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Endnotes

1 The primary state funding the two schools were receiving prior to the PUF was the Higher Education Assistance Fund (HEAF), which uses state taxes to fund higher education. In contrast, the PUF generates revenue from oil sales. The profits from the sales make up the Available University Fund (AUF) that is then used to fund Texas schools of higher education that are under PUF funding umbrella. UTRGV's access to the PUF reduces the burden on state taxes. Also, historically the PUF has been a much richer source of funding than the HEAF. Arguably, an expensive medical program would be much more viable with PUF funding than with HEAF funding.

2 The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Provisional Mission Statement, <http://www.utrgv.edu/en-us/about-utrgv/mission-statement/index.htm>

3 The University of Texas-Pan American, History & Traditions, <http://www.utpa.edu/about/history-traditions/>; all legacy institution websites were scheduled to be permanently deleted on October 24, 2016. A secondary source that contains a brief history based on the UTPA History & Traditions website is, Rolando Avila and Anita Pankake. 2016. "President Emeritus Miguel A. Nevárez: An Agent for Social Justice in Higher Education." *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, pages 1-23, DOI 10.1177/1538192716670995.

4 Ibid.

5 The University of Texas-Pan American, Office of Institutional Effectiveness. 2000. "Student Enrollment: General Headcount Figures from 1927 to the Present." *UTPA 2000 Institutional Fact Book*, page 55.

6 The University of Texas-Pan American, History & Traditions.

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- 11 Raymond Welch, *Struggle and Progress in the History of Pan American University: 1927-1987* (Edinburg, Texas: Pan American University, 1987), p. 36.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Miguel A. Nevárez, Interview by Author, September 9, 2016.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 The University of Texas-Pan American, History & Traditions.
- 17 Nevárez, Interview by Author, September 9, 2016.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Rolando Avila, *Miguel A. Nevárez: A Life History* (Weslaco, Texas: R & L Books, 2016), p. v.
- 22 Miguel A. Nevárez, Interview by Author, August 30, 2012.
- 23 Jerry Polinard, Interview by Author, October 5, 2012.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Miguel A. Nevárez, Interview by Author, September 18, 2012.
- 27 Miguel A. Nevárez, Interview by Author, September 11, 2012.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Miguel A. Nevárez. 1986. "Education and the Future of the Rio Grande Valley: Remarks by Dr. Miguel A. Nevárez, President, Pan American University, to the select Committee on Higher Education," (Harlingen, Texas, March 11, 1986). University of Texas-Pan American Collection, Lower Rio Grande Valley Archives and Special Collections, Edinburg, Texas; and Miguel A. Nevárez, Interview, September 9, 2016; PAU (later UTPA) moved

away from an open admissions policy to a minimum standards admissions policy after it merged with the UT System. UTPA raised admission standards after South Texas Community College (STCC) was established in the area in the early 1990s. At that time, STCC (later STC) took on the brunt of the responsibility for offering remediation classes. This freed up a lot of UTPA's budget to develop more upper-level classes.

31 Nevárez, Interview by Author, September 9, 2016.

32 Edward B. Fiske, "Colleges are Seeking to Remedy Lag in Their Hispanic Enrollment." *New York Times*, March 20, 1988, page 2.

33 Nevárez, Interview by Author, September 11, 2012.

34 Ibid.

35 Nevárez, Interview by Author, September 9, 2016.

36 Frederick von Ende, Interview by Author, November 13, 2012.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Nevárez, Interview by Author, September 11, 2012.

41 Nevárez, Interview by Author, September 9, 2016.

42 Hans Mark, Interview by Author, November 30, 2012.

43 Ibid.

44 Miguel A. Nevárez, Interview by Author, February 5, 2013.

45 Mark, Interview by Author, November 30, 2012.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

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- 53 Nevárez, Interview by Author, September 9, 2016.
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- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Ibid.
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- 60 Nevárez, Interview by Author, September 9, 2016.
- 61 Miguel A. Nevárez, "President's Report: 1989-1994," Edinburg, Texas: UTPA, 1994.
- 62 Patrick Barta, "In South Texas, Universities See a Powerful Hispanic Middle Class," *Wall Street Journal, Texas Supplement*, July 16, 1997, page B1.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Nevárez, Interview by Author, September 11, 2013.
- 67 "Dr. Miguel A. Nevárez Post Office Building," Congressional Record—House, May 11, 2004.
- 68 Nevárez, Interview by Author, September 9, 2016.
- 69 Miguel A. Nevárez, Interview by Lisa Cardoza, June 1, 2010.
- 70 Nevárez, Interview by Author, September 9, 2016.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 "Nevárez Takes a Final Bow," *Low Arrows*, Fall/Summer 2013, The University of Texas-Pan American Special Edition, Volume 18, No. 2, page 8.

SPORTS AND RELIGION



*Three Charro Days Graces
Walking on Egg Shells
à la Botticelli's Primavera*

The History of Baseball in Brownsville

by

Manuel Gutierrez

Nowadays, Brownsville baseball fans flock to the Brownsville Sports Park, Gonzalez Park, and high school baseball fields to watch their sons, nephews, cousins, and friends play on the diamond. Recently, on March 16, 2016, the oldest high school in Brownsville—Hanna—faced the newest—Veterans Memorial—in an epic pitching duel. Veterans Memorial's Fred Villarreal struck out 15 batters and led his team to a 2-0 victory against Hanna. Villarreal has gained much attention from the University of Houston scouts and has committed to continuing his baseball journey at Houston after he graduates.¹ On that same field was Eddie Garcia, the Hanna head coach who is an alumnus of the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College, where he played baseball and graduated in 1992. On one diamond we see history in the making, a player on the opposing team is getting ready to play at the collegiate level, and, on the other end, a college baseball grad continues to coach baseball, motivating youngsters to follow their dreams. This baseball event is one of the many stories that depict the ways baseball has influenced the residents of Brownsville.

America's national pastime is filled with rich history that has evolved in the last century. The baseball hall of fame in Cooperstown depicts the ways baseball has been part of American culture. When people talk about Brownsville history, baseball is seldom a topic that is discussed. Natives and tourists visit Mexican-American War battle locations like Fort Brown, Palo Alto, and Resaca de la Palma. Locals who are on their way to a fishing tournament at Boca Chica beach every July may even stop

to take a peek at the location where the Battle of Palmito Ranch, the last Civil War battle, took place. The infamous Brownsville Raid that occurred in 1906 was published in newspapers from coast to coast and is one historical event that catches the attention of many. Fortunately, Rene Torres, a local baseball historian, has contributed his time and effort to preserving the history of baseball in Brownsville. America's national pastime is significant in Brownsville because it created an escape from the daily struggles of life and inspired individuals to overcome adversity. To understand the importance of baseball in Brownsville today we have to warp back in time to see how baseball originated in Brownsville and the ways it has affected our community.

Who would have thought that the circumstances caused by the Mexican-American War would bring Abner Doubleday, an officer who served under Zachary Taylor and the proclaimed inventor of baseball, to Fort Brown. There is no hard evidence that Doubleday is the inventor of baseball or even introduced the game to Brownsville natives.² Nonetheless, we have to take note that the story of a war hero (Doubleday) who invented baseball in Cooperstown was a story revered to promote the game of baseball. This event is noteworthy in Brownsville because soldiers stationed at Fort Brown after the Mexican-American War introduced baseball to Brownsville natives.³

One might ask when was the first baseball game played in Brownsville? An article, published in the *Brownsville Ranchero Daily Edition* on December 27, 1868, reported that the first baseball game played in Brownsville occurred on December 25, 1868, in which the Club Union de Matamoros defeated the Brownsville Baseball Club 49-32.⁴ Due to the domino effect of events caused by the Mexican-American War 21 years earlier, a non-violent war was waged on the baseball diamond with pride and bragging rights at stake between the two border towns. The bitterness between the Mexicans and Americans may not have subsided since the Mexican defeat in the Mexican-American War. However, these men were able to cast aside

their differences to play a new upcoming game that provided an escape to life's struggles with players demonstrating their skills with a bat and a glove.

Mexicans, white Americans, and Mexican Americans were not the only ball players in Brownsville. The Buffalo Soldiers of the 25th Infantry, who arrive in Brownsville in 1906, played baseball as well. The dreadful event that unfolded in downtown Brownsville on August 1906, known as the Brownsville Raid, ended the 25th Infantry's stay at Fort Brown and was the cause for its soldiers' dishonorable discharge from the U.S. Army. However, before the Buffalo Soldiers arrived in Brownsville, the B Company played in an organized baseball team in Fort Niobrara, Nebraska. "The crowning achievement of Fort Niobrara came during an inter-departmental baseball championship [in which] the Niobrara team battled the Robinson cavalrymen for ten innings before winning 3-2."⁵ While the 25th Infantry had a distinct baseball reputation in the North, in the segregated South they were not given the chance to play baseball in Brownsville. We can only speculate that they spoke about the game with the other soldiers at Fort Brown or with Brownsville residents. However, their legacy with baseball lived on, and 25 years later an African-American baseball team represented Brownsville.

The Buffalo Soldiers of the 25th Infantry were later vindicated when the Missouri Pacific Booster Club, which represented the Missouri Pacific Railroad, sponsored the Black Lions.⁶ They were the first African-American baseball team in Brownsville to be reported in the *Brownsville Herald*. Before a duel against the Houston Outfit, the Black Lions were unbeaten. In an article published in the *Brownsville Herald* on May 5, 1931, a journalist wrote, "The Black Lions trimmed the Harlingen Black Panthers 10-2 ... and in two other starts this season the Lions have trimmed the McAllen Aviators twice, first 12-6 and then 21-6."⁷ Due to unforeseen circumstances, the Black Lions duel against the Houston Outfit would not occur. Instead, the Black Lions

faced the Nacionales de Matamoros. A writer for the Brownsville Herald reported, on May 12, 1931, "The Lions took the measure of the Nacionales de Mexico 5-4 at the Matamoros Square Garden Park."⁸ The implication is that African-Americans in Brownsville, during a time of racial discrimination, overcame the hostilities faced in the South and were able to use baseball as a mechanism to demonstrate their capabilities and to strive for social acceptance.

While African-American contributions to baseball are one of the historical aspects incorporated in Brownsville history, the women of Brownsville had their share of baseball and softball stories as well. Just before the stock market crash of 1929, grammar teachers organized two baseball teams and played a game that was filled with arguments and frequent incidents. The women were known as chalk ladies because the "two women teams were composed of the upstairs and the downstairs teachers of the Brownsville grammar school."⁹ Manuel Rodriguez, the umpire in charge, was forced to stop the game in the fifth inning because the teachers were relentlessly engaged in argumentative exchanges in front of the students.¹⁰ Although the grammar teachers played with emotion, they showed the students and spectators their competitive spirit as women who played baseball with passion and skill in a sport dominated by men. The significance of this event is that the grammar teachers demonstrated to other women that they could handle competitive sports. Ten years later, in the outbreak of World War II, the rise of women's softball began.

Just as many readers of Brownsville were closely monitoring the Nazi attacks against the British, on September 29, 1939, a section of the *Brownsville Herald* displayed a group picture of the Dorfman Jewelers who had won the women's semi-pro softball league championship in Brownsville.¹¹ Even though they had already won the championship, they decided to play in a scheduled doubleheader versus the Brownsville High School girls and the Pan American Ladies softball teams. On October

6, 1939, after the Dorfman Jewelers were presented with their championship trophy, they went on to defeat the Brownsville High School girls 9-0 and lost to the Pan American Ladies 9-7.¹² During a time when men were off to war, the Brownsville community ventured out to watch the women display their skills and competitive spirit, demonstrating to the public that women belonged on the diamond as much as men. The diamond meant more to women than just a place where softball is played. Pilar Garcia, a semi-pro softball pitcher, "led a team dedicated to the Brownsville Public Health Nursing Association and their milk fund against Dorfman."¹³ This selfless act is an example of the ways women filled in for the men by using their capabilities on the diamond to raise money for deprived families who could not afford essential commodities during World War II.

Before women's semi-pro softball gained popularity in the late 1930's, the Brownsville Brownies were playing amateur baseball and became the first professional baseball team in the early 1900's. In an article published in the *Brownsville Daily Herald*, on August 20, 1909, a reporter wrote, "The local baseball season was topped off in fitting style yesterday by a decisive victory over the blatant Seaweeds from Corpus Christi."¹⁴ Not only did the Brownies end the season with a win, but they also finished the season as the top amateur baseball team in South Texas. One reporter described the Brownies' season by asserting, "In a few days more the Brownies will be doing the Alexander the Great act weeping because there are no more baseball teams to conquer."¹⁵ The Brownies ended the 1909 season with 43 wins, 14 losses, and 1 tie, and were considered the best amateur team in the Gulf Coast.¹⁶ Before the Brownies transitioned to a professional team, they were the pride of Brownsville baseball. They showed the public that it was possible to compete successfully against competition outside of the Rio Grande Valley.

While the Brownies were champions at the amateur level, in the back of their minds they did not know for sure if they would be part of the Southwest Texas Baseball League. It appeared at

first that the Brownies would not be given a chance to play in a professional league. A reporter implied, "A Southwest Texas Baseball League without the Brownies would be like the play 'Hamlet' without the 'melancholy dane'."¹⁷ The thought of not being affiliated with a professional baseball league grew in the Brownsville community, but good news finally arrived. On August 31, 1909, a Corpus Christi editor reported that the Brownies would be part of the Southwest Texas Baseball League.¹⁸

The Brownies won their first professional game in the 1910 season. In their home opener, the Brownies defeated the Corpus Christi Pelicans 4-2.¹⁹ However, two months would pass and devastation would strike the Brownies. Just like for many baseball teams at every level, there is a time when adversity will build a wall around a team and block their path to success. According to Noe Torres, "By June 2, Victoria had jumped into the lead with a 25-10 record and Brownsville had dropped to dead last at 10-28."²⁰ The battered Brownies rose to the occasion and scrambled their way back to the top. The Brownies won the season championship by facing their arch-nemesis, the Victoria Rosebuds. The two met at Corpus Christi, where the Brownies came from behind and defeated the Rosebuds 3-2 and were crowned the Southwest Texas Baseball League Champions.²¹ Unfortunately, the Brownies were unable to claim another title in the 1911 baseball season. The league ended in 1911 due to financial issues, the absence of stadium lights, and trifling turnouts.²² Still, the creation of the Southwest Texas Baseball League generated an opportunity for Brownsville fans to experience victory when they read about how the Brownies knocked adversity out of the ballpark to claim the 1910 baseball crown.

Twenty-seven years later, baseball fans would be able to cheer for another hometown professional ball club. On March 1, 1938, a *Brownsville Herald* journalist reported that the Charros would represent Brownsville as one of the six teams to be part of the Class D Texas Valley League.²³ Unfortunately, the Brownsville Charros were unable to repeat the triumphs the

Brownies had accomplished. In the anticipated home opener, with a large audience in attendance, the Charros blew a six-run lead and allowed the Harlingen Hubs to drive in unanswered runs, losing 12-6.²⁴ This devastating loss was just the beginning of their nightmare. The 1938 season was disastrous for the Charros. The organization cycled through five managers in an attempt to salvage victories, but the Charros ended their miserable season winning 30 and losing 103 games.²⁵ Even though the attendance at the beginning of the season was promising, at the end of the season attendance numbers began to dwindle. In an article published in the *Brownsville Herald* on January 1, 1950, Ken Johnson infers that the absence of stadium lights, the summer heat, and the inability of spectators to attend games during the day caused the league to fail.²⁶ Moreover, the onset of World War II put an extensive halt on any attempts for the Charros to participate in any minor league action until the spring of 1949.

Attendance records improved in 1949 as Brownsville spectators poured in at night to watch the Charros play. With 4,000 baseball fans battling the influx of bugs that stadium lights were attracting, the Charros lost their home opener to the Corpus Christi Aces in the 1949 season.²⁷ There was more room for optimism in 1949 than in the 1938 season. The Lions Park had stadium lights, and many baseball enthusiasts were able to watch more games after completing their work shift. The Charros improved in the 1949 season, but they fell short in the league championship series versus the Aces. The Aces defeated the Charros 19-1 and advanced to interleague play against Big Springs.²⁸ The most striking aspect of the 1949 season is the attendance record. Brownsville had a total of 51,416 people who attended baseball games in Brownsville alone.²⁹ The Charros would muster another fair season in 1950 with an increase in baseball attendance, but they failed to win a championship. The Harlingen Capitols eliminated the Charros from championship contention by defeating them 9-8 in a best-out-of-seven series.³⁰ Even though the Charros failed to make the league championship game, they still showed

consistency throughout the season, and the attendance totals displayed how important baseball was in Brownsville. The attendance increased from 51,416 to 56,146 in the 1950 season.³¹ While the Charros failed to bring home the championship title, as had the 1910 Brownies, the citizens of Brownsville continued to support their home team.

Once again, the Charros rose up in minor league status, gaining the opportunity to play at a higher level. The Charros were accepted into the Class B Gulf Coast League in the 1951 baseball season.³² With strong optimism and determination, the Charros were able to win the Gulf Coast League Championship. They defeated the Aces 8-6 in a best out of seven series, "flying the 1951 Gulf Coast League Pennant from the top of Lions Field."³³ That year, the organization had financial drawbacks. They asked the public for financial support and dropped ticket prices since attendance totals had dropped from 56,146 the previous year to 46,360 in 1951.³⁴ In 1952 and 1953, the Charros were unable to repeat the successes they had accomplished in the 1951 season. The Charros ended their 1952 and 1953 seasons with a losing record.³⁵ In the anticipated season of 1952, the Charros were able to improve their attendance record but dropped to an all-time low in 1953. The Charros were able to attract 69,991 fans in 1952, but the attendance fell to 44,266 in 1953 due to the rising interest in television.³⁶ Three months after the 1953 season, the *Brownsville Herald* published an article regarding the future outcome of the Charros. Sadly, the Gulf Coast League died out, and the Lions Club operators started the "sell their property, buses, uniforms and player contracts."³⁷ While the last two seasons could be viewed as failures, the Charros demonstrated to the community that life can throw people curveballs and that, regardless of the outcome, individuals must tie their cleats, grip a bat, and prepare to swing for the future. Twelve years later a group of scrappy high school ball players would put Brownsville baseball back on the map.

In the entire history of Brownsville, only one high school team has played in the state championship game. The Brownsville

High Eagles first had to clinch the district championship before they could follow the Chisholm Trail north to the state final. In a best-out-of-three series the Eagles came back to defeat Corpus Christi Ray and claim the district title. In an article published in the *Brownsville Herald*, on May 20, 1965, Tim Southers wrote, "Rene Torres was the hero today after a two-out home run in the bottom of the seventh inning provided the winning margin."³⁸ Torres still remembers that day as if it was just yesterday. In an oral interview conducted by the author on March 14, 2016, Torres recalls, "Joe Rodriguez told me to bunt, but I did not want to bunt because I had switched to the right side and I felt very confident on the right."³⁹ His choice to swing away proved to be the perfect decision at the right time. Eventually, the Eagles made it to the semi-finals and would go on to defeat Galena Park to secure a spot in the state finals. Charlie Vaughn struck out eight batters and only allowed one run while his teammates were able to rack up seven runs to beat Galena 7-1.⁴⁰ The Eagles would go on to face Dallas Samuel for the baseball crown of Texas. Tony Barbosa got the nod from Joe Rodriguez to pitch, but the Eagles were outgunned by Samuel and lost 14-0.⁴¹ Without a doubt, the 1965 baseball season was successful. While the Eagles had to settle for second place, they proved that a bunch of ball players from Brownsville could compete with anyone in Texas. The Eagles were able to travel out of the Rio Grande Valley and benefit from new experiences that would change them for the rest of their lives. While the Eagles experienced a phenomenal baseball season, the local collegiate baseball team had its share of significance as well.

The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College baseball program originated in the 1950's when it was known as TSC, but it would not tango with success until the 1977 season, when "they advanced all the way to the National Junior College Athletic Association World Series in Grand Junction, Colorado."⁴² The Scorpions were able to muster a couple more successful seasons until that ominous day

came when the program ended. While Scorpion baseball was going to end due to the UTB-TSC split, they were able to pull off winning seasons in the last three years and played their final game on April 30, 2012.⁴³ Even though the collegiate baseball program ended in Brownsville, many local students had the opportunity to play baseball at the collegiate level and obtain a college degree. UTB-TSC graduates like Hanna Head baseball coach Eddie Garcia, Hanna High football coach Rene Medrano, and Weslaco High head football coach Tony Villarreal all took advantage of the opportunity the UTB-TSC baseball program had to offer and became successful coaches.⁴⁴ They are not the only ones who benefitted from the fruits of baseball. Rene Torres took the opportunity to continue his baseball career while obtaining a college education from Pan American College in Edinburg.

