



The Pass Of The North

AND THE CREATION OF
THE U.S. - MEXICO BORDER

Oscar J. Martínez



Plan del territorio de la Sierra de San Juan, en el Estado de Chihuahua, México. En este territorio se encuentran las montañas y cerros, en sus cumbres se ven las neblinas y las nubes blancas, en donde se hace difícil el tránsito, por lo que se establecieron por la experiencia que tiene sobre el terreno y la gente, y se tomaron como puntos de referencia. La zona de las montañas viene una de otra, por lo que se establecieron los puntos de referencia de la Sierra de San Juan, y la Sierra de San Juan, en donde se ven las neblinas y las nubes blancas, en donde se hace difícil el tránsito, por lo que se establecieron por la experiencia que tiene sobre el terreno y la gente, y se tomaron como puntos de referencia. La zona de las montañas viene una de otra, por lo que se establecieron los puntos de referencia de la Sierra de San Juan, y la Sierra de San Juan, en donde se ven las neblinas y las nubes blancas, en donde se hace difícil el tránsito, por lo que se establecieron por la experiencia que tiene sobre el terreno y la gente, y se tomaron como puntos de referencia.



About the Author

Oscar J. Martinez grew up in El Paso-Ciudad Juárez and graduated from Sacred Heart School and El Paso High School. He taught at the University of Texas at El Paso from 1975 to 1988, serving also as Director of the Institute of Oral History and the Center for Inter-American and Border Studies. Currently he is a professor of history at the University of Arizona. He is author and editor of many publications on the history of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, including Troublesome Border (1988) and Border People (1994).

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The Pass Of The North Heritage Corridor

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intended to commemorate and celebrate our border heritage.

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by
Oscar J. Martínez
University of Arizona
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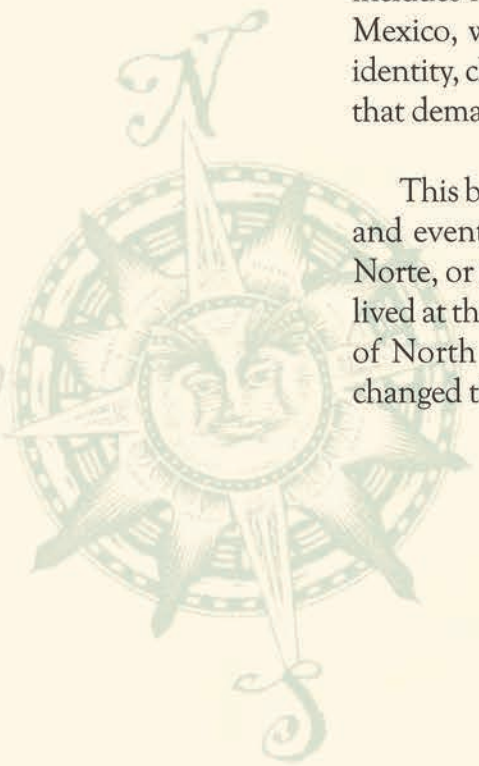
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Introduction

Imagine a prophetess at the “Pass of the North” in the 15th century answering a question about the future of the area. She might well have said, “In the centuries to come I see many strangers from afar coming through here. I see nations of white people claiming our land. I see our soothsayers and seers warning, ‘Borders are coming! Borders are coming!’ I see white foreigners drawing the borders. I see us disappearing. Finally I see lines that unite and divide people, that bring harmony and conflict, that create wealth and poverty.”

Although fictional, this scenario accurately sketches the evolution of the *Pass of the North*, a valley corridor surrounded by mountains that includes numerous communities along the Rio Grande in southern New Mexico, west Texas, and northern Chihuahua. What most defines the identity, character, and personality of the people at the pass are the borders that demarcate spatial separation in the area.

