

The Limits of Natural Boundaries: A Botanist's Experience of Mexico's
Northern Border in the 1800s

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by

Hattie Wilder Karlstrom

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my foundation that is home — my mom and dad. It is also dedicated to my advisor, Miles Rodríguez, who introduced me to this work and has been nothing but encouraging and supportive all the way through. He is an invaluable resource and I am indebted to all the work that he does. Additionally, there is a special place in my heart for the French botanist, Jean Louis Berlandier, who has become not only my main source of information in this project but also a companion in finding this region of the world fascinating. Finally, I dedicate this work to all the lives that have been and continue to be affected by this border, hand drawn across continuous nature, created by maps and war, and more recently weaponized. Having spent time at the U.S.-Mexico border in the Fall of 2019, my heart is with the friends I made. Those who are brave and strong enough to cross and those who are continuing to dedicate their time and energy to help. Every intentional act of kindness is revolutionary; every folded blanket is a prayer; humanitarian aid is never a crime; and the work continues. *Hasta un mundo sin fronteras.*

Preface

Bees

Scribbled in the corner of a page of my journal from October, 2019 is a note to myself: *remember to write about the bees*. That day we walked through the desert — too lighthearted for the work we were doing — with a woman whose life partner awaited retrial by the government of the United States. *Humanitarian aid is never a crime*. We walked through the desert, lighthearted, weighted down by gallon jugs of water and cans of beans, all piled into packs on our backs. We walked through the desert, lighthearted, not following trails but the GPS in our palm, carrying the weight of every life we might save. Every life that was desperate and courageous enough to brave this desert that has been weaponized against brown bodies. A treacherous and inhospitable and dry desert. The same desert we walked through, lighthearted. Lighthearted on the surface. After the second water-drop of the day I bent down to pick up an animalized gallon. A hole had been gnawed into the corner. The water was gone. Evaporated. Drunk. But the bottom of the gallon was full of something dark. Dirt? I unscrewed the cap and turned the gallon upside down, pausing for a moment in our trek to pour.

As a stream of dried and rotting carcasses cascade to the ground my breath catches and I gag. I lose count as the insects continue to hit the dried earth. I realize they are bees and I think of what these tiny deaths must have felt like. Looked like. Hundreds of them, though I cannot count. I look away, to the blue sky and blinding sun that beats down on the backs of our necks as I imagine the excitement these bees must have felt upon the discovery of water. Water in the desert. Life in the desert. They must have swarmed, drawn in for lack of hydration. Buzz buzzing

happily to each other as they sated themselves. What happened next? When did the first one succumb? Did its friend dive in after? Was it a cascade into the water as it is now a cascade out of the dried gallon? The insects continue to thud to the ground and I can't stop thinking about how they must have thrashed as one after another fell to its watery grave. I hear myself breathe out an apology. Finally the small thuds stop and I look down, viscerally disgusted and sorrowful. I see a pile of death and decomposition. The desert does not lend itself to an easy life.

I returned to the green truck in silence, didn't clamor to take pictures of the rattlesnakes or fain enthusiasm for lunch. She told me about the single shoe, size small, a child's. A single shoe, solitary, left on its side on the side of a dusty, narrow path in the middle of a weaponized desert, less than a mile from another country. She told me about the single shoe, and then the pair, neatly set on the ground. Her group traveled on in silence but when they reached the hilltop, they raised voice against the tragedy. *I don't know if you were thinking this but... just because the shoes are here doesn't mean the kid isn't okay.* And later, looking out across the desert, towards the border, a visible scar of newly constructed wall: *they're so early in their journey. I like to think they brought extra pairs of shoes.* She draws on the gallons we place in the desert, we all do. La Virgen de Guadalupe holding a baby. Parents and children walking together, they hold hands, haloed. *Vayan con dios.* Selfish as it seems I comfort myself by hoping that these travelers find our gallons of water, with drawings of encouragement, before it is too late. I hope that they do not end up like the bees, dead in the desert as they give their lives in exchange for the promise of life.

On that Wednesday in October, we took a detour from our planned water-drops to stand beside a pond in the middle of the Sonoran desert. From the parking lot we looked across a short

fence into Mexico, trucks wizzing by along Route 2. We walked along a dusty road and my breath caught as the trees dispersed and I stood before water. Water in the desert. The Quitobaquito spring sits forty miles south of the small Arizona town of Ajo, less than 200 meters north of Mexico. It has been a source of human life for over 16,000 years. The day I circumvented the spring it was complete with ducks and reeds and mud and algae. Deep enough that I could not easily see the bottom. As my friends stood in place and chatted, I walked ahead in silence. On the far side of the pond was a small trickle. I knelt and touched my hand to the stream. I watched tiny fish swim against the current. My eyes tracked a miniature turtle as it zoomed along the the water slide, bumping irregularly against the clay banks. The sight of water was powerful. Because it was water in the desert. And we were trying to stop people from dying of dehydration, by putting water in the desert. And something about that act, that fact, goes back to life and survival — because a lack of water means death. So this water in the desert meant life. And it had meant life for centuries. It made me think back on all the years that Quitobaquito had provided water. And then I thought about how as the border wall went up, not 200 meters away, its construction would destroy the spring. I walked along the stream that fed the pond to where the water emerged from the ground.

The water seems to seep up from the mud. It doesn't appear to flow. It stays — clay, mud and algae. The blooming reeds grow thick. Water trickles, inch-deep and clear. We sat in silence for a long time, contemplating an everlasting beauty that was nearing its end, but tears did not come. In the truck she voiced that being at the spring felt like saying goodbye to something beautiful that we'd only just met. As we drove away along the bumpy dirt road on the northern side of the border we were brought up short by construction vehicles, cranes, signs —

Restoration Area. The monotonous drone of people and machines at work felt like an assault in the quiet desert. In this way we met the construction of the border wall. We stopped and stepped out of our green truck. We watched in silence, took pictures, observed the metal slats going up, constructing what was a large fence more than a wall. I was struck by how see-through this dividing structure was. A taunt from one side to the other. Eventually a Border Patrol car pulled up, asked us to leave through its presence. We drove along the newly constructed wall, a slash across the untamable desert. *My biggest fear, she said, is that this heartbreaking thing is going to happen — the building of the wall — and no one is going to feel heartbroken.* But in the same breath she reminded us how much power there is in being present and observing: *today we saw the wall, and that means something.* As much as seeing the wall felt like a defeat, at the same time I couldn't help but notice its insignificance. The wall might be built, but it will not stop people from crossing the border. It will not stop people from caring. And eventually it will be torn down. Where the wall has power is not in its structure but in its representation of sentiment and situation. The wall is a manifestation of the trauma and violence that has been present in this space for centuries. It is a physical representation of the destruction and inhumanity that is occurring daily. It does mean something. But I like to think that its construction gives the monsters we fight a physical presence, eyes for us to fear but at which we can also poke.

My mother writes me a letter. *Somehow we are already past the middle of October and I am looking forward to your return home. After so many incredible experiences. You have grown into your own — your own activism, your own hikes in the Arizona desert. I am proud of you and the effort you are putting into the things you are doing.* I wonder if these water-drops are really small wins or if we are simply using them to inoculate ourselves against an overpowering sense

of helplessness. When I left to volunteer at the border, I struggled with the feeling of needing to *go*, and the concern that I wouldn't be able to *do* — that I had no power, that it wasn't my place. The man living in sanctuary in my small New England town, protesting an ICE deportation order, left me with these words: *You go. You ask what you can do to help. The power to act is in your hands. You go. Because being there is something.* A reminder: if nothing else, let us bear witness to the atrocities being committed at the border; and if something, let us lend our humanity to those who need it most.

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Introduction

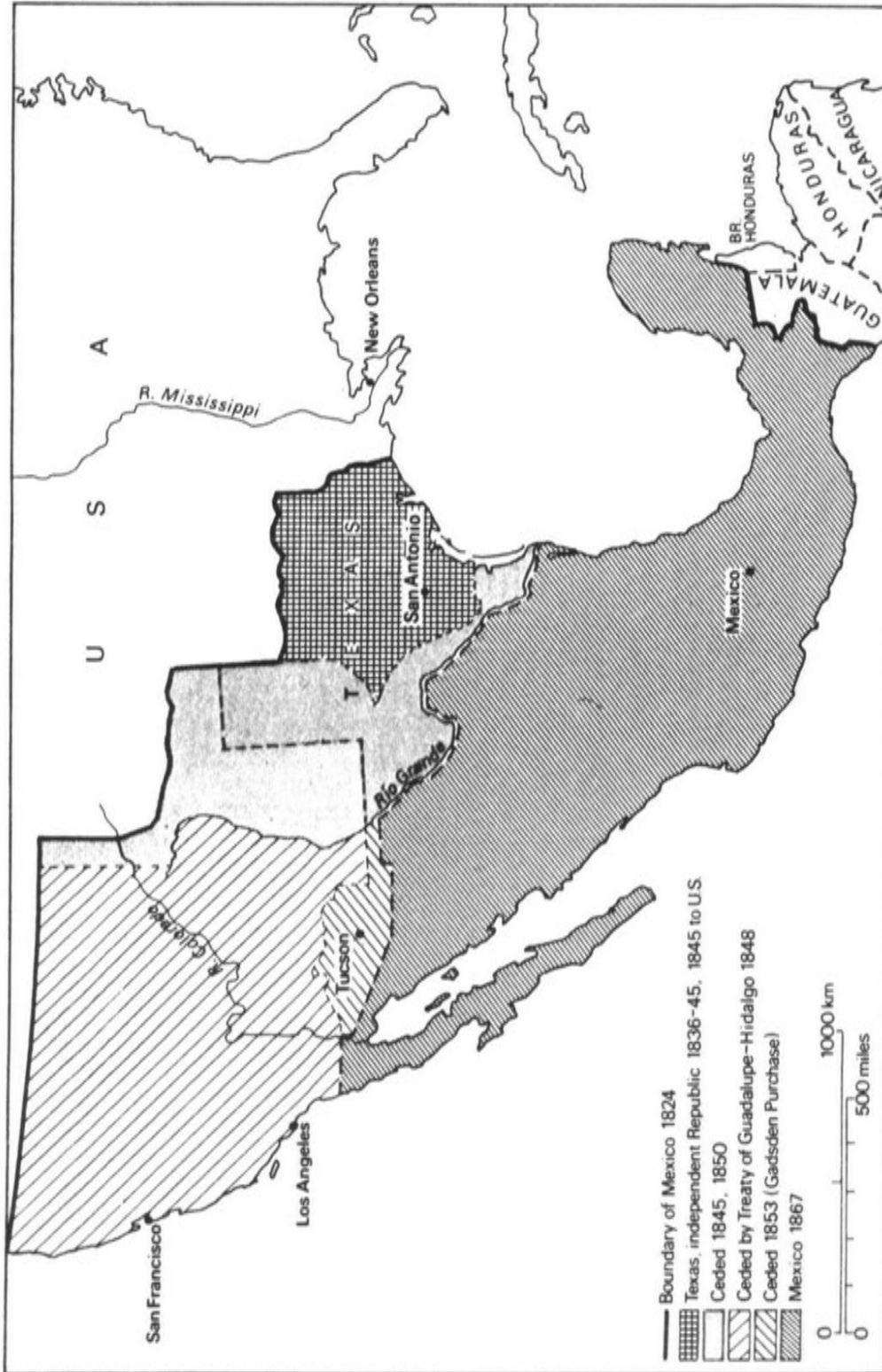
Boundaries — geographic, constructed, conceptual, and political — are present around the world. They are created through the inherently political act of mapping a region and often fall along seemingly natural boundaries such as rivers, mountains, and oceans. By looking at the formation of the U.S.-Mexico border during the 1800s, through the eyes of a French botanist, I will delve into the history of this border's mapping, question the validity of the Río Bravo as a boundary, and recognize that Indigenous peoples greatly influenced the realities of the border region throughout history. To begin, in attempting to understand the border between the United States and Mexico, it is important to note that the region has often been viewed as arid and inhospitable throughout its history. Even early on, the Nahuatl people of Mexico-Tenochtitlan (what is today Mexico City) having come from a northern land called Aztlán, understood the north to be undesirable and the people there wild. In the 1500s, this understanding of the region was adopted by the Spanish Conquistadores as the Spanish Crown wanted little to do with settling the northernmost territory of its viceroyalty, New Spain. Their disinterest was supported by reports from the north that described the region as “a harsh, arid land which provided only limited means of subsistence for those living there.”¹ Written recordings of this region originally came only from Spanish explorers, such as Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca who set out on his notable expedition in 1527, and from the “Catholic missionaries who engaged in the ambitious

¹ Howard Lamar and Sam Truett, “The Greater Southwest and California from the Beginning of European Settlement to the 1880s,” in *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, ed. Bruce G. Trigger and Wilcomb E. Washburn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 57.

task of converting and ‘civilizing’ Native Americans.”² Through most of the Spanish Crown’s reign of New Spain, missionaries in its northern territory provided the most significant and only Spanish influence there. Indeed, in 1573, the Spanish King Philip II issued the Comprehensive Orders for New Discoveries, “which gave missionaries the primary role in pacifying new peoples.”³ These missionaries were largely Franciscan friars who established missions as early as 1610 and by 1776 as far north as present-day San Francisco, California. The relative disinterest in New Spain’s north lasted until the 1800s when the Spanish Empire’s interest in the northern territory of its viceroyalty increased due to many European and colonial powers attempting to lay claim to the land north and south of the Río Bravo. By the mid-1800s negotiations of space regarding the border region between the United States and its southern neighbor had come to the forefront of political interest. This increase in political attention began in 1803 when the Louisiana Purchase took French influence out of the region, thus bringing the United States’ and Spanish interests into closer contact. In 1821, Mexico declared independence from Spain, which then transferred negotiations of the border region from between the U.S. and Spain to between the U.S. and newly independent Mexico. Mexico produced its first constitution, a federalist constitution, in 1824. In 1829, Mexico abolished slavery, something it would take the U.S. until 1865 to do. Mexico’s second constitution was produced in 1836, which was a centralist constitution aiming to grant more power to the executive branch and less to the individual states. The centralist constitution of 1836 along with Mexico’s abolition of slavery led Texas to declare its own independence from Mexico before being annexed by the United States in 1845. This

² Lamar and Truett, “The Greater Southwest and California from the Beginning of European Settlement to the 1880s,” 57.

³ Lamar and Truett, “The Greater Southwest and California from the Beginning of European Settlement to the 1880s,” 68.



Mexican territories ceded to the United States

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Figure 1. "Mexican territories ceded to the United States" in Jan Bazant, "Mexico from Independence to 1867," 440.

contention over border space led to the U.S propositioning Mexico with an offer to buy more of its land, which Mexico refused, causing the U.S. to wage war with Mexico in 1846. The war concluded in 1848 with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which stipulated that Mexico would cede more than 500,000 square miles of its northern territory, which encompassed parts of present-day Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, Nevada, and Utah, to the United States. The cession of this land meant that the border passed south over roughly 100,000 Mexicans who then became U.S. citizens — largely without knowledge of the border’s change in location.⁴ Additionally, it was in 1848 that the fixed border between the United States and Mexico that we know today took its shape. Figure 1 shows the region in question, with demarcations specifying the different locations of the border between the United States and Mexico at different times throughout its history.

In order to understand what led to such a drastic change in border placement in 1848, and the border more generally, it is important to look at the years leading up to 1846 when the conflict between the United States and Mexico came to a head. I believe that looking at the pre-war years yields unique insight into what the land itself looked like, who inhabited it, and how the land was understood both politically and by those present in the border region. With this in mind, I focus my study of the border on the first half of the 19th century, with an in depth analysis of a Mexican perspective on the region between the years of 1827 and 1834. With this analysis I show that the realities of the border region were distinctly influenced by Indigenous actors, that the understanding and mapping of land is inherently political, and that the validity of rivers as natural borders should be questioned. In writing this history I have found that it is the

⁴ Timothy J. Henderson, *Beyond Borders: A History of Mexican Migration to the United States* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 9.

distinct challenge of the historian to retell the past without using the demarcations of space and land that exist today. In other words, we must not write contemporary boundaries back into the history of a land that was then still stranger to them. Therefore, in order to understand the U.S.-Mexico border I believe it is necessary to rid ourselves of current borders, looking instead to understand the conflicts of the past — of which negotiations of land and boundaries were often central — with fresh eyes unhindered by contemporary organizations of space.

