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Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas: Cincuenta años de crecimiento urbano 1940-1990

Eduardo Alarcón Cantú*

Summary

Border cities of northern México have undergone an accelerated growth rate, more than most parts of the interior of México. But several recent studies have given this development a minor role in Mexican urban history. Within this context, the present study analyzes the evolution and rapidly changing city of Nuevo Laredo, 1940-1990.

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Introducción

En la amplia bibliografía sobre el desarrollo urbano en latinoamérica parece existir consenso en relación al crecimiento de las ciudades de esta región. Independientemente del marco conceptual en que basan sus estudios, numerosos investigadores coinciden en la seriedad de los problemas que afectan a estas ciudades.¹ Nuevo Laredo no es un caso que difiera mucho de las ciudades latinoamericanas. En el último libro de Bassols Batalla, por ejemplo, sobre esta ciudad se hace referencia a un crecimiento anárquico así como a grandes carencias en servicios públicos.²

En el presente estudio se pretende describir la evolución y características del crecimiento urbano de esta ciudad a partir del año de 1940, fecha alrededor de la cual se inicia un incremento importante de población. Para este propósito se han revisado los factores que, además de estar interrelacionados, de alguna manera influyen en el tipo de crecimiento que se ha generado en Nuevo Laredo. Entre otros, se pueden mencionar el crecimiento de población, la evolución de las actividades económicas, los planes de desarrollo urbano que se han

realizado para la ciudad y, por supuesto, los resultados del crecimiento físico durante diferentes períodos. Para esto último, se han consultado las fuentes que pueden ser confiables como las fotografías aéreas disponibles para la ciudad así como diferentes planos de la misma, elaborados en el transcurso del período en estudio.

Además de la revisión de los factores que han conformado a la ciudad, también es propósito del estudio el tratar de identificar algunos de los posibles obstáculos a un crecimiento urbano más ordenado.

Algunos antecedentes

Las ciudades tamaulipecas establecidas sobre el Río Bravo se fundaron hacia mediados del siglo XVIII. Alrededor de sus primeros setenta años de existencia, dichas poblaciones, mostraron escasa actividad. En esta primera etapa, bien podríamos denominarlas como comunidades de autoconsumo. Hacia 1820, Camargo y Mier empezaron a cambiar y además surgió el puerto de Matamoros como un lugar importante dentro del contexto regional. Estas primeras transformaciones en las poblaciones del Río Bravo fueron resultado de las que a nivel mundial comenzaron años atrás. La Revolución Industrial y consecuentemente el nuevo sistema capitalista de producción influyeron en los cambios que en el país se generaban para esos años así como también en los que ocurrieron en estas poblaciones del Río Bravo.

Por este lugar, algunos años antes de 1820, se inició un paso de mercaderías que principalmente desde Inglaterra y Estados Unidos encontraron un mercado en el ahora noreste mexicano. Así, la ruta Matamoros, Camargo-Mier, Monterrey se convirtió en la vía de acceso a este mercado que, para entonces, empezaba a ser importante.

En el caso de Laredo, los cambios que ocurrían en las poblaciones mencionadas tardaron un buen número de años más en presentarse. Todavía en 1848, después de haber sido dividida y convertida en frontera, continuó manteniendo escasas relaciones con su exterior. No fué hasta 1881 cuando en Nuevo Laredo se inició el proceso donde, con el transcurso del tiempo, se determinó la función que en la actualidad cumple dentro del contexto nacional e internacional. En ese año de 1881 llegó a Nuevo Laredo el ferrocarril procedente del puerto de Corpus Christi y también desde el norte de los Estados Unidos. Un año más tarde estas vías pasaron por Monterrey y en 1888 se conectaron con la ciudad de México. El comercio que desde aproximadamente 1820

se inició desde las naciones manufactureras hasta el noreste mexicano y que estimuló el crecimiento de las poblaciones de Matamoros, Camargo y Mier, pasó entonces por Laredo a través de un medio de transporte mucho más eficiente. En esta forma, Nuevo Laredo desplazó a Matamoros como el punto de unión entre el noreste mexicano y el exterior. A partir del arribo del ferrocarril el desarrollo de Nuevo Laredo, en buena medida, quedó enlazado a las actividades de importación-exportación. Desde entonces fue notable un aumento constante en las actividades mencionadas.

El crecimiento de la Población

Con referencia al crecimiento de población en las ciudades fronterizas del norte de México,³ seguramente la característica más apreciable es el acelerado incremento del número de habitantes que se inicia desde la década de 1940-50, (cuadros 1, 2 y 3). A partir de entonces, este grupo de ciudades, muestran tasas de crecimiento muy superiores que las observadas para el país. Así por ejemplo, durante 1940-50 cuatro de estas ciudades triplican—o un poco más—su número de habitantes, y durante 1950-60, exceptuando a Nuevo Laredo, el resto de las ciudades la duplican de nueva cuenta. Aún cuando durante 1960-70 no acontece lo mismo, las tasas de crecimiento continúan siendo altas respecto a las observadas en el país. Tal vez la mejor forma de ejemplificar el proceso de crecimiento de población, en las ciudades fronterizas referidas, sea utilizando la medida de su crecimiento absoluto por decenio (cuadro 3). En términos generales, a partir de 1940 y hasta 1970, estas ciudades muestran un crecimiento absoluto que progresivamente se incrementa en cada una de las décadas del período mencionado. No obstante, durante 1970 y 1980 la tendencia anterior parece modificarse. Durante estos años referidos las ciudades fronterizas, con excepción de Tijuana, muestran un crecimiento absoluto menor en comparación a la década anterior. De hecho, algunos estudios referentes al tema mencionan, para 1970-1980, un crecimiento social negativo para las ciudades de Matamoros, Reynosa, Nuevo Laredo, Ciudad Juárez y Mexicali.⁴ Este último, modifica la clasificación relativa al tipo de crecimiento de su población. De ser consideradas, en 1950, como ciudades de atracción muy elevada, pasan a la categoría de equilibrio en 1980. Aún cuando los resultados del onceavo censo de población y vivienda son preliminares, además de

estar referidos a la cantidad de población para los municipios, un primer acercamiento a estos datos nos presentaría un panorama para 1980-1990 como el siguiente: la ciudad de Tijuana continúa con su fuerte dinámica de crecimiento, Ciudad Juárez y en menor medida Reynosa y Matamoros denotan un crecimiento mayor que en la década anterior. En contraste, Nuevo Laredo muestra un crecimiento de población muy bajo en relación a lo esperado en las proyecciones de población realizadas para esta ciudad.

En síntesis, Nuevo Laredo desde 1940 hasta 1980 sigue, en cuanto a crecimiento de población, la tendencia observada para el grupo de ciudades fronterizas mencionado. No obstante, entre los años de 1980 y 1990 esta condición parece modificarse. Durante este último decenio Nuevo Laredo aparece con un crecimiento absoluto sumamente bajo—solamente 16 mil habitantes—en relación a las proyecciones elaboradas con anterioridad. Aún cuando estos resultados se deben tomar con suficiente reserva, es probable que en esta ciudad no se encuentren tan alejados de la realidad ya que la evolución de las actividades económicas—íntimamente ligadas con el crecimiento de la Población—no acusan gran dinamismo con excepción del sector maquilador (cuadro 7).

Las actividades económicas

Para Nuevo Laredo parece tener mayor sentido la afirmación que para las ciudades fronterizas señala Raúl Fernández: “A excepción de algunos ejemplos, las ciudades fronterizas desafían las leyes de la localización económica-geográfica y deben su supervivencia a la existencia de dicha línea fronteriza.”⁵ Las actividades económicas que en Nuevo Laredo han generado el crecimiento son, fundamentalmente, las que se producen en base a las interacciones entre Estados Unidos y México. En este sentido se destacan como importantes las relacionadas con la importación-exportación⁶, los servicios al turismo y muy recientemente—durante 1987 y 1990—la industria maquiladora.

Para las ciudades fronterizas las interacciones que se producen entre Estados Unidos y México, en alguna medida, constituyen el elemento regulador tanto de sus actividades económicas como de su crecimiento. Para el caso de Nuevo Laredo, dicha relación parece ser más estrecha. En este sentido, cualquier modificación en las interacciones mencionadas, es claramente perceptible en el comportamiento de sus

actividades. Tal vez los ejemplos más evidentes sean las crisis económicas que han afectado a nuestro país en períodos recientes, los que a la vez disminuyen las interacciones entre estos países y en este caso las actividades económicas en esta ciudad. En el cuadro 4, por ejemplo, se puede apreciar la disminución en importaciones ocurrida durante los años de 1982 y 1983.

Otra característica importante en Nuevo Laredo, es el alto porcentaje de población económicamente activa que se concentra en el sector terciario. En el transcurso del tiempo, y dentro del conjunto de ciudades fronterizas, Nuevo Laredo se ha caracterizado por ser una de las más terciarizadas y para 1980 llega a tener el 64.3% de su población económicamente activa en dicho sector. Para ese mismo año las ciudades fronterizas tienen un promedio de 54.3% y el Estado de Tamaulipas 46.5%.⁷ Sin embargo para 1990, en Nuevo Laredo, esta concentración de la población económicamente activa en un solo sector, empieza a modificarse debido al auge en la industria maquiladora durante los últimos años.

Actividades de importación-exportación

Basicamente, Nuevo Laredo aparece dentro de la panorámica urbana del país en base a las importaciones-exportaciones que pasan por este lugar. Dichas actividades empiezan a adquirir importancia hacia 1881 al arribo del ferrocarril a la ciudad. Para principios de siglo, Nuevo Laredo es la tercera ciudad en cuanto a la cantidad de importaciones que a través de ella entran al país y para 1942, con amplio margen, es el lugar por donde entra la mayor parte de las importaciones del país. En el caso de las exportaciones, se presenta una situación muy semejante a la descrita para las importaciones. (Cuadros 5 y 6). Asimismo, la actividad del transporte, íntimamente ligada con las actividades mencionadas, ha crecido en una proporción similar a estas.

En Nuevo Laredo, este sector de la economía, ha sido fundamental por varias razones. Por una parte, debido a la cantidad de empleos que ha generado, y por otra, por el ingreso que corresponde a la ciudad derivado de los impuestos federales a la importación-exportación. Dicho impuesto, ha sido la fuente más importante de recursos, por no decir la única, que dispone la ciudad para la construcción de infraestructura y gastos administrativos. Asimismo, las actividades mencionadas han contribuído a generar

algunos capitales importantes, aún cuando su aprovechamiento en otros sectores productivos no es evidente.

Servicios al turismo

En el transcurso del tiempo, los servicios al turismo han generado un considerable número de empleos en Nuevo Laredo. Sin embargo, en los últimos años es apreciable una disminución considerable en este sector. Varios indicadores apuntan en ese sentido. Por una parte, es notable el cierre de algunas empresas importantes dedicadas a esta actividad como son, por ejemplo, el hipódromo-galgódromo y algunas otras empresas dedicadas a este servicio. Por otra parte, al comparar los censos económicos de 1985 y 1989, es apreciable una disminución del número de empleos en los sectores donde se incluyen dicho tipo de actividades. De hecho, en estos censos, el único sector en donde se observa un aumento en el número de empleos es en el de manufacturas (cuadro 7).

Agricultura y ganadería

Respecto al sector primario de las actividades económicas, Nuevo Laredo se ha caracterizado por generar un escaso número de empleos en este grupo de actividades. Para 1980 solamente el 5.21%, de la población económicamente activa, se ocupaba en este sector.⁸

En el transcurso de su historia, Nuevo Laredo nunca se ha caracterizado como una región agrícola. En realidad, la única época en que se cultivaron algunas tierras fue durante la década de los años cincuenta mientras existió una fuerte demanda por algodón. No obstante, el incremento en el costo de su producción, además de la sustitución de esta fibra por materiales sintéticos, disminuye su demanda y consecuentemente terminó su aprovechamiento en este municipio.

Actualmente, las tierras de la región se destinan, en gran parte, a la ganadería extensiva, actividad que tiene como característica el ocupar escasa mano de obra y de requerir gran extensión de tierra por cabeza de ganado.

La industria maquiladora

En Nuevo Laredo, la industria maquiladora ha mostrado un comportamiento incierto. Luego de la sensible disminución de esta industria entre 1973 y 1974 (cuadro 8), atribuída por algunos especialistas

a una etapa recesiva en los Estados Unidos, el crecimiento de esta actividad en Nuevo Laredo ha seguido un patrón muy diferente que el resto de las ciudades fronterizas.

Para 1974, en esta ciudad, se generaba el 6.6 por ciento del total de los empleos de la industria maquiladora en el país. Sin embargo, durante el período que va desde 1975 hasta 1986 el porcentaje mencionado se encontró entre 1.5 y 2 por ciento. Así por ejemplo, en 1982 el empleo en la industria maquiladora de Nuevo Laredo representó el 2.04 por ciento del total nacional y el 1.69 en 1986 (cuadro 9). Para 1988 y 1989 la situación muestra algunas modificaciones ya que se presenta un aumento sin precedente que eleva el porcentaje ya mencionado hasta un 3.4 por ciento. Efectivamente, durante los años mencionados, el número de empleos en la industria maquiladora de esta ciudad pasa de 6,777 en 1987 a 16,218 para 1989 (cuadro 8).

Para Nuevo Laredo, este aumento representará algunas modificaciones en la distribución del empleo de sus actividades productivas. En 1980 el número de empleados en la industria maquiladora representaba poco menos del cinco por ciento del total de la población económicamente activa. Para 1990, considerando la tendencia de crecimiento de esta última, el porcentaje correspondiente a empleos en maquiladoras debe de colocarse en alrededor del quince por ciento.

El crecimiento físico

Respecto al crecimiento físico y en especial de los servicios públicos, las referencias que sobre Nuevo Laredo hacen dos especialistas en desarrollo urbano y regional, nos pueden aportar una apropiada impresión sobre la evolución de este proceso.

Luis Unikel, elabora para 1960 un estudio en donde mide el nivel de vida en las 38 ciudades principales del país. En este estudio emplea diversas variables tales como escolaridad, agua entubada, drenaje, alimentación y otras más. En el resultado, Nuevo Laredo aparece en un aceptable octavo lugar.⁹

Sin embargo, años más tarde en el último libro de Angel Bassols Batalla (1986) se hace referencia a Nuevo Laredo de la siguiente manera: "No son necesarios muchos días de observación para darse cuenta del crecimiento anárquico de los asentamientos humanos en la periferia. . . . Al mismo tiempo saltan a la vista las grandes carencias en servicios públicos que se ofrecen: agua potable, alumbrado,

pavimentación de calles y construcción de viviendas.” Asimismo se señala más adelante que: “...el ayuntamiento municipal dedica anualmente más del 75 por ciento de su presupuesto para gasto administrativo y sólo un 12 por ciento a las obras públicas.”¹⁰

Los resultados del crecimiento físico de Nuevo Laredo, entre 1940 y 1990, no difieren considerablemente de los que se han observado en gran parte de las ciudades del resto del país, especialmente de los de las ciudades fronterizas. Tal vez una de las características más evidentes del crecimiento físico en Nuevo Laredo sea su escasa regulación y normatividad.

En las páginas siguientes se intenta realizar una breve descripción de las características del crecimiento de la ciudad. El orden que se sigue es de acuerdo a los períodos o etapas de crecimiento que se señalan en la gráfica número uno. Es conveniente hacer notar que los períodos no son uniformes en cuanto a tiempo, debido precisamente a que se seleccionaron de acuerdo a fuentes de información confiable, como son las fotografías aéreas disponibles de la ciudad.

Las condiciones en 1937

Hasta 1940, Nuevo Laredo presentó un crecimiento físico sumamente pausado. Para entonces, con una población de apenas 28 mil habitantes, sus problemas de ordenamiento territorial no se señalan como desmesurados. En este sentido, la preocupación de las autoridades federales por la ciudad se dirigía, más que a problemas de ordenamiento, a su aspecto. De esta manera, en el primer plan formal para esta ciudad, elaborado en 1938 por la Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público y donde ya se cataloga a Nuevo Laredo como el primer puerto fronterizo de carga, se menciona la escasez de edificios de buena construcción, la abundancia de casuchas y “tejabanes,” la falta de banquetas y pavimentos que, en conjunto, dan un aspecto desagradable a la ciudad. Igualmente, en el mismo sentido de apariencia, se le contrasta en desventaja con la ciudad vecina de Laredo, Texas. Básicamente, el plan mencionado se justifica en base a los conceptos referidos, pero además, se menciona: “...como Nuevo Laredo constituye la entrada a México de la carretera Panamericana, es evidente la conveniencia de seguir un plan coordinado para mejorar la ciudad y prever su desarrollo futuro, ya que tanto el turismo como el movimiento comercial aumentan a diario.”¹¹

El crecimiento pausado que hasta 1940 se observó en Nuevo Laredo presenta, para entonces, a la ciudad con pocos problemas de

funcionamiento en relación a su número de habitantes o a la cantidad de sus actividades económicas.

La expansión acelerada del espacio (1937-1973)

Para principios de la década de los años cuarenta, en las ciudades fronterizas es evidente un considerable crecimiento de población y consecuentemente de expansión acelerada de su espacio físico. Nuevo Laredo, por ejemplo, en un lapso de sólo doce años—de 1937 a 1949—crece en extensión, aproximadamente lo que anteriormente le tomó cerca de cincuenta. De manera similar, la etapa de crecimiento de 1949 a 1960 muestra un crecimiento del espacio aproximadamente comparable al observado durante la etapa anterior (ver plano de etapas de crecimiento). Sin embargo, durante los años referidos, el único orden apreciable en el crecimiento de la ciudad es una prolongación de las calles y manzanas cuadradas propias de la época. Durante este período no es perceptible, por ejemplo, alguna acción razonable en previsión al futuro crecimiento de población, actividades económicas, equipamiento, jerarquización del sistema vial ni de algunos otros conceptos.

Respecto a esto último, en 1960 ya se encuentran referencias de las dificultades que este tipo de crecimiento generó. A diferencia del Plano Regulador de 1938 que, como ya mencionamos, se justificaba en base al aspecto físico de la ciudad, el plan de 1961 para Nuevo Laredo, elaborado por la Secretaría del Patrimonio Nacional, se justifica ahora en base a problemas de funcionamiento. Así, en este plan se dice que en los últimos veinte años anteriores a 1960: “Este rápido aumento de población se tradujo naturalmente en una considerable expansión de la zona edificada, en rápida sucesión de nuevos agregados... Formalmente en este tejido no se diferencian las circulaciones, no se define de manera concreta una estructura comunal... y por otra parte se han formado verdaderas barreras para la circulación como es el caso de la zona aduanal, el antiguo patio de los ferrocarriles al poniente de la nueva estación, etc.”¹²

Durante el período de crecimiento de 1960 a 1973 la expansión del espacio es poco mayor que la observada en etapas anteriores y los problemas ocasionados por falta de previsión, que brevemente se anotaron arriba, siguen presentándose. En este sentido pocos son los cambios que se podrían anotar. Sin embargo, en este período es posible

identificar otro tipo de características de este crecimiento. Por una parte, a partir de estos años, la separación del espacio, por grupos de ingreso económico, empieza a hacerse más evidente. Poco antes de 1960, en el sector sur de la ciudad, empiezan a definirse asentamientos de grupos de ingreso medio-altos y altos en donde la disposición resultante del espacio parece obedecer más a las proposiciones de los fraccionadores-propietarios de la tierra, que a las instituciones que deberían regular el crecimiento físico de la ciudad. En este sentido, con la lógica de obtener mayor número de lotes en menor espacio, aparece la manzana alargada y con menor profundidad. Forma que seguramente también responde a la necesidad de otorgar privacidad y consecuentemente mayor atractivo a la venta de estos fraccionamientos. Tales desarrollos tienen como resultado el agravar los problemas de funcionamiento. Así, gran parte de las circulaciones que parten de la ciudad se encuentran, ahora, con barreras formadas por este tipo de fraccionamientos. Otro espacio claramente delimitable, en cuanto a su ocupación por un estrato socioeconómico definido, es el de bajos recursos. Prácticamente, en esta etapa de crecimiento, se empieza a determinar así, el espacio ubicado al poniente de los patios de ferrocarril. Además de tener problemas de infraestructura, la comunicación escasa y difícil hacia este sector, debida a las barreras artificiales mencionadas, lo convierte de baja demanda para estratos socioeconómicos diferentes al de bajos recursos.

El crecimiento durante las últimas dos décadas (1973-1991)

Durante el período mencionado, de acuerdo a los datos disponibles, se pueden identificar dos etapas de crecimiento. En la primera de ellas (1973-1982) aunque solamente se consideran nueve años, es posible apreciar un crecimiento físico menor que en etapas anteriores (gráfica de etapas de crecimiento). Entre algunas de las características de este nuevo espacio se puede anotar el desarrollo de fraccionamientos alejados de la mancha urbana, a lo largo de la carretera nacional. Fraccionamientos que, debido a ofrecerse sin servicios básicos, por su costo deben de ser una opción para la población de bajos recursos. Aún cuando estos fraccionamientos, en la actualidad, son de baja densidad de población han generado una demanda por servicios públicos que es difícil de suministrar por su lejanía. Asimismo, después de 1973 se observa el desarrollo de algunos fraccionamientos

completamente diferentes al antiguo concepto de la manzana orientada norte-sur. Sin embargo, esto no quiere decir que hayan tenido mayor éxito que lo realizado anteriormente. En el desarrollo del conjunto habitacional de Infonavit, por ejemplo, se trató de seguir en el concepto de su diseño urbano a la escuela francesa de Gastón Bardet. No obstante, en la realidad dicho concepto fue deformado por el cambio de las áreas previstas para recreación y equipamiento en más vivienda. Consecuentemente, este conjunto, resultó en un área de excesiva densidad de población, con los efectos que esto trae aparejado.

Para la década de los años ochenta Nuevo Laredo muestra algunas otras características en su crecimiento. Por un lado, poco después de 1982 se generan los primeros asentamientos irregulares que se repiten hacia finales de 1989. Los primeros tienen lugar sobre terrenos particulares, los segundos en áreas ejidales que ya limitan con la ciudad. El resultado de este tipo de ocupación de la tierra se manifiesta, espacialmente, en asentamientos de elevada densidad de población y con problemas de dotación de infraestructura. Seguramente la oferta limitada y el alto costo de la tierra para la población de bajos recursos ha sido una de las causas de este tipo de movimientos. Esta oferta limitada, también debe ser la causa del establecimiento de asentamientos considerablemente alejados de la mancha urbana como los descritos en la etapa anterior. El problema generado por este tipo de crecimiento es el de agravar los problemas de abastecimiento de infraestructura básica—como agua y drenaje—al sector de la población.

Durante los últimos años, uno de los factores de mayor importancia en la conformación del espacio en Nuevo Laredo es el auge que la industria maquiladora ha tenido a partir de 1987. Hasta ese año, el crecimiento de esta industria fue relativamente pausado y su asentamiento en forma dispersa dentro de la ciudad. A partir del año referido el crecimiento de la maquila genera una cantidad importante de parques industriales que tienen como consecuencia una clara competencia con los fraccionamientos habitacionales. Tan manifiesta es dicha competencia que inclusive dos fraccionamientos que inicialmente habían sido diseñados para vivienda, cambian su uso a industrial luego de iniciar el auge en la maquiladora.¹³ Igualmente, tres de estos parques industriales, establecidos alrededor de asentamientos de población de bajos recursos, han provocando con esto mayor escasez en la oferta de tierra para este grupo de habitantes.

En resumen, el crecimiento físico en Nuevo Laredo no ha presentado algún orden racional en el sentido de alcanzar un medio que sea más propicio para el desarrollo de sus habitantes. Tampoco lo muestra en el aspecto de prever el adecuado crecimiento de sus actividades económicas. Tal es el caso, por ejemplo, de la actual saturación de las rutas para la importación-exportación, o la falta de atención al ahora deprimido sector turístico, etcétera.

Como se anotó anteriormente, el crecimiento de Nuevo Laredo en buena medida parece ser dirigido, más que por instituciones que deberían regularlo, por agentes sociales cuyos intereses privados no toman en cuenta o no perciben las necesidades futuras de la ciudad.

Los planes en Nuevo Laredo

Para la planificación urbana existe una gran variedad de conceptos acerca de la función que desempeña. Así, se encuentran opiniones como la señalada por Manuel Castells en el sentido de que es: “[una forma de asegurar] la reorganización del sistema urbano, con vistas a mantener la reproducción estructural del modo de producción dominante.” Asimismo, Castells apunta que la planificación urbana interviene en la regulación de las contradicciones que se generan entre las diferentes instancias de una formación social.¹⁴ Otra serie de conceptos sobre planificación tienen semejanza con el que la Sociedad Interamericana de Planificación (SIAP) señala como: “la aplicación racional del conocimiento al proceso de adoptar decisiones que sirvan de base a la acción humana.”

Durante el período en estudio, básicamente han sido elaborados tres planes para la ciudad de Nuevo Laredo. El Plano Regulador de 1937, realizado por la comisión de planificación de Nuevo Laredo Tam., integrada en 1936 con representantes de diferentes organismos públicos de nivel federal; El Plano Regulador de 1961, realizado por la Secretaría del Patrimonio Nacional y; el Plan Director Urbano aprobado por el Congreso del Estado de Tamaulipas en el año de 1988.

El Plan de 1937, como ya se mencionó, básicamente se justificaba en función del aspecto de la ciudad. Para la primera etapa de este Plan se presentan una serie grande de proyectos a realizar. Lo importante aquí, es que en lo que actualmente en planificación llamaríamos la etapa de programación de la acción, el Plan de 1937 presenta un “Programa cronológico de construcción” para los años de

1937 a 1939 y para un “futuro menos inmediato” se señalan algunas otras acciones. Lo que llama la atención en el plan de 1937, y que no sucede en los planes posteriores, es que de las obras señaladas en el “programa cronológico” alrededor del 75 por ciento de ellas fueron realizadas. Sin embargo, las propuestas para un “futuro menos inmediato”, como las acciones de ordenamiento físico o la vialidad estructuradora, nunca llegan a realizarse. Es posible que, al cambio sexenal de Gobierno en 1940, las prioridades relativas a las ciudades fronterizas se hayan modificado.

El Plano Regulador de 1961 para Nuevo Laredo, de nueva cuenta es realizado a instancias del Gobierno Federal. En este Plan, nuevamente se hace una gran cantidad de proposiciones para la ciudad. Entre éstas: una vialidad estructuradora; zonificación por áreas de habitación, comercio e industria; extensos espacios verdes; creación de convenientes servicios para el turismo; una serie de edificios como aduana, escuelas, etc. (estas propuestas aparecen ya, inclusive, con proyecto arquitectónico); y suficientes proposiciones más.¹⁵

Respecto a las actividades económicas, en el Plan se menciona que las principales fuentes de ingreso, como el comercio internacional, turismo, producción regional, etc., están dados en función de factores externos a la ciudad y consecuentemente la planeación para su promoción cae en gran medida fuera de la jurisdicción local.¹⁶ En este sentido, parece ser que quienes realizaron el Plan de 1961, tienen conciencia de que la planeación no debe ser solamente enfocada al ordenamiento físico. Sin embargo, la afirmación mencionada arriba, de que las actividades económicas de Nuevo Laredo están sujetas a factores externos, parece ser una justificación del enfoque de mero ordenamiento físico que tiene el Plan mencionado. De cualquier forma, las proposiciones contenidas en este Plan tienen escasos resultados en la ciudad.

Hasta 1979 la Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales (JFMM) fué el organismo encargado de administrar los ingresos que, derivados de los impuestos a las importaciones-exportaciones, correspondían a la ciudad de Nuevo Laredo. Al liquidarse la JFMM, las autoridades municipales pasan a encargarse tanto de la administración de los recursos como del control del crecimiento urbano. A partir de entonces, se realiza una serie de intentos de planeación que, en ocasiones apoyados por técnicos del Estado, se prolongan durante períodos de sucesivos gobiernos municipales. Finalmente, en 1988 es aprobado por

el Congreso del Estado un Plan Director Urbano para la ciudad de Nuevo Laredo.

Como ya se mencionó, el plan de 1937 se justificaba en base al aspecto de la ciudad; el de 1961 en base a una problemática urbana ya detectada, pero en el plan de 1988 la justificación se destaca por su falta de claridad. En términos generales, posiblemente la característica más notoria de el Plan Director de 1988 sea su falta de precisión. El instrumento divide a la ciudad en seis sectores, para los cuales propone usos y destinos y menciona, en forma muy general, algunos de sus problemas. En el nivel Programático, por ejemplo, se encuentra un conjunto de programas y subprogramas en donde se mencionan una serie de intenciones, por demás imprecisas, como: “articular la estructura urbana; solucionar los conflictos viales; establecer el futuro funcionamiento de los elementos de equipamiento urbano” etcétera. El nivel instrumental es tanto o más impreciso que el anterior. En este apartado se menciona que se debe: “fundamentar y dirigir la estrategia para obtener recursos económicos; asegurar la coordinación y concurrencia de las acciones e inversiones que inciden en el plan; coordinar la participación del sector privado” etcétera.

Casi sobra mencionar que hasta ahora el Plan de 1988, no ha tenido ninguna incidencia en el crecimiento de la ciudad de Nuevo Laredo.

Antes de tratar de formular alguna conclusión sobre los planes ya comentados es conveniente recordar algunos conceptos que, aun cuando obvios, son básicos en planificación. Por una parte el asunto referente a que el logro de resultados satisfactorios no depende solamente de la formulación adecuada de un plan, sino también de otros factores. Uno de ellos, por ejemplo, es el ánimo que en este sentido pudieran tener quienes conducen la administración pública. Por otra parte, también es básico el considerar que la planificación operativa debe ser un proceso. Es decir que cada una de las etapas debe llevarse a cabo de forma sucesiva hasta iniciar el ciclo nuevamente.

En este sentido, ninguno de los planes que se han mencionado puede considerarse como completo. Sin embargo, el Plan de 1937 seguramente fue el que más se acercó a esto. Como ya se mencionó, este Plan llegó a formular un “Programa cronológico de construcción” e inclusive gran parte de las obras contempladas para la primera etapa de este programa fueron realizadas entre los años de 1937 y 1939.

Desafortunadamente después del último año mencionado el Plan no tuvo seguimiento.

Dentro del contenido del Plan de 1961 se encuentran referencias al concepto de continuidad en la planificación. Sin embargo, aún cuando el Plan de 1961 muestra que fué formulado apropiadamente, sus resultados fueron muy escasos para la ciudad debido precisamente a su falta de continuidad o aplicación.

El Plan Director Urbano para Nuevo Laredo, aprobado por el Congreso del Estado en 1988, parece encontrarse aún más lejos de lograr resultados satisfactorios en el control del crecimiento urbano de la ciudad. Además de su nula difusión, en cada uno de sus niveles, pero sobre todo en el programático y en el de instrumentación, el plan muestra un grado de imprecisión muy amplio que, hasta ahora, no ha generado un programa de acciones concretas y prioritarias por medio del cual deberían dirigirse y optimizarse los recursos.