Torres started his career as a batboy for a baseball team which his father, Tomas "Tito" Torres, managed. Later, he became the starting shortstop for Brownsville High and contributed to the success the Eagles had in the 1965 season, when they were the second best team in the state of Texas. After graduating high school, he received a scholarship to play baseball at Pan American College. There, he transitioned to centerfield and was part of the 1968 Pan American College baseball team that defeated the University of Texas at Austin in a regional NCAA tournament. Torres expressed, "I am very proud of the fact that we beat UT in 1968." While Torres was juggling baseball, academics, and his day-to-day struggles living in Edinburg, he never once complained about the disparities that he regularly faced during his collegiate years. After Torres graduated from Pan American College with a Bachelors of Arts in 1971, he was hired at Cummings Middle School, where he coached football. Torres decided to get his Masters in Secondary Education at Pan American University at Brownsville as a supervisor for secondary student teachers in 1979 and retired in 2004 as an Assistant Professor at UTB-TSC. Also, Torres dedicated a

multitude of hours serving the community. One of the most cherished items that Torres has in his possession is the Jefferson Award for Public Service and Volunteerism, which he received in 2007 at Washington, D.C. Currently he continues to devote his time conducting research and preserving sports history in Brownsville and the Rio Grande Valley. In an oral interview conducted by the author on March 14, 2016, Torres uttered, "If it weren't for baseball I wouldn't be here."⁴⁶

While Torres benefited from the successes of his baseball career, another hometown ball player would take advantage of the opportunities baseball had to offer. James Landin grew up deeply influenced by baseball at a young age. In an e-mail conversation with the author, on February 22, 2016, Landin expressed that his entire family supported his interest in baseball. His father, Cornelio Landin, was a talented baseball player in Matamoros and was nominated for the Mexican Hall of Fame. As Landin indicated, "baseball runs in the genes." One of his most vivid memories is when his father carried him while celebrating a win after he hit a walk-off inside the park home run in little league. In Landin's high school years, he played varsity since he was a freshman and helped his team win the "District 32-5A championship three years in a row." After playing his last game in the Rio Grande Valley East vs. West All-Star game, Landin was approached by a Texas A&M-Corpus Christi coach who offered him a full scholarship. While reminiscing about a game against UT-Austin, Landin recalled, "The lasting memory from that game that was supposed to be a pushover ... turned out to be their first loss of the year in shutout fashion, 5-0." He later graduated from Texas A&M-Corpus Christi and received His Master's Degree in Business Administration. Landin got a shot to play professional baseball and played with the Coastal Bend Aviators in 2005. The St. Louis Cardinals bought out his contract a year later, and he continued to play for the St. Louis Cardinals High-A Club. Unfortunately, he suffered two shoulder injuries and decided to retire in 2009. After his baseball

career had come to an end, he ventured out and secured a successful position as a supervisor in the Border Patrol Academy in New Mexico. Baseball was not just a game that he loved to play, it was the catalyst that drove him to seek a fruitful career and taught him “that you get things in life by the work you put into it.”⁴⁶

In the last 148 years, America’s national pastime has transformed the lives of many Brownsville citizens. The aftermath of the Mexican-American War opened up the path for baseball to develop in Brownsville. While the 25th Infantry were unable to play ball in Brownsville, the Black Lions African-American baseball club represented Brownsville and dealt with racial hostilities in the Jim Crow era. Women stepped out of the norms and demonstrated the ways they too can compete and help those in need while playing softball. The rise of men’s amateur and professional baseball fascinated the natives and non-natives of Brownsville. To this day, the 1965 Eagles are the first and only Brownsville high school baseball team to make it to the state championship game. The UTB-TSC baseball program produced coaches that are still motivating the youth of Brownsville and the Rio Grande Valley. Inspiring stories shared by local ball players show how baseball was the foundation that brought about their prosperous careers. The rise of baseball in Brownsville is a cultural experience that continues to evolve, creating a chance for the youth to participate in a sport that fosters quintessential human characteristics that are needed to push through the trials and tribulations of life.

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Reynosa's *Iglesia Evangélica Esmirna* and Pentecostalism in Latin America

by

J. Steven Rice

In 1997, while this writer was a student at the University of Texas-Pan American in Edinburg, Texas, the growth of Pentecostalism in Latin America was a popular theme of study. The professor then teaching the Latin American History course thought it would be a good topic to explore. At the time, this writer was the Church History instructor at the Rio Grande Bible Institute, also located in Edinburg. RGBI was, and still is, a post-secondary academic institution offering a four-year degree for those interested in entering Evangelical Christian ministry. The great majority of students come from Latin America and instruction is exclusively in the Spanish language. Although the institution is no friend to the doctrines of Pentecostalism, there were eleven students there at the time who identified themselves as "Pentecostal." The purpose of the study was to interview these eleven students in an effort to determine the relationship between Pentecostal growth and the ability of Pentecostalism to adapt to differing cultural situations. The results of that study were interesting, but basically supported the findings of studies that had been published previously. The study also yielded little insight into Pentecostalism in the Rio Grande Valley other than the views of eleven students from various parts of Latin America who happened to be studying there in the late 1990s. However, comments made by a previous RGBI graduate of the Pentecostal persuasion, who was not a part of the survey, led to the discovery of a direct link between a Pentecostal congregation in Reynosa and the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906 (by way of Norway and Sweden).

Since 1997, Pentecostal Studies have come “out of the shadows.” A basic search of the term “Pentecostalism” in the South Texas College Library Database shows over 9,000 online articles (full-text, peer-reviewed) published since 1997. Only 635 such articles date from 1967 to 1997. Since the findings were never published, this paper will examine the comments made by the RGBI Pentecostal students in 1997. It will also refer to literature written since 1997 regarding Pentecostal cultural adaptation. Most importantly, it will attempt to update the research linking the Pentecostal congregation in Reynosa to the Azusa Street Revival of 1906.

Pentecostalism Defined

The autonomous nature of Pentecostalism at times makes definition difficult. There is a tendency to brand any Christian evangelical movement that stresses enthusiasm or emotion as “Pentecostal.” However, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* describes modern “Pentecostalism” as the “belief in the possibility of receiving the same experience and gifts as the first Christians on the day of Pentecost.”¹ These gifts would include the speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing and exorcism. They become evident with the “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” which is a distinct experience apart from the conversion experience or from water baptism.² Pablo Deiros points out that Roman Catholics regard the Holy Spirit as manifesting itself through the priesthood, while traditional Protestants view the Holy Spirit as manifesting itself through and in agreement with the Scriptures. To the Pentecostal, however, the Holy Spirit is evident through personal experience. Most often the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” is associated with tongues or ecstatic speech.³

Most church historians link the modern Pentecostal movement with revival services that took place in Los Angeles, California, in 1906. William J. Seymore, an African-American holiness preacher, had been invited to speak at the Negro Holiness Church at 312

Azusa Street in Los Angeles.⁴ The services were characterized by the speaking in tongues, healing, and other manifestations. Seymour had been previously influenced by the ministry of Charles Parham of Topeka, Kansas, where the gift of tongues was first associated with the “baptism of the Holy Spirit.”⁵ The Azusa Street Revival received much press coverage and influenced a number of people who in turn carried the revival to other parts of the world.

Pentecostalism in Latin America

In Latin America, the first known appearance of “Pentecostalism” was in Valparaíso, Chile, in 1909, when a Methodist pastor, Willis C. Hoover, and his congregation received the “baptism of the Holy Spirit.” Hoover, evidently, had been exposed to the concept while on a trip to Chicago, in 1907. It is not clear if those he met in Chicago were linked to the Azusa Street Revival⁶ (although Mark Noll reports that some from Chicago were present at Azusa Street).⁷ Pentecostal denominations in Brazil appear about the same time in São Paulo and Belém.⁸ In Mexico, American owners of a mine in Nacozari, Sonora, are said to have had a Pentecostal experience between 1906 and 1908 while residing in the United States. The owners, George and Carrie Judd Montgomery, began to distribute Pentecostal literature on their trips to Mexico soon after this experience. The first Pentecostal services were held in 1911 by evangelist George Thomas.⁹ It is not clear if any of these North Americans had any exposure to the Azusa Street Revival.

In 1989, Núñez and Taylor reported that Pentecostals made up about 75% of the “Evangelical” Protestant population in Latin America.¹⁰ A number of religious observers and social scientists have posed reasons for the appeal of Pentecostalism in Latin America. Schultze discusses the importance of the Pentecostal emphasis on “orality” as a key to Pentecostal success. It is not so much the speaking in tongues that is at issue when he refers to “orality” but the oral nature of the Pentecostal worship itself...

"[The] primacy of oral over literate culture among poor Latin Americans nearly guarantees that any existing Protestant impulses will move these people toward old style Pentecostalism. Oral cultures (really "oral-aural cultures") are predicated on the primacy of the spoken word. By contrast, mainline Protestantism and even "mainstream Evangelicalism," represented in Latin America by such groups as the Latin America Mission and Central American Mission, are the products of a more literate (chirographic or typographic) culture, which has a very different symbolic sensibility."¹¹

The concept of "orality," therefore, gives great value to public testimony. It allows those with little or no formal education to participate in the religious service. This aspect is very attractive to poor Latin Americans and adds an additional burden to Protestant organizations that place great emphasis on the reading of the Bible and written theology.

Chesnut, in his study of Brazilian Pentecostalism, has stressed the importance of Pentecostal divine healing as a factor in the growth of Pentecostalism. Pentecostals take their healing practices to the people. This accessibility to a supernatural health care system is an attraction to the lower classes. Many sufferers of the afflictions of poverty never even have the opportunity to beseech their traditional deities for divine aid; in their moment of crisis, a Pentecostal evangelist, a *visitadora* or lay missionary, arrives in their home, at their hospital bed, or wherever they are at the time, bringing the message of faith healing for the *corpus* and *animus* and salvation from the sinful, i.e., sick world. Unlike Umbanda and Catholicism, which customarily require supplicants to come to the chapel or *terreiro* to access the means of religious production, Pentecostalism, via its zealous agents of evangelism, brings the means and goods of production out of the temple and into the public and private realms of street, home and hospital.¹²

The emphasis on divine healing on the part of Pentecostals has been met with strong reaction from some mainline Protestant denominations. Author Goodpasture borrows from the diary of Daniel Berg as he describes the founding of the first Assemblies

of God congregation in Belém, Brazil, in 1911. Berg, a Swedish immigrant Pentecostal missionary from Chicago, stated that he and another Pentecostal missionary were originally a part of the Baptist congregation in Belém. Upon convincing the congregation that the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” was a legitimate experience that resulted in the physical healing of some church members, the Pentecostal faction was asked to leave the congregation and not return. The division resulted in the creation of the first Assembly of God congregation in Belém.¹³ In a culture where poverty and sickness are of great concern, the Pentecostals have an advantage. Those groups that de-emphasize or completely ignore the physical needs of the people will not have the same appeal. Pentecostal growth is enhanced in these situations since they are the ones most willing and available to deal directly with the sicknesses that afflict the poor.

The increase in the numerical growth of Pentecostalism in Latin America can also be attributed to the way in which pastors are trained. Authors Beeson and Pearce conclude that the Pentecostal pastor is successful largely because he receives on-the-job training, based in the general geographical area in which he lives. More than half of the pastors they surveyed indicated that they had no more than an elementary school education. Most were also first generation evangelicals. Pentecostal leadership training involves personal evangelism in the neighborhood where the trainee lives. When he has received experience in teaching the Bible to new believers, he is then entrusted with the task of preaching to people on the street. If he is effective, and a congregation is established, the trainee’s livelihood will depend on the financial support of the new congregation. Only when the congregation becomes self-sustaining does the trainee receive the title “Pastor.”¹⁴ Unlike the traditional Protestant seminary education in which students attend a central campus and study theology and ministry in an academic setting, the Pentecostal leader earns his credentials by participating in ministry directly with the people. Ministry

success is not determined by receiving a degree but by actually establishing a self-sustaining congregation.

Survey of Latin American Pentecostal Students

The following analysis is based on an informal questionnaire of eleven Latin American Pentecostal students studying at the Rio Grande Bible Institute in Edinburg, Texas. The interviews were conducted the week of March 10-17, 1997. For the sake of clarification, five of the students were re-interviewed on May 1, 1997. All except one were residents of Latin American countries, and all were members of Pentecostal congregations ranging in size from 70 to 8,000 members. The one exception was a resident Mexican male who was a member of a Spanish-speaking Pentecostal congregation in San Benito, Texas. Of those interviewed, four were women and seven were men. The women included two Mexicans, an Ecuadorian, and a Brazilian. The men included five Mexicans, an Ecuadorian, and a Bolivian. None of the eleven interviewed represented the same congregation. Questions on the survey covered a wide range of topics. These interviews were intended to determine the amount of American influence that was evident within these eleven Latin American Pentecostal congregations.

Definition

All those interviewed described their home congregation as being "Pentecostal." However, it was evident that some of these congregations had modified their emphasis on the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" and on the use of tongues in the worship services. Of the eleven, five stated that their congregation believed that the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" was equivalent to conversion and was not a second experience (which stands in opposition to the more formal definition of Pentecostalism presented above). Of these, four stated that speaking in tongues was

practiced in public worship services, but only in an orderly way. One mentioned that the use of tongues was only allowed with interpretation. "Order" seemed to be the key word. One stated that his home congregation considered the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" to be equivalent to conversion and that the congregation did not practice the use of tongues. This is quite a deviation from the dictionary definition of Pentecostalism as well as its practice at Azusa Street and other revivals. Five other students described the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" as a secondary experience to salvation which conforms more to the traditional definition. However, with regard to the use of tongues, they echoed the sentiments of the other five that tongues be used in an orderly way. One mentioned that the church leadership encouraged its use in private but not in the public worship services. Another stated that the pastor had limited the use of tongues in the services due to abuses in which people were accused of ungodly living and thus making meetings divisive. It must also be mentioned that all of the students interviewed were studying in an institution whose official doctrinal position was (and is) that the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" is synonymous with the conversion experience and, thus, is not Pentecostal. The fact that these students chose this particular school is evidence that they were not overly concerned about having that belief challenged. It is evident, however, that these particular congregations were not afraid to modify their traditional Pentecostal beliefs, especially when congregational unity was at stake.

American Influence

When asked about the founding of their particular congregations, five responded that the congregation had a written history that was accessible to them. Six indicated that there was no written history of the founding of their congregation. However, all except one seemed confident in their knowledge of how their congregations were founded. Of the six Mexican students,

four stated confidently that their congregations were founded by Mexican Pentecostals. One (from the state of Mexico) cited North Americans as the founders. Another (from Monterrey) cited Mexican Americans as the original founders. The one Mexican citizen residing in the United States cited Mexican Americans as founders of his congregation in San Benito, Texas.

The two Ecuadorian students presented a more diverse picture. One stated that her home congregation was founded originally by a Salvadoran Pentecostal missionary. Later, American missionaries from the Assemblies of God denomination arrived. By 1997, the congregation was led by an Ecuadorian pastor. The other Ecuadorian student related that his congregation was founded by Costa Rican Pentecostal missionaries. He emphasized that the background was Costa Rican and "*no Brasileña*". He later again emphasized that the Pentecostalism of his congregation was from the American rather than the Brazilian branch of Pentecostalism. In a second interview with this student, he was asked to clarify the differences between Brazilian, North American, and Costa Rican Pentecostalism. He emphasized that these were informal categorizations that he and others in his church used to describe Pentecostalism. The terms have to do with *temperamento* rather than doctrine or theology. This particular student indicated that the Brazilian Pentecostals tended to place more emphasis on pastoral respect and were more rigid in maintaining rules of conduct. In his description, the Costa Ricans and North Americans tended to be more animated and less formal with regard to dress and behavior in general. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of these interviews was the account of a Brazilian student who arrived for study in the U.S. from Ecuador. Her parents were Brazilian Pentecostal missionaries. They founded the *Iglesia Asamblea de Dios* in Ambato, Ecuador, in 1989. They were originally from Belém, Brazil (which is where the first Assembly of God work was started in Brazil in 1911).¹⁵ When asked about the distinctions between Brazilian, Costa Rican, and North American Pentecostalism, she also referred to the differences as informal categorizations. She referred

to the Brazilians as more *legalista* in their rules of conduct. She mentioned that the Brazilians were stricter with regard to women's clothing, i.e., women should wear dresses and not pants. American and Costa Rican Pentecostalism was *más abierta* with regard to these matters. None of the other students interviewed were aware of these distinctions. Overall, the Ecuadorian students (including the native Brazilian) reflected in their answers an international flavor to Pentecostalism that did not appear to be limited to the United States.

The one Bolivian student interviewed represented the largest Pentecostal congregation in the survey. The congregation *Excelesia* in La Paz, Bolivia, has over 8000 members. He cited that Bolivians founded the congregation in 1986.

Other Possible American Influences

When asked about the worship services, seven indicated that the congregations used hymnals in their worship services while four indicated that hymnals were not used. All indicated that the congregation often sang *coritos* which are shorter, simpler choruses usually known by memory that are easy to sing. Thus the congregation was free to lift their hands or clap. Sometimes the words were projected on a screen or wall. When asked how many of the hymns or *coritos* were translated from English, most were unsure because they did not know the background of the music. In a later interview, five of the students indicated that they were unaware that some of the hymns and *coritos* were translated from English until they came to the U.S. to study. Only then did they realize the origins of some of the music. All five agreed that the average Pentecostal was unaware and was not overly concerned with the origins of the music. This unawareness was an indication that they had not been greatly influenced by Americans who might relate these things to them.

Concerning the presence of Americans in their church services, none of the eleven said that Americans regularly attended

their services. When asked, six gave a definite “no” answer. The remaining five said that Americans sometimes attended who were on vacation or possibly missionaries on a short visit. Concerning funding, all said that their individual congregations were funded directly by the congregation itself. Three qualified their answers by adding that foreign money was received at times for special projects. The congregation, however, was not dependent on these funds for the pastor’s salary or for general upkeep.

Research Since 1997

Researchers, both religious and non-religious, have found Pentecostalism to be a compelling area of study. As mentioned in the Introduction to this paper, research on global Pentecostalism has exploded since 1997. Most researchers today would agree with the conclusion that Pentecostal growth is largely due to its ability to adjust to cultural surroundings. Perhaps the most influential publication on the interdisciplinary nature of Pentecostal Studies was Allan Anderson’s collective work titled *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods* published in 2010. In the Introduction, Anderson states:

Pentecostalism has shown a remarkable ability to adapt to diverse cultural contexts. Through its adaptability, its impact has been global, both in its geographic distribution and in its presence as a religious movement capable of producing local versions of its universal message. As a successful global movement, it has served to give its many converts the possibility of integrating into the widening modernized world.¹⁶

The Pew Research Center reported in 2014 that 65% of Protestants in Latin America identified with the Pentecostal movement, either through congregational association or through their own personal beliefs. One in five Latin American Protestants reported that they had personally spoken in “tongues.”¹⁷ Author Chesnut (cited earlier in this paper) stated in a 2014 interview that Pentecostalism has “absorbed” the Latin American

culture. Thus it has become indigenous to the region. Pastors look like the people to whom they minister. Guatemalan Pentecostal ministers tend to be Mayan. Brazilian Pentecostal leaders tend to be Afro-Brazilian. Pentecostals have been successful at nationalizing their congregations. He states that the Assemblies of God denomination in Brazil was fully under Brazilian control by 1930. As a result of this ability to culturally adapt, national roles have reversed. Today Pentecostals in Latin America far outnumber their counterparts in the United States and have begun sending missionaries to the United States. Most of their success has come from reaching Latin American immigrants living in the United States.¹⁸

Case Study

A former Mexican Pentecostal student who had since graduated from RGBI (before the 1997 interviews) had previously related to this author how her congregation in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, had been established. Her comments were not reflected in the survey. Her account repeatedly gave credit to *Suecos* as founders of the *Iglesia Evangélica Esmirna* in Reynosa. This writer's mistaken assumption was that these *Suecos* were Pentecostal missionaries from the United States Midwest with Swedish roots (possibly Winter Texans) who crossed the border and founded the congregation in Reynosa. After some confusion, the ex-student made it absolutely clear to this writer that these were real Swedes from the country of Sweden who spoke no English, only Swedish and Spanish. These Swedish missionaries had no previous connection to the United States prior to their arrival in Mexico. She gave the name and phone number of the daughter of these Swedish missionaries.

This writer had an extended conversation with Barbara Høglund of McAllen, Texas, on March 15, 1997. Ms. Høglund's parents, Carl and Greta Høglund, started the *Iglesia Evangélica Esmirna* in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, in 1950. They were

Swedish Pentecostal missionaries who arrived in Mexico City from Sweden in 1948. After short stays in Mexico City and Guadalajara, the elder Hoglunds moved to McAllen, Texas. They walked across the border regularly to distribute literature and eventually founded the *Esmirna* congregation (named for their church in Sweden). Their two children, Barbara and Margaret, accompanied them. By 1997, Barbara had continued working closely with the *Esmirna* congregation. At that time, she no longer considered herself to be "Pentecostal" due to what she called "charismatic corruptions," referring to the tendency of preachers and evangelists to emphasize the "spectacular" rather than simple obedience to Christ. From the description of her beliefs, however, traditional Pentecostalism most closely described her. She believed that the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" was an experience subsequent to conversion and that speaking in tongues was a biblical gift that should not be limited. She strongly objected, however, to the abusive over-emphasis on the manifestations. When asked to clarify what she meant by abuses, she referred to pastors and evangelists who made the worship service a "spectacular" event intended to stress high-pitched emotion rather than honest and true worship. She referred to television as enhancing these abuses.

In 1997, the *Esmirna* congregation was pastored by Reverend Pedro Lobato, a Mexican national. The church was a part of a national association called the *Iglesia Evangélica Independiente*. There were over 1000 Mexican congregations associated with the organization. All of the congregations were autonomous. Therefore, Pentecostal practices varied in each one depending on the pastor and the congregation. The association itself received autonomy from the Swedish leadership in 1979 and thus became a "Mexican" organization. In 1997, Ms. Hoglund was a member of the congregation and was serving as the Director of Education. She was receiving no funds from the church.

Most interesting about this case study was the international connection. Barbara's sister Margaret mentioned in passing that

her parents were influenced by the preaching of T.B. Barratt while they were living in Sweden. Barratt is often referred to as the evangelist who brought Pentecostalism to the Scandinavian countries. In 1906, Barratt, a Norwegian Methodist minister, was on a fund-raising trip to Los Angeles. He happened to visit the Azusa Street Mission Revival, where he received the "baptism of the Holy Spirit." Returning to Norway, he conducted various Pentecostal campaigns throughout Scandinavia and Northern Europe.¹⁹ While he was preaching in Sweden, the Hoglunds were exposed to his messages. They later made the decision to go to Mexico as missionaries. The rest has already been mentioned. The founding of the *Esmerina* congregation in Reynosa can therefore be traced from Los Angeles (an African-American led mission), to Norway, to Sweden, to Mexico City, to Guadalajara, to McAllen, Texas, and finally to Reynosa.