Before we find ourselves attuned to a specific tale of the border, at a specific time, in a specific place, some context about the region, its inhabitants, and the political climate of the time is necessary. This context will begin with the Indigenous tribes of the region, a reference to their varying identities and different responses to colonial settlement, as well as inter-tribal relations, and the significant impact of independent Indigenous actions on the outcome of colonial conflicts. From the Indigenous history of the region we will move towards understanding a little of the political circumstances underway in Mexico City in the early 1800s. The political history of Mexico at this time is complex and confusing. Indeed, in Mexico's early years of independence there were as many as fifty changes in government.⁵ Therefore, we will only attempt to grasp what is necessary in order to understand how Mexican governance viewed the border region and distributed attention accordingly. The third point of context will highlight the beginnings of the Mexican Comisión de Límites. This commission was created to explore the northern regions of Mexico and map out the specific landmarks of Mexico's border with the United States, with the intention to better prepare Mexico to negotiate its claim to the region. Finally, I will introduce a French botanist named Jean Louis Berlandier, a noteworthy member of

⁵ Alicia Hernández Chávez, *Mexico: a Brief History* (University of California Press, 2007), 117.

the Comisión de Límites and someone whose writing provides a unique insight into the happenings of the border in the late 1820s and early 1830s.

Before delving in, I offer a brief critique on the concept of the *Frontier*. I believe this is necessary to include because, read from a U.S. perspective, the topic of the U.S.-Mexico border region is prejudiced by U.S. westward expansion and manifest destiny. Thus the U.S. concept of the *Frontier* warrants analytic challenging. In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner wrote an essay entitled “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.” This essay helped form U.S. perspective on the border region by making the claim that the *Frontier* was a significant and integral part of the development of the United States as an independent nation from England. Turner defined the *Frontier* as a region that was forever mobile and changing, a region of transformation, and, for the European, “the line of most rapid and effective Americanization.”⁶ For Turner, the *Frontier* signified an unregulated region where human civilization met wilderness. Understanding the *Frontier* as such is problematic, as the wilderness of the “Great West” was not uninhabited or devoid of human civilization. However, as the largely nomadic Indigenous communities who called this region home did not fit European understandings of civilization, the *Frontier* remained “wild” in the eyes of the U.S. Turner also argued that nationalism for the United States depended on the *Frontier*; that it promoted democracy because the mobility of the *Frontier* limited localism, thus unifying people under a broader nationalism.⁷ In addition to Turner, there were many attempts made by the U.S. to define, understand, and map the contours of the *Frontier* through the 1800s. These attempts included the mapping of the

⁶ Frederick Jackson Turner and John Mack Faragher, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History (1893),” in *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” and Other Essays*, (Yale University Press, 1994), 33.

⁷ Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History (1893),” 53.

Frontier by adventurers such as Zebulon Montgomery Pike, a brigadier general and an explorer for the United States, and contemporary of Lewis and Clark. Pike's expedition in the *Frontier* marked the very beginning of the 1800s and represented a U.S. need for geographical understanding of the *Frontier*. Indeed, as Pike understood it, the purpose of his expedition was "to acquire such a geographical knowledge of the Southwestern boundary of Louisiana as to enable [the U.S.] government to enter into a definitive arrangement for a line of demarkation between that territory and North Mexico."⁸ Thus Pike, on the U.S. side, played the opposing role to Jean Louis Berlandier and the Comisión de Límites on the Mexican side, as we will see. Despite Pike's similarities to Berlandier, as a U.S. citizen Pike viewed the border region as a *Frontier* to be conquered. In order to understand the history of this region we must shed all notions of the *Frontier* as defined by Turner, we must forget about the "Wild West," and we must lose all notions of U.S. manifest destiny. Instead, in looking at the region in question, let us understand that it was not inherently a border, but a land that Indigenous tribes traversed for centuries. In fact, the Indigenous tradition of crossing this land has survived into the present-day, despite the pressures of "border security" brought against the tribes by the United States and Mexican governments. This region of earth has been the attention of not only U.S. expansion, but Spanish and then Mexican settlement as well; and perhaps most importantly has been a home to Indigenous peoples beginning long before any colonial conflict emerged.

Finally, a brief note on terminology. Going forward, though in Spanish the translation for "frontier," "border," and "boundary" are all *frontera*, in order to challenge the U.S. perspective exemplified in both Pike and Turner I have chosen not to use the term "frontier" to define this

⁸ Zebulon Montgomery Pike, *The Expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike*, ed. Elliott Coues, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1987), ii.

region. I believe that the word “frontier” in English carries too much cultural weight and expectation. Instead, I will either refer to the area of land known today as the United States’ southwest, particularly Texas, as the northern regions of Mexico, as it was at the time, or as the border region between the two countries. I believe “border region” is acceptable, for it was understood to be a border region in the 1800s as it is now. Furthermore, the river known in the United States as the Rio Grande and in Mexico as the Río Bravo (del Norte) will herein be referred to as the Río Bravo. This decision is made in recognition of the fact that our main source, the travel journals of Jean Louis Berlandier — even though the majority of his work was written in his native French — refer to this river from a Mexican perspective, thus calling it the Río Bravo. It is worth noting that there may be instances that quotations of other writings are referenced, in which the river is referred to as the Rio Grande. It is the same river. With *naming* in mind, I find it noteworthy to recognize the direct translation of the town Matamoros, in which Jean Louis Berlandier spent much of his life in Mexico. In Spanish, “matamoros” means something along the lines of a racist and violent statement: “kill Moors.” While this information will not be delved into deeper in this writing, I believe language is powerful and that the name of this town, Matamoros, is a direct reference to a history of migration and exclusion experienced in Spain that was then introduced by Conquistadores through language to the border region under consideration herein. Additionally in terms of translation, I have chosen to make reference to the Comisión de Límites by simply shortening it to “the Comisión.” This is in place of using the English translation referenced in other historical works: the Boundary Commission. I make this decision under consideration of the fact that *boundary* invokes a different understanding of the region than was held at the time. While the Comisión was created to discover and map the

boundary between Mexico and the United States, the directives that came from Mexico City at this time encouraged the discovery of Mexico's northern *limits*, not its *border*. Thus I believe using the commission's untranslated title to be sufficient in imparting the correct sentiment. Furthermore, in regards to those inhabitants of the border region, when referring to citizens of the United States, the term "American" will not be used. I will instead substitute "U.S. citizen/colonist/settler/migrant" or some variation of this as is appropriate in context. I believe the term "American" to be inaccurate and nonspecific as any resident of the Americas, whether South, Central, or North, is an American. Therefore this terminology is not exclusive to the United States. Similarly, I will not refer to the war between the United States and Mexico (1846-1848) as the "Mexican-American War" as is often custom, but rather as the "U.S.-Mexico War." Finally, in reference to individuals or communities who are native to the region in discussion, I will use the term "Indigenous" when more specificity is not possible. This is a minimal yet conscious effort to humanize those who so often are completely excluded from the historical narrative. The capital "I" designates that indigeneity is not an all encompassing category of reduction, but rather a title of designation.

The Context

Indigenous Influence in the Border Region

When looking to understand the history of the current U.S.-Mexico border, it is important to first understand the extensive history of Indigenous negotiations and influence over control of space in the region. This includes independent Indigenous negotiations among different tribes, as well as how Indigenous actions responded to and interacted with the actions and interests of Spaniards, Mexicans, and the U.S. Importantly, these histories must be understood outside of the concept of a border between countries that, in many cases, bifurcates regions that had previously been inherently traversable by Indigenous communities. Though the border between the United States and Mexico has recently come into intense debate and gained national attention, its history of violence and negotiation extends back to pre-conquest eras when Indigenous communities negotiated continuously for space, resources, and the means of survival. The area in question, present-day northern Mexico and the U.S.'s southwest, was originally recognized by colonial interests as fairly inhospitable territory. The nature of the landscape meant that the Indigenous tribes that dominated the region in the 1800s and before were largely, though not exclusively, nomadic, and traveled seasonally in smaller communities in order to follow sources of food. As such, negotiations of space and “patterns of social interaction within these groups often shifted with the seasons.”⁹ Early European excursions into this region established reports of barrenness, due both to lack of vegetation and to the Spaniards’ inability to conceive of civilization without strong, sedentary settlements of people. Further, the general lack of violence in negotiations over

⁹ Lamar and Truett, “The Greater Southwest and California from the Beginning of European Settlement to the 1880s,” 66.

space among nomadic tribes “misled Europeans to assume that they were passive or even stupid.”¹⁰ Thus, beginning a narrative of emptiness and lack of civilization in the 1500s, historians have continued to retell this tale of the border region throughout its history. In telling Indigenous histories of the border region, as well as telling the complete history of the border, it is necessary to un-create the border as we know it in order to retell its formation. This is done by understanding the fluid and complex relationships between the Comanche, Apache, Kiowa, Navajo, Ute, Yaqui, Pueblo and other tribes Indigenous to the region. For these different groups did maintain a sense of territoriality “and they negotiated constantly if one group had to cross another’s homeland.”¹¹ Additionally, as non-Indigenous powers began staking claim to the region, attention must continue to be paid to the Indigenous negotiations of space as they continued to have severe influence over the region.

While it would take volumes to do justice to the intricacies of Indigenous life and relationships in the border region, in this context it is most important to include the impact of Indigenous raiding on Mexican settlements in the years leading up to and during the U.S.-Mexico War of 1846-1848. These Indigenous raids, the majority of which were carried out by the Comanche and Apache tribes, were highly coordinated and powerful. Despite their extensive impact, histories of the border region rarely include Indigenous actors as significant contributors. In contrast to this narrative of Indigenous inconsequentiality in the history of the border, we must recognize that Indigenous communities were able to directly influence imperial designs in the region, as well as affect them indirectly. Historian Brian DeLay introduced Indigenous actions to

¹⁰ Lamar and Truett, “The Greater Southwest and California from the Beginning of European Settlement to the 1880s,” 67.

¹¹ Lamar and Truett, “The Greater Southwest and California from the Beginning of European Settlement to the 1880s,” 67.

the historical narrative with his book, *War of a Thousand Deserts*. He not only analyzed how Indigenous raiding influenced the border region in general, but how raids specifically influenced the outcome of the U.S.-Mexico War.

Initially, raids began to increase significantly in both number and size in 1810 at the beginning of Mexico's War of Independence. This increase was a result of declining Spanish authority in the region, and by the time Mexico declared independence in 1821, the new government was left to deal with a vacuum of colonial interest in its northern regions that had previously been filled with delicately fostered Spanish alliances. Among what was lost upon Mexican independence were the financial resources to continue long existing gift-giving relationships between governmental authorities and Indigenous communities, and this led to growing Indigenous hostility towards Mexican settlements.¹² As Indigenous violence grew due to the transition in political leadership in Mexico City, Mexican authorities sought to counteract it by inundating the northern regions of Mexico with non-Indigenous settlers, which included a call for U.S. settlement of the province of Texas. The increase in settlement by migrants from the U.S., eventually banned in 1830, led first to Texas' own declaration of independence in 1836, and then to its annexation by the United States in 1845. As Mexico had not recognized Texas as independent, its annexation by the U.S. was viewed as an aggressive act and this, along with the United States' desire for expansion, led to war between the United States and Mexico. As DeLay argued, it is important to insert Indigenous narratives into this war, as Indigenous actors were a significant third party in the conflict. Indeed, between the years of 1834-1847, at least 44 major raiding campaigns into Mexican territory were carried out by Comanches and Kiowas, each

¹² DeLay, "Independent Indians and the U.S.-Mexican War," 35.

campaign consisting of over 100 men. In 1840, one of these Comanche raiding parties crossed the Río Bravo and traveled far enough south to attack the Mexican settlement of Saltillo, killing more than a hundred Mexicans.¹³ The raids were clearly coordinated and effective in their endeavors. Indeed, the development of and changes in how both Comanche and Kiowa communities undertook raids “indicate coordination of policy rather than coincidence of ambition,” and they were thus a powerful force against northern Mexican settlements.¹⁴ Indigenous raiding was not only in reaction to Mexican actions, but was also often inspired by independent Indigenous designs, as the Comanches and Apaches used conflict between the U.S. and Mexico for their own benefit. Furthermore, Indigenous influence extended through the end of the war. For example, the U.S. justified its taking of significant Mexican territory through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, by claiming that Mexicans were too weak to protect themselves against Indigenous raiding. Thus the U.S. presented itself as the savior who would liberate northern Mexican residents from Indigenous attack. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the U.S. proved just as ineffective against Indigenous raids as Mexico had been. As DeLay explained, the postwar period saw drought, a crisis in food supply to the region, a cholera epidemic and “in the midst these troubles, raids grew progressively worse” not better.¹⁵ In 1848 a dramatic change was made as the border between the United States and Mexico moved south, but the role of Comanches and Apaches, as well as their rival and ally tribes, did not change drastically. Instead, Indigenous communities continued to raid Mexican and U.S. settlements. Thus, the new border only meant

¹³ Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 115.

¹⁴ Brian DeLay, “Independent Indians and the U.S.-Mexican War” (*American Historical Review*, 2007), 44.

¹⁵ DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 298.

that “Mexican forces could not pursue Indians [across the border to] where they lived...”¹⁶ Thus, Indigenous communities helped to write the history of the border region and continued to hold significant control over the negotiations of space, as they had done for centuries before the imposition of a border between the United States and Mexico.

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Regionalism, Revolution, and Political Confusion

To contextualize the border region’s history further, it is important to understand the political climate of Mexico as the country attempted to find its footing after gaining independence from Spain in 1821. At its inception as an independent country, despite a rhetoric of Mexican unity being purported by the Mexican government, the reality of Mexico was one of *regional* political and economic power. In order to understand this, it is necessary to summarize briefly the beginning stages that Mexico underwent as a country. A period that is vastly confusing and complex, and again the analysis of which would take a book itself. In February 1821, after an extensive war of independence, Mexican General Agustín de Iturbide declared Mexico independent from Spain with his Plan de Iguala. The intention of Iturbide’s Plan was to initiate the smooth transition from Spanish colony to independent Mexico, and thus “called for independence, the union of Mexicans and Spaniards and respect for the Roman Catholic Church.”¹⁷ The new country would be, according to Iturbide, a constitutional monarchy. Thus, within the Plan de Iguala were three guarantees, which the army was to protect: 1) an emperor

¹⁶ DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 302.

¹⁷ Jan Bazant, “Mexico from Independence to 1867,” in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 423.

would be chosen for Mexico from an existing European (Spanish) dynasty; 2) Spanish-born residents would be offered security; and 3) ecclesiastical privileges would be preserved. Although the Plan called for the instatement of a European prince as Mexico's new emperor, because Spain refused to accept the reality of Mexican independence, Iturbide himself became Mexico's Emperor Agustín I. Only a little over a month after Iturbide's coronation, he "had already imprisoned nineteen members of congress and several army officers," and his arbitrary actions as emperor "encouraged the spread of republican ideas which until then had by and large been restricted to intellectuals."¹⁸ Eventually, Antonio López de Santa Anna "publicly accused Iturbide of tyranny" on December 2, 1822.¹⁹ This led to Iturbide's exile, after which his Plan de Iguala was rejected by congress in April 1823, making Mexico a republic. Interestingly, when Santa Anna originally called for the reinstatement of congress and the creation of Mexico's first constitution, this constitution was based on the same three guarantees provided by Iturbide in his Plan de Iguala: religion, independence, and union. Additionally, the constitution divided the country into nineteen states, separated government into executive, legislative, and judicial branches, and established Catholicism as Mexico's religion. By the time it was enacted in October 1824, only the guarantees of independence and religion remained, as the concept of union with Spain had fully dropped away. Notably, this federal Constitution of 1824 did not recognize equality before the law, which "permitted the continuation of the *fueros* or legal immunities and exemptions from civil courts enjoyed by the clergy and military."²⁰ The state sovereignty embodied in the Constitution of 1824 — each state was given the power to elect

¹⁸ Bazant, "Mexico from Independence to 1867," 427.

¹⁹ Bazant, "Mexico from Independence to 1867," 427.

²⁰ Bazant, "Mexico from Independence to 1867," 431.

their own governors and legislature — led to the reality of political and economic regionalism referenced above. Mexico was a newly independent country made up of smaller political units; a “society of societies,” where “municipalities were the basis of political organization.”²¹ This meant that municipalities became mechanisms of governance, and that Mexico was undergoing a process of nation-building from the towns up. Mexico’s regionalism meant that kinship and community ties superseded any sense of Mexican identity propagated by Mexico City, especially in the border region. Although Mexico’s new federalist political system had been imagined by intellectuals, it was realized through the force and support of the military, and thus in the absence of “supreme regal authority... [or] a strong nobility or bourgeoisie, the vacuum was at once filled by the popular heroes of the victorious army.”²² This meant that throughout independent Mexico’s development the military maintained a strong claim to leadership, largely through popular support, and the first president of the new republic would be a general from the army.