This booklet tells the story of how the United States expanded westward and eventually established its southern boundary at the Río Bravo del Norte, or the Rio Grande. This was a watershed event for the people who lived at the Pass of the North, a natural crossroads in the geographic center of North America. The new international boundary fundamentally changed the destiny of the area forever.



Encounter Between Indians and Europeans

Before the start of European colonization in North America, an estimated 10-25 million Indians lived in the area that would eventually become the United States. Great diversity characterized the indigenous population. At least twelve language groups have been identified among the thousands of nations, tribes, and bands scattered throughout the land. Some Indians had a sedentary lifestyle and others a nomadic one. Some farmed for a living and others hunted animals and gathered wild plants and fruits. Their numbers declined drastically when the Europeans introduced deadly diseases such as small pox and measles. In addition, warfare, encroachment on the land, and the imposition of artificial boundaries displaced many indigenous groups and changed their way of life forever. (See Map 1 on page 3).

Several hundred thousand Indians lived in the area that would eventually become the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Because deserts dominated much of the landscape, many tribes and bands led a nomadic existence and claimed large expanses as ancestral homelands. For centuries trade had linked Indians of the Southwest with groups from northern Mexico and far beyond to the south. The arrival of Spaniards, Mexicans, and Americans was followed by the imposition of political boundaries totally alien to the indigenous peoples. Much conflict ensued. Large numbers of Indians died as a result of the encounter with Europeans, others wound up in reservations, and some became a part of the general population. Many of the indigenous inhabitants at the Pass of the North probably wandered off to other areas. (See Map 2 on page 4).

Geronimo:
Apache resistance
leader.



Comanche
women.



Pueblo



Styles of
Indian
homes.



Tepee



Wickiup

Apaches protecting
their homes.



Map 1

INDIAN CULTURE AREAS AND SELECT TRIBES, 16TH CENTURY



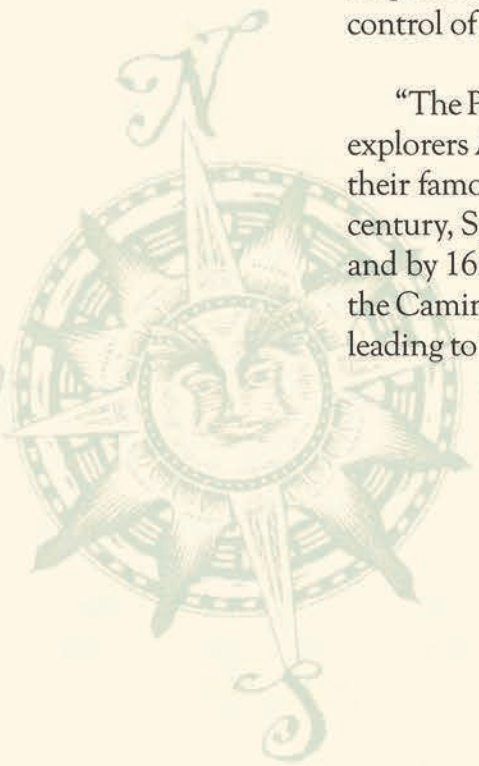
Map 2

INDIANS OF THE BORDER REGION, 16TH CENTURY

The European Division of North America and "The Pass"

Following the voyages of Christopher Columbus in the 1490s and 1500s, European exploration and colonization of North America began in earnest. Spain sent expeditions from its Caribbean base into the southeastern United States, Mexico, Central America, and South America. Once Spain established a permanent presence in central Mexico, it sent explorers and settlers northward far beyond the Rio Grande. France, meanwhile, penetrated North America through the Great Lakes and southward to the Gulf of Mexico via the Mississippi River. French claims included a vast expanse east and west of the Mississippi known as the Louisiana Territory. England explored the north Atlantic region and eventually laid claim to the coastal area of the northeastern United States. A spirited competition developed among these three European powers for control of North America. (See Map 3 on page 7).