Como se ha mencionado, el crecimiento urbano de Nuevo Laredo no se ha realizado de forma ordenada. Entre los obstáculos a un crecimiento de mejores resultados es posible considerar como importantes los siguientes: planes que carecen de viabilidad en su implementación, descoordinación entre los técnicos que hacen los planes con los políticos que deciden, legislación inadecuada, ausencia de voluntad política, intereses de grupos, escasez de recursos, etcétera.

De los problemas mencionados, tal vez la elaboración de los planes sea el menos difícil de resolver. Aun cuando hasta ahora muchos de los planes realizados tienen el enfoque del solo ordenamiento físico, la planificación que puede llegar a ser operativa es una técnica que como tal se encuentra al alcance. En todo caso, los problemas que impiden la implementación van más allá de los mismos planes.

Respecto a los problemas referentes a la legislación, Antonio Azuela de la Cueva afirma que respecto a las atribuciones otorgadas al municipio por la Ley General de Asentamientos Humanos, estas han sido restringidas por la posterior legislación de los estados. En dichas leyes estatales por ejemplo, un plan de desarrollo urbano aprobado por un ayuntamiento no adquiere vigencia si no ha sido aprobado por la legislatura estatal. En este sentido, Azuela menciona que: "En el caso de las atribuciones municipales otorgadas por la Constitución pero restringidas por los estados recuerda la vieja fórmula del 'obedezcase pero no se cumpla.'"¹⁷

Por otra parte, la escasez de recursos ha sido considerada como una de las principales limitantes del desarrollo urbano. Sin embargo, según algunos investigadores, no debe considerársele la de mayor peso. En este caso, parece ser que la ausencia de voluntad política y la incapacidad de dirigir los recursos al desarrollo de la comunidad en general son mayormente determinantes.

En este sentido, Víctor L. Urquidí señala que el problema no solamente es de obtener mayor cantidad de recursos financieros sino que acertadamente menciona que: “La respuesta al desarrollo urbano y el futuro de la hoy ciudad subdesarrollada, debe buscarse dentro del contexto más amplio del crecimiento económico y del cambio social antes que en la ciudad misma o en su estructura.”¹⁸

Alejandra Massolo, por otra parte, al estudiar la reforma urbana de 1983, ha obtenido resultados interesantes problemática urbana actual. En este sentido, llega a concluir que: “[el análisis de esta problemática] no puede reducirse a una cuestión de mayores ingresos, sino que debe considerar otras dimensiones fundamentales para ampliar la autonomía económica, tales como: la voluntad política para desarrollar capacidades que hagan posible un uso más honesto, productivo y creativo de los recursos y la responsabilidad de ejercer un gobierno democrático, legítimo y autónomo.”¹⁹

Conclusiones

El crecimiento de la población en Nuevo Laredo, como anteriormente se anotó, ha seguido una dinámica parecida a la observada en las ciudades fronterizas. En términos generales, a partir de 1940 es apreciable un crecimiento acelerado de población que empezará a disminuir su ritmo después de 1970.

En buena medida la dinámica de crecimiento de esta población ha sido condicionada por la evolución de las actividades económicas. Como ya se mencionó, estas últimas tienen una estrecha relación con las interacciones generadas entre México y Estados Unidos. Por ejemplo, la reciente reducción en aranceles a las importaciones ha generado un aumento en el paso de éstas a través de Nuevo Laredo. Así, durante 1990 el paso de camiones, con este tipo de carga, ha aumentado en alrededor de cuarenta por ciento en relación a 1989 (cuadro 4). Respecto a la industria maquiladora, es notable que su evolución ha sido diferente al resto de las ciudades fronterizas. Su crecimiento se ha

efectuado entre los años de 1987 a 1990, sin embargo, su evolución, durante el transcurso de 1991, es incierto puesto que es notable el cierre de algunas empresas de este tipo.

El comportamiento futuro de las principales actividades económicas en esta ciudad, y por tanto del ritmo de crecimiento de población, en alguna medida parece estar sujeto a dos variables importantes cuyo impacto aún es difícil de preveer con precisión. Por una parte se encuentran los resultados que tendrá el tratado de libre comercio y, por otra, el efecto que sobre esta ciudad causará, una vez terminada su infraestructura, el nuevo cruce fronterizo de Colombia, Nuevo León, ubicado a cerca de treinta kilómetros de esta ciudad.

Respecto al crecimiento físico de Nuevo Laredo, seguramente la falta de orden es su principal característica. La escasa normatividad y previsión han sido parte de este crecimiento. Con referencia a los planes, como es conocido, el hecho de elaborarlos adecuadamente no es garantía de que se tengan resultados positivos en la realidad. El caso de Nuevo Laredo puede ser un buen ejemplo de lo anterior. Es posible considerar que los planes de 1937 y 1961 se realizaron con cierta racionalidad, sin embargo, salvo algunas obras programadas en el de 1937, sus resultados fueron escasos en el medio urbano. En el caso del plan de 1988, puede decirse que se encuentra aún más lejos de lograr resultados satisfactorios, puesto que su elaboración fue demasiado imprecisa. Como es posible estimar, la problemática urbana no es fácil de resolver. La condición de nuestras ciudades, determinada dentro de la estructura de una sociedad histórica, y en posición menos favorable, condiciona los límites dentro de los cuales pueden ubicarse sus soluciones. Ocupar el lugar óptimo dentro de esta escala, tal vez además de planes o mayores recursos, requiere la existencia de voluntad política que permita optimizar los recursos a través de un gobierno comprometido con la población.

18-Nuevo Laredo

Cuadro 1

Población en ciudades fronterizas
1900-1990

	Tijuana	Mexi- cali	Ciudad Juárez	Nuevo Laredo	Reynosa	Matamo ros
1900	242	-	8218	6548	1915	8347
1910	733	462	10261	8143	1475	7390
1921	1028	6782	19457	14998	2107	9215
1930	8384	14842	39669	21636	4840	9733
1940	16486	18775	48881	28872	9412	15699
1950	59952	65749	122566	57668	34087	45846
1960	152473	179539	262119	92627	74140	92327
1970	277306	276167	414908	148867	137383	140660
1980	429500	341559	544496	201731	194693	188745
1980*	461257	510664	567305	203286	211412	238840
1990*	742686	602390	797679	217912	281618	303392

Fuentes: Hasta 1970, con excepción de Tijuana en 1970, Luis Unikel, *El Desarrollo Urbano de México*, México, El Colegio de México, 1976. Para Tijuana en el año mencionado: Mario Margulis, *Desarrollo y población en la frontera norte: el caso de Reynosa, México*, El Colegio de México, 1986.

Para 1980, Nuevo Laredo y Reynosa: *Anuario estadístico Tamaulipas 1983*, Secretaría de Fomento Económico y Turístico, Cd. Victoria, 1984. Para el resto de las ciudades en ese año: Mario Margulis, *op. cit.*

* 1980 Población del municipio. *Anuario estadístico Tamaulipas, Cd. Victoria, 1983.*; Mario Margulis. *op. cit.*

* 1990 Población del municipio. INEGI, *Resultados preliminares del XI censo general de población y vivienda, 1990.*

Cuadro 2

Tasas de crecimiento promedio anual
en ciudades fronterizas
1900-1980

	Tijuana	Mexi- cali	Ciudad Juárez	Nuevo Laredo	Reynosa	Matamo ros
1900-10	-	-	-	2.2	-	-
1910-21	-	-	5.3	5.3	3.2	1.9
1921-30	-	-	7.6	4.0	8.7	.06
1930-40	6.5	2.3	2.1	2.9	5.5	4.7
1940-50	11.4	11.0	8.6	6.6	11.3	9.8
1950-60	8.7	9.1	7.3	4.6	7.4	6.7
1960-70	5.8	4.2	4.5	4.7	6.0	4.1
1970-80	4.3	2.1	2.7	3.0	3.5	2.9

Fuente: Elaborado en base a datos de Cuadro 1.

Cuadro 3

Crecimiento absoluto en ciudades fronterizas
1900-1980

	Tijuana	Mexi- cali	Ciudad Juárez	Nuevo Laredo	Reynosa	Matamo- ros
1900-10	491	-	2403	1595	-440	-957
1910-21	295	6320	8836	6855	632	1825
1921-30	7356	8060	20212	6638	2733	518
1930-40	8102	3933	9212	7236	4572	5966
1940-50	43466	46974	73685	28796	24675	30147
1950-60	92521	113790	139553	34959	40053	46487
1960-70	124833	96628	152789	56240	63243	48333
1970-80	152194	65392	129588	52864	57310	48085
1980-90*	281429	91726	230314	14626	70206	64552

Fuente: Elaborado en base a datos de Cuadro 1.

*Crecimiento a nivel municipio.

Cuadro 4

Exportaciones desde Estados Unidos
hacia México, vía Laredo
1979-1983

	Número de camiones hacia México	Número de carros de ferrocarril hacia México
1979	153514	64411
1980	162404	67332
1981	158753	51242
1982	95569	51139
1983	60644	45298
1989	185683	65861
1990	261064	79636

Fuente: Roland Travis, *Industrie et politique à la frontière Mexique-U.S.A.: Le cas de Nuevo Laredo 1966-1984*. París, Editions du CNRS, 1985, pág. 217. Para 1989 y 1990 "Loaded Truck Crossings 1989-1990 Trend Analysis." Border business indicators. Vol. 15 números 3 y 4. Laredo, Laredo State University. 1991. pág. 5.

20-Nuevo Laredo

Cuadro 5

Ciudades principales en cantidad de importaciones
1900-1979

	Tampico	Veracruz	Nuevo Laredo
1899-1900	21,596	45,806	14,025
1909-1910	39,955	69,352	26,839
1925	66,810	107,558	80,258
1930	38,992	104,004	70,966
1940	47,127	193,522	133,882
1942	29,974	85,614	315,829
1950	183,248	928,425	1,666,834
1959	630,107	2,688,369	4,158,397
1970	1,925,136	6,805,038	7,604,183
1979	16,779,145	37,857,553	71,556,892
Cantidades en miles de pesos.			

Fuente: INEGI, *Estadísticas históricas de México*. México, Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, 1985.

Nota: Dentro del conjunto de puertos y ciudades fronterizas, las tres ciudades que aparecen en el cuadro han sido las más importantes, con excepción de Tampico en el año de 1950 en el que pasa a ocupar el cuarto lugar como puerto de entrada a las importaciones. En ese año fue desplazado por Ciudad Juárez que ocupó el tercer puesto.

Cuadro 6

Ciudades principales en cantidad de exportaciones
1900-1979

	Tampico	Veracruz	Nuevo Laredo
1899-1900	39,989	25,439	5,455
1909-1910	82,881	39,692	17,468
1925	400,981	72,283	44,312
1930	153,942	64,136	61,030
1940	173,369	118,463	313,290
1950	449,560	361,514	628,975
1959	850,093	789,493	530,371
1970	1,272,270	1,913,156	1,950,677
1979	7,178,057	10,835,982	24,922,432
Cantidades en miles de pesos.			

Fuente: INEGI, *Estadísticas históricas de México*. México, Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, 1985.

Nota: Generalmente las ciudades que aparecen en el cuadro se han mantenido como importantes en el aspecto de exportaciones. Esporadicamente aparecen como importantes algunas otras. Entre estas últimas se encuentra el caso de Matamoros que en 1950 ocupó el segundo lugar, y en 1959 el primero. Algo similar ocurre con la ciudad de Nogales que en 1970 ocupa el tercer lugar y en 1979 el segundo.

Cuadro 7
 Nuevo Laredo
 Personal ocupado según rama de actividad
 1985 y 1989

	1985	1989
Total	34,218	33,330
Minería	145	0
Manufacturas	6,019	14,008
Electricidad	79	0
Construcción	390	458
Comercio	10,565	8,571
Transporte	3,410	nd
Servicios financieros	2,278	302
Servicios comunales	11,332	9,921

Fuente: INEGI, Tamaulipas, cuaderno de información para la planeación, 1990.; Resultados oportunos del estado de Tamaulipas, 1991.

Cuadro 8
 Número de empleos en la industria maquiladora
 Ciudad de Tamaulipas
 1970-1989

	Nuevo Laredo	Reynosa	Matamoros	Tamaulipas
1970	3,742	-	2,565	-
1973	6,500	-	-	-
1975	1,928	1,255	9,778	-
1980	2,462	5,450	15,231	-
1983	2,839	10,660	15,639	-
1985	3,603	12,761	20,686	-
1987	6,777	16,948	26,994	50,719
1988	11,056	19,785	32,450	63,291
1989	14,619	23,856	38,119	76,594
1990	16,218	23,685	38,517	81,460

Fuentes: Para 1970, 1973 y 1983, Roland Travis, *Industrie et politique à la frontière Mexique-U.S.A. : Le cas de Nuevo Laredo 1966-1984*. Editions du CNRS, 1985. Para 1975 y 1980, Valentín Lavín Higuera, *La industrialización de Tamaulipas*. México, Ediciones Culturales Mexicanas, 1983. Para Nuevo Laredo en 1985 y 1987. INEGI, Cuaderno de Información para la Planeación, 1988. Para Matamoros y Tamaulipas en 1985, 1987 y 1989, INEGI, Avance de Información Económica, Industria Maquiladora de Exportación, ejemplares de julio de 1988 y mayo de 1990. Para 1987, 1988 y 1989 INEGI, Anuario Estadístico del Estado de Tamaulipas, edición 1990, Los datos para 1987 y 1988 son promedio anual, para 1989 promedio de enero a noviembre. Datos para 1990, datos de oficina de INEGI en Nuevo Laredo, promedio entre los meses de enero a noviembre de 1990.

22-Nuevo Laredo

Cuadro 9

Nuevo Laredo

Porcentaje de Empleos en la Industria

Maquiladora con respecto al total

Nacional y Estatal

	Total de empleos nacional	Total de empleos estatal	Empleos en Nuevo Laredo	% con respecto al país	% con respecto al edo.
1974	75,614	-	4,988	6.6	-
1978	90,716	-	1,916	2.11	-
1980	121,767	-	2,462	2.02	-
1982	127,048	-	2,601	2.04	-
1986	249,833	47,602	4,235	1.69	8.9
1987	305,253	50,719	6,777	2.22	13.36
1988	369,489	63,291	11,056	2.99	17.46
1989	429,725	76,594	14,619	3.40	19.08
1990	461,569	81,460	16,218	3.51	19.91

Elaborado en base a datos de cuadro 7.

Fuente para datos de empleo a nivel nacional que no se encuentran en el cuadro 8: Para 1974 y 1982, Roland Travis, op. cit.; Para 1978, Jesús Tamayo, *Zonas Fronterizas (México-Estados Unidos)*. México, CIDE, 1983, pág. 190.; Para 1982, Mario Margulis, *Desarrollo y Población en la frontera norte*. México, El Colegio de México, 1986, pág. 90. Para 1986, INEGI, Avance de Información Económica, Industria Maquiladora de Exportación, ejemplares de julio de 1988 y mayo de 1990. Para 1987 a 1990 las mismas fuentes del cuadro anterior.

Notas

¹ Sobre los problemas de las ciudades latinoamericanas, entre otras muchas publicaciones, pueden consultarse Francis Violich. "Enfoque conceptual de la planificación metropolitana en Latinoamérica"; Victor L. Urquidi. "La ciudad subdesarrollada", ambos artículos en Luis Unikel y Andrés Necochea. *Desarrollo Urbano y Regional en América Latina*. México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1975. Gustavo Garza. (comp.). *Una década de planeación urbano-regional en México, 1978-1988*. México, El Colegio de México, 1989.

² Angel Bassols Batalla (coord.). *Lucha por el Espacio Social: Regiones del Norte y Noreste de México*. UNAM, México, 1986, pág. 812.

³ En este grupo se incluye a las ciudades que por su actividad económica y por su cantidad de habitantes son consideradas como las más importantes en la frontera. En tal caso encontramos a Tijuana, Mexicali, Ciudad Juárez, Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa y Matamoros.

⁴ Mario Margulis y Rodolfo Tuiran. op. cit. pág. 110.; Consejo Nacional de Población. *Estudio socioeconómico Y demográfico del subsistema de ciudades "Nuevo Laredo-Reynosa-Matamoros"*. (Estudio realizado por el Centro de Investigaciones Económicas de la Facultad de Economía de la UANL), pág. 57.

⁵ Raúl A. Fernández. *La Frontera México-Estados Unidos: Un estudio socioeconómico*. México, Terra Nova, 1980, pág. 12.

⁶ Las actividades de importación-exportación, en Nuevo Laredo, son fundamentales debido al considerable número de empleos que ha generado. El transporte, la tramitación y el control de las importaciones-exportaciones son las principales fuentes de empleo directo en este sector.

⁷ María Eugenia Negrete Salas. "Terciarización en las ciudades de la frontera norte de México." Seminario de planificación regional y urbana en la frontera de México y Estados Unidos. México, El Colegio de México, 1985. Cuadro 1.

⁸ María Eugenia Negrete Salas. op. cit. Cuadro 1.

⁹ Luis Unikel. *El Desarrollo Urbano de México*. México, El Colegio de México, 1976, pág. 108.

¹⁰ Angel Bassols Batalla (coord.). *Lucha por el Espacio Social: Regiones del Norte y Noreste de México*. México, UNAM, 1986, pág. 812.

¹¹ Luis Prieto Souza y Armando Santacruz. *Planificación de Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas*. México, Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público, 1938. pág. 9.

¹² Enrique Córdova. “Plano Regulador de Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas” en *Ciudad*, Año VII, Tomo 5, núm. 28, septiembre de 1961, pág. 12.

¹³ Confrontar ediciones de 1980 y 1988 de planos de la ciudad de Nuevo Laredo. Ediciones G.G.S., Nuevo Laredo, Tam. coordinadas G,H,I,J-12 y 13.

¹⁴ Manuel Castells. *La cuestión urbana*. México, Siglo XXI, 1980, pág. 312.

¹⁵ Enrique Córdova. pág. 12.

¹⁶ Córdova pág. 24.

¹⁷ Antonio Azuela de la Cueva. *La ciudad. la propiedad privada y el derecho*. México, El Colegio de México, 1989, pág. 76.

¹⁸ Victor L. Urquidi. págs. 407 y 409.

¹⁹ Alejandra Massolo. “La descentralización de la gestión pública en México: La reforma municipal de 1983”, en Gustavo Garza (comp.). *Una década de planeación urbano-regional en México, 1978-1988*. México, El Colegio de México, 1989. pág. 148.

Cambios en la estructura corporativa en Baja California: Un estudio de los gremios de taxistas de la CTN en Tijuana

Tania Hernández Vicencio*

Summary

This article analyzes the changing structure of industrial relations in Tijuana's public transportation system, especially since PAN's active involvement in 1989. The analysis takes place on two levels, government leadership and grassroots leadership, both displayed through formal and informal structures. Three variables are also involved in this analysis, a legal frame of reference, the nature of negotiations, and labor relations.

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El proceso de reestructuración del Estado Mexicano, que a nivel nacional se presenta desde 1982, tiene manifestaciones diferenciadas dependiendo del contexto y de los actores sociales involucrados. En Baja California, los factores locales han tenido gran relevancia en la determinación de las transformaciones a la forma de organización tradicional. La estructura corporativa local, caracterizada por relaciones colaboracionistas entre Estado y organizaciones ha experimentado un grave deterioro desde 1989 en que el gobierno de Ernesto Ruffo asumió el poder en esta entidad, la inexistencia de un vínculo partidista ha permitido al gobierno de Ruffo asumir el poder sin ningún compromiso político con las organizaciones oficiales. Dentro de los factores que han contribuido de manera importante al desmembramiento de las relaciones corporativas, se encuentran: a) el deterioro que como aglutinador de masas tuvo el Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), y b) la ideología liberal panista y el estilo de gobernar de Ruffo Appel.

Las elecciones de 1989 representaron para la sociedad Baja Californiana la oportunidad de buscar otra forma de gobierno fuera del control político tradicional. Las administraciones priístas y en particular el período de Xicoténcatl Leyva Mortera y Oscar Baylón Chacón (1983-1989) se caracterizaron por la corrupción, prepotencia y malos manejos en todos los niveles del gobierno. Además, durante este período, se profundizaron las relaciones colaboracionistas entre el ejecutivo estatal y los dirigentes de las organizaciones, lo que convirtió a esta etapa en un punto de ruptura en la relación gobierno-sociedad.¹

Por otra parte, la ideología panista basada en la idea del bien común y en la participación de los individuos antes que la preponderancia de las organizaciones, también representaba la oportunidad de cambio. Ernesto Ruffo Appel, candidato a la gubernatura, proponía acabar con los monopolios de las organizaciones y dar paso a la participación ciudadana, en la concepción liberal del Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), no cabían las prácticas clientelistas características del corporativismo mexicano, su idea de que los individuos son el centro de la sociedad, se oponía a la primacía de las organizaciones y al poder de los líderes, quienes—en su concepción—interponen su interés personal distorsionando su función como representantes sociales.²

Desde la toma posesión de Ruffo, el ambiente de competencia y contrapesos políticos evidenciaron la difícil situación en que habría de funcionar el nuevo gobierno. A tres años de distancia, el enfrentamiento con las organizaciones sociales como las de colonos, burócratas, maestros, transportistas, etc., parece mantenerse y en ocasiones acentuarse; por parte del gobierno. La política de mínimo trato con los dirigentes se ha aplicado a todo tipo de agrupaciones, mientras que los líderes al sentirse agredidos por esta nueva relación, han calificado al gobierno panista, como “inquisidor y antisindicalista.”

El Gobierno de Xicoténcatl Leyva Mortera y su relación con las organizaciones de taxistas de la CTM

Los gremios de taxistas en el marco corporativo

La CTM se funda localmente en el año de 1937, en ese momento agrupa principalmente a pequeños sindicatos gastronómicos,³ y no es sino hasta la década de los setenta, cuando dicha central empieza a fortalecerse al amparo de su representante Roberto Luévano Aguayo, quien se hace cargo de la dirigencia en los períodos 1965-1971 y 1974-

1978, y posteriormente (en 1981) es elegido como secretario general en el estado.⁴ La importancia de en la estrecha relación que su dirigencia ha mantenido con el ejecutivo estatal—por lo menos hasta antes de que el PAN gobernara en la entidad—y que se profundizó en forma importante durante el gobierno de Leyva Mortera quien encontró fuerte apoyo en la dirigencia nacional de dicha organización. En Baja California, la CTM está formada por 275 sindicatos con una membresía de 50 mil personas y en la Ciudad de Tijuana cuenta con más de 100 organizaciones sindicales dentro de las que existen 16 gremios de taxistas que actualmente rebasan los 2 mil afiliados.⁵

Cuadro 1.

Numero de gremios de taxistas en los sindicatos de autotransporte, según central obrera en Tijuana, B.C.

	Organizaciones							
	CTM	CROC	COR	CROM	CRT	SCL*	CCI	Indep**
Gremios de Taxistas	16	8	1	4	1	1	1	1
Total de Afiliados	2084	939	406	399	229	147	24	109

Fuente: Elaboración propia, con información de los archivos del Departamento de Planeación y Normatividad de la Delegación de Transito y Transportes del Estado en Tijuana B.C. Sociedad Cooperativa de Conductores de Taxis en Tijuana. * Sindicato de Trabajadores del Volante "Movimiento de Taxistas y Choferes Libres de Baja California", el único gremio independiente.

Las organizaciones de transportistas y en particular los gremios de taxistas han mantenido una relación de subordinación a la política del gobierno estatal, lo cual tiene que ver con su naturaleza como agrupaciones. Estos grupos nacen corporativizados desde el momento en que sus negociaciones están directamente vinculadas al gobierno que es el único órgano capaz de otorgar una concesión para trabajar dentro del transporte público, además de que se adhieren a centrales como la CTM, la cual se ha caracterizado por su amplia colaboración con la política del gobierno.

En primer término, es importante subrayar que el sistema corporativo en el que tradicionalmente han funcionado estos gremios se compone de dos niveles. Un nivel basado en la relación gobierno-líderes y caracterizado por un conjunto de negociaciones cupulares, y

un segundo nivel de relaciones entre el líder y la base cuya particularidad es el control electoral y político de los representados. En segundo lugar, el corporativismo en el ámbito del transporte público puede entenderse a partir de tres características esenciales de esta forma de organización a nivel nacional: 1) la dominación legal por parte del gobierno, a través del marco normativo que rige la prestación del servicio de transporte y bajo el que se formalizan las relaciones entre gobierno y organizaciones, 2) el control político de los gremios a través de su filiación a la CTM y al PRI,⁶ y 3) la supeditación cultural de la base que se fundamenta en un conjunto de valores y actitudes en las que prevalece la figura del líder charro.⁷ Estas características dieron forma y consolidaron al sistema corporativo durante el período de Leyva Mortera, en esta etapa la CTM se fortaleció como pilar del movimiento obrero a nivel local y sus líderes fueron obteniendo cada vez más cuotas de poder convirtiéndose así en interlocutores del gobierno estatal que a cambio obtuvo el control de los agremiados.⁸ En este trabajo se analizan las relaciones gobierno-líderes (a través de la normatividad y las formas de negociación de las concesiones) y líderes-base (a través de las condiciones de trabajo), en el período 1983-1989. El artículo presenta resultados de investigación los cuales fueron realizados con los gremios pertenecientes a las delegaciones 5, 12, 15, 17, 19, 22 y 30 del Sindicato Nacional de Autotransportes y Conexos "Fernando Amilpa", y la "Liga de Choferes de la CTM" en Tijuana.

El marco legal del servicio de transporte público

El marco legal del servicio es un elemento importante para comprender la manera en que gobierno y organizaciones se han relacionado en el plano formal. En términos del funcionamiento de los gremios es de gran importancia la aplicación de la Ley, ya que tradicionalmente tanto líderes como autoridades han utilizado parcialmente la reglamentación del servicio y en cambio han definido una serie de tratos informales.

Respecto a la Ley de Tránsito y Transportes del Estado, (LTTE) vigente desde 1982, hay que destacar dos aspectos esenciales. Uno de ellos está normado por el artículo 80 y plantea tres puntos bajo los que se podrá obtener una concesión:

- a) Las concesiones para el transporte público se otorgarán únicamente a personas físicas.

b) Cada permiso se contraerá con un solo vehículo.

c) No se concederá a un mismo permisionario más de una concesión.

Otro aspecto importante es la forma que legalmente es reconocida para la tramitación de las concesiones. Al respecto, el artículo 87 reglamentaba dos situaciones.

a) Las personas físicas deberán solicitarlos personalmente.

b) Las personas morales (sindicatos, cooperativas, uniones, etc.) deberán gestionar las concesiones a través de su representante legal, es decir, el secretario general. Aunque formalmente era el peticionario quien debía solicitar y tramitar su concesión, durante este período fue el líder el único medio reconocido por las autoridades para gestionar los permisos; en esta situación, el solicitante quedaba sujeto a las negociaciones de su representante y resultaba vulnerable a los abusos de la dirigencia y las autoridades encargadas del servicio.

La relación gobierno-líderes y las características de las formas de negociación

Las formas de negociación entre gobierno y líderes, se caracterizaron por tres aspectos.

1) Como se apuntó, los líderes funcionaban como el único medio de gestión de las concesiones, por lo que la obtención de los permisos estaba sujeta a las negociaciones cupulares entre dirigentes y gobierno. En esta situación, el líder cumplió con las dos funciones que le han sido encomendadas dentro del corporativismo: a) ser la vía de canalización de las demandas sociales y b) ser un medio de control de éstas. Al respecto José Nevarez Sanchez—uno de los líderes más antiguos y arraigados en la CTM local—dirigente de la delegación #12, manifestó:

En el gobierno pasado (el de Xicoténcatl Leyva), sí personalmente yo trataba las cosas, porque el gobernador y yo éramos muy amigos, viejos amigos. El era cetemista... y yo iba con él directamente o con su secretario, pues era cuando trataba uno las cosas personalmente..., esos tiempos eran diferentes....⁹

Este comentario muestra que además de la doble función que cumplieron los líderes, su actitud colaboracionista con la política de gobierno permitió la creación de estrechas relaciones que los fortalecieron y los convirtieron en interlocutores del ejecutivo estatal.

2) Existía el tradicional intercambio de bienes económicos y políticos.¹⁰ En el primer caso, el gobierno otorgaba un conjunto de concesiones para el transporte público a cambio de que los líderes garantizaran el apoyo electoral y político de las bases. En el caso de los bienes políticos, otorgaba a los dirigentes, candidaturas a puestos de elección popular bajo el mismo compromiso de obtener el apoyo de las organizaciones.

De acuerdo a las entrevistas realizadas con líderes de la CTM, éstos coincidieron en que las buenas relaciones con el gobierno del estado permitían obtener mejores resultados en la gestión de las concesiones para el transporte público. José Luis Cubillas Maldonado, dirigente de la delegación #5 afiliada al Sindicato "Fernando Amilpa", comentó:

Con Xicotécatl se decía que el secretario general fuera el gestor ante las autoridades de gobierno del estado, eso facilitaba que se otorgaran más rápidamente las concesiones y entonces los solicitantes salían beneficiados... es decir, la solicitud hecha a través de la organización nos agilizaba las cosas.¹¹

Por otra parte, de acuerdo con declaraciones de un taxista que participó en el plantón realizado a fines de 1989 frente a las oficinas de Tránsito y Transporte del Estado (TTE), los tratos informales y la protección del gobierno durante el período de Baylon Chacón (de enero a noviembre de 1989) contribuía aún más al negocio de las concesiones.

Los indicios de corrupción quedan a la vista, pero el gobierno del estado no interviene. Tal parece que se sigue protegiendo a líderes como Luévano Aguayo y el "Chavoy" Aguirre que durante muchos años se han beneficiado con juegos de placas.¹²

El conjunto de intereses económicos y de poder político que se creó en torno al otorgamiento de concesiones llevó a la consolidación de numerosos feudos por parte de los líderes, así como de algunos propietarios de permisos que a través de participar en este tipo de tratos crearon flotillas de taxis administrativamente escondidas con prestanombres.¹³

En este contexto de relaciones entre organizaciones oficiales y Gobierno del Estado, es que la CTM se vé mucho más fortalecida, pues si bien este estilo de gobernar se generalizó para la relación con todas las centrales locales, la CTM mantuvo un vínculo menos conflictivo—que la CROC por ejemplo—con el gobierno estatal, lo que le resultó benéfico.

3) La relación de los líderes cetemistas se caracterizó por una pugna por mantenerse en la jerarquía de poder de la organización. En la medida en que la fortaleza de los grupos oficiales está directamente vinculada a la relación que los líderes mantienen con el gobierno, los dirigentes cetemistas trataban de fortalecerse personalmente y mantener su nexos con las cúpulas del gobierno e incluso obtener el apoyo directo del ejecutivo estatal.

Respecto a la disputa de la hegemonía al interior de la central el comentario de José Nevarez Sánchez es ilustrativo.