On July 21, 2016, this writer had a brief telephone conversation with Margaret Hoglund, sister of Barbara and daughter to the elder Hoglunds, Karl and Greta. Margaret related that Barbara suffers from severe hearing loss and has difficulty communicating. In 2010, the *Esmerina* congregation in Reynosa presented Barbara with a plaque, in gratitude for her family's part in the founding of the congregation sixty years earlier. Due to age, neither of the Hoglund daughters are actively involved with the *Esmerina* congregation today. However, Margaret stated that the *Esmerina* congregation continues to thrive under Mexican leadership. When asked about the Azusa Street Revival services, Margaret was well aware of its connection with the *Esmerina* congregation in Reynosa, although she did not relate this information in 1997.

Summary

Pentecostalism in Latin America has proven itself to be versatile. It has the ability to adapt to various cultural situations. One of the reasons for this versatility is that Pentecos-

talism places the individual, rather than liturgy or theological exactness, as its greatest priority. The individual is important to God and therefore he or she deserves to know more about God's love. With this emphasis in mind, formal theological education and adherence to strict liturgical order are minimized in their importance. As a result, Latin American Pentecostals break many of the religious and cultural barriers that hinder the growth of Catholicism and main-line Protestantism. Wilson contends that "versatility" is one of the "strategic moments in the process of Pentecostal emergence."²⁰ For example, in the area of music, the Pentecostals have had little reservation in the use of traditional folk instruments and musical styles, while more traditional Protestants tend to stress the piano or organ²¹ (which require a certain expertise not often accessible to the lower classes).

It cannot be denied that the Pentecostalism of the United States has been carried abroad and, at times, has been imposed on the people of Latin America. However, this brief study indicates that Pentecostalism has proven itself to be very adaptable as it crosses cultures. Not only is there U.S. influence, but, as in the case of the *Esmerina* congregation in Reynosa, there is also a heavy Scandinavian influence. Within Latin America itself, Pentecostalism is growing and producing missionaries within the cultures it penetrates, as in the case of the parents of the Brazilian student studying at the Rio Grande Bible Institute. The students interviewed mentioned North Americans, Mexican Americans, Brazilians, Costa Ricans, and Salvadorans as founding various churches in Latin American countries.

Conclusion

In closing, several issues are suggested for further study. First, the definition of Pentecostalism must be addressed. Five of the eleven Bible Institute students interviewed in 1997 stated that their congregations held to a belief that the "baptism of the

Holy Spirit” was synonymous with the conversion experience. This definition does not conform to the definition stated in the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, which stresses that the two are distinct experiences. Further study is needed to clarify this issue. However, it might be fair to say that Pentecostals, in general, are bothered very little by the fact they do not conform to a dictionary definition of “Pentecostalism.” The strength of Pentecostalism is the ability to adapt with ease from one situation to another. The fine points of theological definition are not allowed to hinder the movement.

A second suggestion is aimed at Pentecostals themselves. The modern Pentecostal movement is just over 100 years old. It is widely agreed that Pentecostal growth owes much to its ability to easily cross cultural and theological barriers. However, after several generations of numerical growth and influence, will Pentecostals see a need for greater analysis of themselves and their movement? A perusal of the STC database indicates that Pentecostals are taking more interest in analyzing themselves. This was also evident in the interviews of the RGBI Pentecostal students. The fact that most were aware of the cultural differences within their movement and their willingness to move to the United States to study in an educational institution that does not share their views indicates that these particular students are not afraid of self-analysis. How typical were these eleven Pentecostal students? Unless Pentecostals are content to allow “outsiders” to do scientific research and analysis of their movement, it seems that there would be an increasing need for more academically trained leadership within the Pentecostal movement.

A third suggestion is also related to education. Why were there eleven Pentecostal students from Latin America studying at the Rio Grande Bible Institute (an institution that is not in harmony with Pentecostal beliefs) in 1997?²² RGBI was offering a four-year post-secondary degree. Research by Beeson and Pearce indicated that most of the Pentecostal pastors they surveyed had no more than an elementary school

education. The answer may be that Beeson and Pearce were dealing with first-generation Pentecostal congregations. All eleven of the RGBI students were coming from congregations that were more established. The students interviewed in this study indicated that their pastors had a much higher level of education than that described by Beeson and Pearce. Of the eleven, nine indicated that their pastors had at least a secondary level of education. Of these, seven indicated that their pastors had received *preparatoria* training. Two others said that their pastors had received university training. In addition, four of the nine had attended a denominational Bible school. It appears from this limited study that the Pentecostal congregations represented by these students are led by those who value a more formal education. This is accentuated by the fact that they are willing to send their future leaders to a Bible School that offers a four-year degree. More research is needed to determine if this is a trend in Pentecostalism.

South Texas College

Endnotes

- 1 F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone, "Pentecostalism," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 1062.
- 2 Cross and Livingstone, p. 1062.
- 3 Pablo Alberto Deiros, *Historia del Cristianismo en America Latina* (Buenos Aires: Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericano, 1992), p. 752.
- 4 Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), p. 386.
- 5 Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1972), p. 22.
- 6 Deiros, p. 752.

7 Noll, p. 387.

8 Joseph A. Page, *The Brazilians* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1995), p. 374.

9 Luisa Jeter de Walker, *Siembra y Cosecha: Reseña histórica de las Asambleas de Dios de México y Centroamérica* (Deerfield, Fla.: Editorial Vida, 1990), p. 16.

10 Emilio A. Nuñez and William D. Taylor, *Crisis in Latin America: An Evangelical Perspective* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), p. 159. Nuñez and Taylor made a distinction between "main line Protestant" and "Evangelical." They calculated that "Evangelical" congregants made up about 8.9% of the total Protestant population. The remaining 1.1% would be considered "mainline" protestant organizations which would account for Episcopalians and Lutherans. With this in mind, Pentecostals would actually make up slightly less than 75% of the total Protestant population.

11 Quentin J. Schultze, "Orality and Power in Latin American Pentecostalism," in *Coming of Age Protestantism in Contemporary Latin America*, ed. by Daniel R. Miller (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), p. 67.

12 R. Andrew Chesnut, "Exorcising the Demons of Poverty: Pentecostal Faith Healing and Conversion in an Amazonian City of Brazil," Paper presented at the 1995 annual meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, Washington D.C., September 28-30, 1995, p. 4.

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15 Page, p. 374.

16 Allan Anderson, ed., *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), p. 1. See also Gerardo Marti, "The Adaptability of Pentecostalism: The Fit between Prosperity Theology and Globalized Individualization in a Los Angeles Church," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* (2012), Vol. 34, Issue 1, Accessed June 1, 2016, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/detail/detail?vid=1&sid=66b81d95-fd4e-42ca-a208-498e64208e55%40sessionmgr120&hid=120&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmUmc2NvcGU9c2l0ZQ%3d%3d#AN=74277994&db=a9h>.

17 "Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region," *Pew Research Center* (November 13, 2014), Accessed July 29, 2016, <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/13/religion-in-latin-america/>

18 David Masci, "Why has Pentecostalism grown so dramatically in Latin America, *Pew Research Center* (November 14, 2014), Accessed July 13, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/11/14/why-has-pentecostalism-grown-so-dramatically-in-latin-america/>

19 Hollenweger, p. 63.

20 Everett A. Wilson, "The Dynamics of Latin American Pentecostalism," in *Coming of Age: Protestantism in Contemporary Latin America*, ed. by Daniel R. Miller (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), p. 98.

21 Wilson, p. 110.

22 In 2016 it seems to be an obvious oversight not to have asked this question in the interviews. At the time however, this writer was a faculty member at RGBI. It was clear to all that these Pentecostal students held some theological views that were not shared by the RGBI staff and faculty. At the time, the question "Why are you here?" on the part of a faculty member would have been detrimental to the interview. The students had been told that the purpose of the study was to find out about Pentecostal adaptability, a topic in which they were all very interested.

LINGUISTICS



Hugs Not Slugs
à la Rodin's *The Kiss*

Spanish-Speaking Institutions and Language Assimilation in the Rio Grande Valley

by

**Alexandre Couture Gagnon
and Carlos Daniel Gutierrez Mannix**

The Rio Grande Valley in Texas, situated on the US-Mexico border, has a population of more than one million, of which more than 90% is of Latino descent.¹ However, no public institutions formally function in Spanish, thus inhibiting institutional completeness² and challenging long-term preservation of the language. Why does this population of Latino descent not demand Spanish-language service? Contrary to traditional research on institutional completeness, we consider institutions as the dependent variable and argue that the absence of institutions reflects the perception, within the population, of inferior status ascribed to Spanish when compared to English.

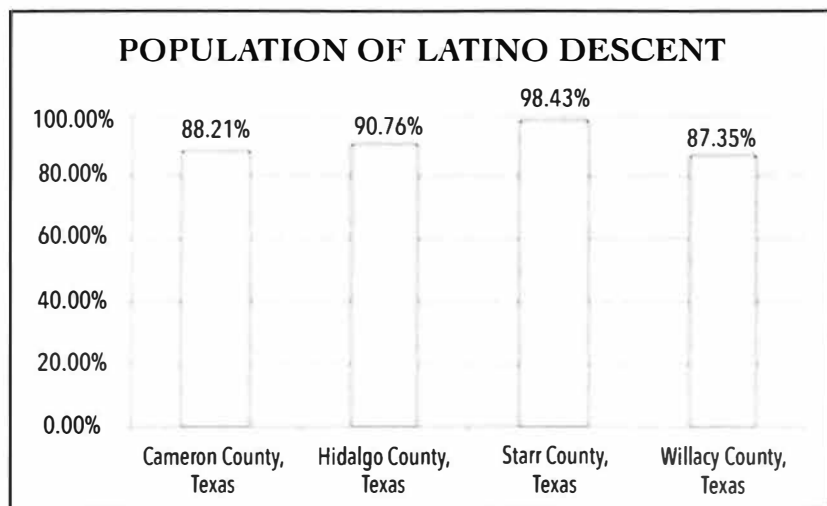
Introduction

The Rio Grande Valley (RGV) was annexed to the United States (US) with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, after Mexico lost the Mexican-American War. What is surprising about the RGV is that its Latino population, unlike many other linguistic groups in Europe and Canada, does not demand linguistic rights from Texas or the US. As far as we know, there are no popularly expressed grievances from Latinos in the RGV when it comes to schools in Spanish, hospitals in Spanish, government administration in Spanish. By comparison, minority nations of Québec (in Canada) and of Catalonia (in Spain) and the minority population of Danish (in Germany) — to give a few

examples—have been requesting institutions in their languages since at least the mid-1900s. The 1992 European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (signed by 25 member states) recognizes “203 national minorities or linguistic groups,” whose linguistic rights are recognized and followed by a committee of the Council of Europe. In Canada, the Francophone minority nation, mainly in the province of Québec, has relatively extensive and entrenched rights in terms of education, healthcare, immigration, and government administration. For Europeans and Québécois, the puzzle is: Why don’t Latinos in the RGV pressure their elected officials for linguistic rights?

The Rio Grande Valley is located on the southern Texas border, next to Mexico. It consists of four counties: Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy. In the RGV, 90.25% of the population (1.3 million) is of Latino descent.³ In Cameron County, more than 88% of the 410,000 inhabitants are of Latino origin. In Hidalgo County, the proportion reaches more than 90% of some 790,000 inhabitants. In Starr County, the proportion is higher, reaching 98% of the 61,000 people. The percentage of Latino population is the lowest in Willacy County, where 87% of the 22,000 people are Latino. Figure 1 shows the population of Latino descent in the RGV.

Figure 1: Population of Latino descent⁴



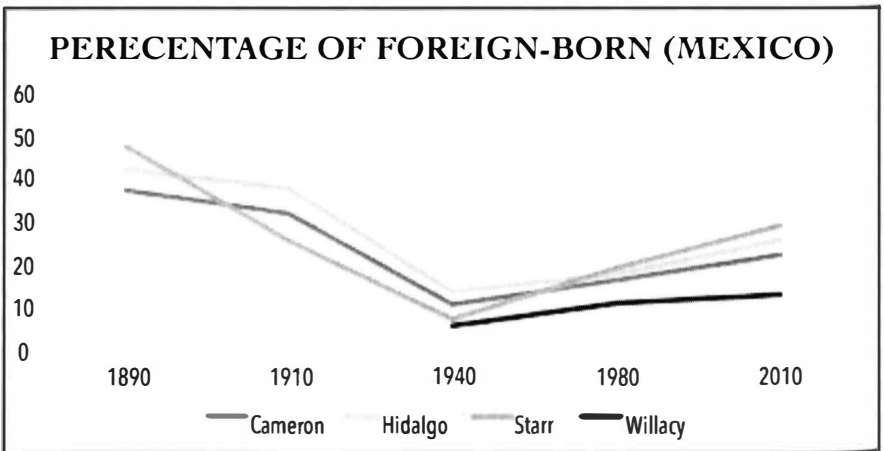
Average income per capita is among the lowest in the country. According to the US Census Bureau, in 2013, these four counties had a 32.4% poverty rate (Cameron) to 43.1% (Willacy). In comparison, for the entire country, the poverty rate was 15.8% in the same year. The median household income ranged from \$ 25,408 (Starr) to \$ 34,607 (Hidalgo). In comparison, it reached \$ 52,250 for the United States.⁵ The proportion of the population that has a BA in 2013 is estimated at 14.2% in Cameron County, at 15.9% in Hidalgo, at 8.6% in Starr and at 8.8% in Willacy. The national average (of the population with a bachelor's degree) is 28.8% and for Texas, 26.7%.⁶

Moreover, while the percentage of illiteracy in Texas is 19%, illiteracy rates for the four counties in question are much higher and have kept high over the last twenty years. Counties of Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy have remarkably low percentages of basic prose literacy skills. For instance, in 1992, the percentage of the population lacking basic prose literacy skills in Cameron County was at 43%, and in 2003 the same percentage was reported. (2003 is the last year for which data are available.) For Hidalgo County, in 1992, the percentage of the population lacking basic prose literacy skills was at 49%, and for 2003 the rate increased to 50%. For Starr County, in 1992, the percentage of the population lacking basic prose literacy skills was at 67%, and for 2003 it had decreased to 65%. For Willacy County, in 1992, the percentage of the population lacking basic prose literacy skills was at 51%, and for 2003 it was at 40%.⁷ It should be noted, however, that with regard to illiteracy (the lacking basic prose literacy skills) the term is used to refer to people who cannot read English.

Migration has always been a component of the fabric of U.S. society.⁸ In 1850, around 10% of the population was foreign born. During the 1800s, most migrants were European, and the percentage in the overall population peaked at 15%. Migratory quotas in 1921 and 1924, the Great Depression, and World War II eventually led to a record low in the percentage of migrants

in the country. In 1970, only 5% of the population was foreign born. It is important to consider that migration from Mexico has not always been at the same pace and, indeed, several migratory waves have been registered. “The first wave, occurring prior to World War II, consisted of agricultural workers recruited by private labor contractors, with the number of Mexican immigrants rising from 105,200 in 1900 to 624,400 in 1930. The Bracero program, from 1942 to 1964, ushered in the second wave, also consisting mostly of agricultural guest workers. The third, largely unauthorized wave began after the Bracero program was terminated and after 1965 changes to U.S. immigration law ended national-origin quotas and imposed the first numerical limits on Mexico and other Latin-American countries. The majority of Mexican immigrants in this third wave were male, seasonal farm laborers who regularly traveled back and forth across the border. The passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) and subsequent investments in border security were a turning point, initiating the fourth wave of Mexican migration.”⁹ Figure 2 shows the percentage of the population born in Mexico for each RGV county, from 1890 until 2010.

Figure 2: Percentage of foreign-born (Mexico)¹⁰



Our research has two objectives. Empirically, it seeks to present data on a linguistic minority, the Latinos settled in the RGV in Texas, and original data on the language use in RGV institutions. On the theoretical level, our research aims at envisaging institutions protecting a language group (Spanish-speaking) as the dependent variable, thus challenging traditional research on institutional completeness of those who regard institutions as the independent variable.

In what follows, we briefly discuss the concept of institutional completeness as initially presented by Raymond Breton and then developed by literature in academia and courts. In particular, we question the traditional direction of causality by suggesting that institutions of a language group should be considered a dependent variable rather than an independent variable. This design highlights the value that a given language group ascribes to the protection of its tongue. We then present the socioeconomic and linguistic characteristics of the RGV using data from the American Community Survey (US Census Bureau). The region is both one of the poorest in the United States and one of the most Spanish-speaking in the country. We show that there exists a positive correlation between income and the use of English (rather than Spanish) at home. We also present original data on language use in RGV institutions. Finally, we argue that the absence of important Spanish-speaking institutions in the region can be explained by the low attractiveness of the Latino identity, which is manifested by the lower chances of living under the poverty line (for monolingual Anglophones vs. bilingual individuals), education (monolingual Anglophone), and the militarization of the border (which emphasizes crime south of the border, where the country is monolingual Spanish).

Institutional completeness and direction of causality

Breton's "institutional completeness" is a central concept in studies of language policy. It reflects the idea that "the more in-

stitutions a community has (the more complete institution-wise it is) the more its members have relationships among themselves, thus the less likely they are to assimilate to the culturally dominant group.”¹¹ In his first research on immigrant communities, Breton showed that churches were the institutions that most strengthened the relationship of an immigrant with his immigrant community; welfare organizations, as well as newspapers and periodicals, also contributed to fostering inter-personal relations with his immigrant community.¹² These findings are important, as they demonstrate that assimilation can be delayed thanks to institutions that create ties among group members. They have since been used to study the Francophone minority in Canada and language communities in general (see Cardinal and González Hidalgo¹³). In Canada, the Supreme Court has used institutional completeness to prevent the closing of a French hospital in Ontario, arguing that the institution was necessary for preserving Francophones’ linguistic rights.¹⁴

As noted by Breton himself, institutional completeness has traditionally interpreted institutions as an independent rather than dependent variable.¹⁵ In other words, the quality or size of the institutions of a linguistic group is traditionally seen as a determining factor of assimilation for members of the group they serve. Some institutions, such as schools and hospitals, offer the highest completeness, that is to say, they allow an individual to live his tongue from his birth to his death.¹⁶ Two decades after his initial definition of institutional completeness, Breton hinted that the mechanism of causality needed to be rethought: “One must admit that membership in the community is to a large extent an individual choice: a person can integrate them socially if it is not already, or escape it, even if he was a member since birth.”¹⁷ In 2015, Breton openly invited students of his work to consider reversing the orthodox causality of institutional completeness and therefore to identify institutions as the dependent variable.

This perspective is interesting because it focuses on the value of linguistic or ethnic protection rather than on the ability

of a small number of group members to establish institutions. To illustrate this dichotomy, we assume that there are two main types of institutions. On the one hand, there exist "interdependent" institutions for a linguistic community and its members.¹⁸ Without these institutions, community members would fail to thrive because they could not maintain their language from birth to death.¹⁹ On the other hand, there are "pragmatic" institutions, which "use cultural goods and social services without commitment vis-à-vis individuals and institutions that produce them, except perhaps temporarily."²⁰ In other words, this last category of institutions is implemented by "elites disconnected from the reality of people [belonging to the linguistic community]."²¹ When the second type of institution prevails, considering the institutions as an independent variable (and institutional completeness as a dependent variable) is an erroneous appreciation of reality because the institutions do not represent the will of the community or the identity of the members of the community.²²

Figure 3: Institutional completeness' directions of causality

(1) Institutional completeness' traditional direction of causality (when institutions are treated as independent variable): Group's own institutions (institutional completeness) → Interpersonal relationships among group members → Less assimilation. (2) Institutional completeness' revised direction of causality (when institutions are treated as dependent variable): Language's social status → Group's own institutions (institutional completeness).

By reversing the causality direction and assessing institutions as the dependent variable, this research asks why or how a group comes to creating institutions that guarantee its linguistic development. Why are there so few official Spanish-speaking institutions in the RGV? Which reasons explain the absence of community demands to promote the Spanish language in a region, the RGV, where the population is substantially of Latino descent?

The next section of this article presents original data on Spanish institutional completeness in the RGV with a survey of selected institutions that matter for language transmission. Later, this chapter suggests that the negative status associated with the Spanish language discourages its adoption or transmission. This low status can be observed through three variables: a) chances of living in poverty are higher for people speaking Spanish than those who speak only English (even if they are of Latino descent); b) the education system is monolingual Anglophone; and c) the militarization of the border between Mexico (Spanish-speaking) and the U.S. (mostly English-speaking) lowers the attractiveness of Spanish.

Spanish institutional completeness in the RGV

In October and November 2015, we surveyed the important institutions of the RGV to find out whether they provide services in Spanish. We obtained the information by calling directly each institution and speaking only in Spanish. We collected data for core institutions: government institutions (including schools), religious institutions (mainly Catholic churches), and business institutions (regional development councils and Chambers of Commerce). We also obtained additional data on hospitals and clinics, TV channels and radio stations, as well as large stores and supply stores. Below are our findings.

Government services in all four counties are normally provided in both Spanish and English. Table 1 presents whether RGV government institutions offer services in Spanish.

Table 1: Availability of Services in Spanish in Government Institutions in Brownsville (Cameron County), McAllen (Hidalgo County), Raymondville (Willacy County), and Rio Grande City (Starr County)

As Table 1 indicates, one can obtain government services in Spanish throughout the RGV, but there are no elementary schools or high schools that function in Spanish and no colleges in Spanish in the RGV.