"The Pass of the North" became known to Europeans in the 1530s when explorers Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and Estevanico passed through on their famous trek from Florida to northwestern Mexico. In the late 16th century, Spanish expeditions sent from central Mexico traversed the area, and by 1659 "El Paso del Norte" had become a significant way station on the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro (Royal Road to the Interior Provinces) leading to New Mexico.



As a result of the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713, England expanded its global territorial possessions, including lands in North America. Spain ceded Gibraltar and France gave up Acadia (Nova Scotia), Newfoundland, and territories whose waters drained into Hudson Bay. Yet boundaries in a number of places within what would eventually become the United States remained extremely vague, triggering chronic friction among these three European powers. (See Map 4 on page 8).

The Treaty of Paris of 1763, which concluded the Seven Years War between France and England, restructured the political map of North America and temporarily eliminated ambiguities regarding boundaries. The Mississippi River became the dividing line between English and Spanish possessions. England gained a substantial amount of territory, including Canada, Florida, and the area between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi. Spain acquired the western portion of the Louisiana Territory but ceded Florida to England. France lost all of its possessions in North America except for two small islands off Newfoundland. (See Map 5 on page 9).

French explorer and colonizer **Sieur Robert Cavalier de la Salle.**



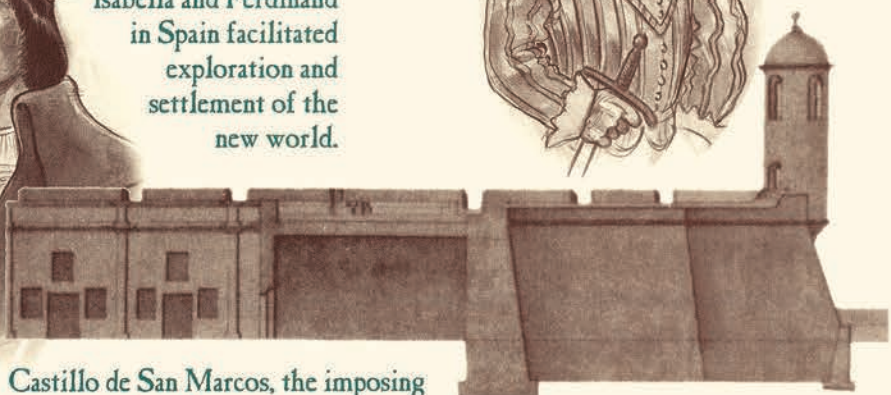
Sir Frances Drake, English privateer who attacked Spanish settlements.



The marriage of **Isabella and Ferdinand** in Spain facilitated exploration and settlement of the new world.



Castillo de San Marcos, the imposing fortress built by Spain in the 17th century to protect St. Augustine, Florida.





Map 3

NORTH AMERICAN TERRITORIES CLAIMED BY ENGLAND, SPAIN, AND FRANCE, 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES





Map 4

SPANISH, FRENCH, AND ENGLISH POSSESSIONS IN NORTH AMERICA, 1713



Map 5

NORTH AMERICA ACCORDING TO THE TREATY OF PARIS, 1763



Map 6

SPANISH / AMERICAN DISPUTE OVER LIMITS OF LOUISIANA TERRITORY, 1803-1819

The Louisiana Territory and the Texas Controversy

Following the emergence of the United States as an independent country, Americans and European immigrants migrated westward in ever increasing numbers. Land pressures mounted and Washington, D.C. responded by seeking to acquire more land from France and Spain. Expansionists dreamed of the day when the western border of the United States would be the Pacific Ocean.

The acquisition of the Louisiana Territory by the United States in 1803 from France ushered in a long period of conflict with Spain over the amount of territory that had actually changed hands. The confusion began in 1800 when Napoleon pressured Spain to return Louisiana to France in exchange for certain Italian lands. Three years later, Napoleon, unable to effectively occupy Louisiana and fearing that it might fall into English hands, sold it to the United States. Spain considered that transaction illegal because by prior agreement France could not dispose of Louisiana without Spain's approval.