La labor que el señor Roberto Luévano realiza como secretario estatal, no la necesito para nada, nosotros somos autónomos y tenemos a quien pedirle (a Salvador Aguirre Sánchez, secretario local de la CTM con quien mantiene estrecha colaboración)...no tengo nada en su contra pero en verdad no tengo nada que pedirle, (además) Luévano desde el primer día de funciones de cualquier gobernador está ahí para ver que le toca. ... No quiero criticar, pero si él cree (que por eso) es más que yo, más grande que yo, pues allá él y sus creencias, y las mías pues son las mías.¹⁴

Una opinión contraria que ejemplifica esta separación entre los propios líderes de la CTM, es la de Guillermo Sáñez Salas, dirigente de la delegación #19 adherida al Sindicato “Fernando Amilpa.”

A nivel del estado nunca se había encontrado tan unida la CTM como con Roberto, acaba de salir reelecto para un segundo período en el que colaboro directamente con él pues soy secretario adjunto.... Los compañeros y yo consideramos que anteriormente sí había problemas y ahora nó, toda la federación ha estado en torno a Roberto Luévano, al grado de que tenemos contemplado hacerle un reconocimiento a nivel estatal.¹⁵

Estas opiniones que expresan sentimientos contrarios sobre un mismo aspecto, muestran que la lucha por mantener un sitio dentro de la estructura corporativa de la misma central, se basa en el tipo de relaciones que existen entre los propios líderes y de éstos con el gobierno del estado. Las rivalidades producto de esta pugna, originaron que en ocasiones se formaran alianzas entre los dirigentes quienes olvidaron su papel como representantes sociales, y en cambio lucharon por sus intereses personales.

Dominio y subordinación en el nivel líder-base

Durante este período las relaciones entre el líder y la base se caracterizaron por la existencia de actitudes de dominio-subordinación que permearon a las condiciones de trabajo dentro de los gremios y que se expresaron en dos formas:

1) Por un lado, se presentó la manipulación del marco legal del servicio por parte del líder y de los trabajadores incondicionales a la dirigencia. Por ejemplo, en el caso de las concesiones, el líder podía alterar el padrón de aspirantes a permisionarios, el cual legalmente debería formarse con aquellos trabajadores que cumplieran por lo menos con los siguientes requisitos: tener más de seis años trabajando como choferes del transporte público y no tener familiares a quienes anteriormente se hubiera otorgado una concesión; sin embargo, un trabajador que no cumpliera con estos requisitos, podía obtener el permiso siempre y cuando entregara una fuerte suma de dinero, generalmente en dólares, a la dirigencia del gremio.

Yo tengo veinte años aquí y logré hacerme de mi permiso en 1983, después de mucho insistir y claro, de colaborar con el secretario. Aquí hay que quedar bien, si no, no la haces. Yo tardé para que me lo dieran porque al principio como que no me querían hacer caso, pero me he dado cuenta que depende de cómo le caigas al secretario; a un hijo de mi compañero ya se lo dieron y no tiene ni cinco años aquí, dicen que se lo dieron porque es muy de confianza del secretario.¹⁶

Otra violación a la Ley, que implicaba cambios condiciones de trabajo de los agremiados, fue la invasión de rutas de otros gremios e incluso de organizaciones de la propia CTM. Por ejemplo, en 1984, el cambio de ruta requería a cada permisionario que lo solicitara, una

“gratificación” de 50 mil pesos,¹⁷ mientras que se pasaban por alto los graves congestionamientos viales de los mejores recorridos lo que evidentemente significaba la disminución de los ingresos de aquellos permisionarios que sí habían contraído un compromiso con TTE para prestar el servicio en esa ruta. Esta situación ocasionaba la llamada “competencia desleal” dentro de la misma organización y el deterioro de la relación entre compañeros de gremio.

Siempre he trabajado en este sindicato y las cosas siempre han sido igual. Si el líder quiere se hacen muchas cosas, por ejemplo, yo cuando entré iba para la Obrera (la ruta Col. Obrera-Centro), pero esa ruta no me dejaba tanto dinero, había trabajo pero se desgastaba la unidad (el vehículo). Entonces hablé con el secretario y él me ayudó a cambiarme a ésta (Central-Rosarito), que está mejor porque saco más (obtiene más ingreso) y mi carro no se deteriora tanto.¹⁸

2) También se presentó una relación más particular entre permisionarios y choferes, que se caracterizó por la reproducción del paternalismo y la actitud de subordinación, lo que se reflejó en la situación laboral del chofer quien generalmente realizaba gastos importantes, como la renta semanal del permiso, la cual dependía de la ruta en la que trabajara. En 1988 esta renta era de no menos de 260 mil pesos sin incluir multas y pagos de refacciones y a principios de 1989 el pago oscilaba entre los 20 y 70 dólares diarios.¹⁹ Otros gastos importantes eran el pago al municipio por trabajar como chofer de taxi, que según los taxistas entrevistados, a principios de 1989 representaba 50 mil pesos anuales, aunque otros trabajadores manifestaron haber pagado hasta 300 y 500 dólares por ese derecho.²⁰

En general, la relación líderes-base se caracterizó por la ausencia de democracia, de manera que se generó una mayor vinculación entre el permisionario y el dirigente, y en cambio se olvidaron las relaciones entre el líder y el chofer. Generalmente el hecho de ser concesionario y brindar su apoyo incondicional al líder, proporcionaron a los permisionarios una situación laboral de cierta forma “privilegiada”, en contraste con las condiciones de trabajo del chofer, quien estuvo marginado de las acciones y decisiones del líder e incluso cumplió un papel subordinado en su relación con el dueño del permiso.

Cambio en la política de gobierno y las transformaciones a la estructura corporativa

La problemática entre el gobierno del estado y las organizaciones de transportistas

El primer trienio de gobierno de Ernesto Ruffo Appel (1989-1991) presentó diferencias significativas a nivel de las relaciones gobierno-líderes.²¹ Como se apuntó, el gobernador ha manifestado su interés por la gestión individual de cualquier reclamo que afecte directamente el interés personal y deje de lado las negociaciones cupulares que caracterizan a la estructura corporativa.²²

La postura del ejecutivo estatal ha originado una situación de enfrentamientos verbales y manifestaciones de rechazo protagonizadas por los representantes de las organizaciones más importantes, entre éstas, de los grupos de transportistas. No obstante, es importante mencionar que si bien el gobierno tiende a privilegiar la participación ciudadana como el medio más eficaz de expresión de las demandas sociales, la fuerte oposición de los líderes sigue siendo un gran obstáculo para la transformación del sistema corporativo.

A continuación se ilustra el proceso de cambio que está sufriendo el sistema corporativo del servicio de transporte público. Se hace énfasis sobre dos aspectos que de manera sustancial están experimentando cambios en el ámbito de las relaciones entre el gobierno estatal y los gremios de taxistas de la CTM en Tijuana: a) la importancia que ha cobrado la aplicación de la normatividad del servicio, y b) el rompimiento de las relaciones colaboracionistas entre gobierno y líderes.

Propuestas de modificación a la normatividad

Como se planteó, la violación a la normatividad por parte de los líderes cetemistas fue una característica fundamental del funcionamiento del sistema corporativo. En lo que va del gobierno actual, es precisamente el apego al marco legal el que ha funcionado, de manera importante, como uno de los instrumentos de cambio a la relación tradicional entre gobierno y líderes, para lo cual se ha recurrido constantemente a los artículos 80 y 87 de la LTTE, los cuales confieren únicamente a los interesados, el derecho de solicitar y usar una concesión para trabajar en el servicio de transporte público en taxi.

Por otra parte, aunque el marco legal del servicio de transporte formalmente no ha sido modificado, durante 1990 se abrió la participación a los diversos grupos involucrados en este servicio, para que opinaran en favor y en contra de la reforma a la normatividad.

a) La propuesta de los diputados panistas René Nuñez Figueroa y Héctor Osuna Jaime (actualmente presidente electo de Tijuana), acerca de la necesidad de fomentar la participación de particulares fuera de las organizaciones de transportistas, y sobre la importancia de elaborar un plan para reestructurar la prestación del servicio de transporte, a partir de las peticiones y sugerencias de la ciudadanía y de los propias organizaciones de transportistas.

b) Otro planteamiento se hizo a nombre de las centrales obreras, que en voz de Roberto Luévano Aguayo, dirigente estatal de la CTM, presentan su oposición total a las propuestas panistas, argumentado que ese tipo de modificaciones irían en contra de los intereses de los trabajadores, y aunque se comprometen a presentar un proyecto de reforma, hasta la fecha éste no se ha hecho público.

c) Por su parte, el gobierno estatal ha planteado que además de la necesidad de reformar la Ley, es urgente la vigilancia del servicio a partir del reglamento vigente, con el fin de empezar a eliminar los vicios creados alrededor del otorgamiento de concesiones.

d) Finalmente las propuestas del entonces Delegado de Tránsito y Transportes del Estado en Tijuana, Rogelio Aros Guzmán, quien se pronunciaba por la agilización de los trámites para todo lo relacionado con el transporte público.

Cabe aclarar que por parte de los usuarios del servicio, formalmente no ha habido ninguna propuesta de modificación a la LTTE, sin embargo, según los funcionarios de la delegación de Tránsito existen numerosas quejas en las que se pide mayor vigilancia en términos de tarifas y rutas.

Aunque estos planteamientos reflejan diferentes puntos de vista para mejorar la prestación del servicio de transporte, el hecho de que los cambios a la Ley requieran del consenso en el congreso estatal, complica un cambio inmediato de aquélla, aunque no interfiere en la aplicación de medidas de vigilancia por parte de las autoridades.²³ Además hay que destacar que en la medida que el gobierno pone orden en la prestación del servicio, sancionando a quienes transgredan la Ley, también debilita los intereses de los acaparadores y en especial de los líderes de estas organizaciones.

Cambios en las formás de negociación

Otro elemento que el gobierno de Ernesto Ruffo ha utilizado para debilitar al sistema corporativo del servicio de transporte público, es terminar con el estilo clientelista y colaboracionistas entre gobierno y dirigentes. En relación a las características actuales de las formas de negociación, se presentan tres aspectos fundamentales.

1) Existe un privilegio al trato personalizado entre gobierno estatal y peticionarios. Al respecto, tanto los comentarios de las autoridades de TTE como de los propios líderes, son ilustrativos.

“Anteriormente el gestor de las concesiones era el dirigente, ahora tenemos nuevas disposiciones del Señor Gobernador de que necesitamos tener un trato más frecuente con el solicitante...desde luego que no se desconoce la personalidad de algún secretario general, pero de preferencia es el trato con el interesado...y lo que hemos visto es que ya empieza a ser frecuente que venga el solicitante directamente.”²⁴

De acuerdo a los comentarios de José Nevarez, las nuevas disposiciones también se han dado a conocer en el trato personal con el gobernador.

Yo fui y platicué con el Señor Gobernador y él nos dijo que él no quería tratos con líderes, sino que si era posible nombráramos una comisión de miembros del gremio para que hablara con él y planteara cualquier problema...pero que él no quería tratar con el líder... Entonces así lo hago, porque a mí también me evita muchas vueltas.²⁵

En vista de que en el marco corporativo, el poder de las organizaciones proviene de las relaciones que mantienen los líderes con la cúpula de gobierno, no todos los dirigentes cetemistas han aceptado el cambio y principalmente aquellos que han obtenido mayores beneficios de su cercana relación con el ejecutivo estatal.

2) Hay una ruptura del tradicional intercambio de bienes económicos y políticos, ya que los vínculos partidistas entre gobierno y organizaciones han dejado de operar. En este sentido, una de las políticas de Ernesto Ruffo ha sido el retiro de aquellas concesiones que no se encuentran debidamente justificadas y la revocación de los permisos de trabajadores que en alguna circunstancia han transgredido la Ley.

“Por ahora no se les está dando mucha esperanza a la gente (en caso de que soliciten permisos para el transporte público), ya que el Señor Gobernador ha dado orden de reestructurarnos y poner al día todo lo referente a concesiones, pues hay muchas anomalías... Además la otra modalidad, es que no se entregarán concesiones a quienes no tengan regularizado su vehículo, pues antes no interesaba si los papeles estaban o no, en regla.”²⁶

Por lo que se refiere al intercambio de bienes políticos, éste ha sido totalmente interrumpido por la inexistencia de un vínculo partidista entre gobierno y organizaciones, por lo que el líder no se compromete a garantizar el apoyo electoral y político al gobierno estatal y éste, a su vez, deja de otorgar puestos de elección popular que funcionaban como recompensa a los dirigentes por el control que ejercían a la base.

3) La apertura a la participación gremial independiente es otra característica de este gobierno. El surgimiento del “Sindicato de Trabajadores del Volante Movimiento de Taxistas y Choferes Libres de Baja California,” el 7 de agosto de 1990, constituye otro aspecto importante para el desmembramiento de la forma de organización tradicional.

Estamos agradecidos con este gobierno porque si nunca se hubiera dado el cambio, jamás hubiéramos tenido concesiones... Nunca nos hacían caso, una vez cansados de esperar, fuimos a Mexicali como 200 trabajadores y Baylón Chacón nos apaleó, nos puso una golpiza porque subimos los taxis a la plaza cívica... adrede los subimos para que nos hicieran caso...y aunque nos dió 45 permisos provisionales después ya no nos dieron nada. Pero con esta administración nos renovaron esos permisos y nos están dando solicitudes para poder obtener más.²⁷

Este grupo independiente en cierta forma ha presionado a las organizaciones oficiales que pierden el monopolio de representación de los trabajadores del autotransporte, sin embargo, es importante comentar que el gremio independiente y cualquier organización que trate de mantenerse al margen de la línea corporativa, deberá enfrentar los ataques que los dirigentes de las centrales oficiales. Por otra parte, esta actitud de apertura a la organización de los gremios, ha contribuido también a que dentro de la misma CTM se exprese el descontento de los

Es importante mencionar que en el caso del “Movimiento Libre” las relaciones de poder no se establecen en el mismo tenor que en la CTM. En primer término, el líder carece de la supremacía que caracteriza a los dirigentes cetemistas pues no tiene el poder político para violar la normatividad y modificar las condiciones laborales de los trabajadores, sin evitar ser sancionado por las autoridades. Por otra parte, hay ciertas particularidades de este gremio, como el ambiente de compañerismo en que se trabaja, y el hecho de que permisionarios y choferes compartan aspectos importantes de su trabajo como los gastos relacionados con las cuotas, el número de días trabajados, y el turno en el que prestan el servicio, lo que evita situaciones problemáticas entre compañeros y en cambio facilita su trabajo.

Balance de las transformaciones en la estructura corporativa

De acuerdo a los elementos aquí planteados, las conclusiones de este trabajo son las siguientes.

1) Existe un debilitamiento de la estructura corporativa a nivel de las relaciones gobierno-líderes, al respecto los elementos de cambio más sobresalientes durante el primer trienio de gobierno de Ruffo, son los siguientes.

a) En el ámbito formal de las relaciones, aunque se sigue operando con la LTTE de 1982, el hecho de que haya propuestas de modificación al marco legal por parte de algunos integrantes del Congreso del Estado, que existan presiones por parte de los usuarios a la mayor vigilancia del servicio, y que el propio gobierno estatal exija el cumplimiento de las normas vigentes, evidencia una tendencia a la reforma de la Ley la cual se prolongará dependiendo de la insistencia de los usuarios y prestadores del servicio, así como de los planteamientos y la correlación de fuerzas en el congreso estatal, que a raíz de las elecciones del 2 de agosto de este año sigue teniendo mayoría panista.

b) Se ha interrumpido el intercambio de bienes al mismo tiempo que existe un desplazamiento de los líderes gremiales como intermediarios en las negociaciones, lo que ha repercutido en un constante enfrentamiento con los dirigentes de estos gremios, por lo que existe un alto costo en términos de la presión política que se ejerce contra el gobierno estatal a través de manifestaciones públicas, cierres de avenidas, etc.

Otro aspecto importante es la apertura a la participación gremial independiente, que ha repercutido en el rompimiento del monopolio de representación de las organizaciones oficiales y en el surgimiento de grupos disidentes dentro de las organizaciones de transportistas.

2) En la relación líder-base existen tendencias de cambio menos claras. En los gremios cetemistas persiste la estructura de dominación tradicional que incide negativamente en las condiciones de trabajo. La figura del líder y la falta de participación gremial más dinámica, aún son importantes obstáculos al cambio, sin embargo algunas manifestaciones de descontento por parte de los trabajadores, acerca de la cooptación electoral y política de organizaciones como la CTM, expresan la necesidad de transformar las relaciones al interior de los gremios. Cabe apuntar, que la aparición del "Movimiento Libre," también contribuye a presionar a las dirigencias de las organizaciones oficiales, y favorece a los trabajadores en la medida en que abre nuevas posibilidades a sus formas de agrupación.

A manera de último comentario diremos que con propósitos de conocer los cambios en las relaciones Estado-sociedad en los estados del norte, sería interesante analizar qué pasa en Chihuahua a partir del ascenso del PAN al gobierno estatal, e ir conformando un estudio comparativo entre estas entidades, en relación a las transformaciones que los gobiernos de oposición presentan a la estructura de organización social y política tradicional. El rompimiento del vínculo partidista en ambos casos significa de una u otra forma un debilitamiento de las prácticas corporativas que se extienden desde el gobierno a las organizaciones sociales, sin embargo, sería importante analizar de qué manera influye el estilo particular de gobernar y cómo se refleja ésto en el enfrentamiento con las agrupaciones oficiales, así como la manera en que las organizaciones sindicales han hecho frente al nuevo gobierno.

Notas

¹ Herrera, (1990), 18.

² Herrera, (1990), 18.

³ Quintero, (1990), 67-96.

⁴ El Mexicano, 10/mayo/1991, 3D.

⁵ El Mexicano, 10/mayo/1991, 3D.

⁶Juan Felipe Leal plantea que la vía legal de la dominación existe a través de la reglamentación de las demandas de la clase trabajadora ya que cualquier reclamo debe ser reconocido y arbitrado por el propio Estado, además de que políticamente los sindicatos se encuentran reunidos en grandes centrales integrantes del partido oficial y por lo tanto son parte de la cadena de dominación Estado-partidos-sindicatos. De esta manera es como el Estado establece los marcos institucionales del conflicto. Leal (1982), 176-179.

⁷Sobre la preeminencia del jefe del ejecutivo y el papel de las burocracias sindicales dentro de la estructura corporativa, es ilustrativo el trabajo de Durand Ponte, (1990), 99.

⁸Según Ilan Bizberg, el Estado Mexicano ha impulsado la creación de organizaciones pertenecientes al partido oficial, lo que ha originado la formación de débiles actores sociales que no gozan de la fortaleza que los grupos oficiales han adquirido a través de su estrecha relación con el Estado, más que de su propia capacidad de convocatoria. Bizberg, (1990).

⁹Entrevista con José Nevarez Sánchez, secretario general de la delegación #12 del Sindicato "Fernando Amilpa," 14/enero/ 1992.

¹⁰ Casar (1991).

¹¹ Entrevista con José Luis Cubillas Maldonado, secretario general de la delegación #5 del Sindicato "Fernando Amilpa," 20 de enero de 1992.

¹² Semanario Zeta, 16 septiembre-13 octubre/1989, 60A

¹³ El negocio de permisos y placas fué una característica del gobierno de Xicoténcatl Leyva, de manera que lo mismo se negociaba con la tramitación de licencias en paquete, las revisiones mecánicas a los vehículos del transporte público y la expedición de placas para taxi, que generalmente estuvieron ligadas al pago de favores políticos en campaña.

¹⁴ Nevarez, entrevista citada.

¹⁵ Entrevista con Guillermo Sandez Salas, dirigente de la delegación #19 del Sindicato "Fernando Amilpa," 15/enero/1992.

¹⁶ Entrevista con Octavio Serrano, taxista de la delegación #19 del Sindicato "Fernando Amilpa," 9/enero/1992.

¹⁷ Semanario Zeta, 3-10/agosto/1984, 40.

¹⁸ Entrevista con Ramiro Delgadillo permisionario de la delegación #30 perteneciente al Sindicato "Fernando Amilpa," 8/enero/1992.

¹⁹ Semanario Zeta, 29 julio-5 agosto/1988, 63.

²⁰ Semanario Zeta, 8-15/mayo/1988, 38 y 39A.

²¹ Uno de los mayores conflictos del gobierno panista y las organizaciones de transportistas ha sido con los líderes cetemistas como Salvador Aguirre, secretario general de la CTM en Tijuana, quien a escasos cinco meses del inicio de gobierno, anunció la negativa de la central a participar en el tradicional desfile del 1 de mayo. Cabe señalar que a esta postura se solidarizaron gremios de la CROC, COR y CROM.

²² Según Tonatiuh Guillén, para el oficialismo el haber perdido la gubernatura en las elecciones de 1989, significa la descomposición de la estructura de relaciones tradicionales en todos los niveles de gobierno. Según el autor, ya no existe la "estructura vertical de relaciones políticas" que se extendía desde el gobierno, al partido y a las organizaciones. Guillén (1989).

²³ Hay que recordar que actualmente, además de que la mayoría del PAN sigue manteniéndose—8 diputados panistas, 7 priistas y 4

perredistas en el congreso estatal—en la medida en que el PRD ha manifestado estar de acuerdo con algunas acciones del gobierno del estado, pudiera pensarse que existe un clima más propicio para que las propuestas de modificación a la normatividad del servicio de transporte lleguen a prosperar.

²⁴Entrevista con Fausto A. Morán Huerta, Jefe del Departamento de Transportes de la Delegación de Tránsito y Transportes en Tijuana, 29/enero/1992.

²⁵José Nevarez, entrevista citada.

²⁶Fausto Morán, entrevista citada.

²⁷Entrevista con Benjamin Acuna Vazquez, secretario general del “Movimiento Libre,” 11/enero/1992.

28. Jose Nevarez, entrevista.

29. Semanario Zeta, 10-7/noviembre/1991, 36A.

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Beyond the Nueces: The Early Geographical Identity of South Texas

Daniel D. Arreola*

Resumen

La idea que la región llamada Sur Tejas es un área de población Mexicana es una identificación moderna. Principalmente, se describió la región como una área natural y no como una región poblada de gente, hasta mediados del siglo veinte. Este artículo describe la historia del Sur de Tejas como una región geográfica.

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“Of this section of country very little is known. From the fact that the Nueces on the south side and the Rio Grande on the north side are without any considerable tributaries it is inferred that it is mostly a dry elevated prairie.”

Richard S. Hunt and Jesse F. Randal
A Map of Texas published by the
General Land Office of the
Republic of Texas, 1839

Penetrated and explored as early as the sixteenth century, and crisscrossed by dozens of travelers during the nineteenth century, South Texas is, today, a popularly acknowledged subarea of the Lone Star state.¹ While South Texas as a regional concept may have emerged in the nineteenth century with the Texan domination of lands south of the Nueces River and north of the Rio Grande, its character as a human geographic region identified by its Hispanic ethnic heritage was not well known outside of the area nor carefully defined until this century.

According to one distinguished geographer, Texans are said to maintain a “perceptual image” of South Texas, especially as a direc-

tional region, and at least one prominent Mexican American historian has labeled the region between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande the "Tejano cultural zone."² The association of South Texas with its dominant Hispanic population, what geographers term a culture area, is, however, a recent identification. In the nineteenth century, the region was principally perceived by outsiders as an environmental wilderness rather than as a human settled area and this image may have delayed its identity as a distinctive subcultural area until surprisingly late in this century.

In this essay, I reconstruct historically and assess critically some early geographical conceptions of the region called South Texas. I do not claim to have examined all available written accounts about the region. Rather I have selected mainly popular and well known accounts as well as official or institutional assessments that I believe best illustrate the general perception of the area as a geographic region by outsiders during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These writings were published in English and would have been known to contemporary reading audiences or to researchers in the United States.

This assessment does not address the image of South Texas from Mexico, or from necessarily Mexican-American perspectives. The reconstruction is an "historical geosophy," an account of geographical knowledge about this region from selected written evidence. Geosophy as a concept was proclaimed by geographer John Kirtland Wright who suggested that the study of geographical knowledge extends far beyond the core area of scientific geographical knowledge and takes into account geographical ideas, both true and false. Wright asserted that geosophy could help us to better understand the ways we observe and conceptualize geographical phenomena.³ Geosophy, it may be said, is to geography what historiography is to history or musicology to music.

To understand a region's historical image is an important part of comprehending its perceptual identity. Historical geographers have demonstrated that regional perception can be a powerful influence on attitudes about an area and consequent settlement expansion into that area.⁴ Although South Texas, especially along the Rio Grande, had been settled by Hispanic peoples since the middle of the eighteenth century, the assessment of the region as a "wilderness" in written accounts by outsiders of the day may have contributed to its early image

as an underdeveloped area. Whether that image was conveyed to later non-Hispanic settlers to South Texas, lending legitimacy in their minds to their invasion and settlement of the region, is a separate question that might be analyzed in further research.⁵

First Impressions

South Texas was first known, traversed, and written about by Spaniards in the sixteenth century.⁶ The earliest contacts were made along the Gulf of Mexico coast by maritime explorations and, accidentally, as a result of shipwrecks on barrier islands. Later encounters with the region commenced with overland expeditions from Tampico, Mexico in present Tamaulipas state south of the Rio Grande. The often related navigation of the Rio Grande by Alvarez de Piñeda in 1519, was not, it turns out, the first Spanish encounter with the river. According to one authority, the Río de Las Palmas or as it is presently known the Río Soto La Marina, considerably south of the Rio Grande near the Tropic of Cancer, was the river that Pineda sailed.⁷

These initial reconnoiterings generated little written evidence because *tierra firme* in these latitudes was so poorly known. In fact, South Texas at this time was little more than a patch of the larger coastal littoral that the Spanish called the “Seno Mexicano,” or Mexican Gulf because the ocean body outline from the Florida peninsula west and south to the Yucatan peninsula appeared as a “seno” or pocket even on the first crude maps of the region.⁸

Over the next two centuries, South Texas became increasingly better known as a geographic area. The early observations of travelers who crossed the region during the nineteenth century described two subareas, rather than a single region, distinctive by environmental perception as well as natural condition. Although these subareas did not become distinctive names at this time, the descriptions of them are here grouped into subregional units that I call “the wedge,” and “the horn,” because they approximate the present physical-biotic reality of South Texas.

The Wedge

Several Spanish *entradas* or overland explorations marched across the Rio Grande and South Texas during the late seventeenth century.⁹ The first regular route across the region stretched along a

northern arc roughly between Monclova, Coahuila and San Antonio, Texas. This trace crosses the northwest corner of South Texas, a wedge-like region bounded on the north by the Balcones Escarpment, on the west by the Rio Grande between Eagle Pass and Del Rio, and on the east by San Antonio. The town of Guerrero, Coahuila, located south of Eagle Pass and across the Rio Grande from the Texas hamlet of El Indio, was the fulcrum point of this travel corridor. Here was the site of the Presidio del Río Grande and the mission San Juan Bautista established in 1699 and 1700, respectively. This colonial settlement has been called the "gateway" into Spanish Texas.¹⁰ In 1827, the settlement name was changed to Villa de Guerrero. Over two river fords located near this site passed most of the contact between Texas and Mexico from the Spanish colonial period until the second half of the nineteenth century.

On the Rio Grande in the vicinity of Eagle Pass, the elevation is nearly 900 feet, but the land surface slopes gently northeast over a distance of some 130 miles toward San Antonio, which is situated at almost 600 feet. This area includes the northern reach of the Nueces Basin or Plains, the southern edge of the so-called Uvalde Country, and the southwestern-most extension of the Blackland Prairie in present Texas (See map Fig. 1, p. 56). The Balcones Escarpment is a rugged plateau edge to the north of this corridor, perched, as its Spanish name suggests, like a series of "balconies" above the coastal lowland. Only the Anacacho Mountains between Del Rio and Uvalde and the upturned edges of *cuestas* or low escarpments like the Austin Chalk southwest of San Antonio mark any significant relief in the wedge. The terrain is rolling to undulating coastal plain crossed by several major streams including the Nueces, Frio, and Medina as well as their numerous tributaries.

This route was blazed by José Domingo Ramón, a soldier-explorer in the service of the Spanish crown in 1716, and later crossed and described by many travelers including Jean Louis Berlandier, a French naturalist employed by the Mexican Boundary Commission in 1834, and Frederick Law Olmsted, a budding New York travel writer in 1854.¹¹ The corridor was referred to by Olmsted as typical of the entire South Texas area which he called the "Mexican border frontier." This region was newly acquired as the result of the Mexican War and Olmsted's view was not unlike that of other Anglo-Americans intoxicated by the manifest destiny of the time.

It is a region so sterile and valueless, as to be commonly reputed a desert, and, being incapable of settlement, serves as a barrier—separating the nationalities, and protecting from encroachment, at least temporarily, the retreating race.¹²

Although Berlandier on several occasions referred to the region between the Nueces River and Rio Grande as a great “wilderness,” his training as a naturalist meant his remarks were more informed than most other travelers and his interpretations usually more politically tempered. Dispatched to Mexico by the great Swiss botanist A. P. de Candolle, Berlandier traveled extensively across north-eastern Mexico and southern Texas, collecting plant specimens and filling notebooks with his pointed observations. His account remains one of the best descriptions of the natural environment in South Texas.

In June of 1834, Berlandier made the transect between San Antonio and Guerrero. He noted the limestone cuesta outcrops along the Austin Chalk that a traveler encounters southwest of San Antonio as well as the hilly countryside south of Uvalde he called “Tierritas Blancas.” In the course of 18 travel days, Berlandier traversed some 20 different streams, testifying to the riparian nature of the northwestern wedge of South Texas. At the Medina River he was forced to wait several days for the high water to subside. South and west of the Nueces River, Berlandier remarked upon the changed vegetative landscape, comparing it to the oak woodland crossed between San Antonio and the Medina River.

As soon as we had gone by the Cañada del Negro we observed a great change in the vegetation, but that change was much more perceptible after the Nueces. At every step one began to find signs of the environment in the neighborhood of the Río Grande del Norte. The streams became much farther apart; the forests disappeared at each step; and the grass-covered prairies offered only a dry herbage where diverse wild animals grazed. . . . The oak and the nut tree which constituted a considerable part of the aborescent vegetation of Texas disappeared between the Nueces and the Río Bravo del Norte. In that region, however, on the banks of streams remarkable for their verdure one finds willows, elms, ash, and some shrubs.¹³

The Horn

The Guerrero-San Antonio corridor remained the principal link between Mexico and Texas until railroads entered the region in the late nineteenth century. In part, the preference for routes across the wedge and the consequent neglect of more southerly routes resulted from the historical connections and short distance between the Coahuilan capitals of Monclova and Saltillo and the Spanish Texas and Mexican provincial capital at San Antonio. Environmental conditions, however, also differed in the southern part of the region and thus isolated it from the better traveled corridor of the northwest.

This “horn” of South Texas pivots on the present cities of Laredo on the west, Corpus Christ to the east, and Brownsville on the south. It encompasses the drier southern part of the Nueces Basin, the South Texas Sand Plain, and the Lower Rio Grande Valley as well as two extensions from the northeast—the Bordas-Reynosa Plateau or Escarpment and the Texas Coastal Bend inland from Corpus Christi Bay (Fig. 1).