Elections were held in 1824 resulting in General Guadalupe Victoria, a liberal federalist, claiming the presidency, and General Nicolás Bravo, a conservative centralist, the vice-presidency. The tensions embodied in their opposing political views came to a head when Vice President Bravo rebelled against President Victoria and was exiled by General Vicente Guerrero. In the next round of elections in 1828, General Guerrero, a federalist, ran against General Manuel Gómez Pedraza, a moderate federalist candidate. Although General Pedraza won the presidency, and General Anastasio Bustamante the vice-presidency, General Guerrero refused to concede. Instead, a successful revolution resulted in General Guerrero’s election to presidency in

²¹ Hernández Chávez, *Mexico*, 128-9

²² Bazant, “Mexico from Independence to 1867,” 431.

January 1829. With this jostling for power, “constitutional order had collapsed after only four years.”²³ Despite instability, President Guerrero was one of those victorious war heroes the populous could rally behind and as such “was a symbol of Mexican resistance to everything Spanish.”²⁴ This contributed to his success in claiming the presidency, as there had been increasing tensions in Mexico City since January 1827 when a conspiracy to restore Spanish rule had been discovered. Six months after General Guerrero claimed the presidency, “the long-awaited invasion by Spanish troops came at the end of July 1829...”²⁵ In response to this attack, General Santa Anna traveled to Tampico and promptly defeated the Spanish who had landed there with the intent to invade. A month later, Guerrero lost the presidency to a revolt led by his own vice president, General Bustamante. The following January, 1830 “Bustamante, acting as president, formed his cabinet,” creating the republic’s first openly conservative government.²⁶ As Bustamante’s presidency was underway, General Guerrero was captured and then executed. General Guerrero was of mixed Spanish and Indigenous blood, thus his execution could be read as a warning to those considered to be socially and ethnically “inferior” to not assume political power within the new republic.

General Bustamante enjoyed the office of president for only a couple of years until the anti-clerical liberal Valentín Gómez Farías joined General Santa Anna in alliance against Bustamante. Though Santa Anna’s personal beliefs were unknown, “in the public mind he was

²³ Bazant, “Mexico from Independence to 1867,” 433.

²⁴ Bazant, “Mexico from Independence to 1867,” 433.

²⁵ Bazant, “Mexico from Independence to 1867,” 433.

²⁶ Bazant, “Mexico from Independence to 1867,” 434.

widely associated with Guerrero whom he had consistently supported.”²⁷ Thus, Santa Anna used the unpopularity of Guerrero’s execution to his advantage and “the combination of Gómez Farías’s liberal campaign and Santa Anna’s military revolt forced Bustamante” to step down by the end of 1832.²⁸ By March, 1833, Santa Anna was elected president, though he left the exercising of governing power to his vice president, Gómez Farías. Without the constraints of the title of President, Gómez Farías was free to initiate “a broad reform program, particularly in respect of the church.”²⁹ However the army revolted against Gómez Farías in May, 1834, forcing Santa Anna to finally step in as acting president. By January, 1835 Gómez Farías was stripped of the office of vice president and his reforms were repealed. In March, Santa Anna’s new congress amended the 1824 constitution in order to introduce a centralist republic. This shift towards centralism led Santa Anna to invade Zacatecas, known to be the bastion of federalism in the country, and depose Governor García. In October, “Congress delivered a provisional centralist constitution which replaced the states by departments, the governors of which would henceforth be appointed by the president of the republic.”³⁰ This was the enactment of the centralist constitution of 1836. The shift towards centralism seemed politically successful.

Although President Santa Anna brought a distinct move against federalism, Mexico had gone through a nation building process in its formative years grounded in the power and independence of its municipalities. This meant centralizing the government would be a challenge. Whatever the politics coming from Mexico City called for, the cultural and societal

²⁷ Bazant, “Mexico from Independence to 1867,” 436.

²⁸ Bazant, “Mexico from Independence to 1867,” 436.

²⁹ Bazant, “Mexico from Independence to 1867,” 436.

³⁰ Bazant, “Mexico from Independence to 1867,” 437.

realities of the country would not necessarily follow suit. Indeed, regionalism was present throughout Mexico and it manifested itself significantly in Mexico's northern settlements. For in the border region, inhabitants were distinctly reliant on ties of proximity and based alliances on geography rather than any shared Mexican identity. In the border region Indigenous raiding grew and created disunity among Mexican settlers. The disunity of the border region was juxtaposed to a notion of a unified Mexican identity coming from Mexico City that even included Indigenous peoples. In 1827, Mexico had officially begun to recognize Indigenous peoples within its territory as active participants in the formation of nation. Thus the Mexican government did "not regard the Indians living within their territory as an independent people in any perspective whatsoever but as a component part of the population of their states..."³¹ The inclusive national identity promoted by Mexico City categorized Indigenous peoples as an integral part of the country, and this meant that Indigenous raids were understood as actions taken by rebel groups within the Mexican populous, not by an independent enemy or ally nation. The political decision to recognize Indigenous peoples as Mexican was in part decidedly necessary in Mexico, as — unlike in the United States — the sheer number of Indigenous individuals had originally drastically outnumbered Spaniards in the 1500s, and continued to outnumber Mexicans. The conquest of the Indigenous in Mexico had not taken the form of elimination but incorporation. Thus by the 1800s, the mixture of European and Indigenous blood was extensive and it made sense politically to officially recognize Indigenous communities as Mexican. However, this did not translate to Mexico's northern region. This was in part due to the fact that Indigenous population of the border region, though present, was drastically sparser, more nomadic, and less

³¹ DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 158.

conquerable than the sedentary Indigenous communities of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, and Mexico's central regions, originally encountered by Spanish Conquistadores. The political recognition of Indigenous communities as Mexican, as well as Santa Anna's efforts at centralization, meant little in Mexico's north. Nonetheless, there was an effort made by the Mexican government to inculcate symbols of nationalism and an attempt to spread these to the country's northern settlements.

These efforts led to a prolonged negotiation over what it meant to be Mexican, but ultimately assumed that there was a unified Mexican identity that could be inspired and relied upon — an assumption that was distinctly challenged in Mexico's north. This may have been due to the distance of Mexico's northern most regions from Mexico City, both geographically and politically. Distance from the capital meant inhabitants of the border region were more likely to rely on regional relationships and ties than any national unity. Although the northern Mexican settlers could have found unity with other settlers in close proximity in the face of Indigenous raiding, "terrorized, impoverished families, whether they had experienced Indian raiding directly or not, began abandoning certain frontier areas as soon as attacks intensified in the early 1830s."³² Thus there was a serious question in Mexico's northern settlements as to whether Mexico City would be able to protect northern Mexicans from organized Indigenous raids. The reality and violence of Indigenous raiding led to factionalism as Mexico's northern states were loath to coordinate their policies in alliance with or opposition to Indigenous communities. In fact, some states created alliances with the same Indigenous groups against whom their neighboring states warred. On the other hand, Indigenous communities in the region, long used

³² DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 146.

to negotiating alliances, maintained a much stronger sense of shared identity than northern Mexican settlers did as *Mexicans*, though all who inhabited the region were technically considered Mexican by the government. Thus, while the early stages of Mexican independence saw many shifts in leadership and type of governance, these changes spread slowly to the border region and had little impact on the relationships there. Ultimately, politics in Mexico City were too unstable for any political attention to be seriously given to Mexico's north. Except, interestingly, for the creation of a scientific commission, sent in 1827 to explore Mexico's border region.

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The Comisión de Límites

In the midst of the political turmoil and reconfiguring of power during independent Mexico's inception, a new motivation to understand the northern regions of the territory emerged. In fact, these efforts began before Mexico's independence when on February 22, 1819, Luis de Oñis González López y Vara, the Spanish minister to the United States under King Ferdinand VII, and John Quincy Adams, U.S. Secretary of State under president James Monroe, signed the "Treaty of Amity, Settlement, and Limits," or the "Adams-Oñis Treaty." Ratified on February 19, 1821 (two years later), the treaty stipulated that the boundary between the two countries would begin west of the Mississippi at the Gulf of Mexico, follow different rivers north and west until it came to the degree of latitude 42 north, and then follow this west to the Pacific Ocean. The boundary line described as such in Article 3, the treaty then stipulated in Article 4 that "to fix this line with more precision, and to place the landmarks which shall designate

exactly the limits of both nations, each of the contracting parties shall appoint a Commissioner and a surveyor, who shall meet before the termination of one year... and proceed to run and mark the said line...”³³ Agreed upon by the United States and the Spanish Crown, it may be questionable what weight this treaty could hold, as Agustín de Iturbide declared his Plan de Iguala on February 24, 1821 (just a few days after the Adams-Oñis Treaty).³⁴ Even though the Adams-Oñis Treaty was signed by the U.S. and Spain, it seems that the newly independent Mexico decided to hold to the stipulations agreed upon therein; for in 1827, the Mexican government, “desirous of fixing the boundaries of its vast possessions, appointed a commission called the Boundary Commission to reconnoiter the limits set forth in the de Oñis treaty...”³⁵ It makes sense that the Mexican government was concerned with understanding its territory in 1827, because a Spanish conspiracy to reconquer Mexico had been discovered in January of that same year. Additionally, this period in Mexico marked the shift from the first Mexican presidency of Guadalupe Victoria, to that of Vicente Guerrero, who was as previously mentioned, a war hero from Mexico’s war of independence and thus a symbol against Spanish governance in the country. Therefore, from a political standpoint, the formation of a commission was as much driven by the stipulations in the Adams-Oñis Treaty as by a necessity to understand and thus defend Mexican territory against Spanish invasion. Interestingly, the authorities in Mexico City, “convinced of the inexactitude of those wilderness frontiers and ignorant of their features, in

³³ United States of America and his Catholic Majesty. “Treaty of Amity, Settlement, and Limits.” *U.S. Law*, 1819. Accessed April 29, 2020. govtrack.us.s3.amazonaws.com/legislink/pdf/stat/8/STATUTE-8-Pg252.pdf.

³⁴ Hernández Chávez, *Mexico*, 115-116.

³⁵ Jean Louis Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico during the Years 1826-1834*, trans. Sheila M. Ohlendorf, Josette M. Bigelow, and Mary M. Standifer, (Austin, TX: The Texas State Historical Association in Cooperation with the Center for Studies in Texas History, University of Texas at Austin, 1980), 179.

order to obtain more exact reports wished to send not only a commissioner and a surveyor, as the treaty stipulated, but also a scientific commission.”³⁶ This led to the formation of the Comisión de Límites, comprised of Lieutenant Colonels José Batres and Constantino Tarnava, in charge of military and geographic observations, Lieutenant of Artillery José María Sánchez y Tapía whose role was that of a draftsman, and Rafael Chowell and Jean Louis Berlandier, both in charge of observations in the natural sciences. The Comisión was led by General Manuel de Mier y Terán and its official purpose “was to journey across the Rio Grande to territory that was under contention between the governments of Mexico and the United States.”³⁷ As stipulated in the Adams-Oñis Treaty, the members of the commission were to keep journals of their proceedings, and what they concluded in their observations would then be understood as part of the treaty, respected with the same force as the treaty itself. The Comisión, with all of its scientific members ready to explore the northern regions of Mexico and record what they discovered, departed Mexico City on November 10, 1827. The Comisión would continue exploring the border region and documenting its discoveries until its dissolution in 1834. Its end can be attributed to a personal loss within the group, the uprisings of U.S. migrants in Texas, and the transition in Mexican politics from the federalist governments of Victoria and Guerrero, to the first openly conservative presidency of Bustamante in 1830 and then the centralist presidency of Santa Anna in 1834. In other words, by the mid-1830s political attention had shifted away from scientifically exploring an unknown northern territory, to the more pressing matters of survival as a nation. While the Comisión did exist, it provided the Mexican government with valuable

³⁶ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 179.

³⁷ Russel M. Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist: Jean Louis Berlandier and the Exploration of Northern Mexico and Texas*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012), 49

information regarding its border region that would influence the formation of the border between the United States and Mexico.

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A Knowledge-Driven Botanist

Jean Louis Berlandier is estimated to have been born sometime before 1805, near the French Fort-de-l'Ecluse.³⁸ This border fortification marked a point in the mountains where a slight opening allowed the Rhône river through. For this reason it got its name of "l'Ecluse" or "the lock" from a legend that told that long ago a key had been inserted into the mountains, and that the turning of the key created the gap. Anyone who held the key would have control of the passage through the mountains, and thus due to its placement, the fortification was often fought over.³⁹ This was where Berlandier spent his youth, in the border region between France and Switzerland, but he would spend his educational years across the border in Geneva. Educated as a botanist at the Geneva Academy, apprenticed to a Geneva apothecary, and accepted into the Société de Physique et d'Histoire Naturelle de Genève, Berlandier eventually left the border region of his youth to explore, investigate, and record a different border region under intense negotiation.⁴⁰ In 1826, on the recommendation of his mentor, Auguste Pyrame de Candolle, Berlandier traveled across the ocean to Mexico and joined the Mexican Comisión de Límites. He would dedicate the rest of his life to this land, documenting the plants, animals, peoples, and

³⁸ C.H. Muller, "Introduction," in *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, (Austin, TX: The Texas State Historical Association in Cooperation with the Center for Studies in Texas History, University of Texas at Austin, 1980), xvi.

³⁹ Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 17.

⁴⁰ Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, p. xix

conflicts it presented, and eventually giving it his death in 1851. Under General Terán's authority, Berlandier's role with the Comisión was to scientifically observe and record the land they passed through, and this required both exploration and collection; "General Terán made frequent use of Berlandier's energy, willingness to travel, and ability to make and record excellent observations of the countryside through which he journeyed."⁴¹ Thus with eagerness Berlandier and the other men who made up the Comisión de Límites departed on their mission to scientifically understand and report on the contours and characteristics of the border region between the United States and Mexico.

In his role as a botanist with the Comisión, Berlandier wrote extensively about his observations while traveling through Mexico. After reading the written records of his journeys, a connection can be drawn between Berlandier and other explorers such as Alexander von Humboldt and Alexis de Tocqueville. While Berlandier fulfilled a similar role as the German geographer von Humboldt, von Humboldt lived slightly earlier (1769-1859) and explored mostly the United States and South America with only one excursion through Mexico City in 1803. Perhaps more similarities can be drawn between Berlandier and de Tocqueville, as they both lived almost identical lifespans (Berlandier from around 1803-1851 and de Tocqueville from 1805-1859) and both were French. But where they differ drastically is their subject matter, as de Tocqueville dedicated himself to understanding democracy in the United States and Berlandier created a life's work of written documentation of the plants and environment of the border region between the United States and Mexico. Upon his death in 1851, Berlandier's collections and life's work remained with his widow where they had lived in Matamoros. His work was

⁴¹ Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 129.

discovered by a U.S. lieutenant named Darius Nash Couch who had fought in the U.S.-Mexico War and who, in 1853, was sent by “the Smithsonian Institution to discover the flora and fauna of northern Mexico and southern Texas.”⁴² Once Couch located Berlandier’s collections and writings, he bought the work off of Berlandier’s widow for \$500 and brought it back to the U.S.⁴³ Berlandier’s work was preserved at the Smithsonian and eventually published, making it possible for a reader to grasp, through his writing, a unique perspective on the border region between Mexico and the United States during the border’s most formative years. In the span of Berlandier’s time in Mexico (1826-1851), the country underwent two constitutional changes in governance, attempts at reconquest by Spain, deadly Indigenous raiding by Comanche, Apache, and Kiowa tribes, more broad efforts to centralize a nation that had become largely regionalized, a war with the United States that resulted in the occupation of Mexico City in 1847 by U.S. troops, and the cession of over half of Mexico’s territory. It was a time of political upheaval and endless negotiation, especially concerning land and boundary, and the conflict was concentrated where Berlandier was exploring. Thus Berlandier found himself in the midst of significant historical events as he ventured along the Río Bravo in the name of science. His perspective is unique not only because he wrote from the perspective of a foreigner, native to a different border region, who had been hired by the Mexican government to understand and map Mexico’s north, but also due to Berlandier’s dedication as a botanist. Though the history of this region proves to be complex, convoluted, and obtuse, the history of the negotiation and formation of the present-day U.S.-Mexico border can be granted some clarity when viewed through the lens of this

⁴² Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 1.