Significantly, neither the Spain-France exchange in 1800 nor the France-United States transfer in 1803 specified the precise limits of Louisiana. Spain argued that the land in question consisted of only a small tract adjacent to the Mississippi River. An expansionist-minded United States countered that Louisiana included all southern and western lands to the Rio Grande and the headwaters of the Missouri River. Under this interpretation, old Spanish settlements such as Santa Fe and San Antonio had suddenly become American cities. Spain could hardly agree with that interpretation.

To substantiate its claim on Texas and other far-flung western lands, the United States cited old French claims to lands along the Gulf of Mexico to the Rio Grande and all territories drained by the Mississippi River. Spain countered that, given the extremely limited French colonization in the lands in question, France had greatly exaggerated its ownership rights. In Texas, for example, the French had merely established a small and temporary settlement, while the Spaniards had founded many permanent missions and towns. (See Map 6 on page 10).

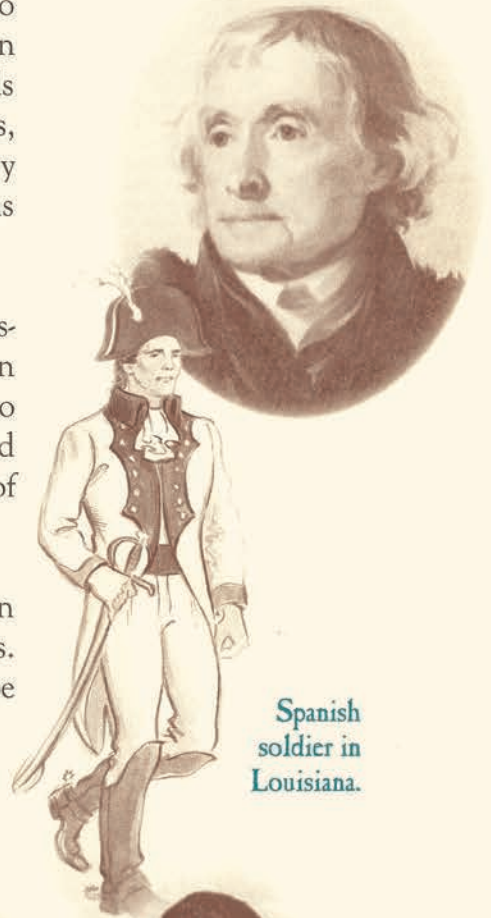
The dispute over Louisiana was finally settled in 1819, when the Adams-Onís Treaty fixed the border between the United States and New Spain along an irregular line beginning at the Sabine River, proceeding north to the 42nd parallel, and from there to the Pacific. Spain acknowledged American ownership of Florida and gave up claims on the Pacific north of the 42nd parallel.

Once again a firm border seemed to be in place. American expansionists, however, continued to press for the acquisition of Texas. They insisted that Texas had constituted part of Louisiana and should be “reincorporated” into the United States. (See Map 7 on page 13).

As Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams negotiated the Treaty of 1819 with Spain.



President Thomas Jefferson orchestrated the Louisiana Purchase and promoted exploration of the west.



Spanish soldier in Louisiana.



Meriwether Lewis and William Clark blazed a new trail to the Pacific in 1803-1806.