The highest elevations in this part of South Texas are along the Bordas and Reynosa Escarpments that stretch northeast to southwest below the Nueces River east of Laredo. These escarpments or *cuestas* are sharper in relief on their northwest face and slope more gradually toward the Gulf of Mexico on the southeast. At Laredo on the Rio Grande, elevation is just under 500 feet, yet near Mirando City some 25 miles east on the edge of the Bordas Escarpment the elevation is slightly over 1000 feet. At Hebbronville, some 30 miles farther east on the edge of the Sand Plain, the elevation drops to near 550 feet, and declines to circa 35 feet above sea level near Sarita where Los Olmos Creek empties into Baffin Bay. The upland nature of this plateau was described by a traveler in 1834.

After traveling several miles to-day, we ascended a high ridge, about three hundred feet above the plain that we had left. This ridge is the highest land between the *Río Bravo del Norte*, and the *Río de las Nueces*. From its summit, one may see in a clear day, to a distance of near one hundred and twenty miles.¹⁴

Although average annual rainfall in the horn of South Texas is greater than in the northwest wedge, there is a decidedly drier aspect to the landscape, in part, a result of greater rainfall variability and also

because of fewer streams.¹⁵ Only the Nueces River along the northern edge and the Rio Grande on the southern periphery are perennial watercourses. Interior drainage marks some parts of the area especially in the Sand Plain, a zone of ancient sand dunes, as well as south of this area at El Sal del Rey, a salt *playa* near Raymondville. This scarcity of surface water especially in the wet summer months caused some travelers to journey a more northerly route.

Many travelers who crossed the Sand Plain described the region as a “wild horse desert,” a term first attributed to William Kennedy who published an account of Texas in 1841, and which identified the large herds of mustangs that roamed this arid expanse.¹⁶ Following this early reference, the toponym “wild horse desert” became standard on many maps of the region. Naturalist travelers, however, were more discriminating in their interpretations of the “desert.” Having crossed between Laredo and Corpus Christi in 1885 Havard observed the following:

The great Texano-Mexican Desert, [is] a vast expanse of plains and prairies, scarred by arroyos, where streams are few and very far apart, and timber, if there be any, confined to water-courses and mountains. The epithet of desert has only reference to the scarcity of timber and water, which imparts a bald, barren aspect to the face of nature; shrubby and herbaceous vegetation fairly covers this immense zone which in many districts is admirably adapted to the raising of live stock.¹⁷

In 1834, Berlandier journeyed across the Sand Plain in route from Matamoros, across from Brownsville, to Goliad. He remarked that the road was almost deserted and that the countryside consisted of a succession of immense plains with no drainage for water.¹⁸

The Lower Rio Grande Valley portion of the South Texas horn is, technically, an inland delta or embayment that emerged with sea level changes in the distant past (Fig. 1).¹⁹ In its lower course the riverine landscape is marked by meanders and oxbow lakes, known locally as *resacas*, as well as dense tropical vegetation including native Texas palms that impart a “jungle” ambiance.²⁰ William H. Emory of the U.S. Topographical Engineers gave this account of the lower valley in the vicinity of Brownsville based on observations made during his survey of the U.S.-Mexico boundary in 1853.

From this point [the mouth of the river] upward to Brownsville the river makes a great bend to the South and is so winding in its course that frequently the curves almost touch. The land on each side is level, and covered with a dense growth of heavy mesquite [sic].... It is generally too high for irrigation, and the climate too arid to depend with certainty upon rain for the purposes of agriculture. The vegetation is of a semi-tropical character, and the margin of the river, which is exposed to overflow, abounds in reed, canebrake, palmetto, willow, and water-plants, and would no doubt produce the sugar-cane in great luxuriance.²¹

As one proceeds up river from Brownsville to Rio Grande City, the land surface begins a gradual ascent rising from 57 to 190 feet above sea level over a distance of some 75 miles. However, this distance is some 241 miles if measured by the curving course of the river, emphasizing the meandering nature of the Rio Grande in its lower course. Between Rio Grande City and Laredo, the terrain is rather hilly and unlike the flat delta lands to the east. In the nineteenth century, the Rio Grande was commercially navigable from Brownsville to Roma, just up river from Rio Grande City. Shallow watercraft could navigate above Roma but the presence of falls like Las Isletas above Laredo and numerous sand shoals made for treacherous conditions.²²

Along the northeastern edge of the horn, the Atascosa River and the lower Nueces River are significant environmental boundaries.²³ Here, elevation descends gradually from near 600 feet at San Antonio to sea level along the coast where the Nueces intersects Corpus Christi, Bay, the northern reach of an elongated estuary, the Laguna Madre, enclosed by off-shore barrier islands (Fig. 1). Berlandier remarked how different the vegetative cover appeared on either side of this divide, with mesquite to the south and oaks to the north.

From Matamoros to the Nueces only eight streams are numbered, whereas from that latter locality to Goliad there are seven on a stretch less than half as long. The vegetation is also much less rich on the Tamaulipas [south of the Nueces] portion of the route,

for in the south, as far as the stream called Arroyo Colorado, the predominant tree is *Mimosa pseudo-schinus*. . . . Beyond the stream named Aransas a lovely forest of oaks exists on a sandy terrain. . . .²⁴

Conclusion

Throughout the nineteenth century, South Texas was perceived as an environmental zone separate from the more settled parts of Texas by the Nueces River. Berlandier's view of the wilderness on the south side of the boundary seemed to capture the essence of this regional perception.

If, retracing our steps, we cast a general glance over the vast wilderness which we have just crossed, we can make some small observations about the chances of populating these solitudes, full of wild animals. The southern part—between the Rio Grande and the Nueces—is the most barren and the least suitable for receiving colonists—the terrain consists only of rather infertile prairies and is completely deprived of forests. . . . There are only a few streams, which are often dry; water is more abundant in the small marshes, which last all year there. . . . The part of the wilderness situated to the north of the Nueces belongs to Texas and is the most fertile and most suited to agriculture. It is watered by numerous streams, endowed with a very lovely vegetation, and rich in forests so useful for the construction of new colonies. . . . We should not attribute these very different physical characteristics to the differences in latitude or to the height above sea level; they are due rather to the presence of streams, or perhaps to a better soil.²⁵

That this geographic perception of South Texas, largely based on environmental conditions, continued into this century is evidenced by a textbook published in 1905. In that source, South Texas was distinguished as "The Rio Grande Plain," a topographic name for land below the Balcones Escarpment and west of the Gulf coast, but imprecise about its northeastern limits.²⁶ Some three decades later in 1931, South Texas was still

being identified geographically as a "natural region,"²⁷ and in 1948, this same area was delimited as a "geographic region," called the South Texas Plain.²⁸ By 1950 the South Texas region was being refined by still other environmental criteria.²⁹

Although South Texas was identified as an "American-Mexican Frontier" by the rural economist Paul S. Taylor in 1934, and as a "Mexican-American" border subculture by anthropologist William Madsen in 1964, the first widely recognized systematic division of Texas by culture area rather than physical boundaries was made by the geographer Donald W. Meinig in 1969.³⁰ He outlined the "stronghold" nature of Hispanic South Texas based on counties with greater than 50% Spanish-surnamed population in 1960, and identified the area as a "bi-cultural region." Meinig's South Texas is the horn-shaped southernmost reach of the state bordered by the Rio Grande between Brownsville and Del Rio and pivoting on San Antonio to the north and Corpus Christi along the Gulf of Mexico littoral; the northeastern boundary, however, roughly parallels the San Antonio River drainage rather than the older delimitation of the Nueces River.

The regional identity of South Texas is still being studied and described, but the focus of recent delimitations, unlike the more environmental assessments of the past century, have been decidedly cultural and have given prominence to the substantial Hispanic imprint and influence in the area.³¹

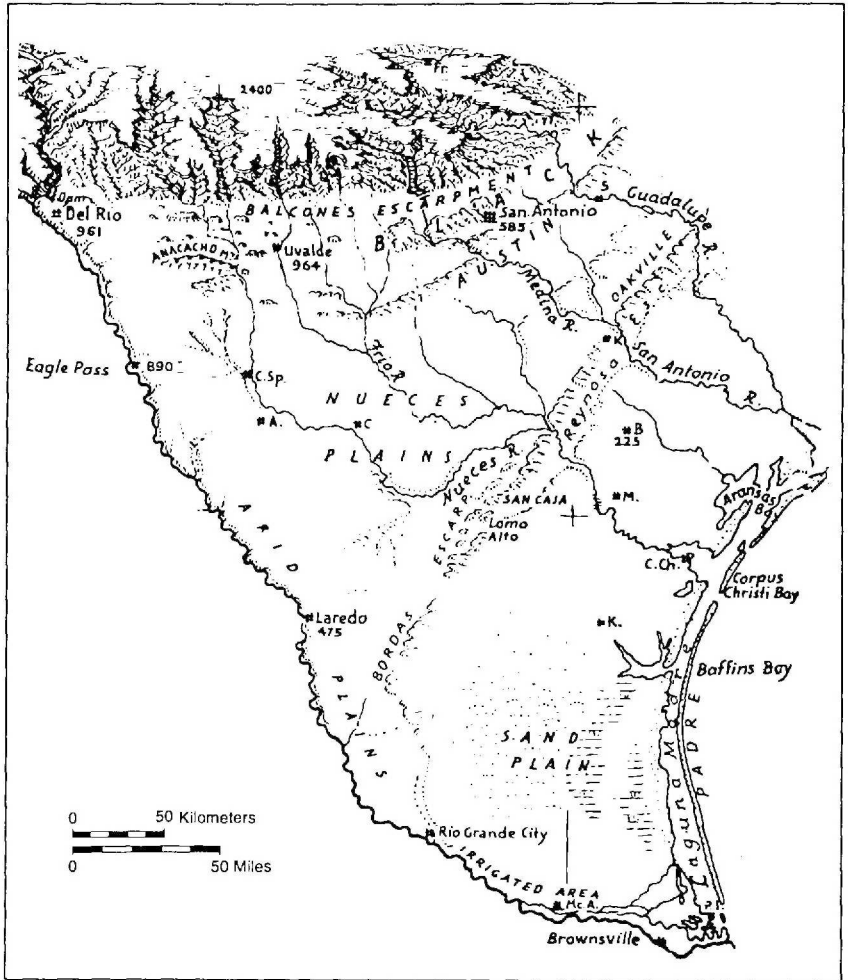


Figure 1.—South Texas. Detail of *Landforms of the United States* by Erwin Raisz, 1957. Reproduced with the permission of Raisz Landform Maps.

Notes

¹Donald W. Meinig, *Imperial Texas: An Interpretive Essay in Cultural Geography* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969) 98-101.

²Terry G. Jordan, "Perceptual Regions in Texas," *Geographical Review* 68 (1978) 305; Arnaldo De León, *The Tejano Community, 1836-1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press 1982) 78-79.

³John Kirtland Wright, "Terrae Incognitae: The Place of Imagination in Geography," *Annals, Association of American Geographers* 37 (1947) 1-15.

⁴See *Geographies of the Mind: Essays in Historical Geosophy in Honor of John Kirtland Wright*, ed. by David Lowenthal and Martyn J. Bowden (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

⁵Joe B. Frantz and Mike Cox, *Lure of the Land: Texas County Maps and the History of Settlement* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1988) 20-47.

⁶Clearly, the area was known by Indian groups before the Spanish arrived, but our understanding of the geography and regional character of what would become South Texas is almost completely a function of non-Indian writings.

⁷Early Spanish contacts with South Texas are summarized in Robert S. Weddle, *Spanish Sea: The Gulf of Mexico in North American Discovery, 1500-1685* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1985) 185-207, 333-349.

⁸Early Spanish contacts with South Texas are summarized in Robert S. Weddle, *Spanish Sea: The Gulf of Mexico in North American Discovery, 1500-1685* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1985) 95-108.

⁹The single best summary of travelers accounts of South Texas is Jack M. Inglis, *A History of Vegetation on the Rio Grande Plain* (Austin: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Bulletin 45, 1964).

¹⁰Robert S. Weddle, *San Juan Bautista: Gateway to Spanish Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968) 3-18.

¹¹For the region I call "the northwestern wedge" I have drawn especially upon Paul J. Foik, "Captain Don Domingo Ramón's Diary of His Expedition into Texas in 1716," *Preliminary Studies of the Texas Catholic Historical Society* 2 (1933) 3-23; Jean Louis Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826 to 1834*, 2 vols. (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1980) v. 2, 557-574; and Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey through Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978) 441-447.

¹²Olmsted, *A Journey through Texas*, 441-442.

¹³Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico*, v.2, 569.

¹⁴Benjamin Lundy, *Life, Travels, and Opinions of Benjamin Lundy, including his Journeys to Texas and Mexico* (Philadelphia: William D. Parrish, 1847) 97.

¹⁵While South Texas is generally classified as subtropical and receives between 30 and 15 inches of annual rainfall, climatologists have further distinguished subhumid and semiarid parts of the region. See Richard Joel Russell, "Climates of Texas," *Annals, Association of American Geographers* 35 (1945) 37-52; and Jim Norwine and Ralph Bingham, "Frequency and Severity of Droughts in South Texas: 1900-1983," in *Livestock and Wildlife Management During Drought*, ed. by R. Braun (Kingsville, Tex.: Texas A&I University, Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, 1985) 1-17.

¹⁶Del Weniger, *The Explorers' Texas: The Lands and Waters* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1984) 60-61.

¹⁷V. Havard, "Report on the Flora of Western and Southern Texas," *Proceedings of United States National Museum* 8 (1885) 450.

¹⁸Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico*, v. 2, 541-543.

¹⁹L.F. Brown, Jr. et al, *Environmental Geologic Atlas of the Texas Coastal Zone—Brownsville-Harlingen Area* (Austin: University of Texas, Bureau of Economic Geology, 1980) 20, 23-24.

²⁰Frederick R. Gehlbach, *Mountain Islands and Desert Seas: A Natural History of the U.S.-Mexican Borderlands* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1981) 21-42.

²¹William H. Emery, *Report on the United States and Mexican Boundary Survey*, 3 vols. (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1987) v.1, 59.

²²Pat Kelley, *River of Lost Dreams: Navigation on the Rio Grande* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986); and Emory, *Report on the... Boundary Survey*, 65-68.

²³Marshall C. Johnston, "Past and Present Grasslands of Southern Texas and Northeastern Mexico," *Ecology* 44 (1963) 456-466.

²⁴Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico*, v. 2, 549.

²⁵Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico*, v. 1, 286.

²⁶Frederic William Simonds, *The Geography of Texas: Physical and Political* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1905) 19-20. Simonds was a professor of geology at the University of Texas at Austin. The physical geography sections of this book are drawn especially from Robert T. Hill's contribution on Texas physical geography in the *Topographic Atlas of the United States* published by the United States Geological Survey in 1900.

²⁷Elmer H. Johnson, *The Natural Regions of Texas* (Austin: University of Texas, Bulletin 3113, 1931) 133-141. Johnson was an industrial geographer and this volume was the first in a series of publications by the Bureau of Business Research at the University of Texas at Austin. The stated purpose of the work was "to delineate Texas regions as units which are necessary not only in making an analysis of the commercial aspects of the natural resources of the State, but also in establishing bases for the analysis of the economic development of the various sections of Texas.... The method employed...[is] *geographic correlation*, that is, the interpretation of the areal extent and characteristics of regions in terms of relationships between the elements of the regional environment...." 5.

²⁸William T. Chambers, "Geographic Regions of Texas," *Texas Geographical Magazine* 12 (1948) 9-11.

²⁹W. Frank Blair, "The Biotic Provinces of Texas," *Texas Journal of Science* 2 (1950) 98, 102-105.

³⁰Paul S. Taylor, *An American-Mexican Frontier: Nueces County, Texas* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934); William Madsen, *The Mexican-Americans of South Texas* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964); and Meinig, *Imperial Texas*, 93, 98-101. Meinig's book is the only book written by a geographer and listed in John H. Jenkins, *Basic Books of Texas* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1988) 379-381.

³¹Terry G. Jordan, with John L. Bean, Jr., William M. Holmes, *Texas: A Geography*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984) 91; Lauro Cruz, *Developing South Texas: A Report to the Governor and Legislature* (Austin: Office of the Governor, 1977) 1-3, 6; Thomas R. Hester, *Digging into South Texas Prehistory* (San Antonio: Corona Publishing, 1980) 4-5; David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987) 2; and Daniel D. Arreola, "The Texas-Mexican Homeland," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 12 (Spring/Summer 1993) (in press).

The Ramifications of IRCA Employer Sanctions: A Case Study of An East Texas Community

Gayle K. Berardi*

Resumen

El acta de reforma y control de inmigración de 1986 dá sanciones al propietario por dar trabajo a trabajadores sin documentos. Este estudio delinea las razones para la inclusión de las sanciones en el IRCA, fijándole al propietario perspectivas para llevar a cabo las sanciones. El análisis se basa en un estudio sobre propietarios de una comunidad del este de Texas.

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Introduction

Legislation containing employer sanctions is the most humane, credible, and effective way to respond to the large-scale influx of undocumented aliens.

1986 House Judiciary Committee Report

Throughout the past four years, two central objectives have been raised again and again...that employer sanctions might result in discrimination against certain American workers and that employers would be unnecessarily burdened with paperwork in implementing the sanctions.

1986 Senate Judiciary Committee Report

The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) is considered by many to be landmark legislation that sets the tone for future United States immigration policy. With such expectations, it is not surprising that IRCA has been described on the one hand as the “remedy” to stem the tide of illegal immigration into the United States and on the other hand as legislation that has created, and will continue to create, more problems than it attempts to solve. The following comments are indicative of the controversial nature of the legislation:

This initial assessment of IRCA, however, seems to warrant a more positive view... a 42 percent reduction in the apprehension of illegal aliens attempting to enter the U.S. is at least suggestive of significant progress... there is little evidence suggesting that the fears of the critics of IRCA are evident; there seems to be no pattern of widespread discrimination (Lemay 1990:162-163).

(IRCA) and the employer sanctions law is not measurably reducing the flow of undocumented immigrants and refugees into the United States. Further, although the employer sanctions law is forcing undocumented migrants to accept more unregulated, exploitative and dangerous jobs, and increasing hunger and homelessness among the undocumented; it is not accomplishing its intended goal of driving undocumented workers out of the United States. ...the employer sanctions law is not working. In fact, it is detrimental to the national interest and should be re-examined by Congress (Schey and Holguin 1990:170).

As seen by these comments, one of the most controversial provisions of IRCA is the employer sanctions and anti-discrimination section. This section makes it illegal for employers to knowingly hire, contrive to employ, or to recruit or refer for a fee any unauthorized or illegal alien.

Critics of this provision have argued that employer sanctions would result in patterns of discrimination against “foreign-looking” and non-English speaking job applicants who would be rejected on the basis of appearance and the fears of employers that a potential hire is an undocumented worker.

Because of this concern an anti-discrimination protection was included in IRCA. It prohibits employment discrimination based on national origin or citizenship status. Enforcement is provided through the creation of a special counsel office in the Department of Justice.

With the implementation of IRCA, the critics of employer sanctions have, if anything, become more vocal. Their concerns center on a variety of issues ranging from employment fairness, to the number of hours spent filling out forms, to document fraud. Additional concerns have recently been expressed by members of Congress, where legislation to repeal employer sanctions is pending. In addition, groups representing business interests and employees alike have been unhappy with the measure.

Focus of Research

The focus of this research is to analyze the reasons for the inclusion of employer sanctions within IRCA and to assess employee and employer perspectives on the implementation of IRCA's employer sanctions. The latter will be analyzed in the context of a case study of employers in an east Texas community.

A survey was utilized to obtain information about the employer's knowledge of IRCA's employer sanction provision. Interviews were also conducted using open ended questions to elicit employer attitudes about the employer sanctions and their general knowledge of IRCA. An attempt was made to assess employer attitudes about the workability of employer sanctions and the effect the sanction provision has had on the operation of businesses.

History of the Employer Sanctions Provision of IRCA

The rationale for the inclusion of employer sanctions within IRCA is similar to those given for earlier attempts at immigration reform. It is succinctly stated in the House Judiciary Committee Report on IRCA:

This legislation seeks to close the back door on illegal immigration so that the front door on legal immigration may remain open. The principal means of closing the back door, or curtailing future illegal immigration, is through employer sanctions.... Employment is the magnet that attracts aliens here illegally...and leads

them to accept employment in violation of their status. Employers will be deterred by the penalties in this legislation from hiring unauthorized aliens and this, in turn, will deter aliens from entering illegally or violating their status in search of employment. . . . As a sovereign nation we must secure our borders (Montweiler 1987: 46-47, 314-315).

Attempts to pass legislation that would curb illegal immigration using employer sanctions dates back to 1952. Under the Immigration Act of 1952, it became illegal to be involved in the willful importation, transportation, or harboring of undocumented workers. Breaking the law was punishable by a \$2000 fine or imprisonment of up to five years, or both. However, this Act did not pertain to employment of undocumented workers. This exemption is popularly referred to as the "Texas Proviso."

The next attempt to include employer sanctions in immigration law occurred during the 1970s and was initiated by the House of Representatives. During the 92nd Congress, extensive hearings were held to investigate the impact of illegal immigration into the United States. The House Judiciary Committee concluded that the problem was becoming more severe and legislation including employer sanctions should be passed as an attempt to remedy the problem. These hearings became the basis for a series of bills prohibiting the employment of undocumented workers, and establishing a three or four tier level of penalties. The House Judiciary Committee concluded that:

The committee believes that the primary reason for the illegal alien problem is the economic imbalance between the United States and the countries from which aliens come, coupled with the chance of employment in the United States. Consequently, it is apparent that this problem cannot be solved as long as jobs can be obtained by those who enter this country illegally and by those who enter legally as non immigrants for the sole purpose of obtaining employment.

The committee, therefore, is of the opinion that the most reasonable approach to this problem is to make unlawful the "knowing" employment of illegal aliens, thereby

removing the economic incentive which draws such aliens to the United States as well as the incentive for employers to exploit this source of labor (House Judiciary Committee 1972: 54-506).

Legislation embodying this rationale passed the House during the 92nd and 93rd Congresses but did not receive Senate consideration. During this time and through the 1970's the Executive branch supported employer sanctions. President Ford established a Cabinet-level council on immigration, which recommended enactment of legislation that would establish penalties for *knowingly* hiring undocumented workers. The work of this council was carried on by the Carter administration. President Carter recommended civil penalties for the employment of undocumented workers, increased border control and a legalization program. The administration's bill, the "Alien Adjustment and Employment Act of 1977" was introduced in the House and in the Senate, but did not receive action during the legislative session.

During the 1980s, joint Congressional hearings on immigration were held. The hearings were chaired by Senator Simpson (R., Wyoming) and Representative Mazzoli (D., Kentucky) and were the first joint hearings since 1951 to be held on the issue of immigration. From these hearings, numerous pieces of legislation were introduced. Of them, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1983 appeared to be the one piece of legislation that could pass both the House and Senate. However, the conference committee could not resolve differences between the House and Senate version and thus, it died during the 1984 session.

The legislation was resurrected in 1985 and was favorably reported by committees in the House and Senate. The concern expressed at this time was that if the legislation included employer sanctions it should also include an anti-discrimination provision. This would ensure that workers would not face discrimination because of their appearance or lack of knowledge of English. Despite a heated floor debate in the House, efforts were defeated to strike the anti-discrimination measure. Thus, both the employer sanctions and anti-discrimination provisions were written into the new legislation, the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act.

Opposition to the bill surfaced in the conference committee where members debated the pros and cons of the legislation. Those

supporting the compromise legislation commented that, “the legislation is probably the most humane bill you’ll get. We’ve all given up something, but if you believe we need immigration reform, support this bill” (Representative Lundgren). This remark succinctly expresses the view that many members shared; that this bill, even if flawed, was better than no legislation.

In opposition, Representatives such as Robert Garcia of New York (D.) stated that employers will be faced with hard choices and will reject foreign-looking applicants. California Democrat Don Edwards called employer sanctions a failed concept that would lead to racial discrimination. Similar arguments were presented by Senators. For example, Senator James McClure (R-Idaho) called the bill a failure, a sham and a fraud.

Even with these protestations, the bill became law and was signed by President Reagan. President Reagan supported the employer sanction provision and remarked on signing the bill that it would allow future generations of Americans to regain control of their borders, preserve the value of American citizenship, while actively discouraging discrimination by employers.

Employer Sanction Provisions

Employer sanctions involve civil and criminal penalties. The intent of Congress in imposing penalties is to deter employers from hiring undocumented workers as well as protecting employers and employees in the hiring process.

Civil Penalties

There are civil penalties for hiring or continuing to employ unauthorized employees. Employers determined to have knowingly hired unauthorized employees may be fined as follows:

First Offense: Not less than \$250 and not more than \$2000 for each unauthorized employee;

Second Offense: Not less than \$2,000 and not more than \$5000 for each unauthorized employee;

Third Offense: Not less than \$3000 and not more than \$10,000 for each unauthorized employee.

There are also civil penalties for failing to comply with record-keeping requirements. Employers who fail to properly complete,

retain, and present for inspection the worker verification form (I-9 form) as required by law may face civil fines of not less than \$100 and not more than \$1000 for each employee for whom the form was not completed, retained, or presented. In determining penalties, consideration is given to the size of the business, good faith efforts to comply, the seriousness of the violation, and whether the violation involved unauthorized workers.

In addition, penalties exist for employers who recruit seasonal agricultural workers outside the United States. Exempted are workers who are recruited and have been granted Special Agricultural Worker (SAW) status.

Criminal Penalties

Criminal penalties are assessed for engaging in a pattern or practice of knowingly hiring or continuing to employ unauthorized employees. Employers convicted for having engaged in this practice after November 6, 1986, may face fines of up to \$3000 and/or six months imprisonment. Criminal sanctions are reserved for serious or repeat offenders.

There are also criminal penalties for engaging in fraud or false statements, or otherwise misusing visas, immigration permits, and identity documents. Persons who use fraudulent identification or employment eligibility documents or documents that were lawfully issued to another, or who make a false statement or attestation, for purposes of satisfying the employment eligibility requirements may be imprisoned for up to five years, fined or both.

Employer Verification Requirements

Under IRCA, employers are required to verify the eligibility of all job applicants except those persons hired before November 1, 1986 and others in a few select special categories.

A prospective employee must show an employer documentation to establish that he/she is a United States citizen, a lawful permanent resident alien, or an alien authorized to be employed in the United States.

The verification process is recorded on an INS I-9 form and signed by the employer and employee. Employers are required to examine and record the documents that establish identity and work eligibility which are presented by new employees. Acceptable docu-

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ments include social security cards, military dependent card, selective service card, and other forms of identification termed by the INS as "commonly-held" documents. Once the I-9 form is completed, the employer is required to maintain it for inspection upon request by either the INS or the Department of Labor.

IRCA does not require employers to determine the authenticity of documents presented to them. Rather it is expected that the employers accept documents in good faith. If employers are suspicious of a document they can contact the INS for assistance in determining the document's authenticity.

If prospective employees cannot produce the acceptable documents they cannot be hired. Employers are required to terminate the employment of undocumented workers hired after November 6, 1986, if the employee cannot establish that he/she is presently authorized to work or fails to complete an I-9 form.

Termination or refusal to employ must not be based on foreign language or appearance. IRCA prohibits discrimination based on the individual's national origin or, in the case of a U.S. citizen or intending citizen, because of his or her citizenship status.

Implementation of Employer Sanctions

The implementation of employer sanctions and the anti-discrimination section of IRCA involved three distinct time periods. December 1, 1986 through May 31, 1987 was designated an intensive public information period. The INS was responsible for providing information to employers throughout the United States about employer sanctions. During this education period, employers were not subject to criminal or civil penalties for hiring unauthorized workers. They were, however, required to inform all employees hired after November 6, 1986 that beginning June 1, 1987 they had to provide proof of eligibility. Also, during this time period the Special Counsel for Immigration Related Unfair Employment Practices, U.S. Department of Justice, was responsible for education about the anti-discrimination provision of the law. During the first year the Special Counsel attorneys gave over 70 presentations at seminars, conferences and meetings throughout the country. They spoke to employer groups, unions, attorneys, personnel officers and federal agencies, including the INS, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Office (EEOC). Videotapes

made by the Special Counsel were also made available to employers. Finally, both the INS and Special Counsel Office distributed several thousand information packets containing explanatory material concerning employer sanctions and IRCA's nondiscrimination provision. During this period of time the INS spent up to 50 percent of its investigative time and a sizable amount of patrol border resources educating employers. Specifically, the INS contacted around one million employers and sent out more than seven million pamphlets. Also, the INS established the goal of 20,000 inspections for 1988. Of these, 12,000 were completed; fewer than 2000 employers were cited and 100 were given "intent-to-fine" (ITF) citations.

From June 1, 1987 through May 31, 1988 limited enforcement actions took place. Employers hiring, recruiting or referring for a fee undocumented workers received warning citations for their first violation.

On June 1, 1988 employers sanctions became fully effective. Since this time employers have been subject to fines and upon establishment of a pattern and practice of violations, subject to criminal prosecution or civil action as previously described. As of September 16, 1989, the INS had issued over 3,5000 intent-to-fine notices to employers for employing unauthorized workers or for not completing I-9s. The fines assessed totaled almost \$17 million. After negotiations with employers, the INS settled for about 1.6 million. In addition, the INS issued over 5,300 notices to employers during this period. According to the INS, as of September, 1989, it prevailed in all 431 closed employer sanction cases where the employers requested hearings. In most of these cases the employers settled with the INS before the hearing (GAO 1990:88).

More specifically in the Southwest, in the Dallas INS region, fines assessed against employers have varied from \$50,000 in 1988, \$420,000 in 1989, \$300,000 in 1990 to \$80,000 in 1991.

Employer Sanctions: Evaluations From Several Perspectives Employer Viewpoint

Since the initial discussion by Congress of employer sanctions, employers have expressed concern about its fairness, workability, and intended goals. With the implementation of IRCA, employers concerns have intensified. One of the major concerns of employers has been the lack of clarity in the information provided by the INS. This has

led to some confusion about the provisions of employer sanctions in IRCA. This complaint about the INS is not new. Similar types of responses have been heard throughout the implementation of IRCA (Bean et al. 1989, Berardi 1989, 1992, Stoddard 1989, Tomasi 1989, 1990).

This claim has some basis in fact as seen in reports evaluating the implementation of employer sanctions. The GAO's 1988 employer survey, with a survey population of 4 million employers, found that 22 percent of the nation's employers were not aware that the law existed and as many as 20 percent of those aware of the law did not clearly understand the law's major provisions. Furthermore, about 50 percent of the employers surveyed had not completed the required I-9 forms for their new employees. Although the 1990 GAO report indicates that the INS has improved its education programs, some improvement is still called for. The report states:

Employer sanctions' effectiveness will increase to the extent employers are aware of the law, understand the I-9 requirement and comply voluntarily. After considerable government education efforts, 83 percent of the nation's employers reported awareness of the law (of a survey population of 4.6 million). On the basis of our survey, an estimated 1.7 million employers said they believed the government's education program was helpful. Although voluntary employer compliance has increased, 35 percent were still not fully complying with the I-9 requirement. We believe this non compliance level suggests a lack of employer understanding of the legal requirements (GAO 1990:100).