Table 1: Availability of Services in Spanish in Government Institutions in Brownsville (Cameron County), McAllen (Hidalgo County), Raymondville (Willacy County), and Rio Grande City (Starr County)

Government Institution	Assistance Provided in Spanish?
Department of Public Safety	X Driving test manual is provided also in Spanish
Public Health	X
Fire Department	X
US Post Office	X
Municipal Court	X
Traffic	X
Public Library	X Books in Spanish available
Elementary Schools	Personnel speaks Spanish but services are offered only in English
High Schools	Personnel speaks Spanish but services are offered only in English
Colleges/Universities	Personnel speaks Spanish but services are offered only in English (There is no college in Willacy County.)

In the case of bilingual schools in the RGV, it is important to note that these are not available for the inhabitants of any of the four counties.²³ At the college level, access to education in Spanish is very limited. For instance, the Texas Southmost College offers a degree in Spanish Translation, but the program in itself is not entirely in Spanish. In the case of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, a bachelor's and master's degree are offered in Spanish as a Language but are imparted in English.²⁴ There is, however, an online Master's Degree offered entirely in Spanish.²⁵

According to our own collection of data, there are almost 69 Catholic churches offering services in Spanish in the RGV (see Table 2 below). Since, for the RGV, Catholicism is the main religion in all major cities and towns of the four counties, one can conclude that a large portion of the Latino population in the RGV has access to religious services in Spanish. In the case of Cameron County, adherents to the Catholic Church account for 137,889, while adherents to Protestantism account for 47,744.²⁶ For Hidalgo County, the same pattern can be found as adherents to Catholicism account for 267,071 of the county population, while members of different Protestant religions account for 75,327.²⁷ Starr County is also predominantly Catholic, with 27,157 of its population belonging to the Catholic religion, while 2,368 inhabitants identify as Protestants.²⁸ Lastly, Willacy County, which has the lowest population of all RGV counties, also has a large Catholic majority with 11,010 of its inhabitants identifying as Catholics, while only 1,614 identify as Protestants.²⁹

Table 2: Catholic Gatherings in the RGV and Availability of Services in Spanish³⁰

Congregation	Town	Mass Offered in Spanish?
Resurrection	Alamo	Yes
San Martin de Porres	Alton	Yes
Christ the King	Brownsville	Yes
Church of the Good Shepherd	Brownsville	Yes
Holy Family	Brownsville	Yes
Immaculate Conception Cathedral	Brownsville	Yes
Mary, Mother of the Church	Brownsville	Yes
Our Lady of Good Counsel	Brownsville	Yes
Our Lady of Guadalupe	Brownsville	Yes

Table 2, continued.

Congregation	Town	Mass Offered in Spanish?
San Felipe de Jesus	Brownsville	Yes
St. Eugene de Mazenod	Brownsville	Yes
St. Joseph	Brownsville	Yes
St. Luke	Brownsville	Yes
The Parish of the Lord of Divine Mercy	Brownsville	Yes
St. Joseph	Donna	Yes
St. Theresa of the Infant Jesus	Edcouch	Yes
Holy Family	Edinburg	Yes
Sacred Heart	Edinburg	Yes
St. Joseph	Edinburg	Yes
St. Ignatius	El Ranchito	Yes
Sacred Heart	Elsa	Yes
Sacred Heart	Escobares	Yes
Immaculate Heart of Mary	Harlingen	Yes
Our Lady of the Assumption	Harlingen	Yes
Queen of Peace	Harlingen	Yes
St. Anthony	Harlingen	Yes
Sacred Heart	Hidalgo	Yes
St. Francis Xavier	La Feria	Yes
Holy Family	La Grulla	Yes
Our Lady, Queen of Angels' Parish	La Joya	Yes
St. Cecilia	Los Fresnos	Yes
Prince of Peace	Luford	Yes
Holy Spirit	McAllen	Yes

Table 2, continued.

Congregation	Town	Mass Offered in Spanish?
Our Lady of Perpetual Help	McAllen	Yes
Our Lady of Sorrows	McAllen	Yes
Sacred Heart	McAllen	Yes
Saint Juan Diego Cauhtlatoazin	McAllen	Yes
St. Joseph the Worker	McAllen	Yes
Immaculate Conception	McCook	No
Our Lady of Mercy	Mercedes	Yes
Sacred Heart	Mercedes	Yes
Our Lady of Guadalupe	Mission	Yes
Our Lady of Saint John of the Fields	Mission	Yes
Our Lady of the Holy Rosary	Mission	Yes
San Cristobal Magallanes and Companions	Mission	Yes
St. Paul	Mission	Yes
Our Heavenly Father	Olmito	Yes
St. Anne	Penitas	Yes
St. Anne, Mother of Mary	Pharr	Yes
St. Frances Xavier Cabrini	Pharr	Yes
St. Jude Thaddeus	Pharr	Yes
St. Margaret Mary	Pharr	Yes
Our Lady, Star of the Sea	Port Isabel	Yes
Holy Spirit	Progreso	Yes
Our Lady of Guadalupe	Raymondville	Yes

Table 2, continued.

Congregation	Town	Mass Offered in Spanish?
St. Anthony	Raymondville	No
Immaculate Conception	Rio Grande City	Yes
St. Paul The Apostle	Rio Grande City	Yes
St. Helen	Rio Hondo	Yes
Our Lady of Refuge	Roma	Yes
Our Lady, Queen of the Universe	San Benito	Yes
St. Benedict	San Benito	Yes
St. Theresa	San Benito	Yes
St. Joseph the Worker	San Carlos	Yes
St. Isidore	San Isidro	Yes
Basilica of Our Lady of San Juan Del Valle-National Shrine	San Juan	Yes
St. John the Baptist	San Juan	Yes
St. Mary	Santa Rosa	Yes
San Martin De Porres	Weslaco	Yes
St. Joan of Arc	Weslaco	Yes
St. Pius X	Weslaco	Yes

Two regional development councils exist in the RGV. The Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council serves the counties of Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy, while the South Texas Development Council serves Starr County. We called directly to the main office of each regional council and found that all regional councils provide services in Spanish and staff

speaks English; members need to speak English (although there is no preferred language with customers or members); and the preferred language while at work is English.

There are five Chambers of Commerce in the RGV: Brownsville, McAllen, Edinburg, Raymondville, and Rio Grande City. We called directly the main office of each Chamber of Commerce. We found that: all provide services in Spanish and staff speaks English (in Rio Grande City, not all employees speak Spanish); members do not need to speak English (in Rio Grande City, as per the Chamber, not knowing English is seen as an obstacle for members as most business meetings and social gatherings are held in English); there is no preferred language with customers or members (except in Rio Grande City, where the preferred language is English) and the preferred language while at work is English.

Still, according to our own data, in the RGV, there are 15 hospitals and clinics offering services in Spanish (see Table 3 below), approximately 40 TV channels and radio stations produced in Spanish (see Table 4 below), 5 newspapers, and at least 28 large stores and supply stores that use Spanish (see Table 5 below).

Table 3: Hospitals and Clinics in the RGV and Availability of Services in Spanish⁵¹

Town	Name	Check-in Forms in Spanish?	Help Provided to Spanish Speakers?
Brownsville	Valley Baptist	Yes	Yes
Brownsville	Valley Regional	Yes	Yes
Brownsville	Solara Hospital	Yes	Yes
Brownsville	Su Clinica	Yes	Yes
McAllen	McAllen Medical Center	Yes	Yes

McAllen	Rio Grande Regional Hospital	Yes	Yes
McAllen	Solara Hospital	Yes	Yes
McAllen	South Texas Health System	Yes	Yes
Raymondville	Valley Family Clinic	No	Yes
Raymondville	Raymondville Family Medical Clinic	Yes	Yes
Raymondville	Spence Clinic	No	Yes
Raymondville	Family Health Services Clinic	Yes	Yes
Rio Grande City	Starr County Memorial Hospital	Yes	Yes
Rio Grande City	Rural Health at Starr County Memorial Hospital	Yes	Yes
Rio Grande City	Driscoll-Rio Grande City Clinic	Yes	Yes

Table 4: TV Channels and Radio Stations in Spanish in the RGV³²

Town	TV Channel	Radio Station	Produced in Spanish?
Brownsville	Azteca America	KBNR Manantial	Yes
Brownsville	Univision	KKPS La Nueva	Yes
Brownsville	Televisa 2	KGBT	Yes
Brownsville	Galavision	XERT Reynosa	Yes
Brownsville	Mundo Max Valle	XEMS Matamoros	Yes

Table 4, continued.

Town	TV Channel	Radio Station	Produced in Spanish?
McAllen	Azteca America	KGBT Univisión	Yes
McAllen	Univision	KRIO Radio Esperanza	Yes
McAllen	Televisa 2	KVJY	Yes
McAllen	Once TV	XERT Reynosa	Yes
McAllen	Mundo Max Valle	KUBR- La Radio Cristiana	Yes
Raymondville	4.2 KGBTDT2	XERDO- Radio Avanzado	Yes
Raymondville	32.2 KTFVCD2	KBIC Radio Vida	Yes
Raymondville	Vallevision	KBUC Super Tejano	Yes
Raymondville	48.1 Univision	KVHI Vision Hispana	Yes
Raymondville	48.3 KNVODT3	KNVO- Jose	Yes
Rio Grande City	Telemundo	KGBT La Primera	Yes
Rio Grande City	003 Univision	KQBO La Patrona	Yes
Rio Grande City	007 Valle Vision	KRGX Estrella	Yes
Rio Grande City	011 TV Azteca	XHAAA- La Caliente	Yes
Rio Grande City	013 Azteca America	KERG-Radio Vida	Yes

Table 5: Shops and Supply Stores in the RGV and Availability of Services in Spanish³⁵

Town	Name	Aisle information in Spanish?	Help Provided to Spanish Speakers?
Brownsville	HEB Boca Chica	Yes	Yes
Brownsville	HEB in Paredes	Yes	Yes

Table 5, continued.

Town	Name	Aisle information in Spanish?	Help Provided to Spanish Speakers?
Brownsville	WalMart Alton Gloor	No	Yes
Brownsville	WalMart Ruben Torres	Yes	Yes
Donna	WalMart Donna	Yes	Yes
Edinburg	WalMart Edinburg	No	Yes
Harlingen	HEB in Harlingen-Morgan & Grimes	No	Yes
Harlingen	WalMart Harlingen	No	Yes
McAllen	HEB South & 2nd Street	No	Yes
McAllen	HEB North & Fern	No	Yes
McAllen	HEB 10th & Trenton	No	Yes
McAllen	WalMart McAllen	No	Yes
Port Isabel	WalMart Port Isabel	Yes	Yes
Raymondville	HEB Raymondville	No	Yes
Raymondville	WalMart Raymondville	No	Yes
Raymondville	Stripes Store #7311	No	Yes
Raymondville	Stripes Store #2277	Aisles have no description	Yes
Raymondville	Raymondville Family Pharmacy	No	Yes
Raymondville	Raymondville Superette	Aisles have no description	Yes

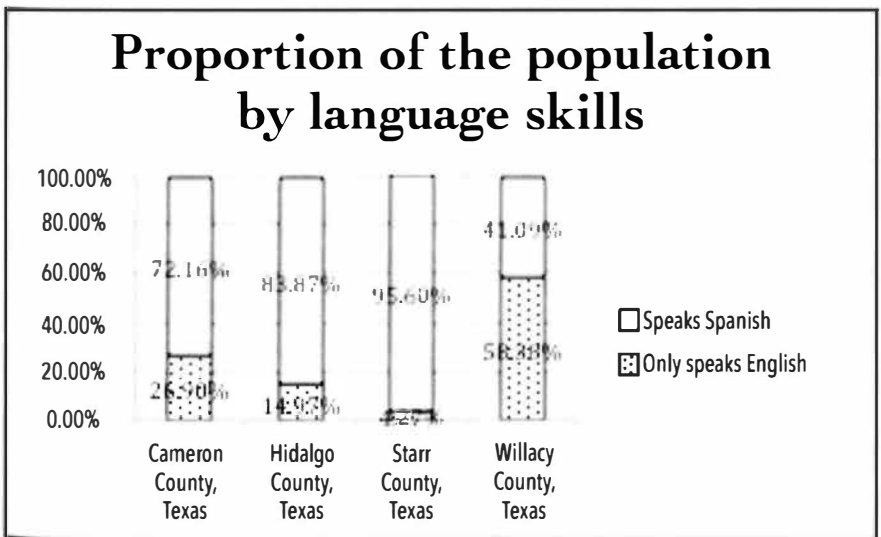
Table 5, continued

Town	Name	Aisle information in Spanish?	Help Provided to Spanish Speakers?
Raymondville	AutoZone	No	Yes
Rio Grande City	Rio Grande City HEB	No	Yes
Rio Grande City	Wal Mart Rio Grande City	Yes	Yes
Rio Grande City	Stripes Store #2206	Aisles have no description	Yes
Rio Grande City	Stripes Store #2437	Aisles have no description	Yes
Rio Grande City	Bealls	No	Yes
Rio Grande City	Country Store	Aisles have no description	Yes
Rio Grande City	El Tigre Food Store II	Aisles have no description	Yes
Weslaco	Wal Mart Weslaco	No	Yes

As mentioned earlier, the population of the four counties of the RGV is very homogeneous. Much of the population speaks Spanish, which is not surprising, given the Latino descent of the population.³⁴ Given the Latino origin of more than 90% of the population, the vast majority of those who speak only English probably have ancestors who spoke only Spanish. In other words, there is linguistic assimilation, that is, one cannot speak one's parents' language. This is in line with what other scholars have found. The Pew Research Center reports a survey in which no third-generation Latino has Spanish as the dominant language; rather, English was the dominant language for all respondents in this category.³⁵ Similarly, Mejías et al.³⁶ and Anderson-Mejías³⁷ surveyed college students in Hidalgo County and reported that they use Spanish mainly for daily communication and to speak with relatives; fourth- and fifth-generation Latinos reported using mainly English.

Figure 4 shows variety among the four counties. In Cameron County, 27% of the population only speaks English. In Hidalgo County, 15% of the population only speaks English. In Starr County, assimilation is the lowest, with 4% of the population who only speak English. However, in Willacy County, assimilation is the highest: 58% of the population only speaks English. It is interesting to note that Willacy County is located north of the RGV and Starr County is the most “isolated” of the RGV counties, being located well inside the U.S. and without any major city.

Figure 4: Proportion of the population by language skills³⁸



It should be noted that the data in Figure 4 are self-reported. They do not indicate the level of Spanish (for those who answer that they can speak Spanish). It is possible that their Spanish is only of the basic level. Similarly, some who report speaking only English (no Spanish at all) might understand spoken Spanish. Yet, we can attest that the data in Figure 4 appear realistic given that the RGV is among the areas with higher levels of Eligibility for Adult Education by Local Workforce Development, an indicator of the lack of English proficiency and the low levels of educational attainment.³⁹

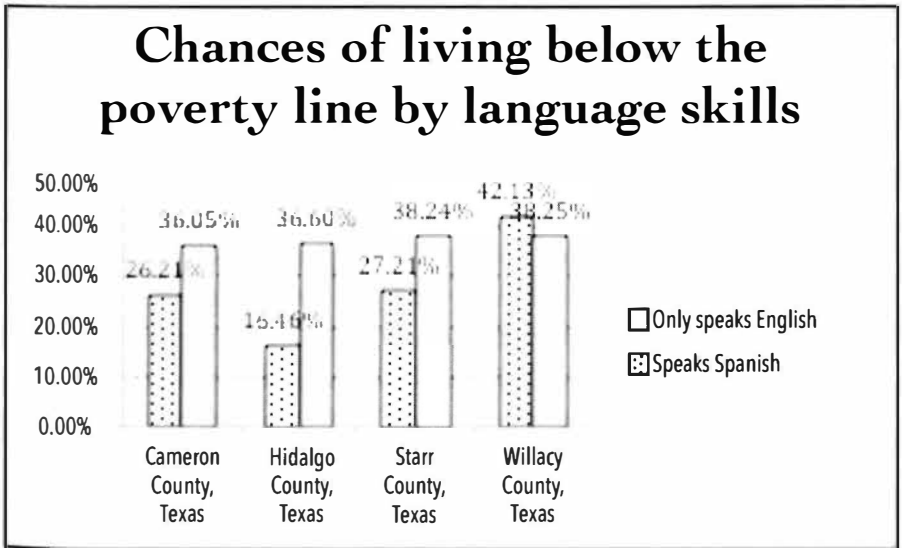
The education system is monolingual Anglophone

The Texas education system most likely contributes to the linguistic assimilation of Latinos in the RGV. As in the rest of the country,⁴⁰ the dominant ideology assumes a monolingual English teaching is necessary to preserve the political unity of the United States⁴¹ and to ensure the socio-economic success of Latinos.⁴² Students in Texas public schools are tested repeatedly in the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STA-AR). There are 34 exams before graduation from high school. By the third year, students are evaluated in mathematics. In eleventh grade, they must pass five exams (algebra, physics, English twice, and U.S. history). Students must pass the math and reading exams in fifth and eighth years to move levels. The success of the 34 examinations is required to obtain the high school diploma (except for home-schooled students). All examinations are administered in English, except for the first two years of study of recent immigrants.⁴³ There are no bilingual public schools in Texas. This is important given that 2.6 million of the 5.08 million students attending Texas public schools in 2012-2013 were Latinos.⁴⁴ In short, if they fail to master English, students cannot graduate from high school. Chances of living in poverty are higher for people speaking Spanish than for those who speak only English

In the RGV, chances of living below the poverty line are higher for Spanish speakers than for people who speak only English. In 2013, for a family of four including two children under 18, the poverty threshold was set at 24,624 US dollars.⁴⁵ Figure 5 shows the chances of living below the poverty line and the knowledge of English. It becomes apparent that, in the RGV, belonging to the Spanish-speaking community entails a "negative identification."⁴⁶ In the words of Breton, belonging to the Spanish-speaking community "[gives its members] the feeling of being impaired, inferior, folkloric, and subject to negative stereotypes."⁴⁷ Speaking English is key to social mobility

for Latinos in the U.S.⁴⁸ Others have shown that Mexican-born immigrants know, or feel, the pressure to learn English to succeed in the U.S. Texas Latinos, when surveyed, report how important learning the main language in the country is.⁴⁹

Figure 5: Chances of living below the poverty line by language skills⁵⁰



Furthermore, 70% of the Mexican migrants aged 16 and above were in the workforce, and this can be compared to the 67% for all foreign born and to 63% of native born. However, median household income for Mexican immigrants was at \$36,700, which is almost \$12,000 lower than for the rest of migrants and \$16,000 lower than native born.⁵¹ A study by Grieco and Ray concludes that Mexican immigrants tend to work more in low-paying occupations than other immigrants and the native-born population.⁵² The militarization of the border between Mexico and the US might lower the attractiveness of Spanish

The crime rate in Mexico contributes to the low attractiveness of the Spanish language in the RGV. States in northern Mexico count extensive kidnappings. The Mexican state of Tamaulipas, on the border with Cameron County, is one of the most

dangerous in the country, to the point that officials of the federal U.S. government “are subject to movement restrictions and a curfew between midnight and 6 a.m.”⁵³ The index of perception of corruption by Transparency International ranks Mexico in 103rd position out of 175 countries. In comparison, the United States occupies the 17th rank.⁵⁴

Beyond crime (whose rapid increase has been recorded since 2008 and therefore has probably little impact on current generations in terms of language skills), some have argued that the “militarization” of the U.S. border damages the image of Spanish-speakers.⁵⁵ The RGV is “protected” by a fence on its south side, reminding of the danger in Mexico, the Spanish-speaking country. In addition, the Border Patrol counts 3,056 officers in the RGV.⁵⁶ Also, Texas politicians emphasize operations on border security, whose budget has reached a billion dollars a year since 2008.⁵⁷ Finally, to leave the RGV, one must cross interior checkpoints (set up to prevent illegal immigration coming from Southern countries).⁵⁸ The symbolism of all these measures is that the region south of the Rio Grande—whose main trademark is the Spanish language—is undesirable, reinforcing the desire to detach oneself from it.

Conclusion

The traditional explanation of causality for institutional completeness states that if a language community (such as that of Latinos in the RGV) has institutions in its own language (Spanish), there will be more contacts between members of the group and lower assimilation (to English). Institutions (the independent variable) prevent linguistic assimilation (the dependent variable). We have argued that the reverse direction of causality might hold. The low status associated with the Spanish language in the RGV deters potential (Latino) group members from joining; it leads to the desire to assimilate into the English group. The majority

of potential group members (the Latinos) do not request more Spanish-speaking institutions, especially schools, in the RGV.

Even though the population of over one million people in the RGV in Texas is overwhelmingly of Latino descent and many Mexicans move to the area every year, assimilation of Spanish-speakers toward English is happening. Adults born in Mexico who move to the RGV can live almost exclusively in Spanish if they so choose: governments, churches, TV channels and radio stations, hospitals and clinics, as well as large stores and supply stores, offer services in their mother tongue. Compared to other Latinos in Texas and in the U.S., the case of the four RGV counties (Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy) seems to illustrate the fact that adult migrants who are closer to the border can speak Spanish on a daily basis because they may be immersed in the Mexican culture. Willacy County—the northmost of RGV counties with the highest rate of assimilation—shows the impact of the distance from the border.