Map 7

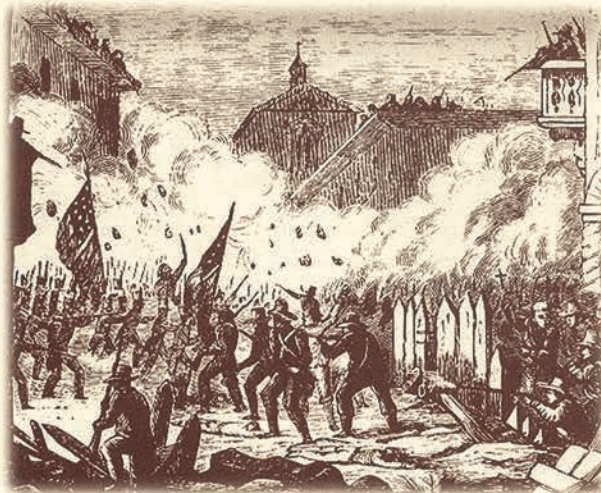
**BORDER ESTABLISHED BY
ADAMS-ONIS TREATY, 1819**

Tensions over Texas and the U. S.-Mexico War

After the establishment of the 1819 boundary, tens of thousands of Anglo Americans immigrated into Texas, a province ruled by Spain until 1821 and thereafter by Mexico following independence. Conflict soon developed between the Anglo Texans and the Mexican government. In 1836 the Anglo immigrants and some local Hispanics rebelled and declared themselves citizens of the "Republic of Texas." In 1845 Texas became a part of the United States through annexation.

Mexico did not recognize the independence of Texas and denounced the United States for annexing what the Mexican government considered a part of the national domain. Along with the question of Texan independence, disagreements surfaced over the formal borders of the "Republic of Texas."

General Antonio López de Santa Anna commanded Mexican armies that fought during the Texas rebellion and during the War of 1846-1848.



Siege of Monterrey
by American Forces.



Rock formation
at Hueco Tanks.

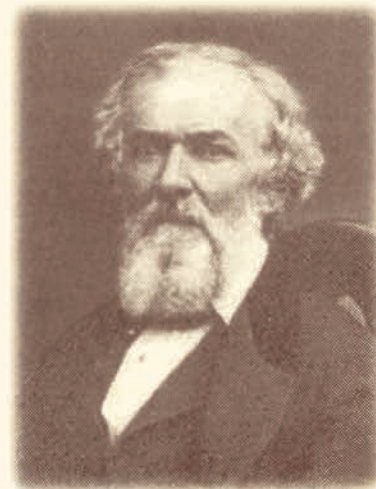
What were the territorial limits of Texas? Under Spain and Mexico Texas had been a small province, but the ambitious leaders of the “Republic” attempted to incorporate large tracts of Mexican land that lay beyond the traditional borders. Basing themselves on a treaty of dubious validity signed by General Antonio López de Santa Anna, who was taken prisoner at the battle of San Jacinto in 1836, the Texans declared the Rio Grande as their southern and western boundary. Some expansionists even proposed that the western boundary of Texas be extended to the Pacific Ocean. (See Map 8 page 17).

The international friction caused by the 1845 annexation of Texas by the United States escalated rapidly, and war with Mexico erupted in 1846. At that point the United States was already a world power, while Mexico was a weak and fragmented society engaged in the initial stages of nation-building. Much better equipped and trained American soldiers invaded Mexico by land and sea. General Zachary Taylor’s troops advanced into Tamaulipas and Nuevo León. Another American army traveled the Santa Fe Trail and penetrated New Mexico, California, Chihuahua and other northern Mexican states. U.S. naval forces joined land soldiers in the invasion of California. Finally, in the most important operation of the war, combined naval and army forces took the port city of Vera Cruz and then advanced to Mexico City. Control of the capital by the Americans gave Washington D.C. the upper hand in dictating the terms for ending the war. (See Map 9 page 18).