Employers also criticized the IRCA provision for placing too large of a burden upon them. This was in terms of the amount of paper work (filling out the I-9 form) and the difficulty in collecting the required documentation from workers. The view that employers would turn into cautious immigration agents because of the required paperwork is succinctly stated in the following comment:

...the lack of a clear method to ensure proper documentation leaves the employer on the horns of a dilemma. Under-zealous compliance could lead to fines and penalties being imposed. Yet over-jealousness could lead to

massive civil right violations of due process and citizens' rights to privacy (Lemay 1990:151).

In addition, many employers were concerned with the cost associated with the extra time needed to fill out the paperwork. Many critics pointed to studies by the INS and Small Business Association that stated that the annual projected cost of completing forms is estimated to be between \$182 million (INS) and \$675 million (Small Business Association). Employers also felt that the ten-minute projected completion time of the form was unreasonable and that it was likely that many employers would be forced to hire at least one new worker just to complete all the I-9 forms.

Employers have also had mixed responses to the civil and criminal fines. Their responses vary from those who feel that the fines are totally unreasonable and should be eliminated to those who feel that the fines should be increased. Most employers have been supportive of the fines but only when employers are given a series of warnings before fines are levied.

Employee Viewpoint

Employee concerns are twofold. First, that it is difficult for many individuals to produce the needed documentation to complete the I-9 form. This was seen to be a particular problem for less-educated and marginally employed U.S. workers. As analysts of IRCA have pointed out, these are the workers that were intended to benefit the most by the law and may be hurt the most by the documentation requirement (Schey and Holguin 1990:177).

Some critics have felt that the required documents, other than a social security card, will not be familiar to most workers (e.g., Certificate of United States Citizenship, INS Form I-94, Temporary Resident Card, Native American Tribal documents, and Refugee Travel Card). In addition, many have been critical of the listing of other more common documents such as a driver's license, voter registration card, or a birth certificate. As Holguin and Schey (1990:177) point out many unemployed U.S. workers, particularly those from rural areas and those with little education, are not likely to have a driver's license, voter registration card, or a copy of their birth certificate.

Initially, employees were also concerned about the short period of time that is allowed to produce the required documentation. INS

regulations state that if an employee cannot produce the required documents at the time of hire, they must produce the necessary documentation in three days. The employee then has 21 days to submit the documents to the employer. The perceived problem with this regulation is that it will be difficult for employees to receive documents in the required time. As critics have noted:

It is absurd to require the production of such documents within 21 days when most agencies give a low priority to responding to requests for certified copies of such public records and often take months or even years to respond to such requests. Delays are also frequently encountered because documents have been lost, placed in storage archives or on microfilm, or the requesting party has insufficient information to allow the agency to expeditiously retrieve the requested documents (Schey and Holguin 1990:177).

This concern, although a major one at the time of the implementation of IRCA, has since become a minor one. Ordering and receiving documents did not produce as many problems as anticipated. Rather a different problem occurred. Errors were found in reproduced documents that made them appear fraudulent.

Finally, many employees and critics of IRCA were concerned with the potential discrimination that could occur with the implementation of employer sanctions. Many felt that IRCA's nondiscrimination provisions would only protect workers from discriminatory hiring practices. Other types of discriminatory practices relating to terms and conditions of employment are not covered. The fear is that employers will assign certain workers more undesirable tasks or pay them lower wages simply because they are not citizens.

In addition, other types of discrimination were anticipated. Examples of these are:

- Asking only “foreign-looking” applicants for work-documentation;
- Hiring only U.S. citizens;
- Firing grandfathered employees;
- Depriving IRCA legalization applicants of benefits;
- Imposing English-Only rules.

The final GAO report supports these concerns. It is estimated that 227,000 employers reported that they began as a practice, as a result

of IRCA, not to hire job applicants whose foreign appearance or accent led them to suspect that they might be unauthorized workers. Also, an estimated 346,000 employers said that they applied IRCA's verification system only to persons who had a "foreign" appearance (GAO Report 1990:41).

In addition, the GAO's study of 360 employers in Chicago and San Diego showed that the "foreign-appearing" and "foreign-sounding" Hispanic member of matched pairs (Hispanic with an Anglo) was three times more likely to encounter unfavorable treatment than the Anglo non-foreign appearing member of the pairs. The Anglo members received 52percent more job offers than the Hispanics (GAO, 1990: pg.48-50).

The second GAO report concluded that of the 3.3 million employers who were aware of the law, 528,000 (16 percent) engaged in some type of illegal discriminatory practices related to employer sanctions. The report also concluded that 15 percent of employers who were aware of IRCA, did not fully understand the penalties for acts of discrimination.

The final GAO report found that on the basis of employers' responses to key questions asked about their hiring behavior and how it related to provisions of IRCA, that substantial amounts of discrimination did occur as a result of IRCA (1990:37). GAO reported that an estimated 461,000 employers, or 10 percent of all those surveyed, reported national origin discrimination as a result of the law. It further stated that many employers discriminated because the verification system does not provide a simple or reliable method to verify a job applicant's eligibility to work (1990:60-63). The study also found that although higher rates of discrimination were found in Texas and California, such practices were not confined to any one particular region of the United States (GAO 1990:38-40).

In addition, GAO reported that 78 percent of employers surveyed wanted a simpler or better verification system. Because of this concern, the INS plans to reduce the number of worker eligibility cards it issues, make it more difficult to counterfeit cards, and replace 20 million old INS cards with new ones. However, this is dependent on further funding from Congress which many feel is not likely.

INS Viewpoint

Many employers and employees alike have complained that the enforcement of employer sanctions has been handled in

a capricious manner. For example, Dallas attorney Craig Miley, who represents employers in immigration cases states: "The way the rules are written, it's like a card game where the INS holds all the aces. All the employer can do is be cooperative and try to negotiate a lower fine" (Dallas Morning News November 4, 1991:10A).

The INS has countered this view by forcefully asserting that the sanctions have worked, that businesses are hiring fewer undocumented workers and that the penalties have been systematically implemented. This view is summarized by Lynn M. Legion of the INS' Dallas District Office:

Before the law passed, we'd drive up to a construction site and people would scatter in 14 directions, and all we could do is shake our finger at the owner and say, "Don't do that." But when the law came about in 1986 it really changed the way that business is done (Dallas Morning News November 4, 1991:10A).

The INS also feels, given its limited resources, that the system of inspecting I-9 forms is working fairly well. Additionally, the INS has reported that its education program has sufficiently provided information to employers about the sanction provisions of IRCA.

Finally, the INS has contended that IRCA has led to a reduction in the number of undocumented immigrants being apprehended along the U.S. southern border. The INS cites the following statistics to support its claim: 1.6 million apprehensions in 1986, 943,000 in 1988, and 854,128 in 1989. However, since 1989, the numbers have increased indicating that the result of IRCA has not necessarily been to control the number of undocumented immigrants crossing the border. In 1990, the number increased to 1.13 million and many officials are now saying this year may surpass the 1986 records.

Employer Perspectives on Implementation of IRCA's Employer Sanctions: A Case Study of an East Texas Community

One of the unique provisions of IRCA was assigning employers responsibility for verifying worker eligibility. In an attempt to understand employer views of this provision and their role in its implementation, 50 businesses in an east Texas community were surveyed. The community of 30,000 is located in a rural county of 50,000. The thirty largest businesses, in terms of number of employees, were surveyed and, in addition twenty other businesses were randomly selected. Many of the businesses are engaged in work that has been immigrant-dependent. The types of businesses range from a University with 1500 employees to live poultry haulers (100 employees) to timber-related industries (25-500 employees). The community economy is based on the University and the poultry and timber industries. The study was conducted with the aim to understand:

- (1) the employer's experience with the implementation of employer sanctions,
- (2) the employer's awareness of IRCA's provisions and their attempt to comply with the law,
- (3) the costs incurred by employers associated with the implementation of worker verification, and
- (4) if employer practices led to discrimination against foreign-looking or foreign-sounding job applicants.

Overall the employers were very responsive to filling out the questionnaires. Thirty-eight questionnaires were returned. The following types of businesses participated in the study (the range of the number of employees is also indicated): Agricultural (10-401); Wood Products (25-500); Poultry Breeders (20-1285); Municipal Government (282); Educational Institutions (700-1500); Health Care Facilities (150-600); Manufacturing (25-500); and, Retail Sales (7-200).

Employer Views on INS Activity

The study attempted to assess the character of INS enforcement activity. How many times had an employer been contacted by the INS? Were there INS educational seminars at the place of business or in the employer's community? Did the employer view the INS as disruptive or helpful?

A majority of the employers reported that their contact with the INS had been non disruptive and that it had been primarily for the purpose of education. Most employers expressed a desire for a continuing education program. This request came most often from small businesses in rural areas.

Of the employers surveyed only three reported that the INS had inspected their I-9 forms. Two of these businesses were subsidiaries of larger firms that had their forms checked by the INS. Because of the INS education program and the reality that businesses could have their I-9 forms checked at a future time, many employers established internal audits of their forms. This is explained by a representative of a major poultry breeder:

An audit was recently completed by the INS. We were found to be in compliance but 23% were forged documents. This was in a Dallas plant. These people are being replaced. I have been told by the Director in San Antonio that forgeries are coming out of the Houston area. Audits are internally showing we are in compliance. When they audit us I doubt we will see any more than 2-3%.

Overall, employers desired more INS activity for educational purposes and expected that the INS would be auditing them in the future. The only exception to this view were small businesses who did not expect to be contacted any time soon by the INS.

Employer Knowledge of Verification and Sanction Provisions

Most employers surveyed (N=36) reported that they were aware of IRCA's employer verification and sanction provisions. In addition, most employers had instituted a verification process in an effort to comply with the law. The high percentage may be due to the fact that the respondents were selected on size (number of employees) and also, that many represented former undocumented worker-dependent businesses which perhaps would have been more likely to be aware of IRCA's provisions.

However, even though most employers were aware of the provisions, many did not have an in-depth knowledge of the law. As many as 50 percent of the sample were unclear on certain provisions, such as acceptable documentation or that the possibilities that fines

existed if the forms were not completed. On the other hand, 50 percent of the businesses had a detailed understanding of the law and had made a conscious effort to establish an efficient worker verification process.

Finally, only two employers (both with fewer than 20 employees engaged in light manufacturing) displayed complete ignorance of the law. Rather, those who were not very familiar with its provisions tended to comment that:

...the law is not a problem because I have never hired illegal aliens.... I always hire Americans so that the law doesn't effect me.

Only these employers, representing small businesses with fewer than 30 employees and located in rural areas, did not seem concerned with filing the I-9 forms.

Effect on Hiring Practices

The survey did not ascertain if employers had a history of hiring undocumented workers. Thus, it was not possible to measure if their hiring practices in regard to this had changed. Not surprising, employers tended to be on their guard in terms of this subject.

In respect to changes at the workplace because of the law, many of the larger firms were not as effected as their smaller counterparts, because hiring was done through the corporate office. This office utilized specialized personnel who brought the firm's hiring practices into compliance with IRCA.

Many mid-size and small firms found that it was easier to go through a state employment office who would certify employees for their business.

Employer Costs

The survey attempted to find out if employers significantly changed their business practices with the implementation of IRCA and further if there were increased costs associated with the implementation.

Almost all employers (N=34) stated that the filing of I-9 forms led to additional paperwork for their office staff and that additional employee time was needed to complete the verification forms. Most employers felt that at least one, if not more, of their employees had become "immigration agents." An exception to this view is expressed by the following personnel directors:

The process takes only three minutes per hire: unless the new employee does not have appropriate documentation. This incidence occurs three out of eight times. In this incidence, the time required increases to approximately 30 minutes total. This estimate includes calling the employee to remind information is needed and giving directions to the Social Security office and explaining the proper forms to return.

The process takes only an extra minute or so. What's the big stink about! Why do employers argue with the new law? The only ones who are arguing are those looking for cheap undocumented labor.

The cost associated with the implementation of the employer verification process was the time spent filling out forms that otherwise could have been applied to firm's work. Most companies did not report the hiring of additional personnel to fill out the forms.

Employer Discrimination

The survey did not directly measure discrimination. However, there were responses from a few employers that seemed to link employer sanctions with a caution toward the hiring of foreign-born workers. For example, when asked if they were aware of other employers not hiring individuals because of appearance or language ability, five employers responded in the affirmative (two of these employers were poultry breeders/haulers and the other three were associated with the lumber industry). Others had the following comments:

- If someone cannot speak the language, if persons (employers) cannot relate to employees it would be difficult to work with them.
- People who are not fluent in English do not easily understand instructions or safety rules.
- I only hire American citizens, because it is not easy to qualify the applicants.
- It was not necessary to make them all fill out the forms. We require S.S. cards and driver's licenses as standard procedures, yet even obvious Americans are required to complete I-9.

—This is all extra paper work—reports, forms, etc. Plus, normally immigrants are easy enough to detect.

Employer Evaluation of Employer Sanctions

A clear majority (N=29) of employers felt that the employer sanctions were justifiable and, further, that it was reasonable for employers to determine worker eligibility for employment. However, these employers also qualified their responses by stating that it is reasonable to ask employers to fill out I-9 forms and collect documents, *if* they are not responsible for checking the authenticity of documents. This is explicated in the following statement:

Yes it is reasonable as long as we record the document but are not expected to determine the authenticity of the documents, then I see no problem.

Other employees stated that the requirement was reasonable but difficult to carry out and they felt as if they had become “immigration agents.”

I don't feel the demand for employers to verify work is unreasonable; however, I do feel that actually ensuring compliance with the INS rules can be difficult; i.e., keeping up with expiration dates of green cards, lack of communication from the government regarding worker status of applicants from El Salvador; 21 day work eligibility requirement; and changing of various acceptable documents by the INS without notification to employers

Yes and no, (I) understand the importance of only hiring employees eligible to work in the United States so not to displace eligible workers. But (I) feel I'm doing work for immigration. It's not always easy for some lower income people to obtain necessary documents when they have been out of work and have little if any money.

It is reasonable if an employer has doubts that a prospective employer is legally documented-however, it appears that the INS is requiring employers to do their work to some degree.

The same percent of employers (N=29) who felt the law was reasonable also felt the fines for citations were reasonable. This was with the proviso that the employers do not *knowingly* hire undocumented workers. However, eight employers felt that fines were unreasonable and should be abolished. This is balanced by an employer who felt the fines should be at least doubled if not tripled.

Employers also complained that compliance with the law involved too much paperwork and the filling out of forms that are too long and unclear. Many complained that a Spanish version was not available to them. Most employers (N=32) also felt that the number of eligible documents (17) should be reduced. One third of those surveyed had difficulty in verifying documents, either because it was hard to locate an expiration date or they were unfamiliar with the document. In addition, most employers felt that the verification process should be made easier and that the INS could help by establishing a n 800 number that employers could call with questions about documents.

—The verification process needs to be a little more “cut and dried.” Too many different documents are valid.

—Many times the green cards appear very authentic, they prove to be forged. The forms are too detailed and unclear. Poorly designed.

—Limit the documentation which is valid to one particular card.

—Too much government. Too much paperwork. It adds to the paperwork for all employers.

—Just use a valid SS card and let the INS do the rest. . . . It's their job.

—The process needs to be changed. As it is critical that we hire new persons quickly, we are not always able to do this with the verification process.

Finally, a four employers expressed the concern that employer sanctions were causing corporations to look elsewhere for employees and business opportunities. The personnel director for a mid-size (400 employees) manufacturing firm expressed this sentiment:

I think the law is paving the way for our employer to hire “Americans” whatever their background is. I do feel that a counteractive approach is being made by employers by sending work out of this country. If

they can't hire who and for what pay they would like to then they will send the jobs out to the country who will conform to their needs.

Conclusion

Employer perspectives on the implementation of IRCA employer sanctions indicate that employers are willing to be part of the implementation process if there are safeguards to protect them. Most employers indicated that the worker verification process is now part of their hiring process and thus, it would not really matter to them if the law was repealed. Many employers stated: "The routine has now been established for implementing IRCA's requirements...it's part of our hiring practices. No need to change it now." Only two employers, disgruntled with the extra paper-work and for some with the intent of the law, desired to have the law repealed. That hiring practices are now routinized seems to be a key factor in explaining why east Texas employers are not as critical of employer sanctions as compared with employers surveyed by the GAO (1988). In addition, a few of the problems anticipated by employers did not occur, for example, increased operating costs or intrusive INS audit practices.

However, the implementation of the worker verification provision has led to an uneasiness between employers and the INS. This has resulted because employers have found the forms unclear and the additional paperwork burdensome. The documentation process is seen as time-consuming and determining the authenticity of documents is a continuing problem. In addition, the dilemma between under and over compliance is a serious concern of employers who are unsure of their responsibilities in the employee verification process.

Employer suggestions to remedy many of these problems are similar to the ones proposed by the General Accounting Office (1990). They are: (1) increase employer understanding through effective education efforts; (2) reduce the number of worker eligibility documents; (3) make the documents harder to counterfeit, thereby reducing document fraud; and, (4) apply the new document standard to all members of the workforce.

Most employers are aware of the provisions of the law, although a few were doing a spotty job in implementing worker verification and record-keeping requirements. As noted in the study,

this could work to the disadvantage of authorized but foreign-sounding or looking job seekers.

Facilitating employee compliance in the future will be a challenge for employers and the INS. The law mandates that non specialists in worker verification become specialists with the added incentive of INS inspections and fines. For the government, this suggests the need for a continuing and expanded education program. Secondly, there is the need to simplify the verification process. This will enable employers to complete the process quickly and feel less like immigration agents.

The INS is already planning to meet some of these needs, although proposed changes will take effect in the 1990s. For example, the INS has plans to reduce the number of eligibility cards and to make these two cards more difficult to counterfeit. In addition, the INS has plans to replace over 20 million old INS cards with new ones. However, this is dependent on additional funding and personnel. Unless the process is expedited, little will be accomplished in the near term to reduce employer confusion and uncertainty about undocumented worker eligibility status.

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Improving Living Conditions in Colonias in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas

J. Michael Patrick* and Armando Alonso**

Resumen

El Valle del Río Grande del sur de Tejas, con una población que se espera alcance un millón de habitantes para el año 2000, es una de las regiones del mayor crecimiento del Estado y de la Nación. En la actualidad esta región se caracteriza por ser la de mayor pobreza y desempleo del país. Las condiciones de vida en las colonias, el hogar de miles de trabajadores, tanto migratorios como temporales y rurales son paupérrimas; en su gran mayoría las colonias carecen de servicios de alcantarillado y drenaje, agua potable y calles pavimentadas. El tipo de vivienda se encuentra muy por debajo del promedio recomendable, y aunado a la falta de servicios sanitarios la salud de los mismos residentes de las colonias, y el público en general, corren un grave riesgo. Aunque esta población represente de un 10 a 15 por ciento de la población total, como fuerza de trabajo representa de un 20 a 25 por ciento.

Adecuadamente educados, capacitados y entrenados y, en condiciones de vida saludables, los residentes de las colonias pueden contribuir significativamente al futuro desarrollo económico de la región. Si los problemas de bajo nivel de vida y escasas oportunidades de empleo en el área no son solucionados, los esfuerzos locales de desarrollo económico no podrán tener resultados positivos.

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Introduction

The Rio Grande Valley (RGV), comprised by Texas' southernmost counties—Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy, is bound on the south by the Northern Mexican state of Tamaulipas and on the east by the Gulf of Mexico. According to the U.S. Bureau of Census, in 1990 the RGV had total population in excess of 700,000, the nation's highest levels of unemployment and poverty, and the lowest levels of educational attainment.¹ Labor intensive agriculture, retail trade, tourism and services constitute the area's major economic activity. The region's population is over 80 percent Hispanic in origin. Brownsville, Harlingen and McAllen constitute the principal population centers on the Texas side of the border; Matamoros, Río Bravo, and Reynosa, the principal centers on the Mexican side.

Colonias, rural unincorporated communities in the RGV, like much of the Texas-Mexico border, are home for thousands of migrant and seasonal farmworkers and rural poor. Living conditions in colonias are bad. Most lack any sewerage facilities and many are without potable water, drainage, and paved streets. Housing units are mostly substandard and overall living conditions pose health hazards to colonia residents and to the public at large.

Although the numbers are imprecise, because they change (upwards) almost monthly, reliable sources estimate there are some 70,000 people residing in 700 colonias in the RGV.² The colonias vary in size, ranging from 2000 people residing on over 100 acres to fewer than 20 people residing on less than five acres. In the average colonia 260 people reside on approximately 25 acres.³

A 1988 study of over 500 RGV colonia residents conducted by the Texas Department of Human Services (TDHS) found that 98 percent were of Hispanic origin. Spanish was their primary language, with almost three-fourths not proficient in English. While the overwhelming majority (87 percent) of the colonia residents surveyed owned their home or were in the process of buying one, living conditions for most were characterized by substandard housing and inadequate water supplies. Waste disposal was also a major problem. Most houses (89 percent) used either an outhouse, a cesspool or a septic tank system, often installed without adequate space for proper treatment and drainage.⁴

Poor living conditions place the colonia residents, particularly children, at risk with chronic health problems and contagious diseases. Over 71 percent of the residents interviewed were not covered by any health maintenance or insurance program.⁵ While the majority of the colonia residents were found to be eligible for public assistance under one or more local, state or federal government-sponsored program, less than a third avail themselves of the services due to the lack of information or the lack of transportation to access the services.⁶

For colonia residents over 16 and not in school unemployment stood at 53 percent. Of those working, nearly half worked less than 40 hours per week, and over three quarters received minimum wage or less. Colonia residents normally found employment in seasonal agricultural field work, construction, factory work, janitor or maid service and retail sales positions. Slightly less than 10 percent of the colonia residents interviewed reported having received vocational training. More than half of those receiving training, however, earned more than the minimum wage.⁷

Illiteracy is the norm rather than the exception in the colonias. Over 35 percent of the residents surveyed did not speak, read or write English well or not at all. 50 percent of the colonia adults interviewed who started high school never finished; one fourth never attended high school. Of those who completed high school, nine percent attended college; one in every four attending college graduated.⁸

The continued growth of colonias poses a serious problem to the future development of the region. Colonia residents represent 10-15 percent of the RGV population and comprise 20-25 percent of the area labor force. Properly trained, educated, housed and in good health colonia residents can contribute significantly to the future economic development of the region. Failure to resolve the problems of substandard living conditions and limited employment opportunities that characterize life in the colonias will act as a brake on local economic development efforts.

Study Objectives and Methodology

The purpose of the study was to identify policies and programs that would lead to improved living conditions in the colonias. While the findings and recommendations of this study are based upon conditions prevalent in the colonias of the Rio Grande Valley of South

Texas, some degree of generalization can be made to the entire U.S.—Mexico border where the colonias are heavily concentrated.

Study objectives included:

1. Documentation of living conditions in the RGV colonias.
2. Identification of the factors contributing to the growth of colonias in the RGV.
3. Identification of strategies for improving living conditions in existing RGV colonias and preventing their uncontrolled growth in the future.

Information and data gathering activities and analysis undertaken to achieve the study objectives included:

1. Review of reports, studies and secondary data on RGV colonias from available public and private sources, including UT-Pan American and other universities and colleges; the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council and other area economic development agencies; the Texas Water Development Board; the Texas Departments of Health, Human Services and Agriculture; and non-profit volunteer organizations.
2. Review of existing laws and ordinances pertaining to the management and control of colonia-type subdivisions.
3. Interviews with selected colonia residents (51 from 22 colonias), colonia developers (14), public officials (10), service agency administrators (10), and volunteer organizations (4) in the two counties. Although the colonia households interviewed were not selected as the result of a statistically random procedure an effort was made to insure those chosen provided a balance between urban and rural, large and small and resident tenure—old and new.

Findings

A. RGV Colonias: Contributing Factors

Although the proliferation of colonias is relatively a recent development, colonias have existed since the early 1900s when the first waves of new Mexican immigrants streamed into the Southwest to work in the railroads, agriculture and mining industries. In the Rio

Grande Valley (RGV), intensive land development and commercial irrigated farming, which began around 1905, served as the pull factor for Mexican immigration. Because most of the immigrants were poor and landless, they took low-paying jobs on farms, ranches and in canneries. Many remained in the area, adding to the native Hispanic population. Historically, every expansion in the economy of the RGV has attracted thousands of new residents to the area.

The basic causes for the growth of RGV colonias in the 1970s and 1980s, and the magnitude of the problems affecting them, included the sharp rise in population during this period, limited employment opportunities, and the lack of controls on substandard subdivision developments in the rural areas. As a result, the number of colonias mushroomed from 70 in 1965 to 700 in 1990, and the colonia population increased from an estimated 32,000 people in 1965 to 81,478 in 1990. If the past trends continue, the number of families living in colonias will likely increase.

The income and employment levels of RGV colonia residents are the lowest in Texas. According to the TDHS survey,⁹ the average annual household income of RGV colonia residents in 1987 was \$6,784, only slightly more than half the \$11,497 average for colonia residents of the El Paso Valley, the second highest area of colonia concentration in Texas. The main reason for this major difference is that more RGV colonia residents, compared to El Paso, are employed in agriculture, which is seasonal and low-paying. As a major agricultural area, the RGV provides jobs to thousands of colonia residents. In fact, the TDHS survey found that 45.5 percent of RGV colonia residents were employed in agriculture with construction employing 14.4 percent of the residents for the second highest ranking.¹⁰

The RGV is also the largest home base for migrant laborers in the country, most of whom live in colonias.¹¹ In Las Milpas, a typical colonia south of Pharr, Texas, about 75 percent of the 1500 families residing there had migrated north to follow the crops in 1988.¹² Some, but not all, colonia residents reported that they used to be migrants or that they were still migrating. Regardless of family size, the heads of the family preferred to migrate when their children were able to work in the fields.

As a result of the seasonal nature of agriculture and limited job opportunities in the non-agricultural sector, the unemployment rate for

RGV colonia residents is extremely high: 47 percent versus 15.5 percent for the RGV and about eight percent for the state.¹³

The 1988 TDHS survey found very low levels of educational attainment and vocational training among RGV colonia residents. Nearly 80 percent of colonia residents 16 years and older had never attended school or quit school and only 16.6 percent are high school graduates. Among heads of household, 86 percent had not completed high school. In addition, only 9.9 percent of all colonia residents 16 years or older and not in school have received vocational training.¹⁴

Low wages paid to workers in the RGV severely limits the ability of colonia residents to improve their living conditions, especially their housing. According to the TDHS survey, nearly one-half (48 percent) of all Valley workers reported earning the federal minimum wage or less.¹⁵ The majority of colonia heads of households indicated that home improvements or repairs were needed and that they desired to make them but that they had no money to pay for them. Because of their limited incomes, some residents reported that they might have a son or daughter make the necessary improvements.

Based on survey data and interviews with colonia residents, it is quite clear that people choose to live in the colonias because land is cheaper and housing is more affordable than in the cities, where building and zoning requirements are strictly enforced. With a strong incentive to be homeowners and the availability of attractive purchase arrangements, poor people who want to buy do so in the colonias.

Social factors also make the colonias an attractive place in which to live. According to the residents, the ease or independence of living in a colonia ranked second as a very important reason for choosing to live in a colonia. Other reasons cited included the lack of affordable public and private housing and the desire to be near relatives or a job.

The strong demand for low-cost land and housing has played well in the hands of land developers. Developers have seen the demand and have reaped great economic benefits from selling cheap lots from land that is largely unsuitable for agricultural or commercial use. Both scrupulous and unscrupulous developers have flourished in the RGV. Greater public awareness of the colonia problem and litigation against fraudulent developers have led to their universal condemnation. There is a very low opinion of one-time and fly-by-night developers. Profes-

sional developers and public officials blame the greed of fraudulent developers for the existence of the so-called "long-neglected" colonias, those that lack basic infrastructure.

An additional factor that facilitated unscrupulous developers in the past was the hands-off attitude of city and county governments to the activities of land developers. For too long, developers profited from the non-enforcement of state health laws and county regulations regarding the platting of subdivisions and flood plain controls.

Even though new measures have been taken to control the growth of colonias, their existence throughout the RGV is a fact. What is also readily apparent is that colonias have features which identify them as enclaves of very poor people. In fact, the colonias are, to a large extent, a world unto themselves. Socially, economically, and politically, the colonia residents are mostly outside the mainstream of American life.

Poverty and powerlessness pervade the colonias of the RGV. Although a resilient people who have learned to survive poverty, economic hardships, and social isolation from the rest of American society, the residents of the colonias recognize that they are poor and powerless. Unfortunately, poverty, exploitation and unkept promises breed other ills, such as distrust and suspicion. Few colonia residents, however, display outward signs of anger at the larger society. Still, delinquency and other crimes are increasing probably because of the social and economic problems found throughout the colonias.

The powerlessness of the colonia residents in the RGV is in many ways similar to that faced by earlier immigrants from Mexico. Low levels of education, low rates of citizenship, and migration tend to limit effective political awareness and participation. Coming to the United States with at best a limited tradition of political involvement and having to adjust to a new environment, colonia residents are clearly at a disadvantage in making the political system respond to their needs. Moreover, because colonia people face daily struggles just to meet their basic needs, they have little time and energy to become politicized.

B. RGV Colonias: Past and Present Efforts to Help

Although colonias have existed in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) since the 1900s, it was not until the 1960s that public action was taken to assist colonia residents, who make up a large proportion (over

60 percent) of the poor in the region. This concern was most evident in the anti-poverty programs created under the Great Society legislation—programs which sought to improve the lives of low-income people in a variety of ways. Because of the high incidence of poverty in the RGV, the county governments sponsored community action programs in the mid-1960s and 1970s. These programs sought to help low-income people, many of whom lived in colonias, with information and referral services, social services, job training, adult and health education, and housing rehabilitation. At the same time, several non-profit organizations were formed to advocate for migrants and colonia residents.

Two of the most important and successful organizations to impact the poor in the RGV were the Texas Migrant Council and *Colonias del Valle, Inc.* While the Texas Migrant Council operated day care and health care services for children of migrant families, *Colonias del Valle* sponsored a wide spectrum of physical improvement, social services, job training, and housing assistance projects. As the principal advocate for colonia residents from 1968 to the early 1980's, *Colonias del Valle* developed a large program, reaching its maximum level of funding in 1981, with about a \$5,000,000 annual budget. Hurt by the drastic domestic cuts of the Reagan Administration, *Colonias del Valle* is now a relatively small organization with a limited program and constituency. The Texas Migrant Council which never operated a program as large as *Colonias del Valle*, continues to provide migrant families in the colonias and elsewhere a range of health and education services.