⁴³ Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 7.

knowledge-driven botanist. According to historian Russell Lawson, “Berlandier was a scientist who was fascinated more by nature than himself... a man who sought knowledge rather than power, an understanding of nature rather than wealth, a life of an obscure savant rather than fame, the activity of exploration rather than the passivity of contemplation.”⁴⁴ Due to his character, through Berlandier’s observations a story of the border emerges that is grounded in the land and its inhabitants, as opposed to the multitudinous and muddled workings of governments whose capitals lay far from the contested region. Through Berlandier’s eyes not only can be drawn a Mexican perspective on what the U.S. dubbed the *Western Frontier*, but also the unique perspective of a French immigrant, exploring a new land, fatally dedicated to the pursuit of scientific knowledge. For Berlandier, “codes of behavior came not from scriptures, philosophers, and teachers, but from the writings and teachings of nature.”⁴⁵ It is because of this, and the fact that Berlandier kept meticulous travel journals, that his story helps highlight the political advantages of mapping and understanding a land, and questions the validity of natural or inherent boundaries. Ultimately, his story illuminates the history of a border region that is still under contentious conditions today.

⁴⁴ Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 16.

⁴⁵ Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 198.

Jean Louis Berlandier and the Comisión de Límites

Populating Ponds and Prairies

After departing Mexico City on November 10, 1827, Jean Louis Berlandier, along with the Mexican Comisión de Límites arrived in Laredo, then part of Mexico's northern region of Coahuila y Texas, on February 2, 1828. This distance, covered by the large exploratory party that made up the Comisión, amounted to around 202 leagues, or nearly 700 miles. According to Berlandier's documentation of their travels, the Comisión was generally able to travel six to eight leagues per day, and nightly destinations were "always determined by the locations of streams or pools where men and animals can slake their thirst."⁴⁶ They traveled slowly, and often took days to explore, recuperate, or deal with unforeseen troubles. Once they arrived in Laredo, the Comisión spent nearly three weeks there. They finally left on February 20, at which time they "departed from the dreary and arid banks of the Río Bravo to take [themselves] to the capital of the department of Texas," otherwise known as Béxar (what is today San Antonio, Texas).⁴⁷ As the Comisión traveled north from Laredo, Berlandier wrote with dismay about how their maps misrepresented the space and land between the Río Bravo and the Nueces River:

We saw, not without astonishment, how much the maps spaced the bed of the Río Bravo from that of the Nueces River, which one may reach in less than four days, whereas it takes six or seven days to travel from the Nueces to Béxar. Some printed maps place that river at an equal distance from both those presidios.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 272.

⁴⁷ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 271.

⁴⁸ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 271.

These observations and the correcting of the few maps that existed of the region were part of the Comisión's objective. They traveled this largely unknown region in order to relay the information they gathered to the Mexican government, so that Mexico could more successfully lay claim to the land and defend itself against attack. As such, there was an interesting dichotomy between Berlandier's personal experience as part of the Comisión and the political intent behind its inception. For the creation of the Comisión was inherently political, if not only because it stemmed from a treaty establishing the boundary between two countries. Nonetheless, Berlandier was always more intent on his scientific discoveries and recordings than on the political nature behind the Comisión's mission. Thus he did everything he could, consciously or simply due to his training as a natural scientist, to observe, strictly and objectively, his surroundings.

Though politics seemed to rarely enter Berlandier's considerations, political discourse was no stranger to the Comisión in general as they traveled through Mexico's north. On their way from Laredo to Béxar, the Comisión was accompanied by General Anastasio Bustamante, who would go on to become president of Mexico three times and was friendly with General Terán, leader of the Comisión. Though they were close, the two generals would engage in intense political debates as they traveled, of which Berlandier took note. General Bustamante was a centralist, while General Terán was more progressive, and as Berlandier noted, "the parties, heated in their political opinions, waged war without truce or pause" while always maintaining "excellent behavior, which comes from good breeding."⁴⁹ Berlandier himself did not engage, instead focusing on the landscape through which they passed. On the road one day, Berlandier noted that "the country is open and the horizon is quite perceptible, although undulating with

⁴⁹ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 271.

small, low hills which can be seen in the distance.”⁵⁰ Berlandier described a few ponds they encountered, writing that they were “covered with algae and reeds, [and] inhabited by webfooted birds which the wolves and foxes come to hunt.”⁵¹ He noted the temperatures were cold at night, rising significantly during the day. He spoke of how the wilderness was full of animal paths, and that “in the midst of these immense prairies the traveller who is not accompanied by good guides or who has no compass can scarcely follow the road.”⁵² The Comisión must have been quite a spectacle as it traveled slowly through the open terrain, for Berlandier explained that it consisted of as many as sixty people, including wagons, cavalry, and pack mules. Berlandier called this group a caravan, writing poetically that “a passage of that nature is heralded afar off, particularly in that uninhabited wilderness where the sounds of the world are scarcely known but heard at a distance.”⁵³ He painted a picture of a noisy mass of explorers traveling through a wilderness of solitude. Berlandier clearly found peace in the wilderness.

On February 24, Berlandier encountered a shift in the plants and landscape. As he wrote, “as soon as we had left behind the Nueces, one of the natural boundaries which separate a portion of Texas from Tamaulipas, we found a completely different vegetation.”⁵⁴ This passage is of particular interest, not only because it shows the scientific observations of a point where the land, plants, and animals changed in nature, but also because of how Berlandier described this shift. It was not only a change in plant-life — Berlandier painted the Nueces River as “one of the

⁵⁰ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 273.

⁵¹ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 273.

⁵² Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 274.

⁵³ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 275.

⁵⁴ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 277.

natural boundaries” of the state. Thus, a state that was already divided in two by its name, Coahuila y Texas, was divided as well, it seems, by the water of the Nueces. This perhaps casual statement on the part of Berlandier speaks volumes about how land was understood, claimed, and divided. Maps themselves are not arbitrary, and Berlandier did much to record what he saw in order to better understand the world of northern Mexico. However, when land is disputed and boundaries are drawn, there is also a question of where to draw these arguably arbitrary lines. Here, in the observational writing of a French botanist who traveled through northern Mexico in the early 1800s, is a hint at how decisions regarding space were undertaken. For to him, a river was a natural boundary, and furthermore, he observed the vegetation on either side of the river to be distinctly different. With this scientific observation, an argument could be made that decisions regarding boundaries were literally grounded in changes in the environment, if not also justified by the apparent natural boundaries of rivers. This could be a valid argument, as many political borders in the world today are marked by rivers, mountain ranges, oceans, and other seemingly natural boundaries. However, I believe that while Berlandier’s observations may support the idea of naturally demarcated borders, his very travel patterns if nothing else will show that the Río Bravo, the river that would become the border between the United States and Mexico years later, was as much a pathway through the land as a border between parts of it.

Nature never ceased to amaze Berlandier, as he found much more comfort in the unpredictability of the natural world than he ever did within so-called civilization. This was abundantly evident when, on February 26, the Comisión encountered a storm. They had set up camp for the night, tents erect, when the alarm was sounded that a storm was coming, and in Berlandier’s words:

In these moments, when everyone was seeking shelter, the wilderness presented a dreadful sight... scattered throughout the camp outside our tents, we enjoyed during the first moments of that majestic storm impressions of Nature at war... eyes fixed on the celestial vault, we carefully followed that series of imposing changes in the theater of the universe.⁵⁵

They survived the tumult of the night, and on February 28 were joined by two dragoons from Béxar who had been sent to discover their whereabouts and escort them back to the town.

On February 29 — for 1828 was a leap year — the Comisión's journeying brought them to a field that had hosted the Battle of Medina in 1813.⁵⁶ The battle had culminated in the victory of the Spanish over the insurgents, or revolutionaries, who had been commanded by General José Álvarez de Toledo y Dubois. As Berlandier described the history of this battle he noted that “the more than four hundred insurgents killed in combat... were abandoned to the wild beasts as heretics by those alleged Christians [the Spanish Royalists], who were themselves perhaps less humane than their opponents.”⁵⁷ Walking through the field of the Battle of Medina greatly impacted Berlandier, even though it had been fifteen years since the conflict there. This is perhaps unsurprising as spaces often hold evidence of their pasts, and this battleground was strewn with proof of its own violent history. As Berlandier explained, “when we passed over the places where the battle was unleashed, the bones of those warriors were still to be found everywhere.”⁵⁸ This is just one moment that shows how attentive Berlandier was to his

⁵⁵ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 280.

⁵⁶ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 283 (footnote 23).

⁵⁷ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 284.

⁵⁸ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 284.

surroundings and their stories. He was notably conscious of the past and made regular note of these histories in his travel journals.

On March 1, the Comisión arrived at Béxar. Upon arrival at the “capital of the department of Texas,” Berlandier took a moment to analyze the land which they had traversed in order to give an opinion on where might be best for Mexico to focus its population efforts. In his own words:

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.⁵⁹

He went on to say that the lands to the east, belonging to the state of Tamaulipas, and those to the west, which belonged to Coahuila, were in comparison sufficiently watered. According to Berlandier, the land “to the north of the Nueces belongs to Texas and is the most fertile and the most suited to agriculture.”⁶⁰ Thus he suggested that colonies could prosper in the northern region best. Though Berlandier himself was not overtly political, through his observations and analysis he fulfilled the task with which the Comisión had been charged. By understanding and mapping Mexico’s northern regions, Berlandier was able to recommend where new Mexican settlements would most likely succeed and prosper in the less known northern territory. Understanding and populating the region would allow Mexico to stake greater claim to the land,

⁵⁹ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 286.

⁶⁰ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 286.

and so Berlandier's observations, as well as those made by the rest of the Comisión would ultimately inform the Mexican government on how best to govern, control, and defend its north.

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A Hunt with Comanches

Although much of Berlandier's descriptions of the land he traveled implied an isolated barrenness, he also recognized that the region was diversely populated by nomadic Indigenous peoples who maintained their own complex relationships and lives. In fact, Berlandier would dedicate much of his writing to his encounters with Indigenous peoples of the region. It is important to understand that Berlandier not only made note of his own personal interactions with Indigenous communities and individuals, but that he also documented the peaceful and violent relationships between Indigenous tribes and Mexican settlers. This is apparent in his frequent reference to remembered past, and feared future, violence that was held by residents of northern Mexican settlements. For instance, Berlandier explained that the path between Laredo and Béxar was rarely frequented and attributed this to a lack of safe travel as "the Lipans and Comanches infest it at every step."⁶¹ Only in the few years leading up to Berlandier's exploration had any sort of peace been found between the settlers of the region and the Indigenous tribes native to it. Berlandier explained the Indigenous peoples' violence towards the settlers by making reference to the original Spanish missions and clergy that had originally braved the northern regions of Mexico in order to "conquer souls." As Berlandier wrote, the missionaries ended up "more frequently abusing the powers which had been accorded them" and thus "their conduct towards

⁶¹ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 271.

the indigenes was inhumane, and the indigenes consequently preserved an implacable hatred against them.”⁶² This meant that while there were some peaceful relationships among Mexican settlers and Indigenous communities — since the Indigenous tribes of the region varied both in their ways of life and in their reaction to Spanish and then Mexican settlement — there was also much violence. The possibility of Indigenous attack was just one of the many perils Berlandier faced in his travels through the border region.

The relationships in the border region were complex to say the least. For this complexity was backed by a history of often violent negotiations regarding space and resources that extended back to pre-conquest times, but that were also accentuated by Mexican political involvement. In 1827, General Bustamante had planned a war of extermination against the Indigenous peoples of Texas. Word of his plan had reached the Indigenous tribes, who, in response, had sent chiefs to sign peace treaties with General Bustamante. Ultimately the war of extermination was called off. Thus, by the time Berlandier found himself in Béxar in August 1828, the region had been privy to two years of relative peace between Mexican settlers and the Indigenous communities. These peace agreements were often remade, and one such renewal happened to occur while Berlandier and the Comisión were in Béxar. As Berlandier described, one day a renowned Comanche warrior named Barbakista arrived in Béxar, reportedly “to renew bonds of amity with the inhabitants of Texas.”⁶³ Barbakista was accompanied by “as many as two or three hundred of these natives” including women and young children.⁶⁴ Berlandier noted

⁶² Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 285.

⁶³ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 343

⁶⁴ Jean Louis Berlandier, *The Indians of Texas in 1830*, ed. John C. Ewers, trans. Patricia Reading Leclercq (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1969), 31.

that groups such as this were a welcome sight, as the inclusion of women and children in their midst meant that it was “proof of peace, of friendship, and of trust; whereas, when they had only a few women with them, it was because they were at war.”⁶⁵ The report of this renewal of peace agreements among Comanches and the settlers in Béxar shows that the relations between northern Mexican settlements and Indigenous communities such as the Comanches were intricate and peace was delicately fostered. For relationships between the Indigenous peoples and settlers of northern Mexico varied by region, time, and the individuals involved. Berlandier recognized this complexity due to the fact that he was able to observe many different relationships underway in the border region. Additionally, he also recognized Indigenous intelligence and fortitude, arguing against the term of “savage” for the Indigenous peoples inhabiting the region. He explained that this term was applied to them because Mexicans fled from what they did not recognize as society. He observed that despite an often nomadic lifestyle, the Indigenous people in the region “are often more closely united with each other than those who live in our cities and villages.”⁶⁶ However, just as Berlandier recognized Indigenous unity, he also observed that despite often sharing languages, “the peoples who still wander the deserts of the New World are continually at war with each other.”⁶⁷ Though not specific, this references the Indigenous negotiations of space that existed prior to colonialism and continued into the 1800s as well. The relationships between Indigenous tribes in the region were as complicated as those between the Indigenous and settlers, and those amongst settlers as well. This was the social network in which Berlandier and the Comisión entered, knowingly or otherwise, as they traveled through the

⁶⁵ Berlandier, *The Indians of Texas in 1830*, 31.

⁶⁶ Berlandier, *The Indians of Texas in 1830*, 41.

⁶⁷ Berlandier, *The Indians of Texas in 1830*, 67.

“barren wilderness.” Evidently they were relatively aware of some of the conflicts underway as the Comisión, though they had been desirous of exploring Texas’ western regions, had refrained from exploring in that direction due to the insecure peace agreements amongst Mexican settlers and the Indigenous communities there. The arrival of Barbakista in Béxar led Berlandier to determine “to go out into the wilds” with the Comanches, joining them for a hunt, which would allow him to learn more of Comanche life as well as the landscape of west Texas.⁶⁸ He was encouraged in this decision by Lieutenant Colonel don José Francisco Ruiz, who had lived with the nomadic tribes of Texas for eight years. Thus, on November 19, 1828 Berlandier left Béxar with the Comanches.

As they traveled slowly, covering only around three leagues the first day due to the fact that they were accompanied by over 300 horses, Berlandier took note of how it was to travel with the Comanches. In his words, “mingling with a confusion of nomadic men, I believed myself to have been transported to those remote eras in which men lived in the fields, being still in the infancy of a future civilization.”⁶⁹ Berlandier wrote that the character of the Comanches changed once the group left Béxar and ventured into the wilderness, an environment in which the Comanches were clearly more comfortable. On the first night of the hunt the group camped at the banks of the Arroyo de los Olmos and Berlandier observed of his Indigenous companions that “in the towns and the villages they are more suspicious, more taciturn, and more mysterious, and never manifest that gay and open nature which they have in the wilds.”⁷⁰ Although Berlandier described the Comanches from an outsider’s perspective, viewing their customs as

⁶⁸ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 343.

⁶⁹ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 344.

⁷⁰ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 344.

strange and their frequent preparations for war with the Lipans as manifestations of “irrational fears,” he observes the Comanches with the same diligence and desire for knowledge with which he conducted all of his observations. While on the hunt with them, Berlandier wrote that “during the entire time we were with them they were always moderate, and, far from increasing the fear which one could justly have had of them, daily they inspired more confidence in us.”⁷¹ These unsubstantiated fears were echoed later in Berlandier’s account as he documented their return to Béxar after thirty days with the Comanches. He explained that they returned to the presidio at night and that “our friends there were uneasy about us, for a false rumor had been bruited about that the Indians, having betrayed us, had left us on foot near the headwaters of the Guadalupe.”⁷² Though fear of violence enacted by the Comanches was not unjustified, as their raiding campaigns were often numerous and forceful, this time the fears were ungrounded. Berlandier and his companions returned to Béxar without injury, having only gained new knowledge and experience from the excursion with the Comanches.

As always, Berlandier was fascinated to learn more of the natural landscape of northern Mexico. The brief excursion into the wilderness with the Comanches taught Berlandier much about the Comanche people, but perhaps more importantly to him it gave him the opportunity to observe regions of Texas that he had not previously explored. In his travel journals from this excursion he noted that “even the most recent maps leave a great deal to be desired with regard to what is relative to Texas.”⁷³ Interestingly, he attributed some of the most accurate work in mapping and understanding of the region to the U.S. settlers of Texas. In Berlandier’s own

⁷¹ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 345.