Some of the institutions identified by Breton⁶⁹ as likely to strengthen the links within a particular “ethnic” community (e.g., churches, media) operate, in the RGV, in Spanish and other institutions operate only in English (i.e., schools). Although Latinos of the RGV have many potential contacts with Spanish-speakers, there is still a significant uptake of the English language. Schooling exclusively in English is most certainly a key factor in the assimilation. This assimilation can also be attributed to the large difference in quality of life between the US and Mexico, visible thanks to the geographical proximity of the southern neighbor. The attractiveness of the U.S.’s wealth is symbolized by a fence on the southern border of the U.S. in the RGV, by Border Patrol agents, and by internal checkpoints. Spanish language becomes associated with poverty, hence a desire to free oneself from it. There is little doubt that historical factors also contribute to the negative perception of Spanish. Mexican students were affected by segregated schools in Texas

and elsewhere in the U.S. starting in the early 20th century.⁶⁰ Mexican-Americans were also the targets of lynching, including by Texas Rangers.⁶¹

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Endnotes

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English/Spanish Flip/Flop Greetings in South Texas

by

Scott J. Baird

If one had the time and money to travel slowly from Oklahoma City to Monterrey, Mexico, one would never know when and where the dominant language switched from English to Spanish. San Antonio provides a prime example of this phenomenon. While both languages can be heard virtually everywhere, English dominates the northeast side of the city while Spanish dominates the southwest side. 150 miles south of San Antonio, on the national border that separates the USA from Mexico, in Brownsville, however, both languages share almost equal usage.

English language dialectologists have carefully mapped the area from Oklahoma City to the border towns of Laredo and Brownsville.¹ The land between Oklahoma City and Dallas was settled mostly by people from Tennessee, Kentucky, Missouri, and Arkansas—settlers who brought with them their Upper South dialect. Gulf South dialect speakers from Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia settled the East Texas area. The Central Texas English dialect, spoken in the hill country that includes Austin and San Antonio, was created by European immigrants—especially settlers from Germany. The South Texas English dialect, spoken between San Antonio and the Mexican border, was influenced by Mexican Spanish.

In the early sixties, linguist Carroll E. Reed studied the mixture of English-language and German-language bilingual speakers in Pennsylvania. He argues that one can only understand such bilingual communities if information on the dialects of both languages have been researched. Carroll calls this

phenomenon “Double Dialect Geography.”² The best explanation of the convergence of the various Spanish and English dialects in borderlands Texas can be found in feminist Gloria Anzaldúa’s cultural analysis *Borderlands/La Frontera, The New Mestiza*.³

Chicano Spanish sprang out of the Chicanos’ need to identify ourselves as a distinct people. We needed a language with which to communicate with ourselves, a secret language. For some of us, language is a homeland closer than the Southwest—for many Chicanos today live in the Midwest and the East. And because we are a complex, heterogeneous people, we speak many languages. Some of the languages we speak are:

1. *Standard English*
2. *Working class and slang English*
3. *Standard Spanish*
4. *Standard Mexican Spanish*
5. *North Mexican Spanish dialect*
6. *Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California have regional variations)*
7. *Tex Mex*
8. *Pachuco (also called calo)*

Implied in Anzaldúa’s list, *Standard English* and *Standard Spanish* include both written and spoken versions, and #7 *Tex Mex* refers to the Texas version of *Chicano Spanish*. She defines *Pachuco* as “...a language of rebellion, both against Standard Spanish and Standard English. It is a secret language. Adults of the culture and outsiders cannot understand it. It is made of slang words from both English and Spanish.”⁴

Scant linguistic research, however, has been published on the Spanish dialect(s) of South Texas. The little that does exist focuses on the classroom English of native Spanish speakers. Ofelia Garcia, of Columbia University’s Teacher’s College, and Kate Menken, of the City College of New York (CUNY), articulate the complexity of the language of Latinos, arguing that their language is “pluralistic,” as that they communicate in a “transcultural context.”⁵ Even so, the Latino’s ability to master both spoken and written Standard English necessarily dictates

their chances of advancement academically and economically in a mobile U.S.A. society.

Similarly, Michelle Kell published an article, in 2006, outlining specific methods to teach Standard English in such “Metalingual” environments. Her article also contains a short bibliography of the few published studies on the conversational Spanish dialects spoken in the USA.⁶

Bilingual Flip/flop Greetings

In a recent ‘Dear Abby’ column,⁷ a reader from San Antonio expressed her dismay over a perceived problem in her bilingual city:

Dear Abby, I am a retired librarian who lives in Texas. I am what around here is called an “Anglo,” meaning white and not Hispanic. I speak four languages, with varying degrees of proficiency. Recently, a friend who is Hispanic told me that if an Anglo speaks Spanish to a Hispanic person, it’s considered an insult because it implies that the Hispanic person is “too stupid” to learn English. I had never heard this before, so I asked a retired college-level Spanish teacher who is also Anglo. She informed me that Hispanic people use the language differences as a “boundary,” and my speaking Spanish to them was a violation of their boundaries. What should I do?

—*In Shock in San Antonio*

Abby responded:

DEAR IN SHOCK: After reading your letter, I polled a focus group of Spanish-speaking friends about it. Some said it didn’t bother them, but the majority explained that the reaction may depend on how long the family has been in this country. If it has been several generations, the people you are addressing might identify more as English speakers than Spanish speakers, and consider you addressing them in Spanish to be condescending because it implies that you don’t think they have learned English. So the rule of thumb would be: Assume that everyone speaks English; then if it turns out they don’t, use their language.

P.S. If your relationship with your neighbors is a good one, tell them what you were told and ask if you may have offended them because if you have, you would like to apologize.

The British linguist R.A. Hudson discusses quite brilliantly the importance of choice in this type of speech as a *signal of social identity*:⁸ “There are, perhaps, linguistic items in every language that reflect social characteristics of the speaker, of the addressee, or of the relation between them.” These items—and flip/flop greetings certainly meet the criteria—signal a recognition of power and of solidarity among speakers. Both In Shock and Abby recognize this dilemma. English and Spanish share equal power among South Texas bilingual speakers; agreeing upon which language to use (or to mix the two) establishes solidarity.

A typical South Texas flip/flop greeting follows a pattern such as “Good Morning/*Buenos Dias*.” Such greetings allow listeners to choose whether to answer in English or in Spanish. In South Texas, this linguistic greeting has numerous variations. At an informal camp-out this past weekend, for example, I greeted two young men from Corpus Christi with: “Hello/*Dias*.” One of the men answered me in English; his buddy in Spanish. The English response was a simple phrase, “Good Morning.” The Spanish response was a series of friendly sentences—very little of which I understood. I chose to continue in English. (I learned rather quickly that both men spoke native English, as well as native Spanish.)

Other examples include the following: (1) “Welcome/*Buenas Tardes*”—from a greeter at an evening bilingual church service (06.26.16) and (2) “*Buenos Dias*/Morning”—from a yard man at Trinity University (8.24.16).

I do not know why the choice of either language comes first. Simon Herman, in 1968, wrote an excellent explanation of the variables that enter such a choice.⁹ His hypothesis includes three variables:

1. When the activity takes place in a public rather than a private setting.
2. When the behavior in the [public] situation may be interpreted as providing cues to group identifications (including social status) or conformity to group norms.
3. When the person involved in the activity wishes to identify (or to be identified) with a particular group or to be dissociated from it, or desires (or feels obligated) to conform to the norms of a reference group.

To paraphrase: flip/flop greetings usually take place in public, when speakers have two languages to choose from and when the speakers desire to convey their comfort with both languages. Obviously, the complexity involves knowing what situations are public, when the speakers know both languages, whether the speakers can decide that the listeners might know both languages, whether the speakers can ascertain that the listeners feel comfortable being addressed, and whether a flip/flop greeting would even be appropriate.

Bilingualism vs. Bi-dialectism

English language speakers, by and large, appear quite positive that they know the difference between languages and dialects. In a scientific application, however, the difference remains elusive. When an inner city Parisian speaker and an American Appalachian speaker cannot understand each other, we say that the difference can be attributed to a language difference. An inner city London cockney speaker and an American Appalachian speaker cannot understand each other either, but we tend to blame dialect differences for that miscommunication.

British linguist R.A. Hudson argues that "... there is nothing absolute about the distinction which English happens to make between 'languages' and 'dialects,' and for readers familiar with

some language other than English, this discussion would hardly be necessary."¹⁰

In the most recent edition of the American Dialect Society's 150-year series of monographs, Vicki Anderson traces in detail the loss of a mixed-language dialect in Pennsylvania's German/English area. In this essay, one can trace the gradual movement from "German language" to "German dialect" to "mixed language? dialect?" to an English dialect.¹¹

So What? Other Mixed Languages and Monolingual Flip/flop Greetings

Whenever I meet Japanese speakers in an uncertain linguistic context, one or the other of us will initiate the conversation with flip/flop variations of "Hello/*Konnichi wa*." I have, therefore, used (unconsciously) this form of greeting for over five decades. This introspection has led me to the "So What?" portion of this paper. The answer, I project, lies in a linguistic universal: All normal speakers in all varieties of languages use flip/flop greetings.

To my own amazement, I have noticed that flip/flop greetings appear commonly in monolingual English speech, signaling a choice among social styles of speaking. To understand the argument, we need to go back over fifty years. Over half a century ago, Martin Joos published a short article in which he described five styles of monolingual speech.¹² That article, now a classic, recognizes five styles¹³ of speech: frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate. In *frozen* speech, one reads from a written text without an audience being present. Think of a radio address or of a teleprompter presentation within the Oval Office. The text, written in edited English phrasing, may have been rehearsed. In *formal* speech, one may read from either a prepared text or from notes, but, this time, the audience is present—present, but silent. The speaker, however, can see

non-verbal reactions, and, when necessary, he/she will alter or clarify or repeat a section of the message. Think of preachers giving prepared sermons to their congregations. These speakers note facial expressions, especially frowns of disapproval, expressions of anger, and so forth.

Classroom teachers provide an excellent example of *consultative* speech. Using authoritative voice and diction, they may also read from prepared text or from notes, but, in this setting, listeners may interrupt either verbally or by raising their hands. The audience participates through dialogue with the speaker. Paralinguistic laughter, boos, applause, etc. punctuate the dialogue.

Contraction of syntax (can't, wanna, etc.) occurs frequently. Friends use *casual* speech when chatting with each other—providing the most prolific style of everyday English talk. Sentences are seldom completed; both parties expect interruptions. Contractions dominate the syntax. Intimate speech occurs only among close friends or family members, but limited to adults—because they share an adult viewpoint of memories. (Children and their parents share memories within the same parameters.) Sentences barely begin before an exclamation, paralinguistic signal, or verbal utterance interrupts. Non-participants have little or no understanding of what is being shared.

Flip/flop greetings among monolingual speakers occur most often by signaling a mixture of consultative and casual signals: "Good Morning/Hi." Several other examples follow: (1) A pastor talking to a boy (casual/consultative flop/flip, as it were) says, "*Good morning there buddy/ How are you?*"; (2) "*Howdy/ Good morning everyone,*" said by a customer at a restaurant, speaking to her friends; (3) "*Welcome/Howdy, Howdy,*" said by an owner at a different restaurant, greeting a new customer; (4) "*Good morning, Leslie/How the hell are ya?*" spoken by me greeting a friend for an early morning walk last week; "*Hi/How are ya, darling?*" spoken by my wife greeting me this very morning.

Back to Oklahoma

To return to my opening guessing game: Should people make a return walk from Monterrey to Oklahoma City, the transition from Spanish through bilingual Spanish/English to English would have one constant. Flip/flop greetings will be found everywhere.

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DRUG CRIMES



*Raining Bullets over Matamoros
à la René Magritte's Golconda*

Crimen organizado y migración clandestina en Tamaulipas

por

Oscar Misael Hernández-Hernández

A fines del 2012, durante un viaje que hice en autobús de la ciudad de Matamoros, Tamaulipas, a la ciudad de Monterrey, Nuevo León, mi compañero fue un hombre joven, hondureño, quien según me narró había sido deportado de Estados Unidos. Le pregunté a dónde se dirigía y me respondió que a la ciudad de Reynosa. “¿Y qué vas a hacer ahí?”, le volví a preguntar y me respondió: “Pues voy por mi segundo chance con los coyotes.” Según me explicó, los coyotes les daban como garantía tres oportunidades para cruzarlos por la frontera, pero antes había que pagarles la mitad de lo acordado.

Allan agregó que de este primer pago, el cual era en dólares y variaba dependiendo de si se era centroamericano o mexicano, los coyotes pagaban a *otros* para poder hacer *su jale*. “Porque si no, está cabrón –expresó-, luego los pueden matar a ellos o a nosotros”. “¿Y quiénes son esos *otros* a los que los coyotes les pagan?”, le pregunté, temiendo me respondiera que no era mi asunto. “Pues, a los de *La Mañana*, ¿a quién más?” Después de escuchar esto y notar cierto nerviosismo en él, opté por preguntarle acerca de su familia en Honduras y de cómo fue que emprendió su viaje hasta la frontera.

Esta fue la primera ocasión que escuché de un migrante acerca del vínculo que existía entre el crimen organizado y la migración clandestina en el noreste de México. *La Mañana*, como yo la conocía entonces, hacía referencia a hombres que trabajaban para un grupo criminal en la región, específicamente para el Cártel del Golfo. Por supuesto, *La Mañana* también podía ser usada como categoría de análisis de una cultura criminal

que articula el tráfico de drogas, la violencia, y la corrupción multinivel, como años después lo hizo el antropólogo mexicano Edgar Morín,¹ pero al menos en Tamaulipas, la gente adjetivada así era visible y había apropiado el negocio de la migración.

Mi objetivo en el presente trabajo será exponer los resultados preliminares de estudios antropológicos que, de forma indirecta, me han llevado a encontrar indicios y reflexionar en torno a cómo dos grupos criminales llegaron a monopolizar, disputar y redefinir la migración clandestina en Tamaulipas. Específicamente haré énfasis en el Cártel de Golfo –nacido en la ciudad de Matamoros– y en Los Zetas. Más allá de sus vínculos y rupturas criminales, estos dos grupos se han distinguido por una apropiación diferenciada de la migración en tránsito o de retorno.

Parto del siguiente argumento: en la región, grupos del crimen organizado como los citados han monopolizado la migración clandestina a través de los llamados “coyotes,” en virtud de que ésta ha llegado a constituir una “industria”² o negocio lucrativo, aunque explotado a través de diferentes prácticas, es decir, además de riesgos tradicionales como ser detenidos por autoridades migratorias, asaltados, robados, o morir en el trayecto, ahora los migrantes viven el riesgo de ser parte del tráfico humano que controla el crimen organizado en la región, aunque dicho riesgo variará dependiendo del grupo criminal.

Dicho argumento lo sustentó, como antes señalé, con base en estudios antropológicos sobre el tema en la región que he hecho entre el 2012 y 2016.³ Específicamente retomo información de entrevistas que he realizado con menores migrantes mexicanos que han sido repatriados de Estados Unidos, autoridades de Centros de Atención a Menores Fronterizos (CAMEF) situados en las ciudades de Matamoros, Reynosa, y Nuevo Laredo, autoridades del Instituto Nacional y del Grupo Beta, coordinadores religiosos de casas de apoyo a migrantes en Matamoros y Brownsville, Texas, así como conversaciones casuales con dos “coyotes” y con migrantes mexicanos y centroamericanos que he contactado al transitar en autobús por la frontera.

A lo largo del trabajo se presenta información cualitativa a través de la cual se analiza, en primer lugar, la articulación entre la migración clandestina y el crimen organizado en la región; en segundo lugar, cómo es que la migración clandestina constituye un negocio lucrativo para el Cártel del Golfo, por un lado, y Los Zetas, por otro; en tercer lugar las formas en que estos grupos criminales se organizan para traficar migrantes antes, durante, y después de la frontera; en cuarto lugar, las formas en que el crimen organizado ha afectado a las asociaciones de apoyo a migrantes en ambos lados de la frontera; y finalmente, la emergencia de una nueva figura (los coyotitos) que ha sido reclutada y utilizada por el crimen organizado para traficar migrantes.

Migración clandestina y grupos criminales

En las últimas dos décadas, la migración clandestina de mexicanos y centroamericanos por la región Tamaulipas-Texas 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.⁴ Lo anterior no ha menguado las actividades de los llamados coyotes (también conocidos como pateros o polleros), por el contrario, son más visibles.

En la región, autores como Spener consideran que los coyotes son contrabandistas en el proceso migratorio laboral y organizan sus actividades en distintos espacios, todo ello a cambio de un pago que garantiza más de un cruce por el río Bravo.⁵ Por otro lado, Izcara-Palacios (2012a), señala que existen dos grupos de coyotes: los que trabajan a tiempo parcial y los que trabajan a tiempo completo.⁶ Los primeros los subdivide en los que regresan varias veces al año por trabajadores, los que viajan una vez al año con diferentes trabajadores migratorios, y los que van y vuelven todos los años con el mismo grupo de migrantes. Los segundos señala que se clasifican en aquellos coyotes locales

que residen en la frontera, los que trabajan en redes complejas, y los que están integrados en redes asociadas con personal del Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

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,⁷ sino también entre los propios grupos criminales disputando territorios y buscando negocios alternativos al tráfico de drogas. La región Tamaulipas-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 clandestina.⁸

Ahora bien, ¿cuál es el vínculo entre grupos del crimen organizado y migración clandestina en la región Tamaulipas-Texas? En mi experiencia, el vínculo toma visibilidad a través de los coyotes, como arriba lo señalé, quienes si trabajan de forma independiente deben pagar una cuota a *La Mañana* – como expresó el joven migrante de Honduras—o bien trabajan como coyotes de *La Mañana* al tener un jefe vinculado con el grupo criminal. Más allá de las narrativas etnográficas contemporáneas, es necesario preguntarse quién o qué es *La Mañana* en la región. Hace un lustro, en un reportaje periodístico se señaló que:

En el reino del cártel del Golfo todo pasa por sus manos: piratería, alcohol, negocios, policías, militares, gobierno municipal, aduanas, prostitución, pornografía, migrantes, venta clandestina de gasolina y, por supuesto, trasiego de droga a Estados Unidos, en una de las plazas más importantes del país. La mañana, como se conoce aquí al cártel fundado por Juan Nepomuceno Guerra y dirigido después por Osiel Cárdenas Guillén, encarcelado en Florida, y controlado ahora por Jorge Eduardo Costilla Sánchez, El Coss, no sólo es un sistema económico que controla la entidad, sino una forma de vida, una expresión del tejido social.⁹

Como se observa, uno de los apodos con que llegó a ser conocido el Cártel del Golfo fue *La Mañana*, y por consiguiente sus integrantes eran *los mañeros*. La historia de este grupo criminal

en la región tiene una larga data: desde los años treinta hasta los setenta bajo el mando de Juan Nepomuceno Guerra; en adelante y hasta mediados de los años noventa a cargo de su sobrino, Juan García Ábrego, y posterior a la captura y extradición de este último, el grupo criminal empezó a ser dirigido por Osiel Cárdenas Guillén, en 1998, quien contrató a desertores del Ejército Mexicano como su brazo armado, aunque en el 2010 se separaron y se volvieron independientes.¹⁰

Más allá de la breve genealogía del poder dentro del Cártel del Golfo, es importante introducir cómo fue su surgimiento y, sobre todo, cómo es que llegaron a monopolizar diferentes actividades ilegales – como la migración clandestina – y posteriormente a disputarlas con otro grupo criminal como son Los Zetas. Según Flores Pérez (2013), quien realizó un estudio profundo y detallado sobre esta organización criminal en Tamaulipas, el surgimiento de este grupo criminal en la región se debió a una coyuntura histórica transnacional – la ley seca en Estados Unidos – pero también a una serie de prácticas de corrupción y contubernios en los ámbitos político y económico.¹¹

Diferentes fuentes de información pública, a decir de reportajes periodísticos e informes de la Procuraduría General de la República, e incluso de la Marina-Armada de México, han señalado que el Cártel del Golfo inició con el contrabando de alcohol, posteriormente de drogas y de armas. No obstante, después de la captura de Juan García Ábrego, la organización del grupo criminal tomó un giro estratégico al mando de Osiel Cárdenas Guillén: contratar a exmilitares para que formaran parte de su grupo armado y de esta forma conquistar otros territorios y rutas.¹²

Este brazo armado del Cártel del Golfo fue clave para hacer frente a las fuerzas federales, pero en especial a otros grupos criminales del país. De esta forma, como ha señalado González Ortiz (2013), nacen los Zetas en 1998, siendo conformados inicialmente por exmilitares mexicanos y posteriormente por exmilitares guatemaltecos.¹³ No obstante, como el autor afirma,

con la captura de Osiel Cárdenas, el Cártel del Golfo se fractura y Los Zetas comienzan a separarse, pero es hasta el año 2010 que este último grupo se independiza a razón del asesinato de uno de sus cabecillas.

Desde la captura de Osiel Cárdenas, Los Zetas comenzaron a tener sus propios negocios, principalmente sustentados en la extorsión y la protección privada, ya que en el negocio de las drogas no tenían los suficientes contactos y redes para llevar a cabo operaciones.¹⁴ Sin embargo, posterior a su ruptura con el Cártel del Golfo incursionaron poco a poco en otros negocios tales como el tráfico de armas y de migrantes. Según Izcarra Palacios, "a partir del 2008 una merma en los rendimientos del narcotráfico hizo que la delincuencia organizada en Tamaulipas buscase en la migración indocumentada una fuente estable y robusta de ingresos."¹⁵

Este fue el caso del Cártel del Golfo y de Los Zetas, quienes al quedar sin un liderazgo y tener pugnas internas, empezaron a ampliar sus negocios pasando del tráfico de drogas y armas los primeros, o la protección privada y la extorsión los segundos, al negocio de la migración clandestina y por consiguiente del tráfico de migrantes en la frontera. No obstante, como mostraré enseguida, el control de este negocio adquirió matices de diferencia en cada uno de los grupos, a la vez redefinió las formas de organización de los grupos criminales.