In the 1980s, initiatives to improve colonias and the quality of living of colonia residents involved a multitude of public and private agencies. Since the practical demise of *Colonias del Valle* in the mid-1980s, Valley Interfaith emerged as the principal new grassroots community organization to advocate for the poor of the RGV, including colonia residents. Valley Interfaith came into the forefront of colonia advocacy following the disastrous freeze of December 25, 1983, when thousands of colonia residents were thrown out of work for many weeks and months with the ruin of the RGV's fruit and vegetable crops. However, helping colonia residents during that emergency was not the sole objective of Valley Interfaith. Its agenda also sought to obtain more social and economic benefits and dignity for the people of the RGV. In 1986, Valley Interfaith lobbied state leaders successfully

to obtain financing for water and sewer improvements in colonias. In 1987, the city of Pharr became the first beneficiary of their efforts, receiving a low-interest loan from the Texas Water Development Board to provide water and sewer services to two large colonia complexes outside of the city limits, Las Milpas on the south side and Lopezville on the northeast side. Valley Interfaith continues to work with county, state and federal officials to secure additional funding for colonia improvements.

Among other efforts, there have been a large number of social service agencies that are providing services to colonia residents. In the health care area, county health care corporations operate clinics throughout the RGV. While the level of funding has increased in the health field—for example, the Hidalgo County Health Care Corporation has doubled its budget to \$3.1 million dollars in the last four years—the number of users and needs have risen. As a result, some services have been reduced and less time, money and trained specialists are available to carry out preventive health education. The Texas Department of Human Services (TDHS)* also provides an array of services to the low-income population.

Quasi-public entities, particularly water supply corporations, have also impacted colonias, particularly those colonias in which water service is available. However, their record of service is not entirely satisfactory because many colonias are still without water services.

The cities and the counties have also had a major role in helping some colonia residents improve their living conditions. When financially able, cities have extended water and/or sewer services to surrounding colonias. But again their record of service is uneven. The cities and counties have also adopted a new attitude towards the growth of subdivisions. Since 1983, stricter enforcement of subdivision development in Hidalgo County and extension of the extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) of all Texas cities in 1987 have made it possible to better control the development of rural subdivisions, restricting colonia-type growth. In 1988, Starr County, a largely rural county, adopted for the first time a subdivision ordinance requiring platting of subdivisions and basic infrastructure such as water and sewer services, streets, lights and fire hydrants. While there is some flexibility on sewer systems, all of the other requirements must be met. These initiatives are seen by most public officials as being very helpful but they are not a panacea for the deep-rooted problems found in colonias.

The 1980s also saw recourse to traditional approaches and funding sources to solving problems in colonias. County commissioners continue to use local sources and special grants from the Texas Department of Community Affairs to pay for infrastructure improvements. There is still reliance on federally-funded Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) loans and grants to improve water supply systems and the counties continue to obtain funds for job training under diverse federal legislation. However, most officials recognize that federal programs will meet less and less the needs of the area, and greater reliance on local and state resources will be necessary.

C. RGV Colonia Problems: Solutions from the Perspective of Residents, Developers, Public Officials and Service Providers

1. Residents

Colonia residents are concerned with meeting their basic food, shelter, safety needs and gaining access to public services. They desire physical improvements in the colonias—water lines, sewerage and drainage systems, and paved streets. Colonia residents voiced a common concern, “*no hay agua, drenaje ni calles pavimentadas,*”¹⁶ (there is no water, drainage, nor paved streets). While colonia residents are aware that many social service programs are available to assist them, the lack of transportation and child care services makes it difficult to access them. They also express frustration and confusion over contradictory eligibility requirements for local, state and federal assistance programs.

Colonia residents do make home and home site improvements and repairs but their efforts are severely constrained by their limited incomes. They have a clear understanding of their limited financial opportunities and its effect on materially improving their homes. The residents remarked that a “*falta de empleos*” resulted in a “*falta de dinero.*”¹⁷

In spite of their poverty and hardship, the colonia residents expressed guarded optimism of the future. They recognize their children need to obtain an education and training to qualify for above minimum wage jobs. Parents voiced their wish for their children to better their lives, hoping that they be able “to finish school so that they could support themselves” (*terminar la escuela y estar preparados para que se mantengan*).¹⁸ Still, they are fearful that their children will have to leave the RGV to find good employment opportunities.

While colonia residents are aware of the magnitude of the problems that they face, they are at a real loss in articulating strategies

to reduce the limitations and barriers that prevent them from improving their living standards. A few colonia residents feel that their neighbors are not interested in improving the quality of life in the colonias—*"Pocos están interesados en progresar. Así están cómodos."*¹⁹ Some, however, sense a need to organize and unite—*"Tenemos que cooperar para progresar."*²⁰ Nevertheless, outside of their recent exposure to community organizing under the auspices of Valley Interfaith, there is not much activity at present time. Beyond Valley Interfaith leaders, colonia residents could not identify any other leaders. In some cases, older colonia leaders who are seen as having accommodated to political bosses are no longer respected.²¹ Such a situation makes for conflict and divisiveness.

There appear to be several barriers to developing colonia leadership to undertake advocacy. The low levels of education and low rates of citizenship, migration, and widespread feelings of hopelessness are severe limitations. Moreover, the fact that most of the older generation—the parents—are immigrants and monolingual makes it hard to recruit leaders. It will be difficult to build leadership among a population that still has to learn about participatory democracy and engage in interest-group politics, as intense as politics is practiced in the region. In the future, colonia residents will have to strive to become involved in organizing and advocating on their own behalf. A few colonia residents expressed the belief that the political system is accountable to any group that unites and presses its concern. As one resident put it—*"Unidos tenemos poder político."*²²

2. Developers, Public Officials and Service Providers

Developers, public officials and service providers across the RGV cite a litany of similar problems regarding the colonias, including: (1) the presence, especially in the recent past, of unscrupulous developers who were out to make a quick fortune; (2) the lack of authority in the counties to enforce zoning and building codes regulations in their territories; (3) the widespread lack of water and sewer services; (4) the lack of coordination and planning among officials and service providers who seek to address colonia problems; (5) the widespread lack of health and consumer education among colonia residents; and (6) a shortage of funds to attack the colonia problems.

Most developers, public officials and service providers agree on three basic strategies to deal with the existing colonia problems.

They include: (1) implementation of existing legislation and ordinances concerning substandard subdivision development; (2) providing infrastructure services to all colonias; and, (3) providing health, safety and consumer education to colonia residents and potential residents. As in the past, these strategies place reliance on obtaining as much state and federal aid as is possible to make the needed improvements. These strategies are not new but they do represent a consensus. What follows is a discussion of each strategy.

A. Regulation.

Regulating land development activities through land use planning, zoning and building code enforcement remains a high priority among public officials. Many view this activity as the best method to control colonia developments now and in the future. While officials recognize the importance of regulation, some limitations remain. Since 1987, the cities have had greater ETJ authority and, for the most part, are exercising that authority. A problem exists in the small towns where planning departments do not exist. In many cases however, the county planning departments are assisting the towns with technical expertise to insure that the regulations are followed. This arrangement appears to be working as both small town and county officials are satisfied. Regulation of new developments has in fact slowed down colonia growth. Outside of flood plain controls, health regulations and platting requirements, the counties are without authority to do much more than what they presently do.

Many county officials would like to obtain authority to regulate building in rural areas. Up to now, they have made very little progress because the legislature is opposed to giving them more authority. A key Valley legislator has stated that he strongly objects to the counties getting such broad authority on two grounds. He asserts that the past record of the counties in regulating is not very good and that more power could potentially be oppressive to hard-pressed colonia residents who could not afford to build, if new and more expensive standards and procedures were set up. The chances for obtaining new legislation also appear dim because rural counties claim they could not afford to enforce building codes. Developers point out that land use planning, zoning and building code enforcement will result in more expensive housing at a time when the demand is for more affordable housing. While the developers support the elimination of substandard housing they empha-

size the critical need to help colonia residents finance home ownership and improvements.

B. Infrastructure and Services.

Making water, sewer and other utility services available to all of the colonias in the RGV is a high priority for officials, developers, and service providers. Clearly such an undertaking will be very expensive. A study of 29 RGV colonias in 1985 estimated that it would cost \$50 million to up-grade to minimum standards the basic services provided to the colonias including water, sewerage, drainage and paved streets.²³ More recent estimates place the total cost of up-grading infrastructure in the RGV's 700 colonias at \$500 million.²⁴

A number of water supply corporations across the RGV have sought to supply colonias with potable water. Their efforts have been hampered however by the lack of federal and state funds to build the systems and extend the water lines to the colonias. Ironically, in many cases, where water lines have been extended, colonia residents have not been able to afford the hook-up costs. A small number of RGV cities are expanding their services to outlying colonias but the costs are often prohibitive. Many small town officials, with limited tax bases, are seeking assistance from the counties to secure state and federal funds.

The problem of delivering water to the colonias is not just an issue of finding adequate funding, it is part of a more complex issue concerning the distribution of available water resources between agricultural and municipal users in the RGV. According to a recent study, even though some water mains are within striking distance of many colonias, there is little incentive for water-short cities or supply corporations to provide water, given the existing distribution of water rights.²⁵ The colonias are located in rural areas and thus have agricultural water rights. The cities and water supply corporations have municipal water rights. With the rapid population growth that the RGV has experienced over the past several decades, many cities are approaching the limits of their water allocations and are looking to purchase additional water rights. Consequently without a mechanism for the orderly conversion of agricultural water rights held by the rural colonias, many cities and water supply corporations would be obliged to commit their limited water resources to supply the colonias. Cities and water supply corporations are not anxious to do this.

The most costly service which remains unavailable in nearly all colonias is sewerage treatment. Officials have discussed regional approaches, but action has not been taken to date. A recent Texas Water Development Board study indicates that \$93 million to \$153 million would be necessary to build regional sewerage treatment facilities for the RGV colonias.²⁶ Beyond study and discussion, few positive signs of coordinated planning can be found.

The principle sources of funds (grants and low-interest loans) to finance water and sewerage systems in the colonias include the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) and the Economic Development Administration (EDA) at the federal level and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds and the Texas Water Development Board at the state level. In recent years the Texas Departments of Agriculture and Commerce have been involved on a limited basis in funding water and wastewater demonstration projects in the colonia.

Although efforts have been made at both the federal and state level in recent years to increase funding for colonia infrastructure projects, the realities of austere budget times has rendered these efforts more symbolic than real. For example, the U.S. Congress recently appropriated \$25 million in grants for engineering analysis and construction of water and sewerage facilities to colonias along the U.S.—Mexico border.²⁷ Obviously, this amount will be inadequate to meet all the needs of the RGV, one section of the entire border.

C. Education.

Public officials and social service personnel agree that health, safety and consumer education of colonia residents will go a long way towards improving colonia living. These people see the public schools as positive social agents for change. Health and nutrition specialists believe that low-income children often take home what they learn and teach their parents how to improve their eating habits, health and physical environment. Sanitation officials of the health departments, in particular, spend much of their time educating colonia residents about safe water and sewage disposal systems after health hazards have been reported to them. Unfortunately, each public agency presently handles the needs of its own clientele without regard to overall planning and coordination. Many believe that educating colonia residents would be more successful if all of the available resources are better coordinated.

The method chosen for delivering educational materials and information is also important. A study recently conducted by the Texas A & M Extension Service found that even though many colonia residents were interested in receiving information on nutrition and health related topics few did so because the programs were not held at a time or in a location accessible to them.²⁸ Holding educational programs in the colonias is the best strategy for facilitating resident participation, according to the Texas A & M study. Colonia residents agree with the study conclusion and hasten to add that they also would make greater use of the range of social service programs available if they could access them through an office in their colonia or nearby.

Clearly, increasing the level of health, consumer, and nutrition education among colonia residents will require the coordinated effort of the different health, social welfare agencies and schools. One positive development in this regard is a two-year pilot project recently started by the Texas Department of Human Services (TDHS) in two colonias where social workers will provide on-site services from their colonia based office.²⁹ Texas Rural Legal Aid, Inc. attorneys also stressed that more consumer education regarding the purchase of colonia lots should be made available so that colonia residents can become aware of the health, economic and legal consequences that would result by their decision to buy.

D. Job Training

Many public officials and social service providers, as well as a few developers, emphasized the need to provide colonia residents with better job and skill training to enhance their employment opportunities. They point out that even though the unemployment rate in the RGV is high, there are many job openings in the retail and service sectors that go unfilled. Clerical and sales positions that require a minimum of job skills and formal education are the areas of greatest opportunity. Yet, many colonia residents are unable to qualify for these jobs due to their poor command of the English language—speaking, reading and writing, and limited computational skills.

3. Other Proposals.

Several ideas related to financing home improvements in the colonias were mentioned, as well as the suggestion for establishing special colonia improvement districts to construct and operate water and sewerage facilities. Setting up a public and/or public-private

mortgage company to assist colonia residents was discussed by some developers, however, few officials and developers elaborated on the idea. Developers, in particular, seemed satisfied with the present system of selling lots under the high yielding contract-for-deed.

Utility districts or special colonia improvement districts were discussed but the general consensus is that colonia residents would not favor any new assessments and that creating more political entities would complicate further the political arena. The one exception to this situation is a new proposal involving a colonia near Brownsville. The city and colonia residents have discussed the possibility of the city building water and sewer facilities for the colonia by borrowing from the Texas Water Development Board. In turn, the colonia residents would agree to the establishment of a special utility district with monthly assessments used to pay off the loan. At the end of the repayment period, the city's public utility board would acquire the facilities and the district would be dissolved. This type of public/private initiative might provide a framework through which colonias can acquire the basic services they are lacking.

Summary

This study has sought to identify living conditions common to colonias in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. There are hundreds of colonias in the region, and hundreds more along the Texas-Mexico border. Although generally poor, living conditions differ from colonia to colonia due to varying circumstances. Future research efforts aimed at identifying these differences and their consequences will contribute to the body of knowledge on the subject and assist decision makers select policies and programs that are likely to have the greatest effect. A better understanding of the cross-border movement of individuals and families between colonias in Mexico and Texas would also contribute to efforts to improve living conditions in the region.

Notwithstanding the need and value for additional research on colonia conditions and characteristics, this study provides the basis for several recommendations for improving living conditions in colonias in the Rio Grande Valley

Recommendations

The following recommendations are meant to address the problems of substandard living conditions and limited employment opportunities that colonia residents face. Properly trained, educated, housed and in good health, colonia residents can contribute significantly to the future economic development of the region.

1. Provide leadership and organization training to colonia residents.

Colonia residents represent a valuable resource. Their ideas, energy and time should be channeled into improvement efforts in the colonias. In the past their involvement has occurred largely on an individual basis. There have been very few organized improvement efforts on a community wide basis.

2. Establish educational-service centers in the colonias.

Colonia residents are the first to recognize they benefit from health, safety and consumer education. They are also aware that they are eligible to participate in many social service program, that they currently do not use. They express frustration, however, over their inability to gain access to the available educational and service programs. Limited transportation opportunities and child care responsibilities keep them close to home, while the program delivery sites are usually located some distance away.

3. Develop alternative mechanisms to involve colonia residents in the financing of home ownership and home improvements.

The dream of all colonia residents is to own their home and they constantly strive to make home improvements when they have the money. The establishment of a colonia home mortgage company or a colonia credit union could provide a source of low-interest loan funds for financing home ownership and home improvements in the colonias.

4. Establish a regional colonia improvement authority to finance infrastructure improvements in the colonias.

A special district with authority to raise funds through limited taxing power, the issuance of bonds and the receipt of funds from public and private sources, could enter into partnerships with colonia residents, counties and cities to provide for infrastructure improvements including water, sewerage and drainage systems, and paved streets.

5.Pursue stricter enforcement of existing regulatory authority to control growth of colonias.

Counties, through the exercise of their flood plain controls, health regulations, and platting requirement authority, and cities, through the exercise of their land use planning, zoning and building code authority, can regulate and prevent the future development of substandard colonia-type subdivisions. Public officials need to pursue a policy of stricter and more comprehensive enforcement.

6.Pass state legislation that provides clear and concise statutory language permitting and encouraging city and county government cooperation in comprehensive planning and delivery of services to colonias on a regional basis.

Several state statutes, including Articles 974 a, 970 a, 2351 a-1, 4477-1, 6626 a.2, 6626 c, 6702-1 and 8280 give city and county governments the authority to regulate subdivisions. The statutes however are not clear in whose jurisdiction the final authority and responsibility rests. ³⁰

7.Conduct a detailed inventory of the job skills, training, education and work experiences of colonia residents.

Effective training and placement of colonia residents in available jobs can only take place if a clear and accurate understanding of their capabilities is known beforehand.

8.Implement programs to improve the functional literacy of colonia residents.

Colonia residents, for the most part, have English language deficiencies—reading, writing, and speaking, as well as computational deficiencies that exclude them from many job opportunities.

9.Conduct a comprehensive study of the emerging jobs opportunities in the RGV.

The RGV economy is undergoing change. Diversification is taking place. Traditional sources of employment for colonia residents, principally agriculture, are declining while new jobs are emerging in light manufacturing and related activities. Job training and placement of colonia residents can be effective only if there is a clear picture of where the jobs are today and will be tomorrow.

10. Develop job skill training programs to prepare colonia residents for emerging job opportunities.

Colonia residents lack training and work experience that qualifies them for emerging jobs.

11. Assist colonia residents begin and expand businesses by providing them with management and technical assistance, and assistance in obtaining funding.

Colonia residents experience a high rate of business failure due to poor management practices and undercapitalization.

12. Establish a small business development fund to provide equity and operating capital funds to businesses across the RGV that are owned and operated by colonia residents or employ colonia residents.

Present sources of financing are inadequate to meet the needs of businesses operated by colonia residents, as well as other small businesses in the region.

13. Promote the economic development of the RGV to increase the number of job opportunities available to colonia residents as well as non-colonia residents.

The long term solution to the colonia problem is economic development that affords colonia residents and non-colonia residents employment opportunities that pay above poverty wages.

*The Texas Department of Human Services (TDHS) administers programs that provide financial and medical assistance and social services to those who are eligible. Administered programs include Income Assistance, Medicaid, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Food Stamps, Child Protective Services, Family Support and Community Care for Aged and Disabled.

Notes

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⁴ Texas Department of Human Services, (1988) *The Colonias Factbook*. Austin, Texas. 6-5.

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⁶ ---. *The Colonias Factbook*. Austin, Texas. (1988). 7-3.

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⁸ ---. *The Colonias Factbook*. Austin, Texas. (1988). 2-5, 4-3, 4-4.

⁹ ---. *The Colonias Factbook*. Austin, Texas. (1988). 2-3.

¹⁰ ---. *The Colonias Factbook*. Austin, Texas. (1988). 5-4.

¹¹ For a good description of the problems migrant workers face in America, see Ray Marshall, (1974) *Rural Workers in Rural Labor Markets*, Salt Lake City.

¹² Carmen Anaya, personal interview, July 1988. Mrs. Anaya is a storekeeper in Colonia Las Milpas and a Valley Interfaith leader.

¹³ Texas Department of Human Services, (1988) *The Colonias Factbook*. Austin, Texas. 5-3. Texas Employment Commission, *Historical Report on Labor Force and Employment*, 1988.

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¹⁶ Olivia Moreno, Colonia Rodriguez, Maria Rivera, Colonia Lull, Lucas Zambrano, Colonia Lopezville, Personal Interviews. July 1988.

¹⁷ Zulema Hernandez, Colonia Las Milpas, Samuel Dominguez, Colonia Las Milpas and San Juanita Ponce, Colonia Lopezville, Personal Interviews. July 1988.

¹⁸ Rene Serna, Colonia Lopezville, Maria Perez, Colonia Rodriguez and Antonio Gallegos, Colonia Las Milpas, Personal Interviews. July 1988.

¹⁹ Lilia de la Rosa Hernandez, Colonia Lull, Pedro Sanez, Colonia Lopezville and Virginia Briales, Colonia Rodriguez, Personal Interviews. July 1988.

²⁰ Carmen Anaya, Colonia Las Milpas, Juan Sales, Colonia Rodriguez and Lupe Rodriguez, Colonia Lull, Personal Interviews. July 1988.

²¹ Carmen Anaya, Colonia Las Milpas, Personal Interviews, July 1988.

²² Carmen Anaya, Colonia Las Milpas and Lucas Zambrano, Colonia Lopezville, Personal Interviews. July 1988.

²³ Field Research. (1985) Center for Entrepreneurship and Economic Development, The University of Texas-Pan American.

²⁴ Estimate provided by Texas Water Development Board Staff, 1990.

²⁵ Blum, Michael J., (1986) *Controlling Options: A Study of the Management and Control of Land Development in Texas Counties*. 43.

²⁶ Texas Water Development Board. (1987) *A Reconnaissance Level Study of Water Supply and Wastewater Disposal Needs of the Colonias of the Rio Grande Valley*. Executive Summary. Austin, Texas. 43.

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²⁸ Patrick, Ida A. (1990) *Quality of Life Perceptions Among Residents of Rural Unincorporated Subdivisions in Hidalgo County, Texas*. Texas A&M University. 46.

²⁹ Texas Department of Human Services. (1989) *Partnership for Self-Sufficiency: Public/Private Initiatives, 1989 Report and Recommendations*. 20.

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Means and Ends: Two Border-Blasters

Jim B. Shattuck*

Resumen

El fenómeno de la radio fronteriza es parte de la realización de internacionalismo desde 1929 hasta nuestra época. Es fácil criticar la explotación de pobres y analfabetos de ambos países, pero quizás debemos ver el "border-blaster" como el laboratorio primero en que las reglas formales e informales de negocios fronterizos se crearon y nos llevaron a pensar internacionalmente. Dos canales—XER y XETRA—estubieron al comienzo y el fin de la era del "border-blaster", y por eso son representantes de la historia de las comunicaciones internacionales mas allá de la frontera.

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Although Marconi carried out his experiments in Italy and finally met success trying to sell his radio in England, it is in the United States that the most pervasive expansion of radio and its networks came about, the fastest growth occurring in the 1920s. Such rapid expansion, combined with the apparently pauseless greed with which American radio investors took the greater part of the desirable electromagnetic spectrum, contributed to the radio-spectrum impoverishment of the Mexican border and a disgruntled Mexican nation.¹

However, since greed is usually the source of its own punishment, Americans in the border areas of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California eventually found themselves inundated by extremely high-powered AM radio stations just over the border in Mexico. The wattages of these stations was elephantine by American standards, sometimes measuring into the thousands of kilowatts by 1971.² These stations, however, did not broadcast in Spanish to Mexican audiences. They broadcast in English to the much more lucrative American

market, and because they were in Mexico they were exempt from Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rulings regarding maximum wattage. Moreover, the Mexican stations—hereafter called border-blasters—were not bound by some of the most basic guidelines of broadcasting law, not even the dictum that broadcasting must be done in the public interest. The owners of the station could broadcast just about anything they wanted to broadcast—even medical prescriptions over the air—and they could not be stopped by the old Federal Radio Commission (FRC) since they were in Mexico, nor did Mexico feel inclined to persecute viable money-making businesses in their financially impoverished northern states of Tamaulipas, Coahuila, Nuevo León, Chihuahua, Sonora, and Baja California Norte. This much of the definition of the border-blaster has not changed, but the more recent border-blaster was a far different creature from the first unearthly AM radio mutations of the 1930s, due mainly to international agreements between Mexico and the United States, the gradual imposition of legal standards on Mexican broadcasters, and the improved sophistication of radio-market audiences. In the 1970s the foci of contention changed between competition for listener markets on both sides of the border, but the juxtaposed extremes of wealth and poverty will always generate some kind of national or technical sovereignty issue between competing U.S. and Mexican stations. The technical or commercial issues may have changed, but the antagonism seemed to be permanent, despite the best efforts of the State Department and its Mexican equivalent to regulate border-area broadcasting—that is, until 1986, when a more binding resolution was signed. However, endemic inequalities between the two countries that may not be addressed until the mid-nineties, or even later, have accounted for sixty years for the unpleasant implications of the border-blasters.

On a human level the same economic forces are at work: Mexican low overhead is drawing away American businesses, but American businesses are exploiting the desperation of the Mexican unemployed—a situation made far worse since the 1980s collapse of world oil prices after the demise of OPEC, a gambit Mexico had counted on to push it into the next century as its major source of income.³ In a cultural sense the border-blaster was representative of what our two nations have done to each other.

Two stations' histories are in order here. The first and perhaps

strangest border station was XER, a facility bought early in its life by one of America's biggest con-artists, John Brinkley. His career and his taking advantage of the weaknesses of jurisdiction in Federal Radio Commission armor stand as some of the worst examples of American Barnumesque sleaziness ever to grace the dubious pages of U.S.-Latin American relations.

Born in extreme poverty in Beta, North Carolina, John Brinkley went to herbal-doctor college and set himself up in business in Milford, Kansas. Taking smart advice, he bought a radio station, KFKB, and began broadcasting over the Midwest. The station in particular advertised his clinic, where he sought to restore the lost potency of aging men by implanting slivers of goat testicles in their scrotums. He also began to prescribe patent medicines—his own—over the air, in violation of American Medical Association rules and FRC law.⁴ Soon after, he was in trouble with the FRC and the U.S. government for his broadcasting policies, which were clearly in his own interests and not those of the listening public.

After losing a lawsuit and an election for governor of Kansas to William White, John Brinkley cast about for a way to escape the restrictions of doing business in the United States and Kansas. He would have won against White if his KFKB listeners writing in his name on the ballot had been better spellers: the name had to be spelled correctly in order for the vote to count.⁵

Brinkley had previously explored possibilities of living near the Mexican border, but no one knew why he had done so:

In between his political gyrations, he had sized up the radio situation down in sunny Mexico. Mexican officials were miffed because Canada and the United States had already taken over the best air channels on the continent. So they were not inclined to worry about the niceties of licensing a radio station on a channel already in use north of the border.⁶

Mexico had introduced commercial broadcasting in 1929. By the end of the 1930s, most cities had radio stations.⁷ Brinkley bought a Mexican government broadcasting permit for \$350,000 U.S. so that he could transmit his radio programs to the U.S. The 100,000-watt station, XER, was built in Villa (now Ciudad) Acuña, in the state of Coahuila.

According to Mehling, besides all the money Brinkley was making from advertising, he "went wild over XER. After Señor

Martínez and the Dwarfie Boys finished their songs, he came on and put the needle to the orthodox medical profession,"⁸ that is, the medical authorities in the United States that had denounced Brinkley as a quack. By using XER, Brinkley escaped adverse decisions of the FRC against him. Brinkley's chief enemy was Dr. Morris Fishbein of the American Medical Association.⁹ Brinkley charged that he was a victim of censorship because the AMA had pressured the FRC to shut down his over-the-air medical prescriptions.¹⁰ He lost his case in 1930, partly because the *Kansas City Star* and the *Kansas City Journal Post* had written separate exposés of Brinkley's operations. It is worth note here that the FRC had not granted the *Kansas City Star*'s own radio station the coveted 5000-watt increase that KFKB had received. Ironically, the same year "KFKB won the golden microphone of *Radio Digest* magazine as the most popular radio station in the nation, with 356,827 votes."¹¹ Brinkley had been silenced for advertising his goat-gland hospital and "prescribing for patients he had never seen."¹² In the Brinkley case, the U.S. Court of Appeals decided that the ruling "was not censorship, but 'the application of the regulatory power of Congress in a field within the scope of its legislative authority.'"¹³ In June 1931, Brinkley sold off the Kansas station that had made his career, KFKB, but he remained in Milford and recorded his broadcasts there, sending them afterwards for broadcast in Mexico.¹⁴ As we will see later, the mode of transmission of this prerecorded information will have important bearing on border-blaster policies in the late 1970s.

As a sidelight at better-faring XER, Brinkley also sold "fortunetelling, gold mine stocks, horoscopes, and oil burners" over the air.¹⁵ The station's hair-sizzling wattage was also instrumental in helping Brinkley. "XER was easily the most powerful radio station in the world at that time. It boomed a wide swath up the Mississippi Valley to the Canadian border and was heard clearly east to Florida."¹⁶ On August 18, 1932, the Mexican government gave Brinkley the right to increase XER's power to 500,000 watts, making it then the second most powerful radio station in the world.¹⁷

That same year, the U.S. began putting pressure on the Mexican government to close down XER in order to hurt Brinkley in the Kansas state governor's election he had once again entered. Brinkley flew to Washington and got Vice President Charles Curtis to stop the pressure on the Mexican government by making political threats—

mainly, that Brinkley himself would run for U.S. president. At the time, Brinkley's popularity with rural Americans was based on his self-generated image as a country boy-outsider who would take on the federal government and the medical establishment. And since the nation was going through the worst of the Depression, people otherwise normally sane were frightened at the nation's collapse and willing to listen to Brinkley. Though he lost, his political threat was quite real. He could easily have split the Republican vote.¹⁸ One imagines that if the Depression had continued, a President Brinkley would have become a demagogue, eventually packing the FRC until he could completely change policies regarding medical broadcasting.

Brinkley was making a fortune from XER, and from those profits he bought land, oil shares, and twelve cars for personal use.¹⁹ However, the good times were not to last. In February 1934 the Mexican government suspended XER's license. The ostensible reason was that Brinkley's over-the-air medicine violated Mexican medical law.²⁰ Riots ensued when a government radio inspector came to take over the station, and Brinkley surrendered XER to stop, as he claimed, "civil war between the Mexican government and Coahuila."²¹

Both ill and good fortune still pursued Brinkley at the border. What began as disaster ended as advantage for aging "Doctor", as he liked to call himself. XER was reborn in December 1935 as XERA—this time with "a new directional antenna that kicked the unique signal northward with an effective transmitting power of 1,000,000 watts."²² Brinkley was eventually forced to reduce his power when across-the-border town Del Rio, Texas, started hearing his broadcasts over their telephones. It is also interesting to note that the Mexican government's attitude was casual when it came to American receivers, but they would not tolerate Brinkley's broadcasts into the heartland of their own nation. They built "giant steel towers," jamming out signals headed south.²³ Why the United States did not also consider building towers is no mystery; the U.S. government must have foreseen that building jamming towers was too expensive: there were many other border-blasters in service by the 1930s,²⁴ and jamming towers would have had to be built for them. The U.S.-Mexican border simply could not be sealed off with a 300-foot wall of steel.

Eventually Brinkley died in obscurity and poverty. The story of the border-blasters and their thorny issues did not die, however,

because questions of autonomy, economy, and nationalism remained. His own station, once again reborn in the 1940s as XERF, had one of its disc jockeys, Lloyd Richardson, arrested in an echo of Brinkley's previous troubles:

Even though they had been in operation for more than twenty years by the end of the fifties, the border stations still caught in the craw of federal authorities who continued to look for ways to turn off their high-powered transmitters. Lloyd Richardson worked as an announcer on XERF in the late fifties and early sixties. 'I would do different characters, you know, the cowboy type, the religious type,' he remembered, laughing. 'We sold everything. Sex pills, how to quit smoking, medicines, Bibles...oh, man, you name it.... One day Richardson's shenanigans caught up with him. He was broadcasting from Del Rio by telephone line across the international boundary to the XERF transmitter in Acuña. The FCC monitored the broadcast, came down to Del Rio and arrested the unsuspecting disc jockey for violating Section 325(b) of the Federal Communications Act, the infamous Brinkley Clause.²⁵

Section 325(b) will also be important to the second border-blaster under discussion here, XETRA, because it too ran into the same problem of making legal transmissions from the United States.