⁷² Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 365.

⁷³ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 365.

words, “the most complete and the most exact work is due to the colonization of Texas. The entrepreneur Mr. Stephen Austin, who has gathered much scientific data, has lately published a map of Texas which most closely approaches the truth.”⁷⁴ Though this was an opinion that surely would not be favored by Mexican authorities due to growing tensions in Texas, Berlandier seemed to have no qualms in expressing his admiration for Austin’s scientific work, as he was forever focused on scientific knowledge over political opinion

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Along the Río Bravo

In the summer of 1829 Berlandier returned to Béxar after six months of exploratory expeditions that had taken him as far east as Louisiana and the Mississippi waterway. According to historian Russell Lawson, upon seeing the Mississippi for the first time, Berlandier “felt sick at heart for the suffering of immigrants like himself who sought a new life, only to be foiled by the harsh environment of the American South.”⁷⁵ In Berlandier’s own words, “I felt my soul become sad and melancholy in those places, which every year are the sepulchers of a large number of nonacclimated foreigners.”⁷⁶ Berlandier also mentioned his astonishment at the success of civility in the United States, despite it being a country where slavery still prevailed. Slavery in Mexico had been outlawed that same year, in 1829, but it would take the United States until 1865 to follow suit. As Berlandier noted in relation to the victory of the U.S. against ten thousand British soldiers in Louisiana in 1814, it was remarkable that disorder did not abound

⁷⁴ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 366.

⁷⁵ Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 115.

⁷⁶ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 398.

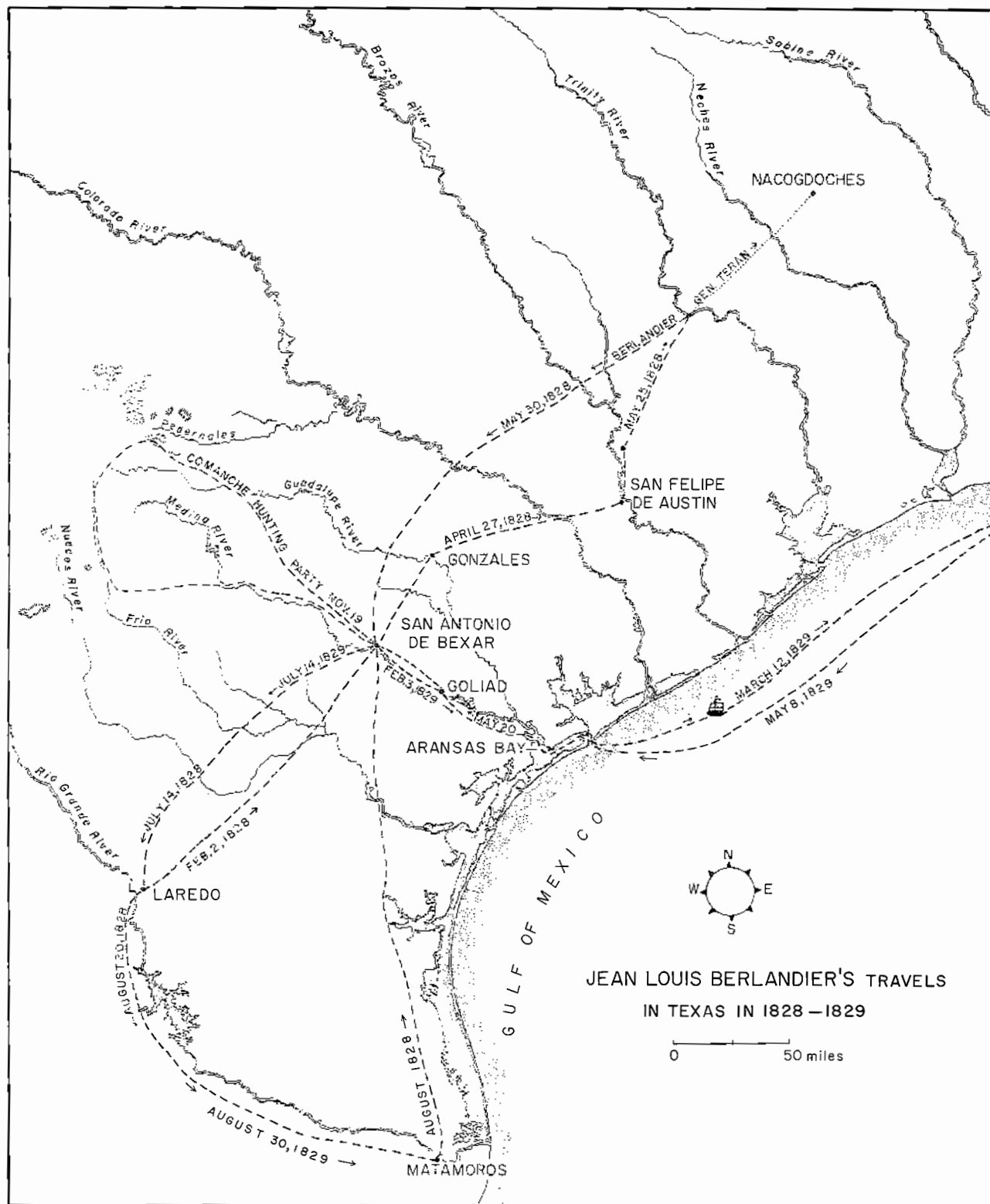


Figure 2. "Jean Louis Berlandier's travels in Texas while serving as biologist for the Mexican Comisión de Límites, 1828-29" in Berlandier, *The Indians of Texas in 1830*, ed. John C. Ewers, xii.

when “some men of color who formed regular corps [for the United States] reentered the rank which the social conventions of the country imposed upon them... after supporting the liberty of their masters and redoubling the chains of their slavery.”⁷⁷ Though slavery had been outlawed in Mexico, many U.S. migrants who settled in Texas maintained their own practice of slavery. This would come to be one of the defining issues that led Texas to declare independence in 1836, as we will see.

After exploring Louisiana, Berlandier returned to Béxar noting that as he traveled back west, “the aspect of the countryside became more and more attractive and more broken.”⁷⁸ He was returning to familiar territory, land that he had come to know as home. Upon receiving orders to travel from Béxar to Matamoros with the rest of the Comisión, Berlandier made to depart but the Comisión was “held back for a long time by continual rains uncommon to Texas.”⁷⁹ They were finally able to leave on July 14, 1829. As they traveled back south towards Laredo, the members of the Comisión first made their way to the mission of San José. Here, the land that had originally belonged to the mission had been sold by the government to private investors, and now was occupied by poor peasants who cultivated and worked the land for their patrons. Berlandier dedicated some time to explaining the relationships of these poor farmers both to the landholders they worked for and to the Indigenous tribes that challenged their lives. Of the latter he wrote, “as soon as some tribe has risen in revolt, especially if it is the Comanches, the workers do not go to cultivate their fields.”⁸⁰ This speaks to the more violent

⁷⁷ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 399.

⁷⁸ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 411.

⁷⁹ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 412.

⁸⁰ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 413.

relationships that were present in the border region in addition to the peaceful alliances we have recognized above. For Berlandier, these dangers were specific to his travels and, speaking about the road to the mission of San José, he said that “during wartime, foodstuffs are transported from the banks of the Rio Grande — and then only in escorted convoys — for communications become so dangerous that few persons voluntarily expose their lives on the roads of that large wilderness.”⁸¹ Though Berlandier was personally affected by the dangers of Indigenous attack, and recognized that life in northern Mexican settlements was made harder because of it, he presented this violence as only one of three reasons why Mexican settlers faced hardship. The other two were apathy and the excessive humidity of the region. Berlandier said that apathy “has even precipitated [the inhabitants of the Mexican part of Texas] into the political revolutions which have broken out,” and that this along with the humidity of the region attracted “the sad scourge of misery” experienced there.⁸²

Life in the border region was rough and thus Berlandier made sure to take note of the simple pleasures of nature he experienced. For instance, after traveling for days through a landscape covered in mesquite — a spiny desert tree — on July 17, Berlandier wrote of a “magnificent oak and nut tree forest” that he took to be “undoubtedly the most interesting place for botany in that large wilderness which separates Béxar from Laredo.”⁸³ Despite the beauty of the nature that he continuously relished in, Berlandier’s travels were not undertaken without difficulty. The days leading up to Berlandier’s encounter with the magnificent forest had known the death of a member of the group who had been with them since Mexico City. General Terán’s

⁸¹ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 413.

⁸² Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 413.

⁸³ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 415.

majordomo had drowned in a river despite the group's efforts to save him. Additionally, there were daily discomforts. The plains they crossed were covered in a thorny grass, which stuck to their feet and legs, making it impossible "to take two steps off the road without becoming covered..."⁸⁴ July 21 brought the misfortune of a broken carriage wheel, which halted their progress for two full days. During this time, Berlandier took note of the temperature, making regular measurements, and recorded that his thermometers read 97°-100° Fahrenheit anytime the sun was above the horizon. He wrote that "the ground burned the feet of the best-shod persons."⁸⁵ When the sun set and they could finally find some respite from the sweltering heat, they would settle down for a meal only to encounter "swarms of blackish bugs (cimex) called Chinchas" that "came in hosts and fell on our table and in our plates."⁸⁶ On July 23, they lost a second carriage wheel. At this time they also struggled to feed themselves, as the two Indigenous Kickapoo men who had traveled with the group for some time and "had furnished us every day with the necessary venison," had not been able to kill anything for a couple days.⁸⁷ Although they mirrored the route that the Comisión had taken the year previously, those earlier travels undertaken in the winter had provided very different conditions than the Comisión now encountered in midsummer.

The day before arriving in Laredo, the Comisión was met by soldiers who had been sent from the presidio to provide them with provisions. With these provisions came letters from family and friends. On the experience of reading such personal notes in the middle of the

⁸⁴ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 416.

⁸⁵ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 416.

⁸⁶ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 417.

⁸⁷ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 420-1.

wilderness Berlandier wrote, “the sensations which one experiences upon receiving those marks of remembrance are greater in proportion to the immense distances, and the solitude of the wilderness augments the pleasure of unexpected news from distant lands.”⁸⁸ Thus Berlandier’s experience of his journeys were often weighted down with the struggle of everyday life in an inhospitable land, and any reference to the world of civility felt distant and foreign. But Berlandier was comfortable, for in the wilderness he was surrounded by the sounds of nature, a world that enthralled him. One night, upon hearing the mingled chorus of bullfrog croaks and coyote barks he remarked:

those wild scenes which renew themselves at each step in this wilderness have something imposing about them for him who is sensitive to the beauties of nature. Born in misery, accustomed to all of life’s privations, I found myself just as happy as in the bosom of society, because at the time my untiring health had not yet been broken by a long succession of journeys and contretemps.⁸⁹

Although he was ever eager to augment his own knowledge of the plants and animals of the world through which he traveled, his constant venturing must also have made him weary and tired, at least at times. His comment at the end of this passage regarding his “untiring health” speaks to the fact that the road would eventually grow to wear on Berlandier as the border region was fraught with challenges.

On July 28, 1829, they arrived at Laredo. Perhaps in a moment of melancholy Berlandier described the landscape around Laredo as lacking in beauty and variety, saying that “nothing

⁸⁸ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 422.

⁸⁹ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 282.

distracts a vexed soul, for the most dreadful monotony seems to augment the ennui which one breathes there.”⁹⁰ The Comisión spent fifteen days recuperating in Laredo, and used this time to have the necessary repairs made to their carriage. During their stay, Berlandier noted that as August rolled in, “the winds from the east, southeast, and south prevailed so continuously and with such strength that the streets were covered with sand, and in the houses it was not possible to obtain shelter from the dust.”⁹¹ Undoubtedly, the environment of northern Mexico was hostile and Berlandier noted that any traveller who was not equipped with the tools to hunt and feed themselves would soon die of hunger. He also observed that, in his opinion, “agricultural industry will never be able to flourish between the Nueces and the Río Bravo del Norte.”⁹² Berlandier even predicted that the region would simply remain an immense prairie for centuries to come. The Comisión left Laredo on August 11, traveling along the banks of the Río Bravo. As they traveled, Berlandier noted the change in the earth they treaded as layers of sandstone appeared under their feet. He made a particular observation of this, saying that “it is between the different layers of that sandstone that an excellent fuel is found, from which no profit is currently extracted.”⁹³ The fuel he documented here was deposits of coal interlaced within the sandstone. Due to its presence, Berlandier imagined small steamboats floating along the Río Bravo, coal mines furnishing a new industry for Mexico. He criticized the Mexican government, saying that “more reasonable authorities, instead of prohibiting the extraction and consumption of the coal,

⁹⁰ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 422.

⁹¹ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 424.

⁹² Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 423.

⁹³ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 427.

will consider it as one of the riches of the country.”⁹⁴ While Berlandier’s observations painted a picture of a landscape that was limited agriculturally, the promise of the land was still very much present in his mind, it simply took the form of a yet-to-be-exploited coal mining industry.

As Berlandier continued to traverse what is today the U.S.-Mexico border along the Río Bravo with the Comisión de Límites, he took particular note of the small towns through which he passed. The three worth mentioning here that dotted his path from Laredo to Matamoros were Mier, Camargo, and Reynosa. In 1829 when Berlandier traveled through each of these presidios, he took particular note of their respective histories. Arriving first in Mier, Berlandier wrote that it had been formed in 1753 “by order of the Count de Sierra Gorda.”⁹⁵ This order by the Count, which was cause for the creation of both Camargo and Reynosa as well, established Mier as a protective measure for towns situated further south “which at the time were too exposed to the invasions of the indigenes.”⁹⁶ At the time of its inception, Mier consisted of only 38 people, but by the time of Berlandier’s arrival over seventy years later it was home to 2,831 residents. Although the town was created as a buffer against Indigenous raids, Berlandier noted that it was home to a small Indigenous tribe known as the Garzas, who lived in huts on the outskirts of the village. Berlandier observed that of the Garzas, “all speak Spanish perfectly, and besides have preserved their own particular tongue.”⁹⁷ Still, just as Berlandier observed the shared lives of the Indigenous Garzas and Mexican settlers in Mier, so too did he observe evidence of violent relationships. Once Berlandier and the Comisión left Mier, they arrived in Camargo on August

⁹⁴ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 427.

⁹⁵ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 428.

⁹⁶ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 428.

⁹⁷ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 428.

17. While en route between the two towns they encountered many white crosses, the presence of which they found hard to explain. They originally thought the crosses could be understood as the markers of murders committed by bandits, “but later we learned that several crosses were very old and indicated places where the Comanches had massacred travellers or herdsmen.”⁹⁸ In Berlandier’s observations the mixture of alliance and aversion present in the northern regions of Mexico between Mexican settlers and Indigenous communities is quite evident. While he often referenced the violence and danger that existed along the trails he traveled and in the communities he visited, this was mostly due to raids made by the Comanches. It is important to remember that relationships between settlers and Indigenous peoples at this time in the border region were not always contentious. This is evident in the intertwined lives of the Garzas and the Mexican settlers in Mier, for there they lived together and were arguably even of the same community. In order to understand the historical landscape of the border region, both naturally and politically, one must hold multiple truths present at once, and understand that the Indigenous tribes were multitudinous and varied greatly in their response to Mexican settlement. Violence against Mexican settlers was one of numerous valid Indigenous responses, but friendships and alliances were also very much present in the border region.

As we have already seen Berlandier observe, life in the northern parts of Mexico was imbued with the “scourge of misery.” Despite the hardships of life in the border region, towns such as Mier had grown significantly in size since their inception. However other towns, such as Camargo, had suffered. As Berlandier reflected, Camargo had diminished drastically in size “perhaps because of the hostile invasions of the indigenes, or else because the founders of

⁹⁸ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 429.

Matamoros were inhabitants who emigrated voluntarily from Camargo...⁹⁹ Indeed, Matamoros had greater appeal, as it was a newly established port and thus provided more opportunities to its residents. Ultimately, life in northern Mexico was in constant fluctuation. Fluctuations of which Berlandier tried to make sense as he traveled along the Río Bravo. As he and the Comisión continued east along the river they arrived in Matamoros on August 20, a town in which Berlandier would eventually spend much of his life.

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Rivers: Boundaries and Pathways

In 1727 a town along the banks of the Río Bravo, near the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, was established under the name of Congregación del Refugio. In 1826, this town was renamed Matamoros. After arriving in Matamoros for the first time in August 1829, Berlandier would continue to use the port town as a base, making extensive excursions from it both north and south as well as west, and calling it home for many years. He thus dedicated a significant section in his travel journals to describing the town. As Berlandier noted, “before the independence of Mexico, Matamoros was nothing but a large, little-known hamlet...” but by 1829 it had grown to around 10,000 inhabitants.¹⁰⁰ Due to the town’s proximity to the coast, its inhabitants consisted of “a large number of Americans, Irishmen, Frenchmen, Italians... [all] carrying on a small trade or living from their industry.”¹⁰¹ Though it was originally a safe and relatively crime-free port, the locality was prone to flooding, which made life there hard, and according to Berlandier,

⁹⁹ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 430.