El negocio de la migración para los grupos criminales

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.¹⁶ Sin embargo, también cuenta con una amplia tradición de migración de mexicanos, tanto documentada como clandestina, 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 Braceros, 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,¹⁷ tanto mexicanas como texanas.¹⁸

Desde los años ochenta, la región Tamaulipas-Texas constituye una ruta preferente de migrantes de América Central hacia Estados Unidos, en particular por la corta distancia geográfica hacia ciudades de la Costa Este Americana, por la existencia de un número considerable de asociaciones de apoyo a migrantes en el Valle de Texas, pero también porque había “una amplia red de pateros, consolidada y protegida desde hace mucho tiempo.”¹⁹ Por supuesto, también era y sigue siendo una ruta elegida por migrantes mexicanos, pero además, los “pateros” o coyotes llegaron a ser reclutados o impuestos por grupos criminales.

El negocio para el CDG

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, en particular para los “coyotes” que trabajan para el Cártel del Golfo. Ello se debe a lo lucrativo del negocio, 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. Izcarra Palacios, con base en varios de sus estudios, afirma que en Tamaulipas aquellas personas que se dedican al coyotaje a tiempo completo, se diferencian entre sí y tienen diferentes cobros para los migrantes.²⁰

Al respecto, afirma que los coyotes locales de la frontera, quienes conducen a migrantes estatales, nacionales y extranjeros,

cobran entre 1,000 y 2,000 dólares; los coyotes que trabajan en redes complejas, que conducen a migrantes nacionales, centroamericanos, sudamericanos, y asiáticos, cobran entre 2,000 y 3,500 dólares; mientras que los que denomina “coyotes integrados en redes asociadas con personal del CBP,” quienes conducen a migrantes nacionales centroamericanos, cobran entre 2,500 y 3,000 dólares por persona.

El trabajo etnográfico que he realizado en la región desde el año 2012 hasta la fecha, en parte difiere con lo encontrado con Izcara Palacios respecto a los cobros a los migrantes. Al menos en las entrevistas hechas con menores migrantes mexicanos, que han sido deportados de Estados Unidos, o bien con migrantes adultos de México y Centroamérica que transitan en las ciudades fronterizas, los cobros definitivamente varían si los migrantes son nacionales o extranjeros, pero también dependiendo de la ciudad de destino, el medio de cruce y del estatus del viaje.

Por ejemplo, menores y adultos migrantes de México coincidieron en decirme que los coyotes les cobran entre 1,500 y 2,500 dólares siempre y cuando vayan a alguna ciudad de la Costa Este Americana; los adultos centroamericanos señalaron que les cobran entre 3,000 y 6,000 dólares, también si la ciudad de destino está en la Costa Este. Ahora bien, estos precios variarán dependiendo del medio de cruce: normalmente pasan la frontera nadando por el río Bravo, pero si se trata de otra forma, por ejemplo, escondidos en vehículos particulares o en autobuses con documentos falsos, los precios se incrementarán.

Finalmente, también encontramos información referente al estatus del viaje: al respecto, los jóvenes “coyotes” con quienes conversé en Reynosa señalaban: “Mira, es que hay los viajes normales, pero también los viajes especiales,” “¿Y cuáles son esos?”, les pregunté y respondieron: “Pues son esos en los que alguien le dice al jefe: “Oye, me urge que me llesves a mijo con su papá, o que traigas a mi abuelita para acá”, entonces esos cuestan más porque son rápido y hay que tener mucho cuidado, y pues ganamos más”.

Tanto las tarifas cobradas a los migrantes como el estatus de sus viajes dan muestra en parte del negocio de la migración clandestina en la región Tamaulipas-Texas, pero dicho negocio no se comprende en una magnitud más amplia si se desconoce cuántos migrantes en promedio cruzan la frontera. Las estadísticas de menores y adultos repatriados, concentradas por el Instituto Nacional de Migración, por supuesto son un buen indicio de cuántas personas cruzan la frontera cada año.

Según datos de la Secretaría de Gobernación (2016), por ejemplo, hasta el primer trimestre del año 2016, fueron repatriados 2,477 menores no acompañados de entre 12 y 17 años de edad. De éstos, el 30% fueron repatriados por puntos de recepción ubicados en ciudades de la frontera de Tamaulipas con Texas.²¹ Con base en estos datos del trimestre, se tiene que 743 menores cruzaron la frontera por la región de interés. Multiplicando esta cantidad por al menos 1,500 dólares por cada uno, se tiene que los coyotes tuvieron una ganancia tentativa de 1,114,500 dólares en ese periodo.

No obstante, los datos proporcionados tanto por menores como por algunos adultos que entrevisté en albergues de Tamaulipas, dan otro panorama sobre la cantidad de migrantes que cruzan la frontera mensualmente: ellos coincidieron al afirmar que, al menos cada semana, los coyotes hacen dos o tres viajes con migrantes; cada viaje integra un grupo de entre 15 y 25 migrantes. A esta información hay que sumar el hecho de que en cada ciudad fronteriza existe más de un coyote traficando con migrantes, lo cual nos da un panorama mucho más detallado del negocio de la migración clandestina.

El negocio para Los Zetas

Por supuesto, la información anterior remite a los cobros y ganancias de coyotes que forman parte del Cártel del Golfo, ya sea porque pagan una cuota a este grupo o bien porque han sido reclutados por el mismo. Sin embargo, poco se sabe acerca

de los cobros y/o ganancias que tienen Los Zetas cuando de migrantes se trata. Los testimonios de algunos migrantes que conocí durante mis viajes en autobús de Monterrey a Matamoros—o a la inversa—dan pistas al respecto: algunos comentaron que no ellos, sino amigos o conocidos, habían contratado los servicios de alguien que sin saber pertenecía a este grupo criminal, pero la experiencia no fue buena.

Por un lado, porque, aunque les cobraron cantidades similares a las declaradas por migrantes que contrataron a “coyotes” del Cártel del Golfo, al final solamente los estafaron y los abandonaron a medio camino. Por otro lado, a algunos los detuvieron en casas de seguridad y solamente los robaron e incluso los extorsionaron, obligándolos a llamar a sus familiares en sus lugares de origen en México—o Centroamérica—o bien a familiares que podían tener en Estados Unidos.

Sea cual sea el caso narrado por estos migrantes itinerantes, el argumento que podemos extraer es que, para Los Zetas, el negocio de la migración no se encuentra cruzando migrantes por la frontera—lo que en gran parte tiene una lógica: al menos la frontera de Tamaulipas con Texas, en su gran mayoría está dominada por el Cártel del Golfo—sino más bien el negocio se encuentra asaltando, robando, y extorsionando a los migrantes, so pena de asesinarlos—como sucedió en San Fernando, Tamaulipas, al encontrarse los cuerpos de migrantes asesinados en 2010 y en 2011.²²

Durante un recorrido a este último pueblo, por ejemplo, un ingeniero agrónomo comentaba lo siguiente: “Aquí cerca está el rancho donde encontraron muertos a los migrantes,” aludiendo al asesinato de los 72 migrantes. “¿Y ya no pasa eso?”, le pregunté de forma ingenua, y él me respondió: “Claro que sí, siguen agarrando migrantes, no más que ya no los matan porque luego viene la Marina, pero bien que los roban y les piden dinero, luego sabe uno que detuvieron un autobús donde venían muchos”.

El mismo ingeniero, quien tenía familiares cerca de dicha ranchería donde acaeció el migranticidio, me narraba: “Una

noche estaba con mi esposa y mi familia platicando en el patio, y como vivimos cerca de una parcela y estaba sembrada con sorgo, que empezamos a escuchar mucho ruido, que nos asomamos y que vamos viendo las sombras de mucha gente caminando agachada en la parcela, y yo le dije a mi familia: ya valimos madre, porque pensé que era gente armada.”

El ingeniero prosiguió su relato y comentó que una de las personas se acercó a ellos y le dijo que venían de Honduras y de Guatemala, que habían estado encerrados por unas personas que las amenazaron con armas, que les quitaron todo su dinero, pero que se habían escapado porque las personas se embriagaron. Posteriormente les pidieron agua y algo de comer, y según el ingeniero, les dieron lo que pidieron a cambio de que se fueran. Más allá de lo anecdótico del caso, es un indicio de cómo operan Los Zetas en esta área —San Fernando es un pueblo supuestamente bajo su mando— y cómo manejan el negocio de la migración clandestina, aunque no se puede calcular una cifra aproximada de las ganancias que obtienen por robos, asaltos o extorsiones.

La organización para el tráfico de migrantes: antes del Bravo

Sea cual sea el caso de los coyotes —pagadores de cuotas o reclutados por el crimen organizado, el punto es que, al menos entre aquellos coyotes que forman parte del Cártel del Golfo en cualquier modalidad y que operan en ciudades como Matamoros, Reynosa o Nuevo Laredo, el tráfico de migrantes se ha redefinido desde hace unos años, habiéndose creado un nuevo sistema de coyotaje que opera como una red de inteligencia y de estrategia operativa antes, durante, y después de cruzar la frontera.

En los testimonios de los menores migrantes mexicanos y adultos entrevistados, antes de cruzar el río Bravo (o río Grande, como se le conoce en Estados Unidos) ellos tuvieron vínculos con tres tipos de actores sociales que en sí forman parte del coyotaje: a decir de *los conocidos*, *los contactos*, y *los cuidadores*;

nombres coloquiales que los menores les asignan a quienes a cambio de un pago preliminar les facilitaron la salida de sus lugares de origen en México hasta alguna ciudad de la frontera de Tamaulipas, o bien hasta los lugares de destino en Estados Unidos a los que pensaban llegar.

Los “conocidos” son varones adultos o jóvenes que residen en los lugares de origen de los menores, con experiencia previa como migrantes documentados o irregulares en Estados Unidos. Los “conocidos,” que en algunas ocasiones son parientes consanguíneos o políticos de la familia de los menores o bien vecinos o amigos, desempeñan el papel que antaño realizaban los “enganchadores” (un tipo de intermediarios entre los braceros mexicanos y los contratistas norteamericanos durante los programas braceros).²³

De cierta forma, los “conocidos” encajan en la categoría de coyotes “a tiempo parcial” que enuncia Izcara Palacios (2012) para el caso de la región de estudio, es decir, personas que cada año transitan la frontera reclutando trabajadores mexicanos para actividades agrícolas en Estados Unidos.²⁴ Sin embargo, en el caso de los menores migrantes, los “conocidos” no necesariamente los “enganchan” con la promesa de un trabajo, sino garantizándoles cruzar la frontera con base en su experiencia migratoria y en los vínculos que tienen en ciudades fronterizas.

Los “contactos,” por otro lado, también son varones adultos o jóvenes que viven en alguna ciudad de la frontera de Tamaulipas. De igual manera tienen experiencia previa como migrantes documentados o irregulares en Estados Unidos. A diferencia de los “conocidos”, son los “contactos” quienes tienen un vínculo directo con algún grupo del crimen organizado, ya sea porque forman parte de sus “coyotes” o bien porque pagan una cuota para poder desempeñarse como tales sin ser sancionados o asesinados.

Necesariamente, los “contactos” deben vivir y conocer la o las ciudades fronterizas en las que desempeñan su trabajo, el cual consiste en: recibir a los menores (o adultos) migrantes en las centrales camioneras o de autobuses, o bien en plazas, tien-

das o centros comerciales aledaños, transportarlos a las llamadas “casas de seguridad” y mantenerlos ahí hasta que se reúna un número considerable de migrantes.

Después de recoger a los menores y transportarlos a las “casas de seguridad,” el trabajo de los “contactos” termina y reinician el ciclo regresando por más migrantes a los puntos de encuentro previamente acordados. Según los menores y adultos migrantes, en algunos casos los “contactos” también son quienes están a cargo de las llamadas “casas de seguridad,” pero cuando no es así, los menores entran en vínculo con otro actor clandestino en la migración: los “cuidadores”.

Finalmente, los cuidadores también suelen ser varones adultos o jóvenes residentes en la frontera. Reciben este nombre porque están a cargo de las casas de seguridad en las que ingresan a los migrantes. “El coyote nos llevó a una casa,” narró un menor, refiriéndose a un contacto, y enseguida agregó: “Ahí estuvimos tres o cuatro días me parece, y había otro señor que cuidaba la casa.” Su narrativa da cuenta del traslado de los menores hasta una casa de seguridad en la frontera de Tamaulipas, a la vez que el tiempo que tienen que esperar.

Los “cuidadores,” además de estar encargados de vigilar a los migrantes y dotarles de agua y comida (cantidades que varían dependiendo del número de migrantes) durante el tiempo que permanezcan en las “casas de seguridad,” también imponen algunas reglas, tales como no mirar por las ventanas, no hablar entre sí y no usar celulares.²⁵ En la opinión de uno de los “coyotes” entrevistado, estas reglas se imponen para evitar ser descubiertos y delatados por los vecinos, o bien que los migrantes empaticen o sean rastreados por la policía.

La organización para el tráfico de migrantes: cruzando el Bravo

Como antes se señaló, durante su estancia en las “casas de seguridad” los menores (y adultos) migrantes están bajo la

vigilancia de los “cuidadores”. Ahí permanecen hasta que estos últimos deciden el momento propicio para cruzar la frontera por el río Bravo. Ello depende de dos situaciones: primero, que se haya reunido un número considerable de migrantes, lo que se traduce en más ganancias, y segundo, que reciban reportes sobre la posibilidad de cruzar la frontera sin ser vistos. Cuando se logra lo anterior, entran en contacto con otros actores clandestinos: *los miradores, los brincadores, los guías y los primos*, cuyas funciones son clave en el negocio de la migración clandestina.

En las ciudades fronterizas de Tamaulipas que son utilizadas mayormente como rutas de cruce para la migración clandestina, los “miradores” son varones jóvenes, con amplio conocimiento de la ribera del río Bravo (caminos, veredas, montes), cuya función primordial es vigilar el movimiento y los cambios de guardia de agentes de la Border Patrol. En algunas ocasiones son los mismos “cuidadores” de las “casas de seguridad” quienes desempeñan esta figura y rol, aunque a decir de los “coyotes” entrevistados, en la mayoría son jóvenes contratados exclusivamente para dicho trabajo.

Los “miradores,” también conocidos como “escaleras” dado que ocasionalmente trepan árboles o postes para electricidad valiéndose de escaleras y de esta forma estar vigilando a la Border Patrol, vía celular reportan a los “cuidadores” la posibilidad o no de sacar a los migrantes de las “casas de seguridad” para cruzar la frontera por el río Bravo. Empero, su función no sólo es relevante para el cruce clandestino de migrantes, sino también para grupos del crimen organizado, pues, a decir de algunos menores de circuito utilizados como “coyotitos,” en la mayoría de las ocasiones las mismas rutas utilizadas para cruzar a los migrantes son usadas para transportar drogas a Estados Unidos.

Después de que los “miradores” han informado a los “cuidadores” de las casas de seguridad que el cruce por la frontera es viable, estos últimos llevan a los migrantes (por grupos) a orillas del río Bravo. Normalmente esta actividad se lleva a cabo en horas de la noche o la madrugada. Ahí los “cuidadores”, en

algunos casos, entregan a los menores —o adultos— migrantes a los “brincadores”: varones jóvenes de la región, cuya función es cruzar (o brincar) a los migrantes por el río Bravo.

Los “brincadores” también son conocidos como “lancheros,” aunque al cruzar a los migrantes por el río Bravo no utilizan lanchas, sino cámaras inflables, botes, o el simple nado; también son los llamados “pateros,” término que ha sido abordado por algunos autores y que alude a una metáfora de este actor clandestino de la migración como un “pato” y de los migrantes como “patitos” que los siguen en el río de forma sigilosa.²⁶

El trabajo de los “brincadores,” en teoría, concluye cuando los migrantes han pasado el río Bravo y pisan territorio de Estados Unidos, aunque no siempre es así. A través de los testimonios de los menores migrantes es posible identificar que en la mayoría de las ocasiones los brincadores continúan el trayecto con los migrantes. Por esta razón para muchos de estos últimos el cruce lo hicieron con *guías*, englobando con este término al “brincador” y a un guía, o bien solamente al “brincador” que hizo la función de guía.

Independientemente de si se trata del mismo actor o de otro, la figura del “guía” es relevante en la migración clandestina, así como la de otros como son los *levantadores*, quienes más adelante esperan al grupo de migrantes. Ambos, tanto los *guías* como los *levantadores*, desempeñan la última fase en la migración clandestina, y de ellos depende el éxito o no de los migrantes. No obstante, si todos llegan a ser detenidos por agentes de la Border Patrol y los migrantes son repatriados a México, entra en acción un último actor: “los primos”, quienes tienen como objetivo ir por los migrantes a los albergues en la frontera de Tamaulipas.

Crimen organizado y asociaciones de apoyo a migrantes

No obstante, los “primos” o “tíos” no solamente operan en los albergues para menores migrantes en la frontera de Tamaulipas, sino también en asociaciones de apoyo a migrantes como

que están en la frontera tamaulipeca o bien en el Valle de Texas. Su función, en general, es vigilar el ingreso y salida de migrantes, ofrecer sus servicios, o incluso amedrentar a quienes coordinan dichas asociaciones – que en sí llegan a ser albergues religiosos que dan apoyo a adultos y menores migrantes.

Las asociaciones religiosas de apoyo a migrantes que existen tanto en la frontera de Tamaulipas como en el Valle de Texas, en su mayoría dependen de Diócesis de la Iglesia Católica, específicamente de la Pastoral de Movilidad Humana, o bien de iglesias Cristianas o Evangélicas. Sin embargo, lo que destaca a las de lado mexicano es el asistencialismo a los migrantes a través de hospedaje, alimentación, y vestimenta; mientras que las de lado americano, si bien también son asistencialistas en su mayoría, otras más bien brindan apoyo a los migrantes a través de asesorías y trámites legales respecto a su estatus migratorio.

Más allá de la filosofía que tiene cada asociación y de las prácticas que llevan a cabo para apoyar a los migrantes, éstas también han sido impactadas por la violencia derivada de los grupos del crimen organizado, tal como lo narraron sus coordinadores respectivos. En la Casa del Migrante situada en la ciudad de Matamoros y Catholic Charities situada en la ciudad de Brownsville, por ejemplos, son asociaciones donde la violencia derivada del crimen organizado, se ha hecho visible de formas distintas.

A decir del coordinador de la Casa del Migrante en Matamoros, ésta vive dos formas de inseguridad: la primera relacionada con los riesgos a los que están expuestos los migrantes antes o después de salir de la misma, tales como ser “levantados” (secuestrados) por miembros del crimen organizado, para posteriormente robarlos, extorsionarlos, o incluso intentar reclutarlos, o bien “enganchados” por “coyotes” para cruzarlos por la frontera; y la segunda referente a los riesgos que viven al interior de la Casa por parte de “coyotes” que se hacen pasar por migrantes.²⁷

Para coordinadores de esta asociación religiosa, el problema tiene que ver con el auge y las pugnas entre grupos delictivos

en esta región fronteriza, quienes han pasado de interesarse en el tráfico de armas, al tráfico de personas como un negocio re-dituable en el que los migrantes son vistos como mercancías de alto valor. En sus experiencias, lo anterior ha derivado en extorsiones e incluso secuestros de los migrantes al salir de la Casa del Migrante en la ciudad.

Ante esta situación, el coordinador de la asociación ha puesto denuncias formales ante la Procuraduría General de la República (PGR) y ante la Comisión Estatal de Derechos Humanos, e incluso, han tomado medidas de prevención que van desde mantener restringido el acceso a las personas, llevar un registro de los migrantes que ingresan y egresan, poner un sistema de video-vigilancia, hasta intentar capacitar al personal que labora en materia de derechos humanos.

En el caso de Catholic Charities de Brownsville, dado que se trata de una asociación religiosa que sólo presta servicios legales y algunos asistenciales, más no alberga a migrantes, ésta no ha sido objeto de violencia comparada con la Casa del Migrante en Matamoros. No obstante, en opinión de un directivo, viven formas de violencia de dos maneras: primero, al recibir a migrantes que huyen de México ante la inseguridad y solicitan algún servicio legal para residencia; segundo, algunos migrantes tanto mexicanos como de otros países recurren a su consejería legal dado que han sido amenazados, de ser deportados, por agentes migratorios y policiales de Estados Unidos.

De forma simultánea, quienes laboran en Catholic Charities, al realizar servicio asistencial o humanitario entre los desamparados (homeless) que deambulan de forma pública o discreta por algunos vecindarios pobres de la ciudad de Brownsville, también están expuestos a expresiones de inseguridad en tanto que algunos desamparados son migrantes indocumentados que, ocasionalmente, son buscados y secuestrados por "coyotes", quienes intentan extorsionarlos.

Como se puede notar, tanto la Casa del Migrante en Matamoros como Catholic Charities of Brownsville son asociacio-

nes religiosas que de formas distintas han estado expuestas a la violencia resultante de la inseguridad que se vive en ciudades fronterizas del norte de México, la pugna entre grupos del crimen organizado en la región y la apropiación de la migración indocumentada como un negocio rentable,²⁸ en la que algunos delincuentes incursionan de forma directa o indirecta.

Sin embargo, tanto para los coordinadores de la primera asociación como los directivos de la segunda, el trabajo asistencial y/o legal de apoyo a los migrantes, sin importar su nacionalidad, situación migratoria, e incluso credo religioso, el apoyo a los migrantes es un trabajo que deben continuar, a pesar de la violencia, en tanto forma parte del ministerio encomendado por la Iglesia Católica.

Nuevas figuras reclutadas por el crimen organizado

Sin duda, desde el gobierno de Felipe Calderón, los grupos del crimen organizado en México han sido “afectados” de alguna manera a partir de los operativos del Ejército, la Marina, y la Policía Federal. En este contexto, al menos en la región Tamaulipas-Texas, los grupos del crimen organizado no sólo diseñaron un sistema de inteligencia estratégico para lograr monopolizar y operar el tráfico de migrantes, sino también, desde hace algunos años, han reclutado a menores de edad como “coyotitos”.