Although the border-blasters were a thorn in the side of U.S. radio policy, the 1940s brought with it a greater need on the part of the U.S. to understand Mexico, if only because the U.S. had wartime security demands along its southern border.

During the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration, American policy toward Latin America took on a surprisingly enlightened shift. Most Americans who gave the matter any thought at all knew that Latin America resented and feared the U.S., and in order to shore up relations south of the border to circumvent any possible influence of the Axis powers,²⁶ Roosevelt abandoned the "Big Stick" policy of his *fin-de-siecle* predecessors, and began the Good Neighbor Policy.²⁷ The overt pressures on Mexico that had been exercised in the past were not to be repeated. Formal negotiations for concessions dealing with broadcasting had to follow normal diplomatic channels. This change

pleased Mexicans, and their attitude toward the United States softened during the war years. History had not always been so kind:

The United States pursued a policy of aggressive political and economic expansion into Latin America during the first third of this century. Along with forceful military and political intervention in the affairs of Latin American countries and growing American investment in the region and increased trade, an important aspect of this overall expansion was the control the United States sought over inter-American communications.²⁸

Roosevelt found himself in a position to rethink Latin American policy and to devise new courses of action to deal with the radically changed conditions. As new strategies of hemispheric control were sought, short-wave radio broadcasting began to emerge as an important element in United States-Latin American relations.²⁹

Although the thesis of Fejes's book deals with short-wave, the regulation of hemispheric airwaves went, figuratively and literally, across the spectrum.

For example, towards the end of World War II, a conference sponsored by the University of New Mexico sought to air grievances and establish future cultural relations between the U.S. and Mexico. The Mexican speakers ranged in tone from polite cordiality to icy correctness. Jaime Torres Bodet said,

The criterion of sheer power will not prevail in the structure of mankind after the war. Strong or weak, all the peoples adhering to the future international organization will contract proportionately equal commitment and will have to take part in the work of education with equal decision.³⁰

Pablo Martínez del Río added in his paper "Mexican-American Relations, Past, Present, and Future:"

In every single instance that the United States has intervened in Mexico, even when they have done so disinterestedly, not only has great hardship been inflicted on large numbers of Mexicans, but a great deal of ill feeling has been engendered.³¹

Del Río sought also in his speech to control the parameters of Mexican and American cultures in that he feared the "Mexicanization of the

United States” and the Americanization of his own nation.³² One gets a sense here of the desire for further cooperation between the two nations; at the same time, there are cultural forces that wish for some kind of separation of the cultures to stop an ill-defined but strongly felt cultural and intellectual miscegenation. The border-blaster is just such a confuser and therefore it is still a matter of contention between our countries, even at present.

The history of the border-blaster after the XER debacle is generally an on-again, off-again trail of disputed wattages, ownership, and spectrum assignments. Never again does the tale invoke the seedy charm of a John Brinkley, but instead is a chronicle of uneasy quiet, punctuated by occasional violence and litigation.³³

Some of the good times in international relations fostered cooperation and even exchange of radio personalities. For example, Robert St. John mentions Martin Block. He “was one of the nation’s leading disc jockeys...the son of a concert pianist. His first radio job as a young man was with XEFD in Tijuana, Mexico.”³⁴ After going over to The Voice of America in 1949, Block became the “first international disc jockey.”³⁵

The 1950’s passed more or less quietly for the border stations. Frank Shattuck, a young radio enthusiast and ham radio operator during the middle and late Fifties, remembers hearing the border-blasters from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where he lived at the time. One station—the old XERF of Ciudad Acuña which had incarnations as XER and XERA—inspired him to take his first trip to Mexico at the age of eighteen. He lives there today where he owns a telecommunications business in Mexico and the U.S. Mr. Shattuck remembers:

The border stations then had caught onto the idea of broadcasting rock and roll, but most of what they broadcast was news and information from extreme right-wing perspectives. I think most of the owners of the stations, or at least the organizations that leased air time, were Birchers and the like. Most of my friends who listened to radio with me laughed at them. There were also a lot of eccentric religious broadcasts that for one reason or another were no longer broadcasting in this country [U.S.]. They must have failed to pay taxes on the taxable parts of their profits, even though they

were radio ministries. Or else they had violated some kind of fairness doctrine. They also weren't mainline churches. They tended to be rather extreme religious-fundamentalist groups.³⁶

This situation continued unchanged until 1960. A law passed in Mexico that year under nationalist pressure, The Federal Law of Radio and Television, created a classification scheme for national airway use. Five kinds of stations—"commercial, cultural, official, amateur, and school"—were created.³⁷ With this new classification scheme came greater controls on commercial broadcasting in Mexico. All broadcasts dealing with over-the-air medical advice and advertising for medicinal products came under stricter government control,³⁸ removing any hope of medical charlatans that the border-blasters might prove fertile ground for selling their wares. This 1960 regulation aimed really at Mexican internal radio transmission policy had its cooling effect on the border-blasters. "The Mexican licensing authority, The Telecommunications Department, supervises the licensing arrangements for [radio] stations,"³⁹ and a greater desire to control the economy of the northern border as well as to answer U.S. complaints goaded the Mexican government into more legislation, if not actual enforcement.

The 1960 law had other curtailing features in its articles. Walter Emery discusses some of the more serious features as they pertain to the border-blasters:

There were numerous restrictions and requirements regarding radio programs. For example, there were specific injunctions against broadcasts which might...offend existing laws or well established customs or mores; [or] invade rights of privacy.... Commercial advertising was permitted but was subject to regulatory limitations as might be imposed by the Secretary in charge of communications.⁴⁰

Some of the border-blasters' practices—even their use of English—might one day be victim to the Secretary of Education's power. Another requirement of the new law demanded at least thirty minutes a day of national, educational, or cultural news, free of charge.⁴¹ More ominous to the border-blasters, however, was the rule governing broadcasting personnel: "By law, all newscasters and news commentators must be of Mexican nationality" and "Foreigners are prohibited from working

as announcers except when authorized on a temporary basis.”⁴² Emery notes that in the case of the border stations, American personnel had to be used:

For example, station XETRA..., located in Tijuana, uses newscasters from the United States, and provides a news service specially designed for the Southern California area. While Article 89 of the Mexican law specifically provides that newscasters and news commentators shall be of Mexican nationality,... Article 85 states that, in special cases, the Secretary of the Government may authorize foreigners to broadcast ‘provisionally.’ It is under the latter provision of the law that a station such as XETRA may use United States citizens to do news reporting and analysis.⁴³

Thus we have a way of life for the border-blaster to continue on into the Sixties and Seventies, though much restricted in their behavior. Stations could not be sold or transferred without government permission.⁴⁴

Article 89 seems not to have been enforced except through a form of attrition: as American owners and operators pulled out of the border-radio businesses, they were replaced with Mexican-national announcers who spoke either English or Spanish, even if the program format was still rock and roll. Occasionally, however, the Mexican government acted in its own interests. In 1986 Mexican authorities banned the broadcast of all English-language religious broadcasts.⁴⁵

More controversy flared in the late Seventies concerning FCC jurisdiction of materials sent over the border from the U.S. to Mexico, for the purpose of being broadcast in the U.S. Surprisingly, the main station in question was XETRA, the same station mentioned in Emery’s article. A flurry of short articles about the controversy appeared in the summer and early fall of 1978. On 10 July an article appeared in *Broadcasting*, concerning a group of San Diego broadcasters seeking to curtail the influence of XETRA-FM by forcing the Tijuana station “to get FCC approval to broadcast material prepared in the U.S.”⁴⁶ Most of the material for the 100,000 watt station was recorded in the States and sent across the border to broadcast. The San Diego group, known as the Committee for Equality in Radio Frequencies (CERF), claims that XETRA, both AM and FM, were in violation of Section 325(b) of the Communications Act of 1934, which “prohibits delivery of pro-

graming [sic] to a foreign country for broadcast to the U.S. without an FCC permit."⁴⁷ The three-year-old Communications Act was tested in 1937 in *Baker v. United States*, wherein the U.S. Court of Appeals determined that hand-delivery of materials was exempted from Section 325(b), the same regulation that Lloyd Richardson had to contend with in the 1950's. San Diego broadcasters had tried to test the exemption in the early seventies but had dropped their cases when both of the other Mexican broadcasters in question went out of business. The head of CERF, Dan McKinnon, delivered a stinging attack on XETRA. He said that:

XETRA-FM is nothing more than a pirate radio station out to steal advertising dollars from the San Diego market, that it can operate without restrictions imposed on U.S. radio stations and that it will pull away up to \$2.5 million a year from San Diego stations.⁴⁸

So far, the typical profile of a border-blaster: but times had changed. The modern border station sought to appear to be a more responsible member of the international community it served. The medical and psychic charlatans had been replaced by advertisers who realized that border-blasters could generate huge revenues for their clients.

The general manager of XETRA, John Lynch, denied the "pirate station" charge and claimed moreover that XETRA was actually a boon to the San Diego marketing area and a legitimate server of the interests of both the Mexican and American communities it served. Its Arbitron ratings would be boosted from nineteenth to tenth nationally, if the rating system counted the millions of listeners over the border in Mexico. Having gone through many incarnations over the decades, XETRA-AM had been broadcasting since 1934, the years 1968 to 1978 as a "beautiful music" station. The real problem, however, was the FM station. The American broadcasters were concerned that the FM station would break into their lucrative rock and roll airtime. The new demographic group XETRA-FM sought was "the 12-to-34 age market,"⁴⁹ that is, the rock-and-roll market.

Lawyers for XETRA-FM and CERF were looking closely at the specifics of the Baker ruling to see if XETRA was safe. The CERF lawyer said that if XETRA filed for a permit under 325(b), CERF "would oppose it on the grounds of a 1973 U.S.-Mexican agreement that FM stations must provide effective programming within their own borders."⁵⁰

Not to be left out, *Advertising Age* ran a similar article on 7 August 1978, though with somewhat snappier language:

A real macho of the airwaves is about to step across the Mexican border into the U.S. advertising scene. Newly formed Noble Multimedia Communications [NMC], organized by the head of Mexico's leading advertising agency, Edward Noble, is causing a furor among local station owners here, and they are banding together to fight what amounts to the first serious marketing effort in Southern California for Mexico-based radio stations.⁵¹

Transmitting from ocean-side towers near Tijuana, XETRA had not aggressively sought to expand its Southern California market,⁵² but as is true of all previous border-blaster stations, XETRA-FM decided to take advantage of the looseness of Mexican law, despite Mr. Lynch's protestations to the contrary,⁵³ to change its format and boost its signal to 100,000 watts to blanket the entire San Diego area. The parent organization, NMC, did a \$24 million business in Mexico at the time, and was actively seeking markets outside of Mexico in the United States. In Mexico, the company is known as Noble y Asociados, and it planned to set up offices in the Los Angeles area, drawing staffers from lesser-paying markets. However, the San Diego broadcasters did not intend to give up:

San Diego's am and fm broadcasters are focusing on XETRA's fm boost and programming supply system, which they contend involves illegal transfer of U.S.-taped programming to a foreign station. NMC says this is a family interpretation of U.S.-Mexico treaties.⁵⁴

John Lynch asserted:

We're not just some bunch of Mexican banditos [sic]... This is a solid company that is following all the rules of both countries. We're in this for the long run. We've joined the National Assn. of Broadcasters and comply with the code. In fact, we have strict Mexican regulations to follow as well. We really have two masters.⁵⁵

The article continues by explaining why the head of a Mexican multimedia empire in the making has an Anglo as its head. In 1941 Mr. Noble had gone to Mexico City to head LifeSavers' operation there and decided to stay to build Mexico's biggest advertising production

business.⁵⁶ He was a Mexican citizen by then and able to get around the government's restrictions concerning foreign ownership of Mexican stations. As for the station personnel, they were already exempt, as provided for by Mexican law.

Certainly, this state of affairs between CERF and NMC could not continue without a confrontation, and finally lawsuits were filed, first by CERF and then by NMC. *Broadcasting* magazine for 4 September 1978 had a feature about the confrontation, entitled "San Diego-Mexico feud escalates to border war."

NMC sued thirteen licensees of seventeen San Diego stations for at least \$3 million each. As plaintiff, XETRA-AM-FM contended that "since 1970, the San Diego stations and unnamed 'co-conspirators' have engaged in actions directed against it that violate the Sherman and Clayton antitrust acts."⁵⁷ In effect, NMC was accusing CERF members of libel, of publishing lies about what XETRA's expansion into the San Diego market would mean to local residents. NMC said that CERF's behavior had caused NMC to "suffer injury to its goodwill and customer acceptance and to be deprived of substantial income which it otherwise would receive."⁵⁸

Noble asked for triple the amount in demonstrable damages over the figure mentioned above. As the controversy moved to a climax, XETRA-FM was preparing its format change and power boost. It appeared that CERF's only real hope of stopping NMC was by having the FCC disallow the transmission of hand-delivered programming across borders for the purpose of transmission into the United States, as already outlined in *Baker v. United States*.

The disposition of XETRA's case (now called "X-91" for its FM spectrum allocation) was fairly swift. The station was not restricted in wattage; it is quite powerful, and XETRA-FM still broadcasts American rock and roll into the San Diego area. Mr. John Buffaloe, chief engineer at KSON-FM (one of the chief members of CERF and who was present at the station during the 1978 confrontation)—says that Noble y Asociados and CERF decided to settle out of court when it became obvious to CERF lawyers that *Baker v. United States* would not be overturned to support their case. The CERF consortium paid damages to Noble, and Noble took that money and bought even more powerful equipment to "blast" into the San Diego area. Buffaloe also admitted in his telephone interview that there had been international

agreements with border-blasters in Mexico for years, but that CERF was acting strictly in its own interests and not abiding by the spirit, if in fact by the letter, of those U.S.-Mexican agreements. CERF stations simply did not want to tolerate what they saw as unfair competition.⁵⁹ *Baker v. United States* was not to be overturned until 1986, when the sources of contention were made irrelevant by the North American Regional Broadcasting Agreement was signed between the U.S. and Mexico, a decision that let American and Mexican broadcasters

Use the other country's clear-channel frequencies for low-powered stations in the evening. That meant that the signals of the border stations would be drowned out in many communities by local broadcasts, effectively putting an end to the era of high-powered, far-ranging radio.⁶⁰

Despite the sad history of the XETRA-CERF brouhaha, there is a sense of international cooperation between the United States and Mexico as never before. A pending agreement (1992-3) between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico may do away with marketing, allocation, time, and ownership conflicts between the hemisphere's broadcasters altogether. In any case, only continued cooperation between the nations of Mexico and the United States will bring an end to the more annoying aspects of the border-blaster.

In 1981, then-presidents Reagan and López-Portillo exchanged gifts and promised far greater economic and cultural expansion into each other's markets, along with an increase in advertising in both English and Spanish, on both sides of the border.⁶¹

However, Kenneth Leeson notes that the present U.S. attitude about spectrum allocation—the scarcity of that commodity giving rise to the border-blaster in the first place—is conservative and reluctant when it comes to international cooperation:

The policy of allocating the spectrum in response to demonstrated economic, national security, and foreign policy needs and future requirements is most effective and should be maintained.⁶²

Leeson did see in 1984 that a greater conception of spectrum management has emerged in recent years and should become a part of any international agreements the U.S. might make, raising hopes for better sharing of spectrum resources.⁶³

Not many commentators have considered the facts of U.S. radio hegemony and the problems it has caused over the years. As Emery noted in 1964, American hegemony allowed Latin Americans to know far more about U.S. than we knew about them. Quoting the editor of the English section of the Mexican newspaper, *El Universal*, Emery said:

There was a tendency of the mass media to emphasize sensational events and to neglect other aspects of Latin American life which would be of as much or more interest to people in the United States. He stressed the need for more cultural exchange—increased use of the media for a freer flow of information and images across our national boundaries. With the cooperation of the two governments and private institutions in both countries, said he, ‘closer understanding could be achieved.’⁶⁴

What is the meaning of the border-blaster as a phenomenon of social culture? Its meaning depends, of course, upon one’s point of view, and not necessarily the opposition of Mexican and American points of view. The truth is that the border-blaster, despite its supposed growing restriction and regulation beneath the ægis of the Mexican government, has remained essentially an American phenomenon. The stations, beginning with John Brinkley, had almost always been owned and operated by American nationals in spite of Mexican restrictions because of escape clauses in Mexican codes, such as the law of 1960 which allowed the breach to continue. Even the licensees of more recent stations like XETRA were descendants of Americans, like NMC’s chairman and owner Edward Noble, who, although a Mexican citizen, was a yankee owning a company that broadcast into America and which made advertising dollars in America from American offices by playing American rock and roll. Although the station had to conform to some aspects of Mexican law such as the regulation requiring thirty minutes a day of transmission in Spanish and on subjects of interest to Mexican nationals, the enforcement of other laws concerning wattage and program content was spotty at best, and basically ignored wholesale.

To the Libertarian or laissez-faire businessman like Frank Shattuck, the border-blaster is a symbol of a kind of swashbuckling defiance of the dead hand of government and artificial national goals. Shattuck says:

To me the border stations were always a world apart, almost like ships in uncharted territory. They were odd mixtures of the familiar and unfamiliar, of English and Spanish, retainers of the stranger byways of our American culture. When American life and entertainment got too structured and too safe, as they often did, the border stations used to offer views of life and religion we would otherwise never have heard.⁶⁵

Moreover, Shattuck sees the entrepreneurial wisdom of the border-blasters:

Like the oil business “wildcatters” the border-blasters stood ready to take advantage of holes in the American radio market. They could even push out American competition because of the few *de facto* limitations placed upon them. The cheap overhead of a Mexican location means low advertising rates, and low rates mean high volume. The border station is a money-making machine. The Mexicans, including the government, are smart enough not to tinker with them too much.⁶⁶

Though there is a large element of truth to this opinion, I feel that the border stations—the older ones, not the rock and roll houses—were also much more to us. They were symbols of our ignorance of other nations and the struggles of those nearest to U.S., the Mexicans. They were a kind of mirror that reflected the worst of our culture, the charlatantry of a fraud like John Brinkley turned into a tin god through the magic medium of radio, or the extremist right-wing preachers and bogus mystics that infested its airwaves. Their sole purpose was the creation of wealth for Americans, by Americans; the avoidance of taxpaying; and the exploitation of the poor and ignorant. This infestation was so powerful that the Mexican government went to extreme lengths to keep the infestation out of its own country by building jamming towers—and all this, when so few Mexicans spoke English and could not understand the broadcasts anyway. What greater evidence could there be of the government’s loathing of its own licensing behavior?

Beneath this seeming contempt for American radio receivers also lies a fear of American influence and technology. The sheer power

of American interests and heavy-handedness certainly weigh on the Mexican mind. Fowler and Crawford claim that “as long as license and inspection fees were paid, the *federales* were willing to look the other way and even use the X stations to fight the aerial imperialism of the Americans.”⁶⁷ Moreover, Fred Fejes tells us:

In a sense, the [Reagan] administration’s aggressive actions in Central America, from increasing military aid and activity in Central America, to the invasion of Granada [sic], to the construction of Radio Martí, bespeaks a return to the ‘Big Stick’ policy of Theodore Roosevelt.⁶⁸

I see enough validity in Fejes’s claim for the U.S. to take notice. An irony lies in his parting words:

While the United States has tried different approaches, such as the Good Neighbor Policy, the Alliance for Progress, and Carter’s Human Rights Policy, all have been failures and the basic contradiction between United States interests and Latin American realities remain. The militaristic policies of the Reagan administration are a frank admission of that contradiction.⁶⁹

It is probably best to see the border-blaster not within the confines of any political outlook but instead as a human institution of a sort, a kind of laboratory that explores the means and ends of money-making for its own sake, disguised as a medium of information and entertainment, and yet in their own way providing those same services in a way the owners never intended. I can also comfortably include the modern blasters here as well, pumping as they do rock and roll into a nation already saturated with that particular kind of ugliness, coming from a nation that has never been socially comfortable with rudeness or tunelessness. Although listener gullibility has declined due to a greater sophistication, border-station owners can reap great profits from the sheer size of their listener area.

The only way the border-blaster will cease to be remembered as a kind of mutation between the Anglophone and Hispanophone worlds will come when there is an even greater understanding of the mutual broadcasting interests of Mexico and the United States, and a realization that national borders and mutual distrust of motive must one day become legally obsolete as they already are in fact. As mad as it

sounds, it is probably true that the Brinkleys and Nobles of the world are the pioneer internationalists, the ones who test the waters of world business and find them stimulating and rewarding. Even the old goat himself, Dr. Brinkley, saw that there was international importance to his undertaking at XER. Fowler and Crawford tell us:

[Brinkley] stated expansively [that] one of XER's primary missions would be the improvement and strengthening of relations between the two nations and assistance in development of Mexican industry and tourism.⁷⁰

The fates of these two stations, XER and XETRA, show how important the reach of U.S. and Mexican federal regulation is to the "shape" of the programming that they produce and how a lack of coordinated international broadcasting control can produce a certain amount of cultural and legal chaos. We must be forgiving to some extent, however. Though there are many other manifestations of international business that will serve humanity better, the border-blaster was, and is, only one of the stranger clarions of a coming world-dream.

Notes

¹ Harold Mehling, *The Scandalous Scamps* (New York: Henry Holt, 1959), 60.

² J.M. Frost, ed., *World Radio-TV Handbook: 1971* (New York: Johansen, 1971), 204-210.

³ Frank Shattuck, Written Interview. 15 October 1991.

⁴ Mehling, 58-59.

⁵ Erik Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel*. vol. 1: *A History of Broadcasting in the United States* (New York: Oxford UP, 1966), 259.

⁶ Mehling, 60.

⁷ Elihu Katz and George Wedell, *Broadcasting in the Third World: Promise and Performance* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1977), 70.

⁸ Mehling, 61.

⁹ Barrouw, 258-259.

¹⁰ Barnouw, 258.

¹¹ Barnouw, 259.

¹² Robert West, *The Rape of Radio* (New York: Rodin, 1941), 460.

¹³ West, 460.

¹⁴ Mehling, 60.

¹⁵ Mehling, 61.

¹⁶ Mehling, 61.

¹⁷ Gene Fowler and Bill Crawford, *Border Radio* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1987), 30.

¹⁸ Mehling, 63.

¹⁹ Mehling, 64.

²⁰ Mehling, 65.

²¹ Mehling, 66.

²² Fowler and Crawford, 32-33.

²³ Mehling, 61.

²⁴ Fowler and Crawford, 187-188.

²⁵ Fowler and Crawford, 187-188.

²⁶ Fred Fejes, *Imperialism, Media, and the Good Neighbor: New Deal Foreign Policy and United States Shortwave Broadcasting to Latin America* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing, 1986), 23-24.

²⁷ Fejes, 13.

²⁸ Fejes, 13.

²⁹ Fejes, 13.

³⁰ Jaime Torres Bodet, "The Bases and Significance of Relations Between Mexico and the United States." *Mexico's Role in Intellectual Cooperation* (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1945), 46.

³¹ Pablo Martínez del Río, "Mexican-American Relations: Past, Present, and Future." *Mexico's Role in Intellectual Cooperation* (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1945), 27.

³² Martínez del Río, 28.

³³ Fowler and Crawford, 188-191.

³⁴ Robert St John, *Encyclopedia of Radio and Television Broadcasting* (Milwaukee: Cathedral Square, 1970), 275.

³⁵ St John, 275.

³⁶ Shattuck interview.

³⁷ Giraud Chester, Garnet R. Garrison, and Edgar E. Willis, *Television and Radio*, 3d ed. (New York: Appleton, 1963), 179.

³⁸ Chester, 179.

³⁹ Katz and Wedell, 44.

⁴⁰ Walter B. Emery, "A Comparative Study of Broadcasting Law and Regulations in Mexico and the United States" *Journal of Broadcasting* 8 (Spring 1964): 188.

⁴¹ Emery, 192.

⁴² Emery, 194.

⁴³ Emery, 194-195.

⁴⁴ Emery, 199.

⁴⁵ Fowler and Crawford, 257-258, 244.

⁴⁶ "San Diego outlets war against new Tijuana station" *Broadcasting* (10 July 1978): 30.

⁴⁷ "San Diego outlets war against new Tijuana station," 30.

⁴⁸ "San Diego outlets war against new Tijuana station," 30.

⁴⁹ "San Diego outlets war against new Tijuana station," 30.

⁵⁰ "San Diego outlets war against new Tijuana station," 30.

⁵¹ John Revett and Stephen Downer, "Mexico station's plan making waves in Cal[ifornia]" *Advertising Age* (7 August 1978): 2.

⁵² Revett, 2.

⁵³ Revett, 67.

⁵⁴ Revett, 2, 67.

⁵⁵ Revett, 67.

⁵⁶ Revett, 67.

⁵⁷ "San Diego-Mexico feud escalates to border war" *Broadcasting* (4 September 1978): 35.

⁵⁸ "San Diego-Mexico feud escalates to border war," 35.

⁵⁹ J. Randolph Sheehan, Telephone Interview. 11 November 1991. (Mr. Sheehan had a telephone interview with John Buffalo.)

⁶⁰ Fowler and Crawford, 256-257.

⁶¹ "Mexican connection" *Advertising Age* (23 February 1981): 20.

⁶² Kenneth W. Leeson, *International Communications: Blueprint for Policy* (New York: Elsevier Science Publishing, 1984), 168.

⁶³ Leeson, 169.

⁶⁴ Emery, Walter B., "Broadcasting in Mexico." *Journal of Broadcasting* 8 (Fall 1964): 272.

⁶⁵ Shattuck interview.

⁶⁶ Shattuck interview.

⁶⁷ Fowler and Crawford, 256.

⁶⁸ Fejes, 174.

⁶⁹ Fejes, 174-175.

⁷⁰ Fowler and Crawford, 28.

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Historiografía de la frontera Norte de México, Balance y metas de investigación. Por David Piñera Ramírez. Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, 1990.

David Piñera Ramírez fronterólogo con muchos años a cuestas en el quehacer de historiar lo desconocido de una parte fundamental de la historia nacional, hoy por hoy nos entrega una herramienta básica para todos aquellos que se inician en la búsqueda de las fuentes primarias donde por naturaleza se nutren los cronistas, los analistas e interpretadores de la historia de la mexicanidad fronteriza.

La obra que además de ser un catálogo de cédulas bibliográficas es un introductor a las diversas temáticas de la historia tradicional de la frontera. En ella se nos ofrecen de manera lógica y coherente lo fundamental en el estudio de la historia tradicional de los estados del Norte de México; en una primera parte se pueden encontrar obras concernientes a la frontera en su conjunto, para luego entrar al ámbito temporal donde en cierta medida se presenta un recuento de las obras bibliográficas más importantes en torno a los asuntos tradicionales tratados en la historia mexicana; pobladores aborígenes, septentrión novohispano, las primeras décadas de la vida insurgente hasta llegar al tema de Cárdenas y la Segunda Guerra Mundial.

Un tema conclusivo de esta primera parte al cual el autor le llama las corrientes historiográficas, donde él señala las principales corrientes donde se inscriben las obras tratadas en este texto; unas obras encajan en lo que él llama la historia tradicional, otras enclavadas en el historicismo y positivismo, también menciona las de corte marxista y otras las eclécticas que de alguna manera David Piñera no puede situar dentro de una corriente muy definida.

En la segunda parte del texto se abunda en una visión de conjunto de la frontera poniendo como punto de partida la temática tradicional: el marco geográfico la población aborígen de aridoamérica, el septentrión novohispano, el movimiento insurgente, la pérdida territorial de 1848, los inicios de la expansión norteamericana, el profiriato, el conflicto revolucionario, hasta llegar a un apartado sobre la Frontera de nuestros días. El tratamiento de esta segunda parte tiende a ser muy sintético, pero con la información manejada en su primera parte del libro tiende a ser un buen acercamiento y una buena síntesis de los asuntos manejados por los historiadores de la frontera.

La tercera parte está dedicada a lo que el autor llama las sugerencias temáticas donde en cierta medida se acerca a cinco aspectos que son los siguientes: Atlas toponímico de la Frontera, Ciudades fundadas en la época Colonial, la Etapa Porfirista, Ciudades surgidas bajo el influjo norteamericano y la "Ley Seca" y otros temas. En este marco el autor vuelve a plantear algunos de los puntos ya mencionados anteriormente en la primera y segunda parte, sin embargo, el manejo que hace de las fuentes documentales es bastante certero ya que logra poner al lector ante nuevas formas de interpretación histórica y en algunos momentos avanza algunas ideas para futuras investigaciones.

El texto ofrece un apartado donde expone unas reflexiones finales donde esboza el perfil de los futuros historiadores de la Frontera Norte. De manera muy particular llama a mi la atención al señalar algunos elementos fundamentales en el desarrollo de las investigaciones históricas fronterizas como son la importancia de tener bien definido el concepto de frontera, el concepto de región y particularmente; el concepto de identidad. También añade como una parte elemental el conocimiento de la historia de los Estados Unidos de America.

En términos generales la obra del maestro Piñera Ramírez viene a conformar una de las piedras fundamentales en el acervo de la bibliografía sobre la frontera, sin embargo, hay una cuestión que quisiera plantear a título de reflexión, más que un corpus terminado, esta obra viene a ser el punto de arranque para todos aquellos que están preocupados por la investigación histórica estructural del norte del país. También cabe mencionar que en el fondo es una invitación para todos aquellos historiadores que han hecho investigación solo de poltrona de empezar a estudiar más que en el corte de la crónica el ir sobre problemas los cuales requieren no sólo un acercamiento histórico sino multidisciplinario. De hecho la tendencia de los nuevos historiadores con mayor rigor científico que se están acercando a la problemática de la frontera desde una visión macrohistórico para entender el rejuego de la microhistoria o de la historia regional o local.

En el fondo lo que se discute a los historiadores tradicionales es su falta de atención a los fenómenos macrohistóricos para explicar los eventos que en cierta medida son foco de su trabajo. Quizá muchas de las obras aquí reseñadas son producto de los cronistas pueblerinos que en alguna medida han hecho posible la existencia del quehacer de historiar. Sin embargo, lo esperado en un futuro inmediato es la

conjunción de esfuerzos entre quienes solo describen y aquellos que pretenden entender los fenómenos.