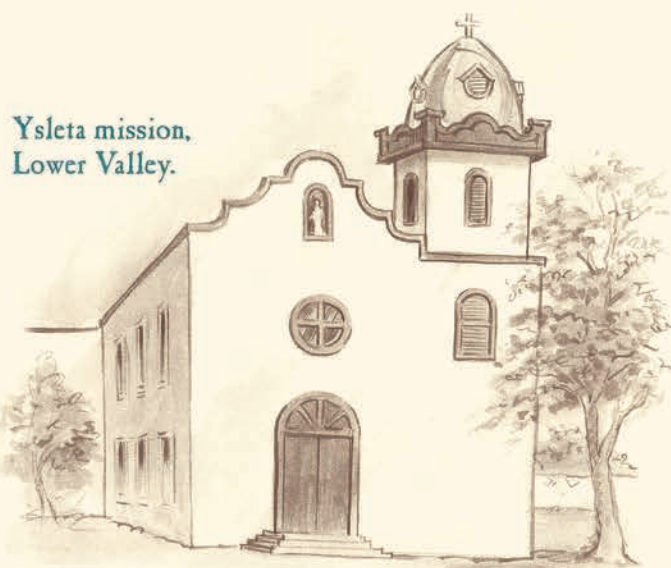
In the negotiations for peace Mexico finally acknowledged the loss of Texas. The biggest challenge became to preserve as much of the remaining national domain as possible in the face of extraordinary pressure from an expansionist-minded government in Washington D.C. and from factions

that wanted the United States to absorb all of Mexico. Mexican negotiators presented three possible borderlines for American consideration. The first two proposals sought to retain California and New Mexico as Mexican possessions and to establish a buffer zone at the Nueces River. U.S. negotiators rejected both plans. The third proposal closely resembled the line finally adopted under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. (See Map 10 on page 19).

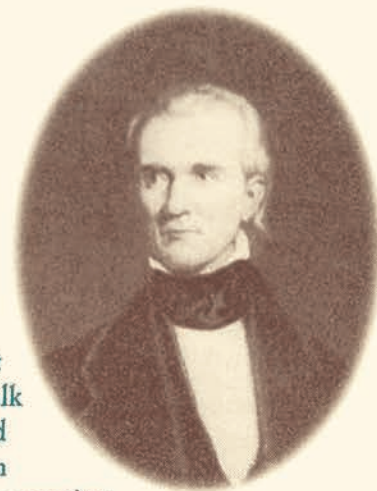
The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed in February, 1848, formally ended the war and established the Rio Grande as the eastern border between Mexico and the United States. The western border consisted of a line above Paso del Norte (present-day Ciudad Juárez) to the Gila River and from there to the Pacific Ocean. Lack of precision regarding the location of the line from the Paso del Norte area to the Gila River caused thorny problems later. In 1853 the United States purchased portions of Sonora and Chihuahua from Mexico as part of the Gadsden Treaty. In Mexico the 1853 agreement became known as El Tratado de Mesilla. (See Map 11 on page 20).



Nicholas Trist, who negotiated the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, expressed sorrow at the harsh terms imposed on Mexico regarding the ceding of territory to the United States.



Ysleta mission,
Lower Valley.



President James Polk promoted American expansion, pressing Congress to declare war on Mexico.



Map 8

BORDER DISPUTES ARISING FROM CLAIMS OF THE REPUBLIC OF TEXAS



Map 9

U.S. INVASION OF MEXICO DURING THE WAR OF 1846-1848



Map 10

MEXICAN BOUNDARY PROPOSALS DURING THE TREATY OF GUADALUPE HIDALGO BOUNDARY NEGOTIATIONS, 1847

Based on John R. V. Prescott, *Boundaries and Frontiers* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978), p. 81.