Claramente se trata de un fenómeno relevante, pues según un reporte de la Procuraduría General de la República en México, entre los años 2010 y 2014 fueron detenidos 158 menores de edad acusados de ayudar a migrantes a cruzar a Estados Unidos.²⁹ En este último país, los menores que participan como traficantes de migrantes han sido identificados por autoridades de la *US Customs and Border Protection* (CBP). Un informe del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados (ACNUR), afirmó que un 38% de los menores migrantes mexicanos no acompañados detenidos por la Patrulla Fronteriza en Texas han sido reclutados por el crimen organizado como polleros.³⁰

Si bien el fenómeno ha adquirido visibilidad mediática y existe información en instituciones migratorias de México y Estados Unidos, desde las ciencias sociales poco se conocen las experiencias de estos menores que constituyen “una nueva figura, no sólo en el entramado de la migración indocumentada, sino también al interior del crimen organizado”, tal como afirman Moreno Mena y Avendaño Millán en una revisión de la literatura sobre los menores de circuito.³¹

No obstante, a reserva de algunas afirmaciones de programas binacionales³² y reportes periodísticos,³³ poco se sabe cómo se lleva a cabo esta actividad ilegal por parte de menores de edad. Sin embargo, tanto en las ciudades de Matamoros como de Reynosa, fue posible conversar con algunos “coyotitos”, de entre 14 y 17 años de edad, y conocer más de cerca su participación en el tráfico de migrantes, así como las conexiones con el crimen organizado en esta región fronteriza.

Algunos menores que reconocieron cruzar migrantes a cambio de un pago, señalaron que era su primera vez en esta experiencia, mientras que otros mencionaron que llevaban más de una ocasión, aunque pocas veces los habían detenido en ciudades del Valle de Texas, tales como Brownsville o McAllen. Para los “coyotitos” en general, el dedicarse a esta actividad implica un abanico de riesgos que asumen porque necesitan dinero y, ante la posibilidad de ganarlo relativamente fácil, deciden continuar. No se trata sólo de los riesgos al cruzar la frontera con los migrantes, ni tampoco de ser encontrados y detenidos por agentes de la Border Patrol, sino también de riesgos relacionados con cumplir con el trabajo ante sus jefes, so pena de ser sancionados.

Pero, ¿quiénes son sus jefes? Uno de los menores, a quien se llamará Joaquín, durante una entrevista dio una respuesta: “Pues mira, yo trabajo para los golfos, porque aquí son los que mandan, no hay de otra, y ellos nos ponen a nosotros y nos pagan bien.” Posteriormente se le preguntó si había otros grupos del crimen organizado que también tuvieran a chicos como él

cruzando a migrantes y respondió: “No, claro que no, aquí en Matamoros, en Reynosa, y más para allá, todo es de los golfos, a veces se quieren meter otros, pero no los dejan, ya saben que está cabrón.”

Es evidente que el Cártel del Golfo ha incluido en su estructura a jóvenes y menores de edad, no sólo como una estrategia de reproducción social al interior del grupo, sino también como una estrategia que legalmente les funciona en tanto los delitos cometidos por los menores de edad no son punibles, en especial si se trata del tráfico de personas, ya sea en México o en Estados Unidos – en este último país hubo un programa de retención temporal que no funcionó. Por otro lado, es también probable que el grupo de Los Zetas haya incluido en sus filas a menores de edad, aunque ese es un tema que no se ha explorado etnográficamente en la región.³⁴

El Colegio de la Frontera Norte/Matamoros

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The Drug Cartel and Drug-Related Violence in Matamoros

by

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It is estimated that, during Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto's current term of office, Mexico has witnessed over fifty thousand drug-related homicides.¹ The border state of Tamaulipas alone has been home to over ten percent of these homicides, placing it among the eight most dangerous states in Mexico.² While it is difficult to ascertain the exact amount of drug-related deaths due to instances of under-reporting and missing bodies, these numbers remain staggering nonetheless. For Matamoros, drug-related violence has become a facet of everyday life. The advent of social media and the proliferation of technology have provided a chilling look at the level of drug-related violence taking place in Matamoros.

To gain an understanding of how Tamaulipas, and specifically Matamoros, have become so entrenched in and perhaps irrevocably damaged due to drug violence, it is important to understand Matamoros' place in the history of illicit smuggling and the genesis of the organization that would play a key role in establishing Matamoros as a destination for drug smuggling—the Gulf Cartel.

Historically, the geographic location of Matamoros has always made the city a key transit zone, due to its proximity to the Rio Grande and the Gulf of Mexico. During the American Civil War, Matamoros became an important shipping destination that allowed an ailing Confederacy to export cotton abroad.³ The history of Matamoros as a smuggling destination can also be seen in the way South Texas businessmen like Charles Stillman and Mifflin Kenedy illegally transported goods across the

border to Matamoros in order to avoid paying Mexican tariffs during the nineteenth century.⁴ However, perhaps the most important figure to increase Matamoros' profile in terms of contraband was Juan Nepomuceno Guerra, who began the organization that would evolve into the infamous Gulf Cartel. Juan N. Guerra, or "Don Juan," as he came to be known, was born in 1915 on a small ranch outside Matamoros known as "El Tahuscal".⁵ Guerra gained a reputation as a teenager during the United States' Prohibition Era (1920-1933) by smuggling whiskey across the border into the United States as part of an outfit that would become known as the "Matamoros Cartel".⁶

After Prohibition was repealed in 1933, Guerra's outfit expanded its scope to include such activities as the operation of illegal gambling houses, prostitution, and car theft.⁷ Guerra's increasing power was palpable by the 1940s, when, in a crime of passion, he shot his wife, Gloria Landeros, dead and was able to avoid repercussions.⁸ According to César Peralta González from the Mexican newspaper *El Universal*, Guerra's status reached near mythological heights as a sort of Robin Hood figure.⁹ Peralta argues that Guerra's commitment to helping those in need and punishing those who committed any perceived wrongdoings against the poor helped him gain influence throughout the Matamoros region.¹⁰ Guerra's influence in this regard can be seen in the ways that locals from all walks of life venerated Guerra and approached him for favors, as witnessed by a *New York Times* reporter in the mid-1990s.¹¹

But perhaps Guerra's most important accomplishment was using his status as a crime lord to gain a foothold in Mexico's notorious web of political corruption. Guerra's Piedras Negras Restaurant in Matamoros offered him the opportunity to host governors, senators, and municipal leaders over the course of decades.¹² In a 1996 interview with *Proceso* magazine, an astute Guerra claimed that "he who doesn't know Piedras Negras doesn't know Matamoros."¹³ This influence in the political and social landscape of Matamoros would go on to pay massive

dividends for Guerra and his family by helping him avoid further legal repercussions, and by allowing him to set up family members with legitimate jobs in the government.¹⁴

Ultimately, despite his involvement in the formation of the organization that would later become the Gulf Cartel, Guerra would dispute the allegations of his involvement in any illicit activities. In 1996, a withering Guerra would tell a reporter from the magazine *Proceso* that he was a “working man who sands his lands” — a far cry from the Godfather-like cult of personality that he seemed to cultivate over the years.¹⁵ In the same interview, he regards the accusations of his involvement in Prohibition Era smuggling as nothing more than a “stupidity”.¹⁶ While Guerra claimed to be a normal, law-abiding citizen, Guerra’s lifestyle showed otherwise. An attendee at Guerra’s 2001 funeral recalls guests wearing gold machine gun pendants and musicians playing *corridos* about Guerra’s escapades — a huge disparity from the image of an unassuming rancher he liked to portray to the media.¹⁷

Despite the shocking nature of Guerra’s many crimes, his tenure as a crime boss of Matamoros would seem tame in comparison to the extreme levels of violence that future Gulf Cartel leadership would introduce in Matamoros in the late 1990s and early 2000s. According to Matamoros historian Andres F Cuellar, Guerra’s death signaled the “end of an era” in the world of Matamoros crime.¹⁸ While Cuellar’s assessment is true in many regards, the beginnings of Matamoros’ next era of organized crime had been put firmly in place during Guerra’s lifetime.

This next era of organized crime in Matamoros would have its genesis in the 1980’s with Juan García Ábrego, who would later be the head of the Gulf Cartel down to his arrest in 1996. As Guerra’s nephew, Ábrego had been involved in Guerra’s crime syndicate from early in his life.¹⁹ It was under Ábrego’s direction that Guerra’s organization evolved into being primarily known as a drug smuggling operation. By the early 1980’s, Ábrego was smuggling large quantities of marijuana under the guise of a profitable trucking enterprise.²⁰

Once again, Matamoros' geographic location would make it a prime destination for smuggling goods into the United States. After the United States increased its efforts to curb Colombian cocaine from entering through places like Florida, Colombian cartels needed a new doorway into the United States—one Ábrego would help blow wide open.²¹ Ábrego's leadership would drive the Gulf Cartel to become major smugglers of cocaine due to a series of savvy deals with Colombian cartels like the famed Cali Cartel.²² Under these deals, the Gulf Cartel would keep half of all shipments of Colombian cocaine exported to the United States.²³ This allowed Ábrego's profits and influence to rise astronomically. A 1995 investigation by Mexico's Procuraduría General de la República (PGR) estimated the net worth of the Gulf Cartel to be a staggering \$10 billion dollars at the time.²⁴

During this cocaine boom, Matamoros would be witness to sporadic bouts of drug-related violence. Perhaps the most noteworthy of these was the 1989 disappearance of University of Texas student Mark Kilroy. While visiting Matamoros with friends during spring break, Kilroy was abducted and brutally killed by a gang of small-time drug traffickers led by Adolfo de Jesús Constanzo in what media outlets described as a "sicko ritual."²⁵ While unrelated to Ábrego's Gulf Cartel empire, the Kilroy incident represented a clear shift in the way drug violence would begin to be perceived by both the media and the public.

The Kilroy incident represented a perfect storm of elements coming together to craft a fascinating story that transformed Matamoros into a destination for news outlets as far away as Japan that hoped to capitalize on the more sensational aspects of the incident.²⁶ Perhaps one of the most noteworthy was how seemingly removed many of the members of Constanzo's group were from traditional forms of crime. For example, Sara Aldrete, otherwise known as "La Madrina" or "The Godmother," was a student at Texas Southmost College in Brownsville when she became involved in Constanzo's group, moonlighting as a high priestess for a drug-dealing death cult.²⁷

These occult elements surrounding the incident were a point of fascination for both the media and the public. The voodoo-like elements related to the story would be blown out of proportion, with outlets such as *Texas Monthly* claiming Kilroy's death was a "sacrifice to Satan."²⁸ In reality, Constanzo's group practiced a form of Santería known as Palo Mayombe.²⁹ Links to Satanism would become greatly exaggerated and incorrect on almost all accounts. This came as no surprise considering that the 1980's had been witness to a Satanic panic of sorts that consumed the public consciousness of the United States. Books like *Michelle Remembers*, in which a young girl supposedly recalled her abuse at the hands of Satanists,³⁰ and fear-mongering reports by talk-show hosts like Geraldo Rivera were instrumental in crafting a culture of fear surrounding the perceived threat of Satanism.³¹

Another important and overlooked angle about the Kilroy incident is the idea that it likely gained the attention of media outlets everywhere due to the fact that a white American was the missing person at the center of the incident. The "Narco Satanicos," as Constanzo's group were ultimately dubbed, had been responsible for at least forty deaths during a period of nine months, but it was not until a white tourist from the United States went missing that the media and the authorities turned their attention towards the group who perpetrated these heinous acts.³² In this case, the disappearance of a white American college student was more noteworthy than that of a fourteen-year-old boy from an agrarian community adjoining Matamoros. As writer Gary Cartwright correctly pointed out at the time, the disappearance of other victims received no press conferences or attention from Mexican authorities.³³

The Kilroy incident would be game-changing in the sense that it would be one of the first times Matamoros gained a reputation as an unsafe place to visit. One Matamoros resident recalls seeing huge drops in attendance the years after the Kilroy incident occurred, claiming that streets and locations frequented by tourists looked relatively bare.³⁴ An important component

of the Matamoros economy revolved around American tourists spending money in the bars and clubs adjoining the Gateway International Bridge along Avenida Álvaro Obregon—a non-existent trend in recent years due to drug related violence. Matamoros institutions like Garcia's, the London Pub, and Black Cats were common tourist destinations that are largely defunct at this point. Ultimately, while the Kilroy incident was part of a string of ritual murders committed by one group, it can be seen as a hint of what drug-related violence would bring to Matamoros in the mid to late 2000's.

Juan Garcia Ábrego continued as leader of the Gulf Cartel until his arrest in 1996. Ábrego was extradited to Houston and convicted on twenty-two charges for his instrumental role in increasing the quantities of drugs that passed into the United States.³⁵ In 1999, after a brief period of unstable leadership, Gulf Cartel lieutenant Osiel Cárdenas Guillén filled the void left by Ábrego and set the Gulf Cartel on a rocky path toward self-destruction.³⁶ Cárdenas' destructive leadership of the Gulf Cartel is perhaps best exemplified by a 1999 incident in Matamoros in which two American federal agents were confronted and held at gunpoint by Cárdenas and his men.³⁷ Ultimately, fearing the repercussions of killing two American federal agents, Cárdenas backed off.³⁸ Along with his continued involvement in trafficking drugs into the United States, this event placed Cárdenas on the FBI's most wanted list, with a two million dollar bounty on his head.³⁹

Perhaps paranoid from the string of murders surrounding several would-be leaders of the Gulf Cartel and the bounty on his head, Cárdenas sought personal bodyguards to protect him from enemies both inside and outside the Cartel.⁴⁰ According to conversations which Mexican federal agents had with an informant, Cárdenas wanted "the best armed men that there are" as his personal bodyguards.⁴¹

Cárdenas then turned his attention to the Mexican military, hoping the promise of money and power would convince sol-

diers to join him. Virtually overnight, the Gulf Cartel filled its ranks with members trained in “explosives, counter espionage and guerrilla warfare.”⁴² Cárdenas’ decision to hire Mexican ex-military commandos as his personal bodyguards and enforcers was a choice that forever altered the Gulf Cartel and the Mexican drug trade. This military-trained wing of the Gulf Cartel became known as Los Zetas and at one point came to be considered by the United States government as “the most technologically advanced, sophisticated, and most dangerous cartel operating in Mexico”.⁴³ Ultimately, after months of prolonged firefights and escapes, on March 13, 2003, Cárdenas was arrested in Matamoros.⁴⁴ Cárdenas’ arrest left a vacuum in Gulf Cartel leadership that caused the organization to implode. Los Zetas splintered from the Gulf Cartel proper, beginning a civil war of sorts between the two factions that has plagued Mexico ever since.⁴⁵

Statistically, the period of time between 1997 and 2006 showed that Mexico experienced a decrease in murders by 37 percent.⁴⁶ By all accounts, drug-related violence seemed to be on the mend. In 2004 Mexican President Vicente Fox claimed the Mexican government was “going to give the mother of all battles against organized crime in Mexico.”⁴⁷ Coupled with a series of high-profile seizures and arrests, including Cárdenas’ in 2003, the Mexican government seemed to be putting up a formidable fight against drug cartels. Even American diplomats stationed in Mexico in 2004 believed the country had “turned a corner in the fight against drug gangs.”⁴⁸ Yet, despite Mexico’s seeming decrease in homicides, the amount of drugs being exported to the United States reached an all-time high in 2004, when Mexican traffickers were supplying 92 percent of the cocaine in the United States.⁴⁹ At the same time, a turf war between Los Zetas, the Gulf Cartel, and the Sinaloa Cartel was brewing and would envelop the state of Tamaulipas in further violence.⁵⁰

In many ways, the increased effort to thwart cartel activity forced groups like Los Zetas to escalate and diversify their crim-

inal activities. American efforts to seize drugs most likely played a role in Los Zetas' criminal diversification as well. According to a 2013 report by the Texas Department of Public Safety, American law enforcement seized a staggering 8.8 million pounds of drugs throughout the Texas border between 2006 and 2012.⁵¹ Essentially, this cut potential Gulf Cartel/Zeta profits. By making it harder for drug traffickers to make money in traditional avenues, government forced Los Zetas to get creative.

Racketeering became an important staple of Los Zetas' activities during the late 2000's. By 2008, most betting parlors across the state of Tamaulipas had shuttered due to increased demands for protection money from organized crime.⁵² According to an article published by the *Associated Press* in 2011, consequences businessmen faced for failing to pay protection money often included beatings and the likelihood of death.⁵³ Instances of racketeering would reach even the highest levels of Matamoros society. In 2015 Matamoros Mayor Leticia Sálaraz Vásquez claimed that the city administration previous to hers paid an estimated fee of twenty to twenty-five million pesos (over one million dollars) a month to members of organized crime.⁵⁴

During this period of expansion, Los Zetas stopped operating strictly as a drug cartel. At one point, the ever-entrepreneurial group even entered the film piracy market by printing and distributing films to street vendors with labels reading *Producciones Zeta*.⁵⁵ The group had evolved into a criminal syndicate akin to the stereotypical ones American pop culture had perpetuated throughout the years in mafia films such as *The Godfather*, albeit an extremely violent, borderline terrorist one. Traditionally, under Guerra and even Ábrego's leadership, the Gulf Cartel was always involved in numerous activities besides drug trafficking, but Los Zetas took these extra-curricular activities to a whole new level by staging mass kidnappings and what one retired FBI agent described as "killings for amusement."⁵⁶

Matamoros would go on to become something resembling a war zone during the last years of the first decade of the twenty-first

century. A combination of *narco* firepower and the deployment of Mexican troops to areas of Mexico like Matamoros enabled increasingly violent clashes which, in many cases, involved innocent bystanders.⁵⁷ It was not uncommon for safe houses to yield hundreds of rifles, grenades, sticks of dynamite, and thousands of rounds of ammunition during police raids.⁵⁸ In a staggering display of violence, the 2010 campaign to capture and kill the Gulf Cartel leader known as Tony Tormenta culminated in a standoff between Mexican armed forces and the Gulf Cartel *capo* that resulted in a bloody firefight that saw over three hundred grenades set off in Matamoros.⁵⁹ This increase in violence and insecurity brought Matamoros one more thing to worry about—an image problem.

Beside constant newsworthy reports of killings, kidnappings, and extortion, an important component of Matamoros' negative image came in the form of the U.S. Department of State's travel advisory warning.⁶⁰ According to this travel advisory, last updated on June 20, 2015, "no areas are considered safe in Matamoros," citing the possibility of random gunfights and the fact that the state of Tamaulipas boasts the highest kidnapping rate in all of Mexico.⁶¹ This increase in insecurity put the final nail in the coffin for spring breakers in Matamoros—another longtime component of the city's economy. In 2010, the Texas Department of Public Safety advised college students to stay away from the Mexican border completely.⁶² According to Abraham Rodriguez, then director of the Matamoros Chamber of Commerce, this warning helped exacerbate a decrease in business activity in Matamoros of up to 95 percent.⁶³ Tourist destinations across the Gateway International Bridge like pharmacies, restaurants, and nightclubs suffered unprecedented levels of decline.⁶⁴

While the perception of Matamoros as a dangerous place to visit had its genesis during the days of the Kilroy incident, this negative image did not necessarily cripple the local Matamoros economy the way drug-related violence would during the

last years of the first decade of the twenty-first century. In an interview he gave to the Nuevo Laredo newspaper *El Mañana*, the Vice-President of Mexico's Cámara Nacional de la Industria de la Transformación (CANACINTRA), Roberto Capistrán González, claimed that, in 2015 alone, over 900 businesses in Matamoros had shuttered, citing the constant state of insecurity and the diminishing number of visitors from Brownsville.⁶⁵

This sharp economic downturn in Matamoros also exacerbated a migration of Mexican citizens fleeing to the United States in order to avoid drug-related violence and racketeering. Once-common Matamoros eateries like Gorditas Doña Tota, Mariscos de la Garza, and Tacos Campeón have all but vanished in Matamoros, while continuing to dot Brownsville streets. Along with these establishments, even vendors from Matamoros' famed *Mercado Juárez* have set up shop in downtown Brownsville, bringing Mexican goods to wary Brownsville citizens wishing to avoid crossing into Matamoros.⁶⁶ While largely limited to affluent Mexicans, this situation has drawn comparisons to the one Mexico witnessed at the turn of the twentieth century during the Mexican Revolution.⁶⁷

Writer William H. Chatfield once described the relationship between Brownsville and Matamoros as one in which it was hard to fathom that these then twin cities were "dependencies of separate republics."⁶⁸ Today, the notion of Brownsville and Matamoros existing as twin cities has become an alien one. The differences between the two cities is obvious purely from a safety standpoint. According to reports released by the FBI in 2015, Brownsville boasted some of the lowest crime and homicide rates throughout the state of Texas.⁶⁹ On the other hand, reports released by Mexico's Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública (SNSP) show that Matamoros boasts one of the highest homicide and crime rates in all of Mexico.⁷⁰

One long-time Matamoros resident described contemporary life in Matamoros as one in which people "live in a constant state of fear."⁷¹ This fear has crippled many aspects of life in

Matamoros and continues to pose challenges for the future of the city and its residents. One of the most troubling problems is the potential for post-traumatic stress and sub-par education for the youth of Matamoros, given the amount of school days students miss due to random bouts of violence.⁷² Ultimately, if history is any indication, the geographic location of Matamoros will continue to place the city in the crosshairs of organized crime groups wanting to export contraband to the United States. The question is whether or not the cultural and civic life of Matamoros will be extinguished along the way.