¹⁰⁰ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 433.

¹⁰¹ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 433.

“frequently repeated revolutions of the Republic multiplied the number of malefactors” in residence.¹⁰² Due to its distance from Mexico City, Matamoros experienced the politics of Mexican government mostly in the form of a lack of attention. One example of this political disinterest on the part of the capital was the sickness that spread rampantly through the municipality in 1829. According to Berlandier, “in less than two months five hundred people succumbed to malign or rotten fevers.”¹⁰³ Those who grew sick were left to fend for themselves in the wilderness, as the town did not have the means or the motivation to help facilitate caregiving; Berlandier blamed this on the governing of inexperienced men. He also cited that as the coasts of the Gulf of Mexico continued to be populated in increasing numbers, he believed sickness would become endemic, for “since the time that the population began to increase considerably, disease also began to appear.”¹⁰⁴ As time would tell, the scourge of disease would revisit Matamoros in the form of a cholera epidemic in 1833. During the epidemic Berlandier was living and working in Matamoros as an apothecary, and he observed that cholera killed one in every twenty people in the town. As Berlandier wrote, the cholera originally came to Matamoros from the south, but once it reached the Río Bravo it jumped from town to town along the banks, traveling westward. Thus “that river appeared to be a barrier which prevented [cholera] from reaching Texas.”¹⁰⁵ This was an interesting observation, as it seemed the river acted as a boundary for the disease, preventing the spread of cholera farther north across its

¹⁰² Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 433.

¹⁰³ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 434.

¹⁰⁴ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 435.

¹⁰⁵ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 438.

waters. This may indeed be another example of why a river could be deemed a natural border, though Berlandier made no claim as such.

On December 14, 1829, Berlandier left Matamoros to travel to Brazos de Santiago, which lay at the mouth of the Río Bravo, where the waters of the river met the ocean waters of the Gulf of Mexico. As he journeyed eastward he was joined by Lieutenant Colonel Ahumada and together they traveled along the more populated southern banks of the river. Though ranchos could be found along the northern banks of the Río Bravo as well, those situated on its north bank were often left abandoned due to repeated invasions made by Comanches. The ranchos on the southern banks, though more numerous, fared little better as they were “often inundated by the overflows of that river, for the land there is so low-lying that the waters cannot be contained within the confines of their course.”¹⁰⁶ After spending little time in Brazos de Santiago, on their return to Matamoros the two travelers decided not to follow the same route as they had come. Instead, they walked along the northern banks of the river, which allowed Berlandier to make new observations. In exchange for fewer encounters with people, Berlandier noted that along the northern banks “the countryside is prettier. Forests are rare. The mesquite is very sparse, and all the ground is covered with prairies and thickets.”¹⁰⁷ During this short excursion, Berlandier took particular note of the path of the river. His observations regarding the river are of particular interest due to the fact that the Río Bravo’s course would prove to be increasingly significant as history continued and borders were drawn using its waters.

¹⁰⁶ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 439.

¹⁰⁷ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 441.

While rivers can be understood as natural boundaries, as we have seen evidenced in Berlandier's writing previously, it is important to recognize that rivers are also parts of nature, prone to changes beyond human control. In describing this particular river, Berlandier noted that "few rivers in Mexico can be so variable in their courses and so dangerous to dwellings as the Río Bravo del Norte, which is constant neither in its direction nor in its rises."¹⁰⁸ He summarized its course, explaining that from Mier to Reynosa it is less winding, but that as it progressed east to Matamoros and beyond, its meandering became more abundant. With the river's constant changes in size and course due to the seasons and to intermittent flooding, as well as its inherent twists and turns, it is possible to question its validity as a border. For Berlandier, who spent his childhood in the border region between France and Switzerland, a border that is itself marked by the Rhône river, it may have seemed that large waterways were natural places of land division. This could be said for many of the European migrants who settled in Mexico's border region as well, as much of the borders between countries in Europe are based on the contours of the land. However, I would argue that as much as we have grown to know the Río Bravo as a border between the United States and Mexico, it is dangerous to understand it historically as such. For Berlandier, much of his journeying through Mexico's north followed the pathways of not only the Río Bravo, but other smaller rivers as well. Rivers were some of the easiest landmarks to note on maps, and he used them to orient himself in relatively unknown territory. The Río Bravo in particular was one of his main routes of travel, as he would explore along its course many more times throughout his life. Additionally, in his brief reflection on the economic opportunities of Mexico's northern region, he envisioned coal mines along the Río Bravo, and the river used

¹⁰⁸ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 442.

for steamboat travel through the country. It is true that Berlandier observed changes in the natural landscape across rivers, such as he did on the banks of the Nueces River, and that the Río Bravo acted as a natural protection against the cholera epidemic. However, I would like to challenge the idea of rivers as natural boundaries upon which political borders should be placed. I think Berlandier's travels themselves attest to the fact that in this border region, historically rivers were used as much for travel between different regions as they were for designating boundaries between them.

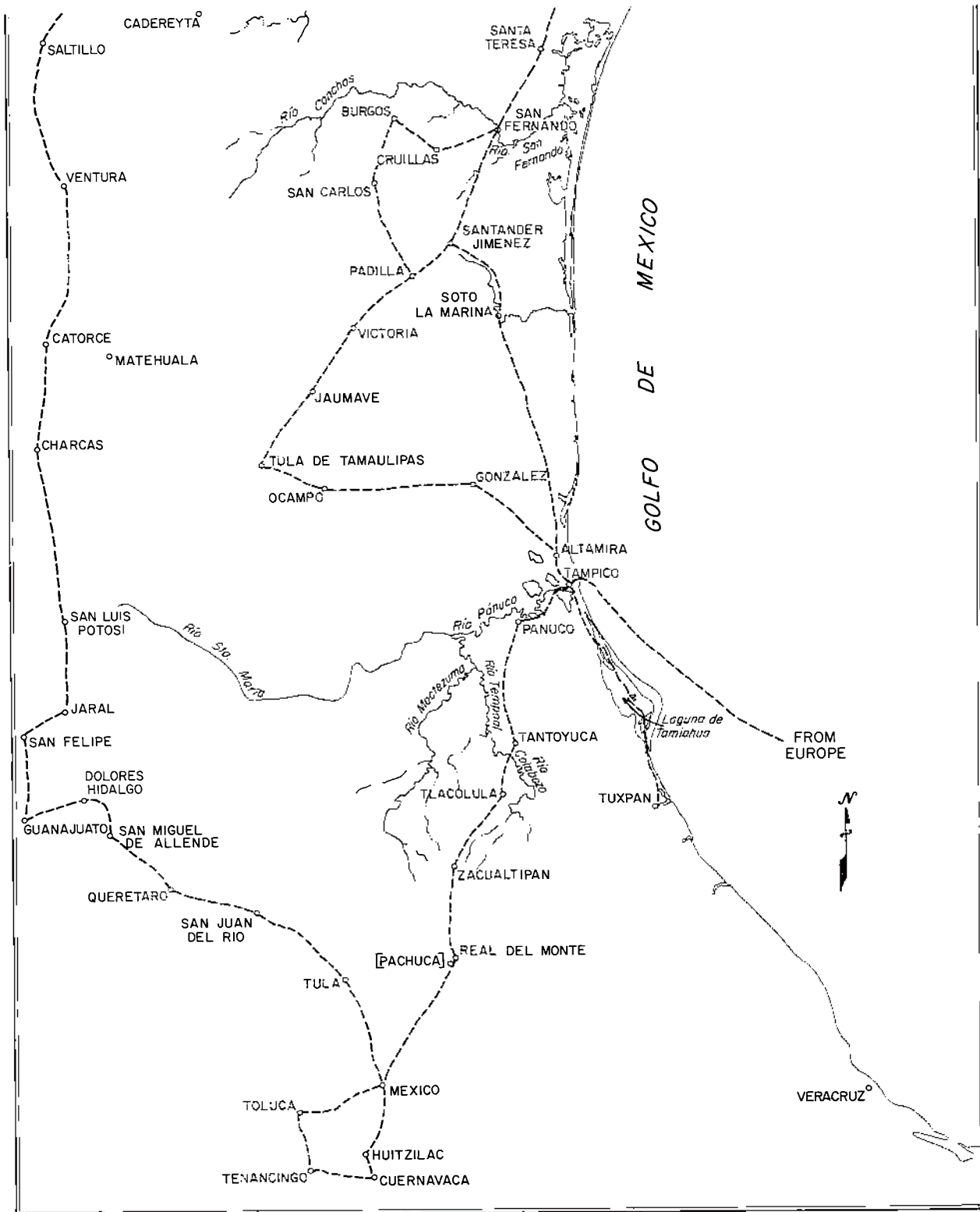
What Happened Next

The Politics of Mapping

From 1830 until 1834 Berlandier traveled from Matamoros as far south as Tampico in the state of Tamaulipas, and as far north as Goliad, in Texas. His travels during this time were inspired not only by his scientific pursuit of knowledge, but also by the varying circumstances and needs of the time. For instance, as smallpox spread north through Mexico, Berlandier left Matamoros in April, 1830 “with the sole purpose of promptly bringing back some vaccine.”¹⁰⁹ Several months later in October, Berlandier set out from Matamoros again, this time to map the principal routes of Tamaulipas and discover the most prominent towns therein. He was addressed before this journey by General Terán, who was then the commandant general of the Interior States. At this time, the Mexican government was expecting an expedition sent from Spain, as a conspiracy of Spanish invasion had been discovered in 1827. In response to this threat, General Terán was “wholly convinced that a comprehensive knowledge of a country which must become a theater of war is as absolutely necessary for him who wishes to defend it as it is for him who wishes to attack...”¹¹⁰ So Berlandier was charged with the mission of obtaining the knowledge of northeastern Mexico that would be necessary for defending it. Here is an instance where Berlandier’s mission was explicitly political, and we can see through General Terán’s convictions that the mapping of land was of the utmost importance to the governance of it, especially in relation to external threat. General Terán had been personally involved in such an external threat

¹⁰⁹ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 449.

¹¹⁰ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 463.



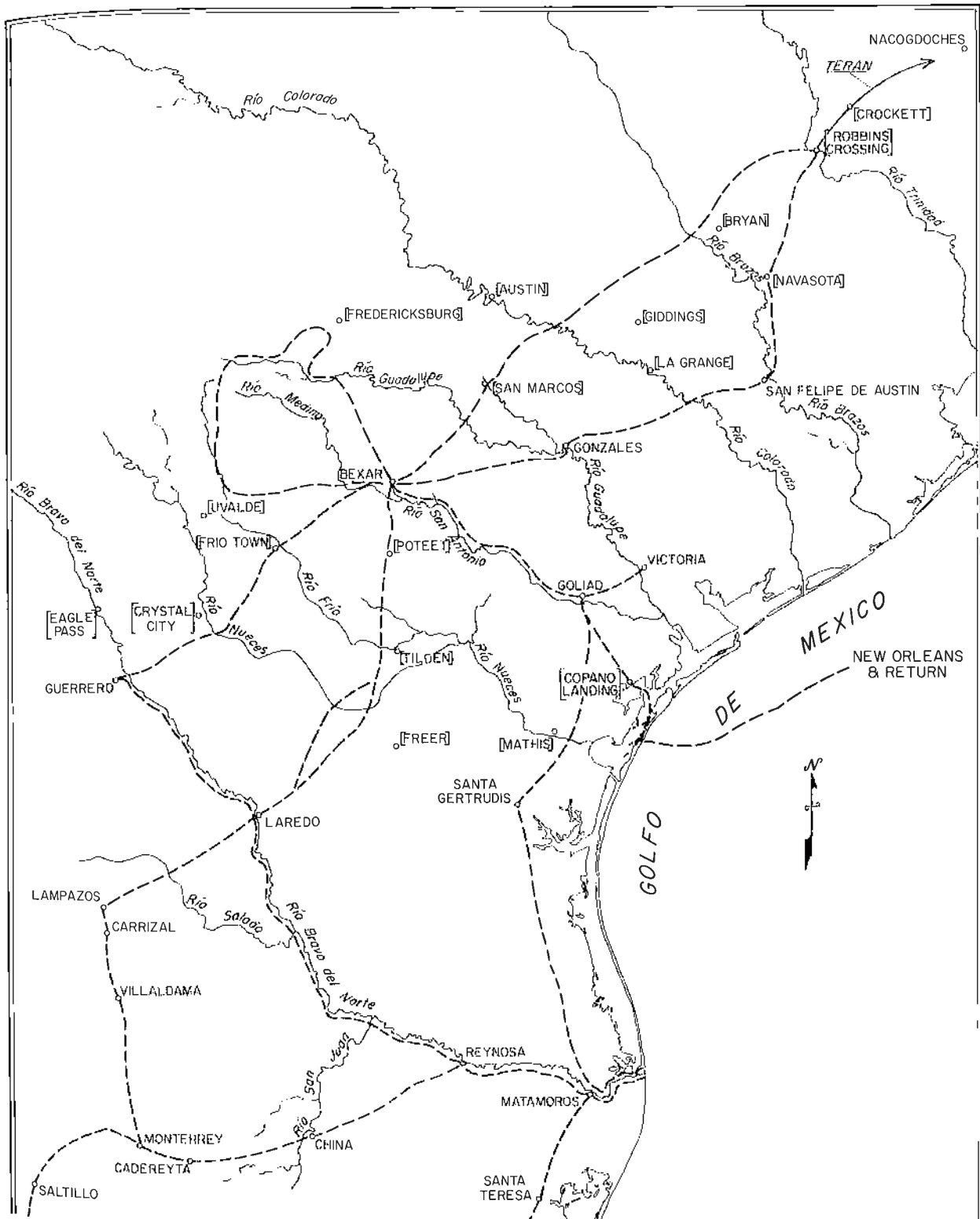


Figure 3. "Map of Berlandier's travels" in Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, vol. 1, following page 64.

the previous year in 1829 when General Barradas had landed on the shores of the state of Tamaulipas with Spanish troops comprised of three thousand men, ready to attack. From where the Spaniards landed, they marched along the shore, overcame a small garrison at Pueblo Viejo, and went on to occupy the mouth of the Pánuco River and the city of Tampico. As the Spanish troops marched north from Tampico to attempt the overtaking of Altamira, “General Terán, whom chance had brought upon the scene, understood the advantages which the countryside offered and placed himself on the route.”¹¹¹ Terán, relying on his knowledge of the land around him, used the “impenetrable forest” to aid his defensive tactics as he held off the advancement of the Spanish enemy with a mere two hundred men, stemming the attack long enough for the residents of Altamira to evacuate. As Berlandier recounted this tale, it is evident that General Terán benefited from his knowledge of the landscape. Berlandier also noted that it was conversely to the disadvantage of the Spanish invaders that they did not understand their surroundings, for “despite the great defensive advantages which that road offers, one should not lose sight of the fact that an enemy who knew the area better than Barradas could have avoided taking that route” altogether.¹¹² Thus it is clear why General Terán charged Berlandier with the task of mapping the intricacies of the state a year later in 1830. However, during this time period not all of Berlandier’s excursions were political. After returning to Matamoros, Berlandier set off again in November, 1831, about a year after his previous departure. This excursion took on a more scientific tone, as he aimed to travel through the state of Tamaulipas again in order “to make a reconnaissance of the various species of woods useful for dyeing, and which the southern

¹¹¹ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 502.

¹¹² Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 502.

part of the state produces in abundance.”¹¹³ Berlandier returned to Matamoros again on December 24 of the same year.

At this point there is a break in the narrative of Berlandier’s travel journals, and he does not pick up the documentation of his journeys again until 1834. During this time he resided in Matamoros and worked as an apothecary. Perhaps in explanation of the break in his writing, these years of Berlandier’s life were filled with the death of his dear friend and leader, General Terán, and the end of the Comisión de Límites. Although Terán had done much in the furthering of Mexico as an independent country, in the pursuit of science, and in support of humanity in the border region in general as leader of the Comisión — and though Berlandier’s writing gave little hint at what General Terán’s fate would be — the Comisión’s dedicated leader committed suicide in July of 1832. Berlandier wrote only briefly of this tragic loss:

An unexpected death — as horrible as it was mysterious — having deprived us of our chief, we were from that moment on abandoned in the Interior States, without salaries and without counsel, forgotten by governments more concerned with the civil war than looking after frontiers occupied by ingrates, who, at first received as colonists, soon wished to dictate laws to those who should be dictating [the laws] to them.¹¹⁴

General Terán had showed great friendship and strength through his leadership of the Comisión and his death took its toll on Berlandier as well as the Comisión itself. Indeed, upon his death it became apparent that it had been thanks to General Terán’s energy that the Comisión had existed

¹¹³ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 519.