Definitivamente la obra presenta un panorama muy amplio en términos geográficos, sin embargo, cuando se empieza a penetrar en regiones geográficas específicas, se nota que adolece de obras fundamentales que no fueron consideradas. En este sentido puedo ejemplificar para el caso de Nuevo León donse sólo se menciona tres vertientes de historiadores como son el caso de Israel Cavazos, Mario Cerutti, Celso Garza Guajardo y Roberto Chapa Martínez. Cada uno de ellos representando un tipo de escuela historiográfica, el primero un clásico en la historia tradicional regional, el segundo un investigador con un trasfondo de alto rigor metodológico y trabajando especialmente sobre problemas, en cambio en tercer lugar se encuentran los cronistas repetidores de documentos que muchos de ellos no trascienden y no tienen un fondo teórico muy claro a quienes más bien los situaría dentro del oportunismo histórico más que en otro lugar. Han quedado al margen historiadores como, Gerardo de Lón, Máximo de León Garza, Oscar Flores, José Resendiz, Javier Rojas Sandoval, Miguel Angel González Quiroga. En ese sentido si hurgamos un poco más encontraremos que no se consideran otros historiadores que en realidad si han trabajado sobre problemas realmente trascendentales para nuestra región como es el caso de Luis Lauro Garza con problemas de sindicalismo en Nuevo León, Abraham Nuncio con su acercamiento al Grupo Monterrey, o sobre asuntos de políticas partidista, Artemio Benavides o que más sobre cuestiones de obreros como es el caso de JAVIERROJAS sólo para mencionar alguno, quiero mencionartambién el caso de acervos no mencionados como es el caso de la biblioteca Cervantina, del ITESM; la Capilla Alfonsina, de la UANL; o simplemente anuarios como el Humanitas de la UANL que tiene un acervo de más de 30 años en investigación histórica .

Finalmente solo me resta decir que esta obra viene a ser el parteaguas de la historia Regional y que de alguna manera es el paradigma a seguir a fin de mantener actualizados nuestros conocimientos sobre lo que en el futuro será la historia de nuestra frontera.

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Always a Rebel: Ricardo Flores Magón and the Mexican Revolution. By Ward S. Albro. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1992. xv + 219pp.

Do we really need another book on Ricardo Flores Magón? The answer is an emphatic “yes,” especially when it is a good one like this. Ward Albro, professor of history at Texas A & I University in Kingsville, has given us new details about the life of this extraordinary Mexican anarchist and his movement which encouraged common people (as well as some elites) on both sides of the border to change their societies radically in the early years of this century.

Ricardo Flores Magón is simply the best remembered and most thoroughly researched among the groups of fervent leftists who sought not only to tumble the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz but also aimed to rid the entire social system he symbolized of its corruptness and inequalities. Some of his followers—more than originally thought—meant to do much of the same in the United States. Flores Magón and his ilk aimed high; they thought in terms of social justice and human dignity. Albro not only captures the nuts and bolts of their frenzied campaign but its lofty spirit. At the same time he exposes the relentless persecution which the crusader suffered at the bloody (at least dirty) hands of his powerful enemies tucked into privileged places which they were determined to protect. The drama which unfolded should not be seen only in black and white; it was not a simple instance of good versus evil. Albro catches the nuances, although his sympathies clearly lie with the Magonistas. Still, his book steadfastly informs us what true visionaries were (are?) up against.

There is currently a healthy debate going on among historians of the Mexican Revolution concerning the impact of Magonista ideas on the inception, flow and outcome of that great rebellion of 1910. Alan Knight downplays that influence; John Hart builds it up. Albro is allied with Hart, especially in the ways that essential points of the Magonista platform folded into the new Constitution of 1917. Other fresh evidence support Albro and Hart. In his new, major contribution to our understanding of that south Texas rebellion infused by the Plan de San Diego in 1915 (still called “bandit troubles” by the uninformed), James Sandos finds that explosive social movement fueled by Magonismo, and in her work on northern Chihuahua just before the outbreak of

revolution, Jane-Dale Lloyd discovers the region saturated with Magonista ideology and people ready to fight to bring it to fruition. Colin MacLachlan in his splendid monograph on machinations of U.S. authorities to corral Flores Magón, explains how they could imprison the man but scarcely contain his ideas. Historians have recently become much more aware of how ideas may drive revolution (I am reminded of Francois Furet's work on the French Revolution); Albro and the others are in a most intellectually stimulating way studying the role of Magonismo in this process for the Mexico and the United States with emphasis on the border regions. The final word on this heady subject is by no means in, but it is exhilarating that some have caught the scent of ideas as catalysts for insurgencies not yet thoroughly explained.¹

One strength of Albro's book concerns his sources: a series of interviews he conducted in 1965 with friends and sympathizers of Flores Magón, to include the likes of Nicolás T. Bernal and Ethel Duffy Turner. He has also digested the significant amount of documentation on the movement, carefully studied its platform, read into its intellectual underpinnings, and rendered a cogent analysis of its ideological stance. No one can miss in this book whom the anarchists addressed and what sort of society they aspired to construct. Hear Flores Magón himself: "Anarchism spreads the establishment of a social order based on brotherhood and love, in contrast to the present form of society founded on violence, hate, and rivalry of one class against another and among members of the same class. Anarchism aspires to establish peace forever among all the races of the earth by suppressing the source of all evil: the right of private property. If this is not a beautiful ideal, what is?" (p.149).

How he could hurl the gauntlet: "...I will challenge all honorable men and women in the world to prove to me that anarchistic doctrines are prejudicial to the human race" (p. 149). Agree or not with the method, who can survey our own society, appraise our own world, and argue with the goal?

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¹Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution* 2 vols. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986); John M. Hart, *Revolutionary*

Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); James A. Sandos, *Rebellion in the Borderlands: Anarchism and the Plan of San Diego, 1904-923* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992); Jane-Dale Lloyd, *El Proceso de modernización capitalista en el noroeste de Chihuahua (1889-1910)* (Mexico: Universidad Iberoamericana, 1987); Colin M. MacLachlan, *Anarchism and the Mexican Revolution: The Political Trials of Ricardo Flores Magón in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); and Francois Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Paris: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

Desde el Cerro de la Silla: Artes y letra de Nuevo Leon. Miguel Covarrubias, editor. Universidad Autonoma de Nuevo Leon, Monterrey, N. L. 1992 438 P.:il.

i) Esta obra colectiva habla, como su título lo indica, de las artes y las letras de Nuevo León. De la producción simbólica de este estado hermano de Coahuila y Tamaulipas, heredero de Zacatecas y San Luis Potosí, y vecino de Texas. Habla de muchos y variados campos de la vida creativa en Nuevo León: el arte rupestre, las maneras de comer, las artesanías, las artes plásticas, la ciencia, el teatro, la literatura, el periodismo, los libros.

No es un volumen con pretensiones académicas, ni propiamente científicas. No se dirige a un público especializado ni a un público universal. Pero tampoco su intencionalidad, como texto, es la de ser un listado de las cosas bellas de la casa para uso y placer de sus residentes. Mucho menos es un texto propagandístico, lazarillo de turistas y exploradores; especie de mapa al servicio de los foráneos. Su afán no es divulgador. No hay tesis que lo ordene, ni premisas que lo guíen.

Desde el Cerro de la Silla: Artes y letras de Nuevo León es, para sorpresa de muchos de los mismos nuevoleonenses, una compilación sui generis situada en una de las mejores tradiciones de Nuevo León. Tradición que se traduce en el acto de inventariar, no sólo para no perder la memoria, sino para deleitarse e invitar, a propios y a ajenos, al deleite de los productos.

¿Antecedentes? Rafael Garza Cantú (1910) *Algunos apuntes acerca de las letras y la cultura en Nuevo León en la centuria de 1810*

a 1910 (Monterrey, J.P. Cueva y Cía.); Héctor González (1946) *Siglo y medio de cultura nuevoleonesa* (México, D. F., Ediciones Botas); Genaro Salinas Quiroga (1981) *Historia de la cultura nuevoleonesa* (Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, Monterrey).

Para no confiar en la memoria de los vivos y los muertos, se hace un inventario de: cuevas, dibujos precolombinos, arte rupestre, sitios, petroglifos, garrotes, piezas de cerámica, objetos de metal, muebles, rejas, recetas culinarias, pintores, pinturas, espacios teatrales, actores y escuelas de teatro, filósofos, científicos, aprendices de investigadores, periodistas, ensayistas, críticos culturales, novelas cortas y largas, autores de cuentos, poetas y poemas, libros y sucesos culturales relevantes.

ii) Una tarea de hormigas la de William Breen Murray, Fernando Garza Quirós y Humberto Salazar en sus respectivos trabajos intitolados: *El arte rupestre en Nuevo León, Herencia cultural del pasado, Algunos horizontes sobre las artesanías de la región y Cronología de Nuevo León 1890-1990, Acontecimientos relevantes en lo económico, lo político y lo social, La cultura y las artes*. Sus textos cumplen la función de referencias por su intención panorámica. Es decir, son autores que no usan la lupa, sino el gran angular en busca de la fotografía que represente a toda la familia, desde la bisabuela hasta los bisnietos. Todos, aunque los rasgos faciales no sean del todo distinguibles.

Estos tres trabajos no evalúan ni magnifican, son producto maduro de autores que por su disciplina y terquedad—de hormigas—han podido reunir, a lo largo de los años, notas, fotografías, recortes periodísticos, apuntes sobre tópicos precisos de su interés personal y profesional.

Una diferencia los distingue entre sí. Murray y, sobre todo, Garza Quirós, pretenden definir, contextualizar y precisar su propio campo de observaciones. Hacer que el lector se haga las preguntas que ellos mismos se han estado haciendo e introduzca las distinciones que han operado. Clasifican, al tiempo que ofrecen, como apoyo a sus respectivas introducciones, doctas referencias bibliográficas. Murray: “En contraste con otros tipos de restos prehistóricos, como las herramientas líticas desechadas y otras huellas accidentales de la subsistencia humana, el arte rupestre es producto consciente de la mente humana....” (p. 19); y Garza Quirós: “El llamado ‘sentido del orden’ subyace en todas las creaciones humanas, y también en muchas

actividades situadas en un nivel más bajo de la escala evolutiva” (p.40). Discusiones que desaniman al lector interesado por las artes y las letras de Nuevo León.

El texto de Salazar, por el contrario, va directamente al grano: cronologar, entresacando a ritmo de rebanadas anuales, aquellos eventos significativos del devenir de Nuevo León: 1932. El gobernador Cárdenas funda la Casa del Campesino. Se publica *Gil Blas*, semanario cultural dirigido por Eusebio de la Cueva. Muere en Monterrey el periodista y poeta Manuel Barrero Argüelles. Juan José Hinojosa publica *El cristianismo y el arte*. Nace en Monterrey la pintora Elena Tolmács” (p. 400). Estilo directo que agradece el lector.

Lo que falta en La Cronología de Humberto Salazar, aparece en El arte rupestre de W. B. Murray y es un exceso en el ensayo sobre las artesanías de Garza Quirós. En el primero, la pregunta que se hará el lector es: ¿Cómo seleccionó el autor los hechos significativos? Una breve nota metodológica no era indispensable pero sí deseable. En el segundo: ¿Para qué ese tono escolar de su introducción? Introducir al arte rupestre en general no es lo mismo que introducir al arte rupestre en Nuevo León. Lo uno es hábito académico, lo otro, pensar en el lector. Y la pregunta para el tercero: ¿Esto es un debate sobre el concepto de “artesanía” o un ensayo sobre las artesanías de Nuevo León?

Recorrer tres sesudos apartados sobre la ciencia de lo artesanal, la forma, el estilo, la importancia de los materiales, la existencia de patrones reproducidos, la perspectiva, la creatividad y cosas por el estilo; hacernos pasar por Octavio Paz, Carlos Marx, Carlos Darwin, Grecia, la Academia de París, Miguel Angel, López Velarde, Fourier y El Renacimiento para llegar a los albañiles, los zapateros, herreros, carreteros, talabarteros y carpinteros de Nuevo León es verdaderamente penoso. No es que no haya un hilo conductor entre Pitágoras, Marx, Paz y los talabarteros de Nuevo León (Garza Quirós se esfuerza en demostrarlo), sino que uno esperaría que *Desde el Cerro de la Silla: Artes y Letras de Nuevo León* no tenía esa intención.

iv) El ensayo de Silvia Mijares: *Donde empieza la carne asada...La cocina tradicional de Nuevo León* cojea de la misma pata. Querer hablar de la “cocina en la cultura”—con este universal y ambicioso subtítulo—antes de describirnos el estofado de puerco, es hacer sufrir al lector hambriento de sabores y aromas regionales transformados en letras y fotografías.

Sin embargo, Mijares no entra en preámbulos conceptuales ni en contextualizaciones excesivas y polémicas escolares. Su introducción habrá de verse más como un aperitivo que resultó incapaz de prepararnos al corto, aunque excelentemente bien escrito, texto que nos describe la cocina nuevoleonesa. El ensayo remata con recetas culinarias breves y una selección de textos literarios que hablan de los sabores.

El *approach* de Mijares a la cocina nuevoleonesa es, sin embargo, desatinadamente culto. Un abordaje de mujer de letras, no de cocinera, ni de etnóloga de las maneras de la mesa. Por eso no hablan, por su texto, las mujeres de tantos poblados de Nuevo León que guardan esos misterios maravillosos de la cocina regional, ni los comensales cuyo paladar acompaña a las fiestas, las reuniones familiares, los cumpleaños, las ferias de los pueblos, las navidades, las bodas o simplemente la comida de mediodía.

Cocinar es un acto culturalmente sorprendente no porque Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz hable de ello, sino porque ahí se guardan los secretos colectivos de las sensaciones primigenias del gusto y del olfato que unen y ordenan a los hombres y mujeres de una región. Hacer una carne asada es mucho más que eso. Es repetir, sábado a sábado, un ritual litúrgico en el que las comunidades de Nuevo León se reconstruyen.

El arte de cocinar va asociado indisolublemente al arte de ser mujer de hogar, al arte de comer, al arte de conversar, al arte de celebrar, al arte de unir o desunir, de mezclar o dividir. Cosas tan cotidianas como tener que desayunar barbacoa, en casa de la abuela, un domingo a media mañana para garantizar estar al tanto de los chismes de familia. Los estadounidenses de las grandes ciudades, que empiezan a olvidar estas tradiciones, lo comprenden mejor que nadie.

v) Labor de mineros es la que llevaron a cabo Alfonso Rangel Guerra y Dulce María González en sus respectivos escritos: *Novela y narrativa de Nuevo León, Apuntes para su historia y Apuntes sobre el teatro regiomontano 1857-1980*. Sorprende en ambos ensayos la ambición exhaustiva, el deseo de abarcarlo todo. Todas las novelas; todos los teatros y grupos teatrales de Nuevo León. Los autores no lo logran desde luego, pero su objetivo es defendible desde cualquier punto de vista.

Existe en ambos trabajos una diferencia sustancial. Rangel Guerra nos ofrece un fichero de novelas presentado en orden alfabético y pulcramente elaborado. Pero como todo fichero, sobre todo si su

criterio de clasificación y ordenamiento es el alfabeto, provee al lector de una visión inconexa y aburrida del género literario en Nuevo León. Y como tal, es un producto intermedio, que no representa la categoría del autor. La trayectoria cultural de Rangel Guerra en Nuevo León lo obligaría a decirnos algo sobre ese fichero. A crear categorías literarias, a dibujar los hilos conductores o los saltos estéticos que den una cierta idea de la secuencia. El listado cronológico que ofrece al final de su ensayo es insuficiente.

Novela y narrativa de Nuevo León, Apuntes para su historia presta ciertamente un gran servicio a la comunidad cultural de Nuevo León, de México y del sur de Estados Unidos. Fichero inconexo pero al fin fichero: “Si se toman en cuenta las tres novelas en proceso, suman 98 las novelas y obras narrativas de Nuevo León escritas en lo que va del siglo..., cantidad muy importante” (p. 251). Rangel Guerra no es solamente un minero, sino un minero habilidoso. Pero su trayectoria cultural en Nuevo León y en México lo obligan a rendir más servicios de los que en este ensayo ha prestado.

Por su parte, Dulce María González presenta el ensayo más ambicioso de todos los que contiene el volumen. Teatros, zarzuelas, comedias, operetas, mimo, actores, directores, empresarios, grupos teatrales, escuelas de teatro, públicos... todo lo que cabe, en materia de teatro, entre 1857 y 1980. Demasiado para un escrito corto, pero digno de su interés y de su tezón por guardar, clasificar y documentar información. Un magnífico panorama compuesto de datos, anécdotas, finas observaciones y apreciaciones de la autora.

Apuntes sobre el teatro regiomontano es un trabajo de investigadora amateur y de crítica de teatro profesional. Como historiadora, González echa mano de entrevistas, notas periodísticas, archivos fotográficos, escritos de diferentes épocas. Pero su formación como crítica profesional la conduce a evaluar y aplaudir, pero no a chiflar y olvidar: “La presencia de estos nuevos teatristas a partir de la experiencia con Leos, aunada al esfuerzo de sus antecesores directos (Sergio García, Luis Martín, Julián Guajardo, etc.), constituye la piedra angular de una de las mejores épocas del teatro regiomontano: el teatro de los setenta. Este es un momento fructífero en el cual los actores han adquirido una conciencia de su función social; una mística de su arte” (p. 138).

Pero sobre todo, su formación como comentarista y crítica, hace que, conforme se acerca al presente, la autora organice sus materiales históricos en torno a quienes considera personalidades teatrales y alrededor de lo que clasifica como obras meritorias. Lo que sin duda tiene el defecto de iluminar con intensidad ciertos recodos de la escena y dejar en la sombra otros: Eglavena Martínez Celis, Guillermo Schmidhuber, Jesús María Alarcón, Jovita Alanís Guajardo, Anastasio Villegas, y Roberto Villarreal. El problema no es las ausencias, explicables en todo intento de relatar la vida artística de un período histórico tan largo, sino el sesgo, la mirada sostenida desde una cierta perspectiva, los ojos olvidadizos de lo que no brilla.

vi) Dos capítulos hacen pareja. Uno sobre la poesía, el otro sobre el cuento. Ambos con el mismo objetivo: mostrar al lector que existen tradiciones cuentísticas y poéticas en este pedazo del mundo llamado Nuevo León. Ambos ejecutan organizaciones similares del material amasado: agradecen, introducen, aclaran, se defienden, para luego describir, clasificar y evaluar. Ninguno adopta el giro panorámico de muchos de los trabajos incluidos en el volumen, sino que ambos seleccionan. Su labor es de antólogos y analistas, no de historiógrafos o archivistas. Capítulos sesudos, bien escritos y arriesgados.

Los objetivos y las preguntas se definen desde las primeras páginas: "Una lectura histórica es necesaria si se pretende cifrar un todo, un posible *continuum* en busca de una tradición regional. ¿Puede haber una poesía neoleonesa? ¿Qué ritmo deberá tener: el de la polka o el de la redoba? ¿Puede haber una lectura histórica de la poesía?" (Minerva Margarita Villarreal p. 286); "En este trabajo intentaremos señalar algunos puntos y cualidades que nos pueden llevar a pensar en una posible tradición cuentística en Nuevo León" (José Javier Villarreal p. 255).

Con estas puntos de partida, los autores ofrecen una descripción adjetivada de poetas y escritores de cuentos de distintas generaciones siguiendo una secuencia temporal. El lector encontrará ahí una dos cosas: a) una definición de estilos y modos de hacer obra literaria en Nuevo León en donde el autor y sus escritos tienden a ser vistos como un "universo narrativo" o un "tono poético" según sea el caso; b) una apreciación del valor y las cualidades de los productos de cada uno de los autores seleccionados. Estos dos elementos constituyen una lectura; es decir, la lectura que José Javier Villarreal hace del cuento en Nuevo León y Minerva Margarita Villarreal, de la poesía de ese estado. No

hablan como analistas, sino se conducen como catadores.

vii) Jorge Cantú de la Garza, poeta, formador de poetas y promotor cultural, funge en *Desde el Cerro de la Silla: Artes y letras de Nuevo León* como transcriptor y entrevistador en torno al periodismo cultural en Nuevo León.

Su labor tiene una triple función: por un lado, proveer material fresco, oral, sobre las principales revistas literarias y secciones culturales de periódicos que ha tenido Monterrey; por otro, hacer que los protagonistas vivos metidos aún en estos menesteres recuerden destacando (“¿Salamandra? La mejor revista literaria que hemos tenido.” p.205) y hablen evaluando (“Creo que en el mejor de los casos contribuimos al mantenimiento y ascenso del hacer poético en estas resecastierras. ¿Cómo? Volviendo imposible el retorno de la sensibilidad lacrimógena y declamatoria al primer plano de lo social” p.199); y por último, definir, sin quererlo, a los protagonistas.

En este texto pareciera que Jorge Cantú de la Garza no habla, a pesar de ser uno de los protagonistas. Sin embargo, no se deja de sentir su voz en la selección de los entrevistados y en las preguntas dirigidas.

viii) Los capítulos de Francisco Ruiz Solís, *Apuntes para la historia del pensamiento científico de Nuevo León*, y de Humberto Salazar, *Nuevo León en 100 libros*, son de factura muy diversa y obedecen a objetivos diferentes, sin embargo, en ellos se observará un ámbito que pocas veces se relaciona con las artes y las letras: la producción en ciencias naturales y ciencias sociales materializada en libros. Ambos autores no ponen su ojos en otros autores, sino en libros.

Ciertamente Ruiz Solís hace un esfuerzo por definir los antecedentes del “pensamiento científico” en Nuevo León describiendo instituciones, ambientes y corrientes filosóficas, pero su aportación central consiste en reseñar los libros en los que se ha venido virtiendo este pensamiento a partir de las últimas décadas del siglo pasado.

Salazar enfatiza esa intencionalidad: Nuevo León en libros. Su selección es muy cuidadosa y justificada en una pequeña nota metodológica. Con la ayuda de otros lectores, ofrece fichas bibliográficas pulcras y sustantivas clasificadas de una manera inteligente y armoniosa. Este es uno de los trabajos más valiosos y duraderos del volumen.

ix) *Desde el Cerro de la Silla: Artes y letras de Nuevo León* es además un libro hermoso, un libro objeto, un libro de colección.

Portada, fotografía, edición, títulos y subtítulos, papel, el libro como arquitectura es un placer para el lector.

La tarea del editor, Miguel Covarrubias, es notable. El libro como objeto es hechura suya; el libro como sujeto que habla es, al menos parcialmente, fruto de las relaciones profesionales e intelectuales que ha alimentado durante años al interior de la comunidad literaria y artística de Nuevo León.

Quizás restaría preguntarle a Covarrubias sobre las razones del título. *Desde el Cerro de La Silla* puede causar un cierto malestar, porque esa bella y soberbia montaña, instalada en el municipio de Guadalupe N.L., ha sido históricamente el símbolo de Monterrey, no de Nuevo León. No es que se encuentre una cierta incompatibilidad entre los símbolos de Monterrey y la realidad del estado de Nuevo León, sino que los símbolos de la ciudad capital no necesariamente significan al estado.

Ciertamente la mayor parte de la poética, la cuentística, de los libros y novelas, del periodismo cultural y las revistas literarias de Nuevo León, del teatro y del acontecer "cultural" tiene acta de nacimiento regional. Pero, en contraparte, el arte rupestre, la cocina, las artesanías y la música de esta región de México generalmente no se producen en Monterrey. Un símbolo más parejo con todos hubiese sido bienvenido.

Victor Zúñiga

El Colegio de la Frontera Norte

Announcement: Official Creation of the Río Bravo Association

The Río Bravo Association, the parent organization of *Río Bravo*, was officially established in Monterrey, Nuevo León on March 26, 1993. The meeting was held in conjunction with the Texas-Mexico Higher Education Conference sponsored by the University of Monterrey and was attended by approximately 75 individuals representing institutions of higher education along the entire length of the Rio Grande/Río Bravo.

At the meeting, by-laws were proposed and unanimously accepted for the bi-national organization. Officers representing both sides of the border were elected. Elected as Co-Presidents were Dr. Chad Richardson, UTPA, and Dr. Victor Zuñiga, COLEF. Dr. Ward Albro, Texas A & I, and Dr. Hector Garcia, Universidad Valle de Bravo, were elected as Co-Vice Presidents. The individuals elected as secretaries of the Association were José María Infante, UANL, and Dr. Israel Cuellar, UTPA. The treasurer of the Association will be Marilu Salazar of UTPA.

By-Laws of the Río Bravo Association:

I. Name

The official name of the organization is the Río Bravo Association (RBA).

II. Object

The purpose of this association is to promote the exchange of communication of research among scholars, researchers, academicians, policy makers, and others upon matters of primary concern for the Rio Grande/Río Bravo border region. It also seeks to promote regulations and policies among educational, commercial, and governmental agencies, that make such purposes possible.

To accomplish its purpose, the RBA holds an annual meeting; promotes international understanding through academic exchange, communication, and research; provides information and consultation to policy makers; publishes a journal and other materials and seeks funding to support its activities.

III. Members

1. There are two kinds of membership—Institutional and Individual. An Institution (limited to colleges and universities, public or private) may join the RBA upon payment of annual dues of \$150 U.S. This fee entitles the institution or a department/division within an institution to name three representative members, for each year paid, and the institution or its library receives a subscription to *Río Bravo*. An individual person may join the RBA upon payment of \$30 U.S., which includes a subscription to *Río Bravo*, or \$20 U.S., subscription not included. Student members will pay a \$10 annual membership that will not include voting rights nor a subscription to the journal.

2. Unless otherwise provided, the payment of individual membership dues at the beginning of each calendar year grants active membership status and full participation in elections and other activities. An active membership lapses when dues are not received prior to the annual meeting. Reactivation is automatic upon payment of dues.

IV. Officers

1. The RBA has seven officers: two Co-Presidents; a 1st Vice President; a 2nd Vice President; a Secretary and Associate Secretary; and a Treasurer.

2. Duties of Officers

A. The Co-Presidents preside over the annual meeting, appoint officials as required, authorize fiscal expenditures, and make policies and procedures for efficient operation. The Co-Presidents work with editors of *Río Bravo* to provide resources and assistance in its publication and distribution.

B. The 1st Vice President is an officer of the institution which hosts the current year's annual meeting. He is responsible for organizing and producing the meeting, including the selection of themes to be treated. Upon the removal or resignation of Co-President from his country, the Vice President assumes the Co-Presidency until a permanent Co-President can be elected at the next annual meeting.

C. The 2nd Vice President is an officer of the institution which hosts the next year's annual meeting. He/she becomes 1st Vice President and assumes those responsibilities based on the site (Texas or Mexico) of the next meeting. Each year at the annual meeting, the membership elects a new 2nd Vice President from the institution which is selected to host the annual meeting two years from that date. Upon the removal or resignation of the Co-President from his country, the corresponding

Vice President assumes the Co-Presidency until a permanent Co-President can be elected at the next annual meeting.

D. The Secretary and the Associate Secretary (the "Secretaries") maintain membership records and publish and distribute a newsletter or other means of disseminating information to the membership in each country. The Secretaries also have the executive power of an elected official in the absence of the Co-Presidents or Vice Presidents from their respective countries. The Secretaries are to be selected from the campus or city where the journal editors have their offices.

E. Treasurer will be elected, but in all cases, will be from the Texas institution where Río Bravo is published. The treasurer is responsible for maintaining funds of the Association in a bank near their institutional headquarters.

3. Officers may be nominated by any member at the annual meeting. Election is by the majority of members voting in the annual meeting.

4. The Co-Presidents serve a term of four years, which need not be coterminous. The 2nd Vice President serves a term of one year, then succeeds as 1st Vice President for a term of one year. The Secretaries and Treasurer serve a term of 3 years.

5. Any active member of RBA is eligible to election as an officer of the RBA.

V. Meeting

The RBA meets annually at the seat of one of its Institutional Members. The host institution receives \$1000 U.S. for support of the annual meeting from the institution which will host the next annual meeting.

VI. The Council

The Council/Consejo consists of 16 members, selected thus:

From Mexico at large	4
From each Mexican border state(1X4)	4
From the U.S. at large	4
The border area of Texas (up to 150 miles from border)	2
Texas at large	2
Total	16

The Council meets twice annually. Council members serve at least one year to make policy recommendations.

Guía para los Autores: *Río Bravo*

Una revista arbitrada de investigación y artículos en español e inglés para fomentar el desarrollo de un mejor entendimiento internacional, al diseño e implementación de la investigación y a nuevos descubrimientos acerca de las relaciones entre los Estados Unidos y México, y para servir de modelo para dichas investigaciones en la región del Río Bravo, preferimos artículos de interés para lectores de varias disciplinas.

•El plazo para el recibo de manuscritos es el siguiente: Para la edición de primavera: el 15 de marzo. Para la edición de otoño: el 15 de noviembre.

•El título de cada artículo y el nombre del autor aparecerán en una página separada del manuscrito. En esta página se incluirá un resumen del artículo de 25 a 35 palabras. Se traducirá cada resumen en el lenguaje opuesto al del artículo.

•Los manuscritos y bibliografías deberán seguir el formato establecido por MLA y serán editados para ajustarse a este estilo.

•Los autores deberán entregar una copia adicional de cada manuscrito en un diskette de 3 1/2 pulgadas indicando el nombre del autor y del programa que se haya usado. El artículo escrito deberá ser compatible con IBM or Macintosh (preferiblemente Word Perfect o Microsoft Word).

•Los autores serán los responsables de suministrar las tablas, gráficas, ilustraciones (*en blanco y negro solamente*).

•Los manuscritos serán a doble espacio, incluyendo las referencias y notas, y con márgenes adecuados. Los artículos serán de 15 a 30 páginas de largo.

•Mandar dos copias del manuscrito. No se aceptarán trabajos que actualmente estén bajo consideración en otra publicación. Los artículos serán leídos por un crítico interno y otro externo en el area que corresponda.

•Mandar los manuscritos al editor:

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- Submission deadlines are: March 15 for the Spring issue and November 15 for the Fall issue.

- The title of each article and the name of the author must appear on a separate page accompanying the manuscript. On this page include a 25 to 35 word abstract of the contents of the article. This summary should be in the opposite language of the article.

- Articles, references, bibliographies, and notes should conform to MLA style. Manuscripts will be edited accordingly.

- Authors should include an additional copy of the manuscript on a 3 1/2 inch computer diskette labelled with the name of the author and the type of word processing program, which should be compatible with IBM or Macintosh (WordPerfect or Microsoft Word preferred).

- Authors are responsible for providing any tables, drawings, or illustrations (*black and white only*).

- All manuscripts should be double-spaced, including references and notes. Preferred length is between 15-30 pages.

- Submit two copies of the manuscript. Please, no simultaneous submissions. Each submission will be reviewed by an internal referee and an external referee from a corresponding discipline.

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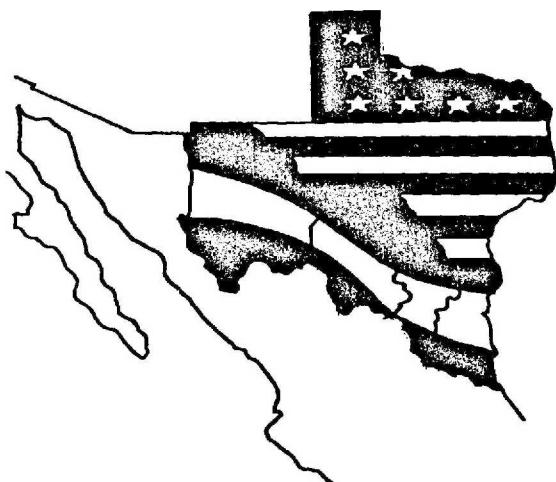
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