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An Assessment and an Explanation of the Recent Violence in Tamaulipas, Mexico

by

Arturo Zarate Ruiz

Violence and crime are not new in Tamaulipas. In the seventeenth century, during the viceroyalty, smuggling took place in its territory even before communities were well established.¹ Spanish attempts to take control of the land failed for many decades because of the natives' furious resistance. If Spaniards militarily conquered Tamaulipas, they finally rushed to do it, not only to pacify the native population, but to curb other European powers' presence in the area.² Tamaulipas was the spot where the Mexican American War started, and, because of its border character then, Tamaulipas was the place where many Mexican rebellions began: smuggled arms were easily available there.³

In this paper, I will assess recent violence in Tamaulipas and explain why this violence has been exacerbated. In doing so, I will, first, recall some shocking events that have made Tamaulipas internationally notorious for its crime; second, I will share some basic statistics of violence and crime in Tamaulipas; third, I will analyze some Tamaulipas data which suggests worse levels of crime and violence than the one depicted by basic statistics; finally, I will offer an explanation for this violence.

Some notorious events and images

Tamaulipas is often considered as "the most violent state of Mexico."⁴ International and national media warn that "Guerrero and Tamaulipas states are the most dangerous" because of their crime incidence and prevalence.⁵ In a news report about one Tamaulipas city, the Spanish newspaper *El País* describes its life as hell:

On the maps, Matamoros is placed at the Northeastern corner of Mexico, at the border of the Rio Grande, facing Brownsville, Texas. But in Mexican people's minds, Matamoros is the closest place to Hell. This city, with a half million population, is in a permanent state of war. It is controlled by the Gulf Drug Cartel, a criminal organization in a deranged combat against the Zeta Gang. Frequently, hit men block out the main accesses to the city, and city authorities ask civilians not to use the highways. Gun powder then fills the air. However, one rarely knows where the bullets are coming from. With a murder rate 40 times superior to the Spanish rate, this city of Tamaulipas, second in size, is, for many people, an open tomb.⁶

No doubt, there are many facts that confirm Tamaulipas' very high rate of violence. Many of these facts are even emblematic of the lack of law and order, and of the prevalence of corruption and organized crime now scourging Mexico:

- The bloodshed at Raya Hospital, in 1984. Although gang hit men failed to kill the rival gang leader, Cacho Espinoza, in the attempt, the hit men slayed other patients and their health providers at the hospital.⁷
- The Satanic Drug Gang killings and cannibalism. In 1989 at Santa Elena Ranch, this gang not only killed their foes, but ate them in Satanic rituals.⁸
- The 1991 riot in Matamoros prison. A gang took power in this prison and executed the rivals using extreme cruelty: the enemies were impaled and then roasted alive.⁹
- The murder of the official party gubernatorial candidate, Rodolfo Torre, close to the capital city, six days before elections took place.¹⁰
- The massive jailbreaks at most of this state's prisons. The record of inmates fleeing took place in 2010. 141 convicts easily found the way out from Nuevo Laredo Penal Institution.¹¹
- In 2014, the kidnapping rate turned Tamaulipas cities into the most dangerous in Mexico. At a national level, the kidnapping rate was 1.4 per 100 thousand people. At Victoria City, the capitol, and Tampico City, the rate was much higher: 23.2 and 21.7 respectively, per 100 thousand people.¹²
- The San Fernando, Tamaulipas, massacres of migrants by deranged "Zeta" hit men. The initial count was 72 victims, in 2010. However, many other clandestine graves have been found and the count has risen much more.¹³

The newspaper *El País* offers an image that may portray current Tamaulipas violence in a more appalling way than the previously mentioned events:

*The usual horror of Tamaulipas: three days of sieges in urban areas and roads, four cities blocked by the gunmen, gun battles with security forces, main avenues obstructed with trailers to rob drivers, corpses in the gutters.*¹⁴

Some basic statistics about violence

This list of shocking events and these images show how badly violence and crime are hitting Tamaulipas state. Yet, it is important to approach this recent violence and crime with precision. In fact, at first sight, Tamaulipas is not always the worst state in Mexico concerning some grievous crimes if we look at the statistics. The organization *Semáforo Delictivo* summarized December 2015 crime statistics in this way:

Table 1: Crime rate per 100,000 people in Tamaulipas and in all Mexico, in December 2015. Source: Semáforo Delictivo, 2015.

Crime	Tamaulipas rate	National rate
Murder	0.9	1.2
Kidnapping	0.6	0.1
Extortion	0.3	0.3
Stab Injuries	4.9	8.4
Rape	1.8	0.8

According to the *Semáforo Delictivo* summary of 2015 Crime Statistics, nationally, Tamaulipas ranked number 12 in murder, number 1 in kidnapping, number 10 in exaction, and number 4 in car theft.¹⁵ According to the organization 8 Delitos

Primero, if Tamaulipas State is compared with other Mexican states, its “theft without violence to a passerby” rate is moderate, its “murder rate, theft with violence to a passerby rate, and stab injuries” rates are average, its “car theft without violence” rate and its extortion rates are grievous, and its “car theft with violence” rates and its kidnapping rates are severe.¹⁶

A review of additional data on violence and crime

The fact that Tamaulipas is not ranked first in every grievous crime does not mean that the Tamaulipas crime problem is minor. According to 8 Delitos Primero, if all crimes are weighed together, Tamaulipas’s crime rate is severe: in a list of 32 states, Tamaulipas ranks number 4 in crime incidence.¹⁷ So, it is grouped together with the worst states in Mexico, regarding crime (with Guerrero, Morelos, Sinaloa, Chihuahua, Mexico State, Michoacán, and Durango). According to Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública (ENVIPE) 2015 (INEGI 2015a), Tamaulipas State is ranked number 3 in crime perception. It is ranked so after Mexico State and Tabasco. Indeed, crime perception in Tamaulipas rises to 86.9%, much higher than the national average which is 73.2%.¹⁸

Current statistics fortunately show that there has been a decrease in criminal activity, in Tamaulipas, during the last two years:

Crime	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Murder	265	308	288	721	855	1016	556	628	533	420*
Kidnapping	20	21	52	47	129	123	196	262	230	138*
Extortion	55	88	153	107	159	154	225	189	174	78*

* Projection for the whole year with January and February information.

Source: Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, 2016.

Even so, one should not ignore that the crime problem is not new in Tamaulipas. Crime activities badly increased in the six last years, during Governor Egidio Torre's term:

Crime	Tomás Yarrington 1999-2005	Eugenio Hernández 2005-2011	Egidio Torre 2011-2016
Murder	1305	2251	3618
Kidnapping	42	155	949
Extortion	64	440	906
Car Theft with violence	2620	2769	14552
Car theft without violence	16206	35027	24519

Source: Carrasco, Alberto y Marcelo Reyes (2016), who refer to Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Publica data.¹⁹

One should not ignore either the high unrecorded crime rate in Tamaulipas, that rises to 82.1%, according to Encuesta Nacional de Inseguridad de 2007,²⁰ nor ignore, at least concerning murder, the nonvisible victims: according to Mexico Evalua, in 2010 Tamaulipas suffered 945 murder cases, 546 specified well, which should be associated to 1,699 nonvisible victims, that is the persons who share the household with the murdered victim.²¹

Moreover, although the number of murdered women and of assaulted journalists does not imply that they were murdered because of being women or assaulted because of being journalists, it is important to notice that, disaggregating the figures, there were 1,600 women murdered in Tamaulipas in six years, a number that makes Tamaulipas State one among the most dangerous concerning women murdered,²² and that this is the state with the largest number of assaults and the highest murder rate against journalists in Mexico in 14 years.²³

State Rank	Murdered journalists	Missing journalists	Assaults	Total
1st Tamaulipas	12	2	10	24
2nd Veracruz	12	4	1	17
3rd Chihuahua	11	0	2	14
4th Coahuila	2	2	9	13
5th Nuevo León	3	2	7	12
6th Guerrero	10	1	12	12
7th Michoacán	4	4	0	9
8th Sinaloa	4	0	3	7
9th Durango	5	0	0	5

Attacks received by journalists in Mexico from 2000 to 2013. Fuente: López 2016, p. 63.²⁴

Crime and violence in Tamaulipas can be described as the most grievous if one pays attention to other figures:

According to Registro Nacional de Personas Desaparecidas, published by the Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, in Tamaulipas State 5,295 cases of missing persons were reported from 2007 to 2014. Nonetheless, Ramos [President of the Human Rights Committee at Nuevo Laredo] asserted that, including the unrecorded cases, the number of missing persons would reach 15,000.

Official figures only amount to 27% of the missing people in the country — as many as 25,027 persons —. Tamaulipas is ranked as number 1 in this problem, followed by Jalisco, Nuevo Leon, Mexico State, Chihuahua, and Sinaloa.²⁵

After considering that Tamaulipas State is notorious because of its irregular executions and because of its clandestine graves,²⁶ it is not far-fetched to say that the 5,293 recorded cases of missing persons, let alone the 15,000 unrecorded cases of missing

persons, may be added to the 4,637 murder cases reported by the Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública (2016) in the same period. Then, the murder rate in this state would rise higher than twice that rate, something that would mean that Tamaulipas State is one of the most dangerous places in Mexico, concerning murder.

Of course, the missing persons figure, in Tamaulipas, is worrisome in itself, without needing to add it to the murder rate: Tamaulipas is the worst state considering the number of missing persons. Concerning the forced disappearance of persons and torture, the Mexican Chamber of Representatives publishes the following report in its web page:

The president of the Liga Mexicana por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (LIMEDH), Adrian Ramirez Lopez, reported that cases of torture have increased by 700 percent 2006 to date. He explained that this figure soared when the Army and Navy took to the streets to perform policing duties in 2006 to curb organized crime increasing activities. He reiterated that UN cases and allegations about torture "are not a device or element that seeks to destabilize the country, because torture is real and unobjectionable". He stressed that the states where the highest rates of this violation of human rights take place are Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, and Coahuila.²⁷

Paying attention to Instituto Nacional de Migración figures about kidnapped migrants in the beginning of 2016, involving 188 cases,²⁸ and comparing this number with the general number of kidnapped persons reported by the Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública (2016) for the same period, namely 23 cases, one may think that the number of 188 kidnapped migrants was not added by the Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública to the general number of kidnapped people which this Secretariado was in charge of counting. If both numbers were added together, the figure of kidnapped persons would rise to 211 cases in two months, and this number would severely aggravate the kidnapping rate of Tamaulipas, which is already the worst in

Mexico without the need of adding numbers to it. In any case, the very high Central American migrant kidnapped figure illustrates how vulnerable this group of people is in Tamaulipas, which is the transit state these people select to reach the United States of America.²⁹

An additional problem in Tamaulipas is the people displaced by violence. Thousands of people have been forced to abandon the state because of the lack of public safety. According to INEGI, from 2009 to 2014, Tamaulipas lost 3% of its population. 41,000 of the 150,000 people who left its territory did it because of the high crime rate.³⁰ According to the Unión Ganadera Regional de Tamaulipas, in four years, breeders would leave behind their properties for this reason, amounting to at least five thousand ranches.³¹ According to real estate businessmen, 30 percent of the housing area in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, is now abandoned. Although urban development's misguided policies could be a factor in preventing these houses from being occupied, lack of public safety cannot be ruled out as an additional and important factor for their withdrawal.³²

As if the lack of public safety, violence, and crime were not enough grievous problems in Tamaulipas, law enforcement in Tamaulipas is extremely deficient, as described by Índice Global de Impunidad en México 2016:

If there were 56,867 certain preliminary investigations, there were only 5,895 criminal cases open in first instance. Of 45,026 defendants recorded in initiated preliminary investigations and in open folders, only 4,902 registered defendants were processed in judicial proceedings in the first instance. And finally, of these 4,902 defendants processed, only a total of 2,042 were sentenced in judicial proceedings in the first instance. In this state, for each folder of preliminary investigation and open investigation, only 0.05 criminals are apprehended and sentenced.³³

This means that, in Tamaulipas, for every 100 preliminary investigations initiated, only five criminals are finally sentenced. We can describe this as extreme impunity.

The following are examples of deficient law enforcement:

- Even though Tamaulipas is one of the Mexican states with a very high and grievous rate of torture,³⁴ “there is not any case of a military man, navy man, federal policeman, or state policemen who has been sentenced for torture in the last five years.” Moreover, the “Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Estado de Tamaulipas has not issued any recommendation concerning cases of torture performed by local officers during the last six years, notwithstanding that there are 370 complaints related to state policemen who committed arbitrary arrest and torture.”³⁵
- Even though Tamaulipas cities, especially the ones at the border with the United States, are considered among the 15 Mexican cities suffering the highest rate of human trafficking,³⁶ and even though Tamaulipas State has a law against human trafficking, in Tamaulipas there were only two preliminary investigations related to human trafficking from 2009 to 2011, and neither of them resulted in a criminal sentence.³⁷

An explanation of Tamaulipas recent violence and crime

One may wonder why these levels of crime and violence have been reached in Tamaulipas. And one may answer that multiple factors have produced this state of affairs. Moreover, one may identify some important factors, such as the following.

Among the Mexican states bordering the United States, Tamaulipas is the nearest to central Mexico. Tamaulipas is also a coastal state. All this, for centuries, has made Tamaulipas a very important crossing point for human beings and products. It is the most important crossing point for Mexican international commerce;³⁸ moreover, it is a crossing point for both legal and illegal exchanges.³⁹

For many decades, just or unjust prohibitions, lack of or wrong enforcement of these prohibitions at both sides of the border, and corrupt and incompetent governments in Mexico and the United States have fostered criminal or semi-criminal activities in Tamaulipas. Smuggling in general, illegal alcohol trade, illegal drug trade, prostitution, arms smuggling, and human trafficking have fostered the rise of criminal organizations, and, to some degree, have fostered a culture prone to break the law. To some degree, breaking the law is now normal both for people in charge of governmental positions, and for ordinary citizens.⁴⁰

It is important to notice that it has been particularly difficult for Mexico to fight drug trafficking organizations because of factors that Mexico itself cannot control. Drug trafficking is a very profitable activity for Mexican criminal organizations because the United States has been for many years the most important illegal drug consumer in the world,⁴¹ with a population of 22 million people consuming drugs every month.⁴² And, notwithstanding that the United States is also an important drug producer (a third of the marijuana consumed at the United States is produced domestically),⁴³ at least since Nixon became President the government of the United States strongly blames its drug problem on foreign producers and drug dealers, to the point of neglecting what is going on in its own territory, and demanding foreign governments such as Mexico and Colombia to be in charge of militarily suppressing the drug trafficking in Mexico and Colombia territories.⁴⁴ Two other troubles may be added to this relative lack of action by the United States against its own illegal drug problem in its territory. It is amazingly easy for Mexican drug traffickers to buy assault guns in the United States, since their sale is legal,⁴⁵ and it is also easy for them to launder their money in American banks without the banks risking severe punishment.⁴⁶ Briefly, although the United States transfers almost all the burden of the drug war on Mexico, American consumers finance Mexican cartels, American gun shops supply the ammunition to Mexican cartels, and American banks launder their money.

Mexican cartels are thus strengthened by the United States itself, and in this way these cartels are not only more capable of trafficking with illegal drugs, but also more capable of diversifying their illegal activities in Mexico in so far as these illegal activities are opportunities for additional profits for them, for example, kidnapping, human trafficking, extortion, and other grievous crimes that severely hurt Tamaulipas.⁴⁷ Therefore, it will be very difficult for Mexico not only to put down the illegal drug trade but also the many other criminal activities of the cartels as long as these criminal organizations continue receiving money, arms, and banking services from the United States.

In recent years, other factors have contributed to an increase of Tamaulipas violence.

Once Vicente Fox became President of Mexico and the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) was not in power in 2000, the relative control of criminal organizations in Mexico was lost, according to Rodriguez Prats:

The most important Partido de Accion Nacional failure, during Fox term, was Mexican governors. They became viceroys. These persons took control of power and corruption. The only check and balance these governors previously had were the central power of the Presidency. But once Fox arrived everything changed. He respected the federal constitution, but he did not create any means of check and balance for governors.⁴⁸

That the control of criminal groups passed from the Presidency to state governors had serious consequences, at least in Tamaulipas. Tamaulipas state police claimed the bribes previously received by federal forces from criminal organizations. But Tamaulipas state police behavior was naïve. This police corps very quickly discovered that it was not powerful enough to control the criminal organizations. Criminal organizations acted beyond state territory and were militarily more powerful, the more so since deserters from the Mexican Army joined the Gulf Cartel and integrated its armed corps, the Zeta group.⁴⁹ If Tamaulipas state police once exacted bribes from criminal

organizations, later this police corps was under the control of criminal organizations. Moreover, policemen now gave money from ordinary citizens to the cartels. Governor Egidio Torre got rid of the Tamaulipas police corps in 2011, since he could not rely on it anymore. He then requested the intervention of the national military forces in order to fight the cartels.⁵⁰

At that time, a drug war was already on its way. It is said that this war against drug cartels, declared by President Felipe Calderón, along with treason among crime capos induced by the American government, caused the break between the Zeta Cartel and the Gulf Cartel, and the subsequent gang war that has covered Tamaulipas State with blood since 2010.⁵¹ However, there were gang wars previously in Tamaulipas, for example, during the 1980s and 1990s, without being induced by foreign governments or a Mexican government war against drug traffickers.⁵² In any case, gang wars, once they were taking place, badly increased the murder rate in Tamaulipas, as it can be checked by looking at Tamaulipas murder rate through the years.⁵³

What may be an additional factor for the recent bloodshed is the military response by the Mexican government to the gang war, at least since Egidio Torre became Governor of Tamaulipas.⁵⁴ There is a very high rate of gang members killed when the military police tangle with them, which may make one think that, not like the ordinary police, military police do not try to capture the criminals but simply kill them.⁵⁵ Moreover, this military response is mostly focused on fighting organized crime. Thus, it neglects crime prevention, attention to victims, and fighting ordinary crime.⁵⁶ Also, it is an excuse for Tamaulipas government to neglect its own responsibilities concerning the fight against criminal activities once this fight has been transferred to the federal government.⁵⁷

Although local and state police corps may offer a more appropriate response to crime, newly elected governor Francisco García Cabeza de Vaca has said that he will continue relying on

the Mexican Army and the Mexican Navy to fight organized crime.⁵⁸ In fact, it is difficult to conceive that local and state forces will return to Tamaulipas unless Tamaulipas society is sure that these forces will not join the cartels again.⁵⁹

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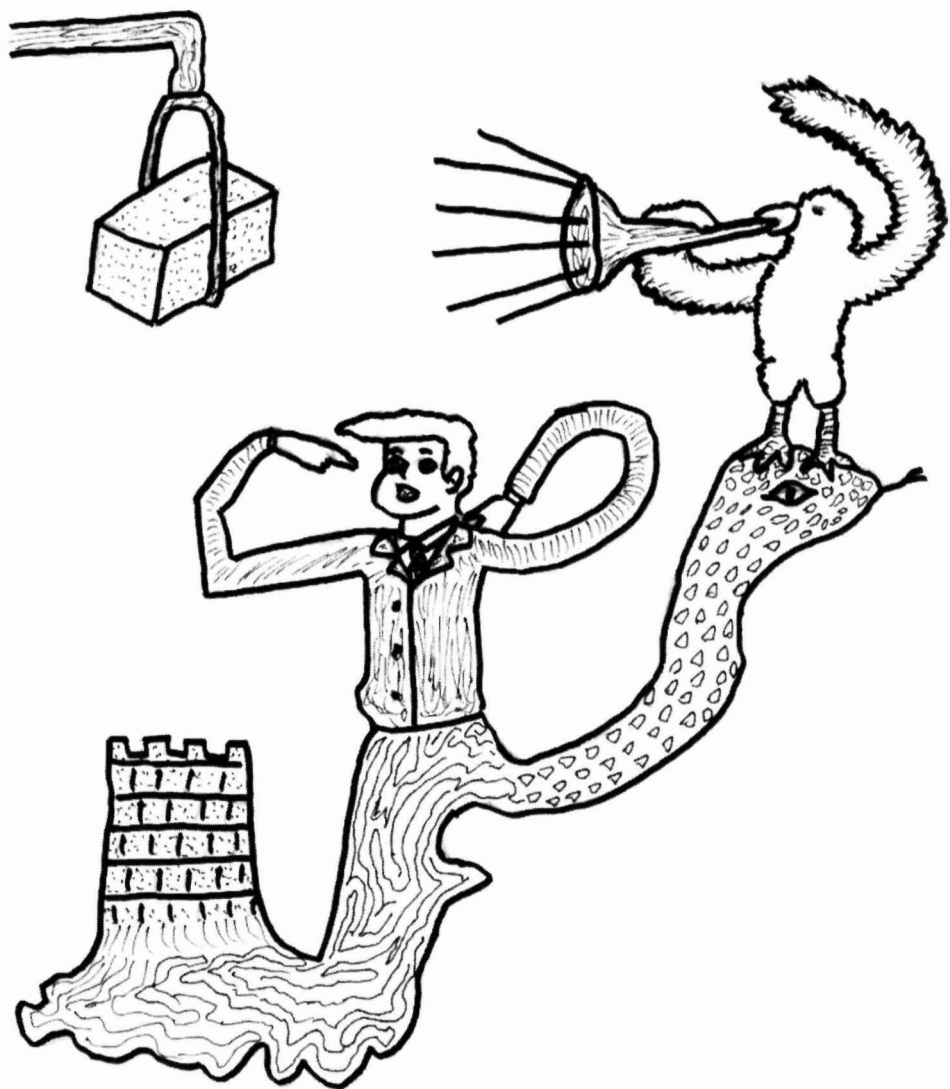
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Building a Border Wall
à la Salvador Dalí

The Wall

by

Tom Emrick

It didn't work in China
It didn't work in Berlin
It didn't work in Scotland
Just ask old Hadrian

Besides, the unemployment crisis
was caused by greedy snobs
They just needed a fall guy to blame
because they outsourced so many jobs

And this wall will cost ten billion dollars
and we won't get our money's worth
because more people are heading south
than those who are headed north

Even if this wall were built
it really wouldn't matter
for all a thirty-foot-high wall would do
is help sell a thirty-one-foot ladder

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