¹¹⁴ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 180.

for as long as it did. Though the Mexican government was clearly invested enough in its northern territory in the 1820s to create a Comisión de Límites, by the 1830s governmental energy was directed elsewhere. Thus General Terán had been the sole force keeping the scientific initiative underway and his suicide brought about the Comisión's end. Despite its dissolution, the border region had become Berlandier's home and so he remained, using his knowledge of plants and their applications to help the sick during the cholera epidemic that hit Matamoros in 1833.

By the following year the cholera epidemic had somewhat subsided and so on April 18, 1834, Berlandier set out from Matamoros on a mission to replenish and replace his collection of the plants of Texas. This excursion also allowed him to visit an old travel companion, Rafael Chowell, a previous member of the Comisión who had since been residing in Goliad. In order to undertake this journey, Berlandier had reportedly "obtained a passport from the commandant general which covered the entire frontier" and wished to travel as far as New Mexico; but as it were he was not able to travel as far west as he had hoped.¹¹⁵ After Berlandier arrived in Goliad and reconvened with Chowell, the two scientists set forth together along the road to Béxar. They arrived on May 28, and Berlandier recorded this as his third visit to Béxar, "the former capital of the province of Texas and today the municipal seat of the department of the same name."¹¹⁶ They stayed until June 10, before departing again, this time traveling southwest in order to meet the Río Bravo. By this time, Berlandier was familiar with the route, though each new excursion brought new experiences. As Berlandier wrote, they left Béxar without an escort, and "left at that time because we were desirous of observing the total eclipse of the moon" scheduled for June 20,

¹¹⁵ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 541.

¹¹⁶ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 552.

which they hoped to use to fix the exact longitude of the town San Juan Bautista del Río Grande.¹¹⁷ Unfortunately, Berlandier reported that the eclipse was underwhelming due to severe cloud coverage. On June 28, they arrived at San Juan Bautista del Río Grande, renamed Villa de Guerrero Coahuila by the congress of the state, which was situated along the Río Bravo.¹¹⁸ It is apparent from Berlandier's notation of the name change of this town, as well as his previous observation of Béxar's change from *capital* to *municipal seat*, and Texas' from *province* to *department*, that there was significant political reordering underway in Mexico's northern territory. This can be attributed to a change in governance in Mexico City for it was in May, 1834 that the army had revolted against Vice President Gómez Farías' liberal reforms and President Santa Anna had stepped in to take on his governing responsibilities. With Santa Anna in charge, there was a significant move towards centralizing the Mexican government, thus *states* became *departments* and ultimately enjoyed less independent governing privileges. However, it is not very apparent through Berlandier's writing how significant these changes really were to daily life in Mexico's northern region. Although this may have been due to Berlandier's focus on the natural landscape he encountered, it seems likely that the political changes coming from Mexico City had little real effect on life in the border region.

As Chowell and Berlandier spent some time in the town of San Juan Bautista del Río Grande, making ready to use astronomical measurements to fix the positions of towns along the Río Bravo, "the civil war broke out anew to afflict the Republic."¹¹⁹ The outbreak of war was due to the U.S. settlers of Texas protesting the orders of centralization that came from Santa

¹¹⁷ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 557.

¹¹⁸ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 573.

¹¹⁹ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 576.

Anna's presidency. These rising tensions, along with a renewed outbreak of cholera, led Berlandier and Chowell to decide to cut their excursions short. Instead of traveling farther west to New Mexico, they determined to return to Matamoros where, "being better known, we would be sheltered from the investigations of the belligerent factions."¹²⁰ Their decision made, the two scientists left San Juan Bautista del Río Grande on July 7, traveling east along the Río Bravo. Berlandier had traveled this route before, five years earlier, and this time he made similar observations as he had previously. As it was summer again, despite traveling along the river, their journey was extremely hot. As Berlandier wrote, "a dreadful drought, which had prevailed in the region for some months, made a fearful sight of the countryside."¹²¹ On July 12, they arrived in Laredo and Berlandier noted as before that in his opinion the surrounding terrain was only fit for population by pastoral peoples. As they continued east along the river, they passed by the deposits of coal that Berlandier had written about the previous time he traveled through these parts. Again he maintained the same opinion as he had held when he had passed by in 1829, writing:

On both banks of the river can be seen some heaps of coal which several private citizens had mined. They were prevented from using it, however, by the authorities... It is to be hoped that one day a more enlightened civic government will favor the extraction of a substance which will become of prime necessity in a country where there are no forests.¹²²

¹²⁰ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 577.

¹²¹ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 578.

¹²² Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 586-7.

Thus Berlandier still viewed Mexico's economic opportunity in the excavation and use of coal as a fuel for the country. Something to which the local governments apparently objected due to health concerns.

Even though it had been five years since his last journey along the Río Bravo, and despite the fact that tensions in Mexico's north were mounting due to changes in governance from Mexico City, it is clear that the region still had not undergone drastic change. As Chowell and Berlandier continued to travel east they experienced firsthand the effects of the stirring tensions of the looming war. When they arrived in the town of Mier, Berlandier observed that "the revolution which was then agitating the republic had already sown the seed of discord in the small city..."¹²³ This caused Berlandier and Chowell to spend their night in Mier on the outskirts of the town to avoid any trouble. When they eventually arrived back in Matamoros, Berlandier wrote a reflection on this most recent journey, noting that upon reflection, "one can instantly get an idea of the prosperity lying in store for these regions — lands entirely unknown to the geographers of Europe."¹²⁴ Here it is evident that Berlandier's passion lay in documenting and mapping a land that was previously unknown to the European colonists, not in the political tensions wracking Mexico. Despite his dedication to the pursuit of scientific knowledge, in the mapping of the land Berlandier theoretically helped to empower newly independent Mexico to protect itself against attacks from Spain and the rest of the world. Berlandier's observations of the border region made Mexico's north more legible to those in power in Mexico City, something that would contribute significantly to the drawing of the border between the United States and

¹²³ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 588.

¹²⁴ Berlandier, *Journey to Mexico During the Years 1826-1834*, 590.

Mexico. Ultimately, as a botanist journeying through the “unknown” Mexican north in the years leading up to the U.S.-Mexico War, Berlandier uncovered the scientific reality of the region and provided a written record of his observations that allowed Mexico to attempt to lay claim to and defend its north. Despite Berlandier's work, in the coming years Mexico would struggle to defend and maintain its land in the face of Texan revolt and U.S. advancement and greed, especially against the backdrop of the ongoing Indigenous raiding of Mexico's northern settlements.

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The Texas Thing

As politics in Mexico City shifted towards centralism with the presidency of Santa Anna, and his centralist constitution of 1836, centralization efforts met protest in Mexico's northern province of Texas; a resistance that eventually turned violent. To understand this growing conflict, it is important to note two political changes in Mexico in addition to Santa Anna's push towards centralism. The first was that in 1829, Mexico had abolished slavery throughout its republic. Significantly, it would take the United States until 1865, thirty-six years later, to do the same. Although this decision had been made in Mexico City, “the de facto absence of a central State apparatus effectively granted Texan residents a level of autonomy bordering on independence” even before they officially declared it, which meant that Texans continued to keep slaves though it was against Mexican law.¹²⁵ The second noteworthy political change was that Mexico banned the further colonization of Texas by U.S. citizens in 1830. The settlement of

¹²⁵ Hernández Chávez, *Mexico*, 140.

Texas by U.S. migrants had been practiced since the colonization-friendly policies of the Spanish Crown, and had been continued by independent Mexico as “the new Mexican republic had proceeded to authorize new concessions to those willing to colonize unpopulated regions.”¹²⁶ This policy had been an attempt by Mexico to defend its northern settlements against the violence that Indigenous tribes enacted through their relentless raiding campaigns. However, the policy of accepting U.S. settlement in Texas meant that by 1835, 3,500 of the 25,000 inhabitants of Texas did not speak Spanish or claim Mexican heritage.¹²⁷ Thus despite being part of the Mexican republic, Texas held a very different cultural identity and this meant that the decision to ban further U.S. settlement of Texas was met with resistance. As such, the combination of centralization, the abolition of slavery in Mexico, and the banning of further U.S. settlement meant that Texans wanted their independence. As tensions continued to rise, in February 1836, President Santa Anna decided to march against Texan forces himself. From the end of February into mid-March, Santa Anna's troops lay siege to the Alamo Mission near B exar (today’s San Antonio). Santa Anna brought six-thousand soldiers with him to fight against the revolting Texans, killing as many as 200 of the men who defended the Alamo.¹²⁸ Santa Anna’s ruthlessness was evident in his choice to have many of his Texan captives shot dead. The battle at the Alamo would prove a great victory for the Mexicans, though they lost many of their own men. However, despite Santa Anna’s confidence in being able to continue his advancement and place the Mexican flag upon Washington D.C., he was defeated and taken prisoner a month later in

¹²⁶ Hern andez Ch avez, *Mexico*, 139.

¹²⁷ Hern andez Ch avez, *Mexico*, 139-40.

¹²⁸ Delay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 73.

April.¹²⁹ As a prisoner of war in Texas, “Santa Anna signed a treaty granting Texas its independence and recognizing the Rio Grande as the boundary between the two countries.”¹³⁰ After signing this treaty, Santa Anna was released and returned to Mexico City in disgrace, as the Mexican government refused to recognize Texan independence or relinquish its claim on the region. This led Anastasio Bustamante to take over the presidency. However, his popularity quickly diminished as Mexico’s southern region, Yucatán, encouraged by Texan success, declared its own independence and Bustamante was unable to return the southern region back to the republic, either by negotiation or force.¹³¹

While politics in Mexico erred on the side of disarray, the botanist Berlandier was still using his talents and knowledge in Mexico’s northern border region. As we saw in the documentation of one of his final excursions along the Río Bravo, Berlandier had already begun feeling the growing tensions of Texas independence in 1834. Throughout Berlandier’s travels he had gotten to know the U.S. colonists who inhabited Texas, including Stephen Austin, so he was well aware of the mentality of many of the U.S. migrants who inhabited Texas. Additionally, he had reportedly been “convinced by General Terán’s viewpoint that it was just a matter of time before the greedy Americans would push Texas into a declaration of independence.”¹³² So it is likely that he was not surprised by Texas’ rebellion, or the conflict that followed. As tensions grew and Mexico still refused to acknowledge Texan independence, Berlandier joined General Francisco Mejia in the summer of 1845 to “reconnoiter Texas positions and Mexican strength

¹²⁹ Bazant, “Mexico from Independence to 1867,” 437.

¹³⁰ Bazant, “Mexico from Independence to 1867,” 438.

¹³¹ Bazant, “Mexico from Independence to 1867,” 439.

¹³² Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 181.

along the Nueces River.”¹³³ Indeed, given Berlandier’s experience exploring the border region there was no one better to assist General Mejia in his mission. Berlandier “set out for Brazos de Santiago on the same day, July 4, 1845, that Texas voted in favor of annexation by the United States.”¹³⁴ Since Mexico still considered Texas in rebellion, any attempt at annexation by the U.S. would be viewed as an attack and warrant a forceful response. Thus General Mejia hoped to understand the landscape in order to know how best to respond to Texas and U.S. aggressions in a way that would maintain Mexican control of the Nueces River. Always the scientist, while Berlandier helped General Mejia in this effort, he also found time to further his own knowledge as well, “believing that politics must give way to science.”¹³⁵

Though Mexico would eventually win back Yucatán, Texas would be annexed by the United States in December, 1845. This was largely due to the fact that many of the migrant inhabitants of Texas were from the U.S., not Mexico, but a second equally significant motivation was the laws regarding slavery in each country. However, just as Texans sought independence because they wished to continue the practice of slavery when Mexico had outlawed it, the U.S. originally had reservations about accepting Texas into the union as a state due to its slavery as well. For “political stability in the United States was dependent on maintaining equilibrium between its ‘slave’ and ‘free’ states, which made the admission of new states and territories a politically volatile issue.”¹³⁶ Nonetheless desire for land and expansion was too great for the

¹³³ Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 181.

¹³⁴ Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 181.

¹³⁵ Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 182.

¹³⁶ Hernández Chávez, *Mexico*, 140.

United States to resist the conquest of new territory, and Texas became the United States' 28th state, leaving the border between the United States and Mexico in dispute.

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U.S.-Mexico War (1846-1848)

After Texas was annexed by the United States, it became clear that U.S. lust for expansion had still not been sated. Thus when the U.S. propositioned Mexico to sell some of its northern territory, Mexico's president, General José Joaquín de Herrera entertained negotiations as he realized Mexico's economy and army were in no state to resist U.S. pressures. However, Herrera's negotiations were seen as treasonous by the Mexican populous and General Paredes soon rebelled, taking over the presidency in January 1846.¹³⁷ This broke off any negotiations, and when Mexico refused to sell its northern territory, the U.S. moved to occupy the land between the Nueces River and the Río Bravo. By March, U.S. troops had officially invaded and by May, U.S. President James K. Polk "signed a congressional declaration of war on Mexico."¹³⁸ In Mexico City, politics were in a state of confusion as Paredes' presidency brought back the notion put forth in Iturbide's Plan de Iguala of a monarchical form of governance led by a European prince. This push towards monarchy did not last long as Santa Anna wrote from his exile in Cuba to his previous political partner, Gómez Farías, also in exile in New Orleans, to suggest "that the army and the people should unite."¹³⁹ They both returned to Mexico and Santa Anna took over the presidency while Gómez Farías became vice president, as before. Once the

¹³⁷ Bazant, "Mexico from Independence to 1867," 442.

¹³⁸ Hernández Chávez, *Mexico*, 142.

¹³⁹ Bazant, "Mexico from Independence to 1867," 442.

change in governance was established, Santa Anna left to lead the army against U.S. invasion. Mexico's attempts at defending itself were not as organized or strong as one might have hoped. Reluctant to leave their localities undefended, "only seven governors sent out their National Guard units to defend the country..."¹⁴⁰ This reluctance largely stemmed from a fear of Indigenous raiding, an increasing violent reality that northern Mexican settlements had been contending with in the fifteen years leading up to U.S. invasion. Historian Brian DeLay made the argument that Indigenous raiding determined U.S. victory in the war against Mexico, as the raids made by Indigenous communities left northern Mexicans, "exhausted, impoverished, and divided," to be "singularly unprepared to resist the U.S. Army in 1846."¹⁴¹ Despite the fact that "observers in both nations tacitly agreed that while tribes could certainly trouble nation-states, they were not entities of international significance," it is important to view Indigenous parties as having agency themselves: acting upon self interests in response to internal inequalities and external opportunities; thus being a political and significant third party in the U.S.-Mexico War.¹⁴² In fact, just as Mexican governors were reluctant to send away their own defenses due to Indigenous raiding, the U.S. was inspired in its attack of Mexico by Indigenous success against northern Mexican settlements. Thus, backed by President Polk's desire for expansion, the U.S. army advanced upon Mexico, starting a war that would last from 1846-1848.

In addition to recognizing Indigenous parties as active contributors to the U.S.-Mexico War, it is important to understand the ways in which both the United States and Mexico conducted their armies during this conflict and how that was informed by Indigenous relations as

¹⁴⁰ Hernández Chávez, *Mexico*, 142.

¹⁴¹ DeLay, "Independent Indians and the U.S.-Mexican War," 36.