Map 11

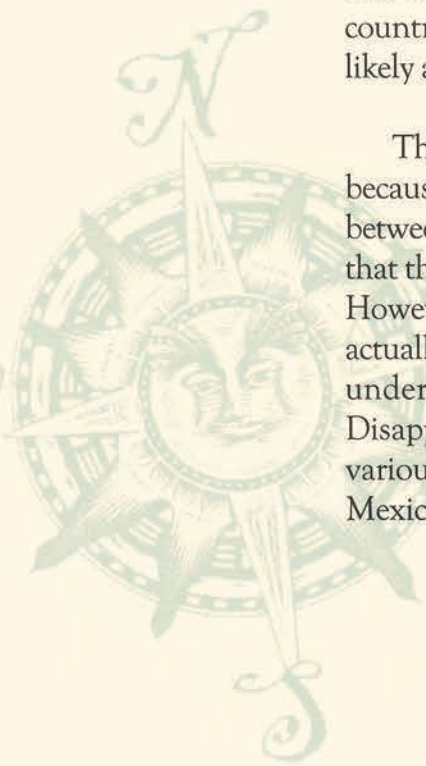
**BORDERS ESTABLISHED BY TREATY
OF GUADALUPE HIDALGO (1848)
AND GADSDEN TREATY (1853)**

Impact of the New Border

At the Pass of the North, the new international boundary divided the local Mexican and Indian population in two. Those who lived south of the Rio Grande remained in Mexico, but those who resided on the north bank became part of the United States. Approximately 10,000 people lived along the Rio Grande from San Elizario to Mesilla in 1848. Half that number resided on soil that would remain in Mexico.

In the years following the creation of the border, Paso del Norte and its satellite communities on the south bank of the Rio Grande, along with other towns in Chihuahua, experienced an influx of Mexicans from points north who wished to remain under the jurisdiction of Mexico. In the case of Ysleta, Socorro, and San Elizario, jurisdiction could not be immediately established because of their location on an island formed by two channels of the Rio Grande. Following some controversy both countries accepted their incorporation into the United States. More than likely a portion of the population in these towns transplanted to Mexico.

The fate of the people of Mesilla turned out to be more problematic because of prolonged disagreement over the precise location of the border between the Rio Grande and the Gila River. The Gadsden Treaty settled that thorny issue in 1853, and Mesilla became a part of the United States. However, many Mesillanos did not welcome that development. They had actually moved to that location after 1848 expecting that it would remain under the jurisdiction of Mexico as part of the state of Chihuahua. Disappointed, an unknown number of the town's residents relocated to various places in Chihuahua to fulfill their desire to continue living in Mexico.



The new international boundary brought momentous change to the Pass of the North. Ancient Paso del Norte (renamed Ciudad Juárez in 1888) and the newly-established El Paso, Texas, would emerge as a major binational urban center in the geographic center of the reconfigured borderlands. Each community would be shaped by the powerful forces generated by an international border that divided a large and powerful nation from a smaller, developing country. Economic inequality created both liabilities and opportunities for the people at the Pass. Conflicts erupted with regularity. With the passage of time, however, interdependence became the dominant feature in the area. Juarenses and Paseños adjusted well to an evolving binational system that allowed them to enjoy the best that each of their respective countries had to offer. At the same time, they developed strategies for coping with chronic border tensions associated with such troublesome issues as smuggling, undocumented migration, and trade.

Looking south
into Mexico,
the Rio Grande
during the dry
winter season.



San Elizario Chapel
in El Paso County's Lower Valley.



The Socorro Mission
bell tower at sunset.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY W. GARY BISSELL

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Credits

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Geronimo photo, National Archives. From Angie Debo, A History of Indians of the United States (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970)

Comanche women. Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma. From Angie Debo, A History of Indians of the United States (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970)

Styles of Indian homes, drawings by Ignacio (Nacho) Garcia, Jr.

Apaches protecting their homes. National Archives. From Angie Debo, A History of Indians of the United States (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970)

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French explorer and colonizer Sieur Robert Cavelier de la Salle. Library of Congress. From Roger Daniels, Coming to America (New York: Harper Collins, 1990).

Sir Francis Drake and Isabella and Ferdinand, drawings by Ignacio (Nacho) Garcia, Jr.

Castillo de San Marcos. Photo © 1998, W.J. Harris in 1912.

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Hueco Tanks. Photo by W. Gary Bissell.

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Ysleta mission, drawing by Ignacio (Nacho) Garcia, Jr.



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