¹⁴² DeLay, "Independent Indians and the U.S.-Mexican War," 48.

well. In his book *The Dead March*, Peter Guardino explained the U.S.-Mexico War in depth, including a close look at the people who made up both the U.S. and Mexican armies, as well as the political interests of both nations. In learning about a conflict that drastically changed the border between two nations, it is important to remember that the war was compiled of individual actions and battles, that were enacted by individual people influenced by their own personal desires and needs. Though the main outcome of the war was the cession of land by Mexico to the United States and the demarcation of the border between the two countries that we know today, it is interesting to note that the majority of the battles fought between the two nations were not geographically located along this border. Instead, the United States army marched deep into Mexican territory. This invasion into Mexico was not something new, as many Indigenous raids had extended into Mexico long before the U.S. army did. As DeLay cited, the communication through violence in the border region leading up to the U.S.-Mexico War, which in turn informed the war, was greatly influenced by a deadly revenge killing cycle. As Comanches and their allies made raids against Mexican settlements, any lives lost would justify the next raid and “the raiding-revenge cycle therefore became a self-reinforcing phenomenon.”¹⁴³ The history of Indigenous raids in the region additionally meant that Mexicans in northern settlements were used to retaliating against Indigenous attacks using guerrilla warfare tactics. Thus those in the border region influenced each other’s actions through their own acts of violence. As Guardino argued, the production of communication through violence between Indigenous raiders and Mexicans spread to and influenced the conflict between the United States and Mexico. Political leaders in the U.S. understood the history of Indigenous raiding in the region and used it to their

¹⁴³ DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 132.

advantage against Mexico. The U.S. troops advanced upon northern Mexico knowing that they were overlaying a new war on a war that had long existed in the region, that their troops “would literally be marching in the footsteps of Comanches, Navajos, and Apaches.”¹⁴⁴ U.S. invasion of Mexican territory at times even took the form of Indigenous raids as “the volunteers [of the U.S. army] were for many intents and purposes a more numerous and well-armed version of the Comanche raiders.”¹⁴⁵ Additionally, the success of the Indigenous raids in leaving northern Mexican settlements in tatters was taken as evidence by the U.S. for a necessary occupation and control of the region. Following this justification, the United States believed that Mexico’s weakness against Indigenous raiders made them unfit to civilize the region themselves, and that the U.S. had no choice but to step in and save its weaker southern neighbor.¹⁴⁶

Although Guardino argued that the idea that Mexicans could not control Indigenous violence did help justify the war and expansionism for the U.S., he challenged the truth of this historical narrative, instead suggesting that the two nations were more similar at this time than is generally believed. Guardino claimed that both the U.S. and Mexico were politically tumultuous during the 1840s, and that the biggest difference between the two nations was in the ability of each to finance their army. Additionally significant to the outcome of the war was Mexico’s struggle to supply men to fight, as well as a significant lack of food and sustenance for Mexican soldiers. Despite this general incongruency, Guardino highlighted two moments of U.S. vulnerability that would have drastically changed the outcome of the war had certain Mexican

¹⁴⁴ DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 253.

¹⁴⁵ Peter Guardino, *The Dead March: A History of the Mexican-American War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 124.

¹⁴⁶ DeLay, “Independent Indians and the U.S.-Mexican War,” 63.

parties acted differently. The first occurred in 1845, when Mariano Paredes marched his troops, stationed close to the border to provide support against U.S. invasion if and when needed, away from the border towards Mexico City in order to make a claim to the presidency. This left Mexican territory defenseless against Zachary Taylor's army, at the time stationed in Texas. The second point of U.S. vulnerability was in 1847, when moderate federalists in Mexico, in alliance with the Catholic Church, tried to overthrow Valentín Gómez Fariás, thus preventing reinforcements from being sent against Winfield Scott's invasion of Veracruz. Scott would go on to occupy Mexico City, after which the war would come to an end through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed on February 2, 1848. The treaty outlined the terms of Mexico's defeat, establishing a new line of boundary between the countries and ceding half of Mexico's territory to the United States. It also "stipulated that all inhabitants in the ceded territory who did not announce their intention to remain Mexican citizens or leave the territory in one year would automatically become citizens of the United States."¹⁴⁷ The U.S.-Mexico War, motivated in part by U.S. expansionism, won vast territory for the U.S. Indeed, during the war "expansionists wanted to take all of Mexico but abandoned the idea because they did not want to bring a populous of colored race into the nation."¹⁴⁸

While the theatrics of the U.S.-Mexico War extended all the way south into Mexico City by the war's end, the French botanist, Jean Louis Berlandier experienced some significant first acts of the war in Matamoros, the town he had made his home. In the winter of 1846, when U.S. General Taylor and his troops occupied the land between the Nueces River and the Río Bravo,

¹⁴⁷ Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 50-1.

¹⁴⁸ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 50.

Berlandier traveled to meet the war party. Just as General Taylor threatened to advance, Berlandier presented himself to the general and “handed him a letter from General Mejia warning that an American attempt to ford the Arroyo would be considered an act of war, which the Mexicans would resist.”¹⁴⁹ Later in May, Berlandier served as an officer-surgeon in the first major battle of the war at Palo Alto. As he manned the field hospital, Berlandier took note of what Guardino has referenced above, “that the Mexican esprit de corps was weak, as the common soldier served only under compulsion...”¹⁵⁰ Having been defeated at Palo Alto, by mid-May Berlandier “wrote that the streets of Matamoros were deserted as the people waited for the inevitable occupation of the city.”¹⁵¹ However once the occupation came, Berlandier remained in Matamoros and continued his work as a physician and apothecary to help care for the injured soldiers. Indeed, the same afternoon that General Taylor entered the city, Berlandier met with him “respecting the condition of the hospitals and the injured.”¹⁵² He specifically wished to consult with the U.S. surgeons that accompanied the troops about whether or not to amputate the leg of one of his patients. Here again is evidence that Berlandier valued the attainment and sharing of knowledge over any political differences. During the occupation of Matamoros, as skirmishes and violence broke out due to the presence of U.S. soldiers, Berlandier even “credited General Taylor with trying to prevent the disorder,” though his efforts were to little avail.¹⁵³ As the U.S. troops moved west and south to continue their advancement on Mexico, Matamoros

¹⁴⁹ Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 183.

¹⁵⁰ Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 183.

¹⁵¹ Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 184-5.

¹⁵² Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 185.

¹⁵³ Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 186.

became the headquarters for Taylor's army, and life for Berlandier returned to a relative normal. Normality for Berlandier, of course, was undertaking excursions through Mexico's countryside. Thus "even though war was engulfing parts of Mexico... Berlandier, intent on continuing his accumulation of data on the latitude of various places in Tamaulipas, decided to journey south once again..."¹⁵⁴ By the time Mexico experienced defeat at the hands of the U.S. army in 1848, Berlandier was back in Matamoros. The post-war years brought a flood of political chaos and insecurity to Mexico, and as a prominent individual in the community Berlandier found himself the victim of negative accusations by some individuals in Matamoros. To make matters worse, a few months after the end of the war, "Berlandier received a letter from Lt. J. D. Webster of the Topographical Corps of Engineers of the U.S. Army requesting that he respond to a series of questions regarding the meteorological conditions of life along the valley and coastline..."¹⁵⁵ Ever desirous of imparting his scientific knowledge, Berlandier responded with extensive notes on the nature of the region recently taken by the United States. Berlandier was, after all, one of the most knowledgeable scientists around concerning the natural state of the border region. It is clear from what we have seen of Berlandier's work, life, and character, that he valued his scientific pursuits over anything political. Thus he must not have thought too much about the sharing of his observations with the United States lieutenant. However, on November 20, 1849, Berlandier was arrested for treason against the Mexican government.

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¹⁵⁴ Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 187.

¹⁵⁵ Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 189.

A Watery Grave

After his arrest in 1849, Berlandier traveled as a prisoner to Ciudad Victoria where he awaited judgement in jail, without bail and without clear charges against him.¹⁵⁶ As his stay continued, it became clear to Berlandier that much of the evidence against him had been fabricated. Luckily by the end of December Berlandier finally got the chance to defend himself to the governor, who reluctantly allowed Berlandier to go free. He left Ciudad Victoria on January 2, 1850 and returned to Matamoros.¹⁵⁷ Although the charges against Berlandier had been dropped, he was never allowed to fully clear his name, and this grew to haunt Berlandier. Not being able to let this matter go, a year later Berlandier decided to travel to Mexico City to attempt to officially clear his name. He left Matamoros for what would be the last time in the spring of 1851. Alas, his trip would not prove successful. That spring had brought heavy rains and rivers were swollen. On his journey south to defend his innocence, after a lifetime of dedication, Berlandier gave Mexico his last great gift, his death. He drowned attempting to ford a flooded riverbed on horseback. Travel-hardened and experienced in river crossings as he was, it seems odd that this would prove the end of Berlandier. As historian Russell Lawson noted, “the foolhardiness of crossing a swollen river on horseback can hardly be explained, save that Berlandier must have felt an urgency to reach his destination.”¹⁵⁸ An urgency undoubtedly inspired by the need to defend his dedication to Mexico and prove that his actions were always only ever in the interest of science.

¹⁵⁶ Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 193.

¹⁵⁷ Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 194.

¹⁵⁸ Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 195.

Conclusion

In 1819 the Adams-Oñís Treaty was agreed upon by the United States of America and the Spanish Crown, and stated that the boundary between the U.S. and Spain's viceroyalty, New Spain, should be formed. The Treaty stated that in order for these limits of two nations to be understood, each nation should provide a commissioner and a surveyor to explore the region, document it, and map it. In 1821, newly independent Mexico decided to adhere to the stipulations made in that same Treaty and formed the Comisión de Límites. In 1826 the French botanist, Jean Louis Berlandier, traveled from Geneva to Mexico to join the Comisión, and they departed for Mexico's northern border region in 1827. What followed were several years of exploration and documentation before the revolt of Texas started a violent series of events that concluded with a war between Mexico and the United States and the cession of over half of Mexico's territory to its northern neighbor. The end of this war, with the cession of so much land, along with the Gadsden Purchase in 1854 — in which the United States agreed to pay Mexico \$10 million for the land that would become parts of southern Arizona and New Mexico — created the border between the United States and Mexico that we know today. Although the border has changed in character over the years, becoming more definite and more militarized, its placement has not been drastically altered. The limits of both nations have remained the riverbed of the Río Bravo. I believe that in writing the history of this border it is too easy to credit the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo at the end of the U.S.-Mexico War in 1848 as the moment, or act, that created the border between the two nations. Instead, I have proposed in this work that in order to truly understand the formation of the border, one must look past 1848 to the twenty

years preceding this moment in history. With the documentation provided by Jean Louis Berlandier, it is possible to grasp an insight into the nature, both literally and metaphorically, of the border region. With this insight comes the understanding that negotiations of space in the border region did not begin with Texas' revolt or the U.S.-Mexico War, but had existed long before, during the years of Spanish missionary settlement, as well as in the pre-conquest era when Comanche, Apache, Kiowa, Navajo, Ute, Yaqui, Pueblo and other tribes Indigenous to the region negotiated control over land and resources.

Through Berlandier's eyes we have seen how the beauty and unknowns of nature enthralled him, but also how the mapping of space is inherently political as knowledge of land meant better control over it. This is evident in specific moments presented by Berlandier, such as when he was charged by General Terán to map the contours of Tamaulipas in relation to the threat of Spanish invasion; for understanding the landscape meant better defense. It is also evident in the fact that the Comisión was even created. Although the original Adams-Oñis Treaty was signed by Spain and the United States, newly independent Mexico understood the political necessity of a defined boundary between their northern territory and the U.S. For understanding the land would make negotiations and claims to space possible. Thus the Mexican government, amidst constant transitions in political power in its formative years, dedicated resources, not only to a commissioner and surveyor, but to an entire scientific Comisión de Límites. Despite these efforts, history would tell that the knowledge of the land provided by the Comisión did little to help Mexico maintain its claim to the border region, or defend its land against the expansionism of the United States. I believe this ineffectiveness can be attributed, not to a lack of effort or knowledge on the part of the members of the Comisión, but to a number of political and social

realities. The biggest of these being the involvement of Indigenous actors in the region. As Brian DeLay has argued, Indigenous influence in the region, largely through violent raiding of northern Mexican settlements but also through amicable relationships in the region, greatly affected the fate of Texans, Mexicans, and the United States. Indigenous actors in the border region not only responded to external changes — such as the original vacuum of resources in the north upon Mexican independence when Spanish influence left the region — but also acted upon independent ambitions. Indigenous presence was not only a lens through which the United States could view Mexicans as weak, thus justifying U.S. advancement on and war against Mexico, but Indigenous presence also meant maintained Indigenous control of the region.

Mexico was correct in thinking that a knowledge of the border region was necessary to make any claim to the land. What they failed to understand was that the Indigenous peoples of the region had far more knowledge of that land — knowledge that extended back thousands of years — than Mexico could ever hope to acquire in the few years that the Comisión explored the region. Nonetheless, I would hazard to guess that Berlandier understood the extent of Indigenous knowledge about the border region, and this contributed to his eagerness to join the Comanches on a hunt in 1828 as he hoped to learn from them. Despite his and the Comisión's efforts, Mexico would fall to the invading United States. However, it additionally should not be assumed that the success of the United States could be attributed to an adequate amount of U.S. knowledge concerning the region. Instead, Indigenous knowledge of the border region influenced U.S. success as much as it influenced Mexican defeat. With their knowledge,

Comanches in particular “made a history of their own... one that set the trajectory of the whole region.”¹⁵⁹ The reality of the border region was an Indigenous creation.

The border itself poses an interesting conceptual challenge. The original Adams-Oñis Treaty stipulated that the border between the United States and New Spain, later Mexico, was to run north and west from the Gulf of Mexico along the Sabine River, the Red River, and the Arkansas River. From the border’s first conception it followed the paths of rivers through the land. It could be argued that in the division of land it makes sense to look for landmarks occurring naturally against which political lines of demarcation can be drawn. Berlandier himself wrote of the difference in foliage on either side of the Nueces River, and noted how it could serve as a natural boundary. Indeed, the concepts of borders imported from Europe was one of natural boundaries, found in rivers, mountains, and seas. However, while rivers are a good candidate for said natural boundaries, I challenge this concept of division as inherent in nature. We have come to understand the Río Bravo as the border between the United States and Mexico, but from Berlandier’s travels it is clear that the river was not always understood as such. Even while Berlandier spoke of rivers as boundaries, he used them to inform his travels, often journeying along their banks. Thus, his very traversing of the border region was made possible by the paths provided by rivers, including the Río Bravo as well as the Nueces River. These rivers were not only landmarks, but important routes that Berlandier relied heavily upon in navigating the wilderness of solitude that he wished to document. Additionally, many rivers have been used throughout history as a means of travel across land. As such, it is interesting that we have conceptualized the Río Bravo as a border, when its inherent nature is that of movement. It is

¹⁵⁹ DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 309.

additionally interesting that the Río Bravo is now viewed as a definite border, something that is fast and unmoving. As I have argued, it is important to recognize that a river is not something solid in its positioning and character but instead a part of nature, constantly undergoing transformations that are uncontrollable by human desire. From what we have seen in Berlandier's firsthand accounts, the waters and course of the Río Bravo were in constant fluctuation depending on the season and amount of rainfall, overflowing often and at times literally changing course.

Although the border has been placed upon the Río Bravo for over a hundred years, today its placement is being challenged with the continued building of a border wall. This is in part because, structurally speaking, a wall cannot be built in a riverbed. Instead the border wall is being constructed north of the Río Bravo, on U.S. soil, creating the question of where the border truly lies. There are places along the border in Texas where U.S. citizens live north of the river yet south of the wall, places where services such as postal delivery and garbage pickup are not provided by the United States, places where the river is easily crossed but the wall is not. These places have become a no-mans land, not necessarily belonging to one country or the other. As such, they call into question the validity of a river as a border between nations. I would argue that there is nothing inherent to a river that makes it a political boundary. Definite borders are not inherent to the world, but instead concepts created by humans. The border between the United States and Mexico was drawn across continuous land, in a region that had been heavily negotiated for thousands of years. The drawing of this border was helped by the information about the region documented by the scientists who made up the Mexican Comisión de Límites, including Jean Louis Berlandier. However, I believe the validity of placing the border along the

Río Bravo was shaky even then, and has continued to be challenged. It is especially challenged by Indigenous communities such as the Tohono O’odham who have traditions of living on and crossing the land that the border now bifurcates. Indeed, the Tohono O’odham are a tribe so tied to this land that eleven elders fell ill and died when the border wall was constructed.¹⁶⁰

Though the border has been drawn into existence, it is not something inherent to the land. As such it is not strictly a physical presence on the land, but also a concept that has been wielded in the name of political dominance and power. The border does not only exist in the border region, but extends far beyond its geographical scope, into the lives of everyone whom it has affected. It is a dangerous concept that has been used to enact violence against those deemed *less-than* and *other*. As violent and militarized as this border region has become, it makes sense that its history is filled with war and conflict. However, with all of this, through the eyes of Jean Louis Berlandier we are reminded of the border region’s distinct physical beauty, by which Berlandier was endlessly fascinated. For he was a botanist who was not entrenched in the region’s politics, as he continued to hold throughout his life that “nature knows little of politics, and science must eschew such temporal distractions.”¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Francisco Cantú, “When the Frontier Becomes the Wall: What the border fight means for one of the nation’s most potent, and most violent, myths,” *New York Times*, March 11, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/03/11/when-the-frontier-becomes-the-wall#>.

¹⁶¹ Lawson, *Frontier Naturalist*, 191